

## Second Sunday in Lent – Year C

**Sunday 16 March 2025**

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Rev Helen Cook, retired Minister, for her thoughts on the second Sunday in Lent.

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.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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## Introduction

The five passages (including the optional Gospel reading) in the lectionary for the second Sunday in Lent this year are challenging to me – and also very interesting. I like to mull lectionary passages over prayerfully and to live with them (depending on how much time I have!), allowing them to come to mind, maybe because of someone asking for prayer, or for something (not often good) heard or seen on the News. The passages for this Sunday are definitely the kind of passages I then look up in commentaries. At present I am using Tom Wright's New Testament commentaries, Rev Leith Fisher's commentaries and also some online commentaries – especially ones from the Lutheran Church [Working Preacher website](#). (I pay to use their material.)

I like to have a theme for services, to tie together our call to worship, prayers, readings, hymns and sermon/discussion. Lent is the time when many churches embrace themes focused on Jesus' final days on earth – such as sacrificial love, mercy, betrayal, loss, despair, forgiveness – and there are others.

The theme that emerges for me is then put on the Order of Service and during worship this helps me and others question what the passages are about, and also what they might mean to each of us hearing and reading them – and what they might mean for the world in which we are worshipping. The theme also gives context for our prayers, both for ourselves in our journeys of faith and for other people and for the world. It is also useful for the musicians and singers to address the theme in their choice of music and hymns/songs.

Material from devotional and study books (I have acquired quite a few over many years of ministry) can be useful. Such books by Sally Foster-Fulton, Peter Millar, Nick Fawcett and Tom Wright have proved very helpful for prayers, themes and non-biblical stories and illustrations.

## [Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#)

The story in today's passage has its beginnings in chapter 12, where we read that when Abram was 75 years old, God called him to take his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated, and all the people they had acquired in Harran, and set out for another land. God promised Abram that he would make him into a great nation, and a blessing: "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3, NIV).

Now in chapter 15, Abram is questioning God's promises. He has no son and is afraid he and Sarai are too old to bear a son. Instead, under the rules of inheritance at the time, a relative

called Eliezer of Damascus will be his heir. God points Abram to the stars in the sky, and reassures him that God's promises will be kept.

These promises were confirmed in Genesis 15 when God asked Abram to prepare very specific animal sacrifices, which would be recognised by all to be confirming a covenant between God and Abram. This covenant, which is a very special agreement, would confirm – beyond the promises already made – that what God has told Abram will indeed come to pass in God's own time.

Themes which come to mind from this passage are: Trust in God; In God's time; Keep the faith; and God gently hears our doubts.

## Psalm 27

(I refer to the Psalmist as "he" because historically most psalmists were male scholars – sometimes representing schools of psalmists.)

In the first half of this psalm (vv1-6), the Psalmist appears very confident and is not afraid of whatever might face him. He trusts in God.

In the second half (vv7-12), he changes and is far less confident – begging God not to turn away from him. He shares his fears of rejection by his parents, and fear of his oppressors, foes and false witnesses. Then in the final two verses, the Psalmist reasserts his confidence in God – not just for the afterlife, but also for his life on earth. In both parts of the psalm there are these words – seek, heart, adversaries/enemies, salvation. Although some people might question if they belong together, these words, together with the first two verses and the last two verses, hold the psalm as an entity.

For the Psalmist, faith and doubt are both companions in his journey with God. Whatever he faces, God, in goodness and power, gives him confidence and strength to live with doubt and faith.

Lent is a time when we pause to consider our walk with God, and the Psalmist here shows us his journey. He invites us to realistically – in trust and in penitence – search what is our walk with God – both in the glories of God's love and presence, and in the darker fears and doubts that are also part of our journey, but are sometimes suppressed or hidden.

Further themes may be: Trust God in our doubt and faith journeys (journeys which usually include both); and God, strength giver.

## [Philippians 3:17-4:1](#)

In verse 20 Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi, “Our citizenship is in heaven.” In his commentary, Tom Wright suggests many modern Christians misunderstand what Paul means, when they suppose he means, “and so we are waiting until we can go and live in heaven where we belong.” He goes on to explain that if someone in Philippi said they were Roman citizens they certainly wouldn’t mean that they were looking forward to living in Rome. They lived in Philippi, which was a Roman colony, and its citizens living there could look to the Roman Emperor – their ruler – for help if things became difficult for them, for example if there was a local rebellion. But like all Roman citizens living in places colonised by Rome’s army, they were colonists and lived as Romans rather than as locals. In verses 20 and 21 Paul reminds his readers that “the church is at present a colony of heaven, with the responsibility (as we say in the Lord’s Prayer) for bringing the life and rule of heaven to bear on earth” (1).

Paul reminds the readers that as Christians they and he have citizenship in heaven, and their hope is always in Christ. They are to “stand firm in the Lord” (Phil 4:1) – not just remaining constant in faith – it also means giving their allegiance to Jesus, rather than to Caesar, as the true Lord.

In verses 18 and 19 there is a warning that both inside and outside the church (then and now?) there are people whose behaviour is conditioned by the world of the senses. “Their mind is set on earthly things.” That way lies destruction.

Possible themes: In what ways do churches differ from other organisations that might demand our loyalty? What would it mean for our church community to live as a colony of heaven? Perhaps both themes are more relevant to a discussion-led reflection.

[1] Excerpt adapted from Tom Wright, *Philippians for Everyone*. SPCK Publishing.

## [Luke 13:31-35](#)

In these few verses, Jesus tells the Pharisees who came to warn of the threat posed to Him by Herod, that Jesus had work to do, regardless of the threats facing Him. In a kind of shorthand, Jesus talked of three days’ work casting out demons and healing people, after which He must get to Jerusalem, where prophets perish. Jesus then offered these friendly Pharisees a word picture of His love for people: how many times did I want to gather your children, like a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would have none of it! (v34). In the natural world, some adult animals save their young from fire by sacrificing

themselves, and it is known that in a barn fire a mother hen might cover her chicks with her body. Farmers have found live chicks under the blackened and scorched remains of the mother hen.

These short verses paint powerful word pictures. One is Jesus' determination to go to Jerusalem to 'finish the job', even while He laments lost possibilities for the people of Jerusalem. But perhaps the greatest picture it gives us is of the hen who would shelter her chicks under her wings, ready to give her life for them. I think it is significant to all of us, that Jesus uses the simile of the hen and her chicks – the female nurturing parent.

Themes: Self-sacrificial love; and Jesus' grief.

### [Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a](#)

Luke has highlighted the way in which the Transfiguration was preparing Jesus for death. Moses and Elijah were speaking to Jesus of His exodus – His departure. In the first Exodus, Moses led God's people out of Egypt towards their Promised Land. In the New Exodus, Jesus will lead all God's people out of the slavery of sin and death, home to their promised inheritance – the new creation in which the whole world will be redeemed.

The disciples there – Peter, John and James, did not understand anything about what they experienced. What they faced on their return was a very ill young man who the other disciples had failed to heal. All the gospel writers put these two events together – the Transfiguration and the boy they could not heal – as Tom Wright put it in his commentary: "They seem to be telling us that the two go together: the mountain top experience and the shrieking, stubborn demon. Many people prefer to live their lives without either, to be people of the plateau, undramatic and unexciting. God seems to call some to that kind of life [...] For many other followers, dramatic visions and spiritual experiences are balanced by huge demands. The more open we are to God [...] the more open we are to the pain of the world ... when we rise from a time of prayer in which God has seemed close and his love real and powerful [...] we are equipped, so God can use us in his needy world" (2).

Out of the cloud, God said: "This is my Son, my chosen. Listen to him" (v35).

Themes: Are we listening for God's voice? Do we have to understand everything? Are we equipped to work in this needy world?

[2] Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone*. SPCK Publishing

## Sermon ideas

I might begin thinking about the sermon after reading the lectionary passages – or sometimes the day or several days after first reading them; I may have ‘noticed’ one or two more than the others. (Some weeks, when life is very busy, I will pray that one reading or two readings will stand out immediately!) Although I have put themes for all the above passages, most weeks I have only one or two passages which offer strong compatible themes.

When the service reaches the sermon or discussion point I pray for God’s help for us all. Questions which I have wondered about in preparation, I share with the congregation when they arise in the sermon. In some churches I might expect an answer – in others it is fine if those listening answer it to themselves. But I think if the questions are relevant to the person hearing them, it leads to more engagement. I have been told that, on occasion, questions come back to mind for some listeners after the service.

## Going slow in Lent?

I have suggested some themes that emerged from my reading of each of the lectionary passages. So, for instance, the Old Testament reading in Genesis 15, and the New Testament reading in Luke 9 both suggested the theme of “Going slow in Lent?” to me. In the Old Testament reading, Abram had dared to check with God about the slow fruition of God’s promises to him. In the New Testament reading in Luke 9, the disciples – not just the ones up the mountain – were so slow in understanding what they had seen or heard, that you could say that they had lost the plot.

Perhaps some further questions for the congregation might be:

- Are you finding it difficult to assess your life of faith and doubt this Lent?
- Which of God’s promises mean a lot to you this Lent?
- How, when life is difficult, are we supported in our faith?

Lent is a good time to think of these questions, and to pray in doubt and faith.

If you tend to have a discussion rather than sermon, this approach could inform questions and areas in which we could share both our faith and our doubts, or failures and anxieties – all of which are good to examine in Lent.

## Prayers

### Call to worship/Opening prayer (*Psalms 27:1*)

The Psalmist declared:

The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the Stronghold of my life;

Of whom shall I be afraid?

Fill our hearts with Your light and strength, O God,  
as together in this place,  
we journey with each other through the questions of Lent,  
seeking always Your truth and love.

Amen

### Thanksgiving and gratitude / Confession and repentance

Lord Jesus Christ,

we thank You that You are with us as we live our lives here on earth.

We thank You for those who over the generations

have walked with You in faith,

responding courageously to whatever they have faced –

even when afraid and bewildered.

Help us also to walk with You,

willing to commit ourselves to follow You, even to a cross.

When You lead us into new territory and we are unsure or afraid,  
help us to be strong, courageous, obedient and faithful.

When You ask us to listen to Your voice,

help us to hear Your word – confronting, challenging, inspiring –

help us to listen when You ask us to reach out in love

to the indifferent, the hostile, those we consider unworthy, or unacceptable.

God of love, overcome our prejudices and fear.

God of wisdom, when You ask us to step out of our comfort zone,

help us to care, to share, to give, to sacrifice, all in Your name.

Merciful God,

forgive us when we would rather put ourselves first,



when we prefer to follow our own inclinations – or those of the crowd, watering down our faith, seeking our own ends.

Lord Jesus, we remember that You were tempted just as we are: yet You chose to journey all the way to the cross – for our world’s sake. Forgiving Lord, touch our lives, and grant us all courage, a deep faith and the ability to journey with You, whatever happens. In commitment now, we share together the words which you gave us –

*[The Lord’s Prayer may be said according to your tradition]*

### **Prayers for the world and its people/Intercessions**

*Different voices may lead alternate parts of the prayer.*

Almighty and everlasting God,  
we do not always know what to ask for in our prayers,  
for there is much we do not understand;  
Yet we trust that You are active in our world,  
moving in human hearts, and in the events around us in this world.

So, we come to You now, in faith,  
placing ourselves and our world in Your hands,  
praying that Your will be done, despite everything and everyone  
that conspires against this.

We bring ourselves, often weak, hesitant, faithless.  
We bring all we are and all we long to be,  
seeking Your help and Your transforming touch.

*[Hold a moment of silence]*

We bring those who are part of our lives – family and friends,  
neighbours and colleagues, all those we meet in the daily round of life.  
We entrust them into Your keeping.

*[Hold a moment of silence]*

We bring our world – the rich and poor, the powerful and weak,  
the well-fed and the hungry, the healthy and the ill.

Those who enjoy peace, and those who are enduring war.  
Those who revel in freedom and those who fight for justice.  
In silence we pray for our troubled world.....

*[Hold a moment of silence]*

We thank You, Great God,  
that You are involved in our lives, active in our world,  
concerned about everything, everyone You have made.  
Ultimately it is You who holds this world in Your hands.  
We lay our prayers before You, asking only this –  
that Your will be done, Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Through Christ we pray  
Amen

### **Closing prayer / Blessing**

God,  
then, now and always the Creator of all things,  
then, now and always the Word spoken and speaking in creation,  
then, now and always the Lord and Giver of Life,  
bless and keep you.  
Amen

*Day 1 'Alpha', from Pray Now 2012 – Daily Devotions on the Theme of Time*

### **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.

A musician once told me (gently) that music and songs are there to help us worship God, but that they have to be singable – that means deliberately learning new ones – and also act well as a bridge between different parts of worship. Music, they said, also affects the mood of participants in worship. If possible – certainly for special services – I agree it is very helpful to include musicians in the planning.

Here are some suggestions that I might choose for this second week of Lent.

- GWA 3 – “The Lord is my light” – based on Psalm 27
- GWA 25 – “The God of Sarah praise” – ties to the Genesis passage.
- GWA 210 – “Hope of Abraham and Sarah” – ties to the Genesis passage.
- GWA 108-111 – “Church Year: Lent” – This section of the book has some wonderful new songs for this time in the Church calendar.
  
- CH4 113 – “God the Father of creation” – a good opening hymn
- CH4 189 – “Be still, for the presence of the Lord” – a good opening hymn
- CH4 259 – “Beauty for brokenness” – suitable for closing the service
- CH4 374 – “From heaven you came, helpless babe” – a suitable closing hymn
- CH4 359 – “He came down that we may have love”
- CH4 462 – “The King of love my shepherd is” – a closing hymn
- CH4 463 – “Fairest Lord Jesus”
- CH4 502 – “Take my life, Lord, let it be”
- CH4 530 – “One more step along the world I go”
- CH4 550 – “As the deer pants for the water”
- CH4 559 – “There is a Redeemer”
- CMP 225 – “He’s got the whole wide world”

- There are some very lovely short songs and doxologies to the back of CH4, which either the congregation or the choir/soloist could sing quietly after the closing blessing/benediction.
- 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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