



## Pastorate worship 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

Welcome

Welcome to the pastorate worship on the first Sunday of Lent, the 40 days that we prepare for Easter. On this Sunday the gospel reading is the account of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness where he was tempted and had to wrestle with some difficult choices. We also face many temptations and making ethical and moral choices is not always easy. And just a week ago an article in the Guardian described the pandemic as a moral (and economic) minefield. What are the choices we are faced with and how do we make the right decisions? During Lent we can follow Jesus into the wilderness, a place of reflection to discern the will and the call of God.

Opening Prayer

Holy God, you meet us in wilderness times and places.

Sometimes when and where we least expect you it is then and there you appear to us. Give us eyes to see where you reveal yourself.

Give us ears to hear when you speak to us. Give us hearts and minds open to your call and loving purposes. O God, we find it difficult to acknowledge that your thoughts are not our thoughts; your ways are not our ways. Our thoughts too easily follow the mindset of the world.

Our choices too often contradict the way you would have us live.

We are slow to understand your truth, afraid to take the path you set before us. Forgive us our clouded vision and lack of courage.

Enable us to open our hearts and minds more fully to your gospel way set out for us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn

Lead us heavenly father lead us

Scripture Reading

Matthew 4: 1-11

Reflection

As the story goes....After baptism and the affirmation of God "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased," Jesus needs time to reflect and discern what path it is that God is calling him to follow. What better place to go to than the wilderness, the same place where Israel had travelled through for 40 years to discern their calling



before they could enter the promised land. Many temptations came on their way, and Jesus will have to face temptations in the wilderness too. While for Matthew the focus of the temptations is clearly vocational, they all have a moral dimension too.

What is the will and call of God? Is it to turn stones in bread, in other words, to satisfy his own hunger and the hunger (for food) of others? Is it working miracles to make people believe? Is it to seek and use power for the good of all even if it means that you have to sell your soul? Jesus withstands the three temptations of self-satisfaction, fame and power even though the subtlety and lure of the temptations lie in the fact that the end result appears to be good. Many temptations are subtle and difficult to resist. Jesus is not exempt from such a struggle with temptations, but he was able to withstand them with a threefold appeal to the words of Scripture and to the will of God. The presence of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism) did not make Jesus immune from temptations, but it enabled him to deal creatively and faithfully with them. It is the same for us. In a world full of temptations making moral and ethical decisions is certainly not easy. It is easy enough to choose between something obviously wrong and clearly right, but many of our choices concern finding the lesser of two evils or carefully weighing the pros and cons. And “evil,” selfishness, self-interest, greed, etc, is always there to tempt us. After all, as the story goes....the devil let Jesus go but it doesn't say that the devil left him at peace. The devil never does that. We are faced with moral questions and issues today; we are bombarded with questions about justice, fairness, human rights...and now with dilemmas thrown up by the pandemic. How do we find our way through the minefield of moral choices?

*A cruise boat is sinking and there are not enough lifeboats. Your lifeboat is full and there are people in the water crying for help. Faced with the possibility that the lifeboat might capsize if any more people are rescued from the water, endangering the lives of those in the lifeboat, should any more people be pulled from the water? The question here is to what extent should individuals risk their well being for the well being of others? And we could ask further: To what extent should nations risk their well-being for the well-being of others? And in the context of the pandemic we can ask, while there is not yet enough supply of the Covid vaccines, should the nations that have a large*

supply share the vaccine with the nations that have less or none? And when?

*You are shopping in the supermarket and see that the jar of fairtrade coffee is sold for £4. The “regular” coffee is a lot cheaper. You know that the world coffee price is low and coffee farmers are struggling. You hesitate. Buy fairtrade or not? You pick up the cheaper coffee and think “I give generously to the foodbank and to charity, that is my bit I do for justice.”* Are you right? Is charity justice? And in the context of the pandemic and the material and mental toll on many people, is it charity or is it a different socio-economic system that is needed to tackle the social and economic inequality revealed and deepened in our country and worldwide? And there are many more dilemmas thrown up by the pandemic. To what extent is saving lives worth any potential damage to society, to people’s mental health, to children’s education, to the economy, to jobs, etc? Are some lives more “worth” than others? Should the Covid vaccine be mandatory? How much power should the government have to limit people’s freedom? Etc etc. But while governments are weighing up difficult choices we all have to consider the moral dilemmas as decisions are made on our behalf which affect many lives and we certainly should have a voice too. And the questions we always have to ask when faced with a moral issue are: What are the benefits and what harm may it cause? What moral rights are involved and how to respect them? What is most fair, most just? What advances the common good? And in light of the gospel reading we add the question: What is the will and way of God? (Of course, it will need some critical reflection as there will be different interpretations!) And another question: What do we learn from the gospel, from following Jesus? We have to acknowledge that making moral/ethical choices is not necessarily something that comes easy or natural to us. It is something we have to learn, and we can learn it together in community – in our community of faith – as we seek together the “Kingdom of God and his righteousness.” May it be so! Amen.

Hymn

Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Dedication of Offering

We do not live on bread alone, but by your Word, loving God. May that Word fill our hearts and our hands, all that we have, and all that we are, that it may be a blessing in your world. In Jesus’ name pray. Amen.

## Prayers

O God, as we begin our walk through Lent, following Jesus, that leads to the cross and to Easter, we pray for the discernment and strength that Jesus found in the wilderness. We seek to learn from Jesus how to face the many trials and temptations that burden us and lure us away from living faithful, thoughtful and compassionate lives. We pray, guide us, lead us, keep us on our journey of faith and faithfulness; help us to understand you, your will and your ways that Jesus lived for us. Loving God, we continue to be deeply affected by the pandemic, the many lives disrupted, turned upside down, and the livelihoods lost, children missing out on school, people waiting longer for treatments or waiting years for justice, because of growing backlogs....and still many people sick and dying from Covid both in our country and around the world. Over the past year we have been reminded how quickly life can change and how short our time on earth is. We have been reminded that we live in a natural world which we ignore to our peril. And we are reminded to call on you, for hope and healing, guidance and strength. We pray that we are able to offer our hearts, hands and resources to help each other get through these difficult times. We claim your promise that when we pray at a time of anxiety, you will hear us. You will be our place of safety; you will care for us in time of trouble. And for a moment of quiet in your presence we pray for those who are particularly in our hearts and minds today...family, friends, neighbours near and far.....And as Jesus taught us so we pray, OUR FATHER....

## Hymn

Come thou fount of every blessing

## Blessing

As we journey through Lent, we journey together, a community of faith. As we travel the Way of Jesus, we journey together, but also alone. Let us go into God's world, practising our faith, living Christ's call to love God with all that we are, to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Let us go into God's world knowing we are never alone. Christ's peace, the Creator's love, and the breath of the Holy Spirit go with us. Amen!