

# Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 9 March 2025 - The First Sunday of Lent

**Lectionary Readings** (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Deuteronomy 26.1-11; Psalm 91.1-2, 9-16 [or 91.1-11] Romans 10.8b-13; Luke 4.1-13

## Homily

**Today's homily has been written by Mrs Pat Blyth, LLM, The Mission & Ministry Department, Ely Diocese**

“Do I have to do this?”

This is the question that the Gospel story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness boils down to. Three years later he would ask again to “let this cup be taken from me” but on both occasions he would follow up by saying to God “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Jesus has spent 30 years or so, to the best of anyone's knowledge, living quietly in Nazareth with his mother and siblings, and carrying on his father Joseph's carpentry business. It must have been a pleasant existence; maybe he would have been quite happy to carry on with it, perhaps marry and have a family of his own.

But he knows, and his mother Mary knows, that he is not destined for that simple life. We have heard throughout Epiphany those enlightening moments of how Magi travelled from afar to worship him as a baby, and give meaningful gifts that would forecast both greatness and sorrow; of how Jesus as a baby was presented in the Temple and recognised by the elderly Simeon and Anna, who also prophesied ‘rising and falling’; and of how his cousin John was fearful to baptise him in the Jordan, yet God had endorsed that deed, by pronouncing him as the Son, “with whom I am well-pleased.”

And the other Epiphany story is the Wedding at Cana; Jesus tells his mother that his time is not yet come, yet she still instructs the servants to do his bidding, and he performs the first of his miracles – was she giving him a nudge, saying it was time for him to fulfil those earlier promises, metaphorically to take up the Cross that soon he would literally have to carry?

Today, the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, would have been the 71st birthday of the IRA activist Bobby Sands, who died in 1981 along with 9 other prisoners following a long hunger strike – his story is currently being made into a film. Knowing his story, it is excusable to imagine that some of the details about Jesus in the wilderness may have been written allegorically, because 40 days with no food at all is almost impossible to survive, and wandering around in the open for all that time equally life-threatening. We can however, be fairly certain that Jesus went through a mental health crisis of stress and anxiety, (and probably loss of appetite and sleeplessness) which is familiar to so many of us these days, hearing the counter voices of

God and the world inside his mind, pulling him in different directions – truly a dark and discomfoting desert of the soul.

Yes, he must obey God’s will, and bring God’s message of love and forgiveness to a harsh world. But how? How about feeding himself, and others, by turning stones into bread? In a manner of speaking, he did a similar thing later feeding five thousand adoring followers with five barley loaves and two fish – but when they wanted to make him their king, he disappeared from them very quickly. How about overpowering all the neighbouring lands and forcing his leadership upon their subjects? We have had plenty of land-grabbing leaders over the centuries, but Jesus was not one of them, and his memory has been much more sustained and revered than any of theirs. How about a death-defying stunt that only divine intervention could save him from? – that should be fairly convincing, job done!

But Jesus resists these temptations from the devil. The voice of God is stronger. There is only one way to save the world, and that is to give himself as a full and final sacrifice, and that was an enormous thing to be asked to do. In *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, a musical that keeps returning to the stage, the singer asks God, “Could you ask as much from any other man?” The choice is made, the agonising decision taken, the mental health crisis overcome, time to act. Jesus, to the outrage of the people of Nazareth, goes on to read from the Scriptures of Isaiah in his local synagogue, and pronounces that it is he himself, their local carpenter, who is the foretold anointed one who would bring good news to the poor; he is immediately rejected. He then sets out, choosing some close friends to walk the walk with him, to learn from him so they can take over when he is gone, and most importantly, to tell the story of how for three years he had taught and preached the word, and healed and made whole the sick, and how he had challenged the prevailing religious perception which was so far removed from the true fullness of God’s love. Those friends became disciples who would witness the events of his death, and would see him rise again from the dead at that first Easter, and would speak it out and write it down – to them we owe a great deal.

We are at the start of Lent, in which we focus on that time of doubt that Jesus experienced at the start of his ministry. At the end of Lent, we will remember the terrible and wonderful events at the end of his ministry. But there is so much more to learn in between, and so many parallels with our own lives, that this story will go on and on being told. Amen.

### ***Ways to Engage all Generations***

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?

- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how \_\_\_\_\_ felt or I wonder how \_\_\_\_\_ felt when \_\_\_\_\_ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about \_\_\_\_\_?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why \_\_\_\_\_ said \_\_\_\_\_?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

### **Suggested intercessions**

#### Collect for the First Sunday in Lent

“Almighty God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted for days in the wilderness  
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:  
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your spirit;  
and as you know our weakness,  
so may we know your power to save;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.”

Let us open our prayers by praying for God’s grace as we prepare for the joy of Easter by observing the discipline of Lent. Help us as we seek to overcome the temptations and torments of daily existence; to learn to put our trust in God’s greater purpose for each and every one of us by looking ahead with hope at the Resurrection to come.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for our troubled world and its leaders. Remembering that Christ’s temptation to seize control of the nations of the world was contrary to the will of God, so we pray that world leaders will not seek to rule by power and force, but with humility, compassion and respect for the sovereignty of neighbouring countries. We ask for unity between all nations as we explore ways to prevent climate change and protect our common home, the Earth.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We pray for the Church of England as it seeks to choose a new Archbishop, and the Diocese of Ely as it searches for a new Bishop. Give wisdom and discernment to those involved in the selection processes, and those who are leading in the interim period. Also, we hold before you those who feel called to serve in their local churches in whatever capacity, that their gifts may be recognised and valued in their local communities. [Especially we pray for this church of.....and all who serve here.....].

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Save and comfort those who suffer; bless O Lord, those of our brothers and sisters who are sick at this time in body, mind or Spirit. Surround them with the healing love of your presence, and give strength and encouragement to all who care for them, whether in hospital, the community, or their own homes. [Especially we pray for .....].

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

May our loved ones who have gone before us never be forgotten, and we pray that they are at peace with you in your heavenly kingdom. [Especially we pray for the soul of..... and all who mourn him/her]. "Make them to be numbered with your saints in glory everlasting." Amen.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### ***Suggested hymns/songs***

Father, hear the prayer we offer

Forty days and forty nights

Jesus, lover of my soul

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

Lord Jesus Christ

O Jesus I have promised

O love how deep, how broad, how high

Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Take my life and let it be

What a friend we have in Jesus

### ***Activities to accompany the service***

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](http://reflectionary.org) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](http://engageworship) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>  
(weekly@lectionary resource)