

22nd February 2026. First Sunday in Lent.

Prayer for today: Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted 40 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 your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for Will Sadler, Leo Pyle, John Gibson, Brenda Clark, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Graeme Common, Kate Marris, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughhead.

Among those who have died we remember Sue Hanning, and pray for Keith, Tori, Izzi and all her family, and also Margaret Isabelle Clark, Nigel Gibson, John Martin and Hilda Walker, whose year's mind is about this time. Sue Hanning's funeral will take place at Whitley Chapel on Monday 2nd March at 10 a.m.

Our Lent Study course this year is an exploration of the Old Testament, created by Chris Simmons. We meet on Thursday afternoons in Lent, from 2.30 to 3.30 p.m. This week we will be meeting at 'Bet Shalom', Juniper, by kind invitation of Mrs. Gwen

Dixon All are welcome, and the course is most interesting. Please contact me or Chris if you wish to receive the study notes to accompany this course.

Readings:

Romans 5: 12-19

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned –

¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.

¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the

many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Psalm 32

Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
² Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
³ When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
⁴ For day and night
your hand was heavy on me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.
⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.
I said, 'I will confess
my transgressions to the Lord.'
And you forgave
the guilt of my sin.
⁶ Therefore let all the faithful pray to you
while you may be found;
surely the rising of the mighty waters
will not reach them.
⁷ You are my hiding-place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
⁹ Do not be like the horse or the mule,
which have no understanding
but must be controlled by bit and bridle
or they will not come to you.
¹⁰ Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the Lord's unfailing love
surrounds the one who trusts in him.
¹¹ Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Matthew 4: 1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'

⁴ Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. ⁹ ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”’

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Thoughts on today’s readings

St. Matthew’s account of Jesus in the wilderness can more accurately be described as the testing of Jesus, rather than his temptation: it is the Spirit which leads him into the wilderness where, to be sure, he will face temptations when he is physically weakened by hunger. How will he understand, how will he live out his identity as Son of God?

Throughout this passage there are references to the Old Testament, and in particular to Moses and Elijah, who also were sent by God into the wilderness, and where the period of 40 days is significant. Elijah too has to depend upon God for his life: angels minister to him. And in the responses of Jesus to the devil, he quotes from Deuteronomy chapters 6 to 8 : you shall not live by bread alone; you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. In this Jesus shows himself to be in a direct and true succession to those faithful witnesses whom God called and who were true in their obedience, and through whom the power of God was at work to save his people. In this passage the cross is already foreshadowed: there Jesus will be lifted up, not on to the pinnacle of the temple but on the cross, and there the onlookers will shout at him: ‘If you are the Son of God, come down, and save yourself, and us!’

The sonship of Jesus involves his complete, trusting and loving obedience to his Father: nothing else. He is the new creation, the new man, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters. His obedience is not blind or accidental: it is intentional, tried and tested.

In his flesh Jesus is the son of Adam, who was incapable of such love, trust or obedience, not a man of faith but of sin. What do I mean by sin? Here is a definition from the Swiss theologian Karl Barth which I find very clear: *sin is an assumption of independence in which God is forgotten*. In the story of the Fall there is a sort of thoughtless (and godless) assumption of autonomy in the way in which the man and the woman accept the apparently reasonable temptation to disobey God, which will then be at the heart of the story of the human race as told in the Old Testament. But then this is also a story about God: about God’s faithful purpose and patience, and about the hope and promise which we see fulfilled in Jesus.

As I approach retirement this year I am very much aware that what may lie ahead is old age (if life is spared). I have tended to define myself by my work: who then am I? It is perhaps a question I should ask my family and those I love: those who love and have loved me. Certainly I have no interest in being defined by possessions: at best they are a means to an end. I am well aware that in the world of work we are none of us indispensable, but more usually disposable: once I have been replaced,...or not..., the world will keep turning.

Once thing of which I am certain is that Jesus Christ came into my life and has remained present in my life. In my failings I have not been cast off, but raised up again, and I know that he lives and I know that he lives in his saints, in his witnesses, faithful and joyful, who bring his light to the world. John Henry Newman once

compared himself to a burning glass: the invisible light passes through it, and then is focussed to a point where its heat may ignite the fire. For myself I am grateful for those whose lives I have been able to touch. I am certain that any good that I was able to do came not from me but by the grace of God. And so this has to be the ground of my hope: I know that I am loved, and that love is stronger than death, and that love will not let me go. I have been given more than I could have hoped for or deserve: surely there is where I find my meaning, and who I am as a child of God in Jesus Christ.