

Online Written Service of the Word – 21st February

Lent 1 – Revd Alison Bownass

Genesis 9.8–17; 1 Peter 3.18–end; Mark 1.9–15



Gathering to worship God

The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart you will not despise. Psalm 51.17

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all

Loving God, thank you
for drawing us together to be your people.
Help us, as we meet together,
to see ourselves as you see us.
Give us faith to hear your words of love
beyond some of the hard realities of our lives.
May your Holy Spirit guide and inspire us
to recognise your presence in all we do Amen

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Welcome Hymn – Be Still and Know

Be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee.

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

I am the Lord that keeps thy soul.
I am the Lord that keeps thy soul'
I am the Lord that keeps thy soul

Words: Anonymous, based on Psalm 46

Words of welcome

Welcome to our online service of the Word.
Revd Alison Bownass has written our talk today.
You can also see a video of this service online just click
on the link, shown on FB or our website which will go live
at 9.30am on Sunday.

So as we come together, let us prepare our hearts for
worship and remember ways in which we have fallen
short of God's purposes for us.

Collect, the prayer of the week is said.

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Saying sorry to God

Confession

God our Father,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins.

For turning away from you,
and ignoring your will for our lives;
Father, forgive us:
save us and help us.

For behaving just as we wish,
without thinking of you;
Father, forgive us:
save us and help us

For failing you by what we do
and think and say;
Father, forgive us:
save us and help us.

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you
by temptations in the world about us;
Father, forgive us:
save us and help us.

For living as if we were ashamed to belong to your Son;
Father, forgive us:
save us and help us.

We say these words

**Blessed is the Lord for he has heard the voice of our
prayer; therefore shall our hearts dance for joy
and in our song we will praise our God.**

Hearing and responding to the Word of God

Alleluia. Praise to Christ, the light of the world.

Gospel Mark 1.9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

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

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

Talk Revd Alison Bownass

From our Bishop David. The head of our diocese – the beloved diocese of Birmingham, that we all support with our common fund so that places of worship in our most deprived places can continue.

Leadership in our churches at this time is very difficult – so it is with kindness and support that we all look after one another.

Dear Co-workers in Christ, (he begins)

'God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.' 1

Corinthians 1:9

As we enter a second year of pandemic, with its restrictions, uncertainties and weariness, Christians prepare for the season of Lent in Lockdown.

Entering a period of forty days' penitence and reflection seems especially daunting when familiar personal and domestic practices continue to be disrupted, UK deaths from COVID exceed 100,000, those in front-line services are under extreme stress, many others face economic hardship, and mental ill-health is a deepening reality.

Bishop David speaks for us all.

Today - Mark's Gospel. Short and action-packed! Probably the first of the Gospels to be written!

Many members of the first century churches couldn't read – and many more couldn't afford to possess a scroll of their own. So, it is said, we should think of New Testament books as intended to be read out loud – when the members of the church were gathered together. Mark's Gospel, the shortest of the four may well have been designed to be read out in a single session – it takes about an hour and a half.

It is an exciting and well-written story. Certainly, much is described in this morning's short episode.

Mark has no time for a lengthy introduction that eases listeners into the narrative. No space for a story of the miraculous birth in Bethlehem or a detailed survey of Jesus' family tree. Instead, readers are cast into the wilderness where John the Baptizer appears, preaching repentance, change, and forgiveness of sins. No sooner does John predict the coming of the Messiah than Jesus arrives on the scene.

All of Advent in eight frantic verses.

Mark proceeds at an almost breathless pace, barely pausing to describe characters or setting, so focused is he on the plot itself, so compelled to tell the gospel story in his own words.

Anticipation is high when Jesus arrives at the Jordan River, where John has been preaching and baptizing. The dramatic climax of the scene is the baptism of Jesus, complete with descending dove and a voice from heaven that declares his divinity.

The ministry of Jesus, like the Gospel of Mark, begins in the wilderness.

Here we are at the beginning of Lent in the Christian year. Lent. Traditionally a time for self-examination.

It's not just for the very holy – those who feel called to the sacred holy life of a nun, a monk, a lay-reader, or a vicar we are all called!

Those words in our reading 'And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In the contemporary language translation called The Message by Eugene Peterson (1993).

It reads: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life." It makes the statement even more personal.

For ALL people.

"You are my daughter, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

HOW HUMBLING!

It maybe makes you want to begin every morning with "O God, help me to please you this day."

So, we begin this sacred season of reflection, self-examination and repentance, of spiritual discipline and renewal, in the wilderness.

ALL THE MORE THOUGHT-PROVOKING IN THIS TIME OF WORLD PANDEMIC.

Is it perhaps the place where pretence fades away and honest vulnerability becomes possible? We are freed to confess the messy reality of our lives. The wilderness, like it or not, is where we live our lives. It is the place between certainty and doubt, between hope and fear, between promises made and promises kept. In the wilderness, Jesus finds his voice and his vocation, and when he emerges forty days later, his words echo those of the Baptizer: the kingdom of God has come near; repent; believe.

Jesus' life was full of adversity and suffering and defeat. He didn't replace all unjust earthly rulers or lift up all the lowly and oppressed.

Sometimes the two thousand years that have passed since seem to have brought little change as well. We read of needless deaths, unending violence every day, innocent suffering, justice denied. All around us are those who lack the basic necessities of life, those who go hungry or live in fear, whose grieving is unceasing, whose isolation is unbearable.

In the wilderness of our lives, we hurt one another, we're unkind, break promises, accept lies as truth, and fail to love our neighbours. The kingdom has not yet arrived in its fullness; we can be sure of that.

In our own lives there can be things within our own minds that prevent us from weathering the storms of life. Story p160 "Your point being?" LIFE-STORMS.

What loose cannon is in your head?

What are those things that de-stabilise us from within, when life gets more tricky?

We can seem to be stuck, year after year, sacred season upon sacred season, at the beginning of the gospel.

WAITING.

Still, even out here in the wilderness, there are times when God's presence is unmistakable. Moments when the extraordinary breaks through the thin veneer of the ordinary and blinds us with its brilliance, when angels outnumber wild beasts.

If you have been on a Christian conference or maybe done DISCIPLESHIP COURSE you may have been encouraged to share your own story of how you came to faith? Journeys towards faith are many and varied often with many ups and downs as we seek to know more of God.

I read of a meeting when a woman spoke up after being silent for some time "I am a Christian because the Christian church saved my life." Suddenly, the chatty group fell silent. She described how she had been abandoned by her parents as an infant. Sent to a foster home where she was neglected and abused for the first six years of her life. At age seven, she was finally adopted by a local family. Not knowing what to expect, she spent the first night wide-awake in her new bed, very afraid and anxious.

The next morning, a Sunday, the family got up early, had breakfast, and got into the car. "It was my first time at church and I had no idea what to expect. We walked into the Sunday school classroom, and the teacher's face lit up. 'Welcome, Janet, we've been waiting for you.' Then she read the Bible story for the day. I will never forget the feeling. Jesus says to his disciples, 'Let the little children come to me. Do not stop them.' I knew, knew with all of my heart, that he was talking to me. I knew that I was home. I am a Christian because of that moment.

What a testimony.

A new beginning, the kingdom in the midst of the wilderness.

As we set out on this Lenten journey, remember the truth of your baptism: you are claimed; you are chosen as God's beloved;

WITH YOU I AM WELL-PLEASED he says.

You are empowered to set out in search of your voice and your vocation.

The work is not easy in this wilderness called life. But the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ is where to begin.

Let us pray: O God of new beginnings, walk with us on this wilderness journey, that we may realise how much we are loved and that we reach the joy of your resurrection with kind, generous hearts and renewed minds. *Amen*

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist**

**We believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again**

**We believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world**

**This is the faith of the Church.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession – Mary Jones

Dear Lord you yourself were faced with temptations in the wilderness, help us to carry on putting the needs of others before our own. Give us the strength of your Holy Spirit to sustain us as we continue to journey on, in this most difficult of times. We see a glimmer of hope that is beginning to shine a bit more brightly and we rejoice in the generosity of your love shown to us through so many of your angels here on Earth.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Dear Lord we pray for everyone whose influence has led us to be able to worship online today. We thank you this morning for Rev Alison Bownass our lovely visiting priest.

We give thanks for the fellowship which we find in this church and community which supports us as we seek to put our faith into practice in our daily lives. Strengthen us, Lord, in your service, so that we, in our turn, may be an encouragement to others. We bring before you our Rector Mark, please support him during his time of personal leave. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Dear Lord we pray for peace and harmony in this divided world; may all leaders find the wisdom and courage to do what is right for everyone ; we pray for all who suffer, the refugees, the homeless, the mentally distressed, the unemployed and those who go hungry. Support them in your loving arms.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

Dear Lord we pray for our community here in Castle Bromwich especially this Sunday for those who live in Southwood Ave we pray for our local shops and businesses, local doctors, local food bank, all who continue to serve us when they can. We pray and give thanks for all our key workers but today we also remember and pray those who feel left out, missed, unloved and forgotten, we thank and surround them with our love and support in their daily lives, work and struggles especially during this pandemic. Everyone is worthy and deserving of our prayers.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Dear Lord in this quiet moment, we remember before you, all those known to us who are frightened, those known to us who are sick, those known to us who have died and those who grieve for them and for all our loved ones who's anniversaries occur around this time
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

God whose light always shines in the darkness, receive these prayers from within our hearts, Amen

We say the Lord's Prayer

**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.**

An act of Spiritual Communion

You may wish to find a space for prayer in front of a cross, a candle, or a special place.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the bread of life and the one true vine. We believe that you are truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. We seek you. We worship and adore you. Since we cannot receive you in the Eucharistic bread and wine, We pray that you will come into our hearts and souls, that we may be united to you, by your all-powerful and ever-present Holy Spirit.

Let us receive you, and be nourished by you. Become for us the manna in our wilderness, the bread of angels for our very human journey through time, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, and solace in the hour of our death. We pray all this, trusting that you yourself are our Life, our Peace, and our everlasting Joy. Amen.

Hymn Jesu lover of my soul

Jesus, lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the gath'ring waters roll,
while the tempest still is high:
hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
till the storm of life is past;
safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

Other refuge have I none,
hangs my helpless soul on thee;
leave, ah! leave me not alone,
still support and comfort me!

All my trust on thee is stayed;
all my help from thee I bring;
cover my defenceless head
with the shadow of thy wing.

Plenteous grace with thee is found,
grace to cleanse from ev'ry sin;
let the healing streams abound,
make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
freely let me take of thee:
spring thou up within my heart,
rise to all eternity.

Words: Charles Wesley, 1740

Continue to serve God during this difficult time

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. Amen

Creator God, you made us in your image
to be your people, wherever we go.
This coming week, whatever we experience,
wherever we find ourselves,
help us to know that you are with us –
guiding, revealing and sustaining – always.
Amen

The Dismissal

Let us bless the Lord:
Blessing, honour and glory be yours,
here and everywhere, now and for ever. **Amen**

Filled with the Spirit's power,
We go in the light and peace of Christ. Amen

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Exit Music

To follow last week's piece by Edvard Grieg here is the second Lyric Piece by him. It is called "To the Spring". It is an invocation of Spring. There is a recording of Grieg playing the piece himself in 1907! He plays it very quickly as if he is trying to create that exciting surge of energy in all living things when Spring comes along. What a beautiful tune!!

<https://fb.watch/3L3k6A8YQR/>