

28 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 service today on Sunday 28 February 2021 at Christ Church New Southgate and Friern Barnet online.

Let us be still before God in this season of lent. We remember Jesus' journey into the desert today. A simple journey without baggage, without companions, without distractions. It was a simple yet challenging journey one that echoes with our own experience of lockdown as a wilderness.

Let us like Christ draw strength from scripture:

Psalm 63

1 You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.
2 I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.
3 Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
4 I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
5 I will be fully satisfied as with the richest

of foods;

with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

6 On my bed I remember you;

I think of you through the watches of the night.

7 Because you are my help,

I sing in the shadow of your wings.

8 I cling to you;

your right hand upholds me.

The people of God were formed by their wilderness years and found God's leading in the desert. Let us sing Guide me oh thou great Jehovah . Thank you to John for playing.

Hymn: Guide me oh thou great Jehovah

1 Guide me, O my great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but you are mighty;
hold me with your powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

2 Open now the crystal fountain,
where the healing waters flow.

Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
ever be my strength and shield,
ever be my strength and shield.

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, songs of praises
I will ever sing to you,
I will ever sing to you.

Reading: Luke 4.1-13 read by Dawn Wilson.

⁴ Jesus returned from the Jordan full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the desert, ² where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days. In all that time he ate nothing, so that he was hungry when it was over.

³ The Devil said to him, "If you are God's Son, order this stone to turn into bread."

⁴ But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone.'"

⁵ Then the Devil took him up and showed him in a second all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ "I will give you all this power and all this wealth," the Devil told him. "It has all been handed over to me, and I can give it to anyone I choose. ⁷ All this will be yours, then, if you worship me."

⁸ Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'"

⁹ Then the Devil took him to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the Temple, and said to him, "If you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For the scripture says, 'God will order his angels to take good care of you.' ¹¹ It also says, 'They will hold you up with their hands so that not even your feet will be hurt on the stones.'"

¹² But Jesus answered, "The scripture says, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the Devil finished tempting Jesus in every way, he left him for a while.

All Age Activity: Story jumble

How well do you know that story? Take a look at this slide and have a think, is this the right order of the different parts of the story that Dawn just read. Or have I got it muddled up? What should it be?

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert
Tempted to jump & test God
Angels cared for him

Devil left him
Tempted to make bread
Tempted to take power

Well I started OK but this is the real order.
Well done if you spotted all of those mistakes!

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert
Tempted to make bread
Tempted to take power
Tempted to jump & test God
Devil left him
Angels cared for him

I have linked a cartoon version of this story on our website and provided a wordsearch, colouring sheet and an alphabet soup activity.

Families - might you discuss a few questions together:

1. How might Jesus have felt in the desert?
2. What is similar in lockdown and in a desert?
3. How did Jesus find strength in the wilderness?
4. How might that help me now?

Sermon

This week I'm taking part in a national pulpit exchange, so I am preaching online at Harrow Baptist Church and our sermon has been prepared by Andy Jackson, their minister. Please enjoy this thought-provoking sermon.

God Strengthens Us in the Wilderness

Firstly, thank you for this opportunity to share with you this morning and to Ruth for offering to take part in today's 'virtual pulpit'

swap. Ruth is someone whose giftings as a minister I have long admired. She was the year above me at Regent's Park College, we served on the Middle Common Room Committee together, and I'll probably embarrass her by saying I've always looked up to her. So it's a real privilege that Ruth's entrusted you to me this morning.

Let me just very briefly introduce myself. I'm Andrew Jackson, and I'm minister at Harrow Baptist, about 100 yards from Harrow-on-the-Hill station. I know they would wish to offer you greetings and best wishes from our church.

Like you, we've been pre-recording services for the bulk of the last year, discovering the joys and the limitations of the technology, and in my case, certainly its users, and negotiating the minefield of when it is and isn't safe to be meeting together and how best to handle it. So if you're finding this season hard work, be assured you're not alone.

Anyway, let's pray, then I'll dive into what I want to share with you today...
Spirit of the living God
Present with us now

However we engage
with this act of worship

On paper, through the internet...
Use this time to connect with us
And may we connect with you.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

Temptation. It's something that is common, yet unique to us all. It is common in that, in some way or another, we all face it. But unique in that it comes to each of us in a different guise.

In the last few weeks, it was the Australian Open tennis. They're hours ahead of us, with

play starting at midnight, through til about lunchtime. So for me there was the temptation to stay up far later than is really good for me, and be like a zombie next day. Or I could get up and think I'll just watch a bit whilst I have my first coffee and start to wake up... then get sucked into it. But for many of you, tennis might sound like a cure for insomnia.

Equally some of you will have to watch yourself around fruit cake or go easy if someone's serving blue cheese after dinner. Neither is such a big challenge for me.

Like a good murder mystery, real temptation requires means, motive and opportunity. Some temptations will simply never come our way, cos we are not in a position to face them. I'm unlikely to be tempted to evade tax by hiding my millions in a secret little scheme in the Caymans. I'm not complaining about what I earn, but it's not enough for someone to think it worth my while. Equally, I'm not really in a position to turn stones to bread, nor, you may be glad to know, have I felt any urge to throw myself off the top of the 20 storey block of flats they've just built next to our church, expecting angels to come and catch me on the way down.

In Lent we are invited to reflect on ideas like wilderness and temptation. Today's Gospel passage invites us to remember the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness and the temptations he faced. But it's hard to equate the temptation I might face to keep quiet when someone gives me change for a £20 note rather than a £10, with what Jesus faces here.

But can we bring these temptations a little closer to our experience?

Might this speak to us, in our ‘wilderness seasons’?

I think we can and it does.

You see, when life gets tough, we feel vulnerable, perhaps isolated, there are a few strategies we can often lean on. They’re not necessarily bad of themselves, but if we are ultimately relying on them to get us through, at some point they’ll come up short.

Jesus is offered the chance to rely on a number of these strategies, but ultimately chooses to lean into God, what God wants for him, what God has to say about him.

Let me explain. Take the first temptation. To turn stones to bread. What strategy might this be leaning into? It’s about *material security*.

Of itself, it is no bad thing. In my life I’ve been financially stretched and I’ve been financially quite comfortable. I know which I prefer. Anyone who thinks there is anything romantic or inherently virtuous about poverty hasn’t experienced it.

But comfort also brings its difficulties. It can make us entitled, perhaps quite arrogant. The more materially secure we become, the more of our own problems we can readily solve. But we can come to rely on it as our way out of anything. We can start to think just throw enough money or resources at it and we can solve it.

Until we can’t.

We can develop that sense of ‘look what I’ve achieved.’ We can lose sight of all that we have is gift. Wealth has been likened to drinking salt water. The more we drink, the thirstier we get. If we’re not careful, what we have is never enough. If we just had this, if we just had that. It can get in the way of generosity.

Material security is no bad thing. But if it takes us down a path of self-reliance, or where we fail to recognise that all that we have is gift, it’s a dangerous basket into which to place all our eggs.

Satan’s not finished. In a moment all the Kingdoms of the earth flash before Jesus. You can have them if you just worship me.

If the first temptation feels a bit removed from me – the second one certainly is. I’m not sure about you, but I’m not sure I’d want all the nations of the earth right now.

But what is it that is being offered to Jesus here? It’s *the illusion of control*. That we can bend the world and our circumstances to our will. We can control everything.

We sometimes speak of someone having their ducks in a row. They’ve got it all under control. You know what I’ve discovered down the years? You might think they’re really sussed. But often those are the most stressed out people I know. They worry about one duck getting out of line, when, can I be honest, most of us would just love to know where our ducks are!

I’m not encouraging us to neglect responsibility for things we can and should take on. But we don’t have the level of control we think we have. So many of our problems are about not recognising the distinction between those things which are under our control and those things which aren’t and ***were never supposed to be***.

How many relationships are dysfunctional and damaged because one party or another is trying to exert influence they have no right to expect?

Throughout the scriptures that was the way of Rome, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt... The way you got the nations of the world was to make

them bend to your will. Coerce them into submission. That was what Jesus was being offered. It's the road down which so many have gone, from the international stage, right down to the smaller scale interactions which are more our arena.

But it's not the way of God. God seeks to draw us with love.

That's costly. It can be painful. It can be rejected.

But that's how God exercises his rule. It's the way God, in Christ, transforms lives. It's the way by which he's redeeming the world and making all things new.

Jesus is then taken to the highest point of the temple. Satan urges him to throw himself off. Surely God would rescue him and everyone would be really impressed. This would get him noticed. This is about the desire to impress. To tie our sense of value up in what others think of us.

It is natural, good healthy desire, to have dignity, worth and value. One of the most consistent messages of the Bible is that we are created in the image of God, fearfully and wonderfully made, completely and utterly and unconditionally loved. That is how we are viewed in God's sight. That's what gives us our true worth.

But if we live for the approval of others, if that is what we tie up our sense of worth and value in, we're destined for disappointment. We will never truly get enough. There will always be that temptation to compare ourselves (unfavourably) with others.

There will always be that voice telling us we're not good enough. That one critical voice will always be louder than all the voices of affirmation put together. It will cut more deeply.

And often that critical voice will be your own.

And it becomes a never-ending effort to maintain it.

Until you realise you don't need to.

That your dignity, worth and value are ultimately not tied up in what you've achieved, who you've become, how many look up to and respect you. Your true dignity, worth and value are bestowed on you by the God in whose image you were created. And nothing can take that away from you. The more we grasp that, the more contented and at peace we become.

Faced with trials these are three avenues down which so many lean on to get through material security, for a sense of self-worth, for a sense of control.

And Jesus rejects all of them. Instead Jesus leans into what God wants for him and what God says about him.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus was doing in those 40 days in the wilderness? Truth is we don't know. But whatever it was, I'd suggest Jesus spent some of the time meditating on the book of Deuteronomy. That's where all his responses to temptation came from.

Jesus didn't do any magic God-dy stuff to defeat temptation. He simply went back to what God said about him and to him. He engaged with God and the scriptures in the wilderness, and that sustained him (last week's message) and strengthened him for when challenge and trial came.

So he didn't lean on his material security, in the work of his own hands. He rested in the strengthening of God. He recognised that all that we have is a gift.

And it is not earned. Our value is not tied up in what we've achieved, how far we've gone, how many people look up to us. It's rooted in the fact that we are loved, completely and unconditionally, simply because.

And our true control is that we are held in that love from which nothing can separate us. When the illusion of control proves to be just that – an illusion – we recognise that even in a world where so much is out of our control, even when we find ourselves in the wilderness, we are not alone.

We can put our trust in the one who holds all things, who has faced all this world has to throw at us, and overcome it. We have one in whom we can rely on, who, if we lean on him, has always strengthened his people in the wilderness and can do the same for us.

Prayers

Our prayers are led by Sally Greenwood today, thank you Sally.

Dear Lord

We ask you to bless the people facing hunger both in Yemen and the rest of the world where starvation is a reality for many families.

Please release enough funding and call willing workers to distribute food fairly and without prejudice. Please shine a light on corruption and greed and enable leaders to act with consideration towards the vulnerable.

Please send blessings on people with insecure asylum status, who have nowhere safe to call home and who have lost family members in war torn communities. Give them an inner peace, a safe place to sleep and good relationships with the people they

meet.

We beg you to send the Holy Spirit to comfort those who are bereaved throughout the world, through COVID, other disease and violence. Bring them peace and courage to face the future.

Please help those with power and control to act with justice and consider the wellbeing of people and planet.

In Jesus name
Amen

Notices

We had a wonderful prayer evening on Thursday with 19 of us gathering on Zoom. Please do join us if you are able this Thursday at 8pm. And don't forget it's our church meeting today at 12noon.

Blessing

Let us share a blessing together:

**The Lord bless us and keep us;
the Lord make his face
to shine upon us
and be gracious to us;
the Lord lift up his countenance
upon us and give us peace.
Amen.**