

Sunday 21st February 2021: The First Sunday in lent

As you prepare for worship this morning you may want to sit quietly for a few moments, maybe listen to some restful or reflective music and light a candle to remind you that He who you worship is Jesus, the light of the world.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1: 15

Call to Worship for Lent

Lent calls us to journey, this and every day,
following Jesus wherever he leads us.

**Lent calls us to journey:
to the place where God covenants with us,
to receive the new names we are given.**

Lent calls us to worship together,
to tell future generations the good news.

**Lent calls us to practice justice,
to bring God's hope to all people.**

Lent calls us to faithful living,
to trust the One who gives us life.

**Lent calls each of us to take up our cross,
to trust the One who bears it with us.**

Lent calls us to journey with God.

**Let us worship God, who walks with us,
this and every day.**

written by Thom Shuman, and posted on **Lectioary**
Liturgies. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.ca/>

Hymn StF 1 – Sing/listen/read/proclaim the words

All people that on earth do dwell,

Introduction

Today on this first Sunday in Lent we consider together the very start of Jesus ministry as told in Marks gospel. The story of Jesus Baptism and its vital significance in focusing him on his identify as the beloved son of God, the testing of his faith in the wilderness of Judea and his first public declaration. Our prayer of confession takes up those themes in our lives.

Confession

Jesus Christ boldly faced the wilderness, its dangers and wonders.
He struggled with his mission to make known God's loving purposes for all people.
Guarded and guided by God's Spirit, he was triumphant and began to proclaim the Gospel,
and the hope that the reign of God would bring oppression to an end and deliverance for those held captive.

For our lack of repentance and our failure to believe the good news:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, your baptism gave you the identify of a beloved child of God, it gave you the faith to persevere when you faced the dessert.

When we forget that we are beloved children of God and loose our faith.

Lord have mercy

Lord Jesus you struggled in the desert and God's angels came to minister to you.

When we have forgotten your presence with us, when we have closed ourselves away from your care and love.

Lord have mercy

Lord Jesus you proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God being here in this place.

When we have tried and failed to live by the values of your kingdom.

Lord have mercy

Loving Lord

Your call to repent and believe the Good News gives us once more the opportunity to refocus our lives and to trust your words. Forgive us now and help us to lives worthy of your kingdom

Amen

~ adapted from a prayer by Rev. Ron Gordon. Posted on <http://pilgrimwr.unitingchurch.org.au/>

The Official Lent Zoom Quiz

A short quiz to help us to start to think about Lent (answers at the end)

1. Lent lasts from Ash Wednesday until Easter Saturday. This is 46 days all together but lent is only 40 days. Why is this?
2. Traditionally on Ash Wednesday. Christians will receive the mark of the cross in ash on their foreheads. Where does the ash usually come from?
3. The French call Shrove Tuesday mardi gras. What does this phrase literally mean in English?
4. On Maundy Thursday, the Queen gives us out alms to people chosen for their service to their community or church? What event in Jesus' life does this symbolise?

5. In Poland, the Thursday before Lent is a feast called Tłusty Czwartek. What food is traditionally eaten?

Bible Reading - Mark chap 1

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him; ¹¹ and a voice came from the heavens: "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

¹² And immediately the Spirit brought Him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And He was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving Him.

¹⁴ Now after John was taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Sermon

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1: 15

Introduction

Traditionally Lent was a time of preparation for Easter through prayer, doing penance, mortifying the flesh, repentance of sins, almsgiving, and self-denial. Thankfully today our preparation for Easter is less rigorous. However, while the shops concentrate on chocolate it is an opportunity for us to take time to refocus ourselves back onto the story of the gospel culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, it is appropriate that our reading from Mark describes the events leading up to the start of Jesus ministry when Jesus stood up and proclaimed, Now is the time to refocus on and trust God for the Kingship of God is here right now in this place.

Refocus

One of the best experiences I have had in church was taking part in the baptism of one of our then teenagers. The family wanted a full immersion baptism. As Methodists we follow the tradition of child christenings and there is no special pool built into my home church, but our minister happened to know a church where one of their members, a local farmer, had converted a circular feeding trough into a portable

pool complete with heater and a trailer for the purpose. Assisting our minister, I helped to unceremoniously dunk the teenager under the water. It made me very envious of him as I was baptised or christened as a baby. The act of publicly declaring your faith in Jesus Christ and going under to be washed clean to new life is very profound. It clearly states, this is who I am. In the first centuries of the church Baptisms typically happened at Easter and often people would be given a new name and new identity as a follower of Christ. Hence one of the origins of the term Christian name for a first name.

If I asked the average church goer what baptism is about, no doubt the first answer would be about the washing clean of sin and entering a new life. This potentially raises a problem for Christians. Why would Jesus who we believe to be without sin need to be baptised? This was a question which perplexed the church for hundreds of years. The answer seems to be that firstly Jesus was publicly aligning himself in solidarity with the teaching of John the Baptist and all the others who came to the Jordan river. Then as the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus, she refocused Jesus on his identity.

Jesus does not receive a new name, but he is reminded of who he is. Mark describes Jesus as seeing the "heavens open", which is a way of saying Jesus had what we might call a God moment, a profound realisation of God's presence there. And Jesus hears a voice confirming who he is, confirming his identity,

"You are my beloved son with whom I am well pleased"

We can describe each other and ourselves in many ways as male female, gay straight, young old, Scottish, English working retired etc and those do add up to who we are, but here Jesus is reminded of a more profound and more basic identity as the beloved son of God.

And this is why Jesus is baptised, to be confirmed in his identity before he starts his mission.

It was and still is a problem in parent children relationships that children are often never told that they were and are loved. The stereotype of the gruff parent who never tells a child they love them is still true and countless people have had a love shaped hole in their identities.

This is what baptism is about it is God saying you are a beloved child with whom I am well pleased. Those words Jesus heard are the word we hear today. When we place our trust in Jesus, we become children of God and God tells us that we are beloved children with whom he is pleased.

Of course, it does not matter whether you were christened as a child, baptised as an adult or have never encountered water in a church. Each and every follower of Christ is a beloved child of God.

At the start of lent we need to pause and refocus ourselves. Traditionally Lent has seemed about beating ourselves up over our personal failings as followers but this lent, we need to learn for the first time, or remember that we are the beloved children of God. And that is our identity.

Believe

Marks gospel moves at a breath-taking speed through the baptism in a mere couple of lines and then tells us the spirit (literally) drove Jesus out into the wilderness. The same spirit who came upon Jesus and called him beloved drives him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark gives no description of what happened, except to imply Jesus overcame the temptation.

The wilderness in the bible represents a place of lawlessness, difficulty and testing. Jesus 40 days reminds hearers of the struggles of the Israelites who after fleeing Egypt spent 40 years in the desert. Christians will often talk about being in the wilderness or desert. Meaning a time when they have particularly struggled in life or felt God was far away.

For Jesus this is a particular time of struggle but was it worse than in the Garden of Gethsemane? I doubt it. This was a testing of another kind.

When you know your who you are then you know the mission. When you know you are the beloved child of God then you can recognise the need to love Gods world.

It is a recognised problem in business and teams that unsuccessful organisations are often those which have lost their identity and hence what their purpose is. Similarly, it is true of churches which are going through the motions and have forgotten their identity as beloved children of God. Similarly, it is true of us individually if we lose or forget our identity as beloved children of God how can we show the love of the kingdom of God?

What the testing of Jesus was in the wilderness was unclear, most likely it was a wrestling with what his mission would be, how he would do it. What is clear it was the identity he was reminded of as the beloved son of God which helped sustain him through it. When we are confident in our identity as the beloved children of God then we too can survive in the wilderness.

The Kingdom of God is here right now

In the Greek, the New Testament was written in you could talk about the time using several words. What time of day it was with the word Chronos, but if you said it is the time for a child to be born, then the word is Kairos. It implies a special time or season, a moment of significance. When Jesus said the time is at hand, Mark uses Kairos to express it. Now is the moment of significance.

All generations believe they are living in a time of significance. In the 10th century many Christians were convinced the year 1000 was the time when Christ would come back. If you asked anyone who fought in WW2, they would likely say it was a time of significance pitting good against evil and most likely they would be right.

Today if you asked, many people would say now is the time, the time of significance of the climate crisis and again they would be spot on. So, when Jesus said the time is now the kingdom of God is at hand, that was the time, the Kairos when God's kingdom was breaking through, he was right, but the time of the kingdom is now too.

The kingdom is at hand in every generation. Today the kingdom is needed just as much as it was needed 2000 years ago.

What does it mean to be a beloved Child of God today in Marlborough at this time? How that will work for each one of us will be different. On a personal level it might mean to pick up the phone again to speak to our friends and family. I know of one person who since last April has made the effort to go through their contacts and phone friends and family, they were losing contact with. It means reconsidering our decisions about what and where we shop. Do we try to buy ethically or locally and try to reduce the damage we do to our environment? When we are able to be out and about it might mean a change in our attitudes? In our day to day lives do we treat Marlborough as beloved.

We need the compassion love and hope Jesus brought 2000 years ago today. That is why we as followers of Jesus, we as the church this lent need to refocus on our identity as the beloved children of God, we need to believe we can get through these testing times to declare in our actions that kingdom of god is here, because just as in previous years that kingdom is sorely needed.

Hymn - Sing/listen/read/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4emGI1gHPA>

Christ be in my waking,

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal God,
you are the maker of us all, and we are your creation,
people formed in your image, as individuals, as community;
formed and fed and furnished with understanding of who you are
and of who and whose we are.
We worship you today in recognition of your calling,
of your communicating,
of your caring to invite us to share in your creative and healing work.
We are here because we have heard you speak in us and through others.
Help us, dear Lord, to ever respond to you
and your invitation to your grace...

Lord hear our prayer...

God of all our moments, of our days and our nights,
you speak and you act in the world around us,
not only to call all people to you,
but also to direct and guide us in the way of healing and wholeness.

Awaken us Lord, to hear what you would say to us.
Help us to open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts to your presence.
Help us to know when it is your voice we are hearing
and it when it is our prejudices and desires to which we are paying heed....
Lord hear our prayer...

Lord, we pray that your church may rise up with renewed commitment
in answer to your call,
that your people may be instruments of your grace and love....
Lord hear our prayer....

We pray for those who consider themselves inadequate
and dismiss or avoid your calling in their lives.
Give them a new vision,
a vision in which you are their strength and their hope...
Lord hear our prayer....

We pray for those who, in answering your call,
must leave the known for the unknown,
the oasis for the desert, the comfortable for the uncertain.
Grant them courage and steadfast faith...
Lord hear our prayer....

We pray too, today, O Lord, for those in want and need –
for those of us and of the larger community who suffer in body or in soul.
We remember before you...*[various intercessions]*
Lord, hear our pray.....

Loving Father, bless us all with an abundant faith,
a fruitful ministry, a joyful life.
Bless us and all those who gather together to continue the work of Jesus,
who came to heal, save, and deliver us all,
and who taught us to pray as one family, saying...

~ written by Rev. Richard J. Fairchild, <http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/b-or02sm.php>

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours,
now and for ever. Amen**

Hymn - Sing/listen/read/proclaim the words

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QkDD4GiqUEM>

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you

The Lord make his face to smile upon and be gracious unto to you

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and grant you peace.

Quiz answers

- 1 Sundays are feast days in the Western Church and not part of Lent
- 2) The palm crosses given out the previous year
- 3) Fat Tuesday
- 4) The washing of the disciple's feet
- 5) doughnuts