



Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

Sunday 21st February 2021 First Sunday of Lent
Rev'd Pauline Crispin: "Encounters with Jesus – The Disciples" John 1: 35-51

Lent is the season in which we focus our eyes and hearts explicitly on the cross of Christ. Our self-sacrifices serve no purpose unless, by laying aside our desires, we are able to fulfil our heart's deepest longing, for our lives to be in unity with His. In these weeks leading to the crucifixion and the joyous fulfilment of resurrection we will use John's gospel to meet those who He met, people whose lives were changed forever by their encounter with Him – we begin with the first disciples.

Opening words:

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great Light; they sat in the land of death, and the Light broke through upon them.

From then on, Jesus began to preach, "Turn from sin and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." Matthew 4:16,17 TLB

Song: Hear the call of the kingdom StF 407

Sing/read/pray/proclaim words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL-UdwB0Qvc&ab_channel=Bridgewater

Hear the call of the kingdom
Lift your eyes to the King
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God rich in mercy
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven
The humility of Christ



Walking justly before Him
Loving all that is right
That the life of Christ may shine through us

King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name

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Keith and Kristyn Getty with Stuart Townend.

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. **Amen** Book of Common Worship

Prayer of Confession:

Rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Colossians 3:8-10.

Lord, in this season of Lent, of examination of our lives, of repentance and reconciliation we ask for your Holy Spirit to be in us, convicting us to turn away from the pride, unkindness, criticism and cynicism that begins to stealthily creep into our lives. Lead us into Your glowing and glorious light which is filled with love, kindness, encouragement and the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus bore our sins on the cross. Jesus shed His blood, suffered, died and rose to life again so that we, gathering together this morning, may be dead to sin and yet alive to all that God has for us. In a moment of quiet we confess now our sins.

In the silence we listen to what God may be saying to us. We give thanks that Jesus came, suffered, died and rose again to offer us a new and redeemed life.

Thank you Lord for the assurance of forgiveness for sin, help us by the power of Your Spirit, in this season of Lent, to follow You in all that we do. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **Amen.**

Song: Forty days and forty nights StF 236

Sing/read /pray/ proclaim the words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkxj3mK3mVQ&ab_channel=Jubilate

Forty days and forty nights
you were fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted and yet undefiled.

Burning heat throughout the day,
bitter cold when light had fled;
prowling beasts around your way,
stones your pillow, earth your bed.

Shall not we your trials share,
learn your discipline of will;
and with you by fast and prayer
wrestle with the powers of hell?

So if Satan, pressing hard,
soul and body would destroy:
Christ who conquered, be our guard;
give to us the victor's joy.

Saviour, may we hear your voice
keep us constant at your side;
and with you we shall rejoice
at the eternal Eastertide. George H Smyttan (1822 - 1870)

Why keep Lent?

Lent, the forty days before Easter (not counting Sundays), is a somewhat curious period in the church's calendar. Most events in the church's year are festivals and we happily talk about celebrating them. Lent is very different: it is a period which is never 'celebrated' but only 'kept'. Some churches and Christians treat Lent very seriously, while others ignore it entirely. Even among those who keep Lent, there is no agreement on how it should be kept. Many Christians try to give up something: for instance, chocolate, social media or television. It's even become a period for us to try to break bad habits, almost as if Lent gives us another opportunity to retake those New Year's resolutions!

Now what exactly is Lent about? For me, Lent is about three 'preparations'. Firstly a preparation for Easter. Easter, with its message of Christ overcoming the curse of sin and death through his death and resurrection, is the most exciting moment in the church's year. Yet we can undercut this note of victory by being so occupied that, amid the frantic busyness of our lives, we carelessly stumble upon Easter. Lent provides us with forty days' build-up to Good Friday and Easter Sunday that forces us to prayerfully ponder the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As the best way to appreciate a sunrise is to be there in the darkness before dawn, so the only way to appreciate Easter is to have come to it through Lent. We as Christians are considered to be an Easter people living in a Good Friday world. Secondly, Lent is a preparation for Existence. A fatal flaw in our culture today is that people do not know how to say 'no' to bad things. Lent gives us the opportunity to practise resisting harmful and hurtful desires that will continue for life. Finally, Lent is a preparation for Eternity. If you take Lent seriously, then these forty days can seem to be a long and often wearying season in which we never get our own way. Here, for a time, pleasures are put to one side and joys are postponed. But Lent doesn't last. The darkness is broken by the joyful light of the glorious triumph of Easter Day. Here there is a splendid parallel with our lives. For many of us, much of our life seems to take place in what we might call 'Lent mode': things do not go as we hope, we do not get what we want and our joys are absent or at best short-lived. Yet, for the Christian, there is that wonderful and certain hope that however deep and hard the darkness is in our lives, it will ultimately be lifted and replaced by an indestructible joy. For those who love Christ, life's long Lent will end one day in an eternal Easter in which death and sin are destroyed for ever. Whether or not you keep Lent and in what way you keep it, is your choice. But to keep Lent, thoughtfully and prayerfully, is to come into a rich and lasting inheritance. Be blessed this Lent and bless others.

Contributed by J.John.

Our Lord's Prayer (the Christian family prayer):

Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the Kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. **Amen.**

Prayer: Loving Lord God, as we read Your Holy Word together, we pray that our hearts and minds will be fully open to hear what You are saying to us. May Your Word always be on our lips as we encounter those you would have us talk to. Provide us with comfort and strength as we remind ourselves of Your promises that are as real and true today as they were at creations dawn. **Amen**

Scripture Reading: John 1: 35-51

³⁵The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'

³⁷When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'

They said, 'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are you staying?'

³⁹'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.'

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). ⁴²And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter).

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.'

⁴⁴ Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'

⁴⁶ 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.

'Come and see,' said Philip.

⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.'

⁴⁸ 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.'

⁴⁹ Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.'

⁵⁰ Jesus said, 'You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig-tree. You will see greater things than that.' ⁵¹ He then added, 'Very truly I tell you, you will see "heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on" the Son of Man.'

New International Version UK edition

A time to pause, read again, pray, and reflect.

Preaching Notes: *these notes are a supplement to the weekly video which can be viewed on our YouTube channel.*

The theological claims in today's gospel reading are profound: "Here is the Lamb of God," "This is the Son of God," and "We have found the Messiah." In verse 45 Philip declares 'We have found him about whom Moses wrote about in the law and also whom the prophets also wrote,' then just four verses on Nathanael feels able to

proclaim to Jesus: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God!"

These encounters may make us want to ask Jesus not just "Where are you staying?" (verse 38) as the disciples did, but also "What exactly are you up to?" "What is your purpose?" or even "What do you want of us?" To these, and to all such questions, Jesus issues the same gentle invitation: "Come and see." It is as if Jesus is compassionately and gently saying, "Why not have your own encounter and give discipleship a try?"

This is a difficult thing for us in the twenty-first century. First of all, we know that to choose to follow Jesus is a major life decision. Discipleship requires dedication, work, and sacrifice. And therefore, we want that choice to be an informed decision.

For most of us, making a major life decision is a hard and prolonged process. We need time to do research, to consult experts, to ask the opinion of friends. Making informed decisions is a worthy endeavour, as it helps us avoid repeating some of life's biggest mistakes, making a bad situation worse, or facing a mountain of unintended consequences of a poor choice. In a way, our society's tendency to encourage us to "do the homework" so thoroughly this may be one of the reasons why Christianity appears to be in decline, in some parts of the world.

Let us see. It may go something like this: if we choose to become a disciple of Jesus, then we will be expected to work harder than we ever imagined, to give more than we thought possible, and to surrender our stubborn need for control, in order, to serve God. What do we get in return? This, of course, is where the invitation to "come and see" becomes so key, so crucial.

Because, on the face of it, we get nothing – at least nothing the world would consider a "gift." Just more work, more need requiring us to give, and more and more handing over our will to be that of God's. That is because the gift of God's grace is free and offered to everyone without

condition. So, if we choose to become disciples of Jesus, and to give our time, talent, and treasure, what do we get for all our trouble?

Come and see: The Saviour of the world, you see, is also the one our scriptures call “a man of sorrows,” “aware of grief,” and “despised and rejected by humankind.” That surely does not sound like someone destined for success or greatness, does it?

The spiritual life is full of seemingly contradictions that actually express a deeper spiritual reality. You really need to “come and see” in order to begin to understand, to encounter, deeper than ever before. Without regular experience of the liturgy, our Sunday worship is just an empty ritual. So, come and see, again and again. Without an ongoing discipline of prayer, our utterances are nothing more than endless demands of God.

So, come and see the Lamb of God. The invitation was offered to those disciples so many years ago, and it is offered to us again today. Come and see – and be enriched in Christ, in speech and knowledge of every kind. Come and see – and learn again that God is faithful, and that you are called into the fellowship of God’s son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Are we willing to journey with Christ even in uncertain times? God rewards us all with faith and hope, to trust in Him, even when the road ahead is unclear. Come and see – so that you too can declare with confidence, “We have found the Messiah.” **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession:

As we walk into these weeks of Lent, we begin a journey of encounters: some people are open and seeking you, others are not so, some have pre-conceived ideas, others do not, in that way they are very much like us today. May your Spirit rest upon us and help us to know that you are with us – though the way ahead may be hard and we so often falter and fail. Strengthen us for the journey ahead, teach us to trust in you and introduce others to you so that they have their own encounter and their lives changed.

Your kingdom comes near to those who call on your name; your pathway is surrounded by love. Teach us to long for an encounter with you.

We walk in relative security, thankful for the comforts we know. We pray for people who cannot afford to work from home and ask that we would address the inequality this shows us. We pray for people in homes that are insecure and who face the threat of violence. We pray for people living in life threatening icy weather in central and southern US. We give thanks for the peace we experience, and ask that our church communities can offer hope and safety for those in distress and those who are seeking refuge and a new life in this country. May we share what we have, and work to lift the burden that others carry. As we look to the example of Jesus, who met and embraced all who were in pain, may we reach out to others in generosity and kindness.

Your kingdom comes near to those who call on your name; your pathway is surrounded by love. Teach us to long for an encounter with you.

We walk in our troubled world, full of anxiety at the conflict we see - in Iraq, in Iran, in the Sahel region, in Myanmar, Somalia and in Yemen: bring your peace we pray. We are aware of the finite resources of our earth: may we limit our destructive habits. As we look to the example of Jesus, who lived in simplicity and trust, and as we are asked again to follow him; may we free ourselves from all that holds us back, and trust in your promise that you will never leave us,

Your kingdom comes near to those who call on your name; your pathway is surrounded by love. Teach us to long for an encounter with you.

We walk in separation, apart from friends and those we love: give us strength to endure in hope. We pray especially for all who are burdened by loneliness; for all who are in pain; for the bereaved and the despairing; the sick and the dying: may we work to make our communities places of warmth and friendship where all are included and each one finds a place.

As we look to the example of Jesus, who welcomed the least and the lost and brought the overlooked into the light, may we extend our circle of belonging and believe that your love is big enough for all to enter in.

Your kingdom comes near to those who call on your name; your pathway is surrounded by love. Teach us to long for an encounter with you.

We walk in hope for a future as the rollout of the vaccine continues across the UK and there are signs of success in the data as death rates among over 80s fall. We give thanks for the work of the NHS as they administer vaccines to the public and manage long lists of people needing urgent surgery. May we be mindful of countries yet to begin vaccination, and countries who cannot afford the vaccines, and we ask that governments would enable fair distribution. When we begin to emerge from crisis, may we work to build a better world where the poorest are protected.

As we look to the example of Jesus, who placed such great value on children, may we create a space where the young can dream again, and all of us can grow, rest and be secure.

Your kingdom comes near to those who call on your name; your pathway is surrounded by love. Teach us to long for an encounter with you.

In love you made us;
in love you call us;
in love you lead us –
through this world,
through sorrow and joy,
until we see you face to face.

Your kingdom comes near to those who call on your name; your pathway is surrounded by love. Teach us to long for an encounter with you.

Amen. Contributed by Roots with minor adjustment to fit our theme.

Closing Song: Lord I come to You StF 471

Sing/read or proclaim the words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=848dJg8WSI4&ab_channel=HughBaird

Lord I Come To You
Let My Heart Be Changed Renewed
Flowing From The Grace That
I Have Found In You
And Lord I Have Come To Know
The Weakness I See In Me
Will Be Stripped Away
By The Power Of Your Love

*Hold Me Close Let Your Love Surround Me
Bring Me Near Draw Me To Your Side
And As I Wait
I'll Rise Up Like An Eagle
And I Will Soar With You
Your Spirit Leads Me On
By The Power Of Your Love*

Lord Unveil My Eyes
Let Me See You Face To Face
The Knowledge Of Your Love
As You Live In Me
Lord Renew My Mind
As Your Will Unfolds In My Life
In Living Everyday
By The Power Of Your Love

Hold Me Close...

Geoff Bullock (b1956)

Benediction: During this season of Lent may we encounter God and His tender and everlasting love in a new and fresh way. May Christ always be beside us in times of struggle and should we weaken may the Holy Spirit give us strength and guide us back to His path. In these weeks ahead as we journey towards Jerusalem and the cross may our minds and hearts be first and foremost on the things of God.

In peace and love we will serve the Lord – **in the name of Christ- Amen.**

Thank you to Pauline for leading us this week and we look forward to welcoming Local Preacher Chris Stuckey next week when it will be “The Wedding Guests” from John 2:1-12 who encounter Jesus.

YouTube links are external resources and are provided to help you engage with the songs. Singing the Faith and Hymns and Psalms resources are provided under license: CCLI 178182.