

The Bride Valley Telephone Service

Sunday 26th February 2023 – The First Sunday of Lent

The service for today has been prepared by the Reverend Jane Williams and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley churches for the First Sunday of Lent.

Steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart. [Psalm 32 v](#)

Hymn: Forty days and forty nights

1 Forty days and forty nights
thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted, and yet undefiled.

2 Sunbeams scorching all the day;
chilly dew-drops nightly shed;
prowling beasts about thy way;
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.

3 Let us thine endurance share,
and awhile from joys abstain,
with thee watching unto prayer,
strong with thee to suffer pain?

4 And if Satan, vexing sore,
flesh or spirit should assail,
thou, his vanquisher before
grant we may not faint nor fail.

5 So shall we have peace divine;
holier gladness ours shall be;
round us too shall angels shine,
such as ministered to thee.

6 Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,
ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear
at the eternal Eastertide.

George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870), Francis Pott (1832-1909) Public Domain

Invitation to Confession

By the mercies of God, let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him, which is our spiritual worship.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart: Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect

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

Old Testament Reading: *Genesis 2.15-17, 3.1-7*

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,* knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

New Testament Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned — sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore, just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written,

"One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." '

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you",

and "On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

"Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Reflection

Temptation always has that element of good sense which makes the sin seem appealing and plausible. We can imagine that Eve could be praised for wanting to stretch the limits of her and Adam's knowledge potential; wisdom for the human race was arguably a sensible step in promotion terms. The darker side of temptation is that the imagined and deceptive good sense masks the basic clear fact that doing or saying or thinking this particular thing is simply wrong. In Adam and Eve's case the serpent's suggestion went against God's instruction and resulted in them choosing to be disobedient. Typically, what initially looks so attractive turns out to cause misery and confusion. The pattern of temptation and sin is a depressing one, and something which we can all bring regretful and painful examples to mind.

And this is the point where God's plan for mending and healing springs thankfully into action in the person of Jesus, who is tempted in exactly the same way as we are. First, Satan goes for personal well-being and comfort: making stones into bread. When Jesus stands firm on what is really important, rather than self-centred needs, Satan goes for another favourite: self-doubt. He suggests a good and fool proof way for Jesus to test whether or not he really is God's son. But, if we look at Jesus' answer, we find he is remembering that putting God to the test like this, as the people had done at Massah in the wilderness, is an insult of God's love and faithfulness.

Next, Satan homes in on Jesus' loyalty to his Father and his respect and love for him. He suggests a clever and speedy way to please God by claiming all the people and presenting them to the Father, just as he is genuinely hoping to do. There's a big catch here, though. Jesus will need to pay for the privilege by worshipping Satan. Satan has completely overstepped the mark here, and made it very plain who he is, and how evil the plan is, so the battle is over, at least for the moment.

We need to copy Jesus in clinging on to the real underlying truths during our temptations, then they will eventually emerge to be seen as obviously wrong. The danger in temptation is the point when we are being won over by the persuasive attraction and plausibility, so that our hold on what is right and good is temporarily lost. It's as if we are temporarily 'off balance' and therefore easy to knock down.

Ultimately Jesus did so much more than wading through terrible temptation without sinning. He went on to take on freely the punishing cursed death which results from sin, opening up for us the way back into the garden of hope and promise. As we hold on to Jesus in faith, he frees us to exchange the lasting death of sin and judgement for full and everlasting hope. Amen.

Prayers

And so let us pray to the Lord for courage to give ourselves to God this Lent and to let go of what is unhelpful and hurtful.

Give your Church the courage to give up her preoccupation with herself and to give more time to your loving mission in the world. *(Time for silent prayer)*

Lord, meet us in the silence, **give us strength and hear our prayer.**

Give your world the courage to give up war, bitterness and hatred, and to seek peace.

(Time for silent prayer)

Lord, meet us in the silence, **give us strength and hear our prayer.**

Give us the courage to give up quarrels, strife and jealousy in our families, neighbourhoods and communities.

(Time for silent prayer)

Lord, meet us in the silence, **give us strength and hear our prayer.**

Give us the courage to give up our selfishness as we live for others, and to give time, care and comfort to the sick and those in need. *(Time for silent prayer)*

Lord, meet us in the silence, **give us strength and hear our prayer.**

Give us the courage to give up our fear of death and to rejoice with those who have died in faith. *(Time for silent prayer)*

Lord, meet us in the silence, **give us strength and hear our prayer, here and in eternity.**

Amen.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,**

The Lord's Prayer: as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen

1 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,
feed me now and evermore.

Hymn: Guide me O thou great Redeemer

lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield.

2 Open now the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar

3 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
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1717-1791) Translated by Peter Williams (1727-1796) Public Domain

God's blessing

May God the Father, who does not despise the broken spirit, give to you a contrite heart.

Amen.

May Christ, who bore our sins in his body on the tree, heal you by his wounds. **Amen.**

May the Holy Spirit, who leads us into all truth, speak to you words of pardon and peace.

Amen.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you now and always. **Amen.**

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