

Worship at Home 28 February 2021

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Marilyn Britt.

Today we continue our Lent worship series, Worship in the Wilderness – the theme today is A Simple Journey. The outline for worship and some of the material has been prepared by Sam and Sara Hargreaves from Engage Worship as indicated.

We can worship God in silence, stillness and solitude. He is with us wherever we are. Let's be still in the presence of our Lord.

Let us Pray ¹

We come to you, faithful Father, slowing down, taking a deeper breath.

Thank you that we do not need to earn our way into your presence,

But that we can come simply, through Jesus, by your Holy Spirit,

We pause. We acknowledge your presence.

We trust you to feed us by your Word. **Amen.**

Loving God all good, all true, all powerful, almighty, we worship you. Wherever we are, however we are feeling, You know us and are with us. You are worthy of our praise and adoration. We may be lost in our own wilderness, thirsty and hungry but we can trust you to help us and guide us so that we may truly live. For your constant and unconditional love of us, we give thanks. Amen.

Hymn - Join in singing a new hymn written by Sam Hargreaves. [Click here to join in](#)

You lead us through the wilderness and give us grace for trials and tests.

The Holy Spirit shows the way and in our weakness teaches us to pray.

We'll worship in the wilderness, a dry and thirsty land.

We won't survive by bread alone, but by your word and guided by your hand.

As Jesus fasted forty days, so help us turn from selfish ways,

To trust in you and learn to give, for when we die to self, we'll truly live.

We'll worship in the wilderness, a dry and thirsty land.

We won't survive by bread alone, but by your word and guided by your hand

You join us in our brokenness and comfort us in our distress,

For you're the hope of all who mourn; you lead us to your resurrection dawn

We'll worship in the wilderness, a dry and thirsty land.

We won't survive by bread alone, but by your word and guided by your hand.

We'll worship in the wilderness and trust the path you've planned.

You're faithful in the wilderness and by your grace we'll reach the promised land.

READING: Psalm 63: 1- 8 ². [Click here to listen](#) from the start to 1:03.

This is a psalm of David when he was in the Desert of Judah and thirsting for God. It is a psalm of desire for God's presence, provision and protection. No matter where we are, our desire should be for God because only he satisfies fully.

¹ You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. ² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. ³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. ⁵ I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. ⁶ On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. ⁷ Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. ⁸ I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.

David was in the wilderness when he wrote this psalm, praying and pleading. Yet David is praising God in his predicament. **Let us pray.**

Loving God, we come to you quietly with longing – in stillness and possibly solitude. Because we know you will help and show us your way and we want to be close to you. We often use many words and forget to listen. Forgive us Lord that we don't always just rest in your presence, but noiselessly you let your blessings fall on us. You speak in many ways, but let us still ourselves so that we can hear the tender whisper of your call and hear the still small voice of calm.

Let us have a time of silence simply to rest in God's presence. If it helps you may like to mouth the name "Jesus" silently.

Open our hearts now to you, and fill us with the assurance and peace that only you can give. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN – STF 236 ⁵ [Click here to join in](#)

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| 1 Forty days and forty nights
you were fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted and yet undefiled. | 4 So if Satan, pressing hard,
soul and body would destroy:
Christ who conquered, be our guard;
give to us the victor's joy. |
| 2 Burning heat throughout the day,
bitter cold when light had fled;
prowling beasts around your way,
stones your pillow, earth your bed. | 5 Saviour, may we hear your voice
keep us constant at your side;
and with you we shall rejoice
at the eternal Eastertide. |
| 3 Shall not we your trials share,
learn your discipline of will;
and with you by fast and prayer
wrestle with the powers of hell? | |

READING: Luke 4: 1-13 ² [Click here to listen](#) from the start to 1:38.

¹ Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.

⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours."

⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

¹² Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

TALK: A Simple Journey ¹

Last week we introduced the idea of journeying through the wilderness with Jesus for Lent. We talked about how wilderness worship might look different to other kinds of worship we have experienced. Some worship involves singing songs or hymns, using guitars, choirs or organs. Some worship includes prayers with many words. Some worship requires a lot of technology, or props, or people to make it happen. But wilderness worship is quite different to all of that. This week we are going to look at three aspects of wilderness worship that Jesus engaged in.

1) Solitude

The first thing we notice about Jesus is that he walked away from the crowds and often spent time alone. In the passage we have read he spends 40 days and nights in this lonely place. Luke also tells of another time when, 'the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their illnesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' (Luke 5:15-16)

We might have different responses to the idea of solitude. Some of us will be very scared of spending time alone - we know that we are extroverts who enjoy people's company and feed off the affirmation of our friends, families and co-workers. Others of us will think that this sounds like a great idea - finally, a bit of privacy; a bit of peace!

Henri Nouwen wrote a book about the Desert Fathers and Mothers - a group of Christians from the 4th and 5th Century who revived the idea of desert spirituality at a time when the Church was becoming increasingly institutionalised. Nouwen warns us against seeing solitude as simply as a quiet place to recharge our batteries, and then go on with life as usual. He writes: 'solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather, it is the place of conversion, a place where the old self dies and the new self is born... In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract... We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with him and him alone.' Henri Nouwen, *The Way of The Heart*, p. 27, 30.

The main reason Jesus sought solitude was to be with his heavenly Father. How can we, today, choose to cut into our busy schedules and demanding relationships? Is it possible to spend some moments each week with no agenda but to be with God? How can we see time alone as a place of transformation, where we are changed to relate to the world in a new and more Godly way?

2) Simplicity

The second thing we notice about Jesus is how he rejects unnecessary baggage. 'The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.'" (Luke 4: 5-6)

Jesus knows it is so easy to 'gain the world' yet 'lose your soul' (Luke 9:25), so he rebukes the devil. How many of the advertisements that surround us every day are about 'gaining the world', or achieving more 'authority and splendour'? How often are we tempted to buy yet more clothes, or upgrade to a better gadget, or invest in a bigger car?

Jesus was a homeless man (Luke 9:58). His only possessions seems to have been one set of clothes (John 19:23). When he sends out the 72 in Luke 10, he tells them: 'Do not take a purse or bag or sandals' (10:4). It is not wrong for us to have homes, clothes and other possessions, but Jesus' example should cause us to question whether we need quite as many things as the adverts tell us we do.

Wilderness worship might ask us to consider whether we rely too much on things - even good things - instead of trusting in God. Maybe walking away from our warm homes and taking a prayer hike through the woods might help you see God afresh. Perhaps putting your smartphone away for a day might give you a new perspective on life and faith. Maybe turning off the music and the radio, sitting silently in God's presence, might be a form of simple, wilderness worship that restores your soul more than you realise.

3) Fasting

This leads us on to one of the most obvious things about Jesus' time in the wilderness - the fact that he fasted from food. The first temptation attacks this directly: 'The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'" (Luke 5:3)

Notice that the devil doesn't say "You must be hungry", even though we know Jesus is feeling the effects of his forty day fast. He goes to the real heart of the matter – 'if you are the Son of God...' Fasting is not about showing people how spiritual we are, or 'guilting' God into answering our prayers. It comes down to the basis of our identity. Who are we, or perhaps more importantly whose are we? It reminds us that, more than food, our lives are sustained by the word of God, by Jesus the Word spoken to create us and in whom 'all things hold together.' (Col. 1:17). So Jesus responds using the words from Deuteronomy 8 that we read last week: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' (Luke 5:4)

Now, literal fasting from food continued through the time of Jesus and into the early church (Matt. 9:15, Acts 13:2). It may be that during this Lent season you choose to give up some meal times, and to spend the time you would have been eating in prayer with God. If you have never tried it I would encourage you to start small and gradually build up.

But there are also other types of fast we can do. Isaiah 58:6 talks about a fast where people choose to put injustice right. 1 Corinthians 7:5 describes a fast where married couples refrain from physical intimacy for a time in order to focus on praying. These two things should show us that we can fast in other ways than from food.

Perhaps the question is: what would be the thing that you most rely on? Where are you in danger of getting your identity from, instead of God? Is it your social media account? The kinds of clothes you wear? Eating at particular restaurants? Or could you 'fast' in a positive way like in Isaiah 58, by helping a homeless person on the street, befriending a lonely person at school, or standing up for a mistreated person at work?

Our Response.

Is there a practical thing you could do this week which would involve solitude, simplicity or fasting. Let us be silent and rest in God's presence. **[Pause in Silence]**

Let us pray

Lord, teach me occasionally to live with less, to fast those things which distract me or in which I am tempted to put my trust.

I know that you have the best for me and are leading me in the way of everlasting, abundant life.

Amen

Prayers for others - including silences for your own prayers.

Lord Jesus Christ, we are reminded of the time you spent in the wilderness facing choices and how, filled with the Holy Spirit, you were able to resist temptation. Just as we are in the wilderness of today. We pray for those who are in a desert place, watching, praying, struggling that victory shall be theirs.

We pray for your Church; for the massive change as we are unable to meet together to worship you but can still spread your gospel by other means. **SILENCE**

We pray for your world and the people in it. We pray for those living in conflict with each other.

We pray for those unable to access the Covid vaccine. **SILENCE**

We pray for our own country and local neighbourhood – for those who are ill and bereaved. We pray for those in poverty, homelessness and in difficult relationships. We remember children who have had their education disrupted and us all, for the missed social interaction with friends and family. We pray for those in trade and commerce and our economic future. **SILENCE**

We pray for those in leadership and authority: that they have the courage, wisdom and discernment to make the right choices.

We pray for those who are caring, teaching and serving us – that they will know the strength of the Holy Spirit within them. **SILENCE**

In the wilderness of life today be present, O Lord, for in your name we pray. **Amen.**

Let us say together The Lord's Prayer

HYMN StF 235 ³ [Click here to join in](#)

Christ our Redeemer knew temptation's hour

In desert places, silent and apart;

And three times over met the tempter's power

With God's word written, hidden in his heart.

He makes not bread what God has made a stone

He at whose bidding water turns to wine:

We are not meant to live by bread alone

But as God speaks the word of life divine.

He will not ask the fickle crowd's acclaim,
Nor flaunt the Sonship which is his by right,
Nor seem distrustful of the Father's Name
Who bids us walk by faith and not by sight.

He seeks no kingdom but by cross and grave,
For love of sinners spurning Satan's throne:
His triumph seen in those he died to save
Who, to his glory worship God alone.

Blessing ¹

God, as we go to our daily tasks, make us a people who are content in all circumstances: in crowds or alone, with much or with little, well-fed or hungry. May your presence, your provision and your bread of life be enough for us. Bless us as we continue in our journey. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Acknowledgements

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