

Sunday 21st February 2021 Lent 1 Order of Service

Opening words:

The journey into life is a choice which we make.

It is a choosing to follow Christ along passages of emptiness and pathways of fullness, through valleys of fear and roadways of our faith, gathering around us the love of God for our safe travelling, the courage of Jesus and the Holy Spirit who will never leave us.

As Lent begins, we travel together on the journey into life, thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 25 God is here, as we his people

God is here! As we his people meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure what it is in Christ we share:

Here, as in the world around us, all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of His Spirit into open minds and hearts.

Here are symbols to remind us of our lifelong need of grace;
here are table, font and pulpit, here the cross has central place.

Here in honesty of preaching, here in silence, as in speech,
here in newness and renewal God the Spirit comes to each.

Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom, in an age of change and doubt,
keep us faithful to the gospel, help us work your purpose out.

Here, in this day's dedication, all we have to give, receive;
we who cannot live without you, we adore you! We believe.

Opening prayers:

Holy and loving God, who lives in the depths of the universe, we come to worship you.

God who calls us in the depths of our hearts and souls, we come to worship you.

God of our weeping and our laughing, full of kindness and grace, we come to worship you.

Merciful God, as we enter the journey of Lent, this invitation into a time of reflection, we grieve
our human failures as we face our lives.

Here, as we seek to follow you we know that we can never earn the costly grace which you offer to
us.

Stay with us here, Lord Jesus, even as we are invited to name the truth about ourselves.

Pause to offer your own prayer to God.....

The word to us in Jesus Christ is that we are never alone, or condemned or rejected.

The Holy Spirit comes to heal and comfort and offer the companionship of God.

We are forgiven, Amen.

Prayer for Lent

God of goodness and mercy, hear our prayer as we begin the journey of Lent with you. May we be honest when we look into our hearts and souls, remembering the times when we have turned away from you. Guide us as we humbly ask for your forgiveness and your love. Once again, we wish to be reconciled with you and live forever in your abundant grace. Change our lives this Lent, heavenly Father, give us the strength to commit ourselves to growing closer to you day by day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Introduction to theme

The bible tells us to spend time in repentance, in prayer and in reflection for the forty days leading up to Easter. We can concentrate on many things during the period of Lent. The most common theme we are aware of is giving up something but obviously that is not all. I was inspired by a song by Stevie Wonder called 'Don't you worry about a thing'. I like to read out to you some of the words in the song -

Everybody's got a thing but some don't know how to handle it.

Always reachin' out in vain, accepting the things not worth having but

Don't you worry 'bout a thing, don't you worry 'bout a thing, mama

Cause I'll be standing on the side when you check it out.

The one THING I would like us to think about today is faith. There are many references and verses in the bible about faith, therefore it must be of great importance to us as Christians. Exodus 14:13 says 'When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the Lord had unleashed against the Egyptians, they were filled with awe before Him. They put their faith in the Lord and his servant Moses'. What does it take for us to trust God and put our faith in Him? For the Israelites they had seen the Red Sea opened up, the Egyptians drowned before they put their faith in the Lord. Their faith came AFTER their miracle. What about you and me? Do we trust and have faith in the Lord BEFORE our miracle? If nothing else let us reflect on our faith as we journey through Lent.

Hymn - StF 466 Have faith in God, my heart

Have faith in God, my heart, trust and be unafraid;

God will fulfil in every part each promise He has made.

Have faith in God, my mind, though oft Thy light burns low;

God's mercy holds a wiser plan than Thou canst fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul, his cross for ever stands;

and neither life nor death can pluck his children from His hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole; grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul, the captive of Thy grace.

Bible Reading – Mark 2:1-12 Jesus Heals a Paralytic

2 When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³ Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk?' ¹⁰ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." ¹² And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Bible Reading – Matthew 6: 25-34 Do Not Worry

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Reflection: In the year 2000 animated film 'Shrek' Shrek was trying to explain himself as an onion when he said that onions have layers and ogres have layers. I hope to peel back the layers found in our gospel readings and see what we can learn about faith. In Mark's gospel our attention is drawn to the miracle of the paralysed man. Not only do we find the man being healed by Jesus, the passage foretold the seeds sown for the Jewish leaders to start plotting against Jesus. Then four men brought another on a mat and appeared on the scene where Jesus was preaching; there was a lot going on in our reading. Matthew's gospel directed us to what appears first to be about worry and anxiety but actually support our theme of faith. Jesus was teaching his disciples to trust

totally in the Lord for he will provide. To me faith is made up of believing, trusting and then faith will grow.

As human beings we tend to concern ourselves with material things, having shelter, food, clothing, jobs, money and so on. As Christians we are taught to think about the spiritual rather than the physical. A good point to start is to believe in Jesus Christ. My mum a few years ago said to my uncle 'I believe in Jesus who died to save me' and then things fall into place after that, my mum's story in a nutshell. In the reading from Matthew's gospel we come face to face with disbelief, this creates a barrier and no one can move on from that. God is already aware of our needs and he will supply those needs. Non-believers do not trust God for their everyday needs as they worry about everything. Worry and anxiety are the fruits of little or no faith. Faith will only flourish if you trust God.

Faith is crucial if we are to see God at work in our lives. The bible says 'he who believes in me will also do the work that I do'. When Jesus tells us do not be anxious, it makes us consider the object of our faith: worldly securities or putting our trust in God? Material possessions often create anxiety - we worry about having enough money, then we worry about keeping that money safe, then we worry about having enough to provide for the future, especially for those who like to plan ahead. We need to know that anxiety is spiritually damaging, like seeds in the parable of the sower which was choked by thorns. Jesus teaches us to take one day at a time and not to worry about tomorrow as the Lord will deal with the next day. Here Jesus is asking us to put our trust in Him. Trust, the second rung on the faith ladder. Talking about ladder, let us return to the scene in Capernaum in Mark's gospel.

The place was packed, Jesus was inside preaching and there is no way you can squeeze anyone else into the building. Does it give you a sense of hopelessness? Not for the four men carrying their friend on a mat. They were determined to get their paralysed friend to Jesus no matter what. They did not let the crowd be an obstacle to their goal, they put themselves at risk of injury, climbed onto the roof and made a hole big enough to let their friend into the room. In doing so, they also ran the risk of damage to property and possibly debris falling onto those people down below. At last they lowered their friend in front of Jesus, job done. We can tell that all this involved planning, confidence and most of all faith.

Often we have to trust in God for something to happen. Miracles do not come naturally in the present day, the only way is through faith in Christ. Through faith Christ responds to our request; not only in physical healing but in spiritual healing as shown in the miracle of the healing of the paralysed man. It was amazing that under Jesus' command, the man stood up, picked up his mat and started to walk home, something he was unable to do for a long time. The impact on everyone there must have been powerful. The man's faith must have been very strong too which led to his healing and his sins being forgiven. How was this possible? Nothing seemed adequate in explaining this miracle except for the presence of faith and trust. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were blinded by the certainty that only God can forgive sins that they totally missed the point - faith of the believers in Christ which made the miracle happen. Let us walk towards Easter remembering three words: believe, trust, and faith. Amen.

Prayer of intercession

We bring to you, O Lord, our concerns and cares this day.

We pray for the restoration of our broken relationship with the environment, help us to rediscover a covenant of care with all creation.

We pray for the healing of our relationships with each other, forge and nurture love and compassion in us.

We pray for those who love and care for those who are sick.

We remember before you people known to us who need our prayers at this time...

We pray for hostile communities and we pray for the healing of the broken body of Christ. Rekindle in us the zeal to share the good news.

Give us vision beyond our own horizons and show us how and where to serve your people.

We bring these prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who restores us to our wholeness. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Closing hymn: StF 544 As the deer pants for the water

As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after You.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship You

You alone are my strength, my shield, to You alone may my spirit yield.

You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship You.

You're my friend and You're my brother even though you are a King.

I love You more than any other so much more than anything.

Closing words and blessing

Generous God, all that we have comes from you. All that we have and are we place at your service asking that we would live and move faithfully in your world as signs of your love for all people.

And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us this day and as we journey through this holy season, now and forevermore. Amen.