

**DSW Written service for Sunday 9 March 2025**

**Ist Sunday in Lent**

**Lent Opening Liturgy**

*Give us this day our daily bread to feed our soul.*

We don't need distractions of a glitzy package, a brown paper bag does just fine.

*Give us this day our daily bread to feed our soul.*

To nourish our minds and warm our hearts, to enrich our faith, our belief, our life...

*Give us this day our daily bread to feed our soul.*

Let us never forget you are our God, the giver of love and joy and hope.

O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey, feed our souls this day we pray. Amen.

**Hymn [STF 419]**

Almighty God, we come to make confession, for we have sinned in thought and word and deed.

We now repent in honesty and sorrow; forgive us, Lord, and meet us in our need.

Forgiving God, I come to make confession of all the harm and hurt that I have done; of bitter words and many selfish actions, forgive me, Lord, and make me like your Son.

Forgiving God, I come to make confession of all that I have failed to do this day; of help withheld, concern and love restricted, forgive me, Lord, and lead me in your way.

Redeeming God, we come to seek forgiveness, for Jesus Christ has died to set us free. Forgive the past and fill us with your Spirit that we may live to serve you joyfully.

*Christopher J. Ellis (b. 1949)*

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**Gospel Reading Luke 4:1-13**

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.

The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.'

Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.'

Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'

Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

**Reflection**

This story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is probably a familiar one to many. It's interesting to reflect in how this story resonated with Christians down through the centuries.

Jesus had been fasting for many days, a common spiritual discipline in Jesus' time which he clearly expected his followers to practise (he said *when you fast, pray, give alms to the poor – not if!*) but less common today among Christians, except perhaps as part of a weight loss regime!

We might find it easier than our predecessors to imagine Jesus being taken to the top of the temple to look down on the world below, given the access we have to similar views via satellite, drone and helicopter pictures today.

But I wonder how relevant the 3 temptations the devil put before Jesus look from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century perspective, and how might they speak to us as disciples of Jesus today?

Jesus is very hungry, as you'd expected after 40 days of fasting. The devil uses that fact, & Jesus' identity as the Son of God who could turn a stone

to bread if he wanted to, to try to sow seeds of pride in Jesus' mind & tempt him to take matters into his own hands to satisfy his hunger.

The temptation to instant gratification is something we might find easy to relate to in our Western 21<sup>st</sup> century society. How often do we feel a need & gratify it instantly? If we're hungry, we go to the fridge/shop. If we want new clothes, car, the latest gadget or whatever, we go & get it or order it online, because according to the slogan "You're worth it!" But as commentators suggest, the problem here is not just about getting things to gratify our desires instantly, it's about doing things our way and in our own strength, instead of waiting on God to tell us what he wants.

As Christians and church people we're good at doing things, aren't we? Whether it's organising faith teas or taking action for social justice, or fundraising, but sometimes perhaps are we too ready to go off & DO something, rather than BEING with God, spending time waiting on God & listening for what his plans for us might be? And that may apply just as much in our personal devotional life as in our corporate church life.

Are we prone to go for comfort instead of discipline & sacrifice in our Christian journey? How many of us will be fasting this Lent? Not as a way to lose weight but a way to get closer to God, to tune in to what God wants us to do? How willing are we to let God decide what should happen, & wait on him, like Jesus did for 40 days & nights? Where & how in our lives do we find ourselves getting distracted or pulled off track, because we don't want to wait, to "let go & let God", or we'd rather choose comfort than sacrifice? When do we say to ourselves "I've done my bit", when God might be asking more of us?

In his book "The me I want to be" (subtitled *becoming God's best version of you*) John Ortberg talks about the ways in which we strive to be what we think God wants us to be – our "holy busy-ness" and our propensity to do things in our own strength. And he reminds us of Jesus' words in John 7:37-39: "Jesus stood up & shouted, *"If you are thirsty, come to me & drink! Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you,*

*just as the Scriptures say."* Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit, who would be given to everyone that had faith in him."

In the reading from Luke's gospel above, when Jesus goes out to the desert, we're told Jesus is "full of the Holy Spirit". And after his temptations it says that he's still full of the Holy Spirit when he goes back to Galilee.

The foundational idea of John Ortberg's book is that the only way to become the person God made you to be is to live with the Spirit of God flowing through you like a river of living water. So maybe this Lent we can reflect on how we can be people through whom the Holy Spirit flows like a river?

Secondly, the devil takes Jesus to look at the kingdoms of the world & effectively says "if you want to be worshipped, I can fix it, I'll fast track you to stardom, you can have all the glory, the only slight catch is that you need to switch allegiance & worship me not God."

Again Jesus is being tempted to take the fast track, this time to fame, which would presumably mean not having to convince people of who he was, or what his mission was, because they'd already be ready to listen. The temptation here is to take the easy way – and also to gain the approval of others quickly and easily.

We live in a society which judges people & seems to encourage the idolising of people based on what they look like/what they own/ how they dress, etc. Some would argue that public opinion has itself become an idol, an entity that is out of control & which strikes fear into public figures and politicians – and interestingly that's a fear of public disapproval, rather than the fear of God.

The devil certainly knows where to press the button!

How much does our need for approval (or to avoid disapproval) govern our behaviour choices, and the extent to which we do what God wants? Two of the most profound experiences I've had of the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life were ones I nearly missed because I was too concerned with what other people would think of me, and whether they'd think I was a bit weird or strange.

The need for approval can easily pull us away from the path God has for us. But Jesus knows that what really counts is who we are in God's eyes, & that we worship God, and only God.

The final temptation is to doubt God & our ability to put our trust in him. And here the devil twists the meaning of scripture from what it actually says; he quotes psalm 91 which recounts God's protection of his people, & twists the words into an incitement to Jesus to test God's protection and use his power for sensationalism.

And perhaps there's a challenge for us there about whether we really believe God to be in control? And about how much we trust him to protect us and those we care about?

And that's important because there's a link between trust & temptation. Because if we do trust God for our daily needs, for our sense of purpose and our identity as a child of God, then the temptations of the world will have little appeal or effect.

But if we allow our natural insecurity to lead us to not to trust in God to give us what we need, including our sense of purpose and identity as his beloved children, then we're more likely to be open to the appeal and temptation of the suggestion that actually it's all down to us, because God won't or isn't able to provide, so we'd better take matters into our own hands.

One exercise which can help us identify how much we trust God, and work with him on that involves writing down on a piece of paper something that matters and is important to you, that you may worry about but you feel you trust God with, e.g. the love of your family, a special relationship, a job, or your relationship with God, and label that "Trust."

Then, on the other side of the paper, write down something that is difficult to trust God with right now. Maybe a particular relationship, or a decision, or something challenging at work or home, an uncertain future. Label this side of the card, "Mistrust."

Then take a moment to compare these 2 things: why is it easier to trust God with one of them and not the other? What makes the challenging one

different? Are they different, or might we be able to trust more than we thought?

You can do that at home, on paper or in your mind, and during the week take a moment or two each day to take it out, physically, or in your mind's eye, give thanks for what you trust God for, and then pray about the thing you're having a hard time trusting God with, and ask him to help you trust him more.

I believe God can still speak to us, through the temptations Jesus faced, about what's happening in our lives today, and show us how to trust him more fully, as Jesus did.

May this season of Lent be for all of us a time of challenge & self-denial, maybe even a time of spiritual fasting from something that leads us away from God, but most of all, a time of deepening our trust in God, in the face of all of the devil's attempts to pull us away from him, so that over the next 6 weeks we will be strengthened in our faith and our walk with Jesus. Amen.

### **Hymn [STF 240]**

When we are tested and wrestle alone,  
famished for bread when the world offers stone,  
nourish us, God, by your word and your way,  
food that sustains us by night and by day.

When in the desert we cry for relief,  
pleading for paths marked by certain belief,  
lift us to love you beyond sign and test,  
trusting your presence, our only true rest.

When we are tempted to barter our souls,  
trading the truth for the power to control,  
teach us to worship and praise only you,  
seeking your will in the work that we do.

When we have struggled and searched through the night,  
sorting and sifting the wrong from the right,  
Saviour, surround us with circles of care,  
angels of healing, of hope, and of prayer.

*Ruth C. Duck (b.1947)  
based on Luke 4.1-11*

*Words: © 1996, Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188, USA.*

### **Prayers**

Loving Living Lord,

When we have taken the bread of others:

Christ of the wilderness, forgive us.

When we have put popularity before integrity:

Christ of the wilderness, have mercy on us.  
When we have taken your love for granted:  
Christ of the wilderness, humble us,  
that we may look only to you for all that we need  
and give, in your name, all that we can. Amen.

(ROOTS)

### Intercessions

*'The devil said to Jesus "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written 'One does not live by bread alone.'"*

Creator God,  
we lift before you all those in your world who  
suffer from poverty, violence, fear, or the effects of  
greed or injustice:

we pray that the hungry will be fed, that those who  
are oppressed will be set free from all that holds  
them captive, and that those who seek peace may  
find it;

we remember those who are battling with illness,  
despair or loneliness;

and pray that all who are in pain, whether physical,  
spiritual, or emotional may know the deeper  
wholeness that comes from your healing touch at  
work in human lives.

*'The devil said "If you will worship me all the kingdoms  
of the world will be yours." Jesus answered "It is written  
'Worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.'"*

Saviour God,  
we pray for the leaders of our world, especially  
those in places where there is conflict & violence,  
an imbalance of power, or oppression;  
and pray that they will not exercise power for its  
own sake, but with wisdom, justice and  
compassion.

We pray for those who feel powerless  
in the face of death, suffering and sin, that they may  
know the power of your saving love.

*'The devil said "If you are the Son of God, throw  
yourself from this pinnacle." Jesus answered "It is said  
"Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

Spirit of God,  
we pray for ourselves, that our faith  
will not only give us comfort and security  
but challenge us to follow Christ's way of suffering  
love; we pray that our faith will stand the tests of  
time and trouble and be a source of hope, grace &  
joy to those around us.

We make our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ,  
who was tempted, as we are, but remained faithful  
to the end. **Amen.**

### The Lord's Prayer

#### Hymn [STF 378]

Father of everlasting grace,  
Your goodness and Your truth we praise,  
Your goodness and Your truth we prove;  
You have, in honour of Your Son,  
The gift unspeakable sent down,  
The Spirit of life, and power, and love.

Send us the Spirit of Your Son,  
To make the depths of Godhead known,  
To make us share the life divine;  
Send him the sprinkled blood to apply,  
Send him our souls to sanctify,  
and show and seal us with this sign.

So shall we pray, and never cease,  
So shall we thankfully confess  
Your wisdom, truth, and power, and love,  
With joy unspeakable adore,  
And bless and praise you evermore,  
And serve thee as Your hosts above:

Till, added to that heavenly choir,  
We raise our songs of triumph higher,  
And praise You in a bolder voice,  
Out-soar the first-born seraph's flight,  
And sing, with all our friends in light,  
With everlasting love rejoice.

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

#### A prayer of Blessing

May the God of truth and grace bless you  
and guide you through these days of Lent,  
May these 40 days be a season of discovery and joy  
for you, as you get to know Jesus better and  
understand all that he has to offer,  
And may the power of the Holy Spirit fill you anew  
as you journey with him.  
Amen

*Rev Jane Wilson  
February 2025*