

First Sunday in Lent – Year C

Sunday 9 March 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Simeon Mitchell, Nathan McGuire and Roo Stewart from the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) for their thoughts on the first Sunday in Lent.

[JPIT](#) helps the Baptist, Methodist, United Reformed Churches and the Church of Scotland to work together for peace and justice.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

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COVID-19 Day of Reflection 2025

The UK Commission for Covid Commemoration's [final report](#) was published in 2023. Their first recommendation is that 'a UK-wide day of reflection should be established and held annually.' Sunday 9 March 2025 is an opportunity for the communities across the UK to come together in a Day of Reflection for the COVID-19 pandemic. 2025 will mark the fifth-year anniversary since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and represents a significant milestone as we continue to remember all those affected.

In line with previous years, the Day of Reflection will offer communities the opportunity to remember lives lost since the pandemic began, reflect on the sacrifice of many, and provide space for people to reflect on their experiences of the pandemic in a way that suits them best. Should you wish to take part, events can be held on a day that suits you best, which includes the week leading up to the Day of Reflection.

In addition to local events you may consider hosting, if you would intend on holding a national or central event to mark the day, we would be grateful if you could let us know by contacting myself or Eilidh Carmichael (in copy).

This year, the day is being directly organised by the UK Government with input from the devolved governments. You can find out more on the UK Government's website: gov.uk/dayofreflection

How might you engage with this day of reflection?

It is worth considering that the shape of this commemoration will look different for each community, each church and each family and every individual. What different opportunities might there be for people to participate, in ways that do not make anyone feel unduly vulnerable?

- Is this something that might form the basis of today's worship gathering?
- What impact will this have on your worship?
- What will praying around this look like?
- Would it be meaningful to gather after the worship service and spend time together as a community?
- Is there an opportunity to hold a vigil?

However you choose to hold time and space for people to be with God and each other, we pray that God would hear us all, as we blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

Introduction

As Lent begins, today's readings offer an opportunity to reflect on power and change. We are invited to recognise, celebrate and respond to the saving power of God, and contemplate Jesus's renunciation of conventional worldly power, which reached ultimate expression in the journey to His death on the cross.

The Old Testament readings point towards the character of God as liberator and protector, and explore the implications for God's people of being those who have experienced liberation, and are called to liberate and include others – a theme continued in the epistle to the Romans. Set alongside these, the gospel account of Jesus facing temptation in the wilderness prompts examination of how people might similarly be tempted to pursue or misuse power, even in pursuit of positive ends, and opens up questions about how power can be used for good. Across the readings, the challenge of engaging politically to seek justice and change is evident.

In preparing these materials, we have been enriched by discussion with each other, which generated new shared insights that shaped what we each then wrote. We asked ourselves questions such as:

- Where would you begin in preaching on these texts? Is there a theme that jumps out at you, or a passage that you'd start with?
- What is the bad news in the texts? What is the good news in the texts?
- What is God's heartbeat for justice here?
- What are the dynamics here around power / marginalisation / justice / wealth and economy / personhood / intersectionality / colonialism / ecology / nation and land, etc?

These are questions that we use as starting-points in JPIT's weekly podcast, 'Politics in the Pulpit?' (www.jpit.uk/politicsinthepulpit) which seeks, through conversation between practitioners, to engage with the lectionary readings through a justice and political lens.

We also brought to this conversation our experiences of reflecting on and engaging with power at JPIT, through our political engagement work, which seeks to influence decision-makers, and our involvement in practices such as community organising and campaigning, which seek to build power for positive change. These led us to the particular thematic focus we've set out above, but we recognised that there were a number of alternative approaches which could just as easily be taken, particularly if there is a theme that is to be focused on throughout Lent in your context.

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

This passage sets out the ritual of offering the first fruits of the harvest, and opens up issues of gratitude, economic justice, and collective memory. The act of presenting the first fruits is not only a religious ritual but also a political declaration. It acknowledges that personal prosperity stems from God's provision and is intertwined with communal wellbeing. The repeated recounting of the Exodus narrative ("A wandering Aramean was my ancestor...") underscores the importance of remembering and honouring the collective journey from oppression to liberation. It celebrates God's character as liberator, and the character of – and consequent responsibilities upon – God's people, as those who have experienced liberation.

The command to share the bounty with "the Levites and the aliens who reside among you" (v11) extends the act of worship into the realm of justice. It challenges worshippers to ensure that marginalised groups – those without land or resources – benefit from the community's abundance that God has provided.

In a contemporary context, this passage invites reflection on how our economic systems might mirror or diverge from such an inclusive approach. How do we ensure that any prosperity we experience uplifts the most vulnerable in society? This passage can also inspire political engagement, prompting questions about policies affecting the cost of living, immigration and asylum, and community support systems.

Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

Psalms 91 is often understood as a prayer of personal trust in God's protection, but its communal implications are equally profound. The imagery of God as a refuge and fortress speaks to the human desire for security, both individually and collectively. However, the promise of protection ("no evil shall befall you", v10) invites deeper exploration in the context of justice. Security and safety are often unevenly distributed, with systemic injustices exposing certain groups to harm.

This psalm challenges us to consider what true security looks like. It is not rooted in military strength or exclusionary practices, but in trusting in the justice and care of God. For communities today, this might translate into advocating for policies that provide equitable access to housing, healthcare, and protection from harm. The reassurance that God will "command his angels concerning you" (v11) can inspire faith-based activism, reminding worshippers that divine support accompanies efforts to create a just society.

Romans 10:8b-13

Paul's message in this passage is one of radical inclusion. "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek" in verse 12 proclaims the breaking down of ethnic and cultural barriers, a theme that resonates with contemporary struggles for racial and social equity. The declaration that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v12) points to the accessibility and universality of Jesus's redeeming work.

Paul's emphasis on confessing with the lips and believing in the heart suggests that faith is both a private and public act. This dual dimension invites Christians to examine how their faith informs their actions, particularly in the public sphere. For instance, how does the belief in God's universal saving power translate into advocacy for fairer policies and practices? This passage offers a powerful framework for exploring how personal faith can drive political engagement, breaking down barriers and fostering inclusivity.

Luke 4:1-13

The account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness highlights the intersection of power, identity, and justice. Each of the devil's temptations represents a different misuse of power – for personal gain, spectacle, or domination. Jesus' refusal to succumb to these temptations underscores a model of leadership rooted in humility and service, rather than exploitation.

This passage raises critical questions about the nature of power and its ethical use. Jesus' responses to the tempter, grounded in scripture, challenge systems that prioritise greed, coercion, and self-interest. This narrative invites worshippers to reflect on their own relationship with power – both as individuals and within societal structures. How might faith communities resist the temptations of complacency or complicity in unjust systems? Jesus' example encourages boldness in confronting systemic injustices while remaining steadfast in faith and integrity.

Sermon ideas

One approach would be to begin by asking who we think has power in the world, and how they use – or misuse – that power. Current examples could be shared of political and military leaders, media and social media owners, international corporations, and even religious leaders. Note also the many disparities in who holds power: between the poor and the rich, and between those of different genders and ethnic backgrounds.

[Editors' note to preacher – be mindful not to stray into political debate here, but remain focused on the fact that responsibility for use of power is paramount, regardless of any affiliation.]

This could be contrasted with the models of power we encounter in the scripture readings – the saving power of God, and the humility seen in Jesus's rejection of the kinds of power the tempter offers.

That could then lead into opening up a consideration of the power that each of us have within our own context, and how we might use it. Do you feel you have much power? In what way? If so, how do you exercise it? As we seek to follow the kingdom call to work for justice and inclusion, what approaches should we be taking to engaging with those with power, and using our own power? Examples such as community organising, campaigning, protesting, and building purposeful relationships with decision-makers show different ways of seeking to build collective power to bring about positive change for the common good. Alternatively, you might want to use some of these questions as a starting-point for discussion or reflection:

- Who holds the power in your family? Or in the local community? Is that power used for the benefit of everyone?
- What power do you hold? Over yourself? Over others? How does it feel?
- If you were given the keys of Bute House or 10 Downing Street today, what would you change first?
- How does Jesus approach power in Luke 4:1-13?
- In Deuteronomy 26:8, God's people are set free from slavery through "a terrifying display of power". Is there a place for terrifying displays of power today? What displays of power would help your family and your community now?
- Do you know the name of your local councillors, MSPs or MP? Do you know anything more about them? How often do you pray for the people who speak on your behalf?
- Could your church develop a meaningful relationship with your MP, to encourage them and influence them? How would you ensure that this influence was for the benefit of everyone?

For more information on how your church could be supported to build a relationship with your MP through being part of JPIT's Constituency Action Network, visit www.jpit.uk/can.

Prayers

Gathering prayer / Call to worship

God of the wilderness and redeemer of land,
we gather to seek Your guidance and grace.
In this season of Lent,
draw us into deeper reflection on our lives and our world.
As we journey with You, may we be shaped by Your justice,
inspired by Your love,
and empowered to act for Your kingdom.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession / Repentance

Merciful God, we confess that we have often turned from Your ways.
We have sought security in power and possessions, ignoring the needs of our neighbours.
We have remained silent in the face of injustice, complicit in systems that harm and exclude.
Forgive us, we pray.
Turn our hearts toward Your justice
and our hands toward Your work
that we may live as Your faithful people.
Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving / Gratitude

God of abundance, we thank You for the gifts of Creation,
for the land that sustains us and the communities that nurture us.
We are grateful for Your unending love and faithfulness,
which guide us through trials and triumphs alike.
Fill our hearts with gratitude and our lives with generosity,
that we may share Your blessings with all.
Amen.

Prayer for others / Intercession

God of justice and peace, we lift before You the needs of our world.
For those suffering under the weight of poverty and oppression, bring relief and dignity.
For leaders and decision-makers, grant wisdom and compassion in using power.
For communities divided by fear or hatred, sow seeds of reconciliation and understanding.
Inspire us to act boldly in love

that Your kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven.
Amen.

Blessing / Closing prayer

As we go from this place, may we walk in the footsteps of Christ,
resisting temptation and embodying justice.

May the Spirit sustain us in courage and compassion,
and may the love of God guide us in every word and action.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from

<https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 11 – “Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble” – a version of Psalm 91
- GWA 59 – “Listen for God who speaks within our hearts” – based on the Luke passage
- GWA 109 – “For days within the wilderness” – based on the Luke passage
- GWA 138 – “Hear the call of the kingdom” - based on the Romans passage, it points us to building God’s kingdom
- GWA 223 – “The kingdom of God is justice and peace” (Taizé)

- GWA 213-226 –The thematic section on Justice and Peace offers a treasure trove of songs, accommodating a number of approaches to this topic.
- CH4 55 – “Safe in the shadow of the Lord”
- CH4 124 – “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation”
- CH4 235 – “God is working his purpose out”
- CH4 253 – “Inspired by love and anger”
- CH4 334 – “On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry”
- CH4 337 – “Forty days and forty nights”
- CH4 338 – “Jesus, tempted in the desert”
- CH4 354 – “O Love, how deep, how broad, how high!”
- CH4 510 – “Jesus calls us now to meet him”
- CH4 629 – “Mark how the Lamb of God, self-offering”
- CH4 641 – “Seek ye first the kingdom of God”
- CH4 662 – “Jesus, thou joy of living hearts”
- “The Church of Christ in every age” (Fred Pratt Green) CCLI song #2564481
<https://www.hopepublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw3092.aspx>
- A suggested [playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Lent](#) can be found on the Church of Scotland website.

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.

- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord's Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of 'holy chaos'.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?
Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/
intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different "Spiritual Styles"?
- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

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