

**Call to Worship**

From Bethlehem to Nazareth, Jordan to Jericho, Bethany to Jerusalem

From then to Now, **Come, Lord Jesus.**

To Heal the sick, to mend the broken hearted, to comfort the disturbed, to disturb the comfortable,  
And to cleanse our Church and draw us together. From then to Now, **Come, Lord Jesus.**

To carry the cross, to lead the way, to shoulder the sin of the world and take it away,

From then to Now, **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Today, to this place, to us, Come, Lord Jesus. **Amen.**

**Songs: SOF 10 - All Heaven Declares**

1 All heaven declares  
the glory of the risen Lord;  
who can compare  
with the beauty of the Lord?  
For ever he will be  
the Lamb upon the throne;  
I gladly bow the knee,  
and worship him alone.

2 I will proclaim  
the glory of the risen Lord,  
who once was slain  
to reconcile man to God.  
For ever you will be  
the Lamb upon the throne;  
I gladly bow the knee,  
and worship you alone.

*Noël Richards (b. 1955) and Tricia Richards (b. 1960) Words and Music: © 1987, Thankyou Music.*

**Prayer of Thanks: -**

Praise to you, Journeying God. God of Movement, God of Change. Thank you for the example of Jesus, who travelled lightly, taking note of creation along the way. Thank you for the beautiful places around us. Help us to treat them gently, to appreciate them, and learn to care for them. And may we rediscover what Jesus practiced: To travel lightly and to walk with friends. **Amen.**

**Prayer of Confession: -**

Glorious God, your thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are your ways, our ways.

You look at the ugliest soul and see the unstirred wings of an angel. **We scan our finest neighbours, Anxious to find a flaw.** You view time in the context of eternity, finding a place for waiting, yearning, and suffering. **We demand instant results and look for tomorrow, before savouring today.**

But we are here, not to have our worst confirmed, but to have our best liberated. Forgive in us what has gone wrong, repair in us what is wasted, reveal in us what is good.

*We pause, in quietness of our homes, to bring confessions of heart and mind to God.*

Nourish us, Lord, with better food, than we could ever purchase: Your Word, your Love, your inspiration, your daily bread for our life's journey. In the company of Jesus Christ, our Lord, we know that our sins are forgiven, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Reading: Romans 5: 12 – 19**

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— 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. 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. 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! 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. 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! Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. 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.

### **Reading: Matthew 4: 1 – 11:**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "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.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

### **Sermon**

Obi Wan Kenobi, one of the famous characters from the Star Wars Films of George Lucas, once said to Luke Skywalker, at the beginning of his Jedi Training, "*You've taken your first steps into a much larger world*". It feels like our readings today are steps into a much larger world, a much larger narrative. Jesus filled with the Holy spirit, and guided by the Spirit, is in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights – where he is tempted by the Devil, and then signifying that Jesus is the Son of God, we are told at the end of the reading that "*the Angels attended him*".

As we take our first steps into Lent this year, we are reminded of the powerful words of our Ash Wednesday Service, as the Cross is marked on your forehead, we proclaim: "*YOU ARE BUT DUST, AND TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN*". It's a sobering thought, on this first Sunday in Lent. What will God do with the ashes of our lives, the ashes of our community – what new life might take hold, in our fellowship, in our hearts and in our minds, as we journey through lent this year? I think the basis of this time in the wilderness is not to know that we are loved by God, but that we learn how to live in the Love of God. But I take great comfort in the fact that even the ashes bear the imprint of the once green leaves that made them. That there is always the hope of life, yet to come.

**Our** reading from Matthew's Gospel, spells out, with relatively sparse details, Jesus' time spent in the wilderness, facing a three-fold set of temptations about **Bread, Power and Safety**. So Jesus, having just been baptized, having been showered in the Holy Spirit, heads into the wilderness. This is the background to Jesus entering the wilderness, to wrestle with the devil, for 40 days. The wilderness is a physical place, where Jesus actually goes to, but deeper than that, this is a spiritual wilderness. That is a place to test the love God poured out, a place to wrestle with the devil, and all of Jesus' fears and anxieties for what is to come, are played out in this powerful sequence of testing and temptation.

This Lent, we are called into a spiritual wilderness. This is a wilderness time, which is about challenging ourselves and being challenged by God and the world. Testing our faith, growing in understanding,

growing in Love for God and his Kingdom. In the wilderness Jesus endures a fast. This is significant – because it parallels with similar experiences of the Jewish prophets Moses and Elijah. Here the writer of Matthew is linking Jesus directly to ancient prophets of the Jewish Faith. Without the strength and wisdom of God, given to him through the Holy Spirit, would Jesus have survived? We should embrace this season of the cross, in the awesome love of God, who searches us and knows, who created us, forgives us and sets us free through his great love, poured out for us through Jesus Christ.

There are three temptations of Jesus by the Devil. These temptations are aimed at piercing the heart of Jesus' identity. Twice the devil begins his temptation by calling into question Jesus' identity as the Son of God with the words "if you are the Son of God..." followed by a challenge to prove this identity with some miraculous display stone into bread; a dramatic angelic rescue from death.

Underlying the dialogue between the devil and Jesus are two competing storylines. The devil offers a storyline of self-indulgence (make yourself bread from stones), all the nations of the world will belong to you if you worship me, and self-serving religious identity (if you are the son of God cast yourself from the top of the temple). Meanwhile, Jesus responds with quotations drawn from the Old Testament that show awareness of the true source of life and identity (he knows that life is more than food), his reliance on God (the one worthy of true worship and service), and his understanding of God's character (not one to be tested). Jesus' responses are rooted in an underlying narrative that he is dependent on God rather than self for life, glory, and identity. God's kingdom is not about political rule, but the reclamation, through Love, of God's fallen creation. Jesus' resistance of this temptation was the beginning of the process of the restoration of life in God presence, for all humanity, which was fulfilled finally through Jesus' death on the Cross, and his subsequent resurrection.

So WHAT does this all mean for us? For me, for you? For our communities here in Dorset South and West Circuit? During Lent, we are called to examine ourselves more closely. We are called to a deeper awareness of how we relate to God, to ourselves, and to others. Lent is a period – where we should focus on those things that block our connection and relationship with God, with those we love and those we are called to love as part of our joint fellowship here.

Perseverance is characterized by the ability to achieve something despite difficulties and obstacles that stand in our way. Jesus' encounter with the Devil in the wilderness, reveals that perseverance is not simply Grim determination. No matter where we find ourselves today, the great truth of our faith is God never gives up on us. Through Lent, through coming together, we are called to build our faith muscle by persevering, through God's abundant love freely given to us, in the gift of Jesus, in the presence of the Holy spirit, and in the awesome, unconditional love of God.

God loves us and will keep loving us, no matter what – WE ARE ENOUGH. We are BELOVED.

**Lent It is a time to renew ourselves, and renew our faith on a prayerful journey, as individuals and as communities of faith.** If we are able to dwell in that rich blessing, to know deeply and intimately that we are loved by God, shaped by Christ & the Cross and be filled expectantly and abundantly by the Holy Spirit, we can build the kingdom, welcome people in, and then from the Ashes of our community, God conquers death with LIFE, and Life in all its fullness.

So in the days and weeks to come, let us take our first steps together, into a much larger world. Because, we are but dust, but from the ashes of dust, dawns new Hope. Hope filled with Love, through Christ. **Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Lord Hear our Prayer

**Lord Graciously hear us.**

**Add your prayers** For the World  
**Add your prayers** For The Church  
**Add your prayers** For the Community  
**Add your prayers** For those close to our hearts and minds

God of compassion and mercy, listen to our prayers. Respond according to our Lord Jesus Christ, who said: Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. So to you merciful God,  
be glory and praise forever, Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer: -**

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.

**Song: - STF 303 – I know that my redeemer lives**

1 I know that my Redeemer lives —  
what joy the blest assurance gives!  
He lives, he lives, who once was dead;  
he lives, my everlasting Head!

2 He lives, to bless me with his love;  
he lives, to plead for me above;  
he lives, my hungry soul to feed;  
he lives, to help in time of need.

3 He lives, and grants me daily breath;  
he lives, and I shall conquer death;  
he lives, my mansion to prepare;  
he lives, to lead me safely there.

4 He lives, all glory to his name;  
he lives, my Saviour, still the same;  
what joy the blest assurance gives,  
I know that my Redeemer lives!

Samuel Medley (1738–1799)

**Blessing: -**

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, to take up your cross, and to follow him;  
The Blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Be with you,  
With those you love,  
And those you are called to love,  
Now in the name of Christ.  
Amen.