

February 2021 (held via Zoom)

Theme: LENT – lead us not into temptation

30 minutes of prayer. Periods of silence throughout, for your own private prayer.

As we go through, we'll pick up some of the themes from the Lent booklet, #LiveLent – God's Story, Our Story.

We meet in the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus said: “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

As we acknowledge God's presence with us now, let's take a few moments of quiet, to still our hearts and minds; to put aside all those things that have occupied us so far today, and to look to God instead.

Let's begin by saying the Lord's prayer together

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.

At the start of Lent we hear the account of Jesus going into the wilderness for 40 days, and how he was tempted by the devil. So let's listen to that now (Matthew, chapter 4, verses 1-11))

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

And so we pray

Almighty and ever-living God, forgive us when we allow ourselves to be tempted, when we turn our backs on your way and follow our way instead. Give us ears to hear you calling us back to the paths of righteousness, give us eyes to see you beckoning to us from afar, give us strength of purpose to turn away from our own selfish desires and turn again to you, ready to do your will.

We take a few moments to think of those occasions recently when we know we've been tempted to follow the wrong course of action, or those occasions when we have not even stopped to think of the choices that lie before us.

This week in the LiveLent booklet we've been thinking about telling others of God's story and our story. Many of us don't find it easy to talk about our faith and the place God has in our lives.

And so we pray

Almighty and ever-living God, forgive us when we are tempted to take the easy way, when we choose to stay silent about our faith rather than risk the ridicule and

embarrassment we fear we might face when we share it with others. Help us to acknowledge, to ourselves and others, that you are a part of our lives, that you are in us and around us, influencing and guiding us. Give us the courage to share that truth with others that they might be drawn to you, and come to know you as you already know them.

We take a few moments to think of those opportunities that we have let slip by, opportunities to be open about our faith, to share with others how we see and feel God working within us and in the world around us.

Next week the main theme in the LiveLent booklet is communication – how we communicate and interact with all those we meet. It is, perhaps, relatively easy to talk with people who are like us, who share the same interests, the same background and culture. It is often much harder to talk with people who are different, people of a different culture, creed or colour. And yet we know that Jesus spent time with many different sorts of people. In fact, he was frequently criticised for the people whose company he seemed to enjoy, those very people that polite society distained.

And so we pray

Almighty and ever-living God, forgive us when we are tempted to avoid the company of those who seem different or difficult. Forgive us when we forget that you create all people in your image and likeness. Forgive us when we are tempted to create you in our image, reducing your power and greatness to the limits of our own knowledge and imagination. We ask that you will give us an appreciation of the uniqueness of each person we encounter, enabling us to learn from them, see the good in them and catch a glimpse of your reflection in them.

We take a few moments to think of the people, or groups of people, around us that we have never taken the trouble to get to know better.

At the end of week 4 in the LiveLent booklet we are reminded that we are never alone. We are asked to do God's work together, as a Christian community. And we are always accompanied and supported by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let's remind ourselves of this by listening to the passage from the end of Matthew's gospel where he sends out the remaining eleven disciples (Matthew, chapter 28, verses 16,18-20).

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

And so we pray

Almighty and ever-living God, forgive us when we are tempted to believe that we do your work in our own power. Give us the grace to know that we need your help, your guidance, your direction. Without you we wander from your ways without even knowing it, we so easily become self-centred and self-important. Give us diligence to seek you out, just as you seek us out. Strengthen our willingness to work together as a community, for together we can achieve so much more. Increase in us our trust in you and help us to follow more closely the example of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We take a few moments to come before God asking to know and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit with us now and every day of our lives.

Let's close by saying the grace together

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