

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 12th March 2023 – The Third Sunday of Lent

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice for Sunday 12th March which has been put together by Liz Howlett. We worship together across the valley in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We begin with some words from the 14th century English mystic, Mother Julian of Norwich:

‘God’s goodness floods creation, infusing all of his blessed works, endlessly overflowing all that is, for he is everlastingness. He made us for himself alone. He restored us through his blessed passion. He sustains us always in his perfect love. And all this flows from his goodness.’

1 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.

2 Saviour, breathe forgiveness o’er us;
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,

Hymn: Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
self denying, death defying,
thou to Calvary didst go.

3 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) Public Domain

Invitation to Confession

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all. Let us come to him, in sorrow for our sins, seeking healing and salvation.

Prayers of Penitence

God be gracious to us and bless us, and make your face to shine upon us:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

May your ways be known on earth, your saving power among the nations:

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You have made known your salvation, and reveal your justice in the sight of the nations:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; 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.

First Reading: Exodus 17: 1 – 7

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarrelled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The LORD answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take

in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Gospel Reading: John 4: 5 – 42

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied.

Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.”

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.”

Reflection

The wilderness – it’s one of the places we are invited to explore during Lent. It was a place of great importance for Jesus before he took up his public ministry and as we have just heard in our Old Testament reading this morning, the wilderness provided the backdrop to the journey from slavery to freedom for the Israelites

hundreds of years before that. The wilderness is a scary place to be. I have some impressive photos of the wilderness which I took when I was in Israel/Palestine a few years ago – the sun beating down on the rolling sand as far as you can see, no landmarks of any sort – it all looks the same in every direction – an easy place to get lost in – but behind us was the coach we were travelling in and before long we got back in and journeyed on to Jerusalem, safely following the road through the desert.

The Israelites were clearly terrified out in the wilderness – nothing in their life in Egypt had prepared them for this wandering through seemingly barren land – they were totally out of their comfort zone and perhaps not surprisingly, in their fear and anxiety, were needing someone to blame. Even though they had been slaves in Egypt and had experienced oppression and cruelty, yet they had food and drink easy to hand there. Here, nothing was certain. They were being urged to trust God but that was clearly not straightforward for them in the midst of all the unfamiliarity of where they were. It was as if you have walked forward, thinking the ground was there to support you but when you looked down, you suddenly realised that you had walked off the edge of the cliff and there is no ground beneath your feet, just 1000s of feet of empty space.

We can each of us find ourselves in the wilderness of our own lives. We don't have to travel to the desert to find it. This is about those times in our lives when things have changed so much that we don't recognise our own life anymore. On the one hand, we are frail human beings, and we will make mistakes and do things that hurt us and other people and which may have long-lasting consequences. And on the other hand, there are things that happen over which we have no control – Covid has been a huge and obvious example, for the way it knocked us all from our usual ways of living; you will bring to mind other major things that happen to us – for example we may experience bereavement of a loved one, job redundancy, losing our home, the breakdown of a significant relationship; illness – our own and others... All these can catapult us out of what feels familiar and settled, into the unknown, into the wilderness, where we cannot navigate because there are no recognisable landmarks. Like the Israelites, we cannot go back to our old life, however much we might want to – we can only move forwards, one step at a time, into the unfamiliar and scary landscape of wilderness.

I've been reading about medieval pilgrims, who might have travelled hundreds of miles to Rome, or Santiago di Compostella, or Jerusalem, or even Whitchurch Canonicorum, just along the A35 from here. And something I've learned recently has really struck me about the actual word 'pilgrim'. Apparently, this word is derived from an ancient word that means 'foreigner'. If we think about it, pilgrims were those who chose to leave behind their old life and set out into the unknown – the wilderness of foreign places and people. Their journey on foot would have taken months, if not years – and who knows if they would ever have returned home, for there would have been all sorts of hazards and dangers ahead. They would have put their affairs in order, settling any disputes with neighbours and getting permission from their family members, before setting out to become a foreigner for God. For many of those who embarked on pilgrimage were hoping and praying that their strange and new experience would bring them to a closer and deeper relationship with God. And likewise, the wilderness, whether a geographical place, or a way of being, as well as being a very scary place to be, can also be something out of which the new and better and deeper can arise. This won't happen immediately, or easily, but sometimes it can feel as if the old and familiar has to be let go of in order for the new and unimaginable to come into existence. For God to be experienced in a deeper and more profound way. I wonder if this has ever been your experience.

For the woman at the well in our gospel reading, her wilderness was not miles from home, but she experienced it within a conversation that would never had happened in the ordinary run of things. Jews and Samaritans had a long history of bad feeling between them – a sibling enmity that went back generations and was perpetuated by every following generation. This woman and Jesus may never have had the opportunity to speak in the town, where they would have been surrounded by others who held this enmity close to their hearts, but out by the well, alone, a wilderness conversation could take place which turned all the old certainties upside down. The boundaries between Jew and Samaritan, between male and female, between supposedly 'good' people and 'bad' people were removed by this conversation between them taking place. In this wilderness, these old boundaries were redundant. The old and familiar ways could not have enabled a life-giving conversation to take place – the old and familiar had to be let go of in order for these two people to encounter one another, to let God be experienced in a more profound way than could ever have be imagined within the old ways of living. When we feel we have lost our way in the wilderness times of our own lives, may we be given the courage to step out into the unknown, hopeful and trusting that this new territory may be a place where we encounter the living God in deeper ways than we could ever have imagined. Amen.

Hymn: Father, hear the prayer we offer

1 Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

2 Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

3 Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

4 Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Love Maria Willis (nee Whitcomb) (1824-1908), Samuel Longfellow (1819-1892) Public Domain

Prayers

Mother Julian of Norwich wrote this: *'God's love for us is so great that it surpasses the understanding of any living being... And so we can approach our Beloved with great devotion, asking for our heart's deepest desire, knowing that what we really want is God, and that all God really wants is us.'* And so let us pray.

As God's children, we come to our creator with our world on our hearts. *(Pause)*

We long for peace and freedom in those places where there is war and oppression.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

As God's children, we come to Jesus our brother and saviour with the church on our hearts. *(Pause)*

May the church the world over be a source of life and flourishing for all touched by it.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

As God's children, we come to our sustainer, the Holy Spirit, bringing our families, friends and neighbours in our hearts. *(Pause)*

May those in need be supported and those struggling with illness find health and healing.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray **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, 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**

Blessing

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all goodness and growth, pour his blessing upon all created things and upon you, that you may use his gifts to his glory and the welfare of all peoples; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you now and always. **Amen.**

Hymn: I heard the voice of Jesus say

1 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Come unto me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down
thy head upon my breast.'

I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live.'

I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'I am this dark world's Light;
look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
and all thy day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk,
till travelling days are done.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) Public Domain

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Quotations from Mother Julian taken from: Julian of Norwich: The Showings: a contemporary translation. Mirabai Starr (Canterbury Press; 2014).