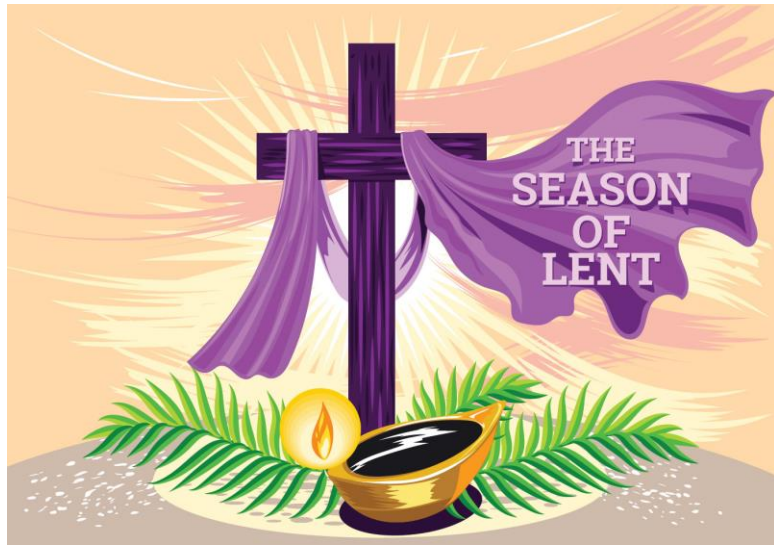


Ash Wednesday Worship at Home for the Beginning of Lent



Welcome to this service, as we mark Ash Wednesday the first day of Lent, our journey of preparation for Holy Week, Christ's Passion, His death on the cross and His rising again on Easter Sunday.

Today we remember how, after His baptism, Jesus entered the wilderness for forty days, to prepare for his earthly ministry. He was alone, He fasted, He focussed on God. Towards the end of this time, when He was hungry and tired, He was tempted by the devil, but Jesus remained absolutely faithful to His Heavenly Father.

WE PREPARE

Let us prepare now to enter the desert.

We will walk the road that Jesus walked.

Let us celebrate these forty days with songs of praise.

We will fast and pray with Jesus on the way.

Let us remember the times we turned away.

We will confess our sin and turn back to him.

Let us face those desert places in our lives.

We will not go there alone; Jesus has gone there before us.

Face the desert we must, if we are to reach the cross of Easter.

Face the desert we must, but Jesus has gone there before us.

O Lord, throughout these forty days you prayed and fasted.

May we do the same, repent and turn to you.

Be with us through all we face and free us from our past;

give us strength that in joy we may follow you

and see the mystery of your grace shining through at last.

All glory be to you, Christ our King. Amen.

HYMN

Forty days and forty nights

Thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted and yet undefiled.

Sunbeams scorching all the day,
chilly dew-drops nightly shed,
prowling beasts about Thy way,
stones Thy pillow, earth Thy bed.

Let us Thy endurance share
and from earthly greed abstain,
with Thee watching unto prayer,
with Thee strong to suffer pain.

Then if evil on us press,
flesh or spirit to assail,
victor in the wilderness,
may we never faint nor fail!

So shall peace divine be ours;
holier gladness ours shall be;
come to us angelic powers,
such as ministered to Thee.



The Ten Commandments

Jesus says, 'If you obey my commands you will remain in my love.'

Aware of our failure to always keep the Lord's commands, we hear / read the words God has given, and, trusting Him, ask that they may be written more clearly upon our hearts:

God says, "I am the Lord your God,

"You shall have no other gods before me.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."

**Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this law.**

"Honour your father and your mother.

"You shall not murder.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness.

"You shall not covet."

**Lord have mercy upon us,
and incline our hearts to keep this law.**

The Gospel Reading Matthew 6: 1 – 6, 16 – 21

6 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **3** But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **6** But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. **17** But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, **18** that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^(a) destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflection

Ash Wednesday. It has come to hold rather a special place for me, Ash Wednesday, because the first service in which I participated in this Benefice was the Ash Wednesday service last year. And, with the benefit of hindsight, there was something rather prophetic about it. Angela had a cold, so she asked me to apply the ashes to people's foreheads and distribute the communion bread so that she would not have to risk possibly passing on her cold germs. Shortly thereafter, of course, no priests were distributing bread or wine at all because we were into the first Covid lockdown and the risks of passing on Covid germs were felt to be just too great. There were a few brief weeks in the summer and autumn when communion was possible in one kind - the bread only - subject to careful safeguards, but then we were back into lockdown two and now lockdown three. There will be no communion here this Ash Wednesday and no ashes. Just this simple service recorded to mark the occasion.

And what exactly is the occasion? Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, the season of penitence as we prepare ourselves for the wonderful celebration of Easter. Traditionally, ashes are applied to our foreheads on Ash Wednesday as a personal act of remembrance and as a sign or a witness for others. When the ashes are placed on our foreheads, the minister says: "Remember you are dust and to dust you will return." We are, thus, reminded that we are but mortal creatures and that our lives were given to us by God. We know this, of course, but it is very easy to forget it as we go about our daily lives. Without the ritual of the ashes to remind us, we will have to work extra hard this year to focus down on the fact that we are but dust and to dust we shall return. But, we must not think of this as a

sombre message of doom - a reminder that death is the only true certainty. The point of this is to remind us that this is not our lasting home: our lasting home is in eternity, with God. And during Lent, whether by fasting, or giving up some small indulgence, or perhaps by doing something we would not normally do, we cause ourselves to think more about God, to become closer to him, to look towards our lasting home.

I am reminded of a conversation I had a few years ago with an observant Jewish colleague at work. It was the Christmas lunch and Simon had attended to be sociable but had ordered only Kosher food. I asked him why this was so important to him because, try as I might, I could discern no rationale behind all the various Jewish food laws. After a pause, he asked me how many times a day did I eat, two, three? And, when you eat, do you just choose what you fancy and eat it?, he asked. When I had answered both his questions affirmatively, he said, "It is not so for me. I also eat two or three times a day but, every time, I must choose carefully because God has said what I should and should not eat. It is not for me to question why but, because I must choose what to eat, I am caused to think about God at least two or three times every day of my life. Can you say that?"

Simon's kosher food discipline is much more rigorous than any Lenten discipline we might choose to adopt: and it is for life, not just for six weeks. Can we not, then, make some small personal sacrifice for this limited time? It may be giving up something material, food, drink, or some other pleasure, or it may just be giving up some time to God which we would not otherwise do: time, like Simon's daily dose, just to think about God.

Spending just ten minutes per day with Angela's Prayer Diary might be one approach we could try. Saying the prayer will take only a moment or two; for the rest perhaps try what I once heard our own Archdeacon Audrey, who will be retiring at the end of this month, recommend: just sunbathing in the warmth and presence of God, just relaxing and opening your mind to whatever he may want to say to you.

Silence

HYMN

Lord, teach us how to pray aright
with rev'ence and with fear.
though dust and ashes in your sight,
we may, we must draw near.

We perish if we cease from pray'r;
Oh, grant us pow'r to pray.
and when to meet thee we prepare,
Lord, meet us on our way.

Give deep humility; the sense
of godly sorrow give;
a strong desire with confidence,
to hear your voice and live;

Faith in the only sacrifice
that can for sin atone;
to cast our hopes, to fix our eyes
on Christ, on Christ alone.

Give these, and then your will be done;
thus strengthened with all might,
we, through your Spirit and your Son,
shall pray, and pray aright.



WE PRAY TOGETHER

*As we pray together, my we slowly reflect
upon the ways our words and deeds fall short
of God's holy standards. May we open our
hearts honestly to him, seek his forgiveness,
and draw upon his strength to help us live
closer to his way.*

Before you, Jesus Christ,
we admit how and where
we have underestimated our influence,
letting our words or silences hurt,
abusing trust, betraying confidences.
Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy.

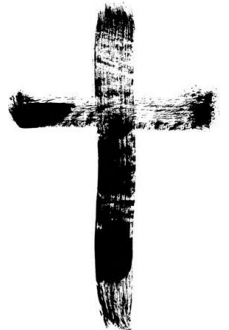
We admit how and where
we have made a show of our religion,
attracting more attention to us
and less to you.
Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy.

We admit to where in our lives
a vague interest
has become a dangerous passion,
and we are not sure what to do
or whether we are still in control.
Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus Christ,
if we have looked or longed for
an easier Gospel,
a lighter cross,
a less demanding saviour,
then turn our eyes and avert our longing
from what we want to choose
to the One who has chosen us.
Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy.

**Forgive us our unfaithfulness,
and, for our better living,
give us not the remedy we desire tomorrow,
but the grace you offer today.
We ask this for your love's sake. Amen.**

God of all grace and love,
we stand at the edge of these forty days,
praying for our sins and accepting your forgiveness,
knowing your commands and going your way.
And so we pray that Lent will be a time of turning to you,
that your ways will become our ways:



**Let us feed the hungry; let us give the thirsty drink;
let us clothe the naked and welcome the stranger;
let us visit those in prison and the sick;
let us tear down walls and build bridges.**

Let this be our prayer and our way of life,
so that when all is said and all is done,
we may inherit a place at the table you have prepared for us.

This we pray in the name of the One
who taught us to say when we pray...

Our Father...

OUR SERVICE DRAWS TO A CLOSE

HYMN

I need Thee every hour,
most gracious Lord:
no tender voice like Thine
can peace afford.

*I need Thee, O I need Thee!
every hour I need Thee;
O bless me now, my Saviour!
I come to Thee.*

I need Thee every hour,
stay Thou near by;
temptations lose their power
when Thou art nigh.
I need Thee . . .

I need Thee every hour,
in joy or pain;
come quickly and abide,
or life is vain.
I need Thee . . .

I need Thee every hour,
teach me Thy will;
and Thy rich promises
in me fulfil.
I need Thee . . .

I need Thee every hour,
most Holy One;
O make me Thine indeed,
Thou blessed Son!
I need Thee . . .

May we
Love what love can do.
Be all that we can be.
God is calling us all.

This is not the past.
Do not live there.
Let the voices go.
Do not cling to what is gone.

This is not the future.
We are not there yet.
Let the worries be.
Do not live where we are not.

This is here and now.
This is all we have.
Do not miss where we are.
For it will not stay for past or future to replay.

Live the life that we are in.
We cannot live where we have been.
We cannot live where we are not.

May we...
Be in the time we are in.
Love what we each can do.
Be all that we each can be.
No one can live for us.
Or be what we each can be.

And may God's peace and blessing be always with us. Amen.



*material for this service is drawn from:
'New Patterns for Worship' - Church House Publishing
'Stages on the Way' & 'God of Desert Places' - Wild Goose Publishing
hymns taken from missionpraise.com & hymnary.com
ccli# 999402*

*service compiled by Sue & Claire
reflection prepared by Rev Jeffrey Terry
hymns chosen, played and sung by Gareth Stubberfield*

*t
his service will be available to watch on YouTube
on the Camel-Allen Churches' page from Wednesday 17th February*