

Second Sunday in Lent – Year A

Second Sunday in Lent – 5 March 2023

The Faith Nurture Forum would like to thank the Faith Action Programme's Resourcing Worship Team for their thoughts on the second 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, we join Abram as he hears from God, we find words from Psalm 121 to help us along the way, an intriguing encounter in the dark between Jesus and Nicodemus and the reaffirmation that God's blessing is for all.

Some of the themes that emerge this week are faith and faithfulness; new ways of doing things; and our responsibilities for living up to God's expectations.

The conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus reminds us of our journey through the darkness of Lent. In these cold, dark days we need to draw deep from the darkness, just as seeds and bulbs are drawing from the dark earth where the goodness and nutrients are to be found while the sun does not rise as high in the sky or provide the warmth of summer.

[Genesis 12:1-4a](#)

This passage focuses on the promises of God and Abram as a blessing. God asks Abram to go and to 'be' elsewhere. This is pioneering, but the story also alludes to migration and the notion of being 'unsettled', of leaving the familiar to go into an uncertain future – how might this speak into our current context?

The passage also resonates with the idea of our responsibility for own behaviour and how this also draws a reaction from those we journey with, encounter on our journey, or those we choose to make community with as God says: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." Abram is being sent out, but not alone. You cannot be a blessing in isolation, so there is something about the significance of relationships in this short passage.

Abram is asked to go to a land that God will show him, so there is the promise of guidance from God. Although we read that Lot went with Abram, God is also going with them as they set off into the unknown, and will guide and bless them. This is not only a blessing for them, not only something that will shape the destiny of an entire nation, but is a universal call to be a blessing and to open up the blessing of God for all people to come.

[Psalm 121](#)

This is a psalm for the journey. A psalm of ascent used for pilgrimage, that links back to the passage in Genesis – being sent out, travelling. We are expected to be out and about, with

the knowledge that God will be at our side, looking out for us and protecting us from harm. Just as Abram left to follow the call of God and journey into the unknown, this psalm speaks into that same space. The opening verse carries the veiled threat of danger. The question in verse 1 about where my help will come from, is answered in the following verses and shows the deeper meaning. In lifting our eyes to the hills there can be recognition of the journey ahead, but the hills may also carry threat. There will be difficult spaces to move through or hidden dangers along the way, yet the hills also point to their Creator, the One who will help.

The psalm has a liturgical feel to it which can be seen with the change in voice (v3) from “I” to “You”. This may be a priestly voice speaking to the travellers as they set out, or perhaps it could be heard as the voice of the main protagonist speaking to their soul. You could also imagine the members of the pilgrimage reassuring one another.

We are reminded that God does not slumber. For the original hearers this would carry significant weight, showing that God is above all other deities of that era, who slept and rested. Whether we are coming or going, God is with us both in the light and the warm times as well as in the dark and the cold times.

There is lots to play with here for use in prayer and worship in your gathering, with much-needed words for a long fast through Lent, and for a journey with unforeseen challenges, where safety is not assured, but God’s presence is.

[Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#)

Who we are and whose we are – this is at the root of this complicated dialogue. The promise of God and the idea of Abraham blessing all who come after him is central. God is not saying that the blessing is for a particular group; this is a blessing for all from the very beginning and it is a result of God’s promises rather than our bloodline, that we might be considered God’s children.

The whole basis of God’s promise to inherit the earth is rooted in God’s trust in us, rather than the expectation of certain behaviour or achievements. As humans we will always fail to live up to the imagined ideal, but if we set out with the intention of doing God’s will, that is enough for God to bless us. The promise was made to Abraham before he had done anything at all, but with the faith of both God and Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. Paul expands on the idea of the inheritance being for just one nation to it being for the whole world (see also John 3:16). We are reminded of God asking Abraham (Genesis 15:5) if he can “look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able

to count them...so shall your descendants be”, as Paul lays out the idea of a cosmological blessing – one that renews all of creation and speaks to the creative power of God, “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (v17).

[John 3:1-17](#)

The cover of darkness in this conversation alludes to belief and unbelief. We must be careful with any language that portrays darkness as being bad and light as being good. There is scope within this Lenten darkness to dig into Nicodemus’ journey, and note that often the time of studying the Torah was in the darker hours, and is an interesting picture of journeying towards belief or faith.

We can too quickly land on verse 16, but Nicodemus’ sojourn in the night, as he discovers hidden meanings of “born from above”/“born again”, can be helpful as we work through Lent towards a fuller understanding of our own faith in God, who so loves the world.

Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus is more about faith than physical evidence. We need to look at things in a different way. Water and wind, like the Spirit – are impossible to catch hold of, but they definitely exist. We should stop trying to apply logical, worldly explanations to things that are of the Spirit.

Jesus gives testimony to things that have actually happened, referring to Moses in the desert. Jesus compares himself to the bronze serpent that the Israelites had faith in to save them. Jesus is our redemption and our faith in Him will give us eternal life – hope and release from condemnation, not just for us, but for the whole world. There are no limits on who is welcomed into God’s inheritance.

Sermon ideas

As we travel through the spiritual darkness of Lent, what is guiding us? The readings for this week reflect many aspects of our own journeys and our ultimate destination. God promises blessings to Abram, we are drawn to look up to the God who creates all things – including the threatening hills – as our helper, and we are reminded of the signs and wonders of the Spirit, who blows where She chooses.

As you gather to worship, where are the signs of God’s presence in your community and the lives of those come to worship?

Where has their help come from?

What are the stories of blessing and faithfulness that will sustain us as we journey through the darkness of Lent, through the uncertainty of modern life and the extra strains and stresses of post-pandemic life, of the difficult circumstances brought on by the fuel crisis and political and financial instability?

As we journey through life, who are our fellow pilgrims to help share our burdens and our blessings, our stories and our hopes and dreams? Do we have people with us who can remind us to look to the hills, created by our Loving God, who never slumbers?

As we gather to worship, we can learn, with Nicodemus, about deeper things beyond that which we can see. We can be encouraged to step out, as Abram did, facing the difficult choice to leave the familiar behind so that we might journey towards blessing. We might be reminded that there are many people who have left kindred and home, in search of such blessings. How will we welcome them, journey alongside them, and ultimately be a blessing to one another?

Prayers

Prayer of approach

God of love
we lift up our eyes
scanning the horizon

Where does our help come from?

Jesus our hope
we lift up our voices
praising Your name
Our help comes from the Lord

Spirit our guide
we lift up our hearts
seeking Your presence
Maker of heaven and earth

Three in one God
we gather together
to worship You. **Amen**

Wendy Lloyd, Weekly Worship 2020

Prayer of confession / repentance

Loving God,
You know each of us from before we were born.
You journey with us through thick and thin.
In the light, when we can see clearly
and the dark, when it can be difficult and confusing.

We confess that we do not always live up to Your expectations of us.
We often misunderstand, or do not listen.
We can be too hasty to judge or to write someone off.
When we are not awake to Your signs and Your presence,
please forgive us.
When we take a wrong turn or walk away from the opportunity to bless, or be a blessing
please forgive us.

Loving God, You know us and love us all.
In this moment of stillness, we bring to mind the times we have fallen short
and seek your forgiveness.

In Your mercy
hear our prayers.
Amen

Prayer of confession

Lead us deeper into Lent, O God
that we might better see
the places of our lives
You wish to change

God lead us

For when we live by law,
legalism and judgement
over and above
the freedom of faith

God forgive us

For when we take for granted
the many daily blessings

we enjoy in our lives
and fail to share with others

God forgive us

For when we neglect to value,
include and treat with justice
every person,
made in Your image

God forgive us

For when we are slow to understand,
make literal what is metaphorical
and deny the fullness of Your Spirit
in our community and lives

God forgive us

Thanks be to God
for Your immeasurable mercy,
available to each of us –
loving, transforming
and forgiving us.

Thanks be to God

Wendy Lloyd, Weekly Worship 2020

Prayer of thanksgiving / gratitude

Creator,

You made the rolling hills and painted the endless sky
You hold in Your hands the depths of the ocean and the expanse of the universe
Yet, You still have time for each of us.
You tend to the needs of Your children,
You listen to our whispers and to our cries,
You know our voices, and we thank You that we can know Yours too.

God with us,

We thank You that as with Abram whom you called to go,
You know our every move.

In every place and space we have the opportunity to encounter You,
to be transformed by Your presence and healed by Your love.

We are thankful for country, kindred and home,
and for the promise of future hope.

Jesus, Word of Life,
As with Nicodemus, You long to teach us Your ways.
For Your presence with us as we learn,
We thank You that even when we falter, You gently guide us,
When we do not understand or rush to the wrong conclusion,
You are patient and wait with us.

God,
You hold open Your hands of blessing for all.
As we offer our prayers and our worship
in adoration and thankfulness,
we know that in Your mercy You hear us
and in Your grace You guide us and love us.
Amen

Prayer for others / intercession

God of all,
You have called us to follow You.
You have called us to care for Your world and for Your children,
You have called us to be a blessing, not a curse.

When we look at our homes, our communities, and at the world around us,
we see signs of blessing,
we also see the need for love and care.

As we think of all the different families that make up this community of faith,
we remember those who are not with us today,
and those who need to know You are close at this time.

[Hold silence for people to bring to mind those they wish to pray for]

Lord in Your mercy
Hear our prayers

We think of our community
and all the different activities that take place in and around it,
all the people who have grown up here, or moved here in recent times.
We remember all those who live and work here,

who learn and play here,
who love and care here,
we bring them all before You now.

[Hold silence for people to bring to mind those they wish to pray for]

Lord in Your mercy
Hear our prayers

We think of our country
and all of the different decisions being made in parliaments and councils.
We think of communities facing many different challenges.
God, we pray for healing, for fulness of life
and for Your way of love to be the guiding rule.

[Hold silence for people to bring to mind those they wish to pray for]

Lord in Your mercy
Hear our prayers

As we think of the world that You so loved so much that You gave Your only Son,
as we continue to come and go,
we pray for Your guidance –
help us to be aware of the impact we are having on the planet and on others.

[Hold silence for people to bring to mind those people and situations they wish to pray for]

Lord in Your mercy
Hear our prayers

Merciful God,
help us to care for and to love all of Your children.
Inspire us to speak out truth to power and healing to division.
And may we be a blessing to all whom we encounter
and humbly receive the blessing from those who encounter us.

Amen

Prayer for International Women's Day

On this International Women's Day,
as we celebrate and give thanks for the achievements of women,
we remember the women who have played a part in our lives.

Those who have
nurtured us,
taught us,
inspired us,
loved us.

Forgive us when we have limited women
through inequality,
by stereotype,
by exclusion,
through lack of opportunity.

On this International Women's Day,
as we acknowledge the challenges women still face,
we pray that all women may know equality
of healthcare,
of education,
of wealth,
of prospects.

We pray that all women may know themselves to be
respected,
safe,
included,
empowered.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus
in whom there is neither male nor female.
Amen

Rev Rosie Frew, 2020

Blessing / Closing prayer

May you know the presence of God our keeper
with us by day and by night,
with us in our coming and going,
with us all from this time on and forevermore.

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

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.

- CH4 81 – “I to the hills will lift mine eyes” – links to Psalm 121
- CH4 118 – “Womb of life and source of being” – links to the gospel reading
- CH4 162 – “The God of Abraham praise” – links to the Genesis reading
- CH4 211 – “Today I wake” – links to Psalm 121 and the theme of journeying
- CH4 530 – “One more step along the world I go” – links to the Genesis reading and the theme of journeying
- CH4 533 – “Will you come and follow me” – links to the Genesis reading
- CH4 593 – “She sits like a bird” – links to the gospel reading and ties in with International Women’s day
- CH4 605 – “Thanks to God whose word was spoken” – links to the Genesis reading

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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