

## Worship at Home, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2026 (First Sunday in Lent)

A short act of worship for use in people's homes prepared by Jon Skeet.

### Introduction

Hello, and welcome to Worship at Home for Sunday February 22<sup>nd</sup>. I'm Jon Skeet, and I worship at Tilehurst Methodist Church when I'm not preaching around the Circuit. My wife Holly will be joining us to read our Bible passages later in the service.

It's good to share worship with you today, as we celebrate the first Sunday in Lent. Our worship together is richer because you are a part of it.

Our call to worship this morning is from Psalm 32.

### Call to worship: Psalm 32:1-2, 11

Blessed is the person whose lawless acts are forgiven. Their sins have been taken away.  
Blessed is the person whose sin the Lord never counts against them. That person doesn't want to cheat anyone.

Be glad because of what the Lord has done for you.  
Be joyful, you who do what is right!  
Sing, all you whose hearts are honest!

### Hymn: STF 99 All creatures of our God and King

Words *close* to STF, only verses 1-3 & 7.

(There are very long versions with all 7 verses, but I think that's enough!)

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| 1 All creatures of our God and King,<br>lift up your voice and with us sing,<br>alleluia, alleluia !<br>O burning sun with golden beam,<br>and silver moon with softer gleam :<br><i>O praise him, O praise him,<br/>alleluia, alleluia, alleluia !</i> | 3 O flowing water, pure and clear,<br>make music for your Lord to hear,<br>sing 'Praise him, alleluia !'<br>O fire, so masterful and bright,<br>giving to all both warmth and light :          |
| 2 O rushing wind that is so strong,<br>and clouds that sail in heaven along,<br>O praise him, alleluia !<br>O rising morn, in praise rejoice ;<br>and lights of evening, find a voice :   | 7 Let all things their creator bless,<br>and worship him in humbleness ;<br>O praise him, alleluia !<br>Praise, praise the Father, praise the<br>Son,<br>and praise the Spirit, Three in One : |

St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)

*translated* William Henry Draper (1855–1933) (*alt.*)

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### Prayers

We continue in our prayers of adoration, already begun in that wonderful hymn.

Lord of all creation, we praise you. We worship you as our King, rejoice with you as the Spirit at work in our world, and humbly adore you as our Saviour. May all of heaven and earth join voices to glorify your name, your nature, your love.

Amen.

**Reading: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7**

<sup>15</sup>The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden. He put him there to farm its land and take care of it. <sup>16</sup>The Lord God gave the man a command. He said, “You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden. <sup>17</sup>But you must not eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will certainly die.”

<sup>1</sup>The serpent was more clever than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. The serpent said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat fruit from any tree in the garden?’”

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden. <sup>3</sup>But God did say, ‘You must not eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. Do not even touch it. If you do, you will die.’ ”

<sup>4</sup>“You will certainly not die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup>“God knows that when you eat fruit from that tree, you will know things you have never known before. Like God, you will be able to tell the difference between good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup>The woman saw that the tree’s fruit was good to eat and pleasing to look at. She also saw that it would make a person wise. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. And he ate it. <sup>7</sup>Then both of them knew things they had never known before. They realized they were naked. So they sewed together fig leaves and made clothes for themselves.

**Reading: Matthew 4:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert. There the devil tempted him. <sup>2</sup>After 40 days and 40 nights of going without eating, Jesus was hungry. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came to him. He said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘Man must not live only on bread. He must also live on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil took Jesus to the holy city. He had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup>“If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. It is written,

“ ‘The Lord will command his angels to take good care of you.  
They will lift you up in their hands.  
Then you won’t trip over a stone.’ ”

<sup>7</sup>Jesus answered him, “It is also written, ‘Do not test the Lord your God.’ ”

<sup>8</sup>Finally, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain. He showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. <sup>9</sup>“If you bow down and worship me,” he said, “I will give you all this.”

<sup>10</sup>Jesus said to him, “Get away from me, Satan! It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God. He is the only one you should serve.’ ”

<sup>11</sup>Then the devil left Jesus. Angels came and took care of him.

## Prayer of confession

Lord, we are humbled when we read of how you resisted temptation, and how we know we let you down. We are sorry for times where we have ignored your voice in our hearts. For times when we have hurt others, through deliberate actions or through failing to follow your call to show love and compassion.

We turn back to you, we ask your forgiveness, and rejoice in the promise of the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Hymn: STF 238: Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

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| 1 | Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us<br>o'er the world's tempestuous sea ;<br>guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,<br>for we have no help but thee,<br>yet possessing every blessing<br>if our God our Father be. |   | thou didst feel its keenest woe ;<br>tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,<br>through the desert thou didst go.  |
| 2 | Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us ;<br>all our weakness thou dost know,<br>thou didst tread this earth before us,  | 3 | Spirit of our God, descending,<br>fill our hearts with heavenly joy,<br>love with every passion blending,<br>pleasure that can never cloy ;<br>thus provided, pardoned, guided,<br>nothing can our peace destroy. |

James Edmeston (1791–1867)

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### *Introduction*

As I mentioned at the start of the service, this is the first Sunday of Lent. I wonder what that means to you. Perhaps it's a period of reflection, or self-denial. Perhaps your focus is on following Jesus on his path to Jerusalem, the cross, the tomb and beyond. There's nothing wrong with this variation. Each of us can mark Lent in our own way, and have faith that the Spirit will work through that.

It's natural to compare Lent with Advent, with both being periods before the major events in the Christian calendar – but I think they have very different emotional landscapes. For me, there's the potential for Lent to be quite a lonely time; a more individual journey rather than the gathering together of Advent. And of course it's an emotional rollercoaster, facing the awfulness of the Passion before the joy of the Resurrection. But we must remember that we are *not* alone – what remains of Advent is Jesus as Emmanuel, God-with-us. We travel with Jesus, not just following him.

The first Sunday in Lent is always about temptation – every year the Gospel reading in the Lectionary is about the same event, whether told by Matthew, Mark or Luke. This year our Old Testament reading is also about temptation – that of Adam and Eve. We'll look at the temptations from these two Bible passages, think about what temptation might mean for us living in the twenty-first century, and also think about how the responses of Jesus in the Gospel passage can help us.

### *Temptations in our readings*

Let's start with Adam and Eve. In some way, their temptation is very recognisable, particularly if you've spent a significant amount of time around kids. There's nothing more certain to make people want to do something than telling them they can't do it. That's just human nature.

So I can relate to that aspect – but I find it harder to connect with the *nature* of the temptation. I can't think of any modern equivalent of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of course, the nature of this temptation and first sin is more symbolic than anything else.

Moving on, what about the temptations of Jesus? If part of the reason for the Incarnation is to give us confidence that God understands how we feel, do the temptations of Jesus correspond to the ones we face? Here's what Jesus was tempted by:

- Turning stones into bread when hungry.
- Throwing himself off the top of the temple, to be lifted up by angels.
- Claiming all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour, in return for worshiping the devil.

At first glance, I can't say any of these are temptations I've faced directly. But if we look below the scale, the grandeur, perhaps even the theatricality of these, we might find temptations that are easier to relate to.

Are we ever tempted to try to live without trusting in God, relying on our own strength instead of God's power?

Are we tempted to "test" God sometimes? That might mean very different things for different people. Perhaps it's in a prayer of quiet frustration: "God, if you help me find my contact lenses, I promise I'll make that phone call I've been avoiding." Perhaps it's asking for a different kind of sign.

Perhaps most relevant to us: are we tempted to set God aside in order to live more comfortably? We may not be worshiping the devil, but if we knowingly look away from what we know to be God's will, from messages that speak of love, in order to justify that bit more luxury, is that so far away? John Bell and Graham Maule put this wonderfully in their hymn "As if you were not there":

As if you were not there,  
we televise the dying,  
watch the helpless victims crying,  
salve our consciences by sighing,  
'Life's unfair!'  
as if you were not there.

I do want to think about some temptations that aren't captured in those readings though.

### *Everyday temptations*

We looked at this Gospel passage in the house group I belong to. When we started thinking about temptations, the same idea came into the minds of several of us independently: chocolate biscuits.

Having another chocolate biscuit isn't worshiping the devil, is it? It's not taking fruit from the tree of knowledge. It's not putting God to the test, or relying on our own power – unless we're trying to turn stones into chocolate biscuits, I suppose. So is that a temptation?

If we're "tempted" into distraction from whatever we're meant to be doing – as I have been several times when writing this sermon – is *that* a temptation?

Most of us won't face a choice between doing something earth-shatteringly wonderful or cataclysmic – but that doesn't mean we're not facing temptation, or that our choices are irrelevant.

If we only see temptation in enormous life-or-death decisions, I think we're perhaps missing opportunities for growth. We don't need to beat ourselves up about it, but we can learn from the consequences of indulging *too* much, of giving in to distraction *too* often. Those aren't *moral* decisions, but they can still feel like "temptations" – and they become more relevant when we believe that God wants the best for us in all kinds of ways, not just spiritually.

So how does Jesus answer the devil, and will those answers help us with our own temptations?

*God alone is enough*

In our house group material, the closing prayer included the phrase "God alone is enough."

That feels like it sums up the answers of Jesus in our Gospel reading, and there's something about that phrase that really appeals to me. I particularly like the way there are two different ways of reading it:

- *Only* God is enough – nothing else provides satisfaction in the end.
- God provides everything we need. God is enough.

I'm not advocating ignoring material needs completely. We still need food, shelter, clothing and so on. It would be immensely hypocritical of me, aside from anything else, as someone with a comfortable life. But I can recognise the limits of that comfort, and the dangers of prioritising *my* comfort over the needs of others.

There's an element of recognition and surrender in the phrase, too: an understanding that however much we try to combat our temptations, each one of us will need the grace of Christ: grace alone is enough. Our willpower and best efforts will *not* be enough.

*Conclusion*

I believe it's difficult to strike the right balance when thinking about temptations. Too much "oh woe is me" isn't helpful – nor is ignoring them. When we recognise that we *are* tempted, whether the consequence is trivial or very significant, we have the opportunity to invite the Spirit to provide strength and wisdom. That sort of "course correction" can help us lead lives more closely following the path that God wills for us.

It does not *replace* the need for grace; the rest of Lent, Passiontide and Easter are still key. But recognising our weakness and God's strength, juxtaposed with the humble sacrifice of Christ, perhaps gives us a better perspective for the rest of the season.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, for God alone is enough.

Amen.

### **Prayers of intercession**

We offer our prayers for God's people and the world. You may wish to pause to offer your own prayers for people and situations you know of.

Lord, we pray for your church. We ask your blessing on this time of Lent, that we, along with Christians everywhere, may use this period to reflect on our relationship with you. May we recognise where we are tempted, and ask for your strength and guidance to lead us back towards your path.

Lord, we pray for the nations. We think particularly of everywhere affected by war, corruption, injustice, poverty, and greed. We ask that you speak words of peace and empathy in the hearts of the leaders of nations, and that communities everywhere will work for harmony and prosperity together.

Lord, we pray for your creation. We ask that you will teach us to be better stewards of your creation, recognising the harm humanity causes, so often through greed. With the spark of inspiration, help us to see ways to work *with* nature for the benefit of all.

Lord, we pray for each other. We pray for those suffering from health challenges, whether physical or mental, and we pray for those who care for them. We pray for those with financial or employment difficulties. We pray for those involved in difficult family and social situations. Lord, we pray for your strength and love to be shared and felt.

All of these prayers we ask in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

You may wish to say out loud the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation you prefer.

### **Hymn: STF 254: Seek ye first the kingdom of God**

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| 1 | Seek ye first the kingdom of God,<br>and his righteousness,<br>and all these things shall be added<br>unto you ;<br>Allelu-, alleluia :<br><i>Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,<br/>allelu-, alleluia !</i> | knock, and the door shall be opened<br>unto to you ;<br>Allelu-, alleluia : |  |
| 2 | Ask, and it shall be given unto you ;<br>seek and ye shall find ;<br>Karen Lafferty ( <i>b.</i> 1948)   | 3   | We shall not live by bread alone,<br>but by every word<br>that proceeds from the mouth of the<br>Lord ;<br>Allelu-, alleluia : |

*The verses may be sung in canon with the refrain. There should be no pause between verses when sung in this way.*

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### **Blessing**

As we begin our journey with God through Lent, may each of us feel the blessing of God in our hearts. May we know that although each of us faces temptation, each of us is supported by God who loves us more than we can ever know. In the strength of the Spirit, may we resolve to follow the path of Jesus ever more closely. Amen.