

## **Welcome**

### **Introduction to Theme**

In the first week of Lent, the gospel reading always focuses on Jesus' time in the wilderness. Usually, we think of Jesus as being alone. However, the gospel of Mark highlights the wild beasts and angels as Jesus' companions in the wilderness place. We use this element of the story to notice and consider animals and creation as our journey companions.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

**We acknowledge that this land is God's land, and God's Spirit dwells here. We pay our respects to the elders, past, present and emerging of the Bidjegal and Gweagal people of the Eora Nation who have cared for this land in time beyond our dreaming. This land on which we live and move was and always will be Aboriginal Land.**

### **We light the Christ Candle**

**Even when we can't see the flame/light of God's presence, even in our darkest times, we know that God is here.**

**God is here!**

***God is always here!***

**God is with us!**

***God is always with us!***

**And we say who we are ...**

***We are a congregation***

***Who welcome people of all cultures and lifestyles,***

***Who create a safe place for the community, and***

***Who share the journey of life and faith.***

### **Call to Worship**

Creator God in you we trust:

**We gather to worship.**

Make known your ways,  
make known your paths:

**We gather to worship.**

Surround us with your love,  
as we come to bring you praise:  
**We gather to worship.**

**Sing: *Love will be our Lenten calling*      Together in Song 684**  
<https://youtu.be/RLegowSR2nk?si=N09T59zZX92N7IGt>

**Love will be our Lenten calling,  
love to shake and shatter sin,  
waking every closed, cold spirit,  
stirring new life deep within,  
till the quickened heart remembers  
what our Easter birth can mean.**

**Peace will be our Lenten living  
as we turn for home again,  
longing for the words of pardon,  
stripping off old grief and pain,  
will we stand, restored and joyful,  
with the Church on Easter day.**

**Truth will be our Lenten learning:  
hear the Crucified One call!  
Shadowed by the Saviour's passion,  
images and idols fall,  
and, in Easter's holy splendour,  
God alone is all in all.**

**© 1997 E.J. Smith Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150**

### **Opening Prayer**

There is a tradition in the Church that through Lent we journey with Jesus towards Jerusalem, following his footsteps towards the cross. We extinguish a candle each week to remind us that Jesus walks on towards his death. We pray that we might take up Christ's courage to walk with love and seek justice. And we pray that we might not falter in this task. Amen.

*Extinguish one Lenten candle.*

**Sing: God to enfold you (John Bell – Iona)**

<https://youtu.be/MLwVGNkMDwQ?si=BPLuWUUPZyW-VBIF>

<https://youtu.be/yOrmUAw5E8Q?si=-q9yjt0Pstuf5ANe>

**God to enfold you,  
Christ to uphold you,  
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight.  
So may God grace you,  
heal and embrace you,  
lead you through darkness into the light.**

**Opening Prayer Continues ...**

Please rise in body or in spirit to offer this opening prayer. As I offer this prayer on your behalf, I invite you to begin by assuming a prayerful posture. You may choose to fold hands or hold them up and open..

You may choose to lift your eyes or close them and bow your head...choose a posture that feels natural and be prepared to make slight movements as you feel led.

***All: God of our bodies, we prepare for the Lenten journey by centring our focus on you. We hold a posture that reminds us of our bodies and spirits at rest in your presence.***

**One: God of our hearts, we open our hearts and ourselves as we slowly move into a different posture. You calm our restlessness and prepare us to take action in response to your call. You have made us capable of holding so much, carrying so much – even each other.**

***All: Thank you, God, for moving our bodies and spirits when we need to move. Thank you for holding us in stillness when we need to be still. Amen.***

**Sing: God of my breathing and God of my heart (Tune: TiS 547) Richard Bruxvoort Colligan**

<https://youtu.be/clPROmMBAik?si=C3VtLcleVN3FXZGX>

**God of my breathing and God of my heart,  
Spirit embodied in all human parts,  
would that this body, from head to the toes,  
bring forth Your glory in all that I know.**

God of my eating and God of my taste,  
flavour my nourishment full with Your grace.  
Bless what comes in through this mouth that it might  
bless how I live with the kindness of Christ.

God of my hearing and God of my sight,  
bless all I find from the moment I rise.  
Upon this mind your table be found,  
prayerfully offered these visions and sounds

God of my footsteps and God of my path,  
where these feet travel may they know no lack.  
Shoes on the pavement or toes in the soil  
carry your servant where Christ bids them go.

God of my memories, Lord of this mind,  
God of the moment whose vision is time,  
all I remember and all I forget  
hold in Your keeping so this soul might rest.

God of my limits and God of all truth,  
You who have knit me with joy in the womb,  
would that this body from head to the toes  
bring forth Your glory in all that I know.

© 2004 This Here Music/Worldmaking.net. Words, Richard Bruxvoort  
Colligan Reproduced under Copyright Licences: LicenSing #604712; CCLI  
#45150

### **Prayer of Confession**

God of compassion,  
we acknowledge that we have not always walked in your way,  
we have not always lived with gracious courage,  
and we have not always sought justice and flourishing for all.  
Forgive us, we pray.  
We ask for your grace and we commit to try again to follow after Jesus. Amen.

### **Words of Grace**

God's Spirit is at work making all things new,  
even us, even here.  
Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Pass the Peace**

## **ENGAGING THE WORD** **Hebrew Scriptures**

### **Genesis 9:8–17**

**8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 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. 11 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.”**

**12 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: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 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. 16 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.” 17 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.”**

### **Psalms 25:1-10**

**1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.**

**2 O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.**

**3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.**

**4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.**

**5 Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.**

**6 Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.**

**7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!**

**8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.**

**9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.**

**10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees**

**Sing: *In water we grow* (Brian Wren) TiS 494**

**[https://youtu.be/-DKjtykP3qI?si=dHAZbfBKz\\_Ps--Nm](https://youtu.be/-DKjtykP3qI?si=dHAZbfBKz_Ps--Nm)**

**In water we grow,  
secure in the womb,  
and speechlessly know  
love's safety and room.  
Baptizing and blessing  
we publish for good  
the freeing, caressing  
safe keeping of God.**

**In water we wash:  
the dirt of each day,  
its trouble and rush  
are carried away.  
In Christ re-created  
by love's cleansing art,  
self-will and self-hatred**

**dissolve and depart.**

**In water we dive,  
and cannot draw breath,  
then surface alive,  
rebounding from death.  
Our old self goes under,  
in Christ dead and drowned.  
We rise, washed in wonder,  
by love clad and crowned.**

**In water we dwell,  
for by its deep flow  
through bloodstream and cell,  
we live, think, and grow.  
Praise God, love outflowing,  
whose well of new birth  
baptizes our knowing,  
and waters the earth.**

**© Hope Publishing Co. (Brian Wren) Reproduced under Copyright Licences:  
ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150**

### **Christian Scriptures**

#### **1 Peter 3:13-22**

**13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14 But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you;**

**16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.**

**18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh,**

but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

### **Mark 1:9-15**

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news<sup>[i]</sup> of God <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

### **RESPONDING**

#### **Offering**

May our gifts be used for the flourishing of all things, the human and the other-than-human, so that God’s world might be renewed. Amen.

#### **Reflection**

**Gordon Stewart: He Was With the Wild Beasts**

**Sunday February 18, 2018**

**The Rev. Gordon Stewart**

**Denomination: Presbyterian Church (USA)**

**1st Sunday in Lent - Year B**

**Genesis 9:8-17; Mark 1:9-15**



In his autobiography Samuel Clemens, the beloved humorist known as Mark Twain, wrote words akin to the Gospel of Mark's briefest description of Jesus' forty days and nights in the wilderness:

*With the going down of the sun my faith failed and the clammy fears gathered about my heart. Those were awful nights, nights of despair, nights charged with the bitterness of death. In my age as in my youth, night brings me many a deep remorse.*

None of us is ever quite sane in the night. Sometimes our faith fails. The clammy fears gather about our hearts. Despair descends. It is into this primitive night of the soul that Jesus enters when Mark describes Jesus' wilderness temptation with one line: "He was with the wild beasts, and angels ministered to him."

In Mark's Gospel, there is none of the later Gospel's three temptations. There is only this perplexing description. "He was with the wild beasts..." Jesus enters that frightening solitude Gerard Manley Hopkins described as a miserable soul "gnawing and feeding on its own miserable self."

The wild beasts of Mark and of Hebrew Scripture are symbolic figures representing the violence and arrogance of nations and empires: the lion that threatened David's sheep; the lion with wings and a bear gnawing insanely on its own ribs in Daniel's dream; a leopard and a dragon with great iron teeth destroying everything in its way. The beasts of Daniel and Hebrew Scripture symbolize the deepest threats, threats to human wellbeing and existence itself. In Daniel's dream, when the Ancient of Days takes his judgment seat and gathers the nations (the wild beasts), they are as nothing before him, but "of his kingdom there shall be no end." Like Samuel Clemens, with the going down of the sun [our] faith fails and the clammy fears gather about our hearts.

In his book *Man Before Chaos*, Dutch philosopher-theologian Willem Zuurdeeg argues that all philosophy and religion is born in a cry. Whether the great philosophies of Plato or Aristotle or Hegel, whether Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity or what we arrogantly describe as "primitive" religions; whether the political philosophy of Western democracy or Islamic theocracy or one or another economic theory - capitalist, socialist, communist, or communitarian - all philosophy and religion is born in a cry for help. It is the primal cry of human vulnerability, our contingency, our finitude, our mortality. It is the cry for order, protection and for meaning in the face of the chaos without and within.

Separated from all social structure and from all the answers that express or muffle the cry, removed from civilization and all distraction - no computers, no video games, no reading material, no play stations, no TV, no artificial

noise, nothing unreal to distract him - in the wilderness of time, "he was with the wild beasts."

"He was with the wild beasts" is a kind of cliff notes for Jesus' entire life and ministry. He would dwell among the wild beasts - the unruly principalities and powers that defy the ways of justice, love and peace. He lived and died among the wild beasts that mocked him at his trial - "Hail, King of the Jews!" - stripped him of his clothing, plaited a crown of thorns believing that they had seen the end of him. But after the beasts of empire had torn him to shreds, he became for us the crucified-risen King whose love would tame us all.

There are times for each of us when the beasts are all too real, moments when faith falters, nights in the darkness when despair gnaws at us, and days in the noontide heat when hopelessness extends its claws to destroy our sense of wellbeing.

A young woman sits in the Atlanta airport. She is returning home from a year of study abroad. All flights have been delayed because of a storm. She is anxiously awaiting the final leg of her journey home. But home as she had known it no longer exists. Her mother and father have separated. Her father has entered treatment for alcoholism. She has entered a wilderness not of her own choosing. The beasts are tearing her apart. Her ordered universe has fallen apart.

She goes to the lounge to get a drink. A stranger, her father's age, sits down. He jolts her out of her fog. "Do you have the time?" he asks. As strangers are sometimes wont to do, they begin to talk. Unaware of her circumstances, he tells her that he is a recovering alcoholic, a former heavy drinker whose drinking was destroying his marriage until his wife became pregnant. The impending birth of his daughter snapped him into treatment and sobriety. "I thought I was going to die," he said, "but it was the beginning of a resurrection, a whole new life." The young woman begins to feel a burden lifting. The stranger finishes his drink and disappears. She never gets his name.

The loudspeaker announces her flight's departure. She boards her flight, and as the plane rises through the clouds, she finds herself momentarily sandwiched between two sets of clouds - one below, one above - and the space between is filled with rainbow light, a world whose grandeur and grace exceed all reasons for despair. She is strangely calm in the face of what lies ahead. A sense of peace descends. It is as though the man has slipped into her wilderness as a gift. She has been with the wild beasts. An angel has ministered to her.

During these forty days and nights of Lent, we live more consciously among the wild beasts, praying that the angels of our better nature will minister to us in the wilderness of this wilder-than-wild time, dreaming with Daniel and Jesus of the Ancient of Days taking the judgment seat and gathering the nations. They are as nothing before him, but of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Let us pray.

Ancient of Days, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, take us in this journey into the wilderness of time and let your angels minister to all anxiety and fear and make us all to do your will. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sing/Listen: How long - Prayer of Lament 2019 (Not played in service)

<https://youtu.be/qJEDa6-0ISU?si=TWRN9rXf227sIRzx>

1. How long must we cry out  
till justice rolls down like a river? How long will this night last,  
and when will we all be together?

Teach me to do what is right:  
work in the darkness, trust in the light.  
And may love be the path I walk upon.

2. How long will these bombs fall,  
and bodies get twisted and broken?  
How long will these voices  
keep shouting loud insult and slogan?

3. How long? Will your creatures be trampled,  
degraded forever?  
How long must we cry out  
till justice rolls down like a river?

Robin Mann 2001

Reproduced under Copyright Licences:  
ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

Announcements

***Prayers for Others***

**We begin with a moment of silence,  
to wonder at the mystery of prayer,  
to reflect on our journeys and the journeys of others,  
and to collect our thoughts before God . . . [pause]**

**We pray for those in leadership,  
that they may bless the life and peace of the nations,  
our common life here,  
and especially the lives of the poor . . . [pause]**

**We pray the hungry might be fed, in body, mind and spirit,  
that the thirsty be satisfied,  
that God will hear the cry of those who long for justice . . . [pause]**

**We pray for those we meet each day,  
at work or in the street, online or in person,  
at home or on the phone . . . [pause]**

**We pray for those who teach, in colleges and schools,  
in churches and community,  
praying that knowledge may build up and not puff up,  
and that wisdom might guide the feet of all who walk our world . . . [pause]**

**We pray for those with prophetic gifting,  
that they hear rightly, and share rightly,  
and that they have a wise community to assess what they say . . . [pause]**

**We pray for the ministers, councillors and elders of our church and  
Presbytery,  
that they may serve with unity, with love and with joy . . . [pause]**

**We pray for one another,  
that we grow up in faith during this period of Lent,  
that we renew our hope,  
that we open our hearts to the deep love of God . . . [pause]**

**God in community,  
Trinity of love,**

today, we pray for those who feel alone or ill, especially ...  
and for the earth that you love.

May we offer friendship to those around us.

May we learn to listen to the stories of others, even when they are different  
from us.

May we even learn to hear and to respect the voices of creatures and  
creation.

We give thanks that we are part of the whole earth community.

Teach us to care for the earth and to strive for its healing.

We seek justice and wholeness for the earth and all its creatures.

In the name of the Christ,

who was with the wild beasts in the wilderness.

Amen.

We pray together a version of the Lord's Prayer

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be,

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your communion of peace and freedom sustain our hope  
and come on Earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and  
forever.

Amen.

(from the New Zealand Prayer Book)

Sing: URW143 *The Grace of God is like a road* (Michael Hudson)

The grace of God is like a road  
that draws the heart from its first home  
We long to go, but we hate to leave,  
and the Spirit calls, "Come follow me."

The voice of God is like the wind,  
it comes and goes and comes again  
– We read the signs in the bending trees,  
and the Spirit calls, "Come follow me."

The strength of God is like a stone;  
it firms the will of soul and bone –  
Still soul and bone grow worn and weak,  
and the Spirit calls, "Come follow me."

The hope of God is like the sun;  
it shines until the day is done –  
And the night stars rise in the East  
and the Spirit calls, "come follow me."

The love of God is like a stream;  
it fills and feeds our deepest dreams –  
It finds a thirst and leaves a spring,  
and the Spirit calls, "Come follow me."

The peace of God is like a friend  
who sees us through the journey's end –  
The road is long and the talk is sweet  
and the Spirit calls, "Come follow me."

© 2004 Church Publishing, words, Michael Hudson Reproduced under  
Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150

### **SENDING OUT Blessing/Benediction**

In the wild places, in the wilderness,  
in worship and at home,  
you are never alone.

God is present with you,  
God's creatures surround you.  
May you have eyes and ears to notice your companions  
in the days ahead.  
Amen.

**Exit Song *Be my keeper* Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan**

**My help and hope who never slumbers,  
you who made the earth and heavens,  
I lift my eyes up to the mountains -  
you're my help and hope to come,  
you're my help and hope to come.**

***Be my keeper as I'm moving  
for I am close to someplace deeper.  
As you've held this world forever,  
be my keeper, be my keeper***

**O Source of Life, my soul is longing,  
catch me now for I am falling.  
Oh, be my shade in sunshine burning,  
be my comfort in the night,  
be my comfort in the night.**

***Be my keeper as I'm moving  
for I am close to someplace deeper.  
As you've held this world forever,  
be my keeper, be my keeper.***

**O Heart of Love, you have sustained me  
from before my birth and always.  
You've been with me for all my journeys,  
help and hope, O Source of Life,  
help and hope, O Source of Life.**

***Be my keeper as I'm moving  
for I am close to someplace deeper.  
As you've held this world forever,  
be my keeper, be my keeper.***

**© *Worldmaking.net*; text, Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan**

Reproduced under Copyright Licences: ONE LICENSE A-604712; CCLI #45150