

North Kent Methodist circuit Sunday service

First Sunday of Lent

21st February 2021

Order of service

Music played before service starts:

StF 20 Be still for the presence of the Lord

StF 18 Be still and know that I am God

Welcome and opening prayer

Good morning and welcome to our Sunday morning worship. This Sunday is the first Sunday of Lent. We ate our pancakes on Tuesday, mixed the ashes on Wednesday and now we are invited to take time to explore the mystery of the cross. This is Lent.

Let's pray. *Reading from the psalm 25, prayer of confession*

Hymn StF 2 Come let us sing to the One followed by StF 437 When the music fades
(by Third Avenue)

Readings:

Genesis 9:8-17 *(by Kathy S., Sittingbourne Methodist Church)*

Mark 1:9-15 *(by Tony B., Sittingbourne Methodist Church)*

Hymn: StF 96 We sing of your Glory, we praise you again

Reflection *(bottom of the page)*

Hymn: In Christ alone *(by Third Avenue)*

Prayers of Intercession *(by Chris Ch., Newington Methodist Church)*

Hymn: StF 104 God moves mysterious way

Benediction

The almighty and merciful Lord, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
bless us and keep us now and always. **Amen**

Exit music: StF 254 Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

Reflection Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25; Mark 1:9-15; 1Peter 3:18-22

Mark goes fast. His gospel just flies and hits with profound accuracy. From v.9 to 15 Mark records three events. Jesus's baptism, 40 Days in the desert and the Beginning of the Gospel.

Jesus' baptism is a unique event! The whole universe pays attention. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are present and certify something what no man can claim for himself. *"This is my beloved son in whom I found favour"*

Baptism is a unique event to all of us of course. All heaven celebrates and angels sing in heaven when one sinner turns back to God. In our Baptism our sins are taken away. In Jesus's baptism it is an act of obedience. He had no sins of his own, but he carried all the sins of the world. Sounds impossible. Such a statement! I do not think we can fully comprehend it. No one ever has done this. Jesus offers an explanation when he carried this heavy burden on the cross. Then it was most obvious even to the criminal mind of a man who was crucified next to him. He said: *"but this man has done nothing wrong – Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom"* Lk 23: 41-43

Then Mark accelerates in his account even more and the words he uses really making it feel urgent, sudden: *"at once the Spirit forced him into the desert"*. Normally after the Baptism we like to have a reception, refreshments and a family party, take pictures. And it is good.

But let's notice this sudden and surprising move. From the Father's affirmation and the Holy Spirit's tap on his shoulder Jesus was driven to the desert. An audience with the devil himself! That is hash. Yet Mark also writes that Jesus was among the wild animals and angels served him. This brief mention brings in a sense of calmness. It resembles the Garden of Eden and the first people living with animals and walking and talking with God.

Mark doesn't give many details compared to the other gospels about what exactly happened in the desert. He simply states that Jesus was there for 40 days and was tempted by Satan. That shortness of details is actually great. As if Mark puts a blanket over this to provide privacy and dignity. As we would expect when we go through a difficult temptation. Temptation doesn't give us much credit. And we would not like it if all our temptations are revealed, because in many we fail, and it takes time to restore the spirit of joy and freedom after that. Jesus is not a show man, he is a friend. He doesn't sell the trust you give him to anyone. He knows how to handle everyone's secrets to the point of healing their soul.

It is also scary how temptation hits exactly our most hidden weaknesses. The weakest point is often there, where we think it would not happen to us. Perhaps that is why Paul writes: “when I am weak, I am strong”

40 days is a long time to spend in the desert. It is one thing to go for a holiday trip on the camel and get back to your hotel but other to spend 40 nights with no water and no food. All kinds of thoughts would go around my mind. As we enter to the Lent season, let's give up holidays in Egypt (which would not happen now anyway) and think of what is stopping you giving God what is his. It is to be a renewing and refreshing journey. I pray may we all find the joy and freedom of the Holy Spirit at the end of this journey. Perhaps I can close with some words from Pope Francis:

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude
Fast from anger and be filled with patience
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
Fast from worries and have trust in God.
Fast from complaints; contemplate simplicity
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
Fast from bitterness, fill your hearts with joy.
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate.
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
Fast from words; be silent and listen.

Amen