

ORDER OF SERVICE – Worship at Home 21/02/21 – First Sunday of Lent

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Today we begin our Lent worship series, Worship in the Wilderness, beginning today with A Spirit-led Journey. The outline for worship and some of the material has been prepared by Sam and Sara Hargreaves for Engage Worship as indicated.

Shared reading – Psalm 25: 1-9 ¹

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.

HYMN STF 363 ²

My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord, there is none like You.
All of my days I want to praise
the wonders of Your mighty love.
My comfort, my shelter,
tower of refuge and strength,
let every breath, all that I am,
never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord all the earth, let us sing
power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down
and the seas will roar
at the sound of Your name.
I sing for joy at the work of Your hands.
Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the
promise I have in You.

Prayer of Praise and Thanks

Lord Jesus, Saviour of all, we offer you praise. You are supreme, the best beyond comparison. We praise you for the wonder of your love and powerful strength. We give thanks that you are our shelter, our comfort, our safe place, our refuge in the storms of life. May our living, our breathing, our speaking and our doing declare true worship of you.

Lord Jesus, Creator, Sustainer and King, we offer you praise, joining with mountains and seas, valleys and all creatures to bend the knee before you in honour and worship. May our love for you grow stronger and deeper, for there is nothing to be compared to the promise of salvation, life and hope that we have found in you.

Lord Jesus, Saviour of all, we offer you praise, now and for ever. **Amen**

Reading – Deuteronomy 8: 1-5 and 15-18 ¹

¹ Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. ² Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴ Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' ¹⁸ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

HYMN – STF 41 – Blessed be your Name ³

Blessèd be your name
In the land that is plentiful,
Where your streams of abundance flow,
Blessèd be your name.
Blessèd be your name
When I'm found in the desert place,
Though I walk through the wilderness,
Blessèd be your name.
Every blessing you pour out
I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say:
*'Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be your name.
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be your glorious name.'*

Blessèd be your name
When the sun's shining down on me,
When the world's 'all as it should be,'
Blessèd be your name.
Blessèd be your name
On the road marked with suffering,
Though there's pain in the offering,
Blessèd be your name.
Every blessing you pour out
I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say:
*'Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be your name.
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,
Blessèd be your glorious name.'*

You give and take away,
You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say:
'Lord, blessèd be your name.'
Blessèd be the name of the Lord,

Reading – Mark 1: 9-13 ¹

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Prayer of Confession ⁴

In what we have done and neglected to do,
in the good we intended but did not follow through:

Lord, we have fallen.

[Pause in silence]

For our wandering off and forgetting your ways;
for leaving you out of our moments, our days:

Lord, we are sorrowful.

[Pause in silence]

Lord, in dust and in ashes we turn our hearts back to you and seek your forgiveness.

Lord, have mercy,

Christ, have mercy,

Lord have mercy.

[Pause in silence]

From the ashes you lift us, erasing our shame.
You grant fresh beginnings and restore us again.

Lord, you have raised us.

[Pause in silence]

Lord you draw us back to you and forgive us our wrongs.
You replace our lamenting with worshipful songs.

Lord, we are grateful.

[Pause in silence]

Amen

Talk - A Spirit-led Journey

Ups and downs, top of the world and in the depths are clichés for the experience of life but like every cliché they contain truth. In our relationship with God, we have moments when we feel very close to him - perhaps at a Christian conference, a worship event, on a retreat or a holiday. And then we have other days when God seems far away, when we doubt him or struggle with temptations. If you feel like that, you are not alone. Everyone has these ups and downs, these mountaintop moments and desert days. Not just us today - the heroes from the Bible, and even Jesus, experienced both. In Lent we will journey with Jesus in and through the wilderness. Today I want to highlight three things that the Bible can teach us about wilderness experiences.

1) Wilderness is not a sign of God's absence

The people of Israel experienced a huge mountaintop moment. They were led out of slavery in Egypt and then God parted the Red Sea, allowing them to pass and escape their enemies (Ex. 14). They celebrated this by singing a joyful worship song, dancing and playing percussion instruments (Ex. 15). They were on top of the world. But very quickly by verse 22 they reached a desert or wilderness called Shur, where there was no fresh water.

Here their joy turned to grumbling, their worship turned to distrust. They immediately doubted that God was really with them. Similarly in chapter 16 they reached another desert called Sin, and here there was no food to eat. They started to long for their days in Egypt, and complained that they are going to die.

Yet in both the deserts of Shur and Sin, God provided for them: with fresh water and with Manna bread and quail meat. The reading from Deuteronomy shows us in retrospect the positives from that experience: 'Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.' (Deuteronomy 8:2)

When we experience the struggles of the wilderness we should not see them as punishments from God, or signs that God is uncaring or non-existent. Instead we should see that the wilderness is an opportunity for God to test our hearts. Do we really trust in him, or do we trust in our own abilities? As Deuteronomy goes on to say: 'He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.' (Deuteronomy 8:16-18)

2) We are led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness

Jesus begins his ministry with a very similar pattern to the people of Israel. He passes through the waters - not the Red Sea, but the waters of baptism in the Jordan river. Again, this is a mountaintop experience, where the Spirit descends and the voice of his Father speaks words of affirmation and devotion: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' (Mk. 1:11).

We might expect that after this high-point Jesus would launch into his ministry of preaching and living out the Kingdom of God. Yet this is not what happens. Like Israel before him Jesus goes from the waters to the wilderness, from spiritual feasting to the struggle of fasting, from affirmation to loneliness and temptation.

'At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness.' (Mark 1:12) Have you experienced that? Moments where you thought God was calling you, sending you, empowering you, followed by setbacks or disappointments? Times of refreshing followed by periods of dryness? If so, take heart you are following in the footsteps of Jesus. Wilderness can be a place the Holy Spirit leads us to. The Father led Jesus into the desert by the Holy Spirit, and he can lead us there too.

3) Wilderness is a place of worship and transformation

Ultimately, God leads us into the wilderness so that we might learn to worship. Do you remember what God told Moses to say to Pharaoh was the reason they wanted to leave Egypt? 'Let my people go that they may worship me in the wilderness.' (Exodus 7:16).

Worship in the wilderness might look quite different to worship on the mountaintop. It is great to have joyful hymns and songs, to celebrate with banners and colours and hundreds of people. But wilderness worship is often about taking away rather than adding more. It might involve aspects of worship such as, silence or solitude or simplicity. It might turn us towards, fasting or lament or giving things away. It might be more like a lockdown experience.

Lent and wilderness are also about laying down some things we are holding on to, that occupy and distract us, until we have empty hands. Hands held out ready to receive from God, to be embraced by him.

Some of you may feel you have had wilderness thrust upon you. You might be going through a desert time right now. God is with you, he never wants to see you suffer but he wants to see you trust in him, and learn to worship in the wilderness. Others may feel great, you might be on a mountaintop right now, but even so you can actively choose to learn to worship in wilderness ways. Learning to find God in simplicity will prepare us all for whatever lies ahead. Israel was transformed through her wilderness worship. We can be too.

Responsive Prayer ⁴

Lord of the wilderness journey, sometimes we feel like we're walking through the wilderness too. When our spirits feel dry, help us trust in your Spirit.

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

Fasting seems difficult, prayers seem unanswered.

The world howls like wild animals all around us.

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

We can choose to worry, or to trust you to provide.

Temptation is everywhere, doubts can overwhelm us.

Jesus we choose to walk with you.

You know what it's like to walk through this desert.

Transform us through wilderness worship and lead us to refreshing springs of living water.

Jesus we choose to walk with you. Amen

HYMN – STF 236 ⁵

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|---|--|
| 1 Forty days and forty nights
you were fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted and yet undefiled. | 4 So if Satan, pressing hard,
soul and body would destroy:
Christ who conquered, be our guard;
give to us the victor's joy. |
| 2 Burning heat throughout the day,
bitter cold when light had fled;
prowling beasts around your way,
stones your pillow, earth your bed. | 5 Saviour, may we hear your voice
keep us constant at your side;
and with you we shall rejoice
at the eternal Eastertide. |
| 3 Shall not we your trials share,
learn your discipline of will;
and with you by fast and prayer
wrestle with the powers of hell? | |

Prayers for others

Lord of these 40 desert days we pray for those who find themselves in the barrenness of wild and isolated places - minister to them as angels once ministered to you.

We pray for those we know in the bleakness of lack - lack of food, lack of shelter or lack of love.

Provide for them, we pray.

[Pause in silence]

We pray for those we know in the desolation of loss - loss of opportunity, loss of certainty or loss of someone they love. Comfort them, we pray.

[Pause in silence]

We pray for those we know in the harshness of sickness - sickness of body, sickness of mind or sickness of heart. Heal and renew them, we pray.

[Pause in silence]

Show us, O Lord, who we can help on their journey and how we can minister comfort and strength to those we know in need. Lead us together to refreshing springs, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN – MP 757 - Horatio Spafford (1828-1888)

1

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

It is well, it is well;

With my soul, with my soul.

It is well, it is well, with my soul.

2

Though satan should buffet,
 though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed his own blood for my soul.

It is well, it is well;

3

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well, it is well;

4

And Lord, haste the day
 when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound,
and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well;

Final Blessing

Holy Spirit, fill us with your water of life, so that even as we walk through the desert we might know your refreshing and share it with those around us. Lead us, as you led Jesus, to the glory of God the Father and may God's blessing and peace be with us and all those we love, now and always.

Amen.

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