

Morning Service 21st February 2021

Welcome to today's worship from Cudham and Downe, online due to covid19. I'm Rev John Musson, vicar and I'm joined by Helen Musson, ordinand at St Augustine's college who will be sharing God's word today.

You'll find the words of the service on the church website pcd.org.uk, or if watching on youtube, why not pause now and turn auto subtitles on! There are moments for you to join in with if you would like to, and the most famous setting of Psalm 23 to sing along to later.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Thank you if you joined in with our Ash Wednesday service – it's not too late to watch this reflective beginning to Lent – it's on youtube and facebook. Throughout these first Sundays of Lent our worship will focus on Psalm 23, the most famous of the Psalms, relevant to our current situation, dealing as it does with uncertainty, even the valley of the shadow of death, yet still knowing the presence of God with us into new pastures. Our bible reading today sees Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness – I wonder if Jesus also focused on Psalm 23 as he did so, knowing the presence of his Father and our Father preparing him for the life of ministry and sacrifice that lay ahead. We begin our worship with a time of prayer.... (background Psalm 23?)

The Greeting and opening prayer

The psalmist writes – you lead me in paths of righteousness for your name's sake:

To you, O Lord, we lift up our hearts,
offering worship and praise.

Show us your path.

Teach us to follow.

Guide us in your truth.

For our hope is in you all day long. **Amen.**

Let's join in with this opening prayer together wherever we are watching, reading or listening to this service today we know that The Lord is our Shepherd, walking ahead and alongside us.

Loving God, thank you
for drawing us together to be your people.
Help us, as we meet together,
to see ourselves as you see us.

**Give us faith to hear your words of love
beyond some of the hard realities of our lives.
May your Holy Spirit guide and inspire us
to recognise your presence in all we do. Amen.**

Let's join together in singing Psalm 23 to the tune Crimond...It tells of God being with us, just as he was with Jesus in the wilderness.

**The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.**

**My soul he doth restore again,
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
E'en for his own name's sake.**

**Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,
Yet will I fear no ill;
For thou art with me; and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.**

**My table thou hast furnishèd
In presence of my foes;
My head thou dost with oil anoint,
And my cup overflows.**

**Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house forever more
My dwelling place shall be.**

The prayer for today, the 1st Sunday of Lent
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.**

Before our bible reading we spend time saying sorry to God. Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness being tempted as we are, yet without sin, so by his precious death and resurrection is able to free us from the effect of sin, and by his Spirit to give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to him. The apostle John writes. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**Most merciful God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we confess that we have sinned
in thought, word and deed.
We have not loved you with our whole heart.
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be;
that we may do justly,
love mercy,
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Today's bible reading is Mark chapter 1 verses 9-15.

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted[a] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Where would you choose to get away from it all? In this lockdown I keep remembering some of my get away from it all places - our journey across Canada by train, plane and car to Vancouver in 2019, our walk from Rochester to Faversham last May, the gorgeous landscape of volcanic Tenerife, a sunny walk around Cudham in November 2020 or even my favourite spot in the garden on a sunny day. Where do you go to get away from it all?

Was Jesus getting away from it all when he went into the wilderness? I'm going to highlight a few things that I've spotted in our reading from Marks' gospel.

To start with just what was going on out there in the wilderness with Jesus?

It's a good question. Mark only gives two verses to Jesus' time in the wilderness. You might be familiar with the three tests the devil gives to Jesus in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 but Mark chooses not to mention any of this.

At his baptism God affirms Jesus as his son, his unique son who he has chosen for the task ahead. Coming up out of the water Jesus had heard the voice that mattered, telling him he was cherished, wanted and ready - ready for the task that Mark was about to tell his readers all about. In verse 10 Mark tells us that the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. But the Greek word for 'on' might also mean 'into'. Mark could be describing the Spirit going into Jesus, filling him. If that's the case Jesus was not just temporarily anointed with the Spirit but was someone in whom the Spirit lived permanently.

As soon as he had been baptised, verse 12, 'Jesus was sent into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan'. Mark uses a very powerful image here; the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. The Greek word *ekballo* here means to throw out, to hurl. It's a bit like this. Ezekiel being "lifted up" by the Spirit and taken to Jerusalem in a vision and in Acts 8:39 the Spirit of the Lord suddenly taking Philip away.

Back to the reading in verse 13 Jesus was suddenly in the wilderness. Have you ever been to the wilderness? We talk about our gardens being a wilderness when there are lots of weeds and brambles in them. Or, we think of forests being wildernesses and talk about wild camping and wild swimming. A few years ago, on a visit to Israel I saw the Judean wilderness, it was hot, and there were a lot of boulders and a lot of sand! It was a desert with mountains, terraces and escarpments. I'm told that there's a short time in spring when brightly coloured flowers bloom. For the rest of the year hardly anything grows, nobody lives there, and the desert is occupied by wild animals such as leopards and the ibex. The wilderness does not support human life.

Jesus was in this wilderness for forty days. The image of desert or wilderness, and the number 40 could remind us of the 40 years Moses and

the Israelites spent wandering in the Sinai desert; or it could just indicate a long period of time. Whichever it was, it was both a time of testing and a time when God tried to draw his people to him and establish a relationship with them.

I don't know about you, but I'm often tempted to just have that extra bit of chocolate cake, not make that call or stay in bed for a bit longer. That's what we all think about as temptation. However, when the word temptation is used in the New Testament it means 'testing'; in the Lord's prayer – what we're really praying is do not bring us to a time of testing.

Rather than temptation this testing is what was going on in the wilderness with Jesus.

Mark does not give us any details of how Jesus was tested except that he was tested by Satan, the adversary, to disregard the life-giving word of God and stray from the path God had just called him to at his baptism. Interestingly Mark doesn't say if Jesus passed his test, but Jesus' announcement in verse 14 and 15 that 'God's kingdom is here' suggests that he does.

Next, it's worth noting that Jesus was out in the wilderness with the wild animals. It's not clear from his writing whether Mark mentions the wild animals to add to the feeling of danger and stress in the wilderness or ; whether they're a sign of the new creation, a time when harmony will be restored to the earth because of Jesus' victory over death and sin – a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy that the wolf will live with the lamb and the leopard lie down with the goat.

Or maybe God was protecting his Son. The wild animals hadn't been made safe, but they were kept from harming Jesus. Just as Isaiah prophesied that God would make a safe way for Israel to return from exile when he wrote 'No lion will be there, nor any ravenous beast: they will not be found there.'

Whatever the reason is Mark is telling us that the old rules and expectations do not apply now that Jesus is around.

Then there's the bit about angels. Back in the 1970's ABBA sang I believe in angels, something good in everything you see.....

A dear friend June once told me about her encounter with an angel. It was pouring with rain and her car had broken down. She was helped to a garage by a man who, when she tried to thank him, was no longer there. June was convinced she had seen an angel that day.

So, Jesus was looked after by angels- beings who St Augustine called God's servants and messengers. Jesus was clearly no solo superhero but needed to depend on God's provision.

Finally, after he'd left the wilderness Jesus was ready to preach God's good news - in cosmopolitan Galilee, not the quiet and peaceful backwater we might imagine it to be. Preach the Good news that God was present with his people, that now was the opportunity to turn to God and respond to God's presence in the person of Jesus.

In just these few verses Mark shows us that Jesus' baptism prepared him to go through a time of testing in the wilderness and not just for his future ministry.

As I finish I'm going to read a short reflection from the book praying with the Desert Mothers by Mary Forman, a Benedictine from the USA.

I invite you to reflect on God's power and strength working in you, and how that ever faithful God has brought you to this time and place in your life.

You may wish to ponder how God's word has been a sword piercing your self- understanding and calling you to ever deeper reverence and awe, so that you have been able to do infinitely more than you ever thought or imagined you could.

Or you may wish to consider a time in your life when God was very near, so near that you thought God was absent and all the while God sustained

your vocation, your struggle, your time of trial with persevering stability, loving mercy and sustaining courage.

Now let's declare our faith in God.

We believe in God the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son, who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who strengthens us with power from on high.

We believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our prayers of intercession are based on Psalm 23... the response, when I say 'loving shepherd' please respond '**Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.**

Dear God, you sustain and feed me:
like a shepherd you guide me.
You lead me to an oasis of green,
to lie down by restful waters.
Quenching my thirst, you restore my life:
renewed and refreshed, I follow you,
a journey on the narrowest of paths.

Even when cliffs loom out of the mist,
my step is steady because of my trust.
Even when I go through the deepest valley,
with the shadow of darkness and death,
I shall fear no evil or harm
For you are with me to give me strength,
your crook, your staff, at my side. Today we pray especially for those struggling with home schooling, or with questions of faith and doubt...

Loving shepherd,
Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.

Even in the midst of my troubles,
with the murmurs of those who disturb me,
I know I can feast in your presence.
You spread a banquet before me,
you anoint my head with oil,
you stoop to wash my feet,
you fill my cup to the brim. We pray for areas of the world where there is conflict and unrest, especially Myanmar, Russia and Iran. We ask God for wisdom for our government as they negotiate a difficult pathway out of the lockdown.

Loving shepherd,
Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.

Your loving kindness and mercy
will meet me every day of my life.
By your Spirit you dwell within me,
and in the whole world around me,
and I shall abide in your house,
content in your presence for ever.
We pray for the recently bereaved and for those who mourn, and we give thanks to God for the gift of eternal life for all who trust in Jesus.

Loving shepherd,
Dwell in me that I may dwell in you.

Wise and loving shepherd, guiding your people in the ways of your truth, leading us through the waters of baptism, and nourishing us with the food of eternal life, keep us in your mercy, and so guide us through the perils of evil and death, that we may know your joy at the heart of all things, both now and for ever. **Amen.**

Bringing our prayer and praises into one, we pray as Jesus taught us to 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.**

On our website pcd.org.uk you'll find ideas for Lent; have a look for the webpage 'a journey through lent' you'll find there a 40 day bible reading challenge, 40 days of self-care, and details of our Lent Course based on the BBC Drama 'broken'; and you're also welcome to join in with our community quiz on Saturday 28th from 7.30pm via zoom.

We meet for prayer on zoom 9.15am and 5pm Monday to Friday – why not join us? And a reminder that we'll hopefully be back worshipping together in church soon - Next Sunday morning's service will again be on facebook and youtube at 10.30am.

Here's a closing prayer I invite you to join in with
**Creator God, you made us in your image
to be your people, wherever we go.
This coming week, whatever we experience,
wherever we find ourselves,
help us to know that you are with us –**

guiding, revealing and sustaining – always.

Amen.

Thank you for joining us in worship today.

Please also contact me, Rev John Musson or Rev Rach Archer if you need any help or just for a chat! vicar@pcd.org.uk 01959540012

Our worship ends with a closing prayer of Blessing:

Go in the knowledge that you are cherished

by the God who made you

and rejoice, in Jesus' name.

And so may the blessing of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with you today and always

Amen.