

## Third Sunday in Lent – Year A

### Third Sunday in Lent – 12 March 2023

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank the Faith Action Programme's Resourcing Worship Team for their thoughts on the third Sunday in Lent.

This material was written through conversation within the team, aiming to creatively incorporate the language of the Lectionary readings into the prayers, suggesting inclusive and participative ways of using this material in worship.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

An archive of resources for daily worship can be found on the Sanctuary First website:  
<https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/daily-worship>

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.

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## Introduction

As we continue the journey through Lent, our Lectionary passages provide more questions to reflect on and opportunities to encounter Jesus.

In the Exodus reading, the Israelites end up asking, “Is the Lord among us or not?” How are we noticing God through a sense of presence or absence?

The psalm calls us to enter into God’s presence to worship, to bow down before our maker and to listen for God’s voice.

Paul reminds us, in the Romans passage, that our endurance can help build our character and there are opportunities to know God in the midst of life’s challenges.

In the gospel reading this week we are called to worship in Spirit and truth, to draw deeply from God’s well of living water and to challenge our preconceptions around the inclusiveness of our worship.

## [Exodus 17:1-7](#)

We join with the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness. We hear them again asking why they were brought out of Egypt. They know fine well, yet they still complain, still do not understand that God provides. They had been journeying with fire and cloud as their guide – visible signs of the presence of God, yet they did not recognise that the provision of manna was the food they needed. The struggle to have the faith that where God calls, God will provide, is a crucial part of our journey as individuals and as communities.

The question in verse 7 can point us to the bigger question of, ‘where is God in the midst of our journey, in the midst of our thirsting and wanting?’ In these trying times, when it can be hard to know where God is, we need to understand and have faith that God provides in ways we may not expect (manna from heaven and water from a rock). The Israelites are still in the wilderness and even though provision comes, they are still in a liminal space, as they journey from the promise of God towards the fulfilment of the promise.

The Israelites need calling to order and Moses feels he is losing his authority over them. They appear to be fed up with their seemingly aimless wandering and now are tired and thirsty. Moses is exasperated with them, and after telling them off, turns to God for help. In their complaining, the Israelites presume that God is not among them (v7), but Moses is faithful and turns to God for resolution.

Moses' staff that he used to turn the Nile to blood must have seemed like the most powerful of totems and is likely to have been revered as such. Still, the changing of the Nile to blood may well have been in their minds and the same staff now draws pure, life-giving water.

God understands the problem and recognises the importance of symbolic gestures as well as meeting physical needs (cf. last week's reference to the bronze serpent in the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus). Moses has faith that God will be there beside him, as promised, when he performs the miracle.

## [Psalm 95](#)

This psalm can feel a little odd in the midst of Lent. In a time when hallelujahs are silenced, this psalm begins with a call for celebration – to worship, to make a joyful noise, not just to sing! There is movement in this psalm – from pilgrimage to procession, from raised hands and acclamation to being on your knees before royalty.

We end up in a position of recognising the sovereignty of God, who creates, sustains and journeys with a pilgrim people. The same God who, in cloud and fire and pillar of smoke, led the people of Israel to freedom and provided for them in the midst of wilderness.

We must recognise God's greatness and God's authority over all of creation. Worship is a spontaneous reaction of praise: music, noisiness and actions are an inextricable part of worship. We can rejoice in creation, God's greatness, steadfastness ("rock of our salvation", v1) and in the fact that we are a cherished part of that. In recognising our place in God's world, we also bow down and kneel in humility.

The Psalmist is encouraging those who are straying from the faith or losing heart that God can save them, but in verses 9-11 there is a change of tone. We need to realise that constant grumbling and mistrust comes with consequences, but thankfully even in the midst of this, God is merciful and gives us access to the water of life.

## [Romans 5:1-11](#)

How far God has gone to reconcile us with Godself! The passage starts with a beautiful statement – "We have peace with God". This is not about our inward peace per se, or about an absence of challenge or adversity, but rather being reconciled to God. This statement is

preceded by the word “therefore”, so we need to understand what has come before. Justification is through faith (even for Abraham, in Chapter 4) – we have infinite access to grace through our faith in Jesus.

Paul is writing out of his experience of peace with God in the context of facing trials and imprisonment. Through all of his experience, Paul was able to see opportunities to grow closer to God, as he picked up his cross and followed Jesus. Paul makes a link between suffering and endurance and character, but it is important to note that Paul does not say that God creates or imposes suffering. However, we are reminded that God is with us in the midst of suffering and lovingly walks with us.

We are saved by our faith while we are still weak (cf. God’s promise to Abram before he had set out on his obedient journey) – God’s favour and glory has already been given to us. Again, this does not mean we are exempt from challenging circumstances, difficulties or even disaster, but we are all ultimately called to grow and to be transformed.

Jesus’ death proves God’s unconditional love for us and we are invited into a new dynamic where we are no longer weak; we are reconciled to God, forgiven and have peace with God. In this new place of righteousness, we are invited to be Spirit-filled co-workers in the creative movement of God.

### [John 4:5-42](#)

Jesus’ conversing on equal terms with a Samaritan woman symbolises the breaking of a boundary between the people who were rejected and those who were chosen and the new invitation to all to come and know God and worship in Spirit and truth.

There is a big shift here from exclusion to inclusion as Jesus legitimises a Samaritan, and the fact that the Samaritan is also a woman is really powerful. Jesus is a foreigner here and because he has no means to draw water, he relies on the mercy of the woman at the well.

As they begin their conversations, the woman is drawn into the imagery and wants to know more, despite the social taboos. As Jesus continues to speak, she becomes even more receptive to the message. She pulls on the thread to ask if he could be the Messiah – would her community have heard about Him already? Jesus clearly states that: “I am he” – once again affirming His deity. Like the overflowing spring, the woman cannot contain the news and rushes off to tell the townspeople, despite the potential problems it might bring with regard to social norms. Despite the risk, the woman shared her story and convinced many from that city to believe.

## Sermon ideas

There are themes here of social inclusion, and of breaking boundaries in the passage from John. As Jesus and the Samaritan woman discuss ethnic issues and the difference between their religious practices, Jesus makes it clear that *where* we worship is not as important as *how* we worship and the norms around our views of who is included or excluded. This passage has a lot to say about power, gender, race and moving beyond dehumanising stereotypes.

Do not harden your hearts like the Israelites did. In the Exodus passage, the Israelites end up saying “Is the LORD among us or not?” With the movement in the psalm from call to worship to a prophetic word, we are asked in the text to listen to God’s voice. How might we unpack this for our communities in the context of our worship and our other gatherings? How are we making space to hear God’s voice? How are we recognising God’s voice? And ultimately, how are we responding to God’s voice?

The texts from this week remind us that we are called to worship in Spirit and truth; our endurance can help build our character and present opportunities to know God in the midst of life’s challenges; we are called to enter into God’s presence to worship and to bow down before our maker; we are invited draw deeply from God’s well of living water; we are called to speak across boundaries, to include and engage with all of people, and to recognise them as God’s beloved.

## Prayers

### **Call to worship** *based on Psalm 95*

Come let us gather

**In the presence of God and one another**

Come let us gather

**And worship God our maker**

Come let us gather

**We open our hearts to God.**

### **Prayer of confession / repentance**

God, even when we are far from You

You are gracious to us

and You call us Your children.

When we fall short of Your glory,  
be gracious to us  
and in Your mercy, forgive us.

When we are weak and give into selfish desires,  
be gracious to us  
and in Your mercy, forgive us.

When we act as enemies and sow division, forsaking the way of love,  
be gracious to us  
and in Your mercy, forgive us.

When we are boastful of anything but You,  
be gracious to us  
and in Your mercy, forgive us.

Amen

### **Prayer of thanksgiving / gratitude**

We thank You, faithful God,  
for Your steadfast love –  
in the times when we fall down and praise You  
and when we're so caught up in our present difficulties  
that we forget all that You have provided for us.

We thank You, all-embracing God,  
for Your example of inclusion and breaking down of barriers  
for the assurance that we are part of Your beloved creation,  
and that we are all welcomed into Your family.

Gracious God,  
thank You for the hope that comes from endurance  
and the knowledge that we are reconciled to You  
who loves each one of us beyond our imagining.

Amen

**Prayer for others / intercession**

As we worship together,  
may we know Your presence with us,  
inspiring us to worship in Spirit and in truth.

God of the living water,  
**Bring life, bring love**

There is so much going on  
in all of our lives and our communities,  
and we bring to you now the situations that are closest to our hearts.

*[Leave silence]*

God of the living water,  
**Bring life, bring love**

There is so much in the world that we do not see or hear about,  
situations that we can feel disconnected from.  
But God, You know all of Your children,  
You so loved the world,  
that You sent Your only Son.

God of the living water,  
**Bring life, bring love**

Where there are boundaries and barriers that exclude,  
meaning that some are left without dignity,  
where basic human rights are stripped away  
and access to even the most basic of needs is denied

God of the living water,  
**Bring life, bring love**

Where there is division and differences that cause fear,  
when the beauty of diversity is disfigured by mistrust and partisanship  
and Your children are excluded or made to feel worthless

God of the living water,



**Bring life, bring love**

**Amen**

**Blessing / Closing prayer**

*From Pray Now: Word of Life*

When waters rage,

God's peace.

When waters still,

God's awakening.

When water is scarce,

God's blessing.

When water flows,

God's grace. Amen

## **Alternative Material**

**Examen – finding a rhythm through Lent for you, your community and the world**

As we journey through Lent you are invited to consider what rhythm of prayer and reflective living may be helpful to you. Will you choose to fast from something, or choose to begin some form of practice? How will your journey through Lent allow you to consider the bigger picture of faith, and how will it play out in your relationships, within the context of community and how will your Lenten journey imprint upon Creation?

At the beginning of the day you may find it helpful to pray to God to raise your awareness of God's presence with you throughout the day.

This prayer by St. Anselm of Canterbury may be helpful:

O my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You,  
where and how to find You.

You are my God and You are my all and I have never seen You.

You have made me and remade me,

You have bestowed on me all the good things I possess,  
still I do not know You.

I have not yet done that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek You.

I cannot seek You unless You teach me  
or find You unless You show Yourself to me.

Let me seek You in my desire,

let me desire You in my seeking.  
Let me find You by loving You,  
let me love You when I find You.  
Amen

**At the end of your day, you might use the practice of the daily examen to consider where you were aware of God's presence, and how you lived.**

Take a moment to settle into the space that you have chosen, or find yourself in.

As you sit, take time to notice your breathing.

As you breathe, notice the noises and movement around you, how you are feeling within and without.

Let these things fade so they are not at the front of your mind.

Invite the Holy Spirit to be with you as you open up your heart and mind to hear God and to be attentive (use whatever words feel right for you).

### **Look back**

Think back over the most recent part of your Lenten journey – perhaps the past day, or the past week.

Notice moments of presence and absence. Give thanks to God for these moments, and try to see how God was present in that time with you.

Now take a few moments to reflect on these questions.

- How did I meet God today?
- How did someone else meet God through me today?
- How did I experience God's love today?
- How did I express God's love today?
- What might God be saying to me now?

It may be helpful to finish your time by saying the Lord's prayer.

Further material can be found on the Sanctuary First website for the journey through Lent and for worship gatherings: [https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/themes/article\\_new/the-third-day-lent-march-23](https://www.sanctuaryfirst.org.uk/themes/article_new/the-third-day-lent-march-23)

## Musical suggestions

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; 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 this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

- A suggested playlist of [songs for the Season of Lent](#) can be found online
- You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

### **Exodus 17: 1-7**

- CH4 153 – “Great is they faithfulness”
- CH4 167 – “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah”
- CH4 550 – “As the deer pants for water”

### **Psalm 95**

- CH4 531 – “My Jesus, my Saviour”
- CH4 802 – “We are here to praise you”
- “Our God is a Great Big God” – widely available

### **Romans 5:1–11**

- CH4 396 – “And can it be, that I should gain”
- CH4 459 – “Crown him with many crowns”
- CH4 466 – “Before the throne of God above”
- CH4 561 – “Blessed assurance”

### **John 4:5–42**

- CH4 348 – “Praise the one who breaks the darkness”
- CH4 503 – “I will offer up my life in spirit and truth”
- CH4 525 – “Have you heard the raindrops”
- CH4 722 – “Spirit of God, come dwell within me”

## **Reflecting on our worship practice**

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- While singing in our congregations is still restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?  
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/  
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?  
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?  
Did it function well as a whole?  
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?  
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?  
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/  
community?  
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?  
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

## Useful links

Up to date information for churches around Covid-19 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](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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