

### WELCOME AND CALL TO WORSHIP:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Since early days, Christians have observed with great devotion the time of our Lord's passion, death and resurrection. It is the custom of the Church to prepare for this with a season of penitence and self-denial.

At first, this season of Lent was observed by those being prepared for baptism at Easter, and by those seeking restoration to the Church's fellowship. In time, all Christians were invited to keep these days carefully, to take to heart the call to repentance, to receive the assurance of forgiveness proclaimed in the Gospel, and so to grow in faith and love for our Lord.

In the name of Christ, therefore I invite you to observe this holy season of Lent, by prayer, self-denial and charitable acts of kindness; by self-examination and repentance; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. But first, we raise our voices in praise for God has done for us in Jesus Christ his Son. Let's stand if we are able and praise the Lord.

### SONGS:

#### GOD, YOU HAVE DONE GREAT THINGS

**God, you have done great things  
God, You give grace to the weak,  
And bless the broken-hearted  
with a song of praise to sing.  
You reached down and lifted us up,  
You came running, looking for us.  
And now there's nothing,  
and no one beyond Your love.**

**You're the overflow,  
You're the fountain of my heart,  
So let Your mercy rain,  
*let Your mercy rain on us.*  
You're the faithful One  
when the world's falling apart.  
So let Your mercy rain,  
let Your mercy rain on us.**

**How deep, how wide,  
how long, how high  
Is Your love, is Your love.  
How deep, how wide,  
how long, how high  
Is Your love, is Your love, O God.**

LORD, I COME BEFORE YOUR THRONE OF GRACE

**Lord, I come before your throne of grace;  
I find rest in Your presence  
And fulness of joy.  
In worship and wonder  
I behold Your face,  
Singing what a faithful God have I.**

**What a faithful God have I,  
What a faithful God.  
What a faithful God have I,  
Faithful in every way.**

**Lord of mercy, You have heard my cry;  
Through the storm You're the beacon,  
My song in the night.  
In the shelter of Your wings,  
Hear my heart's reply,  
Singing what a faithful God have I.**

**What a faithful God have I,  
What a faithful God.  
What a faithful God have I,  
Faithful in every way.**

**Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,  
Let me comfort those who suffer  
With the comfort You have given.  
I will tell of Your great love for as long as I live,  
Singing what a faithful God have I.**

**What a faithful God have I,  
What a faithful God.  
What a faithful God have I,  
Faithful in every way.**

WHEN THE MUSIC FADES

**When the music fades, all is stripped away,  
And I simply come;  
Longing just to bring something that's of worth  
That will bless Your heart.**

**I'll bring You more than a song,  
For a song in itself  
Is not what You have required.  
You search much deeper within  
Through the way things appear;**

**You're looking into my heart.**

**I'm coming back to the heart of worship,  
And it's all about You, All about You, Jesus.  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,  
When it's all about You, All about You, Jesus.**

**King of endless worth, no one could express  
How much You deserve.  
Though I'm weak and poor, all I have is Yours,  
Every single breath.**

**I'll bring You more than a song,  
For a song in itself  
Is not what You have required.  
You search much deeper within  
Through the way things appear;  
You're looking into my heart.**

**I'm coming back to the heart of worship,  
And it's all about You, All about You, Jesus.  
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,  
When it's all about You, All about You, Jesus.**

### **OPENING PRAYER**

Almighty and merciful God,  
You hate nothing that you have made,  
And forgive the sins of all who are penitent.  
Create in us new and contrite hearts,  
So that when we turn to you  
And confess our sins  
We may receive your full and perfect forgiveness;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

### **CONFESSION**

Let us confess our sins as we say the words of Psalm 51.

**Have mercy on me, O God,  
In your constant love;  
In the fullness of your mercy  
Blot out my offences.  
Wash away all my guilt,  
And cleanse me from my sin.  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a right spirit within me.  
Give me the joy of your help again**

**And strengthen me with a willing spirit.**

### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
A broken and contrite heart God will not despise.  
He declares over you, "Your sins are forgiven."  
Be set free from the past which has held you,  
And walk confidently into the future  
which God has ordained for you;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **NOTICES AND TIME OF SHARING**

Lent Course starts Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> at 7.30pm

### **OFFERTORY SONG:**

Speak, O Lord

**Speak, O Lord, as we come to You  
To receive the food of Your Holy Word.  
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;  
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,  
That the light of Christ might be seen today  
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
All Your purposes for Your glory.**

**Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
Holy reverence, true humility;  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
In the radiance of Your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise; cause our eyes to see  
Your majestic love and authority.  
Words of pow'r that can never fail—  
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.**

**Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds  
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
That will echo down through eternity  
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises  
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us  
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built  
And the earth is filled with Your glory**

### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

May God who is most generous, merciful and forgiving, pardon us from all our sins, give us time amend our lives, and give us the help of the Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## PRAYER FOR SUNDAY CLUB

Lord, giver of life and conqueror of death, we pray for the children here today, that they may come close to you and you would come close to them, in Jesus' name.  
**Amen.**

## READING: Mark 1:9-15

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

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

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

This is the Word of the Lord  
**Thanks be to God**

## REFLECTION: APPROACHING THE CROSS (1) Open Heaven

Too many children grow up in this world never hearing their father say, 'I love you' or 'Well done. I am really pleased with you.' It is said that for many adults in counselling the root issues go back to a lack of affirmation and love in childhood. People need to know they are loved. In this country too many fathers find it embarrassing or difficult to express their love for their child, but God isn't backward in coming forward and expressing his complete love for Jesus, as we heard in our reading.

We begin a new series for Lent entitled 'Approaching the Cross.' We begin in Mark 1, and the record of Jesus' baptism and temptation, as well as the very opening words of Jesus as recorded by Mark. Jesus' baptism revealed his true identity. As Jesus came up out of the water, we see the words from heaven declaring: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (v11). The whole Christian gospel could be summed up with this one point: when the living God looks at us, at every baptised and believing Christian, he says to us what he said to Jesus on that day.

Can you hear God speaking those words over you? "You are my dear child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." This passage is not only about Jesus' baptism; it is also about our identity. What is true of Jesus is true of us. We need to allow these words to percolate our thoughts and change our hearts, so that we see who we really are in Christ.

Having heard words of affirmation and love, Jesus is sent out into the desert by the Holy Spirit. The road Jesus must tread, because he is God's Son, is the road through

temptation. If that was the road for Jesus, it will be the road for us too. So often in the Christian life we have times of battle and blessing. The battle often follows a time of blessing. The Christian life is blessing and battle. If we remember the voice from heaven, God's affirming words of love, then in times of struggle we will remember the blessing of his love. Sometimes battle and blessing come at the same time. As we begin Lent, do you need to remember just who you are in Christ? You are God's beloved child. But for many of us we find it easier to hear the words of the tempter, questioning whether we are really God's child. Maybe this morning you need to hear words of affirmation and love from your heavenly Father.

Mark uses a strange phrase in writing about Jesus' baptism, 'As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open...' (v10). 'Heaven torn open.' Heaven in the Bible means God's dimension behind the ordinary reality of this world. It's more as though an invisible curtain was being pulled back right in front of him. Here at Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan we are standing in the presence of a different reality altogether. So much of the Christian faith is a matter of learning to live in the light of this reality even if we can't see it. Sometimes, at decisive and important moments, the curtain is drawn back and we catch a glimpse of what's really going on. For the most part we walk by faith and not by sight. But one of the things Mark is saying to us here is look at this heavenly vision and hear the heavenly voice. Learn to hear these words as though they are addressed to you. Let them change you, mould you, make you the person God sees and wants you to become. Discover in this story the normally hidden spiritual dimension of God's world. When the early Christians read this passage, they believed that their own baptism into Jesus Christ was the moment for them when the curtain had been drawn back and these words from the Father had been spoken to them.

Marc Dupont in his book 'Pursuing Open Heavens' writes, 'We can't go on presuming, through our traditions and head knowledge, that we know precisely what God can do and know what he wants to do. We need a people desperate enough for open heaven[s] – that in their cry to see more of God in the land they will "elevate their hearts above their heads"; a people who will ascend the hill of the Lord to seek his face, but also go to the low place of worship and brokenness.'

We need to hear again these words of love and affirmation, and know that when we go into our own desert, we are still loved and affirmed by the Father. Jesus was in many ways acting out Israel's great story of the Exodus and the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. The road Jesus went down was a road through temptation. But if we start from a point of seeing God as an angry threatening parent, we will fall at the first sign of temptation. However, if we hear the voice of our heavenly Father speaking words of love and pleasure, we will find the way through the desert and into fruitful ministry.

Jesus' baptism and affirmation from the Father and anointing by the Spirit was followed by 40 days in the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan (v12). Do not be surprised by the spiritual attack that follows great spiritual experiences. Having heard God's words over you that you are loved, that you are a child of God, don't be surprised that soon after you have doubts and temptations. When I look back over my life as a Christian, I can see times of testing. These were painful at the time, but they were preparing me for what lay ahead. As a friend used to say to me, "Nothing

is wasted in the economy of God.” You see, it was the Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness after his baptism (v12). These times of testing and temptation reveal that the spiritual world is true. The experience of the Spirit is real but so is the spiritual battle that often follows when we are filled with the Spirit.

However, having overcome Satan in the wilderness, having gone through that battle and won, Jesus emerged from the wilderness with great authority; authority to call people to follow him (1:16-17), authority to lead (1:17, 20) and authority to teach (1:22), and authority to deliver people from evil (1:25,-27) and to heal (1:31-32).

Yet for Jesus his ministry eventually led to the cross of Calvary. The same is true for his people. Through faith and baptism, we die with Christ and are raised with him. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians, ‘And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 2:6-7). If God would do all that for you, now do you doubt you are loved. So, this Lent may you know God’s love for you and his delight in you. And if you are going through a battle at this moment in time, remember that God is preparing you for future ministry. It may seem painful now, but you need to remember your calling, your identity in Christ. You are loved by God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let’s pray.

### **PRAYERS led by Godwin**

#### **THE LORD’S PRAYER**

**Our Father in heaven  
Hallowed be your name  
Your kingdom come  
Your will be done on earth as in heaven  
Give us today our daily bread  
Forgive us our sins  
As we forgive those who sin against us  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil  
For the kingdom, the power  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

#### **CLOSING SONG:**

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind  
**Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways;  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;  
In purer lives Thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise,  
In deeper reverence, praise.**

**In simple trust like theirs who heard,  
Beside the Syrian sea,  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word  
Rise up and follow Thee,  
Rise up and follow Thee.**

**O sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  
The silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love,  
Interpreted by love.**

**With that deep hush subduing all  
Our words and works that drown  
The tender whisper of Thy call,  
As noiseless let Thy blessing fall  
As fell Thy manna down,  
As fell Thy manna down.**

**Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of Thy peace,  
The beauty of Thy peace.**

**Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,  
O still small voice of calm,  
O still small voice of calm!**

### **CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING**

Lord, may we honour you in every way this Lent, and turn from all sin. Help us to walk in the truth that you love us. Help us to hear your words of acceptance and delight over us. And when we are struggling, help us to continue to know your love; in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve and share the Lord  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**



APPROACHING THE CROSS (1)  
Open Heaven – Mark 1:9-15  
18<sup>th</sup> February 2024

