



Sunday 21st February First Sunday of Lent

Leader Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

All **and also with you**

Welcome



Hymn **Forty days and forty nights**

Forty days and forty nights
Thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted and yet undefiled.

Sunbeams scorching all the day,
chilly dew-drops nightly shed,
prowling beasts about Thy way,
stones Thy pillow, earth Thy bed.

Let us Thy endurance share
and from earthly greed abstain,
with Thee watching unto prayer,
with Thee strong to suffer pain.

Then if evil on us press,
flesh or spirit to assail,
victor in the wilderness,
may we never faint or fail!

So shall peace divine be ours;
holier gladness ours shall be;
come to us angelic powers,
such as ministered to Thee.

Words by George Hunt Smyttan
Music by Martin Herbst

Opening activity *Finding the way*

Confession

Leader The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart God will not despise.
Let us come to the Lord, who is full of compassion,
and acknowledge our transgressions in penitence and faith.

All **Lord God, we have sinned against you;
we have done what is evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrong doing and cleanse us from our sin.**

**Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Absolution (*The priest proclaims God's forgiveness*)

Leader May Almighty God,
who sent his Son into the world to save sinners,
bring you his pardon and his peace, now and forever.

All Amen.

Collect (*Prayer for the day*)

Leader As we gather up our prayers to God let us pray for a return to
the discipline of Lent.

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen

Connect Group *Waako Connect group*

Song **Heaven is in my heart**

*O, heaven is in my heart
O, heaven is in my heart*

The kingdom of our God is here
Heaven is in my heart
The presence of his majesty
Heaven is in my heart
And in his presence joy abounds
Heaven is in my heart
The light of holiness surrounds
Heaven is in my heart

His precious life on me he spent
Heaven is in my heart
To give me life without an end
Heaven is in my heart
In Christ is all my confidence
Heaven is in my heart
The hope of my inheritance
Heaven is in my heart

*O, heaven is in my heart
O, heaven is in my heart*

*O, heaven is in my heart
O, heaven is in my heart*

We are a temple for his throne
Heaven is in my heart
And Christ is the foundation stone
Heaven is in my heart
He will return to take us home
Heaven is in my heart
The Spirit and the Bride say
'Come!'
Heaven is in my heart

*O, heaven is in my heart
O, heaven is in my heart*

God is so good
God is so good
God is so good
He's so good to me (*Repeat*)
Amazing grace,
how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now I'm found
Was blind but now I see

*O, heaven is in my heart
O, heaven is in my heart*

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Bible readings

Exodus 13:17-22 – Nicola Cadet de Fontenay, St Peter's

¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." ¹⁸So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

¹⁹Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place."

²⁰After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. ²¹By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. ²²Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

John 14:1-7 – Mary Angus, St Peter's

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

⁶Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Sermon – Rachel Johnson – *I am the way*

What's the worst journey you've ever been on? Mine was about 10 years ago when Eliot and I had the misfortune to be invited to two weddings on the same day. The second one was in a castle and we didn't want to miss out on what promised to be a good party so we came up with a cunning plan – we worked out that if we abandoned the children with nana and left the first wedding after the speeches, we could hot foot it down the M27 and get to the second one in time for the bacon rolls. Great! Except that when the day came it was the most atrocious weather you can imagine. We're talking monsoon level here. If it had been a football match it would have been rain 37, windscreen wipers 0. It was really scary to be driving in so pillar of fire guiding the way would have come in quite handy. Unfortunately, between my faulty sense of direction and our complete inability to see the road signs we ended up in the wrong town. We did finally make it and it was a good party but if we'd known quite how dreadful that journey would be I'm not sure that we would ever have set out.

Our first reading drops us into the beginning of one of the most famous and challenging journeys of all time, the Exodus from Egypt to Canaan. What's it like to be setting out on that journey?

Imagine you're a Hebrew slave, settling down to sleep after a long day of digging and carrying and building. Your hands are sore, your back's aching, your stomach's not quite full enough, your blanket's not quite thick enough. And all you have to look forward to is another day and another day and another day and another day of the same hard labour, building homes and temples for the Egyptians. Until the day Moses comes and challenges Pharaoh. Your hopes ebb and flow like the river Nile as Pharaoh's heart softens and hardens, softens and hardens. Then the day finally comes when you're free to return to the promised land, the place where God dwelt with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The place where he'll dwell with you. And at first the freedom is exhilarating but one night, as you settle down to sleep, with Pharaoh's soldiers at your back and empty desert in front, you just begin to wonder: It's been generations since your ancestors left for Egypt. There are no maps marked Canaan, no sat navs ready to plot the quickest route, no trail of breadcrumbs to follow – does anyone know how to find this promised land? Is God even waiting there for you or are you chasing after a dream? Look again. God isn't waiting for you in the promised land, he's come here in a pillar of cloud and a pillar

of fire, to travel with you. To dwell with you on your journey. To lead you through the desert. You don't need a map, you just need to follow where God leads you. God knows the journey won't be straightforward even with someone to follow, in fact it will last 40 long, footsore years; so will you follow the pillars of cloud and fire all the way to the promised land or head back to the familiarity of Egypt?

Let's skip 1500 years or so. You're living in the promised land but it's hardly flowing with milk and honey, instead it's flowing with Roman laws and Roman taxes and Roman punishments. Day after day after day after day of submitting to Caesar and dreaming of freedom. Until the day Jesus calls you to follow him and leaves you dizzy with hope. But three years on he declares that he's returning to his Father's house to prepare an abiding-place for you. What kind of compass can point the way to heaven? In his confusion Thomas speaks for you all: "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Listen again. Jesus is coming back for you, to take you with him. And Jesus doesn't just know the way, he is the way. All you have to do is follow him. Jesus knows following him won't be easy, it will lead you through the fear and grief of the crucifixion, and on towards persecution and martyrdom; so will you remain faithful to Jesus or turn tail and head back to your fishing boat?

These stories of hardship and fear and hope resonate with our own experiences, don't they? God knows we're in a difficult place right now. Day after day after day after day of isolation, depression and exhaustion. Our hopes ebbing and flowing with good news about vaccines, bad news about new covid variants, fear for today and uncertainty about what tomorrow will bring. I mean, I look forward to the promised land, I really do. I look forward to singing with the angels and being able to hug my friends and asking Paul what he meant in 1 Corinthians 11 and being able to see God face to face. But it seems so far off and the journey there isn't always easy. In fact, as Steve reminded us a few weeks ago, we shouldn't expect it to be easy – if we never face hardship or persecution then we're probably heading the wrong way. So how do Jesus' words – 'do not let your hearts be troubled' – take root in such a hostile environment? How do we take hold of the peace and security they offer?

Let's have another look at these stories. They're both about journeys towards a dwelling place or abiding-place with God, a place to live in peace and safety and fullness of life. A place I'm sure you long for as much as I do. For the Hebrews that place was Canaan but the pillars of

cloud and fire were symbols of the fact that God already dwelt with them. The promised land wasn't just in Canaan, it was right there in the desert. In John's gospel we see this same intertwining of the journey and the destination. To follow Jesus is to abide with Jesus and to abide with Jesus is to abide with the Father. The abiding-place we're journeying towards and the peace it offers are also present here and now. Like we sang earlier, Heaven is in my heart. But we can't experience the joy of abiding with God unless we're on that difficult journey with him. I wonder if that's why the Christian life is such a paradox, where Jesus invites us to lay down our burdens but also take up our crosses. We can't have one without the other, at least not in this world. So is it worth it or would you rather follow an easier path?

If you're my sort of age you might remember a film called Under Siege. It's a bit of a guilty pleasure of mine. In the film a group of terrorists take over a US navy warship and it's left to a cook, a model and the maintenance crew to take back the ship. Fortunately for them the cook turns out to be an ex-navy seal – the US equivalent of the SAS – and he has a plan. Telling the others to stay put, he heads off to confront the terrorists but the model comes running after him, heading into danger. When he tells her to go back where it's safe, she responds 'the safest place on this ship is right behind you'.

The safest place on this ship is right behind you. I'm glad to say God's never called me to storm a navy warship but he has called me to marriage, to special needs parenting, to school assembly halls and Sunday School classrooms and into the pulpit. God clearly has a sense of humour! Others of you he's called to the mission field, the hospital, the care home, the single life, the homeless shelter, the brownie pack. Sometimes these are difficult places, even dangerous places to be. Even so, "the safest place on this ship is right behind you". However difficult or dangerous it might be, the safest place, the most peaceful place on this journey of life is right behind Jesus.

But following Jesus isn't just about those big life decisions, it's about the little things we do every day. The supermarket worker restocking the baked beans and picking up some shopping for their elderly neighbour. The nurse holding the hand of a dying patient and quietly committing them to God, the busy mum or dad finding 10 minutes of quiet to let God revive their soul and forgiving their spouse for doing that annoying thing for the 798th time and reading a Bible story with their children, the

teacher calling to check up on a vulnerable student and give them an encouraging word, the retiree praying for that nurse, that mum or dad, that teacher, that supermarket worker, lifting them to God at a time when they're struggling to pray for themselves.

Following Jesus looks like serving the weak, welcoming the outsider, challenging injustice, sharing the good news and resting in God's presence. Following Jesus looks like all those ordinary and extraordinary acts of love that Jonathan was talking about last week. Following Jesus looks like trusting that the safest place on the ship is right behind our Saviour, the way, the truth and the life.

Hymn *Oceans*

You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep my faith will stand

*I will call upon Your Name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours and You are mine*

Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed and You won't start now

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger
In the presence of my Saviour

*I will call upon Your Name
Keep my eyes above the waves
My soul will rest in Your embrace
I am Yours and You are mine*

Creed *This I believe (song)*

Our Father everlasting,
the all creating One.
God Almighty
through your Holy Spirit
conceiving Christ the Son,
Jesus our Saviour.

Chorus 1

*I believe in God our Father.
I believe in Christ the Son.
I believe in the Holy Spirit.
our God is three in one.
I believe in the resurrection,
that we will rise again
for I believe in the name of Jesus.*

Our Judge and our defender
Suffered and crucified,
forgiveness is in you.
Descended into darkness,
you rose in glorious life
forever seated high.

Chorus 1

Bridge

*I believe in you.
I believe you rose again.
I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord.
(Repeat)*

Chorus 1

Chorus 2

*I believe in life eternal.
I believe in the virgin birth.
I believe in the saints'
 communion
and in your holy Church.
I believe in the resurrection
when Jesus comes again
for I believe, in the name of Jesus*

Prayers ~ *Jacque Still, St Peter's*

Heavenly Father, thank you for once again bringing us safely to this your Sabbath Day. Thank you, that as the light returns to this part of your world and lengthening days are lifting our spirits, we can hold on to the hope you bring that this season of pandemic is beginning to ebb. Thank you, Lord for your Faithfulness – In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.

Lord, as we reflect on the coming spring season, we do remember those before you for whom this time has brought profound change to their lives: For those who have lost loved ones far too soon; for lives still in limbo as they continue to suffer with Covid 19; for those suffering other diseases where time has run out as delays in treatment have pushed their illness beyond the care of Doctors. Father, we seek your presence, hope and peace for them. That they may find life again, in all its abundance, in Jesus. An eternal life without the confines and sadness of mortality. Lord we ask it in Jesus life bringing Name – AMEN.

In our own family of faith, we remember before you those who grieve and mourn. For the families of Barbara Thirst, Bill Smith, Reg Clarke and Daphne Whindle. May you hold them as their world spins round.

We pause for these and for those whose journey is difficult through illness. Especially Eileen and Peter Bliss, Patrick Chapman, Enid Hardman, John Hunter, Lynda Kirk, Catherine McCormack, Olive Park, Malcolm Pritchard and Joy Storkey. We pray for your rod and staff to comfort them. In Jesus Name we pray, AMEN.

At the beginning of this season of Lent, we reflect on the tumult of the passing year.

We pray Lord for mankind in this world. Help us all to reflect on the lessons that are there for us to learn from you. What in this have you been teaching us? Help us to learn, help us to change, dear Lord.

For our world leaders who have been powerless in front of an invisible enemy. May they learn they only govern as you allow them to. Grant them wisdom to lead under your authority. AMEN

We pray for the areas of the globe, war torn, famine stricken, natural disaster prone for whom the pandemic has magnified these already awful conditions. We pray for the peoples of these places, that some how aid would reach them, and your love would find them. AMEN

We pray for the roll out of the vaccine and thank you for the skills you have given scientists to find this. May all countries have access to this help, may those who have more give to those who have less, for unless all are safe, none will be safe. AMEN

We give you thanks to all key workers who have risen to the challenge of this time. All the worlds healthcare professionals who have stood and faced rising tide of infection knowing they had no defence against it either; for our teachers and trainers who have continued to inspire us to learn through difficult times; for our transport workers and council heroes who have kept the normal, normal. For our home working parents zooming to juggle work, teach kids and keep animals out of screen shot as they try to find the mute or stop video button. For all our lonely, both older and younger, for their courage to stick to the rules because it matters to all. For our society and each that has played a part during this time – that all of us may reflect on this season and be changed by it. To look beyond ourselves, for only you are the answer, to love our neighbour as we love ourselves, to let go of the expensive things and hold onto those

who are dear to us. To take this opportunity to hear your call, Lord Jesus – AMEN.

Lord we give you thanks for the constancy of parish life. For all behind the scenes who have enabled us to remain connected. To not stop meeting together, even in a virtual environment, to continue to break bread together and to teach and to pray. We pray for the team as they continue to serve you faithfully. For your generous and overflowing Spirit to continue to fill them and inspire them. Grant them wisdom in the way ahead. We pray to for ourselves, that you would bind us together in love as your family here in South Woking. Help us to serve you in this place. Help us in Jesus Strength and Jesus Name – AMEN.

Lord, thank you for this season of our lives. The ebb and flow, the sunshine and rain. Without the rain how would the flowers in our lives grow; without the sun how can we see the way forward and reach for your horizon. Without a pillar of fire, how could the Israelites know you were there in the darkest of night; without the pillar of cloud how would they know the way in the day. Father as we look to the future, be thou our vision, O Lord of our hearts; naught be all else to us save that thou art, thou our best thought by day or by night, waking or sleeping, thy presence our light. In Jesus Name, we pray – AMEN.

The Lord's prayer

Leader As our Saviour has taught us so we pray.

**All Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Notices – see *N&N*

Hymn **Guide me O thou great Redeemer**

Guide me, O thou great redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream doth
flow;
Let the fiery cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:

Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and
Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's
destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs and praises, songs and
praises,
I will ever give to thee.

Blessing

Leader Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing...

All **Amen.**

Leader Go in the light and peace of Christ.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

Worshipping ▶ Loving ▶ Sharing ▶ Growing

