

Bulletin for Sunday 14th February 2021

Very warm greetings to you all on the first Sunday in Lent - I hope those of you who like pancakes enjoyed some this week! Our 'God of Surprises' Lent Course starts on Tuesday evening. All welcome - if you haven't read the book, don't worry. This is an opportunity to talk with friends about things which matter; the book isn't essential.

Our Sunday morning service will be led by Jonathan Rodell, and the evening service by Karen Kelland. Karen asks those coming to Sunday at Six to bring a candle if possible.

Let's pause as we come before God... and then let's praise God as we sing:

Hymn: For the beauty of the earth (R&S 41)

Prayer: Creator God, you have blessed us:

with the beauty of the world around us,
with rain and sunshine and the growing life they nurture,
with love and friendship, laughter and care...
For all this we thank and praise you.
We ask your blessing on everything we do,
and everything we give in your service,
today and every day. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Readings: Genesis chapter 9 verses 8-17 and Mark chapter 1 verses 9-15

Reflection: Although we think of Lent as focussed on the wilderness, or desert, the reading from Mark's gospel for this first week in Lent starts with Jesus coming up out of the water of the River Jordan. It is as he breaks the surface - back into the sunlight, dripping wet and gasping for breath - that the Spirit descends on him, and he hears a voice from heaven with his Father's recognition, and affirmation, and love.

At least Jesus had presumably only been submerged momentarily. Noah and his family had been surrounded by water above them, below them and all around them for forty days, not knowing how it would end - imagine how terrifying that would be. But the rain did eventually stop, the water slowly retreated, and as they stepped out into a new life on dry ground they also were affirmed by God, who not only made a covenant promise to them, but sealed it with that wonderful sign in the sky - the rainbow.

Just as Noah and all the creatures in the ark emerged from their watery trauma to literal new life - to sunshine and solid ground and opportunities to live again - so Jesus emerged from the symbolic watery 'death' of baptism to confidence that God had called him to a new life, and would be with him as he pursued it. He was able to go away into the wilderness with the strength not only to endure, but to learn from forty days of temptation.

“When through the deep water I call you to go...” As we start our journeys through this Lent, may we also be assured that God will indeed be with us, just as the third verse of this hymn promises:

Hymn: How firm a foundation (R&S 589)

Prayer: Compassionate God
 as we move slowly through the weeks of Lent
 may your Spirit rest upon us all.
 As we are still separated from friends and those we love
 we pray for those burdened by loneliness and pain,
 for the bereaved, the despairing, the sick and the dying.
 May we make our communities places of warmth and friendship
 where we learn that your love is big enough to hold us all.
 Hear all the prayers of all our hearts... in Jesus’ name, Amen

Hymn: The kingdom of God (R&S 200)

Blessing: Through both the deep waters and the deserts of life
 may we know God beside us...
 and may the blessing of God,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 be with us and with all those we love
 this week and always. Amen

While our buildings are shut, we continue to worship on Zoom each Sunday at 10.30am and again at 6.00pm, with a chance to chat at the 11.30am ‘After Church Coffee’ Zooms.

Our series of Zoom Lent meetings, based on the book, ‘God of Surprises’, by Gerard Hughes, start this Tuesday Feb 23rd at 7.30pm; more details from Gerald or me.

Billingshurst’s online Lent Lunch went well this week, there will be another one next Friday (26th) at 1pm in aid of St Barnabas House hospice. Details from Jane.

Fairtrade Fortnight starts on Monday (22nd) - we’ll look at it more closely next week.

Anne Lewitt