

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 5th March 2023**

prepared by the Revd Tim Searle

Preparation

As we prepare to worship God let us be silent, calming our minds and focusing on God's presence with us all, wherever we are.

Call to Worship

Jesus invites us to a way of celebration, meeting and feasting with the humble and poor.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus beckons us to a way of risk, letting go of our security.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus challenges us to listen to the voices of those who have nothing to lose.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus calls us to follow the way of the cross, where despair is transformed by the promise of new life.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Seek ye first the kingdom of God (StF 254)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFxZeY2D5tc>

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you;

Allelu-, alleluia:

Al - le - lu - ia,

al - le - lu - ia,

al - le - lu - ia,

al - le - lu, al - le - lu - ia.

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you;

Allelu-, alleluia:

Al - le - lu - ia ...

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, alleluia:

Al - le - lu - ia ...

Karen Lafferty (b. 1948)

A Prayer of Approach

Gracious God, once more we gather before you in this season of Lent.

We come in the name of Christ remembering again those lonely and testing days he endured in the wilderness. We come recalling how he deliberately spent time there alone, reflecting on who he was and what you wanted of him.

We come reminded of the courage, the faith, and the commitment he showed during that time – qualities that were to characterise the rest of his ministry.

Gracious God,
help us to use this time as a gift.
May we draw closer to you through it,
understanding more of your nature and our own.

May it deepen our faith,
strengthen our commitment,
and confirm our sense of calling.

May we learn what it means to follow Christ and what it means to serve you.
May we recognise more clearly the true cost of discipleship
but equally the rewards.

May we understand more fully
why you have put us here,
what you would have us do,
who you would have us be,
how you would have us live,
and where you would have us go.

Gracious God,
prepare us through this time of worship,
this day, and this season,
to understand and celebrate more fully
all you have done for us in Christ.

So may we love you more truly
and serve you more faithfully,
to the glory of your name. **Amen.**

A Prayer of Confession

Almighty and all-seeing God,
we thank you for this season of Lent –
a time to reflect upon our discipleship,
to consider our calling,
to test our faithfulness to you.

Almighty God, help us to be honest with
ourselves, to see ourselves as we truly are,
with all our weaknesses,
all our ugliness and sinfulness.

Help us to face all those things
which we usually prefer to push aside –
the unpleasant truths we sweep under the
carpet, pretending they are not there.

All-seeing God,
we can fool ourselves but we cannot fool you.
We can pretend all is well
but cannot conceal our inner pain.
We can deny our need of you
but cannot disguise our emptiness without you.
We can seek fulfilment in this world
but will never find real peace outside your love.

Almighty and all-seeing God,
we claim to be faithful
but sometimes that faith is skin-deep.
We claim to love you
but often that love is flawed.
We claim to serve you
but all too frequently we serve self first.

Search us and help us to search ourselves,
control us, and help us to control ourselves,
and give us grace to grow strong in faith
and whole in Christ,
for in his name we ask it. **Amen.**

Read Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17

Read John 3: 1-17

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Be still and know that I am God (StF 18)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyDr9-Mpc_s

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Anonymous

Based on Psalm 46.10-11

Reflection

'Be still and know that I am God.' How often have we heard or sung those words? More important, how often do we make time to be still? Like Martha, all too easily we spend our lives rushing around, always aware of something else to do, something else that demands our time and attention.

We live in an ever more pressurised world in which time to stop and stare has become an all too rare luxury. But Lent reminds us that we fail to make time for what really matters at our peril. It calls us to pause and reflect. It challenges us to ask what life is ultimately all about. Today then we make a space in our lives, and through music, through words and through silence, we seek to make sense of it all.

Take a moment to *'Be still and know that I am God.'*

Pause

In our Gospel reading we meet the character Nicodemus. Under the cover of darkness, he has sought out Jesus expectantly. We are told that he was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews, so he is careful to conceal his approach to Jesus, not wanting to jeopardise his own standing in the Temple community. At this point, he still keeps one foot firmly in his old camp!

Yet something about Jesus has drawn Nicodemus out, away from the busyness of his day job, away from prying eyes. Nicodemus is making his own Lenten journey. He has made space and carved out time to examine his faith, and his life, in the light of Christ. This is a pivotal moment in a journey that, apart from a fleeting mention in chapter 7, sees us meet Nicodemus only one other time in the gospel: at the foot of the cross with Joseph of Arimathea, there to help him prepare Jesus' body for burial. Something is clearly happening to Nicodemus, something that mirrors our own journey alongside Jesus towards the cross, and into the resurrection that follows it.

But like us, Nicodemus demands details, he requires evidence. His curiosity in Jesus has been piqued by the visible signs and wonders that Jesus demonstrated. Confronted by these, Nicodemus is sure that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God, and has the presence of God within him. But Jesus, ever cryptic, no more so than in John, once again refrains from giving a straight answer or a direct response. When Jesus mentions about being born a second time *'from above'*, Nicodemus is perplexed. He is on a journey, yes, but still rooted in the physical world and tied to an experience of God made manifest by the statutes and ordinances of Jewish Law. Paul's words to the Romans from our first reading may well have been ringing in the gospel writer's ears, *"For the promise that Abraham would inherit the world did not come to him through the law but through the righteousness of faith."*

Jesus is inviting Nicodemus to climb off the fence and fully inhabit life with Christ. This can only happen when Nicodemus is prepared to release the reins and take a step of faith, trusting in that mystery which defies explanation, submitting himself to the wind that *"blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."*

So it is for us. That's why Lent is such an important season. We're given an opportunity - not to think about what we do or don't do, what we take up or what we give up, but to rediscover our faith in Jesus; to become reacquainted with the movement of the Spirit breathing through our lives. It's about finding time and space, challenging though that can be, to be present with Jesus in a manifestly different way than the world thinks of or expects. It's a gift from God allowing us to shake loose the shackles of individualism and be united in the community of Christ.

Be born again *'from above'* this Lent, and know that both the healing and stirring Spirit of God is there for you. You need not know where it came from, or where it goes, you only need know of the Spirit's deep desire to rest on you, and in you, now and for ever more. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord Jesus Christ,
we are reminded today, in this season of Lent, of the time you spent in the wilderness – we thank you that you came through that time the stronger – more sure of the path you were to take, and more confident of your ability to take it. So now we pray for those experiencing similar times of testing.

In the wilderness of life today
be present, O Lord.

We pray for those facing difficult and demanding choices – choices which entail pain and self-sacrifice, which mean letting go of cherished dreams, which involve facing awkward facts about themselves and others.

In the wilderness of life today
be present, O Lord.

We pray for those wrestling with temptation –
torn between conflicting desires,
unsure of where they stand,
uncertain about their ability to stand firm.

In the wilderness of life today
be present, O Lord.

We pray for those experiencing a period of
testing in their lives – problems they fear they
cannot cope with, challenges they feel unable
to rise to, questions they would rather not face.

In the wilderness of life today
be present, O Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, give strength to all facing
such times – a sureness of purpose and
clearness of mind. Give the knowledge of your
will – then courage to make right decisions
and resolve to see them through.

May each emerge the stronger for all they
experience,
and better equipped to face the future.

In the wilderness of life today,
be present, O Lord,

In your name we pray. **Amen.**

We bring all our prayers together by praying
the prayer Jesus taught us ...

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

May the mind of Christ my Saviour (StF 504)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE5fOXSymBc>

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self-forgetting –
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859-1928)

Dismissal and Blessing

May God who makes all things new
transform our living, day by day
through the love of Christ.

And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all, evermore. **Amen.**

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