

Worship Sheet for Sunday 21st February 2021

This morning's Service has been prepared by Geoff Rhodes, a Local Preacher who was planned to preach at Pewsey this morning.

Now, as usual, you are invited to switch off your telephone and then, when you are ready, perhaps listen to a piece of music and have a moment of silence as you focus on God before using this sheet. Our hope and prayer is that God will bless you as we worship him in our own homes, apart but together. Isolated, but not alone.



Call to Worship: Today is the first Sunday of Lent. A time of reflection as we look at Jesus' last earthly journey and prepare ourselves for the events of Holy Week.

We begin by reminding ourselves we are coming to worship our God.

Song: StF 20 Be Still for the Presence of the Lord (*Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words*)

David J. Evans.

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Prayer

So, we are still and quiet in the presence of the Lord: (*Silence*)

Mighty God, as we come into your presence now, may we awake anew to the wonder of your love for us. May our thoughts today make familiar words shine with new meaning: and resonate with your praise.

This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen

Song: StF 407 Hear the Call of the Kingdom (*Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words*)

Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Well, have we heard the call? Are we answering it? Questions we often ask in differing ways. Do our two readings from today tell us of the start of that time when the call begins to be answered?

Reading: Genesis 8: 10-12; 9: 1

When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. ¹² He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.



Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.

Reading: Mark 1: 9-15



At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, ¹³ and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Prayer:

With those readings in our minds, and the response of Jesus to his call, let us reflect on our answer to God's call: let us pray:

Loving God you call us on the journey of Faith, forgive us when we have been so comforted by your affirmation and love for us that we have failed to share that love with others.

Challenging God you call us on the journey of Faith, forgive us when we have been so caught up with the day-to-day challenges of our own lives that we have failed to live lives of justice and peace.

Encouraging God you call us on the journey of Faith, forgive us when we have been so excited to hear the Good News for ourselves that we have failed to be good news for the people around us.

Enabling God you call us on the journey of Faith, forgive us and challenge us. Send us out to forgive others and to be the change you want to see in our communities and our world. **Amen.**

Hymn: StF 236 Forty Days and Forty Nights (*Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words*)

George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870) adapted by Jubilate Hymns



Prayers of intercession:



We open the papers; we turn on the radio; we flick through the TV channels; we listen to our neighbour's story and we don't know how to pray. And so we hold our hurting world before you, and ask the help of your Spirit in guiding our intercessions.

Silence

And as we wait on you in the quiet of our hearts, we begin to feel the pain of devastation where people have lost loved ones through the Covid disease. And as we think of that loss, we remember those of our community who have been at the forefront of the fight against the disease and ask that you will give them strength of body, mind and spirit in their tasks.

Silence

We remember the news we see and read of homes and livelihoods, swept away by the destructive power of natural disasters, of war and economic hardship.

Silence

We begin to feel the pain of injustice, where people do not have good health or fail to flourish due to poverty or oppression.

Silence

So Lord, begin to change our hearts and help us find the answers to our prayers through our actions. In Jesus name. **Amen.**

And we close our prayers reminding ourselves that we are part of God's family as we say:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name,
Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours,
now and for ever. Amen

Reflection:

Mark 1:9-10. In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the spirit descending like a dove on him.

We are not surprised that the set lesson for today, the first Sunday in Lent is the story of Jesus' baptism and subsequent temptation in the wilderness. What does surprise us, well, it surprised me, is the pairing of this reading with the end of the story of Noah and the flood. The lectionary linking the two, which leaves us, and me earlier this week with the question, 'what is the connection between Noah, his family and all the animals leaving the Ark and Jesus' baptism and journey into the wilderness to be tempted?

Well, I went looking for connections. One came readily, I expect you have already thought of it! The obvious one is, yes, water. Jesus is baptized and emerges from the waters of the Jordan –



Noah and company emerge from the waters of the Flood. The second was a bit more obscure but yes, it is the dove! In the Noah narrative, a dove alerts Noah to the fact that the waters are receding as it brings back an Olive branch. It is a dove that is the visible sign of God's Spirit descending at Jesus' baptism.

Then another thought occurred: Noah was the world's saviour in the flood, rescuing humanity and the animals. Jesus is the world's second and greater saviour as he prepares to rescue us from sin and death.

So, plenty to think about – but how to make sense of it? I think the easiest way is to go through the gospel reading and follow the links as they arise and see what we can learn from them.

Mark's gospel story, as written, gives his readers here, the first hint of who Jesus is. '*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*' But this is not a public revelation, only Jesus at this stage is aware of who he is. And as Jesus emerges from the waters, Mark notes that the '*heavens are torn apart*'. The imagery here, as the heavens are torn apart is that God was already coming to meet us. If the heavens are open, then God is with us, now and always.

So, emerging from the waters, Noah from the flood and Jesus from the Jordan, both hear God's word to them. Noah as representative of human and animal life hears God's promise to all living creatures. Jesus hears God's words of pleasure and promise.



And the Spirit descends on Jesus '*like a dove.*' Double imagery here, remember, '*the spirit of God hovered over the waters at creation*', a dove was there as the Flood receded. So, here, the Spirit of God is present at the waters of baptism. A special thought for those of us who have been baptised.

Then, Jesus is driven, an unexpectedly strong word, clearly he had no choice, driven by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tested by Satan. Mark's story here is brief. No three representative temptations, nothing except 40 days of tempting. For Mark this is a time

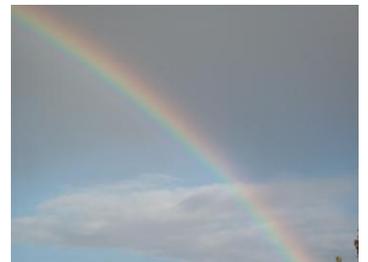
of preparation, Jesus is being prepared for the struggles ahead. The Israelites needed 40 years to prepare them to enter the Promised Land. Jesus uses the symbolic 40 days to prepare himself.

Now I want to emphasise something here that we often overlook. Jesus was tempted, Jesus struggled, Jesus suffered, just as we do. He was tempted, tested and suffered at the start, during and at the end of his ministry. The path that God asked him to follow, the path he took was a difficult one. Yet we have a tendency to assume that as Christians our paths will be easy! That the path that God will ask us to take will be pleasant. But that was not so for our leader, why should it be so for us? We follow one who was baptised and buffeted, was tempted and tested, suffered and died to stay on God's path. But he managed it through the power of God's Spirit, the Spirit that came to him at baptism. We follow Christ and he does not promise us an easy path! Like Jesus, we have been baptised, so we can expect the world to treat us as it did him, tempting and testing, buffeting and suffering. Jesus does not promise us an easy path he promises us the power of the Spirit to tread the path.



As Jesus set out on the path he chose, he had 'angels waiting upon him', we may not have angels waiting on us, but we will have his strength and the help and comfort of our friends to carry us through the rough places in the wilderness.

So, Jesus and Noah, water and dove, God's word and promise. Noah goes into the world, Jesus goes into the wilderness and thence into the world. And there the similarities appear to end but perhaps not. We will come back here in a moment. For this little cameo in Mark's story ends with the death of John the Baptist and Jesus beginning his ministry. If Jesus had any illusions about how he might end up, the death of John surely removed them. Doing God's will is not for the faint hearted. Jesus sets out to proclaim, *'the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.'*



So, what can we take from these two readings. We looked at much that they have in common but there is one other thing they have in common that I think we should take especial note of today as we journey into Lent. Both readings have the thought of 'new beginnings', the idea of 'fresh start'. After the Flood, Noah and everything in it, leave the Ark to begin again with a clean sheet. God makes a covenant and despite subsequent failure, keeps it and finds another way to 'begin again'. And here, Mark tells us of the start of the 'new beginning' as God in Jesus steps up to the crease to bat for our side; to give us another 'new start'.

We are now at the first Sunday in Lent so let us take time out now to begin afresh and meet with God in silence:

Living God, we have heard the Good News in the past and tried to follow. As we hear again the beginning of the story, we ask that you will 'tear open the heavens' for us and give us your Spirit that we may make a new start this Lent. So, we bring our very selves and dedicate all we have and are to your service in Jesus name. Amen.

Hymn: StF 470 Lord for the Years (*Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words*)

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Benediction:

Loving God, as we rise now to go about our daily tasks, may your blessing, grace and strength go with us that we may serve you and our neighbours day by day. Amen

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