

LAIRG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND & ROGART (ST CALLANS) CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
SCO20871 and SCO10035

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> February

**Call to worship**

Lenten God, we come to you at the beginning of this season: seeking change, seeking renewal, seeking your Spirit of transformation to come amongst us.

Lenten God, come and move amongst us today, as we worship. Amen.

**Hymn: Jesus - the name high over all**

Jesus, the Name high over all,  
in hell or earth or sky;  
angels and men before Him fall,  
and devils fear and fly

O that the world might taste and see  
the riches of His grace!  
The arms of love that compass me  
would all mankind embrace.

Jesus, the Name to sinners dear,  
the Name to sinners giv'n;  
it scatters all their guilty fear,  
it turns their hell to heav'n.

His only righteousness I show,  
His saving grace proclaim;  
'tis all my business here below  
to cry, "Behold the Lamb!"

Jesus the prisoner's fetters breaks  
And bruises Satan's head  
Power into strengthless souls he speaks  
And life into the dead.

Happy, if with my latest breath  
I might but gasp His Name,  
preach Him to all, and cry in death,  
"Behold, behold the Lamb!"

Charles Wesley

**Opening Prayers**

Living God as we enter this Lent season we pray that you will

**Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.**

As we remember Jesus who was tempted for 40 days in the wilderness but was with God we hold together with those going through their own wilderness experiences.

As we come to you in worship and thanksgiving,

as we come to pray, to sing, to reflect, and to hold silence,

as we come, knowing that we are far from perfect and have fallen short of your glory, we pray that you will

**Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.**

*[Pause]*

Thank you for your forgiveness of us, and accepting us just as we are.

As we come, with responsibility and facing temptation,

as we come, standing together with all those individuals, families and communities who have been ravaged by Covid 19 and other horrendous diseases that rage around the world,

as we come, as your church to offer you this time of worship we invite your Spirit to move amongst us and to

**Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.**

For ourselves Lord, we hold a moment of silence as we know that as you were with Jesus in the wilderness you are also here with us now by the power of your Spirit. So we pray that you will continue to

**Be with us in the wildernesses of 2021.**

Amen.

**We say together the Lord's Prayer**

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**Readings: Genesis 9:8-17**

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup> God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

**Mark 1:9-15 - The Baptism of Jesus**

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

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

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

**Reflections on the readings**

Noah's story tells of a flood lasting 40 days and 40 nights. During those days Noah had only the memory of God's promise to give them rest, to keep them safe, to protect them in the midst of global devastation. I wonder whether, mixed in with it all, was some survivors' guilt?

That's a story from long, long ago. I wonder whether Jesus pondered it as he fasted and wrestled for 40 days and nights? 40 days of hunger, temptation, agonising; 40 nights of danger from wild beasts, danger from his own temptations, perhaps danger from his own anxiety and fear, wondering what lay ahead. 40 days to hold onto the sign and promise of which he was so vividly aware at his baptism, and to wonder, perhaps, whether he'd imagined it all.

The last year has, for most of the world, felt like a wilderness. For some, there has been the fear and isolation of needing to hide away from an invisible enemy; for others, the pain and deep darkness of bereavement, without access to the usual means of support and rituals of grief. For others the struggles of ensuring that the essential things of life can continue, at risk to themselves and often with increased workload; for still more, a sense of helplessness, as jobs disappear or are put on hold. You may well have your own personal wilderness story from this time, and if you don't, you will be acutely aware of those who do. We are now at the start of Lent, when we are encouraged to travel deep into the wilderness, and to see it as an opportunity for self-examination. We are encouraged to spend time fasting – ‘doing without’ – and to take that as a time for growing and deepening our discipleship. Does that ring hollow to you? Do you feel you've spent enough time in the wilderness, and could just do with an oasis or two? If so, you are not alone!

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New Testament Greek has two words for time. *Chronos* is about the steady progression of time – time marching on, or perhaps hanging heavily and travelling slowly. *Chronos* is measured in days, hours, minutes. We don't know whether Jesus knew how long he would be in the desert, but perhaps he kept a record, marking off the days in the sand, wondering how long it would take for him to feel prepared. Perhaps the present time felt long, and the time ahead too short?

Or perhaps he was deeply thankful for this time alone, in the wilderness – a time of preparation and of reflection. Maybe he felt a mixture of all of these emotions. And maybe the time felt too long, and yet somehow not long enough. One of the great paradoxes of the incarnation is that Jesus became subject to human limitations, and that includes being subject to time: the Creator of time, restricted by *chronos*!

The other type of time in Greek is *Kairos*. This is the word that Jesus uses in our reading from Mark, when he says, "The time is fulfilled." It has less to do with the progress of time, and more to do with the moment in time. *Kairos* is the right time to do something – the appropriate season, the opportune moment, the due date. As Jesus ends his time in the desert, the important thing is not how long his ministry may last, or how much or little time he has, in which to accomplish his mission. The key thing is that this is the **right** time – God's time.

The same could be said of the moment at which he came up out of the waters of baptism, and experienced the Spirit coming upon him. That experience may have lasted a split second, or it may have taken an hour, but that is not the point. It is a moment forever lifted outside of *chronos* time, to sustain him in the wilderness, throughout his ministry, and even at the point of death. Perhaps the story of Noah is similar: as he sees the dove returning with the olive leaf; when he sees the rainbow in the sky; when he receives God's covenant – all these are *kairos* moments, moments of fulfillment

And we, too, whatever our personal wilderness, are invited to encounter and remember special moments. Perhaps you can think of them in your life? Can you speak of them, perhaps to support others in the wilderness? That should be our testimony – that we follow a God who gives us moments of encounter

which are strong enough to sustain us when we feel alone.

But it doesn't end there. This is not just about our personal means of support. The story of Noah is a story of the re-beginning of humanity; the covenant is not just for him and his sons, but for all God's people, through all the ages. And Jesus, emerging from the desert, even in the midst of hostility and arrests, speaks of *God's* time. He speaks of the time of the coming of the Kingdom, a time for repentance, for faith, for good news. And, if you read on, you find that the next thing he does is to invite others to join him on his journey – to join him in God's time, so that they may be a part of his transforming ministry.

And that is the gift that God offers to us, at the beginning of Lent. God, who for our sake entered *chronos*, now offers to live through the *chronos* of these 40 days and nights with us, in order to invite us to enter *kairos*. God, who entered an earthly kingdom, invites us to participate in the kingdom of heaven. God, who took on human form, invites us to be transformed, and to participate in the heavenly mission of transforming our world. God, who was baptised, invites us to emerge, transformed, from the waters of baptism and to claim our place in the covenant relationship.

So, during Lent, make the most of the time that is offered. In the wilderness, hold on to the transforming moments of encounter, and hear the offer that is yours, to join with God in the task of transformation. It is not always easy or comfortable, it requires self-examination, humility, repentance and change, but it promises much as we walk the way of Jesus.

Amen.

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**Prayers of intercession**

Lord, as we enter Lent help us to draw near to you in praise, stripping away all that distracts us from worship.

As Jesus resisted temptation by the devil in the wilderness, help us reflect on his faithfulness to God, his rejection of worldly values and hold these thoughts in our hearts throughout Lent and beyond.

Jesus, you prayed and fasted. As your disciples teach us about spiritual discipline in our relationships with you.

Lord may Lent be a time of inward searching that makes us more able to look with compassion at the needs of the world.

Thank you Lord for desert experiences, when being confronted with ourselves makes us realise our need of you.

God our Father, we trust you to guide us through the difficult days of Lent, encouraging us along the way. We pray that as we move towards the darkest day, that you'll not forsake us but remind us of our Saviour's ultimate gift and promise of new, abundant, eternal life for all who believe and trust in him, your precious son, Jesus.

**Hymn: Have you heard God's voice**

Have you heard God's voice?  
Has your heart been stirred?  
Are you still prepared to follow?  
Have you made a choice to remain and  
serve,  
Though the way be rough and narrow?

*Refrain*

*Will you walk the path  
that will cost you much?  
And embrace the pain and sorrow  
Will you trust the one who entrusts to you,  
The disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice?  
Will you not sit down,  
When the multitudes are silent?  
Will you make a choice to stand your  
ground  
When the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets  
will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?  
Will you stop and eat and when  
friendships start  
Will you share your faith with the  
faithless?

Will you watch the news  
With the eyes of faith  
And believe it could be different?  
Will you share your views using words of  
faith?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path  
that will cost us much?  
And embrace the pain and sorrow  
We will trust the one who entrusts to us,  
The disciples of tomorrow?*

Jacqueline G Jones

**Blessing**

People of wilderness, step out into the wildernesses of 2021, with the Spirit of God at your side. People of God, step out into God's world, and encounter the living God – already at work in your midst.

People of this church, go and be the church, every day, every hour, every moment, this Lent and beyond. Amen.