

## **Worship material for 21<sup>st</sup> February 2021, the first Sunday in Lent**

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Lent has traditionally been a period of self-examination, penitence and preparedness for Holy week and Easter. In many churches worship tended to follow the story of Jesus as he approaches Jerusalem and offers a continuing engagement with the promise and challenge of discipleship. What follows relies on material I have long cherished. Of course, lockdown restrictions have already brought many limitations on what we are able to do.

### **Old Testament Reading Genesis 9:8 – 17**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you – the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you – every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.' So God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.'

SoF 645 All creatures of our God and King [https://youtu.be/8CS-oOC\\_AAY](https://youtu.be/8CS-oOC_AAY)

SoF 164 He is exalted <https://youtu.be/lc1UBwVHGGU>

### **New Testament Reading Mark 1:9 – 15**

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

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

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

**Prayer** (based and adapted from a prayer from Andhra Theological College, India).

Brother Christ, help us to follow you deep into the waters of baptism . . . to break the chain of past wrongs; to become fit to face your coming age . . . **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

Help us to follow you into the desert, with you to fast, denying false luxury-values, refusing the tempting ways of self-indulgence, the way of success at all costs, the way of coercive persuasion. **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

Help us to follow you in untiring ministry to town and village, to heal and restore . . . to cast out the evil forces of greed, resentment, communal hatred, self-destructive fears – rampant in our lands. . . . **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

Help us to follow you into the place of quiet retreat to intercede for the confused, the, despairing, the anxiety-driven, to prepare ourselves for costly service. . . . **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

Help us to follow you on the road to Jerusalem, to set our faces firmly against friendly suggestions to live a safe, expedient life; to embrace boldly the way of self-offering. . . . **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

Help us to follow you even to the cross . . . to see our hope in your self-spending love, to die to all within us not born of your love. . . . **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

Help us to follow you out of the dark tomb; to share daily in your resurrection life, to be renewed daily in your image of love, to serve daily as your new body being broken for your world. . . . **Jesus, our Brother, help us to follow you.**

SoF 261 I want to walk with Jesus Christ <https://youtu.be/5c8-2D55IYE>

## Reflection

It is interesting to pinpoint observations on our two scripture passages.

First, we cannot escape the references to God’s enduring covenant not only with his people, but also with the whole of creation. And that resonates powerfully with global anxiety about many features of the created world today, on land and sea and in the air. Life on earth is under dire threat, and human beings have harmed the creation in many ways. If we continue as we are, species will continue to disappear, the air will continue to be contaminated, ice will continue to melt and the oceans will pose a threat to many low-lying islands and coastal areas around the globe. Frankly, if we opt to continue as we are, we will be breaking the covenant which God established from the beginning, and which in Jesus was renewed. Time is rapidly running out for us to repent and to change our ways. It is an opportunity to focus and to ask ourselves what we can do to follow the prophetic observations and pleas of folk like Sir David Attenborough, Greta Thurnhberg, and many world leaders.

Second, we remember the rainbow, which has become a prominent symbol in several contemporary campaigns – signs of hope in tempestuous and troubled times. In Genesis It points to a fundamental

purpose and direction towards which creation is meant to move towards its fulfilment and purpose. And as we move throughout Lent towards Holy Week, we are inspired by the truth of how firmly God is sticking to all that he would do in and through Jesus his Son to heal us and the whole of creation in all its brokenness. So the rainbow reminds us to look up in spite of the darkness and storms around us.

Third, we cannot avoid the challenge to ‘repent and believe the good news’. This is a challenge to look at ourselves, to see ourselves as God sees us, which at first sight looks threatening. But the truth is that the gospel proclaims the wonderful truth that in Christ God embraces our weaknesses and failings, not simply to expose them, but actually to forgive them and to change us, and challenge us to continue honouring his covenant. And the only explanation why God would want to do that, is simply grace – his awesome open-handedness to us in Christ, and the generous bestowal of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit to enable and guide us through the coming days.

So what should we be doing with all this time on our hands? There will be many practical things to busy ourselves with – in and around the house for example. Then there is the challenge of facing up to ourselves much more than we often do in different times. To help us, daily bible readings and reflections really help to feed and to guide us. Prayer is no less vital – and it is important to be praying for ourselves, as also for family, friends and the fellowship to which we belong. Thankfully, social media helps to inform and to enable a fruitful interchange between us in that respect. We pay tribute here to all those who are enabling that sharing of news and prayer requests and the variety of social media contacts that help that to happen. To all those involved in that, our heartfelt thanks and admiration. In addition, there is the challenge that in all this concentration on ourselves individually and collectively to lose sight of the world-wide church of Jesus Christ on all six continents – and to embrace it continually in our prayers. I am always in awe of the way in which the Apostle Paul not only travelled and traversed the world of his day, but always initiated and sustained an intense pattern of prayer for all the churches and individuals he worked amongst in his extensive ministry. His feet took him far and wide. But his knees helped him to travel even further. Would that this Lent could open rich possibilities for this, so that at a time when we are locked down, our minds and prayers can travel far and wide.

SoF 321 Lead us heavenly Father lead us <https://youtu.be/OpkEeXWtWq0>

**Prayers of intercession** (based on John Pritchard, *The Intercession Handbook*, 1997).

Lord of Lent, come to your Church and ask your hard questions. Are we faithfully proclaiming your gospel? Are we demonstrating in our common life the justice of your kingdom? Are we welcoming to the weak and giving prominence to the poor? Come to your Church to spring-clean our ways of life, our structures and our priorities. Point out to us the cobwebs, the dirt, the extravagance, and the waste. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Lord of Lent, **renew our lives.**

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Lord of Lent, come to the nations and challenge our idolatries. Spring-clean the sordid cupboard of this world's false gods. Sweep out the false pride, the self-seeking, the deceit, corruption and lies. May the kingdoms of the earth seek justice, peace and the integrity of creation. May we look beyond the immediate advantage to seek the common good, and be drawn to it as a lark to the dawn, especially we ask for your cleansing hand in (feel free to mention examples). Lord of Lent, **renew our lives.**

Lord of Lent, look with compassion on those whose lives are full of anxiety and bewilderment. We remember those who are lonely, imprisoned despairing and humiliated. Clear away from them all unnecessary feelings of guilt and self-hatred. Assure them that when you spring-clean our hearts and minds you know what you are doing, for you have been there, one of us, and you are to be trusted. Lord of Lent, **renew our lives.**

Lord of Lent, for ourselves, we pray that your spring-cleaning would be thorough and true this Lent. Show us clearly these effortless sins we longer even notice, and help us to address the sins which sit on our shoulders every day, our constant companions. Give us both discipline in dealing with our faults and gentleness in dealing with others, and help us to know the difference. Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Lord of Lent, **renew our lives.**

Lord of Lent, we pray for the members, friends and leaders of Tamworth Baptist Church, wherever they are today. We remember those who have been bereaved (feel free to mention names here), we pray for those who are not well (feel free to mention names here). We remember those who are in hospital (feel free to mention names here). We pray for our leaders, and those who in these times where we have to refrain from gathering together, reach out to each other in thoughts and prayers. Give us patience and much love for each other. Help us to journey into heights and depths of the true communion of the saints. Bless all those who are making valiant efforts to help us to keep in touch with each other, especially through social media and zoom. Bless those who are supplying helpful material to feed our devotions and prayers. Lord of Lent, **renew our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

SoF 483 Restore O Lord <https://youtu.be/1q4p3v06lhk>

**Blessing** (based on a prayer by the late Revd Michael Walker)

Lord, lead us into the wilderness that we may meet you in the flame which burns but does not destroy. Help us to put aside our business and stress and to rediscover silence. Help us to shut out clamouring voices that are around us and inside us, and listen only to your voice. In silence and prayer, help us to find you and to be found by you that we might be remade in the likeness of Jesus Christ, in whose strong and precious name we pray today. Amen.

SoF 519 Take my life and let it be <https://youtu.be/Of4I5bTdZ8M>