

Dorset South & West. Written Service.

Sunday February 18th 2024 The First Sunday in Lent.

'The Carnival is over....'

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### Call to Worship Psalm 25:1-10

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust.

I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths.

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.

Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;

according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful

toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

### STF 236

Forty days and forty nights  
you were fasting in the wild;  
forty days and forty nights  
tempted and yet undefiled.

Burning heat throughout the day,  
bitter cold when light had fled;  
prowling beasts around your way,  
stones your pillow, earth your bed.

Shall not we your trials share,  
learn your discipline of will;  
and with you by fast and prayer  
wrestle with the powers of hell?

So if Satan, pressing hard,  
soul and body would destroy:  
Christ who conquered, be our guard;  
give to us the victor's joy.

Watching, praying, struggling thus,  
victory shall be ours too;  
angels minister to us,  
as they ministered to you.

Saviour, may we hear your voice;  
keep us constant at your side;  
and with you we shall rejoice  
at the eternal Eastertide.

### Opening Prayers.

Lord, as we enter Lent help us to draw near to you in praise, stripping away all that distracts us from worship. As Jesus resisted temptation by the devil in the wilderness, help us reflect on his faithfulness to God, his rejection of worldly values and hold these thoughts in our hearts throughout Lent and beyond. Jesus, you prayed and fasted. As your disciples teach us about spiritual discipline in our relationship with you.

Lord may Lent be a time of inward searching that makes us more able to look with compassion at the needs of the world.

Thank you Lord for desert experiences, when being confronted with ourselves makes us realise our need of you and the reality that you are with us in every moment of our lives. For this we bring you our praise and thanksgiving. **Amen**

### Prayer of confession.

God of Mercy, we confess that we have sinned against You in our thinking in our speaking in our action an inaction word, and deed.

We have not loved ourselves, our neighbours or You with our whole heart and mind and strength.

In Your mercy forgive what we have been, and redirect what we shall be,

so that we may live fully in Your will and walk humbly in Your ways,

to the glory of Your holy name. Through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

## **Mark 1:9-15. The Baptism and Testing of Jesus**

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

### **Reflection**

Carnivals have always interested me. Living in Germany for a while the three days before lent were full of carnival events. Lots of dressing up and fun and crazy antics. I have also been privileged to attend a few Caribbean carnivals and the splendour of the costumes is always magnificent. The creativity people put into these spectacular performances is incredible. I guess they need forty days of quiet living to recover! My eardrums certainly did from the loud vibrant music! However the colour and splendour are memories I cherish alongside the kindness of the people in their celebrations. The sharing of food and tokens of friendship. I remember in Germany the carnival floats would have all manner of gifts and tokens that they would distribute amongst the crowds. In the UK Carnivals tend to be in the summer but still with an emphasis on giving to charity.

I wonder what lent means to you? When we look at what preceded Jesus going into the wilderness for forty days. We read about him proclaiming the good news. There certainly wasn't a three day party event, nor any pancake feast. We read about temptation's faced, being with wild animals and angels attending him. When we consider what Jesus did and was going to do to make God's kingdom known to everyone. It's certainly something to celebrate and rejoice about. The good news of God's saving grace should make us want to rejoice and share it with the world.

If we look at the history of the celebrations before lent it is interesting to see how they have influenced our current traditions.

The word "carnival" itself is thought to mean "farewell to meat. Reflecting the time to fast until Easter Day. Carnival was first introduced as a pagan festival in ancient Egypt to usher out winter and welcome spring. Darkness giving way to light. We have as with many pagan festivals, taken it and Christianised it.

As Jesus fasted in the wilderness he sought Gods guidance for how he was to make known that the kingdom of God had come to dispel all darkness and to bring light into the world.

The Feast of Fools was a popular festival in the middle ages in Europe. People would wear animal costumes and masks. High and lowly officials would exchange places and there would be much mockery. The Feast of Fools was abolished in the 16th century but much of the ridicule and satire remain in today's expressions of carnival.

In Italy in the late eighteenth century people would dress up and disguise themselves. With popular characters such as the Harlequin and Pierrot. The Harlequin is a mute pantomime character, voiceless as the Pierrot, portrayed with a sad white painted face

Carnival in the West Indies owes much of its history to the slave trade.

Slaves would burn the sugar plantation after the harvest and festivities which included drumming and dancing took place. The drums eventually were banned and so the steel drums were invented to get around the ban.

Fools for Christ's sake. Is perhaps an expression we have heard of? Certainly in the message of the good news of God's kingdom, worldly views are turned upside down. In the first temptation for example it's quite natural to be hungry and to want to do anything to satisfy that hunger. However kingdom values ask that we reevaluate what is right and what is God's way. What might seem foolish in the world's eyes and yet the kingdom of God asks us to turn the world's values upside down and to consider the needs of others before ourselves. J esus first, O thers, next and Y ourself last spells out true Joy in kingdom values.

When you think about it we are bombarded with appeals to be charitable and yet the current economic crisis makes us feel we have to do whatever we can to protect our own needs. What does the rejection of turning stones into bread temptation and the thought that pre lent is about using up our stock cupboards in feasting say to us? Does it make a mockery of what the essence of lent and kingdom values are about? I guess one way of doing something that incorporates both traditions in using up the stored provisions and in not trying to make stones into bread for ourselves, would be to see if we can donate a little more in lent to a charity or food bank.

In his TV money show, Martin Lewis suggests people take part in the year long 1p Savings Challenge. You start by saving 1p on 1 January, then 2p on 2 January, then 3p on 3 January and so on – saving what you saved the day before, plus a penny more each day. Then you will have a nice bit of money for the winter. What if you were to do this just in the forty days of lent and for charity? I will leave you to do the maths. It's a nice little amount that is not too taxing and could help a good cause.

We are told Jesus lived in the wilderness with the wild animals and angels attended him. So when we think about the pre lent tradition's, the masks and costumes they certainly mirror something of the wilderness experience. Wild animals becoming generous gentle creatures and angelic costumed creatures. Plus the masks obscuring the identity of the person. Also the wildness experience and the Lententide experience speaks of isolation and personal reflection.

The carnival images of the Harlequin and Pierrot remind us of the sadness in our world, the voiceless and vulnerable. I have never understood why such historical characters, that we associate with joy and festivities; are so sad and voiceless? But that is how they are represented. Lent is certainly a good time to reflect on the values of the world and how they affect the vulnerable people around us? Do our values oppress the needy? By our own demands are we making others voiceless or sad?

We seem to be wanting to right the wrongs of the slave trade and to remove images that extol the virtues of those who were behind some of the atrocities of those days. But we know that slavery in many forms still exists today.

It's sad to see that the steel drum was born out of an effort to suppress a cultural expression of Joy. How do we still suppress the ideologies of those that are different from us?

The whole refugee and asylum seeker movement has us questioning what is really happening? Especially as we think of the recent events concerning the Bibby Stockholm barge. People who have risked and lost everything to escape the persecution and oppression of their homeland and yet the sheer numbers make us question if our economy can sustain them, without detrimental effects on our way of life? In an article in the Echo I read about some of the barge occupants helping the homeless in our own area, by volunteering and using part their own resources to buy food for the homeless. What they receive for their personal allowance is less than we would raise if we took the penny lent challenge.

I often feel God sends us angels in disguise just at the right moment when we need a helping hand. I am sure you have had those experiences. The kindness of strangers. How in this Lententide can we proclaim that Gods kingdom has come, by our anonymous deeds? To be as angels ministering in a wild world that needs deeds of kindness?

On this first Sunday in lent, 'the Carnival is over', as the songwriter says. Which is a song about the joys of love. How will we find ways to express and make known the joys of God's love as we experience it through being part of His kingdom? Maybe through prayer and devotion? Maybe through charitable acts or just trying to think about others before ourselves. In what ever ways you are able and God leads you, may this Lententide be a source of inspiration and strength to you.

### **STF 238**

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;  
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,  
for we have no help but thee,  
yet possessing every blessing  
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;  
all our weakness thou dost know,  
thou didst tread this earth before us,  
thou didst feel its keenest woe;  
tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,  
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,  
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,  
love with every passion blending,  
pleasure that can never cloy;  
thus provided, pardoned, guided,  
nothing can our peace destroy.

### **Prayers of intercession**

Loving God as we begin our Lenten journey, mindful of the temptations and suffering that your son Jesus Christ endured in the wilderness. We ask for you to strengthen us, as we find ourselves in the desert of human faults, failings and sinfulness.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Lord God, we know in all areas of our society good food is wasted or disposed of unnecessarily when it could be used to relieve suffering. We thank you for the work of food banks and charities which support disadvantaged individuals and communities.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Almighty God Your son Jesus was offered all the kingdoms of the world and their authority and splendour if he would worship the devil rather than you. Help those who govern and rule the nations today to resist the temptation to use evil, violent and corrupt ways to bring about their personal desires rather than ruling with justice, mercy and benevolence.

We pray especially for those places troubled by disaster, natural or man-made. We thank you for all of the wonders of the world which belong to you but were given into our care at the beginning of time. Help us to be good stewards, always mindful of the tragic consequences of our lack of care.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Lord God we pray for the witness of the church. We pray for the whole family of the church in our Circuit. May all your people be built up in faith and demonstrate in their lives the gospel of Jesus Christ. Help us to play our part in the life of the church throughout the world; through our prayers and by our gifts of money and service during this season of Lent and beyond. Give courage to those who find it hard to follow you. Give us a fresh vision that leads to action and strengthen us to serve you in the places where we live.

**Lord, in your Mercy: Hear our Prayer**

Loving God, we pray for those who are ill and in pain, longing to live full lives, for those who are sad and hurt longing for comfort, for those in hospital awaiting treatment, for those convalescing, seeing an end to their suffering. May we always offer gentle support to those in trouble sensitive encouragement to those in need, and strength and support to those in weakness. We especially pray for those known personally to us.....

**We offer these our prayers to you in the words of The Lord's Prayer.....**

**STF 254**

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,  
and his righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added unto you;  
Allelu-, alleluia:

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,  
allelu-, alleluia!*

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;  
seek and ye shall find;  
knock, and the door shall be opened unto to you;  
Allelu-, alleluia:

We shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word  
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;  
Allelu-, alleluia:

**Closing Prayer based on STF 258**

You are the Vine, we are the branches,  
keep us abiding in you.  
Then we'll grow in your love, and we'll go in your name,  
that the world will surely know  
that you have power to heal and to save. **Amen.**

