

Traditional Home service Sunday 26th February

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and repent. Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin. Renew a right spirit within us and restore us to the joy of your salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*It is well*)

READINGS - Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7
Romans 5.12-19
Matthew 4.1-11

TALK

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

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*And can it be*)

CONCLUSION

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, by the power which is at work among us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all ages.

Amen.

Hymns to use

1 When peace like a river attendeth
my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me
to say
It is well, it is well with my soul

*It is well (it is well)
with my soul (with my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul*

2 Though Satan should buffet, though
trials should come
Let this blest assurance control
That Christ (yes he has) has regarded
my helpless estate
And has shed His own blood for my
soul

It is well (it is well) ...

3 My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious
thought
My sin, not in part, but the whole
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no
more
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my
soul

It is well (it is well) ...

4 O Lord, haste the day when my faith
shall be sight
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll
The trump shall resound, and the Lord
shall descend
Even so, it is well with my soul

It is well (it is well) ...

1 And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for
me?

*Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!*

2 'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

Amazing love! ...

3 He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.

Amazing love! ...

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

Amazing love! ...

5 No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ
my own.

Amazing love! ...

Sermon - Holly Horspole
GENESIS 2:15-17, 3:1-7 & MATTHEW
4:1-11 – LISTENING TO THE RIGHT VOICE

What are the loudest voices in your life? There are so many voices we encounter each day that compete for our attention – voices of expectation, voices that remind us of all the things we need to do, voices of encouragement, voices of judgement, voices of love, voices of fear, voices of temptation, voices of challenge. These voices can influence us in both good ways and bad ways, and they can dictate the way we live and the decisions we make. We have to discern which are the right voices to listen to, and choose which voices to follow. There are lots of voices we could choose to listen to and follow, but today I want to invite us to think about choosing to listen to the voice of our Father God above all the other voices, especially the negative ones, that compete for our attention.

Today's readings feature the voice of temptation – first we have Eve in the garden of Eden in conversation with the serpent, and then Jesus's encounter with Satan in the wilderness. In both cases, the voice of temptation tries to divert humans from following God's will for their lives. As we know from Eve's conversation with the serpent, the voice of temptation wins in that situation – Adam and Eve disobey God's instruction to not eat from the tree of knowledge, and sin enters the world. Humanity has been living with the consequences of that moment ever since, and it has implications for all of us – none of us are exempt from sin or living with the voice of temptation.

I find it fascinating that the serpent doesn't simply tell Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, but instead challenges her about what God really said to her. "Did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" – did God really say that? Is that really what God's like?... Eve is able to recall what God has said to her, but the serpent's questioning creates space for doubt, and something that God has forbidden starts to look quite attractive. Eve has a choice between listening to the voice of God or the voice of temptation. As we know she

chooses to ultimately listen to the voice of temptation.

In our Gospel reading, we find Jesus being tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus is led there by the Spirit – Jesus's experience with the voice of temptation is something that God allowed to happen for a purpose. Although Jesus was without sin, he was also fully human, and he knows what it is to face all kinds of temptation – he identifies with us in our struggles against the voice of temptation. This also reminds us that it's not wrong to be tempted and there's grace for when we mess up. It's more about how we respond to that temptation, and trying to let God's voice be louder than the voice of temptation in our lives.

Satan tries to tempt Jesus three times: first, the tempter comes to him and says, 'if you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread'. At this point, Jesus had been fasting for 40 days, so we can start to imagine how tempting it must have been to just turn the stones into bread. The voice of temptation is trying to get Jesus to use his power for himself, rather than trusting in God to satisfy his needs. Jesus answers with Scripture, 'it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'. Jesus is confident that God will provide all he needs. Secondly, the voice of temptation says, 'if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the highest point of the temple, for it is written, He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone'. The voice of temptation invites Jesus to make himself secure from getting hurt or injured. Here, Satan even tries to use Scripture against Jesus, but he's taking it out of context. Jesus answers him, 'it is also written, do not put the lord your God to the test'. Jesus is confident of God's love and protection and doesn't need to test him on it.

Finally, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour and offers to give them to him, if only Jesus would bow down and worship him. The voice of temptation tries to entice Jesus with the prospect of prestige and control over the world. Jesus says, 'away from me, Satan!

For it is written, worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' Jesus is confident in his call to fully submit himself to serving and worshipping God alone.

Satan attempts to distract Jesus from following God's voice with the temptation to use his power to provide for himself, obtain security and prestige, and to be in control. I wonder if any of those perhaps sound a bit familiar to us today? The voice of temptation ultimately inviting us to rely on ourselves and not on God. To try and be the ones who are in control. To trust in the world and its broken systems, rather than in the plans our Father God has for us.

When confronted with the voice of temptation, Jesus is able to resist listening to that voice, and I think that's because he is so familiar with the voice of his Father. Jesus is so intimately familiar with God's voice – he knows what God's heart is like and what his voice is like. He knows that in the wilderness, it was not the voice of his father asking him to do those things. And this helps him to do what Adam and Eve couldn't – they knew the voice of their creator, but they chose to let temptation be the louder voice. Knowing the Father God's voice so well equips Jesus with a response and defence against the voice of temptation – we see this in the way Jesus responds to each time with Scripture. Jesus is committed to being sustained by God's word, to trusting God completely without having to test him. He is committed to loving and serving God alone. It's significant that immediately before Jesus is sent into the wilderness, Jesus is baptised and the voice of God declares, 'this is my son whom I love; with him I am well pleased'. God equips Jesus with this truth, and Jesus is so certain of his identity as God's beloved son that it enables him to stand firm when other voices try to lead him astray.

We need to learn to hear our Father's voice, to be able to recognise the voice of love and truth when we encounter other voices that attempt to distract us – because that's what the tempter's goal is, to divert us from following God's path for us. Proverbs 3:6 in the message version says, 'listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track'.

I think this is less about explicitly receiving step-by-step instructions from God about our lives, but more about becoming increasingly familiar with God's voice – learning what his heart for us and his character is like, so that when we encounter competing voices that try to trick us into not trusting God, we're able to resist them. Like Jesus did when he was tempted, we need to stand firm in our identity as God's beloved children.

So how do we learn to know what God's voice sounds like?

We spend time with him. Like in any relationship – we have to genuinely invest our time in our relationship with God if we really want to know his voice. If you think about the person you are closest to in the world, someone you know really well. Chances are, you know them really well because you've invested time in getting to know them. It's the same with us and God. We spend time dwelling in his word. We spend time worshipping in his presence. We spend time speaking and listening to him in prayer. Each time we do these things, the more familiar we become with his voice. The more acquainted we become with our father's voice, the more that can become the voice that directs, feeds and sustains us as we go through life.

As we've already noticed, Jesus sets the example of using Scripture as a defence against the voice of temptation – we can choose to equip ourselves with Scripture – storing it up in our hearts and minds, so that we can recall it and speak it out when we are faced with negative voices. I'm sure many of us have got favourite Bible verses that we come back to again and again. I've definitely got certain Bible verses that I'll repeat in certain circumstances – for example, Nehemiah 8:10 "the joy of the Lord is your strength", and Romans 8, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.". There are certain prayers written by others that I find helpful, and certain worship songs I'll listen to or sing. Doing these things helps

me to concentrate on God's word and his voice, rather than on other voices that might try to creep in and convince me that I shouldn't trust God.

I think choosing to listen to God's voice is a bit like tuning a radio – there might be some interference from other competing stations, but there are things we can do to help us tune into the right channel and focus on his voice.

So, what is the loudest voice in your life today? Perhaps some of us feel we're in a place where we feel we are really tuned in to God's voice at the moment...Perhaps for some of us the voice of temptation is lingering around a bit today – inviting us to rely on ourselves and not on God. To try and be the ones who are in control. To trust more in the world than in God. Perhaps this is leading to voices of fear, comparison, judgement or shame. We do not need to put our trust in those voices. They do not need to be the voices that direct or lives. The disobedience of Adam and Eve does not need to define us. It's Jesus's obedience against the voice of temptation and ultimately by choosing the way of the cross that defines us, showing us what it looks like to choose God's voice above everything else, and making the way for us to be able to do the same. We won't always get it right, we will sometimes give into the wrong voices, but there is grace for us. God doesn't leave us to struggle on our own or to fend for ourselves. He has equipped us by his Holy Spirit and with his Word, and he's also given us the gift of each other to journey alongside. Whatever voices feel the most prominent for us today, I believe God's voice is so much louder and more persistent than any other voice around us. God's voice is one of goodness and truth and hope. And we can trust God's voice because he loves us, and his voice is one that will lead us, not into harm, but into flourishing.

And as we finish I'd love to pray for us, that we would learn to listen to our Father God's voice above all others...