

Parish of St. Thomas, Apostle & Martyr, Ipswich

First Sunday of Lent - 21st February 2021

Collect:

Heavenly Father, your Son battled with the powers of darkness, and grew closer to you in the desert: help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer that we may witness to your saving love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Psalm 25.1-10

1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.



7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

A reading from the book of Genesis (9.8-17)

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (1.9-15)

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, o Christ.

Reflection:

The baptism of Jesus is a familiar reading to us by this point. Only six weeks ago we had the Sunday when we remembered the baptism of Christ. But we have concentrated less on the second half of today's reading. And there is an awful lot going on in those few verses!

Firstly, we read that as soon as Jesus has been baptised, the Spirit drives him out into the wilderness, where Jesus spends an extended period of time being alone. As an interesting side note, the number 40 here (in the desert for 40 days) could be symbolic of the 40 years Israel spent in the wilderness of the Sinai desert. 40 is a significant number throughout the Bible, and here could be pointing to the importance of this time that Jesus spent alone in the desert.

But what is really striking is that it is the Spirit which drives him out. Right now, at this pivotal starting moment of his ministry, the Spirit directs Jesus to go and spend this long time alone, away from all the crowds who will dominate the next few years of Jesus' life. The Spirit compels Jesus to accept this gift of space, of time, of a chance to commune with God. What is more, during this time Jesus has some dramatic experiences, being tempted by Satan, surrounded by wild beasts, and having angels come and take care of him. But through it all, the Spirit is there.

So what I think we can take from this for our own reflection is this idea of the Spirit being with us in the wilderness. As we walk through these first few days of Lent, we are entering our own kind of wilderness, our own Lenten desert. And of course, we are still experiencing the wider wilderness of being isolated from each other until it becomes safe to gather again as we used to. We are certainly experiencing a time of hardship and being alone, which we can compare to Jesus' desert experience. Yet through it all, we can be sure that the Spirit is with us. This is what we can rely on, and take heart from, even in our dark moments of frustration or loneliness.

I am sure that during Jesus' time in the desert and through all those dramatic experiences, he had to rely entirely on the Spirit, and to give himself up to the safekeeping of God through the times of trial. And this sense of relying on God's Spirit can be a wonderful Lenten discipline for us to try and hold onto as well. I don't know about you, but I sometimes find it incredibly hard to rely on God, and to let go of my desire to have answers now, or for things to work out how I want them to. To let go of that, to trust, to let everything rest in God's hands, is really hard! But it is something we can work on as well, to develop more and more trust and reliance on the Spirit.

I've just started reading a book by Gemma Simmonds, a Catholic nun who is a university lecturer and teaches on Ignatian Spirituality, and in the first few pages she explores the idea of us being 'poor in Spirit'. This is a phrase from the Beatitudes which is quite hard to understand, but Gemma Simmonds explains it like this: that our ability to respond to God, our own ability to pray, our small attempts to live a good Christian life, can often seem pitiful or frustrating to us. But, underneath it all, beyond all words and thoughts, the Spirit of God is at work. In a way, an acceptance of our own poverty (i.e. how little power we have to be holy in our own strength), can be the key to accepting the guidance of God's Spirit. Indeed, for us to reach this realisation of our own 'poverty of spirit', is a gift from God, which allows us to see the need to rest and trust in God's Spirit instead.

To be poor in spirit is to be self aware, and to acknowledge that in the face of the glory of our Creator, we are very small creatures! It is a poverty of our own spirit, because we recognise how much we depend on the riches of God's Spirit. It is a lesson in humility. But it is in that space of acknowledging our dependence, that we find the grace of God.

It may be that this time alone in the desert, having to rely on the Spirit to protect and sustain him, was something that Jesus needed to experience before going out and beginning his ministry. And for us certainly, it is a lesson that we all need to continue to learn, as we travel this strange and sometimes hard journey of faith. As we experience another Lent in lockdown and uncertainty, we can both rest in the assurance that the Spirit is with us, through everything, and learn again and again the power and peace of giving everything up to God. We admit our own spiritual poverty, to rest in the riches of God's Spirit which dwells with us. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

- Rev Cat

*Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has given us access to his grace.*

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

This week's hymn:

Turn to me, O turn, and be saved,
says the Lord, for I am God
there is no other, none beside me.
I call your name.

I am God, who comforts you
who are you to be afraid of flesh that fades,
is made like the grass of the field,
soon to wither.

Turn to me, O turn, and be saved,
says the Lord, for I am God
there is no other, none beside me.
I call your name.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth down below.
The heavens will vanish like smoke,
and the earth will wear out like a garment.

Turn to me, O turn, and be saved,
says the Lord, for I am God
there is no other, none beside me.
I call your name.

A prayer for the journey of Lent

**Forgive those things we have done
which have caused you sadness,
and those things we should have done
that would have brought you joy.
In both we have failed ourselves, and you.
Bring us back to that place
where our journey began,
when we said that we would follow
the way that you first trod.
Lead us to the Cross
and meet us there.
Amen.**

Please pray for:

Those with chronic or long-term illness: Rosemary, Eric Dickerson, Jenny, Andrew Barfield, Kathy Steele, Andrew, Peggy, Margaret Christian, Natacha, Rex & Jill, Christine, Stephen, Samantha, Jean Dominy

Those undergoing treatment or currently ill: Katie, Gloria Elmer, Leslie Bloomfield, Roger Dickerson, Vicky & Matt, Dagmar

All who are affected by the Coronavirus in the UK and around the world: *For all who have lost their jobs due to Covid19; all who are despairing. For all who have lost their lives; the injured, the bereaved. For hospital and health care workers*

For our government & MPs', and local councillors: for honesty in politics, for wisdom and justice for all. For refugees across the world & diplomats and peace makers, working to end conflicts

Those who have recently died, and their families mourning their loss: David Baker (Eric's brother), Stephen Flewitt, Vincent Lightbody RIP

Call this number —> for free.



Notices:

Cathedral Lent Course: 'Radical Faith'. This is a series of five talks on inspirational Christians, given by different speakers at the Cathedral, 7pm on Wednesday evenings during Lent. It looks to be very interesting! It'll be on Zoom (but I'm sure you can just listen and keep your camera off). To sign up, email Michael.robinson@cofesuffolk.org.

Our shoebox crafts were very well received with lots of families saying how much they loved them. Emma is planning similar children's craft bags for Lent & Easter Messy Church. ***If you are able and willing to help in any way please contact Emma*** - all help most gratefully received! (emma.knight1@hotmail.co.uk)

Newsletters: send any more contributions to Rev Cat. All gladly received!

New Vicar Search: Rev Jackie is collecting scripture verses / words of encouragement & inspiration for our prayers. Please email her with anything you'd like to share as this process unfolds. jackie@jbsears.com

Our next Youth Group will be on 21st March 6-7pm.

Prayer for growth! Please join in this prayer at home:

"God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your Church, send your Holy Spirit to give vision to our planning, wisdom to our actions and power to our witness. Help your Church here in Ipswich to grow younger, to grow in numbers and to grow leaders; in spiritual commitment to you and in service to our local community. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

This Week:

Sunday 21st February

10am: Zoom church - you can join by phone too! Speak to Malcolm or Rev Cat.

6pm: Youth Group

Monday 22nd February

4.30: STPC evening prayer – all welcome, speak to Malcolm for Zoom link

Tuesday 23rd February

5.30: Meditation group —livestreamed on [facebook/stthomaspilgrimcommunity](https://www.facebook.com/stthomaspilgrimcommunity)

Wednesday 24th February

10am: livestreamed Eucharist

Thursday 25th February

7pm: Section 12 meeting for PCC

Church website:

<http://stthomasipswich.org.uk/>

Sunday Worship & other Worship resources on the Church Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasipswich/>

Pray for members of the St Thomas Congregation

Jackie Rathbone & family; Maggie Rose; Rachael Rudge & family; Joan Scott; Marilyn Smith; Brian & Jackie Sears; Jim & Daphne Startup



22nd: Emma Knight

25th: Carol Brown

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If you would like to chat, you could also ring:

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