

2022 -6TH MARCH – WORSHIP AT HOME – LENT ONE

Dear friends,

How the year is moving on! Here we are at the beginning of Lent when we test ourselves – ensure we are living good Christian lives. As we move into this time may we all come closer and closer to our Lord, who always stays close to us.

Every blessing, *Margaret*.

Introduction: In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote: ‘Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves.’

There, in a nutshell, is a perfect summary of what this season of Lent is all about – a time for self-examination, for looking honestly and openly at the state of our Christian lives. Just as Jesus was tested in the wilderness, so we too need to test ourselves. Just as he wrestled with temptation so we too must wrestle with the things that may destroy our relationship with God. Just as he had to come to terms with what God expected of him, so we too must seek God’s guidance and ask for grace to accept his will.

[Nick Fawcett]

Call to worship: God is our refuge and strength. Trust in him and his faithfulness will shield you.

Give us the refuge we need, O loving God – refuge beneath your wings.

Protect us from all that we fear, O faithful God, by shielding us from danger.

Guard us from temptation, O gracious God, so that we may choose the right path.

Be with us, and make your compassion known, O compassionate God, on every step of life’s journey.

May we worship with expectation, openness, receptiveness and sincerity.

In the name of Jesus we pray. **Amen**

The words to ‘Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us’ written by James Edmeston [1791-1867] StF 238

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

2 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 did’st go.

3 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:

Author of Life, we offer you our praise for in you we live and breathe and have our being – in you we find protection, because you are faithful and loving – in you we find guidance, because you are wise and all-knowing – in you we find strength, because you are our fortress and refuge.

We praise you for all that you have been to us and to our world.

We praise you for all that you are to us and our world.

We praise you for all that you will be to us and our world. **Amen**

Almighty God, we thank you that we can now come before you – that you are waiting to meet with us and speak to us.

We thank you that though we have no claim on your love and no right to expect any mercy, you are always reaching out to us, ready to forgive and forget.

We thank you that, though we repeatedly fail you, and though we resist your will, you go on wiping the slate clean, offering us a new beginning, a fresh start.

We thank you for loving and caring about each one of us and that, for all our faults and weaknesses, you accept us just as we are. Poor though our faith may be, you are always ready to guide, to help, and to bless.

Almighty God, help us to open our lives to you – to be honest with you, ourselves, and others.

Help us to see ourselves as we really are, the good and the bad, the strength and the weaknesses, the lovely and the unlovely.

Help us to recognise our sins and to confess them, throwing ourselves upon your mercy.

And so may we receive the cleansing, the renewal, and the forgiveness which you long to show us.

Gracious God, open our hearts to your love, in the name of Christ. **Amen**

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.**

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11 [The Message; Eugene Peterson]:

Once you enter the land that God, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and take it over and settle down, you are to take some of the first fruits of what you grow in the land that God, your God, is giving you; put them in a basket and go to the place God, your God, sets apart for you to worship him. At that time go to the priest who is there and say: 'I announce to God, your God, that today I have entered the land that God promised our ancestors that he'd give to us.' The priest will take the basket from you and place it on the altar of God, your God. And there is the presence of God, your God, you will recite:

A wandering Aramean was my father,
he went down to Egypt and sojourned there,
he and just a handful of his brothers at first, but soon
they became a great nation, mighty and many.
The Egyptians abused and battered us,
in a cruel, savage slavery.
We cried out to God, the God-Of-Our-Fathers.
He listened to our voice, he saw
our destitution, our trouble, our cruel plight.
And God took us out of Egypt,
with his strong hand and long arm, terrible and great,
with signs, and miracle-wonders.
And he brought us to this place,
gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.
So here I am, I have brought the first fruits
of what I've grown on the ground you gave me, O God.

Then place it in the Presence of God, your God. Prostrate yourselves in the Presence of God, your God, and rejoice! Celebrate all the good things that God, your God, has given you and your family – you and the Levite and the foreigner who lives with you.

Luke 4: 1-13: Tested by the Devil.

Now Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wild. For forty wilderness days and nights he was tested by the Devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when the time was up he was hungry.

The Devil, playing on his hunger, gave the first test. 'Since you're God's Son, command this stone to turn into a loaf of bread.'

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: 'It takes more than bread to really live.'

For the second test he led him up and spread out all the kingdoms of the earth on display at once. Then the Devil said: 'They are yours in all their splendour to serve your pleasure. I'm in charge of them all and can turn them over to whomever I wish. Worship me, and they're yours, the whole works.'

Jesus refused, again backing his refusal with Deuteronomy: 'Worship the Lord your God and only the Lord your God. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness.'

For the third test the Devil took him to Jerusalem and put him on top of the Temple. He said: 'If you are God's Son, jump. It is written, isn't it, that he has placed you in the care of the angels to protect you – they will catch you – you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone?'

'Yes,' said Jesus, 'and it is also written: Don't you dare tempt the Lord your God.'

That completed the testing. The Devil retreated temporarily, lying in wait for another opportunity.

Thoughts:

Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit after his Baptism and it was the Spirit who lead him into the wilderness. Indeed, it was the Spirit who initiated this meeting with the Devil. Just as Jesus confronted the Devil, so the Church and its people need to be ready to confront evil as we witness to God. It is too easy to stay quiet in the face of evil.

Here was Jesus in the wilderness – a dangerous place where there were wild beasts but little water or food. It was also thought to be the place where evil powers would roam. Good reasons for anyone to avoid the area if at all possible. Though, of course, God can also be found there in the desert, just as he was with Moses and the people of Israel – just as he was with Elijah.

Jesus was there for forty days and nights – no food and minimal water. A really draining time – and it is always at such times when resistance is low that temptation can be even harder to withstand. It is at such times anyone can long to give up the struggle and the striving for God's kingdom. It was here in the desert that Jesus sorted out his aims and priorities.

'Command this stone to become a loaf of bread' – how tempting for a starving man. It had subtle implications too, urging Jesus to look after himself and have the things he wanted as he had the power to do just that. Jesus reminded the Devil – and reminds us – that we need to depend on God for life.

The Devil then offered him the whole world – though you wonder if it was his to give anyway! He tempted Jesus to compromise a little in accepting the 'fallen' life. Back came Jesus with more Scripture: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.' Jesus wasn't interested in false worship. In this modern age people often seem to worship footballers, pop idols, film stars or even soap stars – yet it is only the worship of God which will lead to eternal life.

The Devil then used the holiest of places – the Temple -and quoted from Scripture himself to try to lead Jesus astray. Scripture is often misused to lure us also – yet we know we are never to put God to the test – and that is just what Jesus told the Devil.

It is too easy to jump just because the suggestion seems to come from good quarters – we have to be aware and to use our hearts and minds to ensure that we serve God.

The Devil gave up for the moment – he went off to lick his wounds and to watch for another opportune time. The battle wasn't over – and it never is while we are alive. The struggle against evil – the need to keep alert and to keep aiming straight for the service of God is ever with us.

MEDITATION OF THE DEVIL:

I gave up eventually, for it was futile to continue – all my efforts were a waste of time.

Try as I might, I was never going to deflect this guy from the straight and narrow, even if I stayed out there in the desert for ever.

I'd deployed all my usual tricks – the promise of material comfort, earthly glory, divine protection – and each time he had seen through me, committing himself yet more firmly to his chosen path.

So I made my exit, discretion being the better part of valour and all that. But don't imagine for a moment I'd finished with him.

Not likely!

You might have given up, perhaps, but not me – it's simply not my style to lose heart at the first setback. No – mine was more of a tactical retreat, a temporary withdrawal to consider options, make fresh plans, before coming at him again.

And, mark my words, there will be opportunities again for you humans – even one as unusual as him – all have your weak spots, places where I can prod and probe until you finally succumb.

You think he's different? Well, we'll see about that.

Let's wait till he's asked to choose between survival and surrender – between looking after number one and pursuing his ridiculous way of love and service to the very end.

Then we'll see what he's made of, won't we?

Then we'll know, one way or the other, which of us is the stronger.

The words to 'Be thou my vision' translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne [1880-1931] and versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hall [1860-1935] from 8th century Irish. Singing the Faith 545

1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, be all else but naught to me save that thou art;

be thou my best thought in the day and the night, both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word, be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;

be thou my great Father, thy child let me be; be thou in me dwelling, and one with thee.

3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight; be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;

be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower; O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise; be thou mine inheritance now and always;

be thou and thou only the first in my heart; O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun, O grant me its joys after victory is won;

Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

[When typing the words for this hymn I was, as usual, singing along. I suddenly realised that I was singing the traditional words which have been 'updated' by the compilers of StF. So here are the words which have been changed as found in Hymns and Psalms:-

From Verse 2: 'Be thou my true Father, and I thy true son; be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one..

And the use of 'earth's empty praise' has replaced 'man's empty praise'.]

Illustration of theme by David Adam: Anyone who is alive is tempted, so do not say that you are not tempted. If you are never tempted, you have never lived or you have let something in you die. There is always a tug of war between good and evil, between achieving and failing to do so. There is no place or person free from this battle. In the book *Rogue Herries*, Hugh Walpole tells of how Herries had come to wild and lonely Lakeland where he met a travelling preacher called Robert Finch. Herries asked: 'How shall I like this place? It is cut off from the world.'

There was a sudden odd note of scorn in the little man's voice as he answered: 'It is the world, sir. Here within these hills, in this space of ground, is all the world. I thought that while I was with my Lord Petersham that the world was there, but in every village I have passed since then I have found the complete world – all anger and vanity and covetousness and lust, yes – and all charity, goodness and sweetness of soul. But, most of all, here in this valley I have found the whole world. Lives are lived

completely.....The mountains close us in. You will find everything here, sir. God and the devil both walk in these parts.'

Prayers: *Temptation. Man and woman spoilt God's perfect creation by falling into temptation and disobeying their creator. We are all guilty of sin, but through Christ we are given the strength and grace to resist temptation just as he did.*

Trusting not in our weakness but in God's mercy, we pray to him now.

We pray for Christians whose faith is being tested by hardship, spiritual dryness or any outside pressures.

May they hold fast to you, Lord, and emerge stronger in the knowledge of your loyal, sustaining love.

We pray for those involved in advertising, broadcasting and journalism, and for all in the entertainment business. May they not encourage selfishness or violence but discretion and insight.

We pray for the people we know and for the families they represent – we pray for all who live in this area.

May we live out the pattern of Christlike living in a practical way as we serve you as we serve them.

We pray for those blinded by prejudice or self-centred thinking; for those being dragged down by an addiction they feel powerless to stop. May they be lead tenderly to freedom.

We pray for those who, having worshipped on earth, have now passed into eternity; may they spend eternity in unending love and praise.

Lord, you are our rock on whom our security stands.

Father, we thank you for showing us the way to abundant life, and we ask you to accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The words of 'Be still my soul' written by Katharine A. von Schlegel – based on Psalm 46:10. It is sung to the tune: Finlandia

1 Be still, my soul, the Lord is on thy side; bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
leave to thy God to order and provide; in every change he faithful will remain.

Be still, my soul, thy best, thy heavenly Friend, through stormy waters leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul, thy God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past.

Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake – all now mysterious shall be bright at last.

Be still, my soul, the waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them when he lived below.

3 Be still, my soul, when dearest friends depart and all is darkness in a vale of tears,
then you will better know his love, his heart, who comes to soothe your sorrow and your fears.

Be still, my soul, thy Jesus can repay from his own fullness all he takes away.

4 Be still, my soul, the hour is hastening on, when we shall be forever with the Lord;

when disappointment, grief and fear are gone, sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.

Be still, my soul, when change and tears are past, all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus,

May we see you more clearly,

may we love you more dearly,

and follow you more nearly

day by day. **Amen**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and for evermore. **Amen.**