



# 'A Good News Lent'

**Sunday 28th February 2021**

*led by Rev'd Alex Mabbs*

Online Worship for St Paul's URC  
and South Croydon United Church

## **Lent 2**

*Led by Rev'd Alex Mabbs  
from the Brighthelm Centre in Brighton*

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**Opening Music – 'Song of the Cuckoo'**

### **Call to Worship**

*The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the earth proclaims God's praise.  
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*

### **'All Creatures of our God and King'**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJRqM45Y8Gk>

All creatures of our God and king,  
lift up your voice and with us sing  
O praise him, alleluia!  
O burning sun with golden beam,  
and silver moon with softer gleam,  
*O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

Then rushing wind that art so strong,  
And clouds that sail in heaven along,  
O praise him, alleluia!  
Fresh-rising morn, in praise rejoice,  
And lights of evening, find a voice,  
O praise him, O praise him  
*O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

O flowing water, pure and clear,  
Make music for thy Lord to hear,  
O praise him, alleluia!  
O fore, so masterful and bright,  
Providing us with warmth and light,  
*O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

Let all things their Creator bless,  
And worship him in humbleness;  
O praise him, alleluia!  
Praise, praise the Father,  
Praise the Son,  
And praise the Spirit, Three in One:  
*O praise him, O praise him,  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

*Words: W H Draper*

### **Prayers of Praise**

*Almighty God,  
all creation sings your praise.  
Your glory is proclaimed in the song of the wren,  
in the flight of the gull, in the gallop of the horse.  
All that flies, swims, runs or crawls declares your wisdom.  
Stars and planets call out your greatness.  
Foliage, flowers, fruit and fungi bear witness to your goodness.  
We join our voices with theirs in thanks and praise.*

*The staggering richness of creation only begins to compare to the height, breadth and depth of your loving kindness, embodied for us in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Thank you that in his life, death and resurrection you reach out to us, forgive us our sin, and welcome us home.*

*Thank you for the new life you give in his name, even as you make all things new in him.*

*Make us new today in the power of the Holy Spirit, as we join with creation in praise and join with Jesus in loving service of this broken world.*

*Lead us, with every creature, towards your Kingdom, where there is life in its fullness for ever.*

*Receive our praise and hear our prayer, in Jesus' name,  
Amen.*

**Isaiah 11: 1-9** – read by John Wagstaff

*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*

*<sup>2</sup> The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

*<sup>3</sup> His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.*

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;*

*<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*

*<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

<sup>6</sup> *The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.*

<sup>7</sup> *The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.*

<sup>8</sup> *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.*

<sup>9</sup> *They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.*

**Mark 8:27-9:1** – read by Steve Catling

### Peter's Declaration about Jesus

<sup>27</sup> Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' <sup>28</sup>And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' <sup>29</sup>He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' <sup>30</sup>And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

### Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup>For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup>Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup>Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' <sup>9</sup>And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

## **'Creation sings the Father's song'**

*sung by Stuart Townend*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf8xKiC1dq0>

Creation sings the Father's song;  
He calls the sun to wake the dawn  
And run the course of day  
'till evening falls in crimson rays.

His fingerprints in flakes of snow,  
His breath upon this spinning globe,  
He charts the eagle's flight;  
commands the newborn baby's cry.

*Hallelujah!*

*Let all creation stand and sing,*

*"Hallelujah!"*

*Fill the earth with songs of worship;*

*Tell the wonders of creation's King.*

Creation gazed upon His face;  
the ageless One in time's embrace  
Unveiled the Father's plan  
of reconciling God and man.

A second Adam walked the earth,  
whose blameless life would break the curse,  
Whose death would set us free  
to live with Him eternally.

*Hallelujah!*

*Let all creation stand and sing,*

*"Hallelujah!"*

*Fill the earth with songs of worship;*

*Tell the wonders of creation's King.*

Creation longs for His return,  
when Christ shall reign upon the earth;  
The bitter wars that rage  
are birth pains of a coming age.

When He renews the land and sky,  
all heav'n will sing and earth reply  
With one resplendent theme:  
the glory of our God and King!

*Hallelujah!*

*Let all creation stand and sing,*

*"Hallelujah!"*

*Fill the earth with songs of worship;*

*Tell the wonders of creation's King.*

*Fill the earth with songs of worship;*

*Tell the wonders of creation's King.*

## A 'Good News' Lent

I wonder how you're feeling about Lent this year?

It feels like we've been in a period of abstinence and fasting for the past year, & I'm not sure I can cope with making that even more pronounced by giving up more of the little things that make life bearable.

So I've been thinking about the focus at the beginning of Mark's gospel on good news. I'm trying to observe a good news lent & that's what I want to share with you this morning.

Good News has cropped up a few times in recent weeks in the lectionary.

It's there in the opening verse of the gospel – "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ." It was there twice in last week's lectionary reading, where after 40 days of being tempted in the desert in the company of wild animals and angels, Jesus starts proclaiming the good news of God, saying 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: turn around and believe in the good news.' I think this background of good news preaching was how Peter, Andrew, James and John could leave their fishing nets and follow Jesus.

They believed in the good news – they believed that the good news outweighed the bad news, that what they had to gain from following Jesus far outweighed what they would lose.

But by today's passage, Peter, at least, seems to find the bad news easier to hear. Jesus has told his disciples that he, as Messiah, will suffer, be killed ... and ... rise again. But it looks like Peter can't see beyond the cross.

I guess he knew about crosses and Roman executions. He'd seen Jesus raise a little girl, Jairus' daughter, from the dead, but she hadn't been executed. For Peter, I suspect execution spelt the end of the story. Death's the final word. Humanly speaking, that's the way things are.

Human things. Not divine things. Peter needed to believe in the good news. Jesus would rise again. The kingdom of God is near – turn around and believe in the good news.

Bad news is all around us. In terms of Covid 19, it feels like there's some hope on the horizon. The economics looks pretty scary, but it looks like we're going to get through the pandemic.

But in the bigger picture of global heating, extinction, biodiversity collapse, and the climate crisis, there's a lot of bad news. That's not going to be fixed by a vaccination. It's going to require major change for us as relatively wealthy (on global terms) individuals in a relatively wealthy country. It'll be like denying ourselves and taking up our means of execution – to lose a way of life for the sake of the good news that a better life is to be found.

And we know we can do it. This past year we've made all sorts of sacrifices in order to save lives - lives of people who, mostly, we don't know. We held in our minds the prospect of saving lives and protecting the NHS, and figured that was worth some loss of liberty and all the sacrifices we've made. We could have kept the economy open, but we figured that it wasn't worth gaining the whole world and forfeiting lives. We believed in the good news. OK – there could have been more equality in the approach, more care given to the poorest and most economically vulnerable, and less given to privileged cronies.

When it comes to justice, and an even-ing up of economic circumstances in the country and in the world – we know that we can make sacrifices for the sake of a better world. When it comes to the environment and saving the lives of people, animals and plants who are being threatened by pollution, deforestation, extreme weather, and so on – we know that we can make sacrifices for the sake of a better world. We know we can do it because we've done it.

We can believe in the good news. We can imagine a rich variety of life, all species flourishing together in balance. We can imagine clean oceans and

rivers. We can imagine forests and fields full of birdsong. We can imagine people being generous and sharing resources so that no one has too little and no one has too much, but everyone has enough.

Or is that stretching things too far for you? Is it hard to imagine the kingdom of God? Peter couldn't imagine a man rising from the dead. And he couldn't get beyond the bad news to the good.

I think one of the things that was going on for Jesus during his 40 days in the desert with the wild animals and the angels, was figuring out what *is* the good news. What would it mean to fulfil the words of the heavenly voice at his baptism that had said – You are my Son; with you I am well pleased? What would it look like for him to be the messiah and fulfil the prophecies and the covenants?

I wonder if the company of the wild animals in those 40 days made him remember the covenant God made after the flood with every living creature on earth, or the prophecy of Isaiah 11 that we heard earlier. The wolf shall lie with the lamb. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. The child shall play over the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

It's hard to imagine such a world of peace. It's hard to imagine the world ever being the way God might like it to be. It's as unlikely as an executed man rising from the dead.

I think there in the desert, the wild animals and the angels helped Jesus believe in the good news that the kingdom of God was at hand and he was the shoot from the root of Jesse who would bring about God's kingdom of peace, justice and life in its fullness – and that vision of good news was more than enough for him to resist the temptation to choose a safer route and be a more sensible kind of messiah – one who wouldn't suffer and be killed, and so one who wouldn't rise from the dead and would never begin a new creation of the world as God wants it to be.

But the good news is that Jesus believed in the good news and here we are today.

So, let me spell out what I mean by a Good News Lent. It's much the same as being a good news Christian in a good news church.

Spend some time with the wildlife. Your garden is fine, or even a pot of spring bulbs on your table. Spend time watching and waiting and ask God to speak to you about a world in which all life flourishes in peace.

Spend some time with the prophets where they outline visions of what the world would look like if it were the way God wants it to be. This passage in Isaiah is a good place to start, as is Micah 4.1-4. But also spend time in the gospels with Jesus and his teaching about the kingdom. Ask God to speak to you about the kingdom of God – what are its qualities, what does it look like?

Then thirdly, ask God what you can do to make the world more like the way God wants it to be. What action, what change in your life can you make to care for creation and be a person of loving service, justice and peace. What can you do to be a good news person in a bad news world?

Let's pay attention to the Good News of Jesus. Let's encourage each other to live out that good news in practical ways as best we can. Let's refuse to let the bad news be the only news. As God leads us through this Lent, may we lift our vision beyond the darkness of the cross to the light of resurrection and the Kingdom of God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit proclaim Good News for all creation, in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Prayers of Concern**

*Loving God, thank you that Jesus is good news for all creation.  
Hear us as we pray to you about the bad news, and bring to you  
our concern for the world and people and situations on our hearts  
today.*

*Your kingdom is at hand – may it come on earth as in heaven.*

*Lord Jesus, you are the light of the world.*

*We lift up to you our concern for all those experiencing darkness today. We pray for the coming of God's kingdom where we will shine like stars and there will be no more night.*

*Lord Jesus, you are the bread of life.*

*We pray for all those suffering injustice at the hands of the greedy and powerful.*

*We pray for the coming of God's kingdom of generosity, justice and joy.*

*Lord Jesus, you are our peace;*

*you have broken down every dividing wall.*

*We pray for those suffering violence; for the children of Yemen and other war zones, for refugees and for aid agencies.*

*We pray for the coming of God's kingdom of peace, where no one will make others afraid.*

*Lord Jesus, by your wounds we are healed.*

*We pray for those who are ill today, and for those caring for them.*

*We pray for the coming of God's kingdom where every tear will be wiped from every eye and all things made new.*

*Lord Jesus, you are the resurrection and the life.*

*We pray for those dying and those bereaved.*

*We pray for the coming of God's kingdom, where there is fullness of life for evermore.*

*Lord Jesus, in you all things will be made new.*

*We pray for plants, animals and people under threat in the growing environmental crisis.*

*We pray for the coming of God's kingdom, where every living being will flourish together in peace.*

*Holy Spirit, as you drove Jesus into the wilderness, send us into the world, that, filled with your power and your grace, we might be*

*faithful, hopeful and loving, proclaiming good news in Jesus name,  
to the glory of God.*

*Amen.*

## **The Lord's Prayer**

*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.*

*Lead us not into temptation*

*But deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory*

*Forever and ever. Amen*

## **'God is working his purpose out'**

*sung by Colne Valley Male Voice Choir*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FkXpVSribU4>

God is working this purpose out,  
as year succeeds to year;  
God is working this purpose out,  
and the time is drawing near;  
nearer and nearer draws the time,  
the time that shall surely be:  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,  
where human feet have trod,  
by the mouth of many messengers  
goes forth the voice of God:  
"Give ear to me, ye continents,  
ye isles, give ear to me,  
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea."

March we forth in the strength of God,  
with the banner of Christ unfurled,  
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth  
may shine throughout the world.  
Fight we the fight with sorrow and sin  
to set their captives free,  
that the earth may be filled with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth  
unless God blesses the deed.  
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide  
till God gives life to the seed.  
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time,  
the time that shall surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

*Words © Arthur Campbell Ainger*

### **The Grace**

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

### **Closing Music –**

#### **Allegro from Handel's Organ Concerto 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale'**

*Jonathan Scott, Organist*

*(St Elisabeth's Church Recklinghausen, Germany)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmqZcz32yI0>





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