

Sunday 26 February 2023

The First Sunday of Lent



Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please click on the links.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 [In these days of Lenten journey](#) (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Let us come to the Lord, who is full of compassion, and confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All **Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.**

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

It is usual to omit the Gloria during Lent.

The Collect for the First Sunday of Lent

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

First reading

A reading from the First Book of Moses called Genesis

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die".' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Romans

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness

exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Romans 5:12-21*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Ashes

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Come back to me

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God".' Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone".' Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test".' Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him".' Then the devil left him and, suddenly, angels came and waited on him. *Matthew 4:1-11*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

During the season of Lent, our churches start a series of discussions which seek to place Lent in a wider context. We start by looking at the Biblical basis for Lent.

Christians believe that the Bible is the word of God. Through its diverse stories and messages, ancient yet still relevant, we need to discern the ways by which God seeks to demonstrate his love and offer his guidance—as the saying goes, ‘for best results follow manufacturer’s instructions’. So what are the biblical roots of Lent?

The actual term ‘Lent’ is old English for ‘springtime’ because the season always starts in February or March and ends in March or April. The word itself therefore tells us nothing, but its concept is simple enough: we are preparing for Easter. That preparation takes a great many forms including prayer, liturgy, reading, reflection, and in the popular imagination also involves fasting—the giving up of food.

Today’s Gospel describes Jesus fasting in the wilderness. It’s important to place his Lenten precursor in context. He was baptised by his cousin and was filled with the Holy Spirit; the Bible describes him as being anointed by the Holy Spirit, which is one code for his being the Messiah (the Hebrew *massiach* word means ‘anointed’ or ‘anointed one’). Jesus’ soul is filled with the Spirit and he needs to reassess who he is before God for the Spirit will have been prompting him to radical change in order to take on the new roles and tasks dictated by messiahship. Incidentally, that’s what the three temptations in Matthew’s Gospel are intended to describe: the powers of darkness, however understood, are tempting him away from God’s way of being messiah to an more earth-based mindset.

Jesus is therefore fasting as a Middle Eastern way of clarifying his mind (it does so by clearing the body of toxins, for example) but it also helps improve self-discipline—it’s a spiritual form of exercise machine, building up a spiritual muscle.

Jesus is building on an extremely ancient tradition that runs through the Old Testament (the only scriptures that Jesus knew, of course), but through his culture as well. The idea is simple: it was necessary to fast and pray when discerning for a big decision, before an encounter or meeting, when preparing for something potentially life-changing or enhancing. In each case, the person seeks to purify themselves for a purpose. In the Bible, that purpose is always getting closer to God.

Possibly the best example in the Old Testament concerns the so-called Nazirites, who are described in the book of Numbers 6:1–21. The very name ‘Nazirite’ means ‘to abstain from’ or ‘to consecrate oneself’. Here men (or at least never explicitly women) fasted in a strict, codified manner before a pilgrimage. They recited scripture and made special payments for the times and money forfeited for meals. They generally shaved their heads but were not to shave their beards, and so on. In fact, as an interesting sidelight, the Nazirites were the inspiration for Mohammed’s

Muslims because we have here all five of his so-called ‘pillars of Islam’. We can probably learn much about this tradition of radical consecration by looking closely in that similar, local, direction.

Later, St Paul becomes a Nazirite in all but name when he consecrated a journey from Corinth to Syria (as described in Acts 18:18).

There is a second strand to this tradition, of escaping ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’ for a time in order to get closer to God. It’s a kind of retreat. St Paul went to Arabia for about three years after his experience on the Damascus Road (Galatians 1:17); we may discern something similar when Elijah battles against wicked Queen Jezebel. An ancient tradition says that John the Baptist was a member of the Essene sect by the Dead Sea, a clear forerunner of monasticism—‘clear’ because we now have much evidence that Celtic Christianity as practised in the UK was in fact transplanted from the Middle East, probably from Coptic sources.

It’s time to move from the examples in the Bible and discern what the Bible is saying to us today. The scriptures tell us to search the mind of God and to seek Him while he may be found. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount tells us to ‘pray to your God in secret ...’ which is best regarded as a regular, disciplined devotion without distraction. It’s assumed that anyone with a sincere faith will fast to the point where there are too many references on the topic to list. And there is the idea of single-mindedness in our faith: think of verses like, ‘Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God’; ‘be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect’, and so on.

Taken together then, we can summarise by saying that God wants us to seek Him with devotion and dedication. That seeking is best done in private and must be sincere and costly. It’s best done for short-ish periods. And any great spiritual decision or quest should automatically be accompanied by something that looks like a Lenten discipline.

We are entering the Church’s penitential season of Lent. The scriptures are clear that we should treat lent seriously as an opportunity to grow in holiness and to get closer to God ... in our case, to enhance the joy and spirituality of Easter, identifying with risen Christ and, I suggest, understanding why the Cross was even needed. We enter a biblical Lent. Amen

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

With confidence and trust let us pray to the Father.

For the one holy catholic and apostolic Church ...
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For the mission of the Church,
that in faithful witness it may preach the gospel
to the ends of the earth,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For those preparing for baptism [and confirmation] ...
and for their teachers and sponsors,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For peace in the world ...
that a spirit of respect and reconciliation may grow
among nations and peoples,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer ...
for refugees, prisoners, and all in danger;
that they may be relieved and protected,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For those whom we have injured or offended,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

For grace to amend our lives and to further the reign of God,
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

In communion with all those who have walked in the way of holiness ...
let us pray to the Father.

Lord of compassion,

All in your mercy hear us.

God our Father,
in your love and goodness
you have taught us to come close to you in penitence
with prayer, fasting and generosity;
accept our Lenten discipline,
and when we fall by our weakness,
raise us up by your unfailing mercy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us access to his grace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Attende Domine (Gregorian Chant) [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)
What wondrous love is this [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 Forty days and forty nights [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

Father, you made the world and love your creation.
You gave your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.
His dying and rising have set us free from sin and death.
And so we gladly thank you,
with saints and angels praising you, and saying,

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.
He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Lord God,
you have renewed us with the living bread from heaven;
by it you nourish our faith,
increase our hope,
and strengthen our love:
teach us always to hunger for him who is the true and living bread,
and enable us to live by every word
that proceeds from out of your mouth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory. Amen.