



WEST SUSSEX (COAST AND DOWNS)
METHODIST CIRCUIT

Worshipping Together

March 2022

Worshipping Together comprises an act of worship for the month, with a different set reading and reflection for each week, shared as a starting point for your own reflections. As you worship and draw closer to God, may God draw close to you, speak to you and journey with you beyond the words of these pages, strengthened by God's ever-present Spirit.

We invite you to use **Worshipping Together** at a time that suits you, in whatever way works for you, to spend time with God knowing that you are **Worshipping Together** with others across the circuit family.

Please share these resources with others.

Also available at: www.westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk

As you prepare to worship, you may like a period of quiet, or to light a candle. Become aware of God's already present presence.

GATHERING

Gathering to Worship¹

Let us worship the Lord in times of trouble.

You are our refuge and strength, our God in whom we put our trust.

Let us worship the Lord in moments of temptation.

You are our refuge and strength, our God in whom we put our trust.

Let us worship the Lord in the trials and triumphs of life.

You are our refuge and strength, our God in whom we put our trust.

¹ From All Age Worship Year C, Companion to the Lectionary, Joyce Barrass, p49

Sing: At the name of Jesus²

1. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

2. Humbled for a season, to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious when from death he passed :

3. Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast ;
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

4. In your hearts enthrone him ; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true ;
crown him as your captain in temptation's hour :
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

5. For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory, with his angel train ;
all the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Prayers of praise³

God immortal, God invisible, far beyond our human thought,
we praise you for revealing yourself as Three Persons and yet one God.

God, Creator and Parent; our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.
Jesus, our Redeemer; you lived a life of love, died and arose, offering us salvation.
Spirit, our comforter; you transform us, renew us and strengthen us.

God; our three-in-one and one-in-three,
To you, O God, be all glory and praise, now and forever. **Amen.**



² Caroline Maria Noel (b. 1932), Singing the Faith No.317

³ Adapted from 'Praying with the scriptures' by Neil Dixon, p38

Below are readings and reflections for each week of March.

These reflections are mere starting points, and you are encouraged to ponder and pray through and beyond what is written, as you listen and respond to God.

Lent as a journey of resistance

Week beginning Sunday 6th March

Reading: Luke 4:1-13

In our early years of marriage we only had 1 car. I would usually walk to work and my wife would have the car, but on the occasional days I needed the car, I'd have to drive her to work before I went on with my day. I remember one day I couldn't find my keys anywhere. I'd looked high and low and had to use my wife's keys to drop her off at work then came home again to find them. I was getting really frustrated and after some time of looking I paused, prayed and then immediately thought, have I looked under the coffee table? Low and behold, there they were.

The story of Jesus' temptation in the desert is one of resistance that leads to true contentment. Jesus is tempted to turn stones to bread to satisfy his physical needs (v3), to worship the devil to gain power and authority (v7), to test God's promises by throwing himself off the top of the temple to see if angels will save him (v9-10).

Take a look at Jesus' response to each of these temptations (v4, 8, 12). See how at each point Jesus resists these temptations by responding with quotes from scripture. Each time Jesus speaks, he speaks words which remind us to resist the allure of worldly demands for the sake of a strengthened relationship with God – offering us fulness of life, true contentment and unconditional love.

As we begin again our journey through Lent, may we each begin by being reminded to resist the temptations of this world, and to rest in God's truths.

Follow up:

Take some time this week to read some of your favourite passages of scripture. How do they or have they helped you resist worldly temptations in your life?



Protected under Jesus' wings

Week beginning Sunday 13th March

Reading: Luke 13:31-35

My Aunt & Uncle have a farm, and at one stage they had chickens in their orchard. During the day the chickens would roam free, but come

dusk, they had to bring the chickens into the coup to keep them protected from foxes. But even then, on occasion a fox did occasionally manage to somehow get into the coup and cause devastation.

In today's passage from Luke, Jesus has been approached by some Pharisees, warned that Herod wants Jesus dead. Jesus responds by saying king Herod is like a destructive fox, contrasted with his own desire to draw all those who care for under his wings like a hen does with her young chicks.

There were no modern-day chicken coups in Jesus' day, and while owners of chickens may have developed some protection from foxes and other predators, the hen's role of protecting chicks would be an exposed and vulnerable one.

That is the role Jesus longs to play for us. Jesus went on to Jerusalem as succumbed to the most horrendous and tortuous walk to Calvary, the place of his public crucifixion. Jesus spread his arms of love on that cross and we believe that through his sacrifice and resurrection 3 days later, we find forgiveness, acceptance and love beyond measure.

Jesus longs to protect us from the evil that wants to destroy the hope in our lives. The evil that says we are not worthy. The foxes that distract us from his immeasurable love. The Pharisees were not willing to receive his protection – not willing to trust in Jesus. Are you?

Follow up: Spend some time in prayer this week.

Ask Jesus to help you to see the evils around you which threaten your relationship with him, and nestle into Jesus' wings of love.

There is always hope for everyone

Week beginning Sunday 20th March

Read: Luke 13:1-9



Pilate is documented in the bible, and other historical documents as someone who did things that irritated the local Jewish population. Today's reading connects with one such story, when a group of Galilean pilgrims offering sacrifices in the temple had been slaughtered in the temple by Pilate's troops. Human blood mixed with the blood of animal sacrifices that were so central to Jewish worship – the Temple itself was meant to be a spiritual place of worship – and Pilate had polluted and desecrated it.

It's a gruesome event of history that might leave us wondering how on earth a human in a position of power and responsibility can be so inhumane. But the question Jesus is asked about this event is perhaps just as worrying. 'Have these Galileans suffered like this because they were worse sinners than other Galileans?'

There is a danger we all face, as Christian people to think of ourselves as holier than others. As less tainted by sin. History tells us the church has done much damage to itself by having an attitude of looking down its nose at other people, and too often it has resulted in people feeling rejected by the very community in the world they should have discovered a welcome.

Jesus responds with a parable of a fig tree that bore no fruit. The owner of the tree thinks it should be cut down, but the gardener, who knows about these things, says *wait a little longer, I'll give it some nurture and care, and let us see what happens next year.*

The parable teaches us that we should never give up on the hope that someone might bear fruit by repenting and turning to Christ. We are called not to be judge of others, but to nurture and care for all the trees in the orchard that is our community, with the conviction that there is always hope for everyone to discover the truth of God's saving grace.

Follow Up: Who is there in the circles of your life who you long to see discover Jesus for themselves. Make a list of their names and pray for them daily.

Where to find happiness and contentment

Week beginning Sunday 27th March

Read: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

The parable of the prodigal son may be a familiar one to you. Son number 2 comes of age and asks his father for his inheritance, heads off and lives the high life of parties and frivolity. But then the money dries up, he works and even eats in the squalor of the pigsty and decides to take the emotionally difficult journey back to his father to see if his father might allow him to work for him – not as a son, but a servant.

On seeing his son on the way home, the father runs to meet him, embraces him and throws a huge party to celebrate his return. Son number 1 isn't happy though, he feels like his brother is being rewarded for deserting them. Son 1 has done everything right, perhaps even borne extra responsibility as a result of his brother leaving the family firm.

The father gets why Son 1 feels this way – but also challenges him. Everything I have is yours, he says, but this is not about the money, it's about my love for you both. Your brother was lost, we thought he was dead – but he is alive and found.

In the money driven economy of the western world, it can be so easy for earthly riches and our societal and institutional responsibilities to become the focus of our living, activity and even our whole being. But this parable reminds us that what really matters to God is not our earthly activity, but our willingness to come to God, who is a perfect and loving parent, and find welcome and love beyond measure.



Follow Up: Luke 15 tells of 3 'lost' parables – the lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Lost Son. We often look at each separately, but there can be value in looking at the whole chapter together too. What threads and themes do you notice?

Sing & Prayerfully reflect on these words: Abba Father⁴

Abba Father, let me be
yours and yours alone.
May my will forever be
ever more your own.
Never let my heart grow cold,
never let me go,
Abba Father, let me be
yours and yours alone.



Prayers of Intercession⁵

Creator God, we pray that the hungry may be fed,
and that all humanity might come to know
the deeper satisfaction that comes from you.

We pray that the ill might be healed and made well,
and come to know the deeper wholeness
that comes from your healing touch on our human lives.

Saviour, we pray for leaders of our world,
that they may not exercise power for its own sake,
but exercise it with wisdom, justice and compassion.

We pray for those who feel powerless in the face of death, suffering and sin,
that they may know the power of your saving love.

Spirit of God we pray that our faith may not only give comfort and security,
but challenge us to follow Christ's way of suffering and saving love.

We pray that our faith might stand the tests of time and trouble
and offer hope to all the world.

We pray these and the prayers of our hearts in the name of Jesus who was
tempted as we are, but was faithful and lives forever more. **Amen.**

⁴ Abba Father by Dave Bilborough, StF no.439

⁵ Adapted from Companion to the Lectionary: Intercessions, by Christine Odell, p133.

Sing: Jesus the name high over all⁶

1. Jesus — the name high over all,
in hell, or earth, or sky!

Angels revere, and nations fall,
and devils fear and fly.

2. Jesus — the name to sinners dear,
the name to sinners given!

It scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heaven.

3. Jesus — the prisoner's fetters breaks,
and bruises Satan's head;

power into strengthless souls it speaks,
and life into the dead.

4. O that the world might taste and see
the riches of his grace!

The arms of love that compass me
would all the earth embrace.

5. His only righteousness I show,
his saving grace proclaim;

'tis all my business here below
to cry: 'Behold the Lamb!'

6. Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;

preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!'

Closing Prayer⁷

Loving, Caring, Welcoming God,

Take our resolve and strengthen it.

Take our determination and bolster it.

Take our weakness and transform it.

We offer our gifts and graces, time and talents, passions and deepest desires,
for service to you in building up your kingdom.

Fill us with the strength of your Spirit to keep us moving,

Fill us with the gentleness of Christ to come alongside us,

Fill us with the love of our creator to affirm us,

As we live for your praise and glory. **Amen**

Acknowledgements

Song words reproduced under CCLI Licence

Original material, formatting + editing by Rev Dan Balsdon

Bible texts from NRSV unless otherwise stated, www.biblegateway.com

Images reproduced under Creative Commons Licence.

⁶ Jesus the name by Charles Wesley, StFNo.357.

⁷ Adapted from All Age Worship Year C, Companion to the Lectionary, Joyce Barrass, p51