

Surf Coast Uniting Churches

Lent 1 February 22nd, 2026.



Introit 407 Breathe on me breath of God

Breathe on me, breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love all that you love
and do what you would do.

Welcome

May the worship bless you

Acknowledgement

This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here. We acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, traditional custodians of this land under God.

We commit ourselves again to working for reconciliation in this land.

Call to Worship

Eggs and Ashes, Edit R. Burgess & Chris Polhill, Wild Goose Publications, www.ionabooks.com

Creator God

Walking in the Garden

Breathe life into us

Tempted God

Praying in the desert

Breathe life into us

Holy God

Travelling towards our cities and towns

breathe life into us

Prayer for the beginning of Lent

UCA President Rev Charissa Suli

Holy God

as we enter this Lenten season

lead us with your Son into the wilderness

the place of quiet, the place of testing,

the place where we learn again to trust you.
 When the path feels uncertain, steady our steps.
 When distractions crowd our hearts, call us back to yourself.
 When we feel our weaknesses, remind us that we are your beloved
 Form in us a deeper hunger for your presence
 Teach us to depend upon your Word.
 Shape us through these forty days
 so that our lives may reflect the grace of Christ
 Walk with us, Lord Jesus
 and bring us, in your time,
 to the joy of resurrection hope and peace. Amen

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we come before you in this moment of silence with all that's on our hearts. Seeking healing and forgiveness and a new beginning.

Silence

Hear then Christ's words of grace to us
 "Our sins are forgiven"

Thanks be to God.

Hymn 684 Love will be our Lenten Calling

Love will be our Lenten calling,
 love to shake and shatter sin,
 waking every closed, cold spirit,
 stirring new life deep within,
 till the quickened heart remembers
 what our Easter birth can mean.

What is Lent?

Lent is an opportunity to grow in faith and devotion to our Lord through self-examination, repentance, prayer and fasting. It can involve self-denial or acts of generosity or reading or meditating on the Word of God or all these actions of love towards God, our neighbour and ourselves.

Readings

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-22.

2:15The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

2:16And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden,
 2:17but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

3:1Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

3:2The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,
 3:3but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" 3:4But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, 3:5for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

3:6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 3:7Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

^{3:8}They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹²The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,
 "Because you have done this,
 cursed are you among all animals
 and among all wild creatures;
 upon your belly you shall go,
 and dust you shall eat
 all the days of your life.
¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman
 and between your offspring and hers;
 he will strike your head,
 and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶To the woman he said,
 "I will make your pangs in childbirth exceedingly great;
 in pain you shall bring forth children,
 yet your desire shall be for your husband,
 and he shall rule over you."
¹⁷And to the man^[b] he said,
 "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
 and have eaten of the tree
 about which I commanded you,
 'You shall not eat of it,'
 cursed is the ground because of you;
 in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.
¹⁹By the sweat of your face
 you shall eat bread
 until you return to the ground,

for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰The man named his wife Eve^[c] because she was the mother of all living. ²¹And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man^[d] and for his wife and clothed them.

²²Then the LORD God said, “See, the humans have become like one of us, knowing good and evil, and now they might reach out their hands and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever” — ²³therefore the LORD God sent them forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which they were taken. ²⁴He drove out the humans, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Matthew 4:1-11

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

4:2He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished.

4:3The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4:4But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

4:5Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 4:6saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 4:7Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, 4:9and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 4:10Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 4:11Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Hymn 598 Dear Father, Lord of humankind

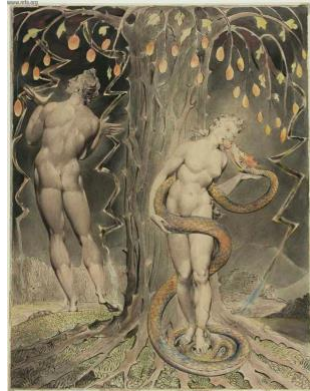
Sermon - The Wilderness

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen



The Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested, before he began ministry.

There seem to be some connections between the temptations Jesus faced and those faced by Adam and Eve. Both seem to relate to relationships.



I remember witnessing relationship breakdowns as a lawyer. Couples doubted one another and stopped trusting one another. Some abused their power over one another, until they both feared intimacy. Sometimes couples were ashamed of their behaviour and hid themselves from one another. Eventually there's just too much suffering, and they left it too late to forgive and heal, and they went their separate ways.

Genesis is about relationships and the consequences of wanting to be like God.

The serpent symbolised darkness and temptation, and sowed seeds of doubt about God's ways of living, saying: *Did God say?* The tempter lies: *You will not die.* The tempter implies God was keeping something from Adam and Eve. God didn't want them to become like God, knowing good and evil.

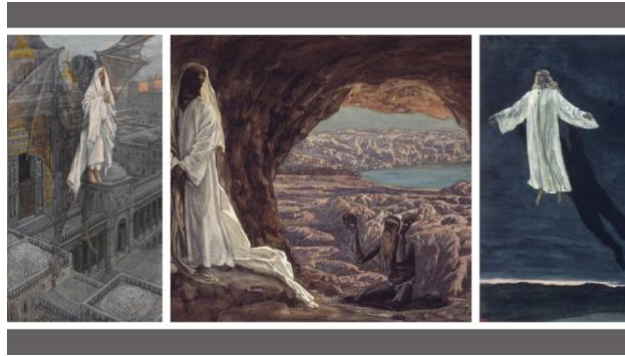
Eve is tempted and then tempts Adam, and they eat the forbidden fruit and lose their innocence. They are filled with shame, cover their nakedness and hide from God. When God asks them questions, Eve blames the serpent and Adam blames her.

God punishes them. The serpent is cursed. Eve is to suffer when giving birth and will no longer be equal with her husband. Adam is doomed to try and get life out of soil that resists blooming for him. They are no longer blessed and when they die, they turn to dust.

A wedge has been driven in between them, in their relationship with one another and more importantly, with God. They are no longer equal and there is discord in their relationship and suffering.

Adam and Eve are driven out of paradise and no longer have a relationship with God, their relationship is broken and they will not experience eternal life. Perhaps this is death.

Spiritual death. It seems bleak. Without much hope for their future. Yet, God made clothes for them, and understands their need to cover their nakedness, now that they have lost their innocence.



In the gospel, the devil symbolising the temptation, darkness and evilness, says to Jesus: *If you are the Son of God*. This is an attempt to sow seeds of doubt in Jesus' identity at a time when Jesus is hungry, weak and vulnerable, after fasting for 40 days. The devil tempts Jesus to be like God. Jesus' response is to quote the Word of God at the devil.

Then the devil tries to sow seeds of doubt in Jesus' relationship with God. *If you are the Son of God... test God's love for you*. The devil tried to drive a wedge in between Jesus' relationship with God. The devil even uses the Word of God to serve his needs.

Perhaps this is what evil is about, playing God, lies, sowing seeds of doubt, breaking down trust and relationships, driving wedges in between people and their relationships with God and one another. Again, Jesus quotes the Word of God.

Finally, the devil reveals his purpose and tries to become God, by offering everything to Jesus in return for Jesus worshipping him. This would mean Jesus denying God, his identity as the Son of God and it would lead to a total breakdown in Jesus' relationship with God. Jesus quotes The Word of God, *'Worship the Lord your God and serve only Him. and says to the devil: Away with you.'*

Jesus claims his relationship with God as central to His life and his identity as the Son of God. Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness is complete. God sends angels to care for him. He is ready to respond to his call from God and to begin his ministry.



Being tested in the wilderness can be transforming. Many great leaders have been shaped in some kind of wilderness. Humbled, tested, become self-sufficient, centred on God, their faith deepened, their priorities and values shaped and affirmed, their wounds healed, and their relationships appreciated. The wilderness can do much to make us fully alive in God.



There are many temptations in today's world. Perhaps many people end up confused and overwhelmed. There are so many little truths, misinformation and choices. We can become easily lost.

Perhaps Lent is an invitation to seek a wilderness place, whether outside of us such as a walk along the beach or seeking God within us where we embrace solitude, prayer and reading the bible. Or both.

Wilderness places can help us affirm our identity in Christ and deepen our relationship with God and ourselves. Time alone can help us process our thinking and feeling and come to value our relationships. It helps us sort out our priorities and ground ourselves in God.

Many things in life can make us vulnerable. Exhaustion, our body failing us or we need an operation or are facing treatment for cancer or money worries are wearing us down.

Sometimes times we can lash out at our loved ones when we are feeling afraid and frustrated. We don't know how to say I'm hurting, comfort me. Sometimes couples need space until strong feelings have subsided, and an opportunity arises to say: I'm sorry.

We need to nurture our relationships and maintain trust and intimacy. We are made to be family and community. We can bear one another up when we feel vulnerable. We need to prevent doubts, fears, anger, frustration, blaming, to build up and erode trust and intimacy.

Jesus revealed there is power in the Word of God. I know of many people, including myself, who have favourite bible verses they read or quote when they are feeling vulnerable, afraid or angry or just worn down by life. God Word can bring peace and reassurance and strength when we are doing it tough and help us resist temptations to go against our values and act in a way that damages our relationship with God others and ourselves.

There are three take home messages from today's gospel.

Firstly, the Word of God is powerful.

Secondly, we need to get our priorities right with God, others and ourselves.

Finally, we need to stay true to ourselves and who we are in Christ,

The Lord be with you

Moment of Silence

Hymn 745 Seek Ye first the kingdom of Heaven

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds
from the mouth of the Lord.

Offering

Lord, giver of every good thing, we bring to you our lives, gifts and resources for the building up of your kingdom and church. We give thanks for blessings and transformation that come through your grace and love made known in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Prayers of the People

Pray for our church and community, for your family and those doing it tough. Give thanks for your loved ones and for God's love for you.



The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive
those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

The Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you
And also with you.

Hymn 210 O for a Thousand tongues to sing

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of our God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Notices and Sharing

Blessing

In the deserts of this world,
may we find signs of God.
In the wilderness of our lives,
may we be encouraged by God.
In our joy and in our sorrow,
may we rejoice in God. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go forth in peace to live your Lenten discipline.
We go in faith and hope. Amen.

779 May the Feet of God

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.