



Call to Worship

The cry of injustice calls us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross, as we prepare to celebrate Christ's rising from death.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us.

Jesus chose the way of risk; strengthen us to resist the easy option.

Together, we seek to follow your path to justice, rising to the call and demands of discipleship.

Hymn: STF 371 – *Breathe on me Spirit of Jesus* (Tina Pownall)

https://youtu.be/DMFZPqk2Q_Q

Breathe on me, Spirit of Jesus.

Change my heart, Spirit of Jesus.

Breathe on me, Holy Spirit of God.

Change my heart, Holy Spirit of God.

Fill me again, Spirit of Jesus.

Bring peace to the world, Spirit of Jesus.

Fill me again, Holy Spirit of God.

Bring peace to the world, Holy Spirit of God.

Opening Prayer

God of all Creation, of grace and love, we come to you at the beginning of this Lenten journey as we seek to turn away from our sin and be faithful to the gospel. In the words of the Psalmist, we ask you to create in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within us; restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us a willing spirit. May our journey be a holy one and this Lenten time be rich and transformational. Amen.

Scripture Luke 4:1-13 – *Jesus is tempted and chooses his way*

Reflection *Rising to the Call: How Do You Resist the Easy Option?*

In this scripture, Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil. We are told of three temptations, and in each case Jesus resisted. It would have been much easier for him to give in and do what the devil wanted.

Jesus was hungry and the devil pointed out the stones lying on the ground and told Jesus to prove that Jesus was the Son of God by turning the stones into bread. We are to understand from this scripture that Jesus had the power to do this but chose not to do so. Jesus resisted the easy option even when he was hungry and exhausted and his capacity to think clearly must have been diminished. He clung to the thought that he needed more than just bread to sustain him.

Another perspective is that Jesus saw all the stones in front of him and was tempted to turn them instantly into enough bread to feed himself and the world temporarily. By not being tempted or going for the easy solution, he was not only denying himself this food, but also others, for the long term greater good.

As we think about climate justice or any form of social justice, the solutions are complicated. Many of the easy answers that are dangled in front of us are either not sustainable or are insufficient in the long term. It is easy to throw our hands up and say that there is nothing we can do, or to pick the simpler tasks that fit easily into our lives and hardly inconvenience us. Like Jesus, we need to consider the best long-term solutions and goals and the steps needed to achieve them.

One of the prominent messages about climate change is the encouragement to reduce our reliance on meat and dairy consumption. Animal farming makes inefficient use of land, releases disproportionate amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and reinforces economic inequity between rich and poor nations. This argument can be full of emotion and when it is characterised as all or nothing, the starkness of the message can become a barrier too far for some. Reducing might be the first step and one we can take right now.

Many decisions we need to make are not clear cut between one strong positive and one negative - those are easy decisions which we could see as the low hanging fruit, but these easy decisions rarely have a big and lasting impact. The much more difficult decisions are where we are faced with no obviously good outcome, and we must choose the course which creates the least harm.

There is currently a Europe-wide panic about the economic impact of rising energy prices, and suddenly all the headlines are about the need to subsidise energy costs to protect the poor. Suddenly, political leaders have forgotten the need to accelerate our shift away from reliance on gas by switching to renewable energy. The low

hanging fruit for the politicians is to get the energy crisis off the daily news, and the quickest solution may prove the worst. The sustainable solutions are more difficult – support for better insulation, more efficient heaters, switch to renewable energy supplies.

The challenge that we hear in our scripture and question today is how not to be satisfied with doing the simple things, although they may still need to be done, but to also do the harder things that will lead to long-term transformation. Was Jesus able to resist the easy option because he drew strength from the scriptures, and he thought about how his actions would not achieve the desired long-term goal?

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance by all Christians. Nowadays, we focus on our relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something and to take up something and give of ourselves for others. Food often features in Lent – both in terms of fasting and in giving up particular items of food. As we do so, the hunger pains from fasting, or the yearning pains from giving up a favourite food, are supposed to make us pause for thought, spend time in prayer and so grow closer to God.

Consider:

- How do we move away from just doing the easy thing to doing some of the more challenging things?
- What easy thing will you commit to do during Lent?
- What harder thing might you take up for Lent?
- When did you regret taking the easy option?
- When have you taken the hard option? How did you find the power to resist the easy option?

Prayers

O God of hope, we hear the cry of injustice calling us to follow Jesus to the pain of the cross. A little of the light which has come into the world is snuffed out when we give in to temptation and reject the harder way. As we take this Lenten journey, guide us towards the darkness of the cross, emboldening us to rise to the call of each new challenge placed before us, as we trust in your promises, revealing the power of transformation, and the hope of resurrection. *In silent prayer now, lift up your concerns for creation and the world ... Now we join with the Methodist Church in this prayer for Ukraine:* Holy and Gracious God, we pray for the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia; for their countries and their leaders. We pray for all those who are afraid; that your everlasting arms hold them in this time of great fear. We pray for all those who have the power over life and death; that they will choose for all people life, and life in all its fullness. We pray for those who choose war; that they will remember that you direct your people to turn our swords into ploughshares and seek for peace. We pray for leaders on the world stage; that they are inspired by the wisdom and courage of Christ. Above all, Lord, today we pray for peace for Ukraine. And we ask this in the name of your blessed Son. Lord have mercy. Amen. *Our Father ...*

Hymn: STF 660 – *Called by Christ to be disciples* (Martin Leckebusch, © 1995, Kevin Mayhew Ltd)

https://youtu.be/_5fION6umzc

Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;

so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword –
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
make a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Blessing

Go from here filled with the Spirit's power to resist temptation and to rise to new challenges.
May God the Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer be with you now and evermore. Amen.