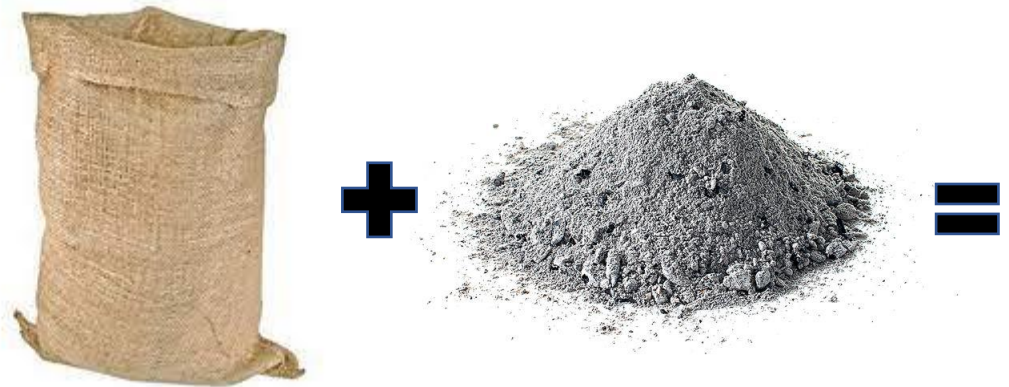


3rd Sunday before Lent

ALL-AGE SERVICE



Welcome

This month's All Age Service is about exploring what we might do this year in Lent. Do we give something up or do something extra?

Geoffrey

Hymn – The Servant King

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHYFFQJNa_I

From heaven you came, helpless babe,
Entered our world, your glory veiled;
Not to be served but to serve,
And give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.*

There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said.

This is our God, the Servant King,

Come, see his hands and his feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered.

This is our God, the Servant King,

So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving.

This is our God, the Servant King,

Words and music: Graham Kendrick
© 1983 Kingsway Thankyou Music

Opening

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all.**

**Lord, direct our thoughts,
teach us to pray,
lift up our hearts to worship you
in Spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ. Amen**

Confession

**Lord God, our maker and our redeemer,
this is your world and we are your people:
come among us and save us.**

**We have wilfully misused your
gifts of creation;**

Lord be merciful: forgive us our sin.

**We have seen the ill-treatment of others
and have not gone to their aid;**

Lord be merciful: forgive us our sin.

**We have ignored evil and dishonesty
and failed to strive for justice;**

Lord be merciful: forgive us our sin.

**We have heard the good news of Christ,
but have failed to share it with others;**

Lord be merciful: forgive us our sin.

**We have not loved you with all our heart,
nor our neighbours as ourselves;**

Lord be merciful: forgive us our sin.

Absolution

God who is both power and love,
forgive us and free us from our sins,
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Jubilate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qS-7qh9tz0>

Jubilate, ev'rybody.

Serve the Lord in all your ways,
And come before His presence singing,
Enter now His courts with praise.
For the Lord our God is gracious,
And His mercy's everlasting.

Jubilate, Jubilate,

Jubilate Deo! *(repeat a few times!)*

Fred Dunn
(1907-1979)

©1977 Kingsway Thankyou Music

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 58.3-8

'Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?'
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.
Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Hymn – Brother, sister, let me serve you

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_ufwqwquqY

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Richard Gillard
©1977 Scripture in Song

Matthew 5. 14-16

Jesus went up the mountain and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to teach them: 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Talk

In the Old Testament the Israelites were a troublesome lot, frequently disobeying or misunderstanding God's instructions. So today we hear a sort of soliloquy from God, who is puzzling over the way in which the Israelites behave, and how they can get it so wrong when following a simple instruction to fast from time to time.

For myself, I've never really thought much about fasting. As a child I was as skinny as a rake and people were concerned I didn't eat enough, so fasting didn't arise as an issue. It certainly wasn't part of my family's tradition.

I did give up sweets for Lent, but that wasn't fasting – I didn't feel any hungrier as a result! It was much more about giving up a pleasure rather than impacting my diet. However I did give up sweets properly!

At prep school we were given a shilling a week to spend on sweets – there was a sort of tuck-shop where boxes of different sweets were laid out – Smarties, Sherbet Fountains (I never liked the liquorice tube), Mars Bars, Caramac, Penny Chews, Refreshers, Polo Mints, Fruit Pastilles. I could get a lot for a shilling – bearing in mind that a Mars Bar only cost sixpence.

When Lent came along I simply didn't go to the Tuck Shop. I have no memory of what I did with my shilling instead – maybe I just didn't get given it? This is relevant to today's passage in Isaiah.

Actually I did know that Friday was technically a day of fasting, but it was nothing about eating less, just different. My mother always used to serve fried cod with home-made chips on Fridays – it was delicious, more like a feast than a fast.

I think "Fish on Fridays" is still quite a strong habit for some people, but what's it to do with fasting?

Well, I was told it was like this. Christians were encouraged to fast for one day a week, by abstaining from eating any meat that day. Friday was the day chosen because it was a reminder of Good Friday. So no roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Fridays!

But sometime in the middle ages, perhaps, the monks weren't impressed by missing out on their meat-and-two-veg, so they persuaded themselves that fish weren't made of meat, but something else that wasn't meat so it didn't count!

Fridays, then, weren't a fast day, just a day for eating fish. This had the double advantage of keeping them from going hungry, and also making a nice change in diet!

But of course they were missing the point – fasting was designed to be about denying oneself food as a spiritual discipline – they were neatly side-stepping that.

But more importantly, as Isaiah writes, fasting was also about giving to the poor the money you saved on your food – a fast was to benefit others rather than oneself. Until I read the passage from Isaiah a few days ago I had no idea about that – it didn't occur to me.

It's a fascinating passage....

God is complaining about the Israelites pestering him for special praise, in effect they're saying "Look at me, aren't I virtuous." And God is getting fed up:

"Day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practised righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God."

God can see that they wanted approval without actually deserving it. In a modern idiom "They talked the talk, but they didn't walk the walk."

They were deluding themselves and God is pretty fed up:

"They ask of me righteous judgements, they delight to draw near to God saying 'Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why do we humble ourselves, but you do not notice?'"

Clearly they want credit for their behaviour, and they believe that God is ignoring them.

So God tells it to them straight:

"Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high."

They are clearly getting it wrong!

God goes on to say "Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?"

This is very revealing. The wearing of sackcloth and ashes was supposed to show how ashamed you are in public, but they are seeing it as a badge of honour – "Look at me, aren't I doing well?"

They're getting it completely wrong. What should they be doing? What should we be doing during Lent?

God spells it out:

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

Isn't that what we should be doing for Lent?

"Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.

"Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am."

Amen.

Affirmation of faith

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

The Peace

Jesus says to his disciples,
'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.
Not as the world gives do I give to you.
Let not your hearts be troubled or afraid.'

The peace of the Lord be always with us.

Hymn – Take my life and let it be

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvEY4SqqCbo>

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take my self, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Havergal
(1836-1897)

Prayers

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ,
let us pray to the Father.

You sent your Son to bring
good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to captives
and salvation to your people:
anoint us with your Spirit;
rouse us to work in his name.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us out to encounter those in need,
and work with them

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to comfort
the sick, the lonely, the depressed.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to those who mourn,
to bring sympathy and understanding where there is grief.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

**Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,
as our Saviour has taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Collect

Almighty God, who alone can bring order
to the unruly wills and passions of sinful humanity:
give your people grace so to love what you command
and to desire what you promise,
that, among the many changes of this world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found;
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.

Hymn – O Jesus I have promised

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU_cev2ri90

O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
be thou forever near me, my Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me! The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but Jesus, draw thou nearer, and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen, thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised to all who follow thee
that where thou art in glory there shall thy servant be;
and Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end:
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my friend.

O let me see thy footmarks, and in them plant mine own;
my hope to follow duly is in thy strength alone;
O guide me, call me, draw me, uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive me, my Saviour and my friend.

John Ernest Bode
(1816-1874)

Closing Responses

The Lord God almighty is our Father:
he loves us and tenderly cares for us.

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Saviour:
he has redeemed us and will defend us to the end

The Lord, the Holy Spirit is among us:
he will lead us in God's holy way.

To God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be praise and glory today and for ever. Amen.

The Blessing

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**