

Wimborne Methodist Church Service for first Sunday in Lent 21.2.21

Decision making/ discernment

Welcome to our Sunday service on this first Sunday in Lent.

Call to worship Psalm 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will guide you and watch over you.

Hymn 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

Come let us sing of a wonderful love, tender and true
Out of the heart of the Father above
Streaming to me and to you;
Wonderful love, dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell, joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
Sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost, saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanders yet; why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
Home, weary wanderer home !
Wonderful love dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love, come and abide,
Lifting my life 'til it rises above envy and falsehood and pride;
Seeking to be lowly and humble, a learner of thee. (Robert Walmsley 1831-1905)

Opening Prayers

Gracious God,
on this first Sunday in Lent, we come together, in church and at home,
to worship you, to praise and thank you.
We seek your forgiveness and ask for your renewal.
Create in us a clean heart, O Lord,
and put a right spirit within us.

We come in the name of Christ, as we remember the time Jesus spent in the Judean desert at the beginning of His ministry. A time of solitude and openness to your guiding Spirit, as He wrestled to discern the best way forward for His ministry.

Help us to learn from Jesus` example- to search our hearts as He did,
to consider our calling, to reflect on our faith and to commit ourselves more completely to you. Forgive us for the times we have failed you...

Speak to us today and in the days ahead, so that we may know you and love you better. In the name of Christ Amen.

We say **the Lord`s Prayer** together.

Reading: Luke 4 1-3 Times of decision

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God tell tis stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live be bread alone'.

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instance all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So, if you worship me, it will be all yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only".

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'".

Jesus answered, "It says: do not put the Lord your God to the test".

When the devil had finished speaking, he left Jesus until an opportune time.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Hymn 238 Lead us heavenly Father, lead us

Lead us heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing, if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us, thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted, through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

(James Edmeston 1791-1867)

Address

How do you go about making decisions ?

From the time we wake in the morning there are decisions to be made. Some are very small e.g. clothes to wear, choice of meals, shopping, our activities for the day. But other decisions people make may be important and have a major effect on family and friends e.g. changing jobs, marriage, moving house, retirement, health issues.

How do you go about making decisions which have far -reaching consequences ?

Jesus had just had an amazing, uplifting experience. He was powerfully affirmed by God as He was baptised by John the Baptist. He experienced the Holy Spirit descend on Him and then heard a voice from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased."

Jesus, fully human but fully divine, was now 30 years old, steeped in His Jewish faith, with experience behind Him. He was well able to listen to His own intuitions and the prompting of God's Spirit. But on the verge of embarking on His mission to the world, of bringing a message of hope, healing and new life, to people who were downtrodden and alienated, He saw the need for an extended period of solitude, reflection and prayer. In response to the promptings of God's Spirit, He was led into the Judean desert. The number forty is often used in the Bible for a period of preparation eg. the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years while they were forged into a nation under God's care.

Although this time of solitude in the desert is often called "the temptations of Jesus" this is not really an accurate translation of the Greek verb, "peirazo". A better translation would be discernment- Jesus needed this time alone to decide on the right way forward, how He would go about His ministry. A huge task lay ahead.

In the Judean wilderness, an expanse of 35 x 12 miles of bare, jagged, crumbling limestone rocks, in blistering heat of 35-45 degrees C, Jesus would be more alone than anywhere on earth. We also need to remember that all of these "tests" which would be impossible for us, were plausible for Jesus. So we follow a sort of dialogue between Jesus and Satan, a reminder of the time of testing the Israelites went through in the desert with Moses. The dialogue is like a religious discussion between rabbis, each participant setting Bible text against Bible text, typical of the many contemporary Jewish writings which were preserved.

In first century Palestine, Jesus would have grown up with the delicious smell of women baking their bread each morning. Now He was hungry. The piercing sun shining on the broken pieces of limestone rock, would remind him of the delicious fresh-baked rolls. Thousands of people would flock to hear Jesus if they thought he could physically feed them. He'd also be doing good, Roman taxes led to much poverty and deprivation. Could this be the way forward?

Next Jesus was taken to what is now called the "Mount of Temptation" in Jericho. From this vantage point, Jesus would have an excellent view of the vast, barren desert stretching before Him. However, by just turning 180 degrees, He would see the lush oasis of palm trees and fruit growing on the rich, fertile plains. As Messiah Jesus could have power over all the kingdoms on earth. Could this be the way forward?

Finally, Jesus was taken to the highest point of the huge impressive temple in Jerusalem, nearly 300 feet tall. Pharisees and other Jews were always looking for signs and wonders. What better place could there be for them to witness the

incredible power of God as Jesus threw Himself from the temple but was saved. What a spectacle ! Would flashy miracles be the best way forward ?

On each occasion, Jesus, filled with God`s Spirit, answers from Scripture. He was a man of integrity and completely dependent on God for support and guidance. He chooses a very different path of humility, love and compassion, working miracles in response to need, not showing off His own power and divine protection.

Interestingly, as Jesus was alone in the desert with no eye-witnesses, how did the Gospel writers hear about this ? Surely it had to be Jesus Himself who shared these intimate experiences with them.

He knew that the disciples, and indeed later generations, would always face competing priorities. There will always be difficult decisions needing to be made and conflicting interests. How do we choose the best way forward ? How do our actions and words nurture and confirm others in their faith ?

Lent basically means "spring". It is a time when we are invited to embark on "turning over" our lives, reflecting on and listening to how God`s Spirit is prompting us to spring-clean our living. As followers of Jesus today, we have to decide on what we might need to embrace and from what to turn aside if we, too, are to live our faith with integrity.

Lent is a time when we can take practical steps to deepen our relationship with God. Let us respond to all God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

Lord, help us to be open to your Spirit, to lead us and guide us forward. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, we pray week in, week out, "Your kingdom will come and your will be done." It`s easy to say the words, far harder to mean them, for they are concerned finally not just with you, but with us.

Help us to understand that your kingdom is not just in the future, but something that begins with us now, today.

Help us to share in your Kingdom values through the love we show, the care we give and the service we offer.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for our world in the upheaval of this dreadful pandemic.

We remember with heartfelt gratitude the countless number of people working unstintingly to care for and serve others, whether in the medical profession or in any employment of service.

We remember those who are struggling to survive, with businesses in lockdown and uncertainty ahead.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for all politicians and leaders who make far reaching decisions affecting so many lives, that there may be openness to your Holy Spirit,

to work with honesty and integrity, that all may know justice, freedom and peace.
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for people we know who need our prayers at this time;
those in hospital or care homes... those facing surgery... or undergoing treatment
...those awaiting test results ... those who are lonely or anxious...
We silently remember all those who are on hearts this morning...
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer

We ask all our prayers, those spoken aloud and those said quietly in our hearts, in the precious name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

Hymn 465 Guide me O thou great Redeemer

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore;
Feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain whence the healing streams shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through;
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer, be though still my strength and shield;
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee. (William Williams 1717-1791)

Blessing

God be with us on our journey of faith -
Revive us when we grow weary,
Guide us when we go astray,
Inspire us when we lose heart,
And keep us travelling ever-onwards
looking to Jesus, who has run the race before us,
and waits to welcome us home.

Amen.