

Our first symbol is a pair of sandals.
Jesus travelled many miles during his ministry, all on foot.
He had left the security of home comforts, employment,
shelter and more in order to follow
the imperative of spreading the Good News of God's Kingdom.

Sing - Verse 1 Singing the Faith 673

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?

John Bell and Graham Maule



Prayer: Lord, when we find the challenges of following your call to service hard, remind us that your Son obeyed, even knowing that the cost was higher than any of us will ever be expected to pay. Amen

Hymn 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 we not 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.

George Hunt Smyttan

Prayers of Praise and Confession

We offer our praises to God, as we enter again into the reflective and contemplative time of Lent. We thank and adore you for this time in the church's life when we prepare quietly and calmly, focussing on the many gifts and graces given, the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. God's love for us humans brought Christ to his cross, let us remember to love one another with the same fervour. We will continue throughout these next six weeks to meet prayerfully together, whether we are in the same room, or building, knowing that you are as always, with us, whether we are aware of you up close, or just in the background.

And although we know we shall never be tempted as Jesus was by Satan in the desert, we know we have our own trials and temptations, that sometimes we can come through unscathed, sometimes affect us in our thoughts and actions, and sometimes consume us completely. Help us, we pray, to recognise and repent our wrong doings and to return, through your forgiveness, to the right path. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray in whichever version and language you prefer

Reading – Matthew 4: 1 – 11 (Contemporary English Version)

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so that the devil could test him. After Jesus had gone without eating for 40 days and nights, he was very hungry. Then the devil came to him and said, “If you are God's Son, tell these stones to turn into bread.” Jesus answered, “The Scriptures say: ‘No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken.’ ”

Next, the devil took Jesus into the holy city to the highest part of the temple. The devil said, “If you are God's Son, jump off. The Scriptures say: ‘God will give his angels orders about you. They will catch you in their arms, and you won't hurt your feet on the stones.’ ”

Jesus answered, “The Scriptures also say, ‘Don't try to test the Lord your God!’ ”

Finally, the devil took Jesus up on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms on earth and their power. The devil said to him, “I will give all this to you, if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus answered, “Go away Satan! The Scriptures say: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’ ” Then the devil left Jesus, and angels came to help him.

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

Reflection

It has recently struck me that the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and the beginning of his heavenly ministry, both of which we reflect on over the Lenten and Easter period, are the only two times when we read of Jesus suffering physical discomfort, pain, and torment.

I can imagine that throughout his ministry he had mental and emotional hardships; he wept when Lazarus died, he got angry in the Temple, he got cross with Disciples and Pharisees alike when they just didn't seem to understand what he was trying to do and say.

And, I don't know about you, but I find that this helps me whenever I am upset, annoyed, or hurting, that Jesus really did understand, in fact more so than us, because there are very few of us that have the desert experience, let alone crucifixion.

So when we read, and sing, words of struggle, searching, temptation, trials, taunting, and weakness it is always counterbalanced by guarding and guidance, forgiveness, joy, peace, and love. This, to me, shows that we can get through the next 40 days (and nights), the rest of the year, the remainder of our lives, if we hold true to the principles of the desert:

we need to feed our spirits as well as our bodies; we don't need to test God, God has it all in hand; we follow and worship God, and no-one or nothing else.

We each have a different, personal journey. We may travel some of the way with other, likeminded people, we may travel solo, but all of us can journey with God. Maybe in this time of Lent we look carefully where we put our feet, or wheel our wheels, and make sure we are moving with Jesus, towards bringing in the kingdom so that we can fully celebrate the joy of Easter resurrection when it comes.

3 Sonnets by Malcolm Guite

1. Stones into bread:

The Fountain thirsts, the Bread is hungry here,
The light is dark, the Word without a voice.
When darkness speaks it seems so light and clear.
Now he must dare, with us, to make a choice.
In a distended belly's cruel curve
He feels the famine of the ones who lose,
He starves for those whom we have forced to starve,
He chooses now for those who cannot choose.
He is the staff and sustenance of life,
He lives for all from one sustaining Word,
His love still breaks and pierces like a knife
The stony ground of hearts that never shared,
God gives through him what Satan never could;
The broken bread that is our only food.

2. All the kingdoms of the world:

'So here's the deal and this is what you get:
The penthouse suite with world-commanding views,
The banker's bonus and the private jet,
Control and ownership of all the news,
An "in" to that exclusive one percent,
Who know the score, who really run the show,
With interest on every penny lent
And sweeteners for cronies in the know.
A straight arrangement between me and you,
No hell below or heaven high above,
You just admit it, and give me my due
And wake up from this foolish dream of love...'
But Jesus laughed, 'You are not what you seem.
Love is the waking life, you are the dream.'

3. On the pinnacle:

'Temples and spires are good for looking down from;
You stand above the world on holy heights,
Here on the pinnacle, above the maelstrom,
Among the few, the true, unearthly lights.
Here you can breathe the thin air of perfection
And feel your kinship with the lonely star,
Above the shadow and the pale reflection,
Here you can know for certain who you are.
The world is stalled below, but you could move it
If they could know you as you are up here.
Of course they'll doubt, but here's your chance to prove it!
Angels will bear you up, so have no fear...'
'I was not sent to look down from above,
It's fear that sets these tests and proofs, not love.'

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We offer our heartfelt thanks to God that we are never tempted and tested as Jesus was, and we do not need to deal with the devil face to face. And we give thanks too that when we are faced with difficulties, of whatever magnitude, we have the example of Jesus to be able to cope with the issue and the aftermath. We thank you that you are forever our Guide, especially during this reflective time of Lent, however we choose to mark it.

And we pray today for all those who don't have the luxuries we have of food, shelter, community, and care.

We pray for those in other countries who have to deal with famine, and war, and deprivation of medicines.

We pray for those in our own country and communities who do not have the basics of stable food sources, a warm and safe place to live, a bed to sleep on, a way of earning money.

But beyond prayer help us to seek ways to help practically, using our voices, our time, our resources.

Whilst we know that God cares for and loves all humanity, it is also beholden to us to care for and love one another.

So let us, in our Lenten journey, follow in Christ's way, with God guiding our footsteps and the Holy Spirit giving us strength. Amen.

Hymn 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 it's 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.

James Edmeston.

Blessing (from the Iona Community)

May God, who is present in sunrise and nightfall,
and in the crossing of the sea, guide our feet as we go.
May God who is with us when we sit and when we stand,
encompass us with love and lead us by the hand.
May God who knows our paths, and the places where we rest,
be with us in our waiting, be our good news for sharing
and lead us in the way that is everlasting. Amen.

