

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 22 February 2026 - The First Sunday of Lent

Lectioary 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)

Genesis 2.15-17 and 3.1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-19; Matthew 4.1-11

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Dr David Newton, Diocesan Director of Ordinands

The wilderness narrative, as Matthew presents it to us, is all about life in *extremis*. What happens, Matthew ponders, when Jesus is taken right to the edge, to the limit of human endurance. What happens when Jesus is 'famished' and then is tempted to turn stone into bread.

The story, for Matthew, is not so much about Jesus in the wilderness, but Jesus at the end of his time in the wilderness, and at that point of extreme need, enduring the devil's temptations. In *extremis* this is how Jesus responds: with integrity, and faithfulness to his Father.

The question then obviously follows... how might we respond in *extremis*? But the answer? Well, who can say, honestly. We don't know until it happens, and ultimately, we pray it doesn't ever happen. 'Keep us from the time of trial' so the Methodist rendering of the Lord's Prayer goes. Being 'famished' – whether literally from lack of food, or in great desperate need in some other way, is not something we ever want or should wish for.

Yet, thinking about faith under pressure feels ever more relevant in a world of geo-political unrest and dis-ease. Would we stand up to tyranny? Would we oppose the erosion of the principles of open and free democracy even if it cost us dearly? We cannot (until so tested) know the answer, yet the question remains before us as an open one: how would we respond to extreme trial and temptation?

If Lent is about somehow metaphorically joining Jesus in the wilderness, then it must have one eye on this *extremis* position, this 'what if'. We cannot answer that 'what if' question in the abstract, and so the one thing we *can* do is set about to cultivate habits, and ways of being, that might just possibly sustain us when things get tough, in one way or another.

Part of what Lent is focussed on is cultivating the habits, and creating the disciplines, which will then give us the resources we need when things get tough.

What kind of habits then?

Well, I wish I could give some novel idea here, but alas, I offer the same basic habits that people have gone on about for centuries, and which we see Jesus exemplify. For Jesus, we realise in this passage, had clearly been immersing himself in the Jewish scriptures before this moment. For years he had spent time digesting them, and thinking them through, so that they might shine forth in this moment of *extremis*. The habits of reading, memorising, and pondering the scriptures stood him in good stead when that really tough moment came. He had resources upon which to draw.

There is no substitute to the basic habits of prayer and scriptural encounter. There are, of course, some simple tools that might help us:

- Bible Notes
- A Daily Prayer App on your phone (the CofE has a couple)
- The App 'Pray as you go' by the Jesuits is pretty good too.

But today we focus specifically on cultivating the habit of that more contemplative silent type of prayer. For it plays a particularly important role in shaping us, and shaping our vision of God. In doing so it gives us the grounding we need when times are tougher.

First, then, it shapes us.

Contemplative prayer begins with hearing God speaking over us those simple words, 'My Beloved'. There is nothing more important for us to hear than those words, spoken over us each and every day. That truth is bedrock of our life, the well-spring of our joy, the foundation that keep us firm through the storm – even through life in *extremis*.

One helpful way of beginning a journey of contemplation is through a simple breathing exercise. As you breathe in, you might imagine breathing in God's love, and as you breathe out, you might imagine pushing out all those things you are holding on to that you need to let go of.

So, we are invited to gaze upon on God and hear those words, 'Beloved'. Our self-understanding begins to be re-shaped.

Second, as we gaze, our vision of God also begins to change.

When we are young, we all inevitably have childish visions of God. We perhaps think of God as an object in the sky, a magician to do our bidding, a powerful person who is there to ease our path. As we grow and mature in our faith, we begin to see that God is no object, no *thing* to put in our pocket, no magician to do our bidding, but the Source of Love, the Energy behind Life, the Fire in our hearts. And so, our vision changes. And in many ways, it darkens. Our vision of God becomes more shrouded in Mystery, more unfathomable, deeper.

Being re-shaped by the love of God, and having our vision of God's Loving Presence re-shaped might just give us the resources we need to sustain us when things get tough, when we find ourselves – with Jesus - in that desert place.

Lent is about coming back to basics; for Christian life begins and ends on our knees in prayer. We hear the words 'My Beloved'. Our idolatrous ideas of God are stripped away.

And we find ourselves held in the Love that can sustain us even through the wildest storms, or the most arid of deserts. 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 Jesus felt?
- I wonder how you feel about 'resisting temptation'?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?

Suggested intercessions

Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.
(Psalm 95:6,7)

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we are safe and secure. Within your embrace we know that we are precious in your sight. Within your embrace we feel the warmth of family and belonging. Within your embrace we grow and are nurtured together as one flock, the people of your pasture under your loving care and protection.

Come, let us bow down

ALL: Before the LORD our Maker

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we find comfort and healing. We bring to you those who are weak, or struggling with physical, mental or spiritual health. You are the great healer, and we pray for healing of mind and body for those we now name in the silence of our hearts.

Come, let us bow down

ALL: Before the LORD our Maker

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we find justice. We bring to you the brave voices who cry out for freedom, those prepared to stand up and be heard without counting the cost. We pray for those who have been imprisoned or tortured for their race, colour, caste

or faith. For all Christians who have taken up the Cross and know its weight and pain.

Come, let us bow down

ALL: Before the LORD our Maker

Good Shepherd, within your embrace we find peace. We bring to you those orphaned, crippled or dispossessed by war, for refugees wandering this earth in search of a home, for all victims of strife and warfare, and for all those who have dedicated their lives for the search for peace and reconciliation.

Come, let us bow down

ALL: Before the LORD our Maker

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

his love endures forever.

(Psalm 118:1)

Taken from: [Intercession ideas for Lent](#)

Suggested hymns/songs

Above the voice of the world around me

Awake our soul

Forty Days and Forty Nights

Father, hear the prayer we offer

Jesu, grant me this, I pray

Jesu, lover of my soul

Purify my heart

O for a closer walk with God

Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Lead us heavenly Father lead us

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](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular ‘Area 52’ for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@ lectionary resource)