

WITH GOD IN THE WILDERNESS

LENT TEACHING SERIES



Series Overview

This series will use the season of Lent to help us explore the time of uncertainty and change the church is moving into during the vacancy. Throughout this series we will see examples of how God uses 'wilderness times' in the bible to teach, refine and lead his people. Often in the bible the wilderness is literal, but also provides a spiritual metaphor we can relate to. Hopefully this will help us to see the coming months as an opportunity to invite God to work in us as individuals and as a church. Let's choose to embrace this time as an opportunity for growing and deepening, rather than just a potentially difficult and testing time to get through.

18th Feb: Into the Wilderness

Matthew 3:13-4:11

This passage introduces the themes of wilderness, and is the basis for the tradition of fasting during Lent, following the example of Jesus.

During the baptism account we read the beautiful words that God speaks (3:17), which provide the foundation of Jesus' identity as being loved by the Father as he goes into the wilderness time.

Notice that the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness (4:1), suggesting it is an opportunity for good to come out of the challenge Jesus will face.

Jesus demonstrates perfect obedience to God in the face of trials and temptation. Particularly relevant to us is his acknowledgement of our total dependence on God (4:4) and our calling

as disciples to put God first in our lives (4:10).

25th Feb: Prepare the Way

Isaiah 40:1-11,25-31

'Isaiah's audience was challenged so to believe that they would encounter God in the wilderness, that they were to go there on purpose – not driven by anything other than hope – and prepare for the return of God when they could see no evidence of his presence in advance'.¹

In this passage we read the prophet's instruction to use the wilderness prepare the way for God (v3), so that His glory can be revealed (v5).

When we declare the message 'here is your God' (v9), we speak of our powerful God (v10) who is also a tender shepherd

to those in times of difficulty (v11). In the second except from the chapter, we read of those struggling with the feeling that God is distant, and perhaps the way ahead is uncertain (v27).

In response the beautiful words ring out, reminding us who are God is; his nature and character and the way he works, and how he cares for his people. (vs28-31) This can be an invitation and encouragement for us as a church in this time of change that our God is good, and unchanging.

4th March: Wait for the Lord

Psalm 27

In this Psalm David models a faithful and faithful response to a time of trial. In the face of trials (vs1-3) David choses to seek God, to draw close to him (v4), knowing that only God offers safety and a firm foundation (v5). We read of David calling out to God (v7), and seeking his face (v8) in the midst of his troubles. We want to be a church who individually and corporately are taught and led by our Father God (v11).

We see David's confidence in God displaying his goodness in the future (v13) and also his acknowledgement that it won't come straight away, but will instead require us waiting for God (v14),

as we continue to seek his face and follow his ways.

11th March: Mothering Sunday

18th March: Fruit from Trials

Philippians 1:1-14

In the final passage of the series, we see a great example of how God can use difficult circumstances to 'advance the gospel' (v12).

Paul's customary greeting (v2) is a timely reminder of how Christians are to interact with one another. As a church we are called to be partners in the gospel, as the believers in Philippi and Paul were (v5).

We are reminded that God has begun a good work in us, as individuals and as a community, which he will bring to completion (v6) for his glory.

Paul's prayer (vs9-11) is a great prayer for us to pray over each other during the coming months.

Finally, Paul's testimony of how God has used even his persecution and imprisonment is an encouragement to us to be open to God using this time of Lent, and of the vacancy to be both working in us, but also advancing the gospel.

Let's be praying as a church that we would see new people coming to faith in Jesus in 2018.

Lent Prayer Meetings

On 3 Wednesday evenings in Lent we will be gathering to pray: for the church, for Middlesbrough and for the world. We'd love you to join us.

Wednesday 14th & 28th February and 14th March

8-9pm in Church

Why not meet as a Life group beforehand for a meal or a cup of coffee and then all come together to the prayer meeting?