

*First Sunday in Lent*

*Welcome and Intimations*

**CALL to WORSHIP**

Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing all you who are upright in heart!  
(Psalm 32: 11)

**LET US WORSHIP GOD -**

**PRAISE** MP 563: Praise to the Holiest in the height

**Prayer of Approach: LET US PRAY -**

Faithful God,  
we come together at the beginning of our worship, at the beginning  
of our Lenten journey;  
to lay down our burdens,  
to celebrate your presence,  
and to remember those on our hearts,  
trusting that you hear our prayer, rejoice in our music and journey  
with us day by day.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

**Children's Address:** 'Nought and Crosses'

Today starts our lead up to Easter, and this period of 6 weeks is called **LENT**.

On the first Sunday of Lent, we find Jesus in the wilderness, or desert, facing temptations - being tempted to take shortcuts to fame, popularity and power.

Do you know what it means to be tempted? (*wait for answers*)  
Sometimes, it's not so easy to choose; and we are quite good at persuading ourselves that 'it's not really SO bad if we give in and do it', or just sneaking one pancake won't really make any difference -

Mum won't notice! Or we tell ourselves that it's not really cheating - we'll just bend the rules a little!

Let's see - how many of you have played 'Noughts and Crosses'? (*Tic tac toe / or Xs and Os*) Two people play and one takes Xs and the other Os - right, and there's a grid with 9 squares or boxes - right?

Well, I just happen to have a grid here, and some big marker pens - who's willing to have a go?

What's the aim of the game? (*to get a row of three Os or Xs*) Allow time to play the game (*hope one gets three, if not try again or with two others*)

(*when someone gets three in a row -*)

**We have a winner!** (*announce the one who did not get three in a row*)

**What's wrong?** O you think I've declared the wrong person the winner? What's wrong with making the other person the winner? (*not fair!*)

That was just a game, and playing an unexpected trick - but in a way it helps us to see what temptation is really trying to get us to do.

We all know that the person who manages to get three in a row is the winner - and it's wrong to change the rules to suit yourself. It's obvious in noughts and crosses - but in a way, that's what temptation tries to get us to do - to talk ourselves into doing what we really know is wrong, while making excuses to ourselves until we convince ourselves that it's not really so wrong! Sometimes, we convince ourselves that it won't matter - that doing the opposite of what we should is really all right!

Like when your Mum or gran has just made your favourite biscuits or pancakes and tells you '**DO NOT TOUCH**' - these are for the meeting tonight and the visitors who will come. I said I'd make 36 - and there are only 36 there.

But they look so yummy, and the harder you try not to think about them or look at them, the more you stare at them - peak under the

cloth - ooh, they look delicious and your mouth is watering in anticipation of the taste - and suddenly, you stretch out your hand and take one - just one! *-no one will notice!*

Or maybe you're walking down the road and you see your least favourite person coming towards you - they call on you, asking if you will play with them - but, instead of facing them, you pretend you don't hear or see them, and walk the opposite way, or turn round and go back as if you have forgotten something - they won't know - they'll just think I didn't see them or hear them!!!!!!

Ever done anything like that? Done the opposite of what you should have done! Convincing yourself that it won't matter - but when we do things like that we are really saying that wrong is right - and we give in to temptation.

That's what Jesus was tempted to do - after forty days in the desert when he didn't eat, he was hungry - what would be the harm in turning these little stones into bread - they looked so like little rolls - no one would see him, after all, he was alone!

Or what was wrong with showing God's power by jumping off the top of the Temple and having God's angels save him from being hurt? And what would be wrong with giving in a little, and speeding things up, to have power over all the world - for that was the temptation - after all, that's what would happen eventually - so why not take a shortcut and do so much good now?

But each time, with each temptation, Jesus said 'No! Scripture says .....

Jesus knew that if he gave in just once, even just a little bit, he would be trapped and would never have the power and influence for good, - and the aims of his mission to free us all to love God for all eternity would be lost.

Jesus was tempted, just like we are - but he showed us how to resist it and say, "NO!"

***Prayer and Lord's Prayer: LET US PRAY -***

Gracious God,

open our eyes this Lent,

that in our weakness, we may see your strength;

in our nakedness, be clothed in your gentleness

and in our sinfulness, be cleansed by your love.

Blessed are those whose sin and wrongdoing is forgiven, whose sin is blotted out.

Blessed are we, Lord Jesus, for you have forgiven us.

Blessed are those to whom the Lord attributes no fault, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Blessed are we, Lord Jesus, for you have cleansed us.

Blessed are those whom the Lord teaches and guides.

Blessed are we, Lord Jesus, for you guard and enfold us in your salvation.

May our journey this Lent be like an adventure: unpredictable, exciting, challenging.

May our minds race, our hearts sing, and yet, may we ever find in our travelling a stillness that is your presence within us; leading us on to Jerusalem where the truth of your eternal love is revealed on a cross, and at an empty tomb.

Hear these our prayers, and hear us as we further pray together, saying;

*Our Father, which 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power,  
and the Glory. Forever. Amen.*

**PRAISE** MP 181: God forgave my sin in Jesus' name

*Scripture Readings:* Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Matthew 4: 1-11

**PRAISE** MP 160: Forty days and forty nights

## *Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession*

### **LET US PRAY -**

We thank you, Lord Jesus, for your example in the wilderness when you resisted temptation and overcame the deceits of the enemy, through the living words of Scripture.

Open our hearts to receive the truths of the Gospel, that when we wrestle with temptation or when we feel alone, we may be blessed with the words to meet our needs, to strengthen our faith and to proclaim your Kingship.

We pray for those led astray by the deceit of others and for those who don't take responsibility for their own wrongdoing.

We pray for those tempted to abuse the power entrusted to them and for all who are exploited or bullied.

We pray for those whose desires are self-destructive and for all those who are violated by the evil desires of others.

We pray for those who pursue knowledge at the expense of wisdom, and for those who carry a sense of shame at their past mistakes.

And we pray for one another this Lent, that we might walk the way of truth, integrity and compassion; in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

*Amen*

**PRAISE** MP 495:O for a heart to praise my God

### **Sermon**

### **Offering**

### **Doxology and Prayer LET US PRAY -**

Lord, accept these gifts which we offer in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who is our Saviour. Empower us through faith in the living Christ to use these resources for the proclamation of the Gospel, and the healing of the nations.

Hear our prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord.

In Jesus' name we pray.

*Amen.*

**PRAISE** MP 683: There's a wideness in God's mercy.

### ***Blessing and Benediction***

Go in the power of the Spirit, knowing that the God of grace will guide us on our way; that we do not walk alone, but in the strength of God whom we love to serve and love.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you and with all who you love, today and forevermore . . . . .

*Threefold Amen*

## **SERMON**

**TEXT:** *Matthew 4: 1-11*

### ***Prayer for Illumination:***

O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen.

***Amen.***

## ***INTRODUCTION***

"The church doesn't do it's business that way; nor does it make those kinds of loans. Christians should simply help one another if they can, and not look for advantages or repayments for it. The church is about caring for all people and this church can give you £30 to help you out.

Pass on the kindness to someone else sometime, no battery chargers required or accepted. And God bless you on your trip."

A minister said this to two strangers he came across outside his church. The younger of the two men had explained that they were in a right pickle and needed some money to buy petrol to get to their

destination. He offered to leave the minister with a battery charger, worth more than the money they needed, saying that would come back for it and repay the money they borrowed, plus make a donation to the church. Or, if they didn't return, he could sell the battery charger to make up the loss.

It wasn't a bad offer, really - and it was tempting to accept it. But, instead, the minister said: "No, this is not the way the church operates - we do not need deposits and safeguards, 'just in case' - we don't look to profit from helping someone in need."

So come with me, the long way round, as we look at today's reading and what God is saying to us through them.

### **ROMANS 5: 12-19**

Paul, in Romans 5, really links our two readings for us when he speaks of how, in Adam, all die - and how, in Christ, all are given life. How, through the sin of one, death entered the world - then how, by the righteousness of the other, death is no more. We understand death to have entered the world as the penalty for Adam and Eve's disobedience - for their turning away from God and doing that one, single thing they had been warned not to do, or on that day they would surely die.

Some folk think this judgment was rather harsh, if not even a little unfair on Adam and Eve. Take a hard look at their situation at the moment the serpent spoke to them, they would say: -

Had they encountered deceit before?

Did they know what a lie was?

Would they have had reason to doubt anyone?

How could they have known what "to die" meant?

These are good questions - questions that have allowed some people to conclude that Adam and Eve were "set up" by God - with no way to defend themselves - that God knew they would sin and created the conditions for them to sin in regardless.

**In short they blame God for what happened.**

## AN ALL TOO FAMILIAR MODERN THEME

That sounds all too familiar, does it not? Never mind taking responsibility for your own actions - find someone else to blame for the faults that lie within us. You know how it goes -  
Spill hot coffee on your lap and burn yourself - then blame Macdonalds for making the coffee too hot and collect a huge sum in compensation!

Injure, or even kill someone when you drive after drinking - and blame the alcohol for it!  
One child hits, or kicks another child in the playground - and blame them for provoking you!

It's a theme as old as Adam and Eve who, when they were confronted by God after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, promptly blamed God, then one another, and then the serpent for doing so!

In a way, Adam and Eve are you and I.  
And whether we intend to or not we all play their game  
- we take and eat the forbidden fruit.  
And like them, most of us, if we don't just outright deny doing the deed,  
- blame someone else for it.  
At least at first,  
- before we finally embrace the truth,  
- before we finally say "mia culpa" and mean it.

Set up or not, the simple fact is that in the story of Adam and Eve there was one simple command given them - not eat of a particular tree in the Garden. Knowing that - as Eve and then Adam responded to the Serpent's invitation - and ate.

The temptation in that invitation was, of course, "to become like God - knowing good and evil"



And so Adam and Eve, who were already made in the image of God and therefore like God, turned away from the one who made them and tried to be like God in the way that their inclinations, and the inducements of the serpent suggested to them.

In other words, they tried to take a short cut to the very state of existence that God had already planned for them; but to do it their way instead of God's way.

## SHORTCUTS

Think of the many children - never mind children - think of the many adults who have insisted taking short cuts to their destinations:

- short-cuts that have been forbidden to them - or that they have been warned about,- only to find out that there were very good reasons for the rule, and very sound reasons for the advice.

No matter who we try to blame, the simple fact is that although the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good to the eye and desirable to make one wise, it was - and it still is - very bad for us.

## JESUS' TEMPTATIONS

In the story of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, we see another who was made in God's image, deal with the same tempter and the same temptation that tempted Adam and Eve.

After fasting 40 days, it must have been very 'tempting' for Jesus to turn **anything** into bread. And already, knowing where his journey was going to take him, it must have been tempting to take the short cut to dominion and power and glory - how much better to gain the whole world with one simple act of homage - than to gain it on journey that would involve dying on a cross.

And if you want to prove that God really is with you, even if you are going to insist on going the long way round - then what could be better than a little demonstration of divine love and protection - it

will really give you a boost and help show folk that you are someone special.

## **NO SHORT-CUTS!**

But Jesus took no short cuts to glory either in the wilderness or later.

He dealt with the world as it is - as it has become - because of the power of sin and death and, with no special advantages other than that which his faith gave him - and which our faith gives us. He walked the path of obedience to God in the midst of a very difficult world.

He avoided eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil even though that fruit is very tempting indeed.

Jesus walked the path of his destiny as one made in the image of God - like you and I - and he suffered and he died - as we suffer and die - to undo what Adam and Eve did - to undo what we do.

No short cuts. He took the long way around because, in the end, that is the only way to take if we hope to arrive.

And Jesus arrived. And because he did - he is able to help us arrive. As in Adam death came into the world for all so in Christ life comes to all who receive him.

It's always good to remember that when we're dealing with sin and temptation, it is rare for a person to be tempted to choose what seems an outright evil, rather we're tempted to a good - a partial good, a short-term good, but still a good. That's why temptation's hard to resist. If it were always a clear choice between good and evil, it would be easy.

That is why the law is given to us - to help us know what is wrong and what is right and to use it, and the word of God as a whole - in our struggle to resist temptation; much as Jesus used the word of God as found in the scriptures to help him turn away from each temptation the tempter offered.

Jesus used the word of God like sign posts on the roadway - showing which route is safe and which is not, which is good and which is bad. And when the devil attempted to twist those sign posts around on him the Spirit of Truth that was poured out on Jesus kept him on course.

Jesus arrived - and he helps us to arrive.

His death as one whose way was blameless opens the way to life for us, it cancels the debt that we owe but which cannot pay ourselves.

When all is said and done however, our faith is about what Jesus has set us free **for**, not just what Jesus has set us free **from**. It is not so much about what **not** to do - but about what **to do**. It is positive - not negative.

And Lent should be a positive time for us too, before the joy of Easter.

We should indeed avoid certain things - we should resist the tempter

- we should, as the Season of Lent has traditionally suggested, give up certain things.

But we should go on to express ourselves positively - like Jesus did as he moved from the River of his Baptism and the wilderness of his temptations towards the cross and ultimately to his resurrection. And Jesus went about doing good, healing the sick, teaching the people about God - because God was with him.

And God is with us as well. We are anointed with the Holy Spirit. And though we may succumb to temptation, we are empowered - thanks to the one who did not succumb - to do all he did.

The children's game, Simon says - clap your hands. Simon says - flap your elbows.

But God says - **love your neighbours as yourselves.**

And Jesus says - **love one another as I have loved you.**

Let us listen to the word of God - and do what God says - Do good and heal those under the power of the evil. We should be so busy doing the do's of our faith that we don't have time to do the don'ts, - that before we know it we will have arrived at the destination for which we all long.

Going the long way round is not always easy - but it always gets us there. Shortcuts only end up in muck and mire.

The minister I mentioned at the start of this sermon, gave those two strangers more than just the money they needed when he said: "The church doesn't do it's business that way nor does it make those kinds of loans. We should simply help one another if we can and not look for advantages or repayments for it. The church is about caring for all people and I will gladly give you the money you need for petrol to allow you to reach your destination.

Just pass on the kindness to someone else sometime, no battery chargers required or accepted. Oh, and God bless you on your trip." Jesus is here to help us in the battle against sin and temptation, whether it comes in the form of nice looking battery chargers or in the form of a fruit that is pleasing to behold and good for acquiring wisdom.

And when we succumb to sin and temptation, be it in obvious ways or in ways that are unseen and buried deep in our hearts, God is here to shower his forgiveness upon us, - his forgiveness and his grace for the meeting of a new day, the grace to get up and to move on doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong.

We go the long way round - because that is the road travelled by Jesus and because Jesus is still on that road to help us walk it and to help us arrive at the destination he has already reached.

**ASCRPTION of GLORY:**

Praise be to God - for being with us and in us, making us able be with him and in him. **Amen**