

Morning Worship
Sunday 6 March
The First Sunday in Lent
Led by Michaela McNeill, ALM



Greeting

The Lord our redeemer be with you
and also with you.

Opening Prayer

God of our days and years,
we set this time apart for you.
Form us in the likeness of Christ
so that our Lives may glorify you.
Amen.

The Beatitudes

Let us hear our Lord's blessing on those who follow him.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Hymn – Forty Days and Forty Nights

- 1 Forty days and forty nights
thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted, and yet undefiled.
- 2 Sunbeams scorching all the day;
chilly dew-drops nightly shed;
prowling beasts about thy way;
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.
- 3 Let us thine endurance share,
and awhile from joys abstain,
with thee watching unto prayer,
strong with thee to suffer pain?
- 4 And if Satan, vexing sore,
flesh or spirit should assail,
thou, his vanquisher before
grant we may not faint nor fail.
- 5 So shall we have peace divine;
holier gladness ours shall be;
round us too shall angels shine,
such as ministered to thee.

6 Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,
ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear
at the eternal Eastertide.

George Hunt Smyttan (1822-1870), Francis Pott (1832-1909)

Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength'.

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen, Lord have mercy.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:

fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:

fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:

fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Readings by John Crang

Romans 10.8b – 13

⁸ But what does it say?

‘The word is near you,
on your lips and in your heart’

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, ‘No-one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Luke 4.1–13

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’ ⁴Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone.”’

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, ‘To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ ⁸Jesus answered him, ‘It is written,

“Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.”’

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written,

“He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you”,
¹¹and
“On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.”
¹²Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’
¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Reflection by Rev David Newton

The Epistle to the Romans is a notoriously tricky text, full of twists and turns and arguments that are hard to follow. Yet, understanding one simple thing opens it – and indeed most of the other Pauline epistles – up for us.

That one thing is this: that the letter is all about trying to understand how God’s grace might be given to *both* Jews and Gentiles.

It is not, as our friend Martin Luther thought, about how my very guilty conscience might be expunged and how I might stop seeking to ‘earn’ my salvation. Those were Luther’s concerns, not Paul’s.

Paul’s concern was how this very Jewish messianic figure Jesus might be proclaimed LORD of *both* Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s concern was how Gentiles might be “saved” (whatever we might quite mean by that) without having to become Jewish.

That was the very simple question or predicament that Paul faced. And his solution – despite the complex arguments in Romans and other epistles – was also very simple. It was this:

‘Confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he was raised from the dead, and you will be saved’.

Confess and believe. That was it. The point of the previous 9 chapters of wrangling in the letter to the Romans was to establish that both Jews and Gentiles fell short of the glory of God, that both Jews and Gentiles were to be saved on the same terms, and that Gentiles did *not* need to get circumcised or keep Jewish purity laws. The way into God's covenantal community was simply to confess Jesus as Lord.

To put it another way, Paul's concern was to ensure that there were absolutely no barriers at all for people to join the community of Christ. There were no pre-requisites, no tests to pass, no habits of behaviour necessary, but only a simple confession of Christ's Lordship.

Paul was inviting his reader to participate in a kingdom without barriers and without borders.

Yet somehow, we have too often turned Paul's vision on its head and used his very words to create a community of exclusion. The slogan 'confess and believe' was designed to knock down barriers. Yet now the same slogan is used to create them.

Do you really believe?? How do we know – we need an outward sign! Perhaps if you *really* believe you will be blessed and so will be rich! Or if you *really* believe God will heal you, or bad things won't happen to you. With such thinking we have the perversion of Christianity called The Prosperity Gospel.

Or again, some might ask if you are confessing the right thing? Confessing Jesus is Lord is (apparently) not enough! Sign this dotted line and adhere to our 10 doctrinal points.

Or again, we might think that belonging means doing the right thing, or knowing the right words, or being in with the right

people.

So let us re-claim Paul's radical inclusive, barrier defying slogan. Come one, come all, no stipulations, no caveats here, confess and believe and join the great adventure of following Christ's Way.

Paul's radical vision for a community without barriers to entry of course is founded in Christ himself, which brings us to our Gospel reading for this morning.

The temptations of Jesus can (of course) be characterised in various ways, but in essence have to do with that well known trio of vices concerning money, sex and power.

First, he was tempted to turn stone into bread. Here is the allure of money that can always turn one thing into another. Here is the desire for more than our daily bread, the desire to accumulate, to store up treasures on earth. Here on offer is the sin of materialism.

Second, he was tempted by great power – to have authority over all the kingdoms of the world. We are all tempted to gain power in one way or another. We seek to stand above others; we seek to control or manipulate for our own advantage. We seek to be lauded and applauded. Here on offer is the sin of egoism.

Third, he was tempted to throw himself down from the Temple and be rescued by angels. Here is the temptation to give in to the ecstatic joy of the moment, to put momentary pleasure above commitment and responsibility. Here is the sin of hedonism.

The temptations that Jesus faced are the very same basic temptations that face us all. There is little that is wrong in our world – it seems to me – that cannot be traced to our giving in

to one of these three temptations, or perhaps to a heady mix of all of them.

He faced in the wilderness the same kind of temptations we face. And that matters because it highlights for us that Christ is not just a deity veiled in flesh, but is in fact flesh and blood, truly human, fully human. And so, as Hebrew says, he was tempted *as we are* (yet without sin). He is like our brother or sister, he is one of us, with us, alongside us.

Which brings us back to barriers...

Instead of God being up there and us being down here; instead of there being some invisible and impenetrable barrier between the infinite and the finite, between Creator and Creature, there is an open path across the body of Christ. In Christ – fully human, tempted as we are - the ultimate barrier between us and God, sin and holiness, the finite and the infinite, is broken down.

If Christ breaks down that ultimate barrier, then surely – Paul reflects – he has broken down every human barrier too. The barriers between Jew and Gentile are gone. As has every other human made wall of hostility.

To follow Christ means being committed to breaking down barriers wherever we find them. For in Christ there are no barriers, only ‘confess and believe’. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God the Father,
God almighty, by whose plan
earth and heaven sprang to being,
all created things began.
We believe in Christ the Saviour,**

**Son of God in human frame,
virgin-born, the child of Mary
upon whom the Spirit came.**

**Christ, who on the cross forsaken,
like a lamb to slaughter led,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
he descended to the dead.**

**We believe in Jesus risen,
heaven's king to rule and reign,
to the Father's side ascended
till as judge he comes again.**

**We believe in God the Spirit;
in one Church, below, above;
saints of God in one communion,
one in holiness and love.**

**So by faith, our sins forgiven,
Christ our Saviour, Lord and friend,
we shall rise with him in glory
to the life that knows no end.**

Prayers of Intercession led by Rick Nelms

This morning when I say 'Lord of Love', please respond, Hear our prayer

Lord Jesus, sometimes we call you man of sorrows. Help us to understand your joy; that through the sorrow would come forgiveness of sins, the glorious gift of the Holy Spirit and the undeserved love of God forever. You gave thanks for food, so help us to be grateful for what we have. You gave thanks that God revealed truth to children, to fishermen, to everyone, so help us to be grateful for the Gospel truth, that everyone who calls on your name shall be saved. You gave thanks when your prayers

were answered as at the grave of Lazarus. Help us to recognize when prayer has been answered and to give thanks with a grateful heart. Lord Jesus, in the midst of suffering, at the last supper, you gave thanks, so help us to be thankful even in the tough times; help us to be more like you.

Lord of Love, **Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, you said 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' Help churches everywhere to behave as though this were true; help churches everywhere to shine your light into the dark places. We pray for the universal Church, the Anglican Communion and the Lordsbridge Team and everyone who plays a part in making them function. We pray for the parts of the team hit hardest by the interregnum, for the people who make the appointment to be guided by your Holy Spirit and for the person you have chosen to hear your call and come obediently to be part of our team.

Lord of Love, **Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, just as your first recorded words, on the coming kingdom of God, were political, your entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was political and your public indictment of the temple as a den of thieves was political, help us to realise that, in becoming more Christlike we sometimes need to be political. You said blessed are the peacemakers, and today Lord we pray for peacemakers between Russia and Ukraine, people to lead the turning of weapons into tools. We pray for the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia, as well as all the people across the world who are frightened. We pray especially for Vladimir Putin, for your Holy Spirit to fall upon him so that light and love

dictate his future decision-making. We pray also for all the other places where there is conflict, criminality and corruption or natural disaster which have either been displaced from the news by other events, or have been ignored. We pray especially for Afghanistan, Yemen, Tonga and many nations in Africa. In the UK we pray for Queen Elizabeth as she recovers from covid. We pray for the government and opposition as we face the migrant crisis, the transition from pandemic to living with covid, rising energy prices, job insecurity, our relationship with the EU and the growing pressure and division in Northern Ireland.

Lord of Love, **Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, through whom all things were made and in whom all things are held together, we pray for the creation that was very good when it was made, and we pray for its restoration to that condition. We pray for all 8 billion people on Earth to understand that every decision that they make as a consumer does make a difference, and that all those tiny decisions add up to the totality of the future of our beautiful little blue planet. We pray for the Church, the one organization on Earth, with the Bible, which is an environmental guide-book, to provide world leadership on the dominion and stewardship of creation and the implications of its destruction. We pray for understanding that the three billion poorest and most vulnerable people on Earth are the ones most intimately tied up to the condition of the creation because they get their water and food directly from the environment. We pray for the Church to provide world leadership when governments, corporations and the most affluent consumers of the world make decisions; help them to understand your words "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Lord of Love, **Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, you understand suffering, for you were fully human

and fully God during those harrowing hours at Gethsemane and Golgotha. Throughout your life and ministry you willingly touched people who needed spiritual healing, healing from mental distress or those who were physically sick. We pray for all people who care for those who suffer, whether in health and social care professions, as unpaid family carers or as those who serve the community in every supportive role from shop workers to drivers to bin emptiers. We pray for those whose suffering is spiritual, worshipping the wrong god or no god at all; for those whose distress is mental, whether caused by external circumstances or by internal changes in brain chemistry, and for those whose struggle is physical, whether visible or invisible, the result of acute infection including covid, long-term conditions, recovery from surgery or injury, or pain with no known cause. We pray for all people who are starving, cold, lonely, bullied, persecuted, falsely imprisoned, grieving, tortured by a past they cannot forget, or by one they cannot remember, homeless or trapped in poverty. In a time of silence we bring those on our hearts to you.

Silence

Lord Jesus, help us to recognize your healing when it occurs and to give you the glory, as well as to accept that some healing will not happen until we receive a new body in heaven.

Lord of Love, **Hear our prayer**

Lord Jesus, though tempted by the devil, you never gave in. By remaining without sin, you won for us the opportunity to be born again, to have our sin removed, so that we might be able to be friends with perfect father God. Thank you so much for that sacrifice and the privilege of being able to accept you as our personal lord and saviour. Thank you for our siblings in Christ, both known to us and those we never knew, those alive and those who have died and are with you in paradise. In a time of silence we remember our Christian friends, both alive and those who

have died in the faith, whether that faith be known to all, or to you alone.

Silence

Lord of Love, **Hear our prayer**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Collect

Almighty God,

whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:

give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness,

so may we know your power to save;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us so we pray

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.

Hymn – In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found,
he is my light, my strength, my song;
this cornerstone, this solid ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save:
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied -
for every sin on him was laid:
here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain:
then bursting forth in glorious day
up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine -
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

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Conclusion

God of compassion,
through your Son Jesus Christ
you have reconciled your people to yourself.
As we follow his example of prayer and fasting,
may we obey you with willing hearts
and serve one another in holy love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.