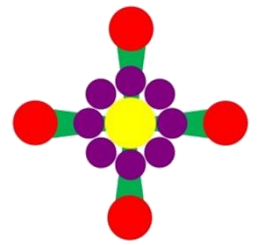


**The Benefice of  
Harden, Wilsden, Cullingworth, Denholme  
21 February 2021**



**The First Sunday of Lent**

Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

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

**Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:  
The first commandment is this:  
'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.  
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
with all your soul, with all your mind,  
and with all your strength.'

The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'  
There is no other commandment greater than these.  
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.  
**Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ,  
to save us from our sins, to be our advocate in heaven,  
and to bring us to eternal life.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit  
into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Let us  
confess our sins remembering before God the times when we have fallen from  
temptation into sin.

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:

**Fill us with your Spirit.**

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:

**Fill us with your Spirit.**

Christ, have mercy.

**Christ, have mercy.**

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:

**Fill us with your Spirit.**

Lord, have mercy.

**Lord, have mercy.**

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,  
have mercy upon you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Heavenly Father,  
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,  
and grew closer to you in the desert:  
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer,  
that we may witness to your saving love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Old Testament Reading: **Genesis 9:8-17**

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 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. 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.” 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: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. 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.” 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.”

Thanks be to God for the gift of His holy word

## The Gospel: **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 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.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

The account of Noah building the ark is probably one of the most popular stories from the Old Testament and one of the most loved by children. It is such a vivid story, stirring the imagination as we envisage all of those animals entering the Ark.

I wonder which part of the story really speaks to you. Is it the thought of all those different species of animals as they enter the ark? Do you spend time trying to name as many animals as possible? Or does your mind reflect on the earlier part of the story when God tells Noah how to build the ark, the materials that are needed and details of the design? Do you wonder how you would set about such a project? When you think of Noah's ark, does your mind begin to sing – old nursery rhymes like the animals went in two by two, or more recent songs like the Arky, Arky song?

Maybe you are led into thoughts and questions on more practical matters? Who looks after the different animals? Where can they exercise? Who feeds them? Who cleans up after them? How many rabbits are there? Do the skunks need a separate room? Why did God include the fleas? Why would he not include the fleas? How would those on board cope with the noise?

Or does your mind reflect on the people on board? Maybe this year, more than ever, we may think about how the people coped. After all, this is probably one of the earliest lockdown situations to have been recorded and we may find parallels with our own situations at this time. Noah, his wife, sons and their wives had to live under extreme restrictions – there was nowhere for them to go to avoid the restrictions because water surrounded their home. They were their own support bubble – but they also knew that God was in their support bubble. He was caring for them through their ordeal.

The day to day tasks of looking after the animals and caring for each other as well as preparing meals all needed to be done, but we can imagine the monotony of living in such a way for any length of time. The situation lasted more than ten months before the floods abated and then gradually over a few weeks, there were signs which meant that they could leave the ark and resume some sort of normality. In some ways it can seem very familiar to us at the

present time – though for Noah and his family there would not have been the many distractions which we use to occupy our minds.

From the beginning of the situation, Noah and his family were aware that they were held in God's safe-keeping. Noah responded to him in faith as he built the ark. Later, in those long days drifting on the flood waters, Noah and the family would certainly have had plenty of time for reflection and prayer. Maybe considering how God's love was such a great part in their lives and wondering how best they could serve him. But I expect that one of their greatest concerns would have been how God would lead them out of that situation. A concern, yes – but also a certainty that God would not leave them and the hope that God would lead them to brighter times. Probably, like us, they had times when they felt fed up or jaded by the situation, but they were supported by that hope and faith in God.

As well as the hope which was held in Noah's faith, he was also able to see physical signs of hope from God. Eventually, as the waters abated, he saw the leaves which were brought into the ark. Signs of new growth and new life in the land which had been under water for so long – and signs for new life which was stretching out before Noah, his family and the animals as they were leaving the confines of the ark. Then, as our reading reminds us, there is the rainbow, the reminder of God's promise to Noah and all who follow him that the world will not suffer the total flooding of those difficult times. A sign which continues to speak to us today of God's faithfulness, love and hope as it reminds us of his promise.

As we consider how Noah and his family could have spent time in prayer and reflection whilst on the ark, it seems appropriate that this reading was chosen for the first Sunday in Lent. A time when we are preparing for Easter and traditionally spend time in prayerful reflection. Thankfully, we do not have to be set adrift in a boat with numerous animals, but I wonder if our prayers and reflections this year may echo some of their thoughts. Are we prepared to set aside some of our distractions so that we can spend time with God in prayer?

As we have heard that God's relationship with Noah and his family was loving, we can be assured that he seeks a similar relationship with each one of us. He cares so much that he wants us to be open with him, to share the things which are causing us pain as well as those bringing deep joy, to hear our frustrations as

well as those things which have been life-giving in the present situation. More than anything he wants us to set aside those things which separate us from him, to turn again to him and his sustaining, life-giving love. As Jesus proclaimed in the reading from Mark's gospel, it is time to "repent and believe in the good news." And let's give thanks for those signs of hope which are brought into our lives – signs of new life in nature, signs of God's love touching our lives and being with us, even in the most difficult of times.

Noah and his family were living through difficult times, but were able to cope because they knew that they were held in God's love. As we progress through Lent, we remember Jesus' difficult journey towards the events of Good Friday and his death on the cross, but he coped because he was held securely in God's love and knew that he was doing as God wished. Their certainty was based on and nurtured by their prayerful relationship with God, bringing to God their fears as well as their hopes, their sorrows as well as their joys.

We are blessed by knowing that at the end of these difficult times, great joy followed. For Noah, the joy of making a new life for him, his family and the animals on dry land as they continued to live in God's care. At Easter, the pain and loss of Good Friday was followed by the great joy of Jesus' resurrection and his victory over sin and death. As we live in the light of God's promises of eternal life, we can be assured that we will always be held in his loving care.

So, as we make our Lenten journey, may we all follow Jesus' example and draw closer to God through prayerful reflection and loving care of those around us and may the Holy Spirit open our eyes to signs of God's enduring love in our lives.

### The Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth:  
I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father;  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

### Prayers of Intercession led by Janice

Lord God, as we prepare ourselves for another Lenten journey we ask for your help to focus as we journey through the wilderness to the glory of Easter.

We pray for leaders of all nations, for those in positions of power and influence throughout the world: that they might see beyond their own interests, and acknowledge the effects of climate change, promote fair trade, and work for the relief of suffering and unity between and within nations.

We remember all those promoting peace and reconciliation in places of conflict; organisations such as Medecins Sans Frontieres who provide humanitarian medical aid, and individuals who place themselves at risk by reporting natural disasters and acts of violence against innocent civilians.

We remember all the essential workers whose tasks have been dramatically increased during the pandemic; parents, and their children, who are home schooling; farmers and fishermen whose work carries on unabated, despite extreme weather conditions.

We think of family, friends, neighbours, and those unknown to us, who are suffering from the frustrations of this pandemic; those who have been bereaved and those who continue to grieve for loved ones.

We remember all those who have already given up so much in the last twelve months, not through choice, but by circumstances beyond their control. Let us be aware of the luxury of entering Lent when we have choice.

We ask for Your help in preparing ourselves to fast from criticism and see good in others; from inactivity to action for justice; from greed to giving; from conflict to peace making and from selfishness to Christ likeness so that we may be changed to become Christ like and carry out Your work here on earth.

We ask all these things in the name of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### The Peace

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us access to his grace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

### The Lord's Prayer

### Final Responory

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Blessed are you, Lord our God:

through your Son Jesus Christ

you have known our pain and show us your mercy.

**Surely he has born our griefs;**

**he has carried our sorrows.**

He was despised, he was rejected;

a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

**Surely he has born our griefs;**

**he has carried our sorrows.**

He was pierced for our sins,

bruised for no fault but ours.

**Surely he has born our griefs;**

**he has carried our sorrows.**

### The Blessing

The God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing;

and the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be among us, and remain with us always.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**