

## Third Sunday in Lent

### Third Sunday in Lent – 7 March 2021

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank Rev Jonathan Fleming, Minister of Cumbrae with Largs St John's, for his thoughts on the third Sunday in Lent.

“We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.”

*National Worship Team*

As the restrictions on our ability to meet in groups continue, worship leaders continue to deliver their services both online and offline.

We can help to facilitate participation from the whole congregation by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technology in the service in ways that suit both physical gatherings and video-conference style settings, such as:

- Opening and closing moments of worship that help people mark out a time set apart with God
- Introducing various parts of the worship service to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each one (framing)
- Enabling conversations or prayers in breakout groups
- Holding spaces that allow people to go deeper in worship
- Using the chat function and microphone settings to allow people to actively participate in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship

#### Useful links:

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 can be found [here](#)

Useful tips for creating and leading worship online can be found [here](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

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## Introduction

This Sunday is the third Sunday in Lent, where some will be approaching the halfway point in their 40-day journey of abstinence or acquisition, depending on whether you see Lent as a time to give something up or take something on.

The Year B readings for this Sunday in Lent show us a God who cares enough about us to set boundaries and show us standards to live by where we can be loving to those around us and in turn show our love for God.

As if that were not enough, we go on to read of the Psalmist's praise of the God of all creation, who not only made us, but loves us enough to show us the way through the commandments **and** to forgive us when we make mistakes.

The crescendo continues with Jesus' words in our Gospel reading, where we learn of Jesus' refusal to stand back and allow sinful and disrespectful activity in a house of God, prophesying what lay ahead for Him in the greatest loving act of all, as discussed in this week's epistle. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we are reminded of how God works in ways that many will never fathom; ways that some will write off as 'foolish'. As followers of Jesus, however, we can rejoice in having a personal relationship with the one who demonstrated that death is not the end and that love always wins.

When preparing this and other acts of Worship, I always read the passages separately to allow each of them to be read in their own context – it is always important to remember that the stitching together of these passages in a lectionary is a human invention (as are the chapters and verses!). I also compare and contrast different translations.

As I read each passage, I ask myself what God is trying to say to those involved, what God is trying to say to me and how I can apply such teaching to my life. When I have an understanding of that for myself, I can then begin to consider how I would communicate my reflections with others.

Since the Spring of 2020, our Ministry team has invited those worshipping with us (online) to come up with a creative response to a question or something that 'pops out' in the readings for the following Sunday and to share it with us by email, text or WhatsApp. These responses often provide us with stimulating ideas when preparing for worship!

## Exodus 20:1-17

### **The Ten Commandments**

The Ten Commandments provided and continue to provide God's people with a framework that allows them to love one another, respect one another and care for one another as well as honouring God.

I have often reflected on why God gave these commandments. I realised the importance of remembering where the Israelites had resided before this point in order to fully understand the rationale behind the Ten Commandments - the Israelites had escaped Egypt via the Red Sea and, having travelled through the desert, arrived at Sinai, the holy mountain of the Lord

In Egypt, there were many different idols and gods, with each god representing a different part of life. To obtain as many blessings as possible, it was not unusual to worship multiple gods. To ask the Israelites to worship Yahweh was not an issue (what difference is one more going to make?!), but when Yahweh commands the Israelites that they shall worship **only** Yahweh and no other gods, it becomes a huge challenge!

What are our modern-day gods and idols?

Money? Possessions? How many followers we have on social media?

What/who distracts us from keeping God at the centre of all that we say and do in our lives?

The Ten Commandments allow us to focus our eyes on the Lord, and when we make that our lifelong goal, we stop ourselves from making some of the things listed above the primary focus in our life.

## Psalm 19

In this Psalm, David meditates on God's creation, God's Word and God's forgiveness.

Psalm 19 opens with the reminder that God is always with us; God permeates all creation, knowing and listening to all that is going on throughout the planets and the stars.

From here, we return to the law of the Lord (v.7), where we are reminded not only of its perfection, but how it is not meant to restrict or stifle, but rather to allow God's people to flourish and stay on the best possible path in life. Having lived with so many new restrictions and regulations over these last 12 months or so, we may regard laws in a very

negative sense. It is refreshing to read of how God's laws can bring revival, wisdom, joy and light. We also take comfort and find joy in God's forgiveness for when we go off course (vv.12,13). What a joy to live our lives forgiven, loved and free by an all-knowing, gracious God!

Many will recognise the closing verse as these words are often used as a Prayer of Illumination before a Sermon. In this verse, David offers his words and thoughts as if they were an offering for the altar of God. These words do not/should not just be for Sunday mornings, but for each day as we rise from our sleep.

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

Paul writes this letter to the people of Corinth at a time when many problems had arisen in the Corinthian church. Rather than skirt around the issues at play, Paul cuts to the chase and turns their attention back to Christ and what lies at the core of the Christian faith – the message of the cross (v.18). This text fits well with the Season of Lent, where our eyes should be looking to the cross of Good Friday...

The message of the cross is one that jars with everyone when heard and reflected upon for the first time. For the Jewish audience, it was considered to be 'foolish' because the Messiah was not supposed to die. For the Greek audience, the idea of a bodily resurrection did not fit either. Even now, in 2021, the message of the cross still seems 'foolish' to a lot of people – coming to this world in humility and offering grace through faith and not by simply jumping through a variety of hoops seems foolish in the eyes of the casual observer.

The cross of Christ and the love of Christ are not aimed solely at the wise man, the scholar or the philosopher, but rather at all who accept Jesus as their saviour and Lord and trust that through Him, and through the cross, love conquers death and sin, once and for all.

### **John 2:13-22**

This is one of two accounts of Jesus clearing/cleansing the Temple; the a second one, about three years later, being documented in Matthew 22:12-17, Mark 11:12-19 and Luke 19:45-48.

As we read in verse 13, Jesus, like every Jewish male, had come to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to celebrate Passover. This was in accordance with one of the laws listed for proper Worship found in the book of Deuteronomy (16:16).

Jerusalem was at the centre of the religious and political world of Palestine. It was here that the Messiah's return was anticipated to take place. Jesus observed the Temple, God's house of worship being used to promote dishonest trade on the part of the money changers and merchants. He decides that it is time for God's work to return to the centre of the life of the Temple and proceeds to turn the tables of immoral commerce over. Jesus clearly sees the actions of the money changers and merchants as making a mockery of God, which brews a righteous anger within Him.

Turning our attention to Jesus' statement in John 19, the Gospel writer, in true Johannine fashion, gives us a theological editorial comment, where we learn that the "Temple" being alluded to is Jesus' own body. Jesus, God's only Son, was standing right in front of these people, but they were far more concerned about their precious building than the body of their Saviour. Would they have believed the claim any more if they knew who Jesus was?

## Sermon ideas

Over the course of 2020 and early 2021, we have had to adapt and react to new and ever-changing rules, regulations and laws as a result of the very unpredictable Coronavirus pandemic. While there are some who have been very outspoken about such laws and regulations, the majority of society has conformed to them in the name of safety and out of love and respect for those around them, be it family, friends, neighbour or stranger.

When you look at the Ten Commandments through this lens, coupled with the context in which they were given by God, we can see that such laws are given in love and are not a means of control or oppression, but rather, as we read in the Psalms, a means of promoting revival, wisdom, joy and light.

This Sunday, why not take time to think about the rules that we observe in our daily life, be it on the street or in the places we work or learn? After taking time to discuss these rules, take time to ask why such rules are in place and what society, school or the workplace would look like without them?

You could go on to look at how Jesus supplemented the Ten Commandments with two more, as found in Matthew 22:35-40. From here, you could show how Jesus reacted in John's Gospel when He saw people disrespect God and focus more on trade than Worship in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Following this, we can show how, like the laws and regulations we live by, some people question and struggle with the message of the cross as found in 1 Corinthians 1 and choose to view such a loving act as foolish. This allows us to weave a message that shows how God loves us enough to set caring and lifegiving boundaries and even loves us enough to send Jesus to demonstrate that God's love is eternal and, even when we break the rules and go off course, God is willing to go to the ends of the earth to show that to all who accept the gracious gift of grace and forgiveness as seen on the cross.

## Prayers

### Call to worship

*Some people have appreciated responses in a call to worship while worshipping online to allow for a sense of inclusion in the service:*

Through the creation of the universe

**You love us, Lord**

Through guidance, call and commandment

**You love us, Lord**

Through the gift of Your son, Jesus

**You love us, Lord**

Through our worship and our response to Your word

**We love You, Lord.**

### Thanksgiving

*When preparing to write this, it felt strange thanking God for giving us rules! With everything, context is important, so when I started to think of all that God has given us, the rules were but a stitch in the loving tapestry of gifts that we have received.*

Loving God,

We take time out of our busy lives  
to come before You this day  
and to offer You praise and thanks.

We thank You for this day  
and all the days of our lives.

We thank You for the world in which we live  
and do not always fully appreciate or care for properly.

We thank You for the ability to gather  
physically or digitally to praise You  
and learn from Your word.

Lord, You love us so much.  
You do not leave us to wander this world  
aimlessly and without boundaries.

We thank You that You love us so much  
that You gave Your people commandments  
in the name of love, harmony and respect,  
commandments that have stood the test of time  
and remain as valuable today as they did when given at Sinai.

Lord, You love us so much  
that You sent Your son, Jesus  
to teach us how to live and to love.  
Not only that, You demonstrated that love  
through the death and resurrection of Your only son.

Thank You, Lord.  
Amen

### **Confession**

*If you do not end up using Psalm 19, here is an opportunity to weave it into your service meaningfully.*

Good and gracious God,  
There are times when we choose not to follow the rules  
there are times when we stray off course  
there are times when we choose the path of sin.

In a time of quiet, we bring before You those times  
when we have failed to keep Your commandments  
when we have decided that we know better.

*Silence*

The Psalmist writes:

“Clear me from hidden faults.  
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
do not let them have dominion over me.  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”

Forgiven, loved and free  
We enter this time of worship with gratitude.

Open our ears to hear,  
our mouths to speak truth and justice  
and our hearts to love and care for Your people.

So be it. Amen

## **Intercessions**

### **Prayers of adoration and confession**

Lord God of all,  
we gather here  
as a Church family –  
a worshipping community  
to honour and to praise You.

We gather together –  
young and old,  
stalwarts and enquirers  
convinced and curious.

God of love,  
when we think of how hard it is  
for us all to get along in this place alone,  
we lament the times  
when we have been caught up  
in times of friction or discord within  
the community in which we worship  
the community in which we work  
the community in which we live.

*Pause*

Forgive us, God, we pray.

Today, as we reflect on the ways  
in which You commanded Your people  
to live alongside one another,  
may we be reminded of what it means to be a part of  
this church  
our community,  
our world.

May we journey into this time of worship –  
forgiven  
loved  
and free.

So be it. Amen

### **Prayers for others and ourselves**

*When writing this prayer, I took time to reflect on the Commandments once again. On the face of it, these should be easy to follow, but when we think of the situations faced daily across our world, we see where others struggle.*

Honour your parents.  
Don't kill.  
Don't commit adultery.  
Don't steal.  
Don't bear false witness.

That should be easy... no?

And yet, these acts are being committed  
all over our world, Lord.

All over Your world.

*Pause*

Although it may not be on our doorstep  
people are being mindlessly killed across the globe,  
as a result of unnecessary conflict,  
corporate greed  
and evil regimes.

And these people are part of our community too.  
For we all belong to You, God.

We pray for all who are mourning loss this day.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

Although it may not be hitting our bank balance,  
people are being robbed in every corner of this planet.  
Land and livelihood - snatched by corrupt governments.

Crippling interest rates from payday loans and credit cards  
are causing vulnerable people  
to lose their homes and possessions,  
despite some seeing this as the only way  
to put food on the table  
or heat and light their home.

And they are part of our community too.  
For we all belong to You, God.

We pray for all who are caught in the spiral of debt.

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer**

God of love,  
open our eyes and ears to these situations.  
Inspire and guide us to play our part in bringing about change –  
standing against injustice;  
speaking up  
and stepping up.

Inspire and guide those with the power to make a difference  
to act  
to intervene  
to save lives  
to rebuild  
and to restore.

Hear us, we pray.  
Amen

### **Blessing / Closing prayer**

Trusting that we are cared for and not controlled  
loved and not law-shackled  
blessed and not bound  
let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

And may the blessing of God Almighty  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you, those who you love  
and those you struggle to love  
now and forever  
Amen

## Alternative Material

This material has been supplied by kind permission of **Spill the Beans** and allows you to explore the readings or theme of the service in creative ways that include everyone gathering for worship.

New material from Spill the Beans is provided in the latest issues available from their [website](#).

We believe in telling story. This material is simply the **retelling of our faith stories**. It always starts with the story each week. Then each activity is simply a way to engage the story and enable children and adults to embed the story, capturing different aspects of it, highlighting different images that help us hold the story in our beings.

But we believe these faith stories ought to be able to **mingle with our own life stories**, our day-to-day experiences. So as activities are engaged, it is important to ask people to retell the faith story along with their own story of that week. It's the tangle of life stories with faith stories that perhaps make both real.

## Through the Season of Lent

### Sacred Space

You can offer a simple image each week that people take from the worship space and use more reflectively at home or in house-groups, building up a small collage of Lenten images that help them journey through the season during their own devotions. The objects are simple pointers that enable people to pause and think about the journey they are taking during the season and can be used in various ways:

- as a reflective object that links them back to the words from the previous week
- as an object to touch and hold as they pray
- as a focal point for house-groups or devotions for church meetings that continually bring the whole community back to the Lenten journey
- put in a special place or windowsill or mantelpiece where the collection will grow during Lent
- placed on a coffee table at home or other appropriate space throughout the season, growing as the season goes on: objects then can be played with or left in a particular shape such as a circle or cross or line that provoke questions from visitors

- carried in the pocket each week so they are constant reminders of the journey between Sundays in Lent

The objects are given to the congregation in various ways depending on the size and culture of your own congregation. Think carefully about this in your own setting.

**Theme:** *Laws and Love*

**Object:** A length of rough string such as sisal (or other natural rope). This can be sourced online.

## Bible Notes

### Turning the World Rightside Up – [John 2:13-22](#)

Only a couple of months after congregations have been dutifully singing about baby Jesus, no crying he makes, being the exemplar of mild, obedient, and good, we have today's revolutionary upheaval at the hands of an angry Jesus. He cries out in frustration at the crass commercialisation that had befallen the Temple under the burden of the laws and rules governing Temple sacrifices.

Without suffusing too much testosterone into these notes, this story is a perfect antidote to images of Jesus that portray him as the passive weakling getting sand kicked in his face. This story also helps us immensely to understand why Jesus made enemies as well as friends.

In John's gospel we find this incident placed right at the start of the narrative, just following the wedding banquet in Cana. It is a rich contrast between partygoing Jesus ensuring that the wine keeps flowing, and the regime-toppling Jesus who whipped up a frenzy in the courts of the Temple.

The fact this story was written long after Jesus' death and resurrection is made explicit in this account with the editorial notes and asides explaining how people had later interpreted these events, and seen the Scriptural importance of this act. It was an act of shocking disobedience towards the powerful rulers of the Temple, even if at the same time an act of great obedience to the justice and truth of his Father, whatever the cost to himself.

John's exploration of the importance of this event is made clearer by the connection he makes between the physical Temple and Christ's body (not found in the synoptic gospels). John, no doubt, places this powerful story so early in his gospel because he wants to give a clear indication right from the beginning that Jesus' Way would replace what people had known. Just as Jesus overturned tradition with the good wine served last in Cana, so he

overturns the tables in the Temple. The world is changing by the acts of Jesus, but in doing so, Jesus reveals the way the world is supposed to be.

Where law shackles and binds people unnecessarily and in order to maintain a system of abusive power, then love comes to turn it on its head.

Some churches are involved in leading an Easter programme for Primary 7 (approximately age 11) children called *The Easter Code* (available to buy from CVE Scotland <https://bit.ly/2YySDEy>). One of the privileges of running this event is seeing the children start to understand why it was that some people did not like Jesus and wanted to kill him. Otherwise it can be rather confusing how, in the space of three months, we go from celebrating the birth of an innocent child, to marking his violent death at the hands of the Romans.

In this particular story, we might ask, “Why didn’t Jesus politely ask the traders and money changers to leave?” His passion for his Father and to overturn the corruption that surrounded the institutions that should have served his Father’s will set Jesus on a collision course that was inevitable.

While the Temple leaders would have been furious with Jesus, so, surely, would have been the traders and money changers trying to earn their crust and unaware of how they defaced the Temple they thought they were serving. Which begs the question: what traditions do we cling to possibly without realising they too deface God’s holiness?

### **Retelling for young people**

*The ‘wondering’ questions are inspired by the Godly Play method of exploring stories. They are so phrased to invite and encourage interaction, but not to demand an ‘answer’, especially not a single ‘right answer’. There is much to be gained from simply wondering together, adults and children sharing thoughts on an equal footing, using our imaginations to delve into Jesus’ experiences and our own.*

## **'Mr Nice Guy'**

Some people think Jesus is Mr Nice Guy. I wonder what you think?

Here's a story about Jesus. He was going to the biggest church he knew in the biggest city he knew. When people went to that big church in those days, they had to buy an animal, maybe a sheep or a dove, and they gave the animal to God as a way of saying 'thank you, God' or 'sorry, God' or 'help me, God'.

But lots of people had no money to buy anything to give God. It wasn't fair. Surely God listened to people saying thank you and sorry and please help me, even if they had nothing to give God when they prayed.

Jesus walked into the big church and saw all the rich people selling their animals and making money. He saw all the poor people feeling sad, thinking God wouldn't listen to their prayers.

Jesus decided to do something about it. He chased the animals out and tipped the plates of money on the floor! "Get out of here!" he shouted, "This is a place for everyone to pray, it's not for shopping!"

I wonder why he did that? I wonder what he was thinking? I wonder what you think about Jesus not being Mr Nice Guy?

## **Activities**

### **Gathering**

Ask people to imagine that they had never worshipped with your community or fellowship before. What are the things that would encourage them to return?

Encourage people to look for positive ideas rather than focussing on the negatives! Though negatives can be illuminating too, so be prepared!

### **Welcome Song**

*You will need: music for the Fischy Music song ['Welcome, everybody'](#).*

If the song has not already been used in worship then sing the song and talk about everyone being welcome. Jesus wanted everyone to be welcomed in God's house and got angry when people did things which meant some people were not made welcome.

## Discussion starters

### Labels and Logos

Assemble some differently labelled clothes, trainers, mobile phones or pictures of well-known brand logos, or just brand names on bits of paper and place a selection of these in three different places. Split the group into three smaller groups and give each group about 3 minutes in each place asking them to say what kind of people they think would wear certain labels: they should come up with quite set ideas!

### Optical Illusions

Alternatively, you could look at a number of different optical illusions (you will find many online via a web search, or you can usually find books of optical illusions in the children's section of your local library). Explore the idea that there is more to some images than first meets the eye. The same can be true for people!

### Reflection

Gentle, meek, mild, insipid.  
What kind of Saviour is that?  
Wishy-washy, ineffective.  
Not someone we'd respect.

So why is it shocking to discover  
that Jesus is a man of passion,  
seized with righteous anger,  
wielding a whip,  
driving out those  
who drive out others,  
and make God's house exclusive?

Why should we be surprised  
that Jesus doesn't just speak out  
but takes action to ensure  
that all people, everywhere  
have access to the love of God?  
And that, following this feisty man  
means that we too  
must be people of action.

## Prayers

### Call to Worship

Leader: This is God's house,

**All: God bids us all welcome.**

Leader: These are God's people,

**All: God bids us all welcome.**

Leader: With empty hands and full hearts we come,

**All: God bids us all welcome.**

### Sending

We follow God

who leads us into the world.

We follow Jesus

the man of action.

We follow the Spirit

who gives us courage.

Father, Son and Spirit,

leading us on to make a difference

until all know the power

of the love of God.

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## Musical suggestions

Our online music resource is on the Church of Scotland website [here](#): you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for liturgical seasons and themes on the [Inspire Me](#) tab.

- Mission Praise 1 - “A New Commandment” - An opportunity to reflect on the new commandment given by Jesus in his Ministry
- “[Build Up](#)” [from the Album ‘Build Up’ by Fischy Music] – A great all-age song, reminding us that we can choose to show love and not hurt through our words and actions
- Mission Praise 760 – “When we walk with the Lord” – A reminder of our call to ‘trust and obey’
- “I have brought you out of Egypt” [Carolyn Winfrey Gillette] – An excellent hymn based on Exodus 20. (Tune: Nettleton)  
[https://www.carolynshymns.com/i\\_have\\_brought\\_you\\_out\\_of\\_egypt.html](https://www.carolynshymns.com/i_have_brought_you_out_of_egypt.html). This page also contains very helpful all age resources for The Ten Commandments
- CH4 485 – “Dear Lord and Father of mankind” – A good opening hymn with the first stanza seeking God’s forgiveness for the mistakes we have made
- CH4 567 – “Focus my eyes on you, O Lord” – An opportunity to reflect on keeping God at the centre of all we say and do

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