



## Strathearn Episcopal Churches 21 February 2021

During these restricted times there will continue to be a weekly zoom service and chat (see the Notices at the end for the link) and on Sundays there will be a Provincial service online which is broadcast each Sunday at 11 am <https://www.scotland.anglican.org/broadcast-sunday-worship/>

### Collect

**Almighty God, whose Son fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are but did not sin, give us grace to discipline ourselves in submission to you Spirit, that as you know our weakness so we may know your power to save, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.**

*Hymn: Forty days and forty nights* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9N29ZnwU4LM>

### Readings: Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup>'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' <sup>12</sup>God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' <sup>17</sup>God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'



### 1 Peter 3:18-22

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who in former times did

not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup>And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

### ***The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark 1:9 – 15***

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’



Hymn O God you search me and you know me

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEGc3\\_D19Vo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEGc3_D19Vo)

### ***Reflection by Revd Gennie***

Throughout the country, in the past year rainbows have appeared everywhere, from coloured stones, to painted pictures in the windows of homes and shops. They have been offered as a sign of hope that all will not be lost and healing will come. They have been associated with gratitude for the work and self-sacrifice of NHS staff and other key workers during the pandemic. The rainbow was already seen as a sign of inclusion and welcome, forming an arc over people regardless of sexuality or race, as well as finding a place as a symbol of change or of peace across different religions and peoples. In Genesis, it is a sign of the covenant between God and all the earth, every living creature of all flesh; that the waters shall not again destroy. The rainbow is set in the sky after the flood, not as a sign for humanity but as a reminder for God, in order that when God sees it, God will remember not to let the flood water destroy life again. So, it is not primarily a reminder for us, but rather a sign that reassures us that God remembers us, remembers that even though we will go wrong, that the waters will not again overwhelm the earth.

Creation narratives explain the existence of the firmament (vault) that holds the waters above and keeps them from the waters below in a domelike barrier. Once the firmament is punctured, chaos ensues, but now God has promised to maintain the structure and keep life safe.

There will be echoes of the flood in the baptism of Jesus, being enveloped by the water but rising out of it, to signs and symbols of hope and belonging, as the beloved Son is remembered by God.

Each year we begin lent with how Jesus goes from hearing God's voice at his baptism saying that 'he was well loved,' and 'in you I am well pleased' to then 'immediately' being sent away into the desert, with wild beasts, hunger, struggle and to be tempted by evil. It's not quite what you'd expect really. It is as though God the father is saying 'I'm pleased with you but go away, into the desert and have a hard time.'

People sometimes think that if they're having a hard time then they must have done something wrong. When desert or hard times come, then God must be punishing them. But it's not like that. God doesn't punish his people. God's love underpins and sustains creation. God's love is in the physics of the universe, in the way that light can be refracted in a rainbow. This is why the readings today include Noah, with the promise that God will not destroy us, for God loves us.

There are all sorts of wilderness or desert experiences that we can undergo, for example: when your prayer just seems empty, or you're lonely, or there is just too much pain in your life, or exhaustion from caring for someone, or you can feel lost, or maybe worried and frightened as you don't know how you are going to survive the future or times of frustration and discouragement.

All these situations can be wildernesses.

When these things happen, it is easy to think that God is displeased with you, that God is sending a message. But we see from the gospel today that God the Father wasn't displeased with Jesus when he went into the desert. The desert just was, and through this time he was able to work out who he was and what he had to do, his mission.

St Ignatius hundreds of years ago, wrote some rules for growing in the faith, and in the section of rules for beginners, he said, when in a time of desolation, in desert times:

**'don't panic' ...**

Well, that's my translation, he really wrote,

'In times of desolation, we should never make any change but remain firm in the resolution that had guided us before the desolation...'

And he goes on to say, sometimes we need to do the opposite of what the desolation feels like, so if the feelings say, stop praying - then keep going, if you feel tempted to stop reading your bible, keep going, I'd normally add 'keep coming to church' but we can't do that at the moment so instead keep connecting in some way, whether it is through Zoom or YouTube, or radio or?

St Ignatius says that, even if it feels like a desert for a while, hang on, things will change...

There are some hard deserts in this life, and most of you, here, will have known them at some point. I guess the greatest encouragement from this reading for me today, is that Jesus went into the desert. In Hebrews 4:15 it says *'For we do not have a high priest who is*



*unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in **every respect** has been tested as we are, yet without sin’.*

There is no desert on earth today that is so remote, so lost, so seemingly inhospitable to life that Christ has not walked there first, where God’s love can reach.

I think this is why we also have the reading today from Peter. Verse 18 says, ‘Christ died once for your sins... to bring you to God’, and into verse 19 ‘**Christ then preached to the Spirits that were being kept in prison’**. The usual interpretation of this verse, shows that even those who are dead, (in prison) will still get an opportunity to say yes to Christ, even those who haven’t heard of Christ.

This reading is also read on Holy Saturday, the day after Good Friday.

I’m sure you all know the story of the Sunday school, where the kids were told that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Sunday on a donkey, died on Friday, rose again on Sunday, and then were asked by the teacher, ‘So what happened on the Saturday?’. One child answered, ‘Jesus was in hell, looking for his friend Judas, and bringing him back...’

There is no desert on earth today, that is so remote, so lost, so seemingly inhospitable to life that Christ has not walked there first, where God’s love can reach.

But, I want to say something else about deserts, this is, that despite looking lifeless, they **are** actually full of life.

A handful of dusty soil contains seeds, just waiting for the chance to bloom.

Or there are roots reaching down into the ground.... When the water comes.... The desert will bloom.

God often uses deserts as places of transformation. Some people see Lent as a miserable time, in church services we don’t have flowers, we don’t sing the Gloria, or say alleluia, we eat less chocolate....

But it shouldn’t be a miserable time, for deserts and Lent can be a time to connect deeper with all that God offers.



Ash Wednesday marked the beginning of Lent. In the Episcopal tradition, our liturgy directly invites us into a holy season of specific practices aimed at helping us reconnect with God in preparation for the celebration of Easter. “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.”

What have you done in the past that helped you feel that you engaged in a “Holy Lent?” What are you going to do this year? You may want to have another look at the Ash Wednesday booklet we sent out for other reflections on drawing closer to God.

Lent is not a miserable time but it may be that this lent may find you or someone you love going through a hard or desert time. It might feel like wrestling with demons and being tempted by evil. But do not panic, or despair for in John 16:33 Jesus said: 'in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!'

To finish I want to go right back to the beginning, and here the voice of our Father saying to us, what he said to Jesus, 'You are my child, and I love you.' And God says that to each one of us, and that love sustains us.

This lent, let us remember that we are the well-loved children of God, remember that the desert can be a place that can bloom, through God's living water. That there is no place that is beyond Jesus, no place he hasn't been, even death and 'hell', there is no place that Jesus hasn't overcome. Let us remember the rainbow promise of God, never to destroy us, that there is no arbitrary vengeance, but that we hold the rainbow love of God for his rainbow people.

*Hymns: O Jesus I have promised* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEGc3\\_D19Vo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEGc3_D19Vo)  
Or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trs17OEHe7E>

### *Poem*

God led Noah safely through the flood,  
from the plains of Mesopotamia  
to the mountains of Ararat.

It was a voyage between two worlds –  
from the primitive world  
of myth and legend,  
the world of gods and giants,  
into the world we know  
and now inhabit,  
the world of rules and rulers.

Eden's age of innocence  
(so the story goes)  
had given way,  
to an unruly age  
of violence  
and corruption.

But the great Flood  
put an end to all that.  
And after the Flood,  
there was law  
based on strict justice –  
a life for a life.

It was the beginning  
of social order and control,  
and we, the descendants of Noah,  
have inherited his world,  
although we've come a long way  
since then.

Even the animals  
were now ruled by fear.  
Their flesh could be eaten,  
and their bodies offered  
in sacrifice.

Yet the eating of blood  
was forbidden,  
because the blood was the life,  
and all life was sacred.

But we've come a long way  
since then.

By the rainbow covenant,  
God promised  
the stability of nature –  
enough to make possible  
the unsteady growth

of human civilisation.  
'Never again,' said God,  
'will I destroy  
all living creatures;  
and seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night  
will remain  
as long as the earth endures.'

Oh glorious promise!  
And we can surely trust God  
not to break that promise.  
The worry now is –  
because we've come a long way  
since the days of Noah –  
can we trust *ourselves*  
not to break God's promise  
for him?  
*Peter Dainty*

### **Notices**

You can contact the **Revd Gennie** by phone **01764 650985**

**Thursday 25 Feb 11 am Zoom service, at 11:00 AM** please click on the link...

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82649949819?pwd=Wmc3UU4xdmd0OGh0b2xPbXR3SUJpdz09>

Strathearn Church buildings are now closed under Covid restrictions but Strathearn Churches as a Christian Community remains open.

Please call Gennie, the Rector, if you would like a chat, prayer or just someone to listen. Weddings and Funerals can still take place, with very limited numbers.

In addition to the online resources, there is a telephone service to allow those who do not have internet access to listen to the service of worship by telephone. If you want to use this please contact Gennie. Please take care, stay safe and let us know if you need any help whatsoever. God Bless, Gennie



**Please pray for all, and in Crieff:** Zena Howard, Maureen Corbett; Daphne Foster, Drew Corrigan; **Comrie:** Rachel Crane, Brian & Helen Hughes, Agnes Morrison, Louis Sainsbury, the Appletree Community, Maureen Shelley. **Rest In peace: Thelma Brodie**