

21 February 2021

*Christ Church New Southgate &
Friern Barnet*

Please join with us at 11am to read this service together either in printed form, whatapp or via the youtube link on our website www.christchurchnsfb.org

Each person in the church is assigned a deacon who will call you to see if you are alright in these times and to pray for you.

Welcome to our first service in Lent on Sunday 21 February where we will be using resources from Worship in the Wilderness.

Prayer

God of feasting and fasting,
mountaintop and desert,
you gather us together by your Holy Spirit.
May we follow Jesus into the wilderness,
feeding on your living bread
and tasting your water of life.
We come hungry and thirsty
for more of you, God. Amen.

Song: You lead us through
by Sam and Sara Hargreaves

You lead us through the wilderness
and give us grace for trials and tests.
Your Holy Spirit shows the way
and in our weakness teaches us to pray.

*We'll worship in the wilderness,
a dry and thirsty land.
We won't survive by bread alone
but by your Word, and guided by your hand.*

As Jesus fasted forty days,
so help us turn from selfish ways,
to trust in you, and learn to give
for when we die to self we'll truly live.

You join us in our brokenness,
and comfort us in our distress,
For you're the hope of all who mourn
you lead us to your resurrection dawn.

*Storytelling of the Wilderness from Exodus 16 with
Diana, Desmond and Lynda*

Forty-five days after their escape from Egypt, the people of Israel were hungry. So they went to Moses and Aaron and complained.

[People of Israel:]

**Meatpots in the morning, white bread,
wheat and rye.
We ate our fill in Egypt,
but now we're going to die!**

So Moses went to God and told God what the people had said (as if God didn't know already!). And this is how God replied.

[God:]

**"Heaven's bread" at daybreak... "Quail Surprise" at dusk.
I'll send enough for just one day to teach my people trust.**

There was an exception, of course. On the sixth day, the people had to collect two days worth of the food God sent, so they didn't have to do it on the Sabbath.

So Moses and Aaron went back to the people, who were still complaining:

People of Israel:]

**Meatpots in the morning, white bread,
wheat and rye.
We ate our fill in Egypt,
but now we're going to die!**

In response to which, Moses and Aaron had a moan of their own!

[Moses & Aaron:]

**We've had it with your
moaning
We find it rather odd
that you complain to us
instead of grumbling to God.**

And just as Aaron said it, the glory of God appeared in a cloud above the wilderness. And God spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard my people's grumbling, so this is what I shall do:

[God:]

**"Heaven's bread" at daybreak... "Quail Surprise" at dusk.
I'll send enough for just one day to teach my people trust.**

And, sure enough, quail arrived and covered the camp, that evening. And, sure enough, when the people of Israel woke the next day, they found flaky stuff all over the ground, fine as frost.

And even though they did not know exactly what it was, they ate it, and they were no longer hungry.

And, as a result, the moaning of the people...

People of Israel:

**Meatpots in the morning, white bread,
wheat and rye.
We ate our fill in Egypt,
but now we're going to die!**

and the frustration of Aaron and Moses...

[Moses & Aaron:]

**We've had it with your
moaning
We find it rather odd
that you complain to us
instead of grumbling to God.**

was transformed by God's power and mercy into something they would never forget:

[God:] **"Heaven's bread" at daybreak...
"Quail Surprise" at dusk.**

I'll send enough for just one day to teach my people trust.

*ALL AGE ACTIVITY: Tasting Prayer
tath.co.uk*

The Israelites had to rely on God for food and drink in the wilderness. Let's use the different tastes around our home to help us to pray today. We'll use salt/bitter/sour/umami and sweet.

Can you find: some salt and pepper, something sour, something savoury and something sweet?

Salt

God showed mercy and was patient and forgiving with the grumbling Israelites. Pray and say sorry to God for anything you have done this week that is not pleasing to Him.

Pepper – Bitter

Take it in turns to bring to God in prayer something that has been challenging or upsetting this week.

Sour

Pray and ask God to help you forgive anybody who has upset you this week.

Savoury

Umami is the savoury taste, it is linked to warm comforting things like broth. Pray and ask God to give you the feeling of his wrap around love and comfort.

Sweet

Take it in turns to pray and say thank you to God for a good thing that has happened to you this week.

Reading: Deuteronomy 8.1-5 read by Elijah

“Obey faithfully all the laws that I have given you today, so that you may live, increase in number, and occupy the land that the Lord promised to your ancestors. ² Remember how the Lord your God led you on this long journey through the desert these past forty years, sending hardships to test you, so that he might know what you intended to do and whether you would obey his commands. ³ He made you go hungry, and then he gave you manna to eat, food that you and your ancestors had never eaten before. He did this to teach you that you must not depend on bread alone to sustain you, but on everything that the Lord says. ⁴ During these forty years your clothes have not worn out, nor have your feet swollen up. ⁵ Remember that the Lord your God corrects and punishes you just as parents discipline their children.

Sermon: God sustains

The best meal I have ever eaten was a packet of rehydrated beanfeast, some instant potato – Smash and salt & vinegar crisps gently infused with methylated spirits. It was served in one saucepan with three forks, in a cramped school tent with wind and rain lashing all around. It was glorious!

This meal was so good because despite an unpromising menu, we had truly earned that meal. As part of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, I and two other girls had trekked 20 miles around a mountain in the Lake District and pitched a tent in the pouring rain. Finally, for the first time that day we were warm, dry and eating hot food, even if the crisps had

somehow soaked up the camping gas from the stove, we ate them and we loved every bite. I had never tried the food before, I did not think I would like it, but I truly did.

Today we are thinking about how God provided for his people in the desert after leaving Egypt. He provided them with manna – a sort of flaky bread. A kind of food they had never eaten before, they hadn't cooked it before, and they were not sure they were going to like it. But it fed them in the wilderness. The manna meant that they were not hungry.

With the wilderness almost behind them, the people of God are standing close to the Jordan, close to the promised land in Deuteronomy 8 and Moses is reminding them not to forget what has happened in the desert. Not to forget but to remember his provision. Why?

The years in the wilderness were not wasted. The trials of the desert life were important. For here in the place of testing and trials the people of God learnt to rely on him for sustenance. They learnt that relying on God was not only about bread, but about something more, it was about life.

Some of you I know read the bible reading notes – Daily Bread. Well this is where the inspiration for the name comes from, the daily bread God provided in the desert was manna literal food but far more it was spiritual food to sustain them in the wilderness.

In the first lockdown I wrote a sermon about finding a chicken for a roast dinner, and you all delighted with me. IN the first lockdown, supplies were low, stock of everything was running out, we panicked and stripped the supermarkets bare. In this third lockdown, we've got food sorted, we can more or less

get what we want. Certainly no-one is worried about running out of loo rolls anymore.

But now we face the bigger challenge, a creeping battle of our souls and mental well-being. We thought the problem was finding food in lockdown 1, and indeed it was difficult. In lockdown 3 the problem is not so easy to solve. In fact the thought of being able to travel together with lots of people around a desert almost sounds appealing against having to spend another evening trying to find something new to watch, read or make at home.

What we need now in lockdown 3 is exactly what the people of God needed in the desert: sustenance from God. Our daily needs are fairly well covered now, our lockdown wilderness is not making us panic but it is dragging us down.

In this wilderness time, God is present with us, he is teaching us how to walk in faith, how to seek him in new ways, how to worship in new ways, how to connect with each other in new ways. He is helping us in lockdown to understand what life is really about. God wants us to have full life in abundance, to delight in his world and creation, to be happy and well.

Life is not eating out constantly, shopping to excess, and being too busy to notice creation, too busy to grow friendships and healthy relationships. Life is about having the basics of life covered such as food and shelter but then prioritising time in God's presence, in laughter, in care, in love and in growing good relationships.

At the edge of the promised land, at the edge of lockdown 3 ending, where we can almost see the light at the end of the tunnel, what will we forget? And what will we remember?

Moses calls the people of God to remember the law and to remember the relationship that God had with his people. He calls on the people to remember God for it is he that sustained them, not just with bread but with his presence. We've learnt in lockdown 3, the greater battle of life is not material but spiritual. Not physical but mental.

And it's God's strength for the spiritual and mental challenge of the desert that sustained Christ too. As Jesus was baptised, he went into the wilderness where he was tempted in many ways, including the temptation to turn stones into bread, to which he quoted Deuteronomy 8.3

You must not depend on bread alone to sustain you, but on everything that the Lord says.

The rainy adventure in the lake district was just the practice for the real expedition in the summer. On that trip, there was further to walk, heavier packs but beautiful sunshine and wonderful friendships forged. I cannot tell you what I ate then, but I can tell you I felt totally alive.

As we begin to look forward to coming out of lockdown, whenever that may be, may God's word be that which has fed us, equipped us and trained us for the next challenge. You know entering the promised land wasn't all about milk and honey, it was also about learning to be the people of god in a new land with a new song. There would be challenges ahead that only the wilderness could prepare them for.

The book of Deuteronomy tells us how the people of God survived 40 years in the desert and how God guided them in the wilderness years. In chapter 8 we hear Moses speaking to the people as they look onto the promised land. Their time in the wilderness is almost

over, they can almost see the light at the end of the tunnel but not quite yet. Testing times are when we learn most. What will you take with you from lockdown 3? How has God's word spoken to you? What has the Spirit revealed to you? How has Jesus sustained you?

When a child learns to walk, she falls, tumbles and has wobbly legs. God is like the father who offers hands to hold as a child steadies herself, and supports her as she begins to walk. How has God sustained you so far? How might that continue? Allow yourself to stretch out your hand and allow God to strength those who feel weak and faint, for those who wait on the Lord will be renewed in hope. Let us allow God to sustain us by his word now in lockdown and in the future. May we not live by bread alone but by his word. May God sustain us.

Communion

Sharing in communion in lockdown at home reminds us of the bread given to the Israelites in the wilderness, reminds us of the meal Jesus shared with his friends and reminds us of our community gathering together to share this meal.

Communion is physical and spiritual food for the road ahead. The bread and wine are to bless and encourage us. The presence of God's Spirit is assured wherever and however we gather together. We are not alone. We sit separately but are joined as believers in the body of Christ.

May our bread and drink today be like manna in the desert, may it sustain us and equip us for our journey ahead. May it remind us of God's provision for us. May it tell us again and again of God's overflowing love for us.

Hear again the story of Jesus breaking bread:

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Thank you Lord
that you are present with us.
Thank you Lord that you sustain us.
Help us today to be honest before you
To share our frustrations,
challenges and failures
Help us to confess
and make our peace with you.

Silence

Most gracious God,
we delight in your love
and forgiveness.
We draw close to you today
and ask that you would sustain us
in this meal and by your word.
Amen

Break bread

Jesus said: "This is my body which is for you.
Do this in memory of me."

Share wine

Jesus said: "This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it do this in memory of me."

Prayer

Sometimes we feel like we're walking through wilderness:

[All:] Jesus we choose to walk with you.

When our spirits feel dry, help us trust in
your Spirit:

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

Fasting seems difficult, prayers seem
unanswered:

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

The world howls like wild animals all around
us:

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

We can choose to worry, or to trust you to
provide:

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

Temptation is everywhere, doubts can
overwhelm us:

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

You know what it's like to walk through this
desert:

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

You long to transform us with wilderness
worship:

Jesus we choose to walk with you. Amen.

Blessing

Holy Spirit,

fill us with your water of life,

so that even as we walk through the desert

we might know your refreshing

and share it with those around us.

Lead us, as you led Jesus,

to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

*Liturgy, storytelling and music provided by Worship
in the Wilderness*