

The Vine at Home
First Sunday of Lent – Year B

Sunday 21st February 2021

Call to worship

Lenten God, we come to you at the beginning of this season:
seeking change, seeking renewal, seeking your Spirit of transformation to come amongst us.

Lenten God, come and move amongst us today, as we worship. Amen.¹

Hymn: 357 STF – Jesus - the name high over all

Opening Prayers

Living God as we enter this Lent season we pray,
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

As we remember Jesus who was tempted for 40 days in the wilderness but was with God we hold together with those going through their wilderness experience.

As we come to you in worship and thanksgiving,
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

As we come to pray, to sing, to reflect, and to hold silence,
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

As we come, knowing that we are far from perfect and have fallen short of your glory,
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

[Pause]

Thank you for your forgiveness of us, and accepting us just as we are.

As we come, with responsibility and facing temptation,
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

As we come, standing together with all those individuals, families and communities who have been ravaged by Covid 19 and horrendous diseases that rage around the world.
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

As we come, we your church offer you this time, and invite your Spirit to move amongst us.
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

For ourselves Lord, we hold a moment silence as we know the Lord that was with Jesus is with us here now by the power of your Spirit. So we say together:
Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.

Amen.²

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Matthew Forsyth and Tim Baker

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.^[a] ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”³

Mark 1:9-15 - The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** 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. **11** And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;^[a] with you I am well pleased.”

The Temptation of Jesus

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. **13** He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news^[b] of God,^[c] **15** and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;^[d] repent, and believe in the good news.”⁴

Reflections on the readings

Noah's story tells of a flood lasting 40 days and 40 nights. 40 days on the water, with nowhere to land, no respite from the noise and overcrowding of the ark, no visible signs of hope; 40 – I suspect, sleepless – nights with only the memory of God's promise to give them

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rest. God's promise to keep them safe, to protect them in the midst of global devastation. I wonder whether, mixed in with it all, was some survivors' guilt?

That's a story from long, long ago. It was already a very ancient tale when Jesus went to meet his relative, John, and benefit from his ministry of baptism. And yet, myths like that story are timeless; they tell a truth that doesn't change. I wonder whether Jesus pondered it as he fasted and wrestled for 40 days and 40 nights? 40 days of hunger, temptation, agonising; 40 – I suspect, sleepless – nights of danger from wild beasts, danger from his own temptations, perhaps danger from his own anxiety and fear, wondering what lay ahead. 40 days to hold onto the sign and promise of which he was so vividly aware at his baptism, and to wonder, perhaps, whether he'd imagined it all.

You don't need me to tell you that the last year or so has, for most of the world, felt like a wilderness. For some, there has been the fear and isolation of needing to hide away from an invisible enemy; for others, the pain and deep darkness of bereavement, without access to the usual means of support and rituals of grief. For others again, the struggles of ensuring that the essential things of life can continue, at risk to themselves and often with increased workload; for still more, a sense of helplessness, as jobs disappear or are put on hold. You don't need me to relive this further – you may well have your own personal wilderness story from this time, and if you don't, you will certainly be acutely aware of those who do.

We are now at the start of Lent, when we are encouraged to travel deep into the wilderness, and to see it as an opportunity for self-examination. We are encouraged to spend time fasting – 'doing without' – and to take that as a time for growing and deepening our discipleship. Does that ring hollow to you? Do you feel you've spent enough time in the wilderness, and could just do with an oasis or two? If so, you are not alone!

The Greek in which the New Testament is written has two words for time. *Chronos* is the about the steady progression of time – time marching on, or perhaps hanging heavily and travelling slowly. *Chronos* is measurable in days, hours, minutes. We don't know whether Jesus knew how long he would be in the desert, but perhaps he kept a record of how long he had been there, marking off the days in the sand, wondering how long it would take for him to feel prepared. Perhaps the present time felt long, and the time ahead too short?

Or perhaps he was deeply thankful for this time alone, in the wilderness – a time of preparation and of reflection. Maybe he felt a mixture of all of these emotions. And maybe the time felt too long, and yet somehow not long enough. One of the great paradoxes of the incarnation – of God entering the world in the person of Jesus – is that he became subject to human limitations, and that includes being subject to time: the Creator of time, restricted by *chronos*!

The other type of time in Greek is *Kairos*. This is the word that Jesus uses in our reading from Mark, when he says, "The time is fulfilled." It has less to do with the progress of time, and more to do with the moment in time. *Kairos* is the right time to do something – the appropriate season, the opportune moment, the due date. As Jesus ends his time in the desert, the important thing is not how long his ministry may last, or how much or little time he has, in which to accomplish his mission. The key thing is that this is the **right** time – God's time.

The same could be said of the moment at which he came up out of the waters of baptism, and experienced the Spirit coming upon him, accompanied by the declaration of his relationship with God, and God's love of him. That experience may have lasted a split second, or it may have taken an hour, but that is not the point. It is a moment forever lifted outside of *chronos* time, to sustain him in the wilderness, throughout his ministry, and even at the point of death. Perhaps the story of Noah is similar: as he sees the dove returning with the olive leaf; when he sees the rainbow in the sky; when he receives God's covenant – all these are *kairos* moments.

And we, too, whatever our personal wilderness, are invited to encounter and remember those moments. Perhaps you can think of them in your life? Can you speak of them, perhaps to support others in the wilderness? That is our testimony – that we follow a God who gives us moments of encounter, glimpses of glory, which are strong enough to sustain us when we feel alone. And, of course, we follow a God in whose love we never truly are alone – perhaps that constant presence is what Jesus experienced as the angels waiting on him?

But it doesn't end there. This is not just about our personal means of support. The story of Noah is a story of the re-beginning of humanity; the covenant is not just for him and his sons, but for all God's people, through all the ages. And Jesus, emerging from the desert, even in the midst of hostility and arrests, speaks of *God's* time. He speaks of the time of the coming of the Kingdom, a time for repentance, a time for faith, a time for good news. And, if you read on, you find that the next thing he does is to invite others to join him on his journey – to join him in God's time, not for their sake alone, but so that they may be a part of his transforming ministry.

And that is the gift that God offers to us, at the beginning of Lent. God, who for our sake entered *chronos*, now offers to live through the *chronos* of these 40 days and nights with us, in order to invite us to enter *kairos*. God, who entered an earthly kingdom, invites us to participate in the kingdom of heaven. God, who took on human form, invites us to be transformed, and to participate in the heavenly mission of transforming our world. God, who was baptised, invites us to emerge, transformed, from the waters of baptism and to claim our place in the covenant relationship.

So, during Lent, make the most of the time that is offered. In the wilderness, hold on to the transforming moments of encounter, and hear the offer that is yours, to join with God in the task of transformation. It is not always easy or comfortable, it requires self-examination, humility, repentance and change, but it promises much as we walk the way of Jesus. Amen.⁵

What are you being called to?

We read of the early Christians, "All who believed were together and had all things in common;" Acts 2: 44.

Methodism teaches that we "watch over one another in Christian love".

- Whom can you talk to about your sense of calling?
- What type of community do you long to be a part of?

⁵ Reflection written by Catrin Harland

[Pause, giving an opportunity to discuss or reflect on the questions, alone or with someone you trust].

Let us pray.

Jesus, we read of you in scripture living amongst ordinary people, people like us. We see you teaching through your words and actions to love our neighbours as ourselves and to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We confess that sometimes we neglect the needs of fellow Christians here and overseas.

Forgive us. Help us to watch over one another with your love. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We pray for the restoration of our broken relationship with the environment,
Help us rediscover a covenant of care with all your creation.

For the animals we hunt to extinction, for the forests we burn in our wilful self-destruction,
For the air we pollute with our selfish habits,
God of covenants, Lord of rainbows, lead us in your truth, and teach us.

We pray for the healing of our relationships with each other, help us to forge a humanity of
love and peace,
Destroy the relationships of inequality and injustice,
Forge and nurture love and compassion in us,
God of covenants, Lord of rainbows, lead us in your truth, and teach us.

We pray for those who have promised to care of, and love those who are sick:
For nurses and doctors, for care and social workers, for chaplains and visitors.
We pray for those who care for those in our prisons, for prison guards and probation officers,
God of covenants, Lord of rainbows, lead us in your truth, and teach us.

We pray for broken families, broken homes, and hostile communities,
Recall them to paths of steadfast love and faithfulness, fulfil in their time the decrees of your
promises, God of covenants, Lord of rainbows, lead us in your truth, and teach us.

We pray for the healing of the broken body of Christ, rekindle in us the zeal to share the
good news. Give us the vision to see beyond the rainbow of our horizons,
Come and dwell in us that we may go out and serve your people,
God of covenants, Lord of rainbows, lead us in your truth, and teach us.

We bring these prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who restores us to our
wholeness. Amen.⁶

Hymn: 662 STF – Have you heard God's voice

Blessing

People of wilderness, step out into the wildernesses of 2021, with the Spirit of God at your
side. People of God, step out into God's world, and encounter the living God – already at
work in your midst.

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Vincent Jambawo

People of this church, go and be the church, every day, every hour, every moment, this Lent and beyond. Amen.⁷

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker