

Leicester West Methodist Churches

Lent Reflections 2024

Sharing our story

Introduction by Miriam Stevenson

Our lives as Christians are marked by a sacred calendar, the weekly pattern of Sunday worship and the annual calendar of feasting and fasting, ecstatic celebration and solemn commemoration. This cycle gives our lives structure, rhythm and meaning, particularly as we trace the life of Jesus from manger to cross and beyond the grave. Lent is the longest such portion of sacred time. For forty days we linger in the barrenness of the desert, sharing with Jesus in His human vulnerability and finding Him beside us in temptation, struggle and loss.

Sometimes the way our own life story intersects with this sacred cycle brings it to life. This might be joyous – the Whitsun wedding or the Advent you find yourself expecting; or poignant – the Easter week funeral or the eerie lockdown Lent we shared in 2020. Such intersections offer insight and deepen feeling, while on other occasions these seasons seem to creep up on us unawares or find us in a place disconnected from the events we recycle.

The repeated nature of this weekly and yearly cycle acknowledges that these events in the life of Jesus cannot be taken on board all at once. Indeed as our own life story shifts, repeated exposure is required. Each time the year circles round, we find a new perspective and are gifted a fuller appreciation. Once is not enough, a lifetime of Christmas and Easter, Advent and Lent does not exhaust their meaning.

In this booklet there are 40 personal reflections on Scripture by members of the Leicester West Circuit and an Easter Day reflection from a guest contributor.

They have responded to the challenge of connecting the daily portion offered by the Lectionary for Lent 2024 with their own life experience.

Jesus's defiant words in the wilderness remind us that humans need more than material bread to live. We need every word which comes warm, urgent and life-giving from the mouth of God to sustain us. Wherever this Lent finds us, may we catch that sustaining word through God's Word and these faithful, personal reflections as well as the experience of each of our lives. As we set out again with Jesus into the wilderness, may we receive what we need for the next steps of our journey.

Miriam Stevenson

(Local Preaching Tutor in the Leicester Methodist Circuits)

The Lent readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary Year B. The reflections cover Monday to Saturday but not the Sundays of Lent.

You can just read the reflection and prayer each day or if you have longer you could read the scripture passages as well.

Lent Reflections 2024: Sharing Our Story

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Beginning of Lent: Ash Wednesday, 14 February

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17;
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

He will teach us his ways, so
that we may walk in his paths.

Isaiah 2:3

Beware of practicing your piety
before others in order to be seen
by them, for then you have no
reward from your Father in
heaven. **Matthew 6:1**



Working quietly in the background

Why I identify with this reading from Matthew chapter 6 is because I am not one to do things in the limelight and like to work quietly in the background.

I have a bit of difficulty socializing and don't find chatting easy.

I have been blessed with skills and technical ability and can quietly use these in God's service with love and gratitude for what I have received in my walk with the Lord and in fellowship with other believers.

These verses encourage me because they tell me God knows everything I do for the Church and others.

Prayer

Thank you Lord, that you know me through and through and have given me a way to serve you and others.

Dave, Ratby

Week One: Thursday 15 February

Psalm 25:1-10; Daniel 9:1-14; 1 John 1:3-10

Make me to know your ways O Lord; teach me your paths. **Psalm 25:4****Fully intending to go home and paint my nails**

This reading from Psalm 25 filled me with thankfulness because in my youth I was rebellious and stubborn – always going my own way whether it brought suffering to the family or not - despite good Christian advice from my parents. To know that the Lord forgives me and does not hold it against me brings such relief and peace because I would certainly never make it if left to my own strivings.

I thank him that as He states here, He guides and instructs us, and I am finding this especially in His Word. It helps me to stay focused and encouraged, to keep on trusting, and not to harden my heart as I did in my youth.

Despite turning from God in my youth I decided to give my children a chance to make up their own mind and took them to Sunday School in the seventies fully intending to go home and paint my nails 😊. I just felt I had to go into church though and from there my walk began. I sat at the back - a stranger - and God spoke: 'Welcome home'. I cannot describe how I felt, looking back a bit frightened and also emotional.

Since then it's been a real curveball of learning, some of it very hard to take, but an enormous blessing. Bible group studies have been a great aid. Each lesson learnt brought me closer. He has seen me through some horrendous times and I have learnt to look and listen for Him every day to direct me. Though I still battle with my own will and often fall short. Holding fast to Him is my answer to life.

Prayer: Father, your love for us, your children, knows no bounds. You have paid the price for our sins of today and yesterday. I am so grateful to have found rest in your eternal love and forgiveness. I am grateful You have seen me and led me to You. Amen

Margaret, Rathby

Week One: Friday 16 February

Psalms 25:1-10; Daniel 9:15-25a; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you ... **2 Timothy 4:1**

Days of greasing, oiling, cleaning ...

In 1965 on the Firth of Clyde sat 73 ships of the Royal Navy awaiting the Royal Review. The day before the actual review Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the 2nd along with Prince Philip and Lord Mountbatten visited one of those ships on which I was part of the crew, H.M.S. Kent. In preparation for this Royal visit there had been days and days of greasing, oiling, cleaning, painting and polishing. Even our own personal clothes lockers had to be absolutely perfect.

Reading the passage from Timothy was what reminded me of that Royal Fleet Review because Paul reminds Timothy that all Christians should always be prepared for the coming of the King of kings. Our preparation should involve a review of our affairs including our actions and our relationship with God, the latter always affecting the former. Lent is clearly a time for this preparation and one thing that can affect our relationship with God dramatically, as with any relationship, is communication. George Herbert once said, **‘Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night.’** That could be a great thing for all Christians to hold onto.

Prayer

Lord God, our heavenly Father. During this time of Lent as we prepare once again for the mystery of faith, guide us, encourage us and uplift us, that we may truly have body, heart and soul worthy to receive the greatest gift ever given, that of your precious Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fred, Glenfield

Week One: Saturday 17 February

Psalm 25:1-10; Psalm 32; Matthew 9:2-13

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. **Matthew 9:9**

I was sent God's angel

What, no questions first? No – 'I'm not good enough Jesus!' (He was after all a tax collector, a sinner, despised and shunned by his fellows!) No – where will we be going? No – what will you be expecting me to do?

He got up immediately, we are told, and followed him ... So, when Jesus asks me to '*follow him*', when he needs me as his disciple, to be his hands or feet or love in the world – why do I hesitate? Why do I come up with excuses? Why can't I go at that moment? Why, when I know I can trust him and his mercy and love, do I not 'get up and follow' in faith without question as Matthew did?

A few years ago, after becoming a member of the Methodist Church, I believed I heard Jesus calling me to be a Local Preacher. And yes, I was full of doubts and questions. I asked myself how could it possibly be! But I found God does not leave you with those questions. I was sent his messenger (you could say 'angel' as indeed that is what they are after all) in the person of Rev'd Joseph Suray! He talked me through all my questions and doubts and in May, 2017 I was welcomed as a Methodist Local Preacher - aged 72!

Have no worries. God doesn't mind doubts. He will always be there to guide you on the path he needs you to take.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I pray for the courage and faith to get up and follow you whenever and wherever you need me to go. Amen

Gill, Rathby

Week Two: Monday 19 February

Psalm 77; Job 4:1-21; Ephesians 2:1-10

The rewarding Lenten discipline of giving

It is a tradition in the season of Lent to give something up. You do this in order to remind yourself where God needs to be in your life. A person gives up listening to the radio on the way to work in order to concentrate more on the events of her own life and prayer, instead of being distracted. A person may give up eating dessert in order to remind himself of the joy found in God, not just God's edible creations. Others may give up watching television to focus on reading the Word of God and the gift of family instead of losing themselves in mindless images. What are you giving up this season of Lent?

You see what you give up does not matter but what matters is that you are able to place something else in its place that constantly reminds you of who God is and our need of him in our lives. Some people, instead of giving something up, become giving in Lent by adding something to their daily lives. Getting up early each day to spend time with God, to pray, read God's Word and to connect. All the above reminds us of who God is and our need for God.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount wants us to be humble in our spiritual disciplines for that is where grace is found. We should not desire to have everybody looking at us or gloat over what we give up. Give in secret so only God knows what you are doing.

Our reward for following a Lenten discipline is that our personal relationship with God grows. The Journey of Lent begins, yes, we can look back at our lives with joy and beyond with excitement because there is potential for great spiritual growth.

Prayer: Father let this be a time of personal reflections and to create that desire to get closer to you. Give us the courage to persevere and the will to do what you want us to do. In your hands we entrust our lives. Amen.

Reverend Jimi Kaci

Week Two: Tuesday 20 February

Psalm 77; Job 5:8-27; 1 Peter 3:8-18a

I cry aloud to God, aloud to God,
that he may hear me ...
in the night my hand is stretched
out without wearying; ...

my soul refuses to be comforted.
You keep my eyelids from closing;
I am so troubled that I cannot
speak. **Psalm 77:1,2,4**

Write problems down – God answers!

At first the Psalmist is in deep trouble. He cries out to God to help him. God has helped him in the past but now he seems far away. He used to be filled with joyous songs but now everything seems different. He wonders if God has rejected him? Will he ever feel God's loving kindness again? Has God forgotten him? Is God angry? Will he never have his love and blessings again? Then he remembers how God helped him in the past, what a wonderful blessing he received. The wonderful miracles God did, how the Red sea parted and the people crossed safely. God guided and looked after them.

Isn't this true of life today? Sometimes we are basking in the love of God and everything seems to be going well and then problems come - loss or sorrow - and we don't know what to do to solve them. Where is God? He is still there, loving us even if he seems far away.

I remember reading a book which said to write your problems and fears down and give them to God to sort out and answer. It said to leave them with God, don't keep taking them back and worrying what to do. Tell yourself that God is sorting everything out.

I have found that God always helps, the problems are solved, help is given, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. I write down the answer God gives which gives me more confidence for the future. I know that God is with me and will help when things are difficult.

Prayer: Thank you God for meeting and answering my deep needs.

Bridget, St. Andrews, LFE

Week Two: Wednesday 21 February

Psalms 77; Proverbs 30:1-9; Matthew 4:1-11

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.' **Luke 10:38-42**

At the Home of Martha and Mary

During this season of 'busy-ness' we may all be feeling like Martha. Preparing, planning, worrying and implementing.

Take time today to reflect on your own personal relationship with Jesus. Spend time in stillness, kneeling at His feet, and hearing what He needs to tell you. Remember that He wasn't chastising Martha for her 'busy-ness' but allowing her to witness the demonstration of what is most important and to make a choice to make the space for time with the Lord.

Prayer

Lord, let me open my heart to Your Spirit today. I pray that in your care, I shall not be overwhelmed. May I demonstrate Your love in all I do today. At your feet I pray. In Jesus name, Amen.

Amanda, Huncote



Week Two: Thursday 22 February

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18; Romans 3:21-31

Tested and made right

They say without a test you can't have a **testimony**. One of my earliest tests, a short while after I asked Jesus to come into my life, was a fidelity test. I'd been married for 4 years, and married life started to get tough due to a culmination of pressures and so I packed a bag for me and my kids. Alone in a room, I opened the laptop and found a hotel to stay in, as the first step to leaving the marriage. Just before I booked it, I heard a stern but soft voice say, 'What God has brought together, let no man set apart'. I was not a bible reader at this point, and I very rarely prayed. But, stunned by scripture, seemingly coming out of thin air, I shut the laptop, and hopelessly said 'I need help, I can't cope'. Help didn't come and things got worse. Then a much more tempting second fidelity test came, but the warning voice also came again. And as I heard the warning a second time, everything became crystal clear and I realized I'd been tested. I said 'Amen'. After a month or so and after I had accepted Jesus as Lord of my life, things started to improve rapidly in the marriage, and it has remained rock solid. Not only have we been a blessing for each other, but through our marriage God has used us to be a blessing to others. Before I met my husband, on the rare occasions that I prayed, I prayed a lengthy prayer to God, to bring the perfect partner for me into my life. After I gave up on believing God had listened or cared and only 6 months after the prayer, he arrived. Later, I took my vows before God, agreeing to the marriage 'for better or for worse,' but was tempted to break them. Jesus said even thoughts can equate to sin. Though we sin, **'we are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are,'** (Romans 3:22-23). What sin are you battling? Don't battle it alone. Take it to God. When you think you can't take any more, God will sustain you and forgive any sinful thoughts, words and actions.

Prayer

Wonderful Lord Jesus, at times we sin and need to ask for forgiveness, knowing your blood has already covered our transgressions past, present and future. Thank you for this gift. Colossally. Amen

Anon

Week Two: Friday 23 February

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

For better and for worse

‘For better and for worse’, is often read out during the wedding vows when a couple gets married. It is a solemn promise that during times of difficulty, both partners will be there to support, love, and care for the other. It is a promise of faithfulness during the hardest times. I imagine it would have been so hard for people like my grandfather who went to fight in World War 2, leaving behind my grandmother to care for a working farm and 2 small children. When he came back from the war, he would have seen such atrocities and would have spent the rest of his life trying to make sense of it all. My Grandmother would have needed the patience of a saint and unshakeable loyalty to support him through this process. He also would have needed great faithfulness to his family as he returned to work the land and raise his children whilst recovering from the impact of war.

God expects us to remain faithful to Him, for better and for worse, to cling to Him during our most difficult trials. It can be difficult to cling to God sometimes because unlike our loved ones we cannot see God suffering with us on a day-to-day basis.

It is important to remember that our God suffers with us because He is faithful. He will not abandon us during our hardship or struggle. When you have struggled through the tests of time with God, remaining faithful to Him, He will stand up and lift you both above the clouds of suffering as you cling to one another. Then you can enjoy His abundant blessings together.

Prayer

Father God, cling to me through the hard times, hold me in your mighty hands, and protect me as I try my hardest to depend on you for strength, support and guidance. Lord, help me to be faithful to you, as you are faithful to me, as we go through life together. Amen

Rob, Glenfield

Week Two: Saturday 24 February

Psalm 22:23-31; Genesis 16:7-15; Mark 8:27-30

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
Yet ... In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters, in the congregation I will praise you. **Psalm 22:1,4,22**

Utter blackness of the coal mine ... to light

As a boy in a church choir I learned to chant psalms. When we sang Psalm 22 there was a huge key change at verse 22, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters ...' The first two thirds of Psalm 22 are total anguish; the author begins with a cry of agony, quoted by Jesus on The Cross: 'My God, why have you abandoned me?' (Verse 1). Whether the two halves always went together or not, the writer(s) wanted to create a complete contrast.

Then with a jolt, from nowhere, the mood changes to hope, praise, prosperity and justice and the perspective widens from individual and nation to all generations and future generations. The closed door bursts open and light, unbearably bright floods in.

At the same church in North Derbyshire where I sang in the choir we visited a coal mine. My dad was the youth club leader who organised it. Hundreds of feet down, the guide turned the lights off for a whole minute of utter blackness. Silence ...

Lights-on released a burst of relief from the whole group.

Prayer

Why not try to find the darkest corner of your house? Recall a recent dark moment in your life. Now switch on the light and read from verse 22. Now thank the Lord for bringing light into our lives by rising from the dead.

Tom, Glenfield

Week Three: Monday 26 February

Psalms 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 21:1-7; Hebrews 1:8-12

God has brought laughter for me. **Genesis 21:6**

On a rollercoaster – me, my girls and God

Most would understand if I said life is full of ups and downs - sometimes it's overwhelming. For those of you that do not know me, a little insight, I am a single mum to two teenage girls and all 3 of us have complex health issues that impact life regularly - and on top of that is normal life; work and doing things we love.

In today's readings - for me the thing that stood out - 'Sing to him, sing praises', 'look to the Lord and his strength' from Psalm 105 and 'God has brought me laughter' from Genesis 21.

For me, God certainly brought me laughter in the shape of two amazing daughters that I am blessed to have a great relationship with. We laugh together all the time, we share praise and worship together and we sing together. All of which we do even in our darkest days.

My eldest has Tourettes and laughter is sometimes a by-product, our only way to cope. Other times we need more strength than we have and either together or individually we look to God for that strength. As a parent when your child tells you, 'when ... happens, I pray and it calms me', you know you have got something right and you know God works wonders. He is the strength I cling to. He is the Light in the dark and we are never alone.

Prayer

Lord, You are strength, love and light. You help when I can't even find the words to ask. Lord stay beside me and those I love and care for everyday and I will praise you always for you are great. Amen

Sarah, New Parks

Week Three: Tuesday 27 February

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45; Genesis 22:1-19; Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

Times of Trial

In reflecting on my own trials, challenges and trusting in God, I draw inspiration from the character of Abraham. Much like him I've encountered moments of uncertainty and difficulty in my life. For example, when my husband was sick Doctors declared it was cancer. But I put trust in God and prayed, had strong faith in God that nothing is impossible to him. When the biopsy report came back there was no cancer.

During times of trial I've experienced the transformative power of placing my trust in God. Just as Abraham faced the difficult prospect of sacrificing his son Isaac my challenges often seemed too difficult to overcome. For example, my son suffered with pneumonia and yet, like Abraham, I chose to trust in God's plan, believing that He would provide a way. Miraculously God healed my son.

Reflecting on answered prayers I find parallels in Abraham's life where God intervened in remarkable ways. Despite the complexities Abraham's faith was rewarded. Similarly, I've witnessed God's responses to my prayers, reinforcing my faith and affirming that trust in Him is never in vain.

While writing this personal reflection, I am reminded that, like Abraham, my journey is a testament to the strength found in unwavering faith. It's an acknowledgment of the challenges faced, the trust placed in God, and the profound moments where prayers were answered and made into the strong foundation of my faith journey.

Prayer: Dear God, I thank you for being my God. Thank you for always being with me in my trials and challenges and answering my prayers. Help me to be strong in faith like Abraham, always trusting in God. Help me to tell out the wondrous things that you have done in my life. Use me to testify your name to others. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Mary, New Parks

Week Three: Wednesday 28 February

Psalms 105:1-11, 37-45; Jeremiah 30:12-22; John 12:36-43

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God. **John 12:42-43**

The fear of not knowing

Throughout my life, I had followed my faith, sometimes close to God, sometimes at arm's length, but whichever it was, I was always too scared to tell people 'I believed', fear of their reactions or questions ...

When I encountered God in my life during 2022, I got this overwhelming feeling of allowing him in, without questions, like I needed to know him more. At this time I also had a feeling I needed to share with others my new encounter and without shame or embarrassment.

Being closer to God than ever allowed me to feel fearless when talking about my faith and my journey with other people, whether in the church community, family, friends or even people I didn't know that well. I honestly believe if you fully let God into your life, no matter what, the fear of talking about God to others is taken away. Have faith, believe and God will take you on his journey.

Prayer

Almighty God, touch our hearts and our minds and help us to praise you alone and also in company. Give us the confidence to share your unconditional love and praise with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jay, Epworth

Week Three: Thursday 29 February

Psalm 19; Exodus 19:1-9a; 1 Peter 2:4-10

Rejection

When we were children, my siblings and I would listen every Saturday morning to the radio when 'Uncle Mac' played children's record requests. A favourite was 'The Ugly Duckling' sung by Danny Kaye and based on the Hans Christian Anderson story. It tells of a bird that identifies as a duckling but is despised by everyone because he looks different. Eventually he turns into a beautiful swan, so a cygnet and not a duckling after all.

During his short ministry Jesus too suffered constant rejection – from those who knew him for years, from the establishment, from his fellow Jews who bayed for his crucifixion and even by his closest friends. The lowest point was during the agony in Gethsemane when he felt that even his father had forsaken him. Then came the wonder of Easter morning when he was raised in glory to sit at the right hand of God.

The 1 Peter 2:4-10 passage talks about 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner'. Rejection is a very difficult thing with which to cope; but just as Christ in the desert withstood the temptation to seek popularity with the masses and thereby fulfilled his true potential, so must we be true to that in which we believe, whatever the cost, because only then will we attain the crown of victory.

Prayer

As we follow in the steps of Christ on his way to Calvary this Lenten time, may we rejoice with being at odds with most of the world, even if it means rejection, because we are only emulating the path trodden by our Master and Friend.
Amen

Louise, St Andrews GRE

Week Three: Friday 1 March

Psalms 19; Exodus 19:9b-15 Acts 7:30-40

Take Your Shoes Off

Moses saw a bush on fire.
A normal sight in the desert.
Except ... this bush did not burn up.
Moses went to take a closer look.

And God met him there: *'Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.'* **Acts 7:33**

There was something between Moses and holy ground ... His shoes.
And God said, *'take them off'*. **Remove the thing that gets in the way of you and holiness. Gets in the way of you and Me.**

Shoes come in all shapes and sizes – literally! What do your life-shoes look like? Is anything getting in the way of you and God? Perhaps your relationship with Him has drifted. You're not as close as you once were.

The commandments of the LORD are right ... Psalm 19:8

What does the Lord command? ... *'Take off your shoes.'*

Come closer to Me

Holy ground is where God is.
And God is everywhere!
Cleaning the kitchen?
You're on holy ground.
Going to church?

You're on holy ground.
Sitting in a chair?
You're on holy ground ... *bringing joy to the heart.*

As we take off our shoes, whatever our shoes look like, we'll grow closer to God. We'll recognise Him more and more, in every day. We'll be reminded that we are on holy ground. And we'll find joy. *'Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God. But only he who sees takes off his shoes...'*

~ Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Prayer

Father God, please help me take off my shoes today, Amen

Emily, St Andrews GRE

Week Three: Saturday 2 March

Psalm 19; Exodus 19:16-25; Mark 9:2-8

God speaks from the whole earth

When I think of Lent, I initially think of testing one's self - discipline because of the forty days that Jesus spent fasting for the sake of others, just prior to his death at Calvary. But more than just the idea of testing, I do think more about dedication to God.

I have been looking at Psalm 19 which has such a powerful message which, to me, can be summed up in one word and that is 'truth'! This Psalm really makes me feel as if my whole life is in His hands for everything that the Lord does, is worth trusting in. The Psalm says 'LORD my Rock and my Redeemer' which is everything that He is.

There have been times in my life when I have felt challenged by temptation, sadness, dismay and despair and felt that I just needed something I could put all my faith in. And what more than God! This Psalm says a lot about the comfort of God's love, the truth and righteousness in His words, and His heavenly panorama over the earth. I know I certainly feel such comfort from reading this Psalm simply by seeing the love that is in His Holy Word. The words from verses 7 - 14 teach me more about God's love than I feel any mortal could on earth. I feel that I am being communicated to by Him through the world around us, for instance, from the sky. I feel as if it is being spoken to me from the atmosphere around me rather than just from text and reading scripture.

In my times of turmoil especially, I know I feel great comfort from not just reading this Psalm, but by imagining and visualising everything that it says. Lent and Easter to me is a time of consecrating one's life to God. One is never alone in moments of grief for the Lord will always be by our side.

Prayer

God bless us all in this season of Lent!

Shiv, St Andrew's GRE

Week Four: Monday 4 March

Psalms 84; 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22; 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

One day spent in your house, this beautiful place of worship, beats thousands spent on Greek island beaches. **Psalms 84:10 (The Message)**

Better than Greek island beaches

The season of Lent is a time of quiet introspection. It encourages me to find time to reflect and sort myself out in terms of my relationship with God.

The desert is a desolate place, devoid of the material distractions you might find on Greek Island beaches and completely different to the temple that Solomon built but it's the desert that Jesus went into to confirm his relationship with God. He discovered there the security and confidence that comes from putting himself completely in his father's hands.

We can't all go to the desert during Lent but Paul reminds us that we ourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us.

During Lent we can enter that 'inner temple' of our being, aware that, as the psalmist says in the Message translation: 'One day spent in your house, this beautiful place of worship, beats thousands spent on Greek island beaches.'

It's here that we can discover ourselves once again. This discovery gives me the confidence and security I need, so that like Jesus, I can cope with all that the world throws at me.

Prayer

In the stillness
I settle my heart in silence,
Patiently waiting for You,
Adoring You.
In these moments,
Touched by the hand of mercy,

Drawn by transforming beauty,
I worship You.
Show me Your ways,
Show me now Your glory;
I want to know You more.
(Chris Bowater.)

Mike, Trinity

Week Four: Tuesday 5 March

Psalms 84; 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19; Hebrews 9:23-28

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! **Psalms 84:1**

Pilgrims journeying in God's dwelling place

Psalms 84, one of the Pilgrim Psalms, is believed to have been sung by those who traveled to Jerusalem believing they were in the presence of the Lord. I do believe we all dwell in the presence of the Lord, whether we believe or not, because this universe, formed by the hand of God, is and always will be His dwelling place, His Temple.

For pilgrims of old such journeys were often dangerous and hard as they wandered through the wilderness in order to reach Jerusalem. So they praised God for His presence and protection along the way.

We too are on a pilgrimage as we journey with Jesus towards Jerusalem to witness His ultimate sacrifice and glorious resurrection. As we travel in the presence and under the protection of God our journey gives us time to reflect on our faith and the strength we get from Him when we stumble along a sometimes rocky road. When the going gets tough we realise that without His love and care we would have nothing but emptiness and despair. For the Christian pilgrim a close walk with God rewards us with endless supplies of GRACE. Grace that can only come from trusting and putting our faith in the One who went to the Cross that we might live.

Prayer

Peace and blessings to all who journey with us through the wilderness into the joyful season of Easter.

Edith, Trinity



Week Four: Wednesday 6 March

Psalm 84; Ezra 6:1-16; Mark 11:15-19

The turning point

In this short passage from Mark's gospel we see a Jesus who is filled with a passion that results in righteous anger. This is portrayed by Jesus turning over the temple tables and reminding all those present that the Temple was to be used as a house of prayer and not as a marketplace. He wisely refers to scripture which provides the motive behind the passion. This episode upset the chief priests and teachers so much that they became fearful and wanted to get rid of Jesus. This is a critical turning point in Jesus's ministry.

Passion can spur us into positive action if it is based upon the right motives. The passion that drove Jesus was his love for his father.

Being human sometimes we misinterpret situations and become very judgemental and passionate about our own views.

During Lent we have the opportunity to reflect on our own Christian journey. Through prayer and bible study we can learn how to become passionate about the things that matter.

If you have ever observed a passion flower it has a beauty all of its own. Passion which is based on unselfish love, which can only be obtained from God, can produce amazing results.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, we thank you for the love and compassion which you have for each one of us. Help us to show your love and feel compassion for those in need. Give us the wisdom to understand when to be passionate, praying for your guidance at all times. Amen

Wendy, Epworth

Week Four: Thursday 7 March

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Genesis 9:8-17; Ephesians 1:3-6

The Rainbow

In Genesis we read the 4,000 year old story about the creation of the rainbow. The rainbow has now become a symbol of all-embracing hope and love.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu called post-apartheid South Africa the Rainbow Nation. A diverse nation, all colours and backgrounds, rich, poor, all religions and different languages.

The LGBTQ community have the rainbow as their symbol.

During Covid it was used by many as a symbol of love, hope and solidarity. School children in Anstey painted and posted rainbows through local houses for people to display in their windows.

The rainbow has become a beautiful symbol for inclusivity, diversity and unity: an all-embracing image of the promise of love and friendship. The rainbow is light divided into its constituent colours. Humankind is divided by colour, creed and culture but should be united by unconditional love and so be a Rainbow People bringing light to each other.

The Church is gradually learning to be a Rainbow Community, welcoming everyone as it becomes more inclusive and diverse. In the symbol of the rainbow I see the God who is Love at work, fulfilling the promise in the Genesis story of unconditional love for all humankind.

Prayer

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

(STF 409, Marty Haugen)

Richard, Anstey

Week Four: Friday 8 March

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Daniel 12:5-13; Ephesians 1:7-14

God's Spirit goes out through the world

Ephesus was a town on the west coast of Asia Minor and was famous for its heathen religions, which meant that the society from which the Christian converts came was one where superstition and false religious ideas were widespread. Paul's letter to the Ephesians appears to be a more general letter, not being addressed to anyone specifically and lacking any personal greeting. The zealous Ephesian converts evangelised most of the province of Asia having accepted Paul's teachings wholeheartedly. However, by the time of this letter Paul saw that the church in Ephesus would be troubled by false teachings.

The selected verses are quite inspiring. Verses 7 & 8 in particular are awesome. We have been redeemed through the blood of Christ for Our sins due to the riches of God's grace that he has lavished upon us with all wisdom & understanding. How wonderful is that, and how can we possibly live up to it, except through full acceptance and prayer. All we have to do is share the love of God and of our neighbours throughout the World.

Verse 11 seems to refer to the Jews who were God's chosen people, but verse 12 looks to the Jews who were the first to accept Jesus and his teachings. I believe verse 13 includes us gentiles when we heard and accepted the truth of Jesus' teachings, so that all the people of the world without exception are offered the gift of the Holy Spirit when they believe and accept the word of Jesus. I find this very encouraging and since we are given it by God's grace, let us pray:

Prayer

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen

Ian, St Andrews LFE

Week Four: Saturday 9 March

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Numbers 20:22-29; John 3:1-13

I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. **John 3:3**

God moves in mysterious ways

We are now around halfway through Lent. So what has Lent meant to us? What have we sacrificed? In John chapter 3 Nicodemus says to Jesus 'No one could perform the miraculous signs that you are doing if God were not with him.' In reply Jesus declared:

'I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'

I was once told and do believe our lives are set before us and although sometimes (and it has happened to me) situations have not worked out and I thought I had a problem but in time situations have changed and worked out for the better.

As the saying goes, 'God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.'

Think back whether you have had similar experiences?

Prayer

This Lent let us take time to speak to God and thank him for his guidance and love.

Tony, St Andrews, LFE

Week Five: Monday 11 March

Psalm 107:1-16; Exodus 15:22-27; Hebrews 3:1-6

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.

Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;
hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.

Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.

For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.

Psalm 107:1-9

Heart failure ... then I felt re-created

Following a bout of rheumatic fever in my teens, I then unknowingly lived with the beginnings of heart failure and its physical restrictions. Forty years later I received a mechanical heart valve implant and the promise of a brighter future.

I felt re-created, saved, ready to move forward and very thankful. I felt like the ones the psalmist speaks of: 'All you whom He has saved.' (Psalm 107:2)

Prayer

Lord, I thank you for the way in which you have worked in my life. The way you offered me a new beginning and gave me a sense of purpose. Teach me to count my blessings and welcome each day as your gift. As I journey on in life make me a person you would have me be.

Margaret, Markfield

Week Five: Tuesday 12 March

Psalm 107:1-16; Numbers 20:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

I the Lord have called you and given you the power. **Isaiah 42:6**

The Lord's Servant

Here I sit watching Mary Berry prepare her menu for this coming Christmas, pondering over what to put down on paper, my thoughts on the above text during the next Holy Week. Sometimes our Senior Steward, Ian / or Justin, do ask for the near impossible.

Why did I put my name down to train as a Worship Leader. The planted seed – and after much deliberation, and like Samuel, many words in my ear, I reluctantly agreed to train, but am now enjoying the experience.

I can sing my favourite hymns and choruses, so long as they 'fit in' with the quoted lessons. I can say prayers for each and everyone and all world events, pleas for help and healing, glory to the life and works of our Saviour, and as we prepare for God's greater gift to mankind, remember the fear and pain he suffered for the redemption of me and you.

I underwent no Damascus conversion, just a gentle walk along the road to Emmaus with the realisation we walk not alone but with our God at our side, strengthened by His Spirit, and as Isaiah says in verse 6 'I the Lord have called you and given you the power.'

If you have heard Him call, no matter how small, be not afraid, He will hold your hand as you walk through life, always.

Prayer

Thank you for calling me, for holding my hand through life, for taking away my fear with your love.

Ian B, Markfield

Week Five: Wednesday 13 March

Psalm 107:1-16; Isaiah 60:15-22; John 8:12-20

‘Lord Help’ they cried in their trouble, and he rescued them from their distress. **Psalm 107:6**

Finding calm in life’s roller-coaster journey

This verse from Psalm 107 means a lot. My son and I have joined the church recently asking the Lord for help, guidance and calm. I am sure that most people have asked for help at some point in their lives or will need to. We have had a lot happen to us as a family and it didn’t matter where we were turning, the help received just wasn’t helping or having the positive impact that we were all hoping for. That is until about a month ago I brought myself a devotional Bible and joined church on a Sunday. I’m delighted to say this had such a positive impact. We asked for help and since asking and devoting time to the Lord both of us are calmer and feel loved, (not just by each other which is fierce and strong) but now we feel surrounded by love and understanding. We are trying to be better each day. Asking the Lord for help is brave and takes courage to believe but when you let him in it becomes easier and more natural each day.

Prayer: Loving God, when we ask for help, please hear us. Life is a rollercoaster of ups and downs, turns and flips, but I’m happy riding it knowing you are there by my side. I will always try to understand and do what’s right with love and compassion for you, my family and neighbours, till I am no more and standing with you. Amen.

Don’t be afraid, I am here. **John 8:20**

This resonated with the personal journey I am on regarding my faith. I have been struggling for a year with my beliefs, questions and darkness. I can see the light now though and the darkness is fading each day as my faith grows. The light is brighter, knowing he is walking beside me, he is here.

Prayer: Thank you for walking beside me, for your everlasting strength and light. Amen.

Cari, Glenfield

Week Five: Thursday 14 March

Psalm 51:1-12; Isaiah 30:15-18; Hebrews 4:1-13

On the 7th day God rested

I am lucky to be part of a family in which worship is a part of our routine. From a very young age, I have attended church every Sunday, and have taken countless messages from this time spent with the Lord, many of which I try to use as 'rules for life'. As I get older and continue on my academic journey (I am currently studying for my A Levels), I have occasionally found myself conflicted between going to church and spending my morning revising at home. One particular quote from today's readings that spoke to me about this dilemma is this: 'On the seventh day God rested from all his works.' For most of us, this will be familiar as the final part of the Creation story (Genesis 2:2), however, it is used again in Hebrews 4:4 in the context of the people of God, who did not enter this rest because of their 'disobedience'. Personally, I understand that worship, and going to church, is something I do only for the Lord. It does not matter what anybody else wants me to do, as it is only against the Lord that I sin, and I know that he is right in his verdict and justified in his judgement (Psalm 51). Let us, therefore, make every effort to take some time out of our busy lives on a Sunday morning to enter that rest and follow the example of the Lord himself, such that we may share the faith and take value from every message we hear. And it is never too late to start! The Lord longs to be gracious to all of us (Isaiah 30:18), whether we have been faithful since childhood or are unsure where our beliefs lie, and blessed are all who take the smallest amount of time to put the smallest amount of trust in the Lord.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your unfailing love, your endless mercy and your great compassion. Thank you for blotting out our transgressions and making it so easy for us to start again. Thank you for your patience, and for always being ready to listen. And thank you, Lord, for the many, many blessings you have bestowed upon our lives, those we see now and those yet to come. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Oliver, Glenfield

Week Five: Friday 15 March

Psalms 51:1-12; Exodus 30:1-10; Hebrews 4:14-5:4

Every high priest chosen from among mortals ... is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; **Hebrews 5:1,2**

Who can I talk to?

When we pray to Jesus with a problem Christians know that Jesus will talk to God about our problems. However, there are times when you really want to talk to a human being who will listen to you without judging or condemning you, especially if it is something important. God knows this and he chooses certain men and women to be those people that you can talk to. They can't volunteer, God chooses them. They are called by God. They may be Ministers or lay people, part of the 'priesthood of all believers.' They are human and they are still subject to the same pressures and temptations that exist in this world so they can offer you understanding. You are not alone.

Sometimes bad things can come all at once. In my case my career in aviation was coming to a close, my employer wouldn't renew my contract as my hearing was damaged. On top of that my wife didn't like our location or living out in the countryside. So she left, taking the children with her to live in her home town. Life looked bleak. Lockheed, the aviation company, were offering me a job out in Saudi Arabia which was tempting. What to do? If I went to Saudi Arabia I would never see my children grow up, I would lose my family. Somehow I met a Christian where I worked and they invited me to join their group. I didn't feel alone anymore. At one meeting I became a committed Christian and that is when my life changed for the better. I phoned my wife one night and in conversation I told her that I had become a Christian. She said that's funny, so have I. So 100 miles apart without any knowledge of what each of us were doing we became Christians. We were together for 38 years, until she passed on. I did see my children grow up and be a part of that and I got a new career when I was made redundant. God still has his hand on my life today.

Trevor, Glenfield

Week Five: Saturday 16 March

Psalm 51:1-12; Habakkuk 3:2-13; John 12:1-11

An Intimate Relationship

As we read Psalm 51 together with all the other Psalms of David it is quite clear that he not only was close to God, his Father, but also how sorry and repentant he was for the sins he had committed and how it had broken that precious relationship. I'm reminded of the verse of that hymn 'It is a thing most wonderful' which goes, 'I cannot tell how He could love a child so weak and full of sin; His love must be most wonderful if he could die my love to win.'

Whatever we may have done or not done, we have a loving God who wants to forgive us and draw us close to Himself. The old chorus says 'Oh the love that drew salvation's plan, Oh the grace that brought it down to man, Oh the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!'

When I was going through an acrimonious divorce I was troubled about a broken relationship, deeply hurting for my children and disturbed about the break-up of the home. But at this time I felt and experienced a particular closeness to the Lord who supported me. I cannot explain why but as days went by His closeness to me was so real in so many ways.

Richard Rohr writes '... an infinite God seeks and desires intimacy with the human soul. Once you experience such intimacy, only the intimate language of lovers describes what is going on for you: mystery, tenderness, singularity, specialness, changing the rules "for me," nakedness, risk, ecstasy, incessant longing, and, of course also suffering. This is the mystical vocabulary of the saints.'

During this time of Lent maybe the Lord wants to say to you and me 'Be still and know that I am God' or as The Message says 'Step out of the traffic! Take a long loving look at me, your high God, above politics, above everything.'

In Corrie ten Boom's verse about the Weaver it says, 'Not 'til the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why the dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned. He knows, He loves, He cares and nothing this truth can dim. He gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him.'

Andy, Glenfield

Week Six: Monday 18 March

Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 43:8-13; 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

How can a young man keep his way pure? **Psalm 119:9a**

God's Word hidden in our heart

Psalm 119:9a provides a great question for a young man to ask – in fact, a great question for anyone of any age. I cannot recall asking myself that question; if I didn't ask, I should have done. Part of the answer to the question is given in verse 119:9b – By living according to your word.

In my early years I attended a Roman Catholic primary school where we had a good religious education which included studying the Roman Catholic Children's Catechism. I attended a state secondary school for boys where I was able to go to a Roman Catholic assembly once a week; this consisted of prayers and Bible readings and each boy was gifted a copy of the Douay Bible. Considering my religious education at schools and being part of the church where my family worshipped, by the age of 18 I felt that the teachings I had learnt would guide my way of life. Reflecting now on my early adult years I think that God's word was in my heart (119:11a) but hidden too deeply and not as accessible as it needed to be.

I was about 50 years old when I got heavily involved with Community Bible Study at Birstall Methodist Church. Over the following 22 years this proved to be a joyful, eye-opening, mind-broadening experience for me. By study and discussion I achieved a better understanding of God's word in my life which strengthened my relationship with God. The Holy Spirit was able to help me access my knowledge of scripture when dealing with life issues. I must say that Psalm 119:15-16 summarise my experience of Bible study very well.

Prayer

Loving God, I pray that you will encourage me to study your teachings to get a better understanding of your guidance for my life.

Pete, Anstey

Week Six: Tuesday 19 March

Psalm 119:9-16; Isaiah 44:1-8; Acts 2:14-24

I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams. This one will say, 'I am the LORD's', another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, 'The LORD's', and adopt the name of Israel. **Isaiah 44:3-5**

A time of Waiting

Lent is a time of waiting, waiting for the glorious celebration of Easter, but we are not there yet ...

In the silence of our waiting, we lift our heads to hear the coming songs of triumph and joy. Journeying to the cross, we catch the notes of victory.

In the stillness of our waiting, we ponder the all-surpassing love of our Redeemer, he who is the Lord of Heaven's Armies, laying down his life for us.

In the quietness of our waiting we are challenged to stand with the lonely figure of Jesus; folding our hands in prayer do we see the Lord's name written there?

In the loneliness of our waiting, let us take refuge in the Lord, trusting his strong right arm that, even now, is raised in triumph.

In the emptiness of our waiting, confessing our unworthiness and facing our weaknesses, let us listen to the promise from long ago, and open wide our very beings to receive his Spirit poured out on us.

And let us not wait to call on the name of the Lord, for everyone who calls on his name will be saved.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for journeying to Calvary for me. I am awe struck that you, my King, gave your life to be my Redeemer. I choose to write your name on my hands to show that I belong to you. Take my weakness and fill me with your Spirit, that I may be filled to overflowing with joy.

Anthea, St Andrews GRE

Week Six: Wednesday 20 March

Psalms 119:9-16; Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23; John 12:34-50

I have hidden your word in my heart. **Psalm 119:11a**

The Promise Box

As a child I often visited my Nan's bungalow. One day I noticed a brown box on her dressing table, nestling among the hairbrushes & pots of cream. When I asked her what it was she told me it was her 'Promise box'. Lifting the lid she showed me pieces of paper rolled up tightly like miniature scrolls. She explained that on these papers were written Bible verses & every day she took one out, read it and kept it in her heart and mind.

Years later, when I was fifteen, I invited Christ into my life and began to read the Bible. I often underlined verses that stood out to me and would memorise them. It's amazing how these verses still come back to me at times of sorrow, difficulty or joy.

Jesus was steeped in the Jewish scriptures, our Old Testament. When He was led into the wilderness and came under temptation from the evil one, His knowledge of God's word was paramount. Jesus was able to resist the Devil by quoting verses He had learnt from a young age.

The word of God is powerful, it challenges us, it teaches us and comforts us. This Lent let us devote ourselves to reading the Bible and learning the verses that stand out for us. Let's hide God's word in our hearts and it will stay with us forever.

Prayer

O Holy God. Thank you for your Word that helps and heals. Guide us in our reading and learning. Amen

Paulette, Trinity

Week Six: Thursday 21 March

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Philippians 2:1-11

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 2:3-5**

Regard others as better than yourselves

From the day we are born it's almost as if we are conditioned to be competitive beings: mothers compare the progress of their babies; siblings vie for their parents' attention; schoolchildren want to be top of the class or best at a particular sport; competition for the best exam grades; getting that job promotion; earning more money than your friends; having the fanciest wedding or the poshest house. And yet Christ calls us to be so different to what the world expects and it's such a huge challenge. Verse 3 says: 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves'.

Jesus showed us how we should act. Even though He had access to all the power in the universe, He chose to be humble, a servant, obedient to His Father and died a dreadful death on a cross so that we might be saved from our sins. This awesome act of total humility makes me feel ashamed of all the times when my competitive nature has vainly wanted to 'come first' at something.

Prayer: This Lent, let us pray that Jesus will fill us with His spirit of humility and love for others:

'May the mind of Christ My Saviour
Live in me from day to day
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.'
(STF 504, Katie Barclay Wilkinson)

Carole, Epworth

Week Six: Friday 22 March

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:1-9; Philippians 2:12-18

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. **Philippians. 2:14-15**

When he smiled his face lit up

Some time ago I met someone who was a very devout Christian, but something about him disturbed me. You see he didn't seem a very happy person. However, some time later after talking to him and getting to know him better I realised how wrong I was. When he smiled his face lit up and after talking to him, I realised what a kind and caring person he was.

In this reading we are asked to shine as lights in the world showing others our joy through our faith. I must admit that I was quite ashamed that I had made a judgement without really knowing the kind of person he was. I was certainly taught a lesson that day about the way I judged people.

Christ is always with us on our Christian journey, and so as we approach Easter and the sad time of the crucifixion we can then rejoice at the resurrection on Easter Sunday and with the joy of the risen Lord in our hearts we are able to shine for Him as we share our joy with others.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for being with us in our daily lives. We often make mistakes but with you to guide us we can have confidence knowing that we are doing your will. Amen

Eileen, Epworth

Week Six: Saturday 23 March

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29; Jeremiah 33:10-16; Mark 10:32-34, 46-52

He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him. **Mark 10:32**

Listening to follow God's path

The point that stands out to me in this passage is that God is all knowing. Jesus would likely have known before he was born how his life would progress and ultimately end. This is borne out by the prophecies in the Old Testament. On lots of occasions many aspects of his life were revealed there. It's interesting to note that the disciples and others were only made aware at the right time.

Likewise, God has our lives mapped out for us. We try to plough our own way through life, we pray for what **we** want but God only grants the things that fit in with his plans for us. Lent is a time for making sacrifices, giving up things we enjoy. For example, to me it's a time to listen to what God is saying to us. We need to listen very carefully because God often makes his plans very clear to us and sometimes he uses others to interpret for us. We need to listen to that 'still small voice' and follow God's path for us.

Prayer

Loving God, help us to listen to what you have to say to us in whichever way you speak to us. Give us the understanding to follow your will and to achieve what you have planned for us. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

John, St Andrews GRE



Holy Week: Monday 25 March —

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11

I will take hold of your hand. **Isaiah 42:6**

God takes hold of our hand

When I read this passage from Isaiah the phrase that jumped out for me was from verse 6, 'I will take hold of your hand'. When a child takes hold of their parent's hand there is a connection, a trust and a feeling of security. I know from my own experience how comforting it can be when as a small child taking hold of my parent's hands, particularly if I felt there was danger or I was in unfamiliar surroundings.

Sometimes, as a parent and grandparent, I have insisted that my children or grandchildren hold my hand, especially when crossing a busy road or in a crowded place. That connection through the hands gives assurance and shows mutual love. As a parent you want to protect and also guide your children. Isaiah reminds us that this all powerful God, the creator of heaven and Earth, who gives life to all, will stoop down and take hold of our hand.

God calls us to be His servants, to demonstrate His love and to be a light to all. It's a challenge – and sometimes we fail, I know I do. There have been times when I have prayed to God not to let go of me. Times when I have felt doubt creeping over me or I have become angry or failed to show His love. But, as I read verses 2 and 3, it tells me that God will not step on me or toss me aside, **He will continue to hold my hand.**

Prayer

Help me to trust you Lord.

Ian L, Markfield

Holy Week: Tuesday 26 March

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

The message of the cross is sheer folly to those on the way to destruction, but to us, who are on the way to salvation it is the power of God. **1 Corinthians 1:18**

Marked out

At 15 I began an engineering apprenticeship; I was the youngest in a company training centre with other apprentices aged 15-18 years. On Monday morning my peers would boast to each other of their weekend drinking and amorous adventures. They asked me what I did at the weekend and I told them I attended a Boys Brigade Bible Class on Sunday morning and a church service on Sunday evening. I was marked out and became the target of an increasingly malicious campaign for several months. This almost led to losing my job, but I said nothing about their activities until they decided to attack me on my way home. I decided they had gone too far and reported this incident to the personnel department of my employer. Throughout I felt the assurance of the Holy Spirit and the comfort that this was nothing compared to the persecution of Jesus. My faith was strengthened and I felt I was his witness in the situation.

The following year, the 18 year-old leader of this activity approached me and asked to be my friend. (Note: he had changed, rather than changing me.)

Prayer

Loving Caring God,
Be with all who are feeling oppressed and alone,
Let your Spirit strengthen them, reminding them
you are with them always. Amen.

Stuart, Markfield

Holy Week: Wednesday 27 March

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. **Isaiah 50:4**

He awakens me morning by morning

I look at Isaiah 50 verse 4 - He awakens me morning by morning, awakens my ear to listen like one being taught. What I do most mornings when I awaken is to give thanks to God. The rest falls into place with the words to a song that God puts in my head which I search for on YouTube and play and share.

In psalm 70 we see the need for God our champion. Maybe not like the psalmist but in other areas of our lives when we seek for God to intervene.

I feel surrounded by a crowd of witnesses (like in Hebrews 12:1-3) when I am in Sunday worship or at prayer meeting. When I'm alone it feels difficult to throw off what causes sin. God is my strength and a constant presence through the gift of the Holy Spirit and I rejoice because of the unconditional love of Jesus.

When I was a teenager joining the Good Friday service and listening to the way to the cross I used to cry because I had not quite grasped that Jesus had to suffer for my sins. I used to think that those wrongfully accusing him just didn't get it that he really truly was the son of God. I have grown a lot since then, more so during covid. I used to say that I didn't know how to pray and now when I start I feel filled with words that I can only believe that the Holy Spirit put in my mouth.

Prayer

I pray that these words of reflection may resonate with individuals as we recollect the road to the cross. in Jesus's love and name, Amen.

Irene, Glenfield

Holy Week: Thursday 28 March

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
John 13:1-17, 31b – 35

And during supper Jesus ... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. **John 13:2-5**

Washing feet

I am currently in my twentieth year in Ministry, and for every one of the Maundy Thursday services I have taken I have paused to re-enact Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet as part of the worship. The issue for me in doing this is that I have a real foot phobia!!

And yet, every single year, God has blessed me with the gift of humility and with a sense of how profound a thing it was, for Jesus, the Saviour of the world to kneel before his followers and tenderly wash their tired feet. Also, as I look into the eyes of those whose feet I am washing I glimpse a part of their story of faith too. A sense of all that has happened in their lives in the year between and how God has been working in all the circumstances of their journey of faith. It is always that most incredible example of how we serve God through our service of others.

As we all now journey through the amazing events of these last days of the week most holy, may God move in us to appreciate once more the enormity of Jesus' sacrifice for each one of us.

Prayer

Holy God, touch us again with the gift of humility, that we may serve you all our days with a spirit of grace and care. Thank you for giving your only Son for the life of the world. Amen

Reverend Helen Bell

Holy Week: Friday 29 March

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;
John 18:1-19:42

Jesus ... said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. **John 19:28-30**

Good Friday

Rain and drizzle

The weather echoing my feeling

The sadness, the sorrow

The shame of Good Friday

A solemn act of worship

Remembrance

Of a violent act of sacrifice

Two thousand years ago on the
outskirts of a city

Where a man, full of love

Full of God

Gave his life for mine.

The drizzle lifts but the sky is heavy
with greyness

Gathered here at the Cenotaph

Where we remember other lives
given for our sakes.

We hold our act of witness.

We have processed the cross

through the town centre

And now adorn it with the
accoutrements of crucifixion –

A cloak, a crown of thorns

And a sign that mocks the man

Yet is a signpost to his kingship.

We pause, silent, reflective,
prayerful.

The cross is lifted up - High

It stands tall above us.

I look up at the crown and the
cloak hanging on the cross
And for a brief, painful moment

Imagine the man

Fragile and bleeding

Betrayed and dying

For me.

Gillian, Trinity

Holy Week: Saturday 30 March

Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8;
Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. **Lamentations 3:19-23**

My soul is downcast within me

About 3 years ago John and I came through a really difficult time of struggling. Over a period of about 10 years, we experienced one problem after another. To name only some of these: our daughter had school phobia and was suicidal, our son was smoking weed, my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, my youngest brother (an alcoholic) tried to commit suicide, we were in debt and were told that our landlord needed to sell the house. All of this whilst I was trying to complete my degree and was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. Quite a lot to deal with!

When I look at the words from Lamentations 3:20, I can identify with the sense of despair that is expressed. 'My soul is downcast within me'. This, I am sure, resonates with each of us at different times. For me, in those dark days, my soul was downcast. But at the end of verses 21 and 22, Jeremiah writes, 'I have hope because of the Lord's unfailing love' (my paraphrase). I can honestly say that even in my darkest hour I knew there was hope in God because of his love.

Those difficult times, the dark night of the soul, are only a glimpse of the dismay felt by the disciples on Holy Saturday. Their embryonic faith was almost completely crushed – but not quite. Tomorrow was on its way.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me to hold onto that glimmer of hope even in the darkest hour, that your love never fails. May I profoundly know your love lifting me in the darkest hour. Amen

Reverend Joy Langford

Sunday 31 March: John 14:1

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2,14-24; John 20:1-18

John 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled

When I want to relax I swim a few lengths. No one speaks to me and I can compose answers to emails that I will never send but feel better for composing and then discarding. As I plough up and down the lanes I sometimes encounter an elderly gentleman who swims on his back and swims rigorously with scant regard for fellow swimmers. After a few bruising encounters we know to avoid him – he can't see where he is going but it doesn't stop him – on and on he goes.

He reminds me of Denise Levertov's poem The Avowal

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,

so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

Rather than floating through life I find myself more often scrabbling for points of certainty I can hold onto like a climber on a rock face who encounters scree and you might feel the same.

These words from John's Gospel are part of a longer conversation between Jesus and his disciples about what their lives will be like after his death and they struggle to understand what he is saying. It is likely that 3 years of shared life has gone by for the disciples since they left their fishing nets and Jesus is gently trying to warn his friends that difficult and different things are ahead. So, he tries to get them to talk about the future and they resist him.

We all prefer to think that nothing will ever change.

But it is important to consider if what we have now is all there is?

Or is there more?

Or is there something different we need to be or try?

Is the life we have now only something to be endured in order for there to be something better - or does it matter who we try to be now? I ask this question because the resurrection of Jesus from death affects us here and now, not just when we too die.

The account of Jesus we have in the Gospels does not suggest that we are merely marking time until we die and we can be with God.

How we live now, and who we try to be now matters.
Life is not a rehearsal.

There is in the person of Jesus Christ access to life that is eternal and abundant now - not when we die but now. Jesus is life itself, he is the way to follow and be, he shows to us the nature of God and God's love for us.

In Graham Green's novel *The Power & the Glory* there is a brilliant portrayal of a priest. He gets so much wrong, he is fragile and frail, but he is a minister to God's people. When the soldiers are raiding the villages he stands in the middle of the people in dirty clothes, no robes, and announces as he holds up bread and wine, 'Here is heaven - God is here, God attends to you now and will not let you be overcome, God is to be praised'. He reminds them they are loved and held in God's love now and for all eternity.

If the resurrected Jesus is the way we follow - how does that help us live well now? We should remember that as Easter people we are in the world but not of it, we are to serve and love the world, be involved in its transformation and we do that together as the body of God's people where God can be joyfully praised and faithfully served.

So can we do that?

Prayer

Can we live as those who can say in their work and leisure, in the way we include not exclude others, can we live as those who can say to their community 'do not let your hearts be troubled ... God is here among us ... and here is heaven.'

Let's try as those filled with resurrection power and new life in Jesus.

Helen Dixon Cameron, Chair, Northampton District of the Methodist Church