

7 March 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 on Sunday 7 March 2021.

Prayer

God, you rejoice with those who rejoice;
you mourn with those who mourn,
and you call us to do the same.
Help us to come to you today
with honesty and openness,
sharing our sorrows
and knowing your comfort. Amen.

Song: You lead us through the wilderness
<https://youtu.be/hw70gNwEmOY>

Reading: Exodus 3.1-10

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

²There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

All age activity: Make a burning bush.

Why not create a burning bush together, you could build a 3D model or design a collage or picture. Or you can light a candle. Please make sure the candle is in a holder and is safe.

Praying using the burning bush

1. Preparing to approach

Moses saw the bush in the distance and decided to find out more about it. Say a prayer together dedicating your time to God and asking God to meet with you. Lord we are here now, please would you meet with us

2. Take off your shoes

God told Moses he was standing on Holy Ground, take off your shoes and place them neatly at the edge of the room or outside the

door. Explain that you are going to draw close to God who is Holy. Like Moses – let us take off our shoes to draw closer to God

3. A prayer of repentance

God sees us – **point to your eyes**

Before God let us be honest with him.
Lord we are sorry for saying silly things
We are sorry for doing bad things
Thank you for being a loving and kind to us.

4. Share your sadness

God hears us – **cup hand to ears**

God told Moses he knew the sadness of his people.
What are you sad about? Tell God what you are sad about and ask him to help others and yourself.

5. Ask God about His plans for you

God helps us and leads us - **two hands with palms up above head**

Take a look at your burning bush or your candle. God can speak to us, let's ask him to speak now. Lord as we sit before you today, we ask that you would speak to us through wind, fire and still small voice. Help us in these difficult days to be still and listen for your voice to lead us. Amen.

Sermon: Rev. Matt Harbage, St Paul's New Southgate

Good morning, it's a pleasure to be invited by Reverend Ruth to share a reflection with you today. For those who haven't yet met me, and as I only moved to the area last March that's probably most of you, my name is Matt and I'm the new vicar at St Paul's New Southgate.

My wife Catherine and I moved into Woodland road just two weeks before the first national lockdown last year. It's been a

rollercoaster of a year hasn't it, for all of us. Ruth and the other local church ministers have given me a very warm welcome and my congregation have been great. I love our area and love meeting new people and discovering new places.

In case I forget, I want to first thank those of you who have donated recently to the foodbank we've set up at St Paul's. I always find it moving, seeing the small crowd of people who queue up Monday by Monday. We can only do so much, and it's a small thing, but families genuinely look lighter as they leave carrying heavy bags. It's like seeing someone who has found a well of water in the middle of a desert.

Worshipping God in the desert has been the theme at Christ Church I believe over the last couple of weeks of Lent. The desert is a richly symbolic place in Scripture and the Christian life. It is a powerful metaphor... but for what exactly?

The desert is certainly not the promised land: that land is described as flowing with milk and honey.

The desert is barren and empty. As Bishop Tom Wright explores, the desert is harsh and unforgiving:

"For all these reasons, the wilderness was feared. For people in Bible times it represented the unknown, danger, failure and mortality."

Perhaps it's not unlike our COVID lockdown world. And yet, as we also know, the desert is also a place where God is powerfully at work: providing manna; revealing himself – like in the burning bush. A place God uses to equip his messengers, as John the Baptist shows us. The desert is also a place where Jesus himself withdrew to, to find space. It's a place of silence, free from distractions and the busyness of the city.

Perhaps more than anything the desert is that: A place of silence. It is in that silence that we have a place for potentially very honest, very real communion with God and space to listen to our own heart. If you're anything like me, I can find it hard to enter into a place of silence. We like to have our phone, our TV, our radio, - something to keep our minds occupied. But if we dare to stop... well... that's when we might discover our own Burning Bush.

Let's turn to our passage from Scripture, from Exodus chapter 3.

Here we pick up Moses' story, he's in hiding, having ran away from Egypt. Moses had become a shepherd and it was in the wilderness, in the desert place, that Moses saw his burning bush.

There is an old rabbinic saying that others passed by the bush whilst it was ablaze but only Moses turned aside to see... What if there are many burning bushes in world waiting to be beheld? This echoes a poem by Elizabeth Browning:

"Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush is afire with God: But only he who sees, takes off his shoes... the rest sit round it and pluck blackberries". 😊

Do we, in our lives, take time to stop? To look for the signs of God around us? What would we hear? Do you hear God calling you by name, as he called out to Moses?

What God says next to Moses reveals much about the character of God, and gives us perhaps something for us to pray into over the coming weeks:

The Lord said, 'I have **observed** the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have **heard** their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed,

I **know** their sufferings, and I have come down to **deliver** them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land ... to a land flowing with milk and honey'

The author of Exodus here wanted to drive home a point:

God saw the misery.
God heard the cry.
God knows the suffering.
So God comes to deliver.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are living through hard times. If we bravely stop and listen to the silence the desert brings us, we might get overwhelmed by the voices struggling in anxiety, illness, grief, and practical difficulty.

But whatever we see, or whatever we hear, or however we feel remember: God sees. God hears. God knows. So God comes to deliver [and save].

The Bible is full of texts of "Lament", of people pouring out their hearts of sorrow: From Hagar to David, from Jesus to Paul. The prayer of distress is a prayer that God hears and does not ignore.

I wonder if in the desert silence you might discover your own cry of pain and sadness too. I wonder if you can give it voice. Because it is a prayer God answers. As the Psalmist writes: "Tears may flow in the night, but joy comes in the morning."

At different times, we may experience 'desert worship' differently. I'm not going to lie: the night might be long. There might be a dryness and barrenness, but if you stop, you will discover your own burning bush. Dare to listen to the cry of despair of the world, and you may hear an inner voice of pain echo too. You do not need to be afraid of these cries. Let them rise before God:

For God sees. God hears. God knows. So
God comes to deliver.

I want to end with a prayer by Charles de
Foucauld, a man who knew well the desert:
literally in the Sahara, and as a priest and
monk. It's a prayer of desert worship:

Father,
I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do,
I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you
with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands,
without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father. Amen.

Communion

**We gather at tables,
of different sizes and shapes,
used for various reasons
over the weeks and months.**

Ordinary tables laid with something to eat
and something to drink.

**Each table tells a story
today the story it will tell
is the story of 2000 years of history**

where God's people
have gathered to remember
the first night that Jesus shared
this meal with his disciples.

So come in faith to this table,

to be reminded that we are not alone.
Come in faith to this meal, you and I
to be nourished for the journey ahead.
For some of us are fresh
and others weary,
all of us aware of our failings

Gracious God, we give thanks
for all you have given us.
offering rest for the weary,
strength for the weak
and hope for the hopeless.
We thank you for this meal that speaks
of healing and nourishment
found in your love.

We thank you for this bread and this wine
on different tables, on different plates
in different cups, in different places,
all symbols of your body broken
and your blood shed for us.

We sit together, yet dispersed
and we praise you Lord. Amen

And so we gather at the table,
with bread and wine,
scattered yet together to remember:

Take your bread, break it and eat it.
This is Jesus' body, which is broken for you.

**Though we eat from many loaves,
we remember that in Christ,
we, though many, form one body and
each belongs to all the others.**

Take your wine, hold it and drink.
This is Jesus' blood shed for you.
He offers you forgiveness, calls you his own
and restores your soul.

**Though we drink from many cups,
we remember that in Christ,
we, though many, form one body and
each belongs to all the others.**

Lord Jesus you have put your life

into our hands,
now we put our lives into yours.
Take us, renew and remake us.
What we have been is past,
what we shall be,
through you, still awaits us.
Lead us on and make our story, your story.

Intercession

**How long, Lord?
Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide
your face from me?**

We pray for those who feel forgotten and unseen, may they know that they are remembered and seen by you God. Help us to partner with you to remember the forgotten. Search our hearts to reveal those we hide our faces from, the outcast, the stranger or the homeless. Change our hearts, that we may turn our faces towards these people and see them as your beloved children.

**How long
must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day
have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy
triumph over me?**

We pray for those we know who struggle with mental illnesses, anxiety and depression. We pray that there will be resources released to help, enough staff employed and finances given towards mental health services nationally. Help us to be a friend and a listening ear to those who suffer. Fill us with compassion and wisdom.

Ultimately, we pray for those who wrestle with sorrow, that they may know your victory over those dark thoughts which currently seem to triumph.

**Look on me and answer,
Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes,
or I will sleep in death,
and my enemy will say,
'I have overcome him,'
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.**

We pray for those who might be considered fallen by those around them: may they know your restoration and grace. Help us to not judge or exclude your beloved children, but instead lift them up in prayer, and embrace them with the grace we know in Christ.

Thank you, loving Father God, for hearing our prayer. We exclaim together:

**But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord's praise,
for he has been good to me.**

Song: O praise the name
<https://youtu.be/wTXCHqFe4Rg>

Blessing
May we each know
we are loved by God,
seen by God
and heard by God.
In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit Amen