

Ash Wednesday

Embracing the season of Lent



Weekly Liturgy

“Is not this the fast I choose. . .” – The Isaiah 58 Vision

Readings: Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10. Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21

Sentence

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Mt: 6:21)

Reflection

Isaiah 58 forms part of an ancient and prophetic vision which can give new meaning and life to the season of Lent here and now. Rather than Lent being a matter of ‘giving things up’ Isaiah 58 challenges us to ‘take things up’ instead. This gives us a fresh perspective on the traditional disciplines of Lent: almsgiving, fasting and prayer.

Lent is more than just a time for self improvement. The Isaiah 58 Vision challenges us to consider how our way of life impacts on the lives of others – positively and negatively. “Is this not the fast I choose. . .” asks our God through the prophet Isaiah: to bring freedom and justice; to feed the hungry; to house the homeless; to clothe the naked; to be reconciled with others.

And what is the fruit of this kind of fast?

The Isaiah 58 Vision declares that such a fast will bring light and healing; it will give glory to God; it will bring both protection and freedom; it will assure God’s guidance and strength; it will rebuild lives, ancestries and communities.

ABM’s Holistic Mission

The Isaiah 58 Vision resonates strongly with the work of ABM in its engagement overseas and across Australia. This work is a tremendous challenge and opportunity, as it seeks to respond to the Isaiah 58 Vision in many ways. ABM works with communities to bring freedom and justice; to strengthen the faith of Christians; to maintain the culture of their ancestors; to learn and teach the Gospel among their own peoples; to enhance health, education, healing and well being; to be reconciled with others.

The Millennium Development Goals

ABM also actively supports the challenge of the Millennium Development Goals through its Community Development and Church to Church programs. The MDGs resonate strongly with the Isaiah 58 Vision:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women

4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Bringing the Isaiah 58 Vision home...

So, how can we bring the Isaiah 58 Vision home and make these global objectives real here and now?

This may seem too great for us. Yet the primary challenge of Lent is simple and achievable: to prayerfully consider and make some life giving choices for others and ourselves. We may consider doing one of the following:

- Support an ABM project which meets one or more of the Millennium Development Goals;
- Consider ways to engage prayerfully and practically in self denial which gives life to others;
- Identify a specific action as ‘the fast I choose’ as a personal response to the Isaiah 58 Vision;
- Identify a specific action you may share with other Christians as a shared response to the Isaiah 58 Vision.

From Isaiah to Corinthians to Matthew

The Isaiah 58 Vision is strengthened as we reflect on the other readings set for Ash Wednesday 2008. As we begin the journey of Lent, we are encouraged that “now is the acceptable time – now is the day of salvation.” We are encouraged that though we endure many trials and tribulations in life, that they also have the power to bear fruit for others and ourselves, and to bring us closer to God. We are challenged to give alms, to pray and to fast “in secret” rather than seek recognition or draw attention to ourselves. Lent is business as usual: on the outside we maintain a cheerful countenance; and on the inside we embrace the opportunity to grow, to be open to the new, to bring justice and freedom to others and participate in practical acts of reconciliation. Lent is about giving ourselves time and space to consider what is of ultimate meaning and importance in our lives: for where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

First Sunday in Lent

Weekly Liturgy

Readings: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19. Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Sentence

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." Mt: 4:1

Reflection

Discerning what is right and making choices is part of the great challenge of human life. In the season of Lent, Christians are encouraged to reflect on and renew their lives in the light of the life and ministry of Jesus and his journey to the cross, through suffering and death to the resurrection. Jesus begins to face this challenge as the Spirit drives him into the wilderness. Yes, it is the Spirit which does this: the Spirit of creation and empowering love; the same Spirit that is with us today, comforting us and urging us to embrace the wilderness as a place of testing and growth.

The wilderness Jesus faces in Matthew's Gospel includes both the Spirit and the devil as symbols of good and evil. While no tree is mentioned in the reading, the knowledge of good and evil and the harsh reality of human choice is much in evidence. We too face significant choices in our lives and can feel isolated in the midst of the possibilities. Like Jesus we face the temptation to seek magical solutions; to put God's grace to the test; to seek power and control. Yet we can find the energy to resist such temptations amidst our hunger and isolation. Then the ministering angels of the Spirit can come. Like Jesus, we are ready to live anew and embrace our ministry and mission. In this way, the 'tree in the wilderness' in our life experience becomes a symbol of both suffering and hope; as does the tree on which Jesus died – the cross – which transforms human knowledge to deeper understanding.

Affirmation

God of creation,
Your grace transforms human knowledge into understanding.
We thank you for enabling us to share in the work of your creation.
We accept this awesome responsibility with humility and open eyes seeking truth.
We worship you, in the life you give us and the mission you share with us
God of redemption,
Your hunger and isolation in the wilderness crowns suffering with hope.
We thank you for sending Jesus to share the free gift of your grace.
We accept this gift with joy and promise to share it freely with others in our daily lives.
We worship you, as we draw nearer to the tree of life and death and resurrection.

God of Spirit,

Your refreshing wind moves us on to seek and find life in unfamiliar places.

We thank you for the gift of the journey and the energy we find in your life giving way.

We accept the urging of your Spirit to widen the horizons of our life and our love.

We worship you in Spirit and in truth, that we and the whole earth may be renewed.

Amen.

Intercessions

Leader: God of the journey.

Response: Come, grace our way.

We give thanks for the gift of knowledge and the deeper journey of understanding; guide us to embrace the mystery of your love and seek the truth in our common life. **L. C.**

We give thanks for the many gifts in the garden of your creation; help us to love each other with humility and share and conserve the resources of the earth. **L. C.**

We give thanks for the free gift of grace in Jesus Christ; enable us to accept the freedom of the Gospel and share this gift freely with others. **L. C.**

We give thanks for the work of ABM in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in this ancient land; may they lead with courage, integrity and joy. **L. C.**

We give thanks that we find you in unexpected people and places; be present to heal those who are in the wilderness in body, mind and spirit. **L. C.**

We give thanks for the life you give to all, and a love that is stronger than death; may all who follow in this way of love be led by the Spirit to find their true home with you. **L. C.**

Response/Action

Personal: prayerfully consider how our own temptations resonate with the temptations Jesus faces in the wilderness. Do I crave magical solutions? Do I test God's grace? Do I seek power and control? Identify what this reflection invites us to do or become.

Collective: Discuss with others the benefits or otherwise of human knowledge in a particular area of life.

Second Sunday

in Lent



Weekly Liturgy

Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121. Romans 4:1-5, 13-17.

Gospel: John 3:1-17 or Matthew 17:1-9

Sentence

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”
John 3:16.

Reflection

Nicodemus was drawn to Jesus and came to him at night, seeking spiritual knowledge and insight. In the well known dialogue that follows, Jesus guides Nicodemus to a new level of understanding. The exchange culminates with some of the best known words in the Gospels which go to the very heart of the mission and ministry of Jesus. Like Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, this is a moment of spiritual insight for Nicodemus, a glimpse into the mind and heart of God, that all people will know and experience his love for them. In many parts of the world, the Church is bristling with promise and enthusiastic about its mission. Whilst rich in promise and enthusiasm, some parts of the Church lack resources that are taken for granted in Australia. ABM is actively working with its Partners to enhance and equip the vital ministry of the church and its leaders in these communities, that all people will know the saving love of God through his son Jesus Christ.

Affirmation

We believe that God so loved the world
That he sent his son Jesus,
To make known his will and teach us his ways,
that we, and all people, might know and love him.

We believe that Jesus Christ came into the world
to offer himself in sacrificial love,
to be lifted up on the cross for us all
Not to condemn us, but to save us.

We believe that God the Holy Spirit
continues to be at work in our midst,
bringing light from darkness, and showing us the way
to live as people of justice, love, and truth.

Intercessions

Leader: O God, whose Son was lifted up for us all.

Congregation: Hear our prayers for the world you love.

As Jesus was lifted up on the cross, we lift up to you O God,
our prayers;

For the leaders of the nations and for all in places of trust
and authority;

For a wise and generous use of the beauty and resources
of the earth. **L.C.**

As Jesus was lifted up on the cross, we lift up to you O God,
our prayers;

For our neighbours, both near and far, with whom our lives
are bound by the humanity we share,
for our brothers and sisters in the local village and in the global
village. **L.C.**

As Jesus was lifted up on the cross, we lift up to you O God,
our prayers;

For those who, like Nicodemus, come seeking truth, and
searching for wisdom and enlightenment.

Speak to them your words of life and make your gospel known
to all. **L.C.**

As Jesus was lifted up on the cross, we lift up to you O God,
our prayers;

For all who have come to know and love you,
That together we may proclaim you with our words, our deeds,
our generosity. **L.C.**

As Jesus was lifted up on the cross, we lift up to you O God,
our prayers;

For all who long for healing and wait now with unfulfilled needs.
For the sick, the suffering, the destitute, the poor and the dying. **L.C.**

Response/Action

How are you like Nicodemus this Lent? What insights, spiritual
or otherwise, will you be seeking as we progress through this
season?

Third Sunday

in Lent



Weekly Liturgy

Readings: Exodus 17:1-7. Psalm 95. Romans 5:1-11

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Sentence

Jesus said, '...those who drink of the water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' John 4:14

Reflection

The soul of the Samaritan woman was parched. Her life was as trampled as the path she walked several times daily between the village and the well. Her load was heavy and life was a daily struggle. It was as though she was trapped in one of her clay water jars, in a life which demanded so much, enslaving her to toil in the darkness. Then Jesus came. He spoke to her, breaking through the hardened clay of age-old traditions, prejudices and misunderstandings. First he asks for water to satisfy his physical thirst, then he tells about springs of spiritual water which gush up into eternal life, forever washing away division, difficulty and spiritual thirst. Water gives life. Living water gives eternal life. The delivery of running water to rural communities in poor countries is a giant leap. 'Just like man's first step on the moon,' one community elder in the Philippines said. Bringing water brings hope to communities. Hope opens them up to the living water. God comes to the people through a tap.

Affirmation

We believe in our creator God, who desires that we have life in abundance,

Who opens arms of love to those considered unlovely by the fortunate,

And whose abundant love quenches our primordial thirst to be loved.

We believe in our Saviour God, who embodied abundant love,

Who walked with us, pure love clothed in flesh before our disbelieving eyes,

Offering the same love to those disfigured by life as to those beautified by it.

We believe in our God, the Spirit, pure energy, gushing, bringing forth life,

Who sees no barrier or obstacle, healing, making new paths to unite all creation,

Bringing us to a place where in Spirit and truth we may worship as one people.

Intercessions

Leader: Lord Jesus Christ, give us your living water

Congregation: That we may worship our God in spirit and truth

In a world where many mistake the flow of cash for the river of your living water, and where so many live in poverty, open our eyes, our hearts and hands to the need of our brothers and sisters that we all may be one. **L.C.**

You created your church to be a riverbed for your living water, that your grace and love might flow abundantly from its sanctuaries. Where our prejudices and traditions have redirected or cut off the flow of your grace, we pray that you will help us find ways of restoring your water to all. **L.C.**

Our communities rely on your living water for life, hope and love. We pray for communities in the Philippines who thirst and for those who toil for their daily supplies of water. We give you thanks for ABM and other agencies which fund permanent water supplies. We pray also that your living water will flow through all the world. **L.C.**

We pray for those who thirst for health and wellbeing in their lives, and for those who care for them. We give thanks for the touch of your cool water which brings comfort and healing. **L.C.**

We give you thanks for your servants of every age. May we meet with you and all your saints at the source of your living water. **L.C.**

Response/Action

Compare the life expectancy of the average child in urban Australia to that of a child where drinking water is contaminated. Can you personally contribute to a program which provides clean water?

As a church community, give thanks that in providing funding for water projects, ABM also provides life in so many ways. What is your contribution to the coming of the kingdom?

Fourth Sunday

in Lent



Weekly Liturgy

Readings: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel: John 9:1-41

Sentence

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

Reflection

Although the gospel reading is about the healing of blindness it actually begins and ends with blindness of a different kind – the blindness of prejudice and stigma. The disciples assume that the disability of a man born blind must have been the result of either his own sin or that of his parents. This ancient association between disease, disability and sin still presents in many cultures and lingers even in our own. Jesus corrects their interpretation and instead relates the event to the mystery of God working through and in creation (the world). Jesus proceeds to heal the blind man, thereby witnessing to the mystery and power of God. The man born blind gains his sight and becomes one of the few in John's gospel to know and believe in Jesus.

On the other hand the Pharisees, who claim to know and maintain the way of God, refuse to accept the healing. They proceed to cast the man out and stigmatise both the man and Jesus. By their actions they show that they are the ones who are truly blind and bring judgement upon themselves.

Affirmation

We believe in God
who is often to be found
in the places and people
where we do not want to look.

We believe in God
who is to be found
with the sick, the disabled,
the person living with HIV.

We believe in God
who was reviled as a Jew,
stigmatised as a sinner,
died on a cross.

We believe in God
who is found wherever
there is love, tolerance,
acceptance, compassion.

Intercessions

L. Leader

C. Congregation

- L. Creating God, we live in a world racked by preventable poverty, war and disease. Open our eyes,
- C. **so that we may know the needs of our sisters and brothers and seek justice.**
- L. Living God, we live in a world where lack of opportunity and education condemn many to premature death. Open our eyes,
- C. **so that we may know the needs of our brothers and sisters and seek equity.**
- L. Living God, we live in a world where HIV and AIDS has ravaged whole nations, leaving a generation of orphans in its wake. Open our eyes,
- C. **so that we may know the needs of our sisters and brothers and bring hope.**
- L. Living God, we live in a world where the stigma of HIV and AIDS, of disability, of being a refugee or of another faith corrupts our relationships. Open our eyes,
- C. **so that we may know the needs of our brothers and sisters and bring love.**
- L. Living God, we live in a world where love and hope and justice are often in short supply. Open our eyes,
- C. **so that we may know more fully your unconditional love and embody your gospel to the world.**

Response/Action

Every year ABM produces Lenten resources for the Australian Anglican Church. To assist with the stewardship of our resources we would like to gather data on how these resources are being used. Please help us by visiting this website and sharing your thoughts. The survey will only take 5 minutes and will provide great assistance for the production of future resources.

www.abmission.org/lent/survey

Fifth Sunday

in Lent

Weekly Liturgy

Readings: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Sentence

"I am the resurrection and the life," says the Lord; "whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

John 11:25-26.

Reflection

The shortest, and one of the most poignant, statements in the Gospels is that of John 11:35 – 'and Jesus wept'. Although initially he seems somewhat blasé, when the full impact of the death of Lazarus on those who had known and loved him in life was felt by Jesus, he shared in that sorrow and wept with those who wept. Here, we see Jesus at his most human, and shortly afterwards, in the raising of Lazarus from death to life, at his most divine. ABM, through its partners in the Episcopal Church of the Philippines and in local communities, has seen and experienced the sorrow and despair of human suffering, and sought to transform this by equipping local men and women for the work of aiding and enhancing the church in the Philippines. This life giving ministry brings good news to some of the most isolated and poorest people in the country. Here, where there might have been despair and death, and a loss of hope, new life is breathed into whole communities, and the Gospel proclaimed in a practical and a powerful way.

Affirmation

We believe in the God of life and love
Who placed us in the garden of his delight
and breathed into us the breath of life.

We believe in God the Son
Who calls us forth from the way that leads to death
To new and abundant life.

We believe in the Spirit of God
The very breath of life, who disturbs us, and our world
Transforming and renewing, and making us whole.

Intercessions

Leader: Jesus, who called Lazarus from death to life

Congregation: Breathe into us your life giving Spirit

O Breath of Life, which moved over the waters at creation, giving breath and life to all, move again over the waters and across the lands of this earth breathing new life into the hearts and minds of those who live in darkness. **L. C.**

O Breath of Life, which moved over the dry bones and gave them new life,

Where our bones are dry and old, and lacking in life and vigour,
Breathe into us the breath of life, that we may rise with new purpose, to proclaim your works and words in the world. **L. C.**

O Breath of Life, where the light of our faith has grown dim and where our souls have become faint,

Where the wants and needs of the world have wearied us,
Where we have not loved and have not cared; change, inspire, and renew us, that we may call forth new life, in ourselves, and in others. **L. C.**

O Breath of Life, you bring light from darkness, and hope from despair. Grant to us, into whom your Son has breathed new life, the discernment to know, to name, and to confront the things that threaten his life giving message of love, hope, and justice and give us the courage to cry out with a loud voice – Lazarus come forth! That we and all people may be free. **L. C.**

Response/Action

Where will the spirit of God breathe new life into your heart and mind this season of Lent?

How have we as a community participated in bringing new life to a community threatened by physical or spiritual death, or both?

What can we do, together, to ensure the life giving breath of the spirit continues to move in those places and amongst those people?

Sixth Sunday

in Lent – Palm Sunday

Weekly Liturgy

Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11

Sentence

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”
(Ps 118:22-23)

Reflection

In a climate of rising civil tensions and zealous religious proclamations, Jesus enters Jerusalem by enacting the words of the prophet Zechariah. There is an atmosphere of anticipation, of acclamation and joy. But with God nothing is as it seems, and the expectations of the crowd, which sees Jesus as the Messiah who will restore Israel, will soon collide with the intention of God to restore people’s hearts through the sacrifice of God’s Son. The crowds who cry ‘Hosanna!’ today will in a few days cry ‘Crucify!’ before Pilate.

Affirmation

We believe that the Lord is here among us, and we welcome God into our lives.

We believe that Jesus was sent by God, and we offer our own lives for God’s purpose.

We believe that God triumphed over evil, and we look forward to resurrection.

Intercessions

Leader: To Jesus our King we pray, saying

Congregation: Hosanna in the highest.

Lord of history, help us to follow your example and serve others joyfully and unceasingly, giving of ourselves completely. **L. C.**

Lord of the journey, help us to follow your example and challenge injustice and lack of charity wherever we find it, responding always to your call to love others as we love ourselves. **L. C.**

Lord of the people, help us to follow your example and live with compassion towards all those in need, caring for others even when it may be uncomfortable or inconvenient. **L. C.**

Lord of the cross, help us to follow your example and live so closely to God that God’s will may be done in and through us. **L. C.**

Response/Action

How often do you rejoice at the Lord’s entry into your life?
Be grateful today for all the blessings with which God has blessed you, and pray for those who are still waiting for God’s message of hope.

Pray for and support the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders.



Sixth Sunday in Lent – Passion Sunday

Weekly Liturgy

Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 31.9-16; Philippians 2.5-11.

Gospel Matthew 26.14-27.66 or 27.11-54

Sentence

“For the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been confounded; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.” Is 50.7-8a

Reflection

Jesus knows that humiliation and an agonising public death await him. He also knows that God’s plan of redemption for all creation rests on his voluntary ‘yes’ to this course. While the story of the Passion has elements of politics, intrigue, human frailty and weakness, the great saving love of God for all people lies behind it all, and leads to a sacrifice few can comprehend. Jesus could have avoided the cross, but he didn’t; and even in his final words we can hear his conviction that God’s purpose has been served through what might look like a death in failure.

Affirmation

Jesus King of the Jews, you have shown us that God is with us in the still of the night, when the future seems dark and fearful. I trust in you, O Lord.

Jesus King of the Jews, you have shown us that God is with us when we feel abandoned, friendless and misunderstood in an uncaring world. I trust in you, O Lord.

Jesus King of the Jews, you have shown us that God is with us when we suffer pain, illness, grief or distress, that on the cross you have triumphed even over death. I trust in you, O Lord.

Intercessions

Leader: Jesus, Son of God,

Congregation: We kneel before your cross.

Jesus, Son of God, in life you showed us that God loves us all. Help us to work together to create a world where all are made whole in you. Strengthen us to act with justice and integrity as we seek to give ourselves for your service. **L.C.**

Jesus, Son of God, you loved all people. Help us to build a society based on loving our neighbour as ourselves. Strengthen us to open ourselves to others, to engage deeply in the lives of others, and to seek to understand from others’ perspectives. **L.C.**

Jesus, Son of God, you enjoyed time with your disciples, for work, rest and refreshment. Help us to take time to breathe in the midst of a busy world. Strengthen the workless, and the overworked, that all needs may be met. **L.C.**

Jesus, Son of God, you healed the sick and gave the distressed peace. Help us to comfort the physically, psychologically or spiritually distressed. Strengthen those facing their own Golgotha, that they may know your peace and assurance. **L.C.**

Jesus, Son of God, you suffered through death to gain victory over the grave. Help us to live joyfully even in the shadow of death, and to know that you are always with us. Strengthen us to live each day in love and peace knowing that all our efforts are ultimately contained in you. **L.C.**

Response/Action

Jesus prayed alone all through the night, knowing that no one could help or understand. Visit someone who is sick or lonely, or telephone a loved one who is far away.

Remember the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders, bringing the gospel of hope to their own communities. Get involved with local Indigenous ministries, and pray for the work of Nungalinga and Wontulp-Bi-Buya Colleges in raising up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders.