

LENT 1
18/2/24
CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

We go with Jesus into the wilderness.

We feel the need to get away to reflect and to pray.

We stay with Jesus in the wilderness.

We sense the power of the Tempter calling us to the easy, self-serving way.

We endure with Jesus in the wilderness,

aware of a Supportive Presence showing us a faithful way, a compassionate path.

We return with Jesus from the wilderness,

renewed in body, mind, and spirit, ready to be about God's work.

Opening Prayer

Prepare us for our Lenten journey, O God;

give us the courage to venture into the challenging places of heart and spirit.

Come with us on our Lenten journey, O God;

strengthen us that we might learn and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Join us with others on our Lenten journey, O God;

in faithful solidarity, we will search out dark forces of oppression and defeat them with the light of Jesus Christ.

Be with us at the end of our Lenten journey, O God;

that at the foot of the cross we might look up and understand your wonderful love. Amen.

HYMN 188 Where wide sky roll down and touches red sand [Sorry no backing singers]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFX7VBH_2ZQ&list=PL6lZyrMOdxQ4FAvTd2ta4hQ9HQxVXqazx

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

God of storms and rainbows, God of rain and sunshine, God of all creation, we worship and adore you. We gaze in wonder at the beauty of your creation and marvel at stormy skies transformed with the vibrant colours of

a rainbow. Like Noah and his family, we praise you for this everlasting sign of your love and care for the whole creation - your desire to preserve and not destroy life. And at Jesus' baptism, the sky again revealed your love when you identified him as your beloved Son, strengthening him with the same Spirit who empowers and strengthens each of us. For all these assurances of your love for us and for the whole creation, we praise and worship you, O God, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

Gracious God, as we begin our Lenten journey, we do want to follow Jesus but we confess our reluctance to face the stress and temptation that the journey might hold for us. We confess that we are sometimes tempted to wish for miracles which would make life easier rather than more stressful. We admire the difficult and risky journey that Jesus took, challenging systems which put conditions on God's love, but confess that we want our journeys of faith to be devout but not too daring; comfortable and not too threatening. We cherish the faithfulness and humility of Jesus, yet we confess our fear of treading Jesus' way of obedience - the way of the cross.

A time of silence for personal confession

Lord Jesus Christ, save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. Forgive us our sins and fill us with the joy and peace of your salvation, and strengthen us during this Lenten season to follow you wherever you choose to take us. Amen

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news. "For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18) And so I declare to you: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!

READINGS

- **1 Peter 3:18–22**

18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight lives, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

- **Mark 1:9–15**

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him.

11 And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

HYMN 591 Forty days and forty nights

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9N29ZnwU4LM>

SERMON

With echoes of God’s words from last Sunday we now jump back to the start of Jesus’ ministry.

Many of you might not have remembered that last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the 40 days leading into Easter. If you count the actual days you might get confused if we didn’t know that Sundays are not counted.

In some traditions people might do some special thing for Lent, like not eating meat. Some take it as a time to make some sort of self-sacrifice to help focus on their spiritual life. Others can do interesting things like abstaining from coffee or chocolate, using the money saved for donations to mission projects.

The reason why lent goes for 40 days is that historically this number was associated with several events in the Bible. There are the 40 years that the Hebrew people were nomadic after escaping from Egypt. Then there is the passage which was read this morning. Jesus spent 40 days in the

wilderness after his baptism in the Jordan. After this Jesus commenced His public ministry. Traditionally 40 was seen as standing for a 'long time.'

Compared this passage to both Luke and Matthew Mark gives us a much brier description of the 40 days of Temptation that Jesus went through. Mark summarised it in just a few words saying: "And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him."

Elsewhere in Mark's Gospel we do get some hints about his approach to temptation. The word which Mark uses for 'temptation' here is the same word used for tempting or testing in three other places in this Gospel. Each time Jesus used it in reference to the supposedly deeply religious Pharisees when they try to catch Him out with trick questions. Each time Jesus simply responds rebuking the questioner asking why they are trying to tempt or test Him.

One interesting observation from Mark's Gospel is that the encounters Jesus has with demonic spirits seem to occur in religious places. There seems to be a link between the actions of the religious leaders and satan. Both seem to be trying to tempt Jesus and derail His ministry. The test for Jesus is to keep His focus on His ministry and not be side-tracked.

The accounts of the desert temptations on Jesus in both Luke and Matthew are far more detailed. In Mark's Gospel those temptations seem to be far more subtle. Unlike those other Gospels the tempting agents are not so blatant. In this Gospel they seem to try to use ideas which seem almost in tune with those being expounded by Jesus.

It is just that the outcomes for any deviation would have a very different result if Jesus had agreed. After all the ends do not always justify the means. Jesus seems to resolutely suggest that the contrary is in fact correct. The desired outcomes are the sole objective but not every path can rightly achieve that objective.

This then gives us a challenge to keep an eye out for temptations during Lent. We also need to face up to our demons, to our many weaknesses. This is a time for us to personally take some time to identify those things in our lives which tend to sidetrack us. We need to recognise their ability to

stop us from fulfilling our goals of moving closer to the life that the Holy Spirit is guiding us towards. Let us be honest with ourselves this is a big, but rewarding, challenge.

Jesus with His natural and charismatic gifts was challenged to keep focussed so that He could fulfil His mission to defeat those demonic forces trying to stop people from being united with God.

If we reflect carefully we might also see that it was the Holy Spirit which drove Jesus into the wilderness for those 40 days of testing. In those 40 days Jesus proved Himself ready to start on His ministry. For us each time we come into Lent it is also a time to take stock of our lives and see what we can do to live life more fully guided by the Holy Spirit.

- In what ways are we living in our own delusional world?
- What destructive patterns are compromising our living a fulfilled spiritual life?
- In what ways are hostility and fear holding us back?

It is only as we address those issues in our lives that we can live to full life that Jesus taught us about. To do this we might need to utilise a wise mentor or person who can see through our barriers to help us seek out our true potential.

The Gospel passage ends with Jesus sharing the good news that the Kingdom of God was ready for us now. It is time to get on board. It is time to respond to the good news.

In our time we have all experienced the ministry of the Holy Spirit and had some vision of that land of flowing milk and honey with God's never ending grace.

We need to be careful when we refer to the 'kingdom' as we know that this is not a physical place, nor is there a physical king. We are talking about God's gift to us which is ongoing. Our 'kingdom' still remains an ongoing threat to nations and even families which want to overpower our allegiance to Christ. We are called to avoid being tempted by worldly demands on our obedience. After all our faith is a culture not a physical entity.

This can be hard to explain but the best way to grasp the concept is to think of people who have chosen to live a lifestyle of their home country after

having moved to a country with a vastly different culture. They seek to maintain their old ways no matter what happens locally.

- We should be challenged when society suggests that we embark on vengefulness and self-aggrandisement.
- We need to be people of grace and humility whatever the current society seems to promote.

In a world where fear and defensiveness seem to prevail we are called by Jesus to be a people of love, openness, hospitality and inclusiveness.

When society seem to promote an image of a vengeful and demanding god in order to justify those who don't fit their rules we need to be a community who bears witness to unending love mercy and forgiveness. We worship a God who calls on us to reflect the way He treats us.

This the good news which Jesus set out to share after His time in the wilderness. He tells us that God is not a two-faced monster sometimes loving and then turning into a vengeful tyrant. Even in the middle of the turmoil of our world as we see daily in the news God calls on us to provide a way of escape and safety.

Before embarking on His ministry Jesus had many years to build a foundation that culminated in those 40 days of testing. During the last week many churches around the world have embarked on programs to refresh and rebuild those within and around their church for the future.

For us this 40 days is a time to renew and re-examine our commitment as Christians. We need to be aware of the journey which brings us here today and the road ahead. The Holy Spirit remains our constant guide and companion on this journey.

Even the long-term members, the most seasoned campaigners, and the most trusted ambassadors among us need this time regularly to re-examine our own call and to face again our own demons, to ensure that they have not been stealthily regaining the upper hand over us such that we are in renewed danger of being derailed into ways and means that are incompatible with our baptismal vows to live the life that Jesus set out for all of us.

The Holy Spirit which Jesus left with us remains our companion to help us face and overcome even the most obstinate obstacles so that we can emerge renewed and inspired with the strength to gently walk the road ahead.

HYMN 590 What a friend we have in Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2skxuowcaY>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

The skies open, and God's love shines upon us. Let's reflect on this loving intention in our giving today.

Loving God, receive our offerings. May they help spread your warmth and light into places they are most needed. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Atonement

A perfect sacrifice... By a perfect person... To perfect... Some imperfect people.

Today, I will be quoting ideas from "Unlocking the Bible" by Colin Smith inspired from the word of God.

When Adam and Eve committed the first sin, they were vanished from their life with God in the garden of Eden, and were prevented from re-entering by cherubim... Atonement was necessary.

Many years later ...the day of atonement for the children of Israel was scheduled....this Symbolism points us to the significance & relevance of the death of Christ on the cross.

On the day of atonement ,the High Priest did not wear his magnificent clothes – instead he wore a simple white cloth ,like a common slave.

This was like Christ, who laid aside his heavenly magnificence and glory, and took on himself the form of a servant

Firstly the high priest, Aaron , slaughtered a young bull, and took some of the blood behind the curtain of the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle – the blood was then sprinkled here for Aaron sins, (because having sins himself he was in no position to deal with the sins of others.)

On the other handJesus was what every priest wished he could be – he was perfect – without sin – his perfect life qualified him to achieve atonement.

Now going back to Aaron, the high priesthe would then come out of the tabernacle where a goat was slaughtered....he would return to the Holy of Holies to sprinkle blood on the Atonement Cover of the Ark of the Covenant (which was called the mercy seat). This was the moment when Justice and Mercy came together.

Judgement demanded death as the penalty for sin – now it was satisfied with blood.

Mercy demanded forgiveness for the sinner and now this was released.

Now ,Jesus was nailed to the cross. His blood was shed, and God's judgement fell upon him.

When Jesus cried out, "It is finished "the inner curtain of the Temple was ripped in two from top to bottom so that atonement was made by our Great High Priest ,Jesus Christ.

The new and living way was opened up into the presence of God.

Returning to the Children of Israel ...on their day of atonement

A second goat was brought to the high priest, who confessed every sin of the Israelites.

While He lay both hands on the head of the live goat ,God moved the guilt of all these sins onto the goat, which was then sent into the desert... never to be seen again.

So, as an act of faith, we are to lay hold on the Lord Jesus – – confess our sins and transfer them to Christ, then..... atonement will be applied for our sins

Hold onto Jesus in faith and confess your sins ...this way guilt is transferred, and your guilt and sin are dealt with and removed.

Through Jesus Christ as our high priest we have atonement made for our sin, and when our sin has been confessed, our guilt will be removed and taken out of sight forever

sin is confessedguilt is removed.....atonement is achieved

This is the story of Easter

Let us pray together as God's people.

Lord we come before you – just as we are – we know we have sinned– we know we have fallen short of your standards– we know we have let you down again and again – but we are assured by your word that we are forgiven if we confess our sins to you now.

We reach out our hands to touch forgiveness flowing out from the cross of Jesus Christ, our Saviour – our high priest - who removed all his glory to become human, dwell with us and cleans us all from sin.

We Lift our hearts and minds to think of you, our Almighty God, the creator of all beautiful things

We ask for strength in our faith so that our lives will reflect your love.

Now in our own silence, fill us with your presence – so we are assured of your reality and strength – your loving care for us.

So many of us have a few problems with our health – our bodies are ageing and simple tasks are becoming more difficult these days – we need your help and guidance .

Sometimes we feel lonely, forgotten, weary, sad, misunderstood, we pray for your comfort. Some of our members are seriously ill and need different degrees of care and treatment.

We remember those who are not with us today because they are in care or have moved to be closer to the relatives.

Despite our weak faith, our illnesses and frailties, we love you and want to serve you in whatever way we can.

Thank you for those who are busy within the church, and we pray as the church endeavours to employ a person to serve in the community that you will bless and guide that person into responsible service for you.

Our world is devastated by disasters at the moment – heavy rains and snow and floods – forest fires – droughts – earthquakes – dust, storms – viruses . Then there is war – angry mobs of protesting people – violence in the streets and at home – dishonesty in political leaders around the world. We know we have so much, and yet we are greedy for morehelp us in this world of consumerism – show us how to live so that our lives and values are back on track

Lord, as we approach this Easter season, we pray for Australians as they holiday & buy their hot Cross buns, may they remember the significance of the cross of Jesus.

We will sing the Lord's prayer together.

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.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

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

HYMN 28 God is our strength and refuge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bA0zJnW1Rr8&t=40s>

BENEDICTION

As you prepare to go from here,
hear the loving words of God spoken over you:
You are my beloved child; with you, I am well pleased!
Know that the same Spirit that drove Jesus out into the wilderness
sends you out from this place now.
May the shining joy of God go with you,
bursting from your heart, overflowing into all the world.
Go in peace. Go with courage. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liH_HdkWs74