

## WELCOME

Welcome to worship today. *Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.* <sup>5</sup> *Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.* <sup>6</sup> *Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.* <sup>7</sup> *Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.* *Psalm 25:4-7*

This is the first Sunday in Lent and over the next six weeks of Lent we are going to look at a series that I've called the Heart of the matter. The heart of the matter is a phrase that we use when we want to get to the bottom of something.

Lent is a time to think through what it means to be a Christian, what it means to have Christ in our lives. We're going to do this using the lectionary readings for Lent, discovering different types of heart that God shows us and how Jesus can affect our heart as we can respond to Him. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* I like the sound of that! Mark's the kind of guy that doesn't beat about the bush – not someone to use 5 words when 1 will do - he gets on with telling the story of Jesus and how he thinks that Jesus is the heart of the matter for all Christians. The six verses that Chris will read to us tell us what is necessary for a hard heart to become soft and loving. Follow Jesus and His way. Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News! Walk the walk with Jesus; follow in His footsteps, the footsteps of God, the footsteps that strode across the universe as it was being created, the feet that were willing for the footsteps to stop as they went to the cross. The footsteps that have left their mark so that folk can follow. Nothing is more important than following in your father's footsteps. And do you know that is exactly what Jesus did.

He'd followed in His earthly father's footsteps by becoming a carpenter. Now he was to become God here on earth so that His people could see how to follow the Father's way.

The Psalmist was very sure that to have a good fulfilling life there were certain things that we needed to do. *“Teach me to live according to your truth,”* he cries. *“Teach me to live according to your ways,”* he pleads. Jesus says *“I am the way, I am the truth.”* Follow in his footsteps and we will follow him straight into His Father's and our Father's home. What a wonderful God we have – it is right that we give Him our thanks and praise.

## HYMN 70 Give praise and thanks unto the Lord

Give praise and thanks unto the Lord, for bountiful is he,  
his tender mercy doth endure unto eternity.

God's mighty works who can express or show forth all his praise?  
Blessèd are they that judgment keep, and justly do always.

Remember me, Lord, with that love which thou to thine dost bear,  
with thy salvation, O my God, to visit me draw near:

That I thy chosen's good may see, and in their joy rejoice,  
and may with thine inheritance triumph with cheerful voice.

Blest be Jehovah, Israel's God, to all eternity,  
let all the people say, Amen. Praise to the Lord give ye.

Psalm 106, verses 1-5, 48 *The Scottish Psalter*, 1929 Reproduced from CH4 CD-ROM edition, number 70

## **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION**

Creator God over these past weeks we have been enthralled by footsteps in the snow, cats, birds, deer, humans, all leaving their mark to show us that they have been here. Gracious God in your goodness and mercy you have left your mark on creation to show us the way in which you are a God of the past, the present and the future. As signs of new life are beginning to spring up around us we worship you the God who brings rhythm to life on earth.

Saviour God you are the One whose feet trod dusty roads, trampled over desert sands, trudged up the hill to Calvary carrying such a burden of wood till these feet were stilled as the burden of sin, our sin, killed you. We worship you the God who was willing to die so that we might live.

For those feet did not stay still but again walked into folks' houses, accompanied two friends on the road to Emmaus, brought you to the Sea of Galilee to provide breakfast and forgiveness for your friends.

Living Lord Jesus Christ we worship you for you are the One who brings your Spirit into our lives today in order to guide our footsteps, allowing us to walk in the way you have chosen for us. As a sign of our willingness to follow you we give you our money using our time and our talents to help you bring your Kingdom here on earth.

We recognise that we are not always the people we want to be let alone knowing what you want us to be. We come saying how sorry we are and seeking your forgiveness so that we may walk forward in your company for ever. We acknowledge that is your promise to us. In Jesus' name we pray and say together the prayer he taught. 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. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

## **READING Mark 1:9-15**

**Read by Chris Carroll**

*<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' <sup>12</sup> At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, <sup>13</sup> and he was in the wilderness for forty*

*days, being tempted<sup>[a]</sup> by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. <sup>14</sup>After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’*

## REFLECTION

This reflection is entitled the Tempted Heart. In Mark's passage this morning we see Jesus doing three things. Mark is not a detail kind of guy – he doesn't elaborate his stories very much, he just gets on with telling us what he thinks is important for us to know – so we need to note what he does tell us. These six verses tell us that God has spoken to his people in a new way – in the Jesus' way. Three activities in six verses, acknowledge you're a sinner, be sorry asking for forgiveness and as a sign of your willingness to follow, be baptised – Mark doesn't pull any punches!

**Baptism** is always such a special event. Hundreds of folk had flocked out into the desert to hear what John the Baptist was saying. Just think for a moment – there hadn't been any special word from God for over three hundred years. Can you imagine what that must have been like? The special people of God not hearing from him – it happens today too – there are times in our lives when we find it difficult to hear what God is saying, when it feels as if he has abandoned us. All we want is to hear God speak to us; perhaps to bring us comfort, perhaps to bring us guidance, maybe even we'd be happy to hear him challenge us, but, no, there seems to be a deafening silence. These are really difficult times – the Psalmist knew plenty about that – he'd plead, he'd cry and then he'd remember that God had spoken in the past and was content to trust that he would speak again in the future. But 300 years – that was a long test of time. You'd be tempted to think he'd abandoned you. No wonder the Israelites flocked to hear the message – you're a sinner, acknowledge that, be sorry and be baptised. What a hope that message must have given. God had not forgotten them. The time was now right for action. And they were ready for it. They had never given up hope. The temptation for us is when we seem to have no message from God is to withdraw into our shells and not be ready for action when the time does come. That's a temptation that we need to resist.

The first public act of Jesus is to be baptised. People down through the centuries have puzzled about why Jesus should submit himself to baptism. After all he didn't have to say sorry for anything he'd done wrong, for he'd never done anything wrong. There has been one main explanation. Jesus wanted to do all things that people do so, though he didn't need to, he went through baptism to align himself to us who need baptism. But perhaps there's another explanation. These people that flocked to John the Baptist were flocking to him because his message was one that a new kingdom was going to come – the kingdom of heaven. That's what they'd been waiting for all these years so yes let's join the new movement. You can feel the excitement, the thrill, the expectation of what this was going to mean to them. Jesus needed to align himself with that and with them so that they would know that HE was the one who was to bring this kingdom in, that John's work was now finished and Jesus' was starting. It was at his baptism that he

received the endorsement from God – you are my son, you are loved by me. Have you ever noticed something though – God’s endorsement only came after Jesus had taken the first step. That is truly biblical: remember the waters of the Red Sea only parted after Moses had raised his stick, when the Israelites were crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, the flooded river only stopped flowing when the Priests put their feet into the water. **Following in the footsteps of Jesus means stepping out in faith. Resisting the temptation to stay comfortable.**

At the first major event in Jesus’ public ministry he is assured that He is God’s Son and the folk hear this. I wonder can anyone remember what the first words following Jesus’ death were? The army officer guarding him said, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” His whole life and his death showed to those with open eyes, ears and hearts that Jesus was God’s Son. So often we are tempted to wait when what we need to do is step out in faith.

**Temptation.** Mark then wheechs Jesus away into the desert – driven out there by God’s Spirit, why, to be tempted. I think that is a huge biggie – imagine God’s heart has been tempted, it knows, God knows, what temptation is. Mark doesn’t tell us the gory details like the other Gospel writers. He doesn’t even tell us the outcome. What he wants us to know is that Jesus wasn’t there on his own. Wild beasts were with him. I can think of better places to be than in the desert with wild animals! Were they part of the struggle of temptation or perhaps Mark tells us that to remind us that this new kingdom that Jesus was bringing in was to be one where lions lie down with lambs, where the little children will look after lion cubs as Isaiah had prophesied. A new and peaceful way of living.

**A power struggle** went on in that desert. How was Jesus going to use His power? He could use it as a dictator inflicting his way on everyone, or he could use it in a humble servant like manner – one which encouraged response rather than demanded it. He chose the way of servant hood, the way of suffering, the way of death, His death, in order to bring us a life where lion and lamb would live together in peace and harmony.

We all know that power can be used for good or for evil – think of the atom; the power used to split it and the way in which splitting of atoms can be used for good or for evil. Our hearts are tempted to misuse power. **Following in the footsteps of Jesus means allowing Him to guide our tempted hearts –** *When we are tempted to despair* that God has abandoned us, He reminds us that He too has felt abandoned, but His resurrection proves to us that God is always there for His people.

*When we are tempted to stay put* in the safety of our comfortable lives, Jesus calls us out to follow in His way of faith.

*When we are tempted to misuse the power* that has been given to us, Jesus reminds us to follow in his way of servant hood – He reminds us that this is the way of the new kingdom life, lived with soft, fleshy, responsive hearts.

Perhaps you'd like to ponder these things throughout this coming week. Why not gather a stone when you are out for a walk which could remind you of a desert place and use it to help you in your meditation. We think of the way in which Jesus offers us an example of servant living as we sing The Servant King. Amen.

**HYMN 374 The Servant King.** (From heaven you came, helpless babe)

words omitted for copyright reasons

### **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

**Fan Heafield**

Dear Lord, God, our Father, blessed are you who has sent your own Son to be our Saviour. In him, you have delivered us from the darkness and made us your children of the light.

Lord there are many times when I know I have disappointed myself and others. I know I have given into temptation and my shortcomings. Thank you for helping me overcome the temptations I meet in my life by your strength and for forgiving me when I do not succeed.

As you have called each one of us make us worthy of that calling and we ask your blessing on all who seek to fulfill your calling.

We pray for those who are called to proclaim the Gospel and to give witness of you. We pray for your preachers and all those who support them. We pray for those who go out of their way to help others in all walks of life. We ask for your guidance in everything we do and may we have an understanding of the effect our actions have.

We come to your love: heal us and raise us up.

We remember all who are struggling with the impact of the pandemic. Those who are ill both at home and in hospital, those who have been bereaved, and those who are still shielding after twelve months. We also remember those who are struggling with the restraints of lockdown. We remember before you all who suffer from rejection and scorn. We pray for homeless people, for refugees and the world's poor. We ask your blessing on all who are used as cheap labour or who are abused by taskmasters. We pray for all who suffer from injustice or the lack of fair trade.

We come to your love: heal us and raise us up.

We give thanks for our homes and our loved ones. As we ask your blessing upon them, we remember homes where there is sorrow and suffering. We pray for those who are struggling due to all illnesses, for those who have dealing with their mental health as well as those coping with debt and addictions. We remember all those who are drained and exhausted.

We come to your love: heal us and raise us up.

We give thanks to all those in the healing professions, and we pray for our own doctors and health workers. We remember all those who are denied healing through poverty, war or simply their situation.

We come to your love: heal us and raise us up.

Dear Lord, help us to cultivate the simplicity of devotion to you. Let seeking your heart be the goal of our lives even when we are weighed down with stress and business of living. To you, to your power and love we commit ourselves now and forever Amen

### **HYMN CH3 482 Yield not to temptation**

Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;  
Each victory will help you some other to win;  
Fight manfully onward; dark passions subdue;  
Look over to Jesus, He will carry you through  
*Ask the Saviour to help you Comfort, strengthen and keep you;  
He is willing to aid you; He will carry you through.*

Shun evil companions; Bad language disdain;  
God's name hold in reverence, Nor take it in vain;  
Be thoughtful and earnest, Kind-hearted and true;  
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.  
*Ask the Saviour to help you Comfort, strengthen and keep you;  
He is willing to aid you; He will carry you through.*

To him that o'ercometh God giveth a crown;  
Through faith we shall conquer, Though often cast down;  
He who is our Saviour Our strength will renew;  
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through. *Ask the Saviour*

Horatio Richmond Palmer, 1834 - 1907

### **BENEDICTION**

Leader: Even though the rain hides the stars

**All: *Even though the mist swirls the hills*** Leader: ***Even when the dark clouds veil the sky*** All: ***God is by my side***

Leader: Even when the sun shall fall in sleep

**All: *Even when at dawn the sky shall weep***

Leader: Even in the night when storms shall rise

**All: *God is by my side God is by my side***

Go knowing the blessing of the presence of Almighty God; Father; Son and Holy Spirit at work in your life and through your life today and everyday Amen