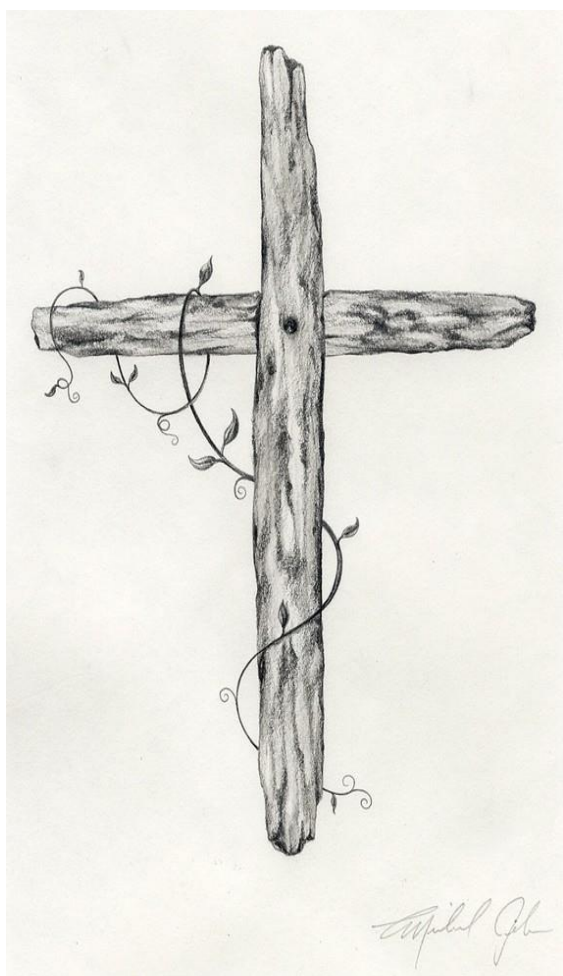


Wilbraham St Ninian's United Reformed Church

*Egerton Rd South, Chorlton-cum-Hardy,
Manchester, M21 0XJ*

March 2018



Lent can be an opportunity
to explore what is the nature
of the promised Kingdom of God
on earth
that we long for;
a time to discern
how we are called to work for it.

No, Lent is not for the faint-
hearted!

*"Lent is not for the Faint-Hearted" Kate McIlhagga "The
Green Heart of the Snowdrop" Wild Goose Publications,
Glasgow*

Interim Minister

Rev Alan Poolton

Secretary

Kath Lacy

0161 860 4717



From the Editor..... March 2018

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

(Mark 1:12 - 13)

At time of writing the country is suffering biting winds, blizzards, significant disruption to travel and work, and even “red warnings” of possible danger to life! I’m looking out on a white “wilderness”, though, if we’re honest, Manchester gets a frankly pathetic amount of snow compared with the rest of the country. And as with the wintry weather, we generally don’t **ask** for wilderness times or conditions (except perhaps the children enjoying “snow days” when school is closed!).

And yet - do you notice, in the passage from Mark above, that the Spirit “**drives**” Jesus into the wilderness? The same Spirit that in the preceding verses was present at Jesus’ baptism, conferring God’s profound blessing on him, now “drives” Jesus into that place of challenge, struggle, testing and temptation.

Why? Mark doesn’t say.

But maybe we could imagine that the Spirit drove Jesus to the wilderness with some purpose. And if we can imagine that, then might we also look at some of the wilderness places in which we have found ourselves and wonder the same? Can we possibly imagine that the Spirit might make use of us during these challenges?

I would never countenance the suggestion that a loving God deliberately causes us misery or suffering, not to “teach us a lesson”, nor to “punish us” nor to “put us in our place”. And we absolutely should **never** think that God wants us to remain in dangerous or degrading situations.

No, these questions shouldn’t be asked lightly, especially when the struggles we face are major.

I wonder if it's possible for us to look at our own struggles, trials and even misery - our wilderness times - in the light of this passage from Mark's Gospel and bring ourselves to ask, "Even though I did not wish for this, how might God be at work through this difficult period? How might God use me to help someone else?" These questions remind us of God's presence during those wilderness times that leave us feeling stretched beyond our abilities. Because, remember, that same Spirit of God that descended upon Jesus at Baptism and drove Jesus out into the wilderness also accompanied him during that time and brought him back again.

Mark's story tells us that God will not abandon us during our wilderness times but may even, from time to time, drive us there for our benefit or for that of someone around us. And sometimes we need to be forced to take time out from our busy lives to think about what our priorities and purposes really should be. God is, after all, in the business of taking that which seems only to cause death and somehow wring from it resurrection life. And that's not a bad thing to remember at the beginning of Lent.

So let's try to look at our struggles, try and hear the promise of God's presence in them, and then look for God at work in and through them, for the sake of this world that God loves so much.

Mark's short wilderness story might just help us not just to survive the wilderness times of our lives but to emerge from them renewed in hope, faith, and confidence.

Every Blessing,

Mel

Readers & Readings

Taken from "Roots on the Web" 2018 Revised Common Lectionary Year B

| | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|--|
| March 4 | Kevin Meade | <i>Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22</i> |
| March 11 | Joyce Henry | <i>Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3,17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21</i> |
| March 18 | Ella Burton | <i>Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33</i> |
| March 25 Palm Sunday | Barbara Williams | <i>Psalm 118:1-2,19-29; Mark 11:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15.47</i> |
| April 1 Easter Sunday | Chris Burton | <i>Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2,14-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18</i> |
| April 8 | Sue Posada | <i>Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2.2; John 20:19-31</i> |

**** Please check readings with the preacher in good time before the service ****

Thank you to Kath Lacy for producing the Readers' Rota.

Walt Johnson is candidating for non-stipendiary ministry and will be leading morning worship on Sunday 4th March.

Wilbraham St Ninians has been asked to provide a report supporting Walt's candidacy out of the Church Meeting on Sunday 18th March.

The Elders would welcome any comments or feedback before the Church Meeting.

Please give Walt your prayerful support as he looks to move forward with his ministry

Dates & Rotas

| | |
|----------|--|
| March 4 | Walt Johnson Communion |
| March 6 | Lent Group 7pm – 8.30pm Traditions and Statements of Faith led by Mel Hall |
| March 11 | Rev Alan Poolton Communion Mothering Sunday |
| March 14 | Lent Group 7pm – 8.30pm Working Ecumenically and with Other Faiths led by Rev Alan Poolton |
| March 18 | Worship Group led by Ella Burton |
| March 18 | Church Meeting 1.45 pm preceded by faith lunch |
| March 20 | Lent group 7pm – 8.30pm Being Christian and Political led by Chris Burton |
| March 25 | Rev Sue Rowe Palm Sunday |
| March 29 | Maundy Thursday Passover meal and service 7pm |
| March 30 | Good Friday service 3pm led by Walt Johnson |
| April 1 | Rev Fleur Houston Communion Easter Sunday |

Open Church

The church is open for quiet reflection and prayer every Thursday morning 10:00am – 12:00pm

News Round up

Family News

We are delighted to announce that, after 10 years together, **George Morton** and **Andre Groarke** are getting married at Wilbraham St Ninian's on Saturday 21st April. There will be more information about the day in the April Bulletin! We send our love and congratulations, and wish them every happiness in this new phase of their lives.

Our friend and ex-colleague **John Piper** is retiring after many years' service as a stipendiary and non-stipendiary minister, and as NW Synod Treasurer. A celebration of John's years of service will be held at Shaw St Paul's Church on Saturday 14th April, with a short service followed by a buffet. Details are at the back of the church and will appear in next month's Bulletin.

Church News

A big thank-you goes to Walt Johnson and his colleagues at Bytesize Computers for the installation of a new audio system in the New Hall. This includes a new hearing loop and wireless connections. We are promised it will be **very** easy to use! Thanks also for the installation of a speaker in the vestibule.

Another thank-you goes to the team of volunteers from **Growing Together in Levenshulme** who braved wind and sleet to clear weeds from the bed west of the church and plant bulbs there. Surplus bulbs have been donated to the Friday gardening group.

Jenny-Anne Bishop reported to the Elders' Meeting that 17 people attended the Transforum meeting, which has moved to the Wilbraham St Ninians. She recently presented to a conference at Buckinghamshire University about the work done by the church in supporting Trans people.

“Big Brew” Coffee Morning

Building on the success of 2017 we will be holding a “Big Brew” coffee morning for Fair Trade Fortnight on Saturday 10th March 10:00 – 12:00. Pat will be selling Fair Trade goods and would welcome anyone willing to lend a hand on the day. Margaret and Maggie from the Afternoon congregation will be available to talk about their work as volunteers for FareShare, who redistribute food to over 226 charities and community groups, including our Food Bank.

Even if you can't help at the Coffee Morning, please come along and bring a friend or two!

Membership News

13 people from the afternoon congregation attended a membership preparation session on Saturday 17th February, led by Rev Alan Poolton. The February Elders' meeting agreed that 15 names will go forward for approval to the Church Meeting on March 18th after the morning service, and a provisional date for the service of baptism and reception into URC membership has been set for Sunday 22nd April at the 4.30pm service. Between now and the service please support all of them with your love and prayers as they respond to God's call to be here with us at this stage on their journey of faith

Good News about Asylum Seekers

We were pleased to hear that **Adelodun Yahaya**, who has been regularly attending worship with the afternoon congregation over the past two years, was successful in his asylum appeal. Adelodun, who comes originally from Nigeria, is still in that period during which the Home Office can appeal against the judge's decision; however, we hope and pray that his particularly long and difficult asylum claim will soon be finally and fully resolved. We send our love and best wishes to Adelodun and to his partner, Joseph.

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LENT GROUPS AT WStN

The Lent Groups are continuing as follows: All are welcome!

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Tue 6 Mar, 7pm | Traditions and Statements of Faith Mel Hall |
| Wed 14 Mar, 7pm | Working Ecumenically & with Other Faiths Rev Alan Poolton |
| Tue 20 Mar, 7pm | Being Christian and Political Chris Burton |
| Thursday 29 March, 7pm | Maundy Thursday meal and service |
| Friday 30 March 3pm | Good Friday Service led by Walt Johnson |

MISSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS UPDATE

This is a very brief summary of the updates from the afternoon Synod Roadshow on March 2nd:

- It was reiterated that “Missional Partnerships” are the way forward in North-West Synod. Stipendiary ministers will focus on identifying and enhancing the skills and talents of the people in each local church
- Wilbraham St Ninian’s will be in a missional partnership with 8 other churches in South West Manchester
- **Calling Ministers:**
 - Synod will identify when and where opportunities for new ministry exist
 - Ministers will be invited to “preach with a view” in 1-2 churches within a partnership, and also meet the congregations in a more informal social setting. The Church Meeting still decides whether to call the minister; the votes will be combined in a “United Church Meeting”.

Synod hopes it will be in a position to “launch” Missional Partnerships on Pentecost Sunday 20th May. Let’s pray that Synod and local churches can continue to have a constructive dialogue and be kind and gracious to one another through this challenging period.