

HOW Mission Community & KSAT Worship Service for 21st February 2021: Lent 1. Theme: Leaving Home

We thank Penny Hilland for this week's service as we enter Lent (and we also belatedly thank Jackie Betts for last week's service!)

Call to worship – *Psalm 145, verse 13*

The Lord is faithful in all his promises and loving towards all he has made

Opening prayer

God of all our days and years, unchanging and true, we set this time apart for You. Let us lift our eyes to gaze on God; hear His most Holy Word and receive His peace; and with all that we have been, all that we are, and all that we hope to be, let us offer ourselves to God in worship and in praise.

Hymn MP 16 – All my hope on God is founded <https://youtu.be/W3LCGh02Vew>

All my hope on God is founded, He doth still my trust renew;
Me through change and chance He guideth, only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone calls my heart to be His own.

Pride of man and earthly glory, sword and crown betray His trust;
What with care and toil He buildeth, tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour, is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth, deep His wisdom, passing thought,
Splendour, light and life attend Him, beauty springeth out of nought;
Evermore, from His store, new-born worlds rise and adore.

Day by day our mighty giver grants to all His gifts of love;
In His will our souls find pleasure, leading to our home above.
Love shall stand at His hand; joy shall wait for His command.

Still from earth to God eternal, sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising for the gift of Christ His Son.
Christ doth call one and all: ye who follow shall not fall.

Prayer of adoration

We praise you, Lord, for thinking that we are worth redeeming and for wanting us not as slaves to Your commands but as friends. Through Jesus Christ, You have enabled us to trust Your love. In Him this faithful love was fully expressed. From Him we learn that love is vulnerable and, when tested, is willing to pay what cost it may. In love we go with Jesus as He struggles with the dark powers of this world...as He approaches hostility and the cross of Calvary.....as You continue to make Your approach today and feel the spiteful hurt of human pride. In love we bow before You for standing with us and never failing us. In love we thank You that You have overcome the darkness and brought us into Your light. *To the God of all grace, who has called us into His eternal glory in Christ, belong all glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Reading: *Mark 1: 9-15*

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.' At once the Spirit drove Him out into the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended Him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' He said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.'

Prayer of confession

As we enter into the season of Lent, we remember again how our Lord Jesus Christ went alone into the wild places to examine His heart, His faith and His trust in God who had declared Him His beloved Son. Confirmation of who He was must have been a joy and a burden. Here was His caring Father, tender as a dove, who wanted Jesus to know He was close to Him. What joy! And yet here was a dynamic God who tears the skies open and sends Him off without delay on an onerous mission. What was expected of Him? What path must He take? What would be the consequences of obedience to God? Like Jesus, we each know how hard it is to surrender our own will to the will of God. We also know that Jesus succeeded and we so often fail. The great comfort for us is that Jesus knew this frailty in His common humanity with us. Whatever we go through, Jesus has been there before us. And, knowing us and loving us in our frailty, He is compassionate and merciful towards us when we turn to Him.

A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise(Psalm 51:17)

Let us pray

Beloved Lord Jesus, You stepped from the water of baptism to wilderness, from God's loving voice to the taunting voice of the enemy. In the wilderness of today's world, we face many enemies, many temptations that turn us away from You. Forgive us for succumbing to falsehood, selfishness, greed and complaint. Forgive us when we prefer to stay at home and look after our own comforts rather than go out to be as Christ to others. Even as we journey through this difficult time of personal restrictions on our freedom, due to the spreading coronavirus, we remember Your own struggles to deny Yourself and take up the cross to save many. Knowing that You carry our troubles and lead us through them into life with You, we are truly sorry for the wrong we have done You. Lord forgive us, and set us back on the right path. **Amen.**

Let us pray for the coming of God's kingdom in the words our Saviour taught us

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 forever. **Amen.**

Jesus heard the voice of God the Father affirming Him as His beloved Son. Have you heard God's voice affirming that you, too, are His beloved child? He calls each one of us in love and when we hear our name, we have a decision to make – just as Jesus did. Are we willing to leave the safe place we call home...perhaps to face the wilderness?

HymnMP 67 – Breathe on me, breath of God<https://youtu.be/M5keJHZdWYM>

Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will, to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God, till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God, so shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life of Thine eternity.

Prayer

God our Father, open our hearts and minds to know who You made us to be. Help us to live every day knowing that we are Your children. Open our eyes to see not only others, but also ourselves through the eyes of Your love. In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen.**

Reflection

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus left home.

Mark says such a lot in so few words that it is sometimes easy to miss the point. We need to read between the lines where we can. This is his first mention of Jesus, apart from identifying Him as the Son of God in the opening sentence of his gospel. He seems to be saying that we don't need to know about His early life. All that matters is that we know who He is; and that is precisely the point at which he starts to tell the story.

So when Jesus came from Nazareth to Galilee, and was baptised by John in the Jordan, Mark indicates the *beginning* of the great story of our salvation, God's good news to us. It all began because Jesus left home. And it happened *at that time*. Again not a word is wasted in Mark's writing! The gist here is nothing to do with a date or period in history, but refers to the blockbuster news surrounding John the Baptist. People were flocking from countryside and towns, even from Jerusalem, to receive in a river, (well away from the Temple), the baptism of the forgiveness of sins. This was extraordinary. The ancient rituals of repentance and atonement were always administered by the priests in the Temple, not by a would-be prophet quoting Isaiah and proclaiming the time had come *today* to prepare the way for the Lord. *'That time'* was the time of great stirring up, driven by the burning hope of a people who were longing for God's Saviour to come. The buzz would certainly have reached Nazareth..... and Jesus set off from home.

If Jesus was initially unaware that this was God's call on His life (we don't know!) He was to be left in no doubt when He came to John and was baptised. He saw the skies being torn apart and the Spirit of God descending on Him *like a dove*; Jesus hears a voice from heaven saying, *'You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'*

Again, few words, but certainly enough to convey their power! For Jesus was *immediately driven* by the Spirit into the wilderness and tempted by Satan for forty days. The feeling Mark conveys is that God required an urgent response. This was the time. Would Jesus take on His role as God's Son and do the work of our salvation that His Father had sent Him to do, or would He follow a path of His own choosing? For Mark, the details of those forty days of solitude are left for us to imagine; and even without the other gospel narratives it isn't hard for us to grasp that they were gruelling enough to require angels to protect Him. We also know that it was a testing time of formation that radically changed Him. For Jesus returned from the wilderness to Galilee to proclaim the good news of God. He knew who He was and what He must do. *'The time has come'*, He said. *'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe it'*. In other words, God Himself has come into the world. He is very near to us in a way that has never happened before. Even as I write this and you read it, God is very close. He is alongside us and within us and present in every moment, through thick and thin. Are we receptive? Do we believe it?

These words attributed to St Patrick say this much better than I can. I have always found them a great comfort:

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

As disciples of Christ, we would do well to reflect on how our own lives follow the same pattern that Mark sets out here. God is the Father of Jesus in the unique relationship of the Godhead, but He is also *our* Father, loving and faithful to His promise to raise us up to Him.

At our own 'baptism' (when we 'come to Christ'), we are released from the burden of our human sinfulness and enter into God's grace. We become changed and receive a new identity, a new purpose and our own special name to go with it! Immediately we belong to

the family of Christ's Church. In a way this is a moment of leaving home. I am reminded of the time when Jesus rebukes His mother for wanting Him to go back to the family, saying that *'whoever does God's will is My brother and sister and mother'* (another abrupt statement to be unpacked in *Mark 3:35!*).

I have personally had experiences of wilderness when I have felt utterly lost and far from the safety of home. Even my call to lay ministry had some big blows in store for me and I almost gave up. However, God kept on knocking gently at my door until I realised that He was confirming that the work He had first sent me to do was *what He intended me to do* and, indeed, *who I am*. Time to come out of the wilderness and move on! The great secret of life is how to survive struggle without succumbing to it.....how to bear hardship without being defeated by it.....and crucially how come out of great struggle better than we found ourselves in the midst of it. I have heard many people say that hope for a new and better way of living in the future is helping them through the present coronavirus wilderness. How has it changed you?

I am reminded of the story of Jacob wandering alone in the wilderness, unaware that God was travelling with him. Having laid down his head upon a stone to rest, God comes to him in a dream and when he wakes he thinks: *'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, the gateway of heaven'* (*Gen.28: 17*). The place, Bethel, became the birthplace of hope for him. In God's protection lies the secret of winning all the struggles of our lives. We must learn to hand them over to God and put our trust in Him, so that we come to the blessings hidden within these times. A spirituality of struggle becomes our witness to this world and reveals the secret of God's presence in it. As it was for Jesus, so it is for us!

So it is that all of us experience tough circumstances of one kind or another.... illness, loss of loved ones, loss of a job, insecurity, fear.....but surely we all learn more about ourselves and the person that God is calling us to be. This is how God forms us into the way of Christ. I remember my friend of many years, Revd. Giles Thompson, saying many times that there is no such thing as a problem, instead there is only opportunity. How many times, for example, have those who have suffered put their experience to use in helping others through the same pain? Are we continually learning to trust God as Jesus did, to bring us through the worst of times and in the end, to raise us up from darkness and death, as He raised up Jesus, into His perpetual light? Jesus is the beginning of our story and the end. We can take heart from remembering that – praise God! – we are journeying with Christ through the middle of that story. God is with us all the way.

Let's listen for the voice of our Father in Heaven calling us by name, declaring His love for us, and sending us out in His name. Every time we leave home (as we know it now), we move a little closer to the home that our Father has prepared for us, to our place with Him. The season of Lent is a time set aside, an opportunity, to take ourselves spiritually on the journey that Jesus took.

Heavenly Father, form us, we pray, into the likeness of Christ so that our lives may glorify You. Amen.

Hymn MP244: How good is the God we adore!<https://youtu.be/cbLNVAIqumI>

How good is the God we adore! Our faithful, unchangeable friend:
His love is as great as His power and knows neither measure nor end.

For Christ is the First and the Last; His Spirit will guide us safe home:
We'll praise Him for all that is past and trust Him for all that's to come.

Let us pray for the needs of the Church, the world and ourselves

We pray, Lord God, for Your Church throughout the world, that we may be united in courage and true in sharing the message and the work of Your Son, who offers hope and healing to the suffering and the down-hearted. We pray that we and all Christians may be what You want us to be and do what You want us to do. May we never be content with staying where we are but open our hearts to Your call and may we be willing to move forward where You are leading. Raise our expectations, Lord, and reveal something of Your divine nature to us in ways that change the way we see the world today.

We pray for the generation to which we belong, those with whom we share a common fund of memory, common standards of behaviour and a common attitude towards the world. Remind us that we must act for *Your* values within our world and grant that the presence of Christ may be so real to us that He may guide us to help our generation to see Him as our contemporary. May we take up and encourage what is good and holy.

We pray for the countries of the world; especially, Lord, bring Your peace and mercy to places where people are exploited, neglected or forgotten. We pray that the coronavirus immunisation programme and treatments will soon reach the poorer nations and that political motivations will not stand in its way. We also pray for political prisoners and people whose freedoms are threatened by military rule and ethnic hatred. Lord, hasten the changes that will bring release to the suffering. We pray for the day when all nations You have made come and worship You and honour Your name.

For those who are ill we pray that they will know Your presence and the wholeness of spirit that is Your gift..... May those be made well who are able to receive the healing skill You have provided for them.....May the bereaved find their solace and their eternal hope in You.....Lord, we believe that all who are suffering are precious to You and known to You by name. We ask that You would bless them and keep them safe from harm, now and always.

Father, graciously hear our prayers. We ask them in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who has come to us and has faithfully fulfilled all Your promises of old and who is Your final word in the story of our salvation.**Amen.**

Hymn MP 1012 – These are the days of Elijah <https://youtu.be/b8TpnYtkxaw>

These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord;
And these are the days of Your servant Moses, righteousness being restored.
And though these are days of great trial, of famine and darkness and sword,
Still we are a voice in the desert crying, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'

*Behold He comes riding on the clouds, shining like the sun at the trumpet call;
Lift your voice, it's the year of jubilee, out of Zion's hill salvation comes.*

These are the days of Ezekiel, the dry bones becoming as flesh;
And these are the days of Your servant David, rebuilding the temple of praise.
These are the days of the harvest, the fields are as white as the world,
And we are the labourers in the vineyard, declaring the word of the Lord.

Blessing

May Christ give us grace to grow in holiness, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow Him. May Your love and blessing be upon us, heavenly Father, as we journey on in the name of Your beloved Son and in the fellowship of Your Holy Spirit. **Amen.**