

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most
 High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty

All: **I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my
 fortress my God, in whom I trust.”**

MP 746

What a friend we have in Jesus

Opening prayer and the Lord’s Prayer

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
Let us pray:

Magnificent and ever-faithful God,
whose love has been present since the birth of creation,
your love is constant and surrounds us all.
When you called your people to follow you in faith,
you helped them through captivity and desert,
leading and guiding, supporting and strengthening,
and putting them back onto the right path when they made mistakes.
Your prophets spoke, and their visions encouraged your people
to dream and grow together in love and faithfulness.
Through your Son, Jesus Christ, your people heeded the call to
discipleship,
and witnessed healing, reconciliation,
and acceptance of outcast people.
We know that his road led to suffering and death on a cross,
and that his life was given for us all.
We know that good overcomes evil,
and death cannot destroy your love.
Forgive us when we are half-hearted in following Jesus:
when we find his footsteps too difficult to follow;
when the cross is too heavy a load for us to bear;
when we put 'self' before servant hood.
We thank you, loving God, for your constancy and care,
and for Jesus, through whose life and death you show us how to serve,
how to be strong in weakness, and in the power of love.
May we serve you, in grace and love,
holding Jesus close to our hearts,

and may our praise and thanks be unceasing.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever. Amen

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 4:1-13 (NT page 1030-1031)

Reader: Margaret Peden

Romans 8:31-39

31 What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Background

Luke makes strong connections with the Old Testament in this case with Moses who also fasted forty days and nights and the people of Israel also was in the wilderness forty years. It is also very important to Luke to portray Jesus not only as fully human, being tempted by temptations but also as God, who could overcome them.

Jesus acts as a typical Rabbi of his time by appealing to the Old Testament scripture. But He use it as his authority.

The three texts from Deuteronomy (6:13, 16; 8:3) cited here (4:4, 8, 12) were commands given to Israel when Israel was tested in the wilderness. Unlike Adam, another “son” of God, who sinned (3:38), Jesus overcomes the tests.

The devil’s first test of Jesus is the sort of feat ancient thought attributed to magicians, who claimed to be able to transform themselves into animals and to transform other substances, like stones into bread.

The world did not belong to the devil. Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:13, 14, a commandment anyone who worshiped the devil would obviously violate.

The devil takes Jesus to a part of the temple overlooking a deep valley; a fall from there would have meant certain death. Later rabbis acknowledged that the devil and demons could handle Scripture expertly; here the devil cites Psalm 91:11–12 out of context, because 91:10 makes clear that God’s protection is for events that *befall* his servants, not an excuse to seek out such dangers.

Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:16, which refers to how the Israelites had tested God at Massah by refusing to accept that God was among them until he wrought a sign for them (Ex 17:7).

So what do make of this text?

It was important for Luke to tell his readers that Jesus was the expected messiah, Immanuel God with them. It was important to portray Jesus as the man of honour, the Man who not only had an answer for the religious leaders but also for the BIG enemy, the devil.

MP 626

Teach me Thy way

Sermon

For many of you, it would have been quite strange to hear Romans 8 being read out, as it was not on the printed order of service. SO if you are

wondering, I will tell you the reasons why I picked it after completing the printed order of service.

I completed the order of service and my sermon before I flew to Manchester on Friday.

I was quite happy with the sermon I prepared. But as I was waiting to board my flight, I suddenly realised that I cannot preach the sermon I already prepared. In fact I realised that I cannot read the text from Luke without reading and understanding the meaning of Romans chapter 8 verses 31-39. It was then that the full meaning of Luke's reading struck me almost for the first time. I also started to think differently about the season of Lent and Easter.

Let me explain. Friday was a long and difficult day, a day where I wished I could carry some of the burdens of the parents and children I met. I met one couple with a wee boy in a wheelchair. They were chatting to Vicky and David and wishing them well. After I was introduced to them, I heard their story. Their wee boy had an unknown near death experience. He "just" died for no known reason but after about 20 minutes the doctors resuscitated him. It left him with damage to his brain. When Vicky asked them about his progress, the father said: "The doctors said he will not be able to walk or even talk normally, but we do not care. Our son is alive, and who knows maybe one day he will". I could hear the love and the affection of the parents and in that moment realised their gratitude.

When I was sitting and waiting to board my flight I could not stop thinking of these parents. If they loved their wee boy so unconditionally, how much more is God's love for us. He loved us so much that He overpowered the devil, sin and death on our behalf as it is written in Luke chapter 4 and Romans chapter 8.

The apostle Paul wrote this amazing chapter 8 to the believers in Rome. He told them in no uncertain terms exactly what their true destiny was as believers of Christ. Although they face tragedies, persecution and hardship on a daily basis they need to know that Christ is with them because He suffered too on their behalf. But He overpowered hardship and death for them and on their behalf. They have a new future and a new existence in Christ namely the kingdom of heaven. Nothing on this earth or beyond this earth can ever separate them from the love of God – not even death.

And this is the message to us all. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. The only thing we need to do is to ask Him to be a part of our lives and our journeys on this earth. If we do ask him – we can be certain of His presence in our lives and on our journeys. He will be with us. He will support us.

Lent is a journey where we need to learn what gratitude is and why we need to rely on God every second of it. It is not about you and me, and how well we can manage not to succumb to trails and temptations. It is not about how well abstain from all sorts of worldly temptations. It is about Jesus Christ who loved us so much that He overpowered the devil, death, sin and hell for us all.

Lent is a time of rejoicing and praising God. There are so many things that are wrong and unfair but God is in charge. We need to trust Him. He loves us so much and will do everything in His power to protect us and do the best He can to make our lives meaningful.

Lent is also a time of responsibility. Love is not a feeling that passes. It is a commitment of sacrifice and service. We need to work hard on our relationship with God. We need to devote ourselves to a life of prayer and service to His Holy Name not only Lent and Easter and Christmas, but all year long, every second of every day.

Life is precious and not something that you or I can control. Let's be thankful for all the things we receive from God's hand and stop our moaning about ordinary senseless things, stop our complaining about our healthy children's routines who can be such an "inconvenience".

Vicky said something on Friday that will stay with me for the rest of my life. She was telling the story of a nurse who complaint about the hassle she is experiencing to organise her child's first birthday party. Vicky said she could not help herself and said to her: "You are so fortunate to have the opportunity to organise his first birthday party. I just so wish to get out of this hospital, hold my baby and be a normal family".

I guess we can indeed be thankful for all the graces we often do not see...

May we focus this Lent of all the miracles we do not see, and help each to recognise God's hand in the ordinary things of everyday life. Nothing can ever separate us from his love, not even the fact that we live in a postmodern world with modern gadgets...

Amen