

# Parish of Central Exeter

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

14<sup>th</sup> March 2021



## Lenten Journeys: Have a break - have....?

Welcome everyone.

*Our reflections this morning are by Sheila and this evening by Keith. Intercessions are by Helen. Many thanks.*

*Welcome to the penitential purple of Lent.*

*Today is 'Refreshment Sunday' or 'Mothering Sunday' when we are at the midpoint of Lent. People could return to their Mother Church – their home parish or visit the nearest cathedral or large town church and those working for others had a day off to visit their mothers (and perhaps go to church). This year with travel and mixing with other households restricted the celebration of Mothering Sunday will take a different form. Today we are using the set readings for Lent 4 from the Book of Book of Common Prayer.*

### **Call to Worship**

Jesus said "I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry

and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

Hungering and thirsting, we come to the Lord.

**Jesus is the living bread!**

Feed us with your love and healing power, O Lord.

**Give us the bread of hope**

**and compassion that we may also feed others.**

Praise be to you, O Lord, for your compassion for us.

**Praise be to you, O Lord, for your steadfast love. Amen.**

*(written by Nancy C. Townley, and posted on the Ministry Matters website.)*

### **Gathering Hymn**

'This is our God' (The servant King). Its composer, Graham Kendrick leads the singing at a special service in Glastonbury Abbey. However, this recording may not appeal to all. Words on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VeQrWmvCms>

## **Preparation for Confession**

*In our Lent service booklets we have an introduction to the Prayers of Penitence which quotes the Beatitudes. Here is a version by P. Jacob from Chile in Bread of Tomorrow (SPCK 1992)*

Blessed are the poor....  
not the penniless  
but those whose heart is free.

Blessed are those who mourn....  
not those who whimper  
but those who raise their voices.

Blessed are the meek....  
not the soft  
but those who are patient and tolerant.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice....  
Not those who whine  
but those who struggle.

Blessed are the merciful...  
not those who forget  
but those who forgive.

Blessed are the pure in heart...  
not those who act like angels  
but those whose life is transparent.

Blessed are the peacemakers...  
not those who shun conflict  
but those who face it squarely.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice...  
not because they suffer  
but because they love.

## **Prayer of confession**

Forgive us for those times  
when our own wants and wishes  
have filled the horizon to the exclusion of all else,  
and made us blind and deaf  
to the needs and concerns of others.

Forgive us for those moments  
when the fear that sharing what we have  
will lead to our own impoverishment,  
has kept us silent and still  
when those around us are in need.

Forgive us for those situations  
when seeing only a problem  
rather than daring to dream a solution,  
has left us fettered and powerless  
where we might have been building your Kingdom.

Forgive us Father.  
Help us to transcend self-centredness, greed and fear  
and to always to feel, think and act  
as those who know the hope  
that is rooted in the generous giving of God

*(from Christian Aid's Weekly Prayers website.)*

### **Collect for the fourth Sunday in Lent**

Merciful Lord,  
you know our struggle to serve you:  
when sin spoils our lives  
and overshadows our hearts,  
come to our aid  
and turn us back to you again;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Readings**

#### **Gospel Reading**

#### **John 6: 1-13 Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand**

**6** Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), <sup>2</sup>and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. <sup>3</sup>Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. <sup>4</sup>The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

<sup>5</sup>When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" <sup>6</sup>He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

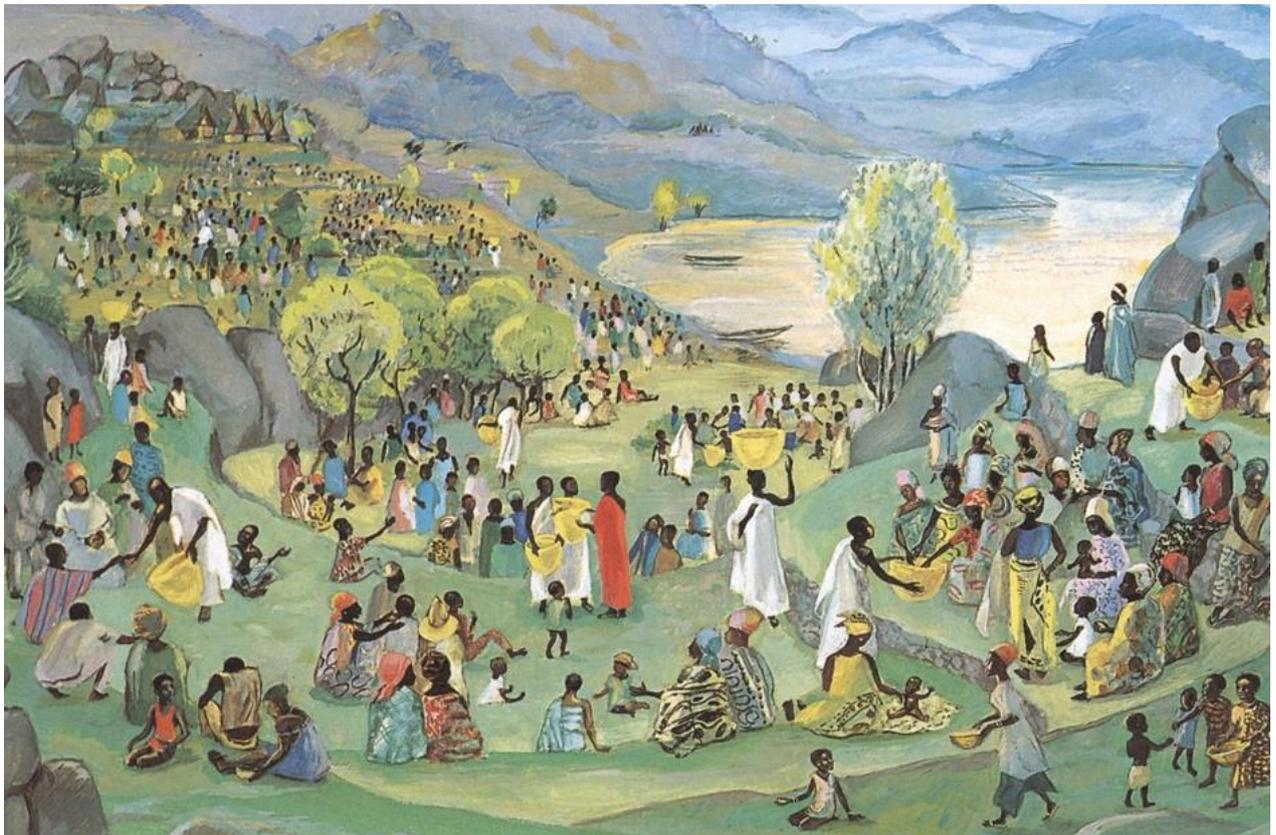
<sup>7</sup>Philip answered him, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

<sup>8</sup> Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, <sup>9</sup> "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). <sup>11</sup> Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

<sup>12</sup> When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

<sup>14</sup> After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." <sup>15</sup> Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.



This painting of the feeding of five thousand was produced by a Christian community in Cameroon in 1973. Available through the Vanderbilt University Divinity Library, Nashville.  
<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48287>

## New Testament Reading Galatians 4: 21-31

Hagar and Sarah

<sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup> For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. <sup>23</sup> His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

<sup>24</sup> These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> For it is written:

“Be glad, barren woman,  
you who never bore a child;  
shout for joy and cry aloud,  
you who were never in labour;  
because more are the children of the desolate woman  
than of her who has a husband.”

<sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. <sup>30</sup> But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” <sup>31</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

## Worship song

‘Tell His song in Praise and Story.’ A paraphrase of Psalm 34 (appointed for today) by Timothy Dudley Smith.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8\\_9MdqCwVY4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_9MdqCwVY4)

## Reflection

Galatians is probably the first letter Paul wrote, in 48 or 49 AD, sent to the small groups of believers he had evangelized in the first missionary journey recorded in Acts 13 and 14. Since his visit others had arrived questioning his authority as an apostle and emphasising the importance of keeping the symbols of the Jewish faith. Paul’s response is this argumentative letter where he first defends his position as an ‘apostle’. Then he shows how we are made right with God (justified/righteous) through faith in Jesus, not through circumcision or keeping the law.

He begins this argument in Galatians 3 with Abraham, quoting Genesis 15:6 in 3:6, 'Abraham "believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"'. The aim is to show that the true descendants of Abraham are those who believe and not those who rely on their physical descent (being a Jew) and on keeping all the law. He concludes his argument in this complex passage where he uses an allegorical interpretation to show the difference between Hagar with her son Ishmael, and Sarah with Isaac. Both are descendants of Abraham, but the full blessing comes to the child of promise. It is a gift from God. We are reminded once again that faith is a gift, that we depend on God's gracious mercy.

The gospel reading, with the feeding of the crowd from a few loaves of bread and some fish, shows the gracious, generous provision of God. This is the only miracle of Jesus's public ministry recorded in all four gospels. John provides a more theological approach as he takes it as one of the signs of Jesus' identity and leads to a discussion on Jesus' statement 'I am the bread of life'. On 25 February, this passage was the New Testament reading for Morning Prayer and I now will quote from the reflection written by Margaret Whipp.



'Why mention the small detail of the approaching Passover festival? This incidental fact earths the timing of the miracle in the spring season, when the grass is abundant and green. But, more suggestively, it also points forward to the ultimate sign of Jesus' glory revealed in his Passion sacrifice for the sins of the world.

The story is wonderfully told, to be relished at every level. We can smile at the cluelessness of the disciples, and the ludicrously meagre resources snatched from the hands of a little lad. We are hushed as Jesus gives thanks over the bread – the Greek verb denotes our word for Eucharist. And we are heartened by the Lord's insistence that all the scattered fragments will be gloriously gathered up.

Week by week, believers across the world celebrate the Eucharist as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all peoples. Still taking nothing grander than our small, perishable offerings, Christ satisfies our deepest hunger for eternal and imperishable food. People who first saw this sign began to appreciate its phenomenal significance. Do we?'

These words challenge me as a priest when I am celebrating the Eucharist now, more than they did before the pandemic. I wonder what they mean for the rest of you when many of you have only been able to share in 'spiritual communion'. One of the hard aspects of the pandemic has been the loss of communal sharing of food which has been a fundamental part of society for millennia. Its restoration will be a sign of more normal social interaction.

Meanwhile we continue with our Lenten journey perhaps refreshed today with the assurance again of God's generosity, mercy and love and reminded of the nature of true religion by the seventeenth century poet Robert Herrick in this poem which I found in the *Literary Companion to the Lectionary* by Mark Pryce, SPCK 2001.

**To Keep a True Lent** *Robert Herrick 1591-1674*

Is this a Fast to keep  
The Larder Leane?  
And cleane  
From fat of Veales, and Sheep?

Is it to quit the dish  
Of Flesh, yet still  
To fill  
The platter high with Fish?

Is it to fast an houre,  
Or rag'd to go,  
Or show  
A down-cast look, and sowre?

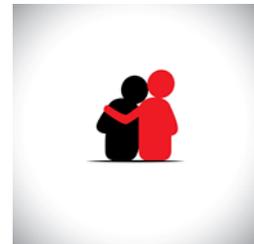
No, Tis a Fast, to dole  
Thy sheaf of wheat,  
And meat,  
Unto the hungry Soule.

It is to fast from strife,  
From old debate,  
And hate;  
To circumcise thy life.

To Shew a heart grief-rent;  
To sterve they sin,  
Not bin;  
And that's to keep thy Lent.

**Affirmation of Faith**

We believe in Jesus:  
who does not carry around a notebook  
to write down every foolish mistake we make  
or all those hurtful words we offer to others,  
but who gathers them up like so much dust  
and scatters them to the wind,  
inviting us to join hand in hand  
in the dance of forgiveness and grace.  
*(Lectionary liturgies)*



## Prayers for others (as well as ourselves)

Loving parent, hearing the promise that we are God's free children, we pray for all those who are unfree, including those parts of ourselves that remain unfree. Help us this Lent to become more open to your freedom and help create it in the world. We pray:

- For people whose lives are not their own because of poverty, overwork, all forms of prejudice, bullying, domestic abuse, gang culture, injustice, imprisonment, armed conflict, and all other forms of abuse and violence
- For people unable to release themselves from the grip of feelings that have outlived their usefulness and have become stuck, harming themselves or others – such as fear, anger, grief or hatred – and for all those who feel isolated or alone
- For people facing illness – temporary or chronic, curable or not – and for those approaching the end of their life in this material world
- For people whose lives are not their own because they are enslaved not figuratively but literally, across the world and here in this country as victims of modern slavery
- For people whose unfreedom we cannot begin to imagine, or about which we do not know, but who are known to and loved by you.
- We pray also for all those who care about the unfree, who work freely in the service of others and of your Kingdom – those who do so visibly, and those whose care or work is known only to them and to you.

In particular, we pray for \_\_\_\_\_

Liberating God, we know that true freedom comes from you. Keep each one of your children under the protection of your wing, like a mother hen and her chickens. May they and we find rest in You, knowing that you will give support in time of need and help in time of trouble. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

## The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace as appropriate.

## A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.



Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

O God,  
help me to trust you,  
help me to know that you are with me,  
help me to believe that nothing  
can separate me from your love  
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **An offertory prayer**

*We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.*

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,  
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.  
We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,  
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,  
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

*As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to Bee playing her version of the Taizé chant: Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est. Wherever there is love, God is there.*

<https://www.parishofcentralexeter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/converted-3.mp3>



*Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.*

*Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say*

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits you have given me,  
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.  
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,  
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know you more clearly,  
love you more dearly,  
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

## Post Communion Collect

Sustainer of the hungry,  
Like a mother you long to feed your children  
until each is satisfied.  
Turn our eyes to you alone,  
that, aware of our own deepest longings,  
we will reach out with Christ  
to feed others with the miracle of your love. Amen.

*(from Revised Common Lectionary Prayers)*

## Commission and Benediction

He believes in you. The busy world awaits your compassion.

**God believes in us.**

Sometimes you will give your best yet fail.

**God believes in us**

At other times you will succeed in spite of your stumbling.

**God believes in us**

Go gladly, daring to succeed or fail to the glory of God,  
and then at the very end, nothing shall dismay you.

**God believes in us**

**With Christ's own breath within us, we shall travel well.**

The help of the saving Christ,  
the wisdom of the Living God,  
and the support of the loving Spirit,  
    will be with you  
every step of the way, now and always.

**Amen!**

*(written by Bruce Prewer)*



## Closing Music

Immortal Love, for ever full. Sung by choir of Trinity College, Cambridge. Words on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMLvVYFxCT0&t=24s>

**Scroll down for Coffee Break**

# Coffee Break

## St Patrick's Day March 17<sup>th</sup>

Wednesday will be St Patrick's Day. No saint is more widely celebrated throughout the world than this Briton. The dates of his birth and death are not certain, but it seems clear that he is working during the fifth century. Patrick was born to Christian Romano-British parents. However he was to claim later that although his parents were believers, he was not. According to the 'Declaration' which Patrick probably wrote himself, he was captured when sixteen by Irish raiders and sold into slavery in Ireland. He tells us that he worked as a shepherd during these years, and found his faith. After six years in slavery he had a dream in which God told him to flee to the coast where he would find a ship to take him back home.

Having escaped, he decided to train as a priest, studying at Auxerre in France, where he was ordained.

He has another vision in which he is invited by the locals to return to Ireland. Traditionally he then proceeds to convert the Irish to Christianity, although there was actually already a Christian presence in the land. Eventually he is made Bishop of Armagh. His work was not without controversy and he was charged by other Christians with financial impropriety.

Two particular legends stick to St Patrick: that he banished snakes from the country, and that he used the three-leaved shamrock to help explain the Trinity. There is no evidence that there ever were snakes in Ireland. The first written reference to the use of the shamrock dates to 1726 so it's hard to tell how old the story is. It is plausible though.

Truth to tell, there is very little we know about Patrick for certain. He was declared a saint locally (which was the normal procedure at that time) soon after his death, and has never been canonised officially by a Pope. St Patrick's Day is the traditional anniversary of his death, and he is said to be buried in Down Cathedral, Downpatrick, but there is no proof.

However, you may break your fast and raise a glass to St Patrick on Wednesday and wear something green or blue, but don't dress up as a leprechaun, who have nothing to do with the blessed saint!



The earliest known image of St Patrick produced in the 13<sup>th</sup> century shows him wearing a blue cassock before the High King of Ireland. The colour green as a much later association.



**Scroll down for Night Prayer**

# Night Prayer

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
14<sup>th</sup> March 2021

## In the Wilderness



### Introduction

We are keeping to the theme of 'In the wilderness' to reflect over some implications of the Gospel account.

### Preparation

i just realized  
that in my imagination  
the wilderness is always somewhere else;  
a foreign landscape i actively have to enter  
in the act of being faithful.

truthfully,  
the wilderness is always where i am  
right now  
and faith is the courage to stay with it  
when i'd rather pretend i am  
anywhere else.

*(written by Cheryl Lawrie and posted on hold this space.)*

### This Evening's Music

Our first song tonight is a modern one, not written as a hymn, but is an appropriate reflection on the theme.

### Song

We start with 'Wilderness' sung by Anna Byrd  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cknrU8rt5N4>

I could pray for deliverance  
I could beg You for greener pastures  
I could question why I'm still here  
Shake my fist and demand an answer

*Pre-Chorus*

But right here right now  
Is where I start to know You better  
So right here I'll stay

*Chorus*

Even in the wilderness  
I know I'm not alone  
Even in the desert place  
Your river overflows  
Even in the wasteland  
Through the darkest valley  
There is hope  
'Cause even in the wilderness  
You won't let go

I could settle for what I want  
I could ask for the easy way out  
But You've proven that You're still good  
In the midst of the valley of doubt

*Pre Chorus*

But right here right now  
Is where I start to know You better  
So right here I'll stay

*Chorus*

Even in the wilderness  
I know I'm not alone  
Even in the desert place  
Your river overflows  
Even in the wasteland  
Through the darkest valley  
There is hope  
'Cause even in the wilderness  
You won't let go

*Bridge*

You will lead me  
You will keep me  
You will never let me go

*Chorus*

**Prayer for Lent:**

Once we stood by the clear waters,  
knowing who we were,  
who the church was and where we were going....  
...now we're in the desert....  
...uncharted territory.  
...severe and bleak.  
...but full of possibilities.  
...the rules are different.  
The old ways don't work.  
...it is a lonely place,  
and dangerous.  
There are snakes and scorpions.  
Alien creatures.  
We have been stripped of our illusions  
of growth...  
of plenty...  
and we are in the desert.  
waiting...  
for God to speak.

**Reading Matthew 4: 1 (New International Version)**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

**Reflection**

There are two quite different sets of experiences happening at the same time for Jesus here. He is in the wilderness and he is fasting. And we should also add that he is alone. Furthermore, none of the Gospels suggest they are other than real physical experiences. For us just one of those experiences is challenging enough, and it is unlikely that many (or any) of us will have undergone any prolonged involvement, and certainly not on our own.

It's probably fair to say that Jesus would have been far more aware of wildernesses which were part of the geography of where he lived, and as a devout Jew he would have regularly practised fasting at the appointed times. Even so any significant period of time in such a double or triple whammy cannot be easy and must be regarded as a highly formative event – which indeed becomes apparent as his ministry takes shape.

Fasting, wilderness and aloneness are all aspects of being without; without food, without clear boundaries, without company, and therefore being thrown back on your own resources. But will they suffice? If you are watching the BBC series 'The Terror' based on the true story of the search for the North West Passage by HMS Terror (built in Topsham) and HMS Erebus in 1845, the wilderness claims the lives of all a highly resourceful group of people.

But our resources should include our faith – however strong or fragile that may be. In this time of Lent we see how Jesus brought his faith into that empty wilderness, and at Easter we are invited to bring our faith to an empty tomb.

Today there is a resurgence of people seeking ‘wilderness experiences’ (and organisations ready to provide them), and you will find plenty of web-sites offering advice on the value of fasting both physically and spiritually. The reasons why people seek the wilderness today are perhaps well expressed in the lines below. They are part of a poem ‘The Call of the Wild’ by Robert Service (1874 – 1958) born in the UK but moved to Canada aged 21 where he became known for his poetry of the Canadian North. Bear in mind that it was written in 1907.

‘Have you suffered, starved and triumphed, grovelled down, yet grasped at glory,  
Grown bigger in the bigness of the whole?  
"Done things" just for the doing, letting babblers tell the story,  
Seeing through the nice veneer the naked soul?

Have you seen God in His splendours, heard the text that nature renders?  
(You'll never hear it in the family pew.)  
The simple things, the true things, the silent men who do things --  
Then listen to the Wild -- it's calling you.

They have cradled you in custom, they have primed you with their preaching,  
They have soaked you in convention through and through;  
They have put you in a showcase; you're a credit to their teaching --  
But can't you hear the Wild? -- it's calling you.

Let us probe the silent places, let us seek what luck betide us;  
Let us journey to a lonely land I know.

There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star a gleam to guide us,  
And the Wild is calling, calling .

.

.

let us go.

*I suggest this is very romantic, and a wilderness temptation that can be and should be resisted. What do you feel?*

Moving from wilderness to fasting.

I find it is quite difficult to give up things – even things I don't particularly like. So fasting in any shape or form has never really been my scene. When Doreen sent me these words by Pope Francis my initial reaction was: I like what he is saying, and his focus on the positive. It extends the message of the Hendrick poem that Sheila used this morning. But the more I

think about it, the more I realise that it is far easier to say than to do. We know that all the positives he mentions should be part of our practice, and hopefully often will be, but some we may find harder than others. *Take a few minutes to reflect over the Pope's Lenten message.*

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 trust in God.  
Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.  
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.  
Fast from bitterness and fill your heart with joy.  
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate to others.  
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.  
Fast from words and be silent so that you can listen.

### **We Pray**

We will wait for you, O God.  
Your Spirit compels us  
to go into the wilderness,  
and we ask for the courage to examine  
the desert places in our hearts,  
and to be willing to  
face the adversaries in our lives—  
that which lures us away  
from being who you have created us to be.

We pray for the courage to face our wild beasts and fears.  
Relieve the troubles of our hearts,  
and the devastation of our distress.  
Turn your love towards us  
that we may we know your grace in our loneliness and afflictions.

We pray this prayer,  
knowing that you watch over us, and deliver us.  
We wait for you, O God.  
In the name of our brother Jesus we pray,  
Amen.

*(excerpted from a longer prayer by Rev Karla. Posted on RevGalBlogPals )*

## **Closing Prayer**

So may we step into this wilderness  
and believe  
the life Jesus spoke of might be true  
the love he held to might be true  
the words he spoke might be true  
because there is only space  
where death ought to be

this possibility of life  
this resurrection of spirit  
in every empty space  
is our new hope

go and believe into the void.

*(Written by Roddy Hamilton and posted on the New Kilpatrick Parish Church website.)*

## **Blessing**

The love of the faithful Creator  
The peace of the wounded Healer  
The joy of the challenging Spirit  
The hope of the three in One  
Surround and encourage you  
Today, tonight and for ever.

*(Kathy Galloway)*

## **Closing music**

We are closing with 'Be thou my Guardian and my Guide', sung here by the Choir of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFpaP-BGG4A>

## **Thanks**

*Thanks to everyone who has participated, especially to Sheila and her reflections, Doreen for the material from Pope Francis, and Bee for the music at Communion. Material taken or adapted from other websites has an attribution made where possible.*



*The Temple of Hercules in Amman, Jordan, illuminated green for St Patrick's Day.*