

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR LENT 2020

PICTURES OF JESUS

Introduction

For our daily Bible readings and reflections for Lent this year, we thought that we would use Luke's Gospel, and the way he portrays different aspects of Jesus the person and his ministry, to prepare us for Easter.

Below are some questions that you may want to use to help you reflect on each reading. Note also that there are no readings or reflections on Sundays – rather, we encourage you to use that day to join with God's people in preparing for Easter at church.

My thanks go to all who have contributed reflections –(in alphabetical order): Ian Chidlow, Christopher Hobbs, Rob Munro, Mike Newman, Stuart Poole & Malcolm Winton. Each brings their own perspective and style to the booklet and I believe that much increases the richness of the offering. We pray that the Lent readings will both encourage and challenge you.

Stan Tomalin

Questions to ask

What does this passage tell us about:

Jesus?

what Jesus shows us about God?

what God wants for us and our lives?

how God wants us to live?

Try asking these questions as you read the daily Bible passages.



WEEK 1: Jesus The Fulfilment

Wednesday 25th February (Ash Wednesday) *Luke 1:26-38*

The Old Testament has been described as 'a book of ever increasing expectation'. Here at the start of Luke's Gospel we see expectation turn to fulfilment as Mary is told by Gabriel, an important messenger (verses 26,28; see also verse 19 & Daniel 8:15-26; 9:21-27), that God's Messiah or Christ (from the Greek word for anointed) is to be born. The Lord is faithful to His promises (verse 37; see also verses 30-33).

That said, there is surprise about the way that the Lord has chosen to work: Mary is a virgin and will remain so. (Mary's comment in verse 34 only makes sense if her pregnancy is to be immediate rather than follow the normal route). There is surprise too about Mary herself: a young girl, likely only just a teenager, from an insignificant place, Nazareth, a town in the 'backward' northern province of Galilee. Finally, there is surprise about Mary's response: in spite of her understandable fears, she gladly embrace the Lord's call on her life something that the far better qualified Zechariah, a priest serving in the Temple, had singularly failed to do (verse 20).

Some questions for us to ponder:

am I ready for the Lord to surprise me by His work in and through me?
do I believe that the Lord can use me in spite of my unsuitability and inexperience?
am I ready to embrace the Lord's will for me whatever it may be?

PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

Thursday 26th February

Luke 1:46-55

Not only is Mary destined to be the world's all-time greatest mother, she is also set to be the author of the world's biggest 'chart hit', the 'Magnificat' (from the Latin for 'glorifies' or 'magnifies', verse 46).

The occasion of Mary's song was a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant. The response in utero (!) of John and the blessing pronounced upon her by Elizabeth - both of whom recognise the superior status of Mary's son, Jesus - causes praise to well up in Mary's heart, joy being one of the hallmarks of Luke's Gospel.

In terms of content, two main themes dominate the Magnificat which, in general terms, resembles the song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) another mother with great faith: Firstly, the Lord's faithfulness to His promises already expressed in Gabriel's words to Mary (verses 51-55; see also 2 Samuel chapter 7). Secondly, the Lord's

graciousness. Mary is staggered that she should be shown 'favour' (literally grace) and not her alone, but her people, the nation of Israel. That the Lord favours those who are poor, that is, those willing to turn to Him and rely on Him is another of Luke's distinctive emphases. It has both spiritual and sociology-economic connotations (see also Luke 6:20-26).

Some questions to ponder:

how often do I bless or encourage others as Elizabeth encouraged Mary?
when I am blessed or encouraged do I stop to give thanks as Mary did?
in what ways have I been 'favoured' by the Lord?

PRAYER

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
Tender to me the promise of his word;
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.*

Friday 27th February

Luke 1:67-80

Zechariah too had a song to sing which complements that of Mary: the 'Benedictus' (from the Latin for 'Praise be to the Lord'). The circumstances, though, are less happy than in Mary's case: Zechariah had responded to Gabriel's words with disbelief and so had been silenced (verse 20). Now, his mouth is freed and he is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Like the Magnificat, two themes dominate: Firstly, the Lord's promise is being fulfilled and that He is 'coming' to His people. The latter expression is an important one (see also Luke 7:16; 19:44; Acts 15:14) making it clear that God's visitation comes through the Messiah's visitation. Secondly, the role that Zechariah's son, John (meaning 'the Lord is gracious'), is destined to play. In particular, he will 'prepare the way', words that call to mind two Old Testament prophets, Isaiah (40:3) and Malachi (3:1; 4:5). Both speak of one who will make things ready for another, that is, the Lord. The way that the coming is described suggests that it has already begun (verse 78 NIV footnote).

The Benedictus also helps shape our response to the Lord. We are to be a people who are glad to serve (see also Exodus 4:23), who do so in holiness, that is, in a way that is distinctive from that of the world around and in righteousness, that is, with integrity, honesty and the seeking of justice (see also Luke 12:43).

Some questions to ponder:

how often like Zechariah do I refuse to listen to what the Lord is trying to tell me?
how important are the Lord's promises to me?
where and how do I see them being fulfilled?
is my response to Jesus' coming the three fold one described in the Benedictus?

PRAYER

Eternal God, give us insight to discern your will for us, to give up what harms us, and to seek the perfection we are promised in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday 28th February

Luke 2:21-40

What is the most precious thing that you have ever held? One St Cuthbert's member recently visited a company that provides cash for ATM's and so had the opportunity to handle several million pounds. Few of us will have done that. Most of us, though, have held a small child and sensed how special and precious they were.

Simeon had been waiting for a long time to see the fulfilment of God's promise for himself and, more importantly, his people ('He was waiting for the consolation of Israel'). Now the longed for moment finally arrives:

All thy Spirit promised, All the Father willed;
Now these eyes behold it, Perfectly fulfilled.

Equally - and Luke loves male, female pairings - Anna had been waiting - at least 84 years (!) - a waiting that consisted in both prayer and fasting. Like Simeon, she too was filled with thanksgiving, though unlike Simeon her joy was not expressed in the form of a song.

Simeon's song, the 'Nunc Dimittis' (from the Latin for 'now let depart') adds to the picture painted by Mary and Zechariah the important detail that Jesus' birth is good news not simply for Israel, but also for the Gentiles. Simeon himself would not see the outworking of his prophecy, but it would dominate Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles (Luke 24:46,47; see also Acts 1:8).

The heart of the good news - for both Jew and Gentile - is found in Jesus, God' Son, presented here at the start of his life for divine service. A service that would be as troubling for some as it would be uplifting to others. A service also that would bring acute pain to the heart of Mary, Jesus' mother - an early indication of the goal of Jesus' ministry, death on the cross.

Some questions to ponder:

how patient - and prayerful - am I in my anticipation of God's promises?

how much does joy feature in my experience?

have I taken on board the significance, for good or for bad, of the response to Christ by myself and others?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, light of the nations and glory of Israel: make your home among us, and present us pure and holy to your heavenly Father, your God, and our God. Amen.

WEEK 2: Jesus The Messiah

Monday 2nd March

Luke 2:41-52

This might be a familiar story to you, and there's a lot we could focus on here - it's a particularly interesting section of Luke's gospel. What is really amazing though, is verse 52: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." We see a bit of this in action in verse 46, as Jesus listens to the teachers and asks them questions.

Jesus gains wisdom as he grows up. He learns things. So what? Don't we all do that?

Well, don't forget that this is the Son of God we're talking about. This is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word who became flesh, now as a 12-year-old boy growing in wisdom.

Now, we're not saying God learns new things. Not at all! But talk of Jesus' human and divine natures can get very complicated.

So for now, let's dwell on the fact that as a fully human boy, Jesus had to learn and grow, just like the rest of us. This was essential. Jesus needed to be fully human, because a real human needed to die in my place, for my human sin, on the cross. And to be fully human includes learning new stuff.

This blows my mind. It's well worth dwelling on today. How kind, how humble, how loving, how unimaginably gracious, that God the Son would take on human flesh which meant that as a human being he had to learn things and be taught stuff by other humans!

PRAYER

Father God, thank you that your Son became one of us. He became a human being, just like I am. He was thirsty, he got tired and he needed to learn new things and grow, just like all humans do. I can't wrap my head around the humility and love it took for the Son to willingly take on flesh. But I praise you, God, that he did it for me. I praise you for your grace and mercy. Amen.

Tuesday 3rd March

Luke 3:1-20

What can a passage all about John the Baptist tell us about Jesus the Messiah? Answer: quite a lot! Our first clue comes in verses 2-3: the word of God comes to John, and John begins to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is a big deal. John's saying "turn back to God and be forgiven!"

God is at work. It feels like something big is about to happen. But what? Verse 4, a prophecy from Isaiah: a voice will come, shouting "make way for the Lord!" This voice is John. So if John, the voice, is here, then surely the Lord himself can't be far behind?

We know this Lord is Jesus himself. John is preparing the way for Jesus the Messiah, the one through whom "all mankind will see God's salvation." (Isaiah chapter 40)

Finally, all those promises of a Messiah to save God's people are coming to pass! So people need to be ready...

John tells the crowds to repent, and to repent quickly, because "the axe is already at the root of the trees." The Lord is coming; you don't want to be found sleeping. "His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." This is not gentle Jesus, meek and mild. This is the King of Kings. The Messiah is coming to claim his people and destroy his enemies. Are you ready?

PRAYER

Lord God, thank you that you made your people ready for the Messiah, through John the Baptist. Just as they repented and were ready, make me ready for when the Messiah comes again. Show me areas of my life where I need to say sorry and turn back to you. Give me faith where I'm lacking. Make me ready for when Jesus returns, so that I can bow the knee to the King of Kings with joy. Amen.

Wednesday 4th March

Luke 3:21-22

Imagine you're in a court room. The court has been called to find out who Jesus is, once and for all. The first witness (in yesterday's reading) was a man called John. He lived in the desert and ate funny insects. He was charismatic, but at the end of the day, just a man. He said Jesus was the Messiah. Well, maybe. But maybe John was mistaken. The court needs more. A better witness.

The Father and the Spirit are called to the witness stand. The question is asked, "Who is Jesus?" The Spirit answers first, by going over to rest on Jesus himself, fulfilling Isaiah 11:2. The Spirit is, in effect, saying "Jesus is the Messiah, the promised one of God."

Now it's the Father's turn. His answer is clear: "This is my Son, whom I love." (see 2 Samuel 7:14)

This amazing testimony to the identity of Jesus happens in today's reading, as Jesus comes to be baptised. No doubt people wondered who this man was. Could he really be the Messiah? In answer to this hope, centuries in the making, heaven is opened and the Father and the Spirit testify to the identity of the Son. "Yes, this is him. It's time."

Yes, Jesus is the Messiah. God has come to save his people.

Of course, some people still weren't convinced. Some never will be. But in a sense that doesn't matter. What matters is, are you?

PRAYER

Almighty and Eternal God, thank you for showing me who you are. Thank you for this amazing passage in Luke's gospel, where I get to see the Trinity together, where I get to see that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Son of God. Please help me to believe it with all my heart, and to get up and follow him each day. Amen.

Thursday 5th March

Luke 3:23-37

Did you read all of the reading today? Or did you give in to temptation and skip it because it's a genealogy? If you skipped it, go back and have a read. Go on. I'll wait. Christianity is a faith with a history going back to the beginning of everything, based on real events which really happened in the past. As Christians, we are connected to all God's people who have gone before, in a very special way.

Look at Luke's genealogy again:

Joseph (Mary's husband); Zerubbabel; David; Boaz;

Judah; Jacob; Isaac; Abraham; Noah; Adam

Jesus didn't come from nowhere. He came from a line reaching all the way back to Adam. And it wasn't always certain that this line had a future. Noah was saved from a world destroying flood.

Abraham had no kids until he was 100. Jacob cheated his brother to steal a blessing from him. Judah's wicked sons were killed and he got his daughter in law pregnant. David...well we all know about David. And Zerubbabel was born in exile in Babylon, and had to govern God's people as they tried to start all over again.

This genealogy is a testimony to God's grace and patience. He promised one who would put everything right, in Genesis 3:15. He kept that promise. No matter how rubbish his people have been, God has always been faithful. God has never turned his back on us. God promised a Messiah. In Jesus, God delivered.

PRAYER

Father, thank you so much that even the longer, harder to read parts of the Bible tell wonders about your love and faithfulness to your people. Thank you for this genealogy that stands as a witness to just how patient and gracious you have been to us. You have constantly held up your end of your promise, even though we have failed time and time again. Thank you that because you are faithful, Jesus the Messiah was born, thousands of years after you promised it would happen. Help me to recognise your faithfulness and patience in my life today, and thank you for it. Amen.

Friday 6th March

Luke 4:1-13

Memorising Scripture can save your life. Seriously! In today's reading, Jesus goes into the desert for 40 days where he's tempted by the devil.

First, when Jesus is hungry, Satan tempts him: "make bread out of these stones!" (As an aside, thanks Satan for proving here that Jesus is the Messiah - who else could make bread out of rocks...?) Jesus resists temptation. How? He knows Scripture. "Man does not live on bread alone." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

Jesus - 1 Satan - 0

Next, Satan offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if only Jesus will worship him. Jesus resists temptation. How? He knows Scripture. "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." (Deuteronomy 6:13)

Jesus - 2 Satan - 0

Finally, Satan takes Jesus to the top of the temple and says "Jump off. The Bible says angels will keep you safe." Here, Satan tries to use Scripture himself! But that's not going to work. Satan is twisting Scripture, but Jesus resists temptation. How? He knows Scripture. "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."
(Deuteronomy 6:16)

Jesus - 3 Satan - 0

These are Satan's usual tactics: "Why not just give in to your desire?"

"I'll give you whatever you want"; "But didn't God say...?"

Each time, Jesus resists by knowing God's Word inside out. Now we're not Jesus. We aren't perfect, we're bound to fail sometimes. But do you want to stand a chance against the devil's temptations?

Memorise Scripture. Know Scripture. Love Scripture.

PRAYER

Loving Father, thank you for your written Word. Thank you that you have spoken to the world. You have caused your Word to be written down and translated into our language, at great cost to many men and women. There are people all over the world who don't have the Bible in their language. Help me not to take my Bible for granted. Help me to read it, learn it, memorise it. So that in those moments when I really need your Word, it is already in my heart and mind. Help me resist the temptations of the devil by knowing what you have said. Amen.

Saturday 7th March

Luke 4:14-30

It's Sunday, and we're at the morning service. The reading is Isaiah 61:1-2. Stan is reading, so he walks to the front, opens the Bible and begins: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me..."

Stan finishes the reading and sits down. All eyes are on him. And Stan says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. It's about me." Silence...

How would you react? Confusion? Anger? Now would be the perfect time to shout "He's not the Messiah!" We know Stan. We know he's Anna's husband. Josh and Adam's dad. He's not the Messiah!

This is what happened when Jesus walked into the synagogue in Nazareth, read Isaiah, and said, "That's me. Here I am." The people in the synagogue were furious. Well, first they were amazed. But then Jesus got a bit close to home, and then they were furious.

"Isn't this Joseph's son?" They asked. Don't we know this guy? He's a carpenter. He's Mary and Joseph's son. Who does he think he is, making all these claims and insulting us?

Familiarity breeds contempt, and the Jews try to throw Jesus off a cliff. Of course, they don't succeed. They had the Messiah right in front of them. But they couldn't see him, because they thought they already knew who he was.

Are you too familiar with who you *think* Jesus is to let him tell you who he actually is?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I'm sorry for the times I've been so familiar with the image of Jesus in my head that I haven't allowed him to challenge me with who he really is. Show me the Messiah. Show me your Son, and help me to believe. Give me a clearer picture of who Jesus is, in all his glory, than the one I have in my head right now. Please do this, so that I can love him more and grow more like him. For his glory. Amen.

WEEK 3: JESUS THE TEACHER

Monday 10th March

Luke 5:33-39

Jesus is the new teacher in town – and he's stirring things up. He doesn't do things the way the Jews were used to. In his teaching he doesn't just give you the answer, rather he paints a rich word picture (his parables) and asks you to work out your own answer. And, if that wasn't enough, he mixes with all the wrong sort of people. In the verses just before today's reading, he's been criticised for mixing with the hated tax collectors and "sinners". Now he's challenged about lifestyle. John the Baptist's disciples used to make a point of fasting and praying. Jesus' disciples seem to follow Jesus' own example of eating and drinking. Jesus makes it clear that the coming of the kingdom is something to celebrate. Maybe we should have fewer meetings and more parties. But we should also follow Jesus example and invite not just close friends.

Jesus responds to the criticism by putting it in a wider context: the old versus the new. The old covenant can't be rejuvenated by just patching it up. Only a totally new covenant could bring us to God. The Church has always found new wineskins a challenge. Verse 39 is not just an afterthought but maybe a piercing judgement. Do we prefer our old ways over something new and challenging even when we know in our hearts that Jesus, through his Spirit, is calling us to embrace change?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus help us to show the hospitality that you showed and to be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to give up the old and embrace the new. Amen.

Tuesday 11th March

Luke 6:12-26

Matthew and Mark record the calling of the first disciples as something that happened almost spontaneously as Jesus passed by the fishermen at the Sea of Galilee. Luke speaks of Jesus selecting the twelve apostles from a larger group of disciples after a night of solitary prayer. I wonder what criteria we would have used to select the twelve. Would we have organised interview panels, a "Bake Off" style series of tests or even brought Lord Sugar in to advise! The Gospels are silent on the criteria Jesus used and we know that they turned out to be a very mixed bunch. What is clear is that Jesus spent the night in prayer before he made this big decision. A reminder to us of how much more we need God's guidance in the decisions we make.

It must have been startling to the twelve to see Jesus with the crowds, bringing healing. We've read of his teaching so often that it no longer seems startling to us.

But to his first hearers it was a bombshell. In his “blessings” and “woes” Jesus turns normal values upside down. Poverty and oppression were harsh realities for Jesus’ listeners and they longed to be free of them. Jesus says that far from bringing defeat or curse they can bring blessings. It’s the things we welcome – riches, food, good reputation – which will go sour and bring misery. The “blessed” are those who put their trust in God despite the circumstances they face.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to put our trust in you rather than in the transitory riches of this world. Help us, too, to make space for prayer in all the decisions of life. Amen.

Wednesday 12th March

Luke 6:27-42

If we thought Jesus was being radical yesterday then he goes even further today! This makes no sense in the world’s eyes. What Jesus is urging is not just non-retaliation -when we don’t hit back or go for vengeance. He’s asking us to make ourselves utterly vulnerable to someone who hates us or treats us as an enemy. As we look forward to the events of that first Easter Week we realise, of course, that Jesus followed this road himself. None of this is denying that the state has a role in upholding justice when there is murder, abuse or theft. But as individual Christians we are called to practise love and non-violence in our personal interactions. We also need to be alert to hypocrisy. The story is told of the teacher who pinned a large sheet of white paper to the classroom wall. It had a minute black dot at its centre. When she asked the class what they could see they answered, “A black dot.” None of them saw the white paper. We all tend to see the black dot of fault and miss the white sheet of goodness in others. We’re even worse at spotting the large black dots in our own lives.

PRAYER

Lord God, we confess that so often we want to retaliate when others hurt us. Help us, even when it seems so very hard, to turn the other cheek and show real practical love to those who have upset us. Help us, too, to shine a mirror on our own personality rather than using a microscope to examine others. Amen.

Thursday 13th March

Luke 6:43-49

As we look back at this whole chapter we’ll realise that Jesus’ listeners have heard some profound teaching and he’s now coming to the end. He reminds us that we show the state of our hearts through what comes out of our mouths. The old adage goes, “You can’t fool all of the people all of the time.” And you certainly can’t fool God at any time. What’s inside does come out sooner or later. There is another saying, “We are what we eat,” which is equally true of our spiritual state. We do become what we feed ourselves on and discipleship food is the word of God. Jesus’ story about the two builders reinforces the point. If we have no depth it will become obvious, for any storm in life will leave us exposed and devastated. We need deep and strong foundations, a firm base on which to build. Jesus points out

with devastating frankness that merely to hear Jesus' teaching is not enough. It is responding with obedience and action that shows true discipleship. Even impassioned cries of "Lord, Lord" in worship or prayer counts for little if there is no reformation of character and commitment to loving service. Just as only good trees bear good fruit, and good hearts produce kind words, so only good foundations make strong buildings.

PRAYER

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Amen. (Psalm 139:23,24)

Friday 14th March

Luke 10:17-20

This is one of the most encouraging passages in the New Testament. Over the years we've all got used to stories in the Gospels that display the disciples lack of understanding. We've probably all studied passages where Jesus asks them, "Where is your faith?" or rebukes them. But here seventy-two ordinary people took the message of the kingdom of God into the communities around them and witnessed something the prophets of old had longed to see but never did (verse 24). What unfolded was, as Jesus said, momentous and something of cosmic significance. No wonder their participation in Jesus' mission filled them with joy. As we read on, we see that Jesus shared their rejoicing and excitement, but he also saw the need to caution them (verse 20). They were not to be seduced by the spectacular, a very easy and understandable mistake. Jesus had indeed given them his authority, and he also gives us his authority as we share in his mission. Much more important was their new status, their relationship with God himself. Maybe you are like me – I so often feel I'm letting Jesus down. Even when I'm doing what I believe he wants; my efforts seem so small and the results so meagre. "That's all right" he says. Jesus' love and joy for us are based on his mercy and not on our efforts or excuses. And one last thought. Jesus shares the disciples' joy. I'm very practised at sharing my problems with God – do I share my joys as freely?

PRAYER

Thank you for the privilege of sharing in your mission. Help me to remember that faithful and obedient service is what you ask for – not performance targets! Help me too to share both my joys and my difficulties with you. Amen.

Saturday 15th March

Luke 10:38-42

In the verses before this passage we have been given a member of a despised minority (the Samaritans) as a model of neighbourly love. Now, little better in Jewish eyes, we are given a woman as a model of the good life. Not only that, but a woman who abandons her housewifely duties to take the unfeminine position of an accepted student at the feet of a rabbi.

Does this mean we should scrap all those coffee rotas at church – I don't think so! After this chapter's concentration on doing – the seventy two's mission of proclamation and healing, the parable of the good Samaritan caring across ethnic and religious boundaries – we could easily begin to think that being Christ-like is all about activism. Wasn't Jesus himself always on the move, always responding to need? Doesn't he ask the same of us?

Mary's story tells us otherwise. All our busy diaries, our worthy efforts for God, are not only futile but self-destructive, unless they grow from a central love relationship with God. You can imagine Jesus putting his arms round Martha and comforting her. Some of us would rather bustle than sit and listen and learn. Some would like others to see that we're doing most of the work and hope they feel guilty. Jesus gently points out where our priorities should lie.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us to get the balance right in our lives between service for you and deepening our relationship with you. Show us how, day by day, to obey both the great commandments: to love you and to love our neighbour. Amen.

WEEK 4: Jesus The Story Teller

Monday 16th March

Luke 8:1-15

"After this."

The religious people thought you had to be good before you could come to God. Religious people still think that. What you actually need is to be forgiven. So we read of a sinful woman who knows Jesus saves, and he gives us peace. The heart that we need has peace with God because of faith in God's forgiveness.

Luke then tells us about other women who have been saved, and that they had so much love for Jesus that many were supporting Jesus financially as he went about preaching. Luke tells us that the 12 disciples were there too, and we can't help wondering if they supporting the work financially as well?

The next (very familiar) parable draws out that following Jesus is a gift from God, with great results if we persevere in faith with a noble and good heart.

God graciously brings the Word of God (maybe through us scattering it!) and different people react differently. What we need is to hear with faith. There is no faith in some people, they won't believe and be saved. Others seem to believe, but having faith is too hard when difficulties come. As difficulties get worse, it is harder and harder to keep believing. But if we keep having faith, persevering, there is a wonderful result. It's not about our goodness, but God's.

Religious people don't get that (verse 10)

PRAYER

Dear Lord, increase my faith. Amen

Tuesday 17th March

Luke 10:25-37

An amazing mission trip for 72 disciples saw the power of the evil one broken over and over. The Messiah is there showing the signs of the kingdom of God. All that the prophets and kings had longed to see and hear is being fulfilled. Surely everyone will follow Jesus now, with all their heart and soul and mind? Surely no one will hold back giving everything for him?

Religious people still think it's about what we do to make ourselves pure, when it's about being transformed by the love of God in Jesus.

In Jesus's parable the religious people didn't want to lose their purity, so they showed no love. But a foreign heretic Samaritan showed them what a transformed heart looks like. He cared, he gave. He shows us what a transformed heart looks like, in contrast to people who depend on their keeping the Law.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, change my heart. Amen

Wednesday 18th March

Luke 11:1-13

Mary had been showing a heart devoted to Jesus, spending time with him. But Martha was upset that no one was doing what she wanted.

Well, prayer is putting ourselves in the Mary direction, seeking Jesus and what he wants, rather than being distracted by all the things we have to do.

Prayer is to our Father. When we are in Jesus, his father is our Father too.

We want his name, his very being, to be seen in all its holiness. Prayer is for God's Kingdom to come everywhere.

We bring to God our distractions, our daily bread, our sins, our temptations, asking God to lead us in the way he wants. Dependently. Socially. Privately.

And we keep doing this every day of our lives. To our Father, who gives far better than an earthly father.

PRAYER

Father, give us your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thursday 19th March

Luke 14:1-24

What is it for Jerusalem to bless Jesus, the one who comes in the name of the Lord? The King is on his way to Jerusalem to die for our sins and rise in glory. If only the Jews of the day would recognise that relationship to God comes through Jesus who was there with them.

Instead the religious people continue to try to trap Jesus into breaking the Law as they saw it. They continued to exalt up human importance rather than depending on God's grace.

If you think law keeping is the way to please God you will have no reason to be humble. Humility recognises we are all weak, all equally dependent on God for everything we need.

How do we get to eat at the feast in the kingdom of God? By accepting God's gracious invitation. There is still room. People would still rather engage in the things of the world than with the one who has come in the name of the Lord.

PRAYER

Lord, Don't excuse me, help me to come and share your invitation. Amen

Friday 20th March

Luke 15:1-3, 11-24

Jesus has just said we have to give up everything to be his disciple. We have to keep going. We mustn't give up because the cost is too great. Start out, and keep going in the same direction.

And the way to start out is to recognise we are a sinner. To recognise that we depend totally on God's mercy and kindness. It's not about us and our goodness, but only Jesus. No perfect people here. Which is why Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them.

The younger son learned the hard way that riches don't really satisfy. Or only for a short time. He couldn't care about his father, how rude to as good as wish the father dead and get the inheritance before time. And all wasted. How easy to waste everything that has been given to us in life. How easy to be self-centred and wreck our life.

But there is hope. There is joy. There is peace ever after. The younger son shows us the way of discipleship: confession of our sins, humility, returning to the Father. And feel the Father running to us and embracing us, because he wants us to be his loved children.

PRAYER

Father, I am a sinner. I am not worthy to be what you have made me, thank you. Amen

Saturday 21st March

Luke 15:25-32

Some people find it genuinely offensive that we could turn to Christ on our death beds and be totally forgiven. It doesn't seem fair to them. It doesn't seem as though God is just when God doesn't punish bad people. It doesn't seem that God should welcome sinners and eat with them.

So the older brother is shocked that the father in the story is wasting more money on the younger son. That sinning younger brother had had his inheritance.

Everything was one day going to go to the older son. There shouldn't have been a party for the younger son, he should have been treated like a slave, at best, surely? And the older son had worked so hard. He really deserved the father's love, and the younger son really did not.

But everything is still the father's. And the father loves both his sons. Who are we to tell the Father who to love? Who are we to tell the Father how he should use what is his?

And who are we to ignore the sins in our heart, and treat them as unimportant? Older brothers need to be happy, and humble, and celebrate when younger brothers repent and come home. And repent too. And what a great thing that an older son became a servant and gave his life for bad people.

PRAYER

Lord help me to be glad when the dead come to life, and the lost are found. Amen

WEEK 5: JESUS THE MIRACLE-WORKER

Monday 23rd March

Luke 4:31-44

A well-known local Anglican minister used to say, "Well of course, Jesus was a preacher", setting aside the miracles of Jesus. We discover in this passage that he was more than just a preacher as his word carried authority (verses 32 and 36).

When the Son of God speaks things happen. By his word:

- he drives out impure spirits from people (verses 31-35)
- he heals Simon's mother-in-law (verse 38)
- he continues to heal many and drive out evil spirits from others (verses 40-41)

The unclean spirits recognised his authority in word and deed.

It is interesting to note that all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) tell of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law but it is only Luke (the physician) who refers to Jesus rebuking the fever.

What was Jesus doing? He was proclaiming in word and deed the good news of the kingdom of God. He would give his life to restore the broken relationship between God and man. Sickness and death were under attack and Jesus commanded total authority over both.

Regarding the aforementioned Anglican minister, he recounted to me the conversion of his wayward son whilst travelling abroad. Driving in storm conditions a bolt of lightning struck the road in front of his son opening up a hole in the road causing him to turn to God. Within the context of the modern signs and wonder debate, publically the father did not advocate modern miracles but privately he acknowledged that God had done so in the life of his own son.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you that in Your Son we see the beginning of the end of human suffering. Remind us of this when life presents us with every type of challenge. Amen.

Tuesday 24th March

Luke 5:1-11

The famous sheet of water in Galilee is called by three names – the Sea of Galilee, Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret. It's a freshwater inland lake extending

13 miles from north to south, 8 miles east to west and is located at 680 feet below sea level. Apparently along the lake shore close to Capernaum there is a sequence of steep inlets, a zigzagging shoreline with each inlet forming a natural amphitheatre. Once the boat had been pushed from the shore Jesus' voice could be easily heard due to the natural acoustics.

Peter, James and John had worked all night and caught nothing (verse 5) and as experienced fishermen acknowledged, that the haul was something special. The miracle described was not as some say due to Jesus' discerning eye spotting a shoal of fish leading to the haul, rather Jesus causing by his power and authority over nature fish to be drawn into the nets.

If we had been in either of the boats it would have been "all hands on deck" to manage the catch. But what about if you had been on the shore? We would have seen the movement of the boats and the furious activity of the fishermen landing the catch. We would then have seen Peter dropping to his knees and perhaps heard his words. Hopefully many on shore will have been convinced not only of the authority of his teaching but also of that authority demonstrated in action. Pray for family and friends yet to acknowledge Jesus as Son of God.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we pray for those we know who have yet to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Lift the veil from their eyes so they can see Him as He truly is. Amen.

Wednesday 25th March

Luke 7:1-17

The centurion had probably from birth been a natural leader of his peer group. Polybius, a Greek Historian taken as hostage to Rome, wrote about Rome and its rise to power. Referring to the characteristics of centurions he wrote "They (the leaders) wish the centurions not so much to be venturesome and daredevil as to be natural leaders, of a steady and sedate spirit. They do not desire them so much to be men who will initiate attacks and open the battle, but men who will hold their ground when worsted and hard-pressed and be ready to die at their posts."

The centurion heard of Jesus and was concerned for the health of his servant. He had distinguished himself locally:

1. among local Jewish leaders whom he has asked to approach Jesus
2. by his compassion for his servant

His words have been incorporated in the "Prayer of Humble Access" in communion services - "I do not deserve to have you come under my roof". He was a man of natural authority who recognised in Jesus a superior authority distinguishing himself by his deep humility.

If the centurion had great faith, it is Jesus' faith and compassion which led to the healing of the widow's son, as he touched the (unclean) bier and body and commanded the man to come back to life. This will have reminded many – and should remind us - of Elijah healing the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17:7-24) and Elisha restoring to life the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:8-37).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, enable us by Your Spirit to demonstrate compassion for those for whom we have a responsibility for at work, home or wherever we may be. Amen.

Thursday 26th March

Luke 8.22-39

The Sea of Galilee is famous for its sudden squalls. It is surrounded by table lands beyond which the mountains rise. The rivers have cut deep ravines through the table lands with the ravines acting like funnels drawing down the cold winds from the mountains so that storms arise. It was in such a storm that the disciples found themselves. For those such as Matthew used to life on land it would have been terrifying, but that experienced fishermen such as Peter and Andrew feared for their lives is a measure of their overall distress. Then Jesus arose and spoke to the winds and the waters until the storm abated.

When the boat reached the other side of the lake in Gentile territory he met the man who had been banished to the tombs, without home and clothes. Due to the violent extremes he went through, no chain could bind him. Most of us would have run away and placed ourselves at a safe distance (Poor green-faced Matthew would probably have preferred to jump back on the boat!). Jesus confronted the demons and banished them into the pigs which then career down the slope to their death. The man is at peace for the first time in a long time. He wants to follow Jesus but is told to tell all the towns round and about what Jesus had done for him.

We don't know why the local witnesses ask Jesus to leave. Did they value the swine more than a human being? Did they hate Jesus for disturbing the rhythms of their lives? In whom do we place our trust and hopes if not on Jesus?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant us your peace and tranquillity in all circumstances. Let love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control guide our behaviour at all times. Amen.

Friday 27th March

Luke 8:40-56

There is a wonderful stop-animated film released about 20 years ago entitled "The Miracle Maker" which tells the life of Jesus from the perspective of Jairus' daughter, the 12-year-old daughter of the synagogue leader. It shows her life both before and after the mortal illness which threatened her.

On the way to the house of Jairus a woman in the crowd approaches Jesus and touches him seeking healing. There are still parts of the world where illness can destroy individuals and bankrupt families. This woman had spent all she had but remained unwell and (ritually) unclean. She stepped forward in fear and trepidation as Jesus called her to account for her actions. However, no scolding followed, only a commendation for her faith.

Continuing on to Jairus' house the party were advised that the girl had died. Jesus encouraged the father to trust him and not listen to the wailing of the mourners. Taking Peter, James and John along with the mother and father, Jesus took the girl's hand and commanded her to get up which she did.

Two remarkable healings both indicating Jesus' authority over human frailty and death. Both involved faith – that of the woman and Jairus. As leader of the synagogue the impact on the lives of that family will have been a permanent testimony to all its members of the power and authority of Jesus. May the Lord demonstrate to those we know and love that sickness and death is not the final word.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus was unafraid of touching or being touched by others deemed to be "unclean". Help us never to walk away from those in need regardless of their lives or personal circumstances.

Saturday 28th March

Luke 9:10-17

There are two occasions in the NT where Jesus feeds the multitudes. On this occasion 5,000 people were fed in Jewish territory. On the other occasion 4,000 were fed in Gentile territory (Matthew 15:29-39 and Mark 8:1-8). The feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle, apart from the resurrection of Jesus, reported in all 4 Gospels.

Prior to this event the 12 disciples had been sent out to announce the kingdom with power and authority over demons and to cure the sick. On their return they travelled privately to Bethsaida. The crowds decided to follow. For many after hard work and travel, peace and rest is needed to recuperate. Jesus however looked on the crowd with compassion providing food for them through the 12. In fact there was so much of it that there were leftovers in abundance.

Some have said that it was the effect of Jesus' presence which encouraged those present to share what they already carried with them – another liberal interpretation. Jesus wasn't a magician rather he allowed God's creative power to flow through him and invited the 12 to share in the miraculous provision. The Lord over both the natural and supernatural domains!

Be encouraged over the miracles we have looked at over the past few days. Jesus is Lord over all, including the natural and the supernatural. He will come again. Sickness, disease and death will be banished forever. What a wonderful God we have.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus is Lord over all. We look forward to His return and ask that family, friends and colleagues discover what a wonderful God we have.

WEEK 6: JESUS THE LORD

Monday 30th March

Luke 9:18-27

The disciples may have been close by, but the text specifically says that Jesus was praying "in private" (or "alone" in other bible translations). Was He actually praying FOR those disciples? If so, it was before He challenged them; should we not similarly pray if opportunity allows before any important face to face confrontation we may have?

Jesus seemed anxious to know what others thought of Him. He didn't need their support and later forbade the disciples publicly proclaiming the truth which Peter had declared. His anxiety could only have been a consequence of how He saw them in their need, like "sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). We must believe that the Lord still feels the same way about all unbelievers. Sadly, today, so many people have such little knowledge of the Bible that they are unable to come to any conclusion about Jesus for themselves. The people featured in our reading could not have such an excuse; their eyes and ears gave them adequate evidence but they still got it wrong, coming up with all sorts of ideas about who Jesus was and what He was about. The gospel records show us that even the disciples were slow to settle these issues in their own minds; here we see Peter as the first disciple to testify to a new faith. Peter may have wanted to share his conviction with others but Jesus would not allow him to do so at that time. He must wait until the resurrection had completed all the necessary evidence; later on the Day of Pentecost his boldness knew no bounds! (see Acts 2:36).

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, whenever need-full, please help me to be alone with you in any crowd.
Amen.*

Tuesday 31st March

Luke 9:28-36

To say that three young men had the experience of a lifetime would be an understatement. They didn't plan it, work for it, or even look forward to it. It was totally unexpected. With hindsight we can see that they experienced nothing less than a foretaste of Heaven; remember what Jesus had previously told them at verse 27 of this chapter! Referring to Jesus, Peter later wrote that he and his fellow disciples had been "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). We call the event "The Transfiguration", an almost exclusively biblical word, but do we realise how miraculous and significant it was in the ministry of Jesus? It is recorded in all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke) but the accounts are not identical, a feature which should be seen, not as a weakness, but as contributing to the veracity of what is being retold. The three eyewitnesses effectively saw the Old Testament merge with the New Testament as Moses, the Law Giver, and the prophet Elijah talked with Jesus. What a privilege it was to eavesdrop on that conversation, like

being a fly on the wall at a Government Cabinet meeting! Representatives of how God had worked in the past were face to face with the one who would institute the new covenant, which of course includes us. It is interesting to see how Luke, the reporter, was critical of Peter. The mountain top experience had to finish, the three disciples had to come down to ordinary living again; so must we, however thankful we might be for any highpoints in our own spiritual experience.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you that I have this record of such a high point of your time on earth. Amen.

Wednesday 1st April

Luke 9:51-62

James and John may have had in mind what is recorded in 2 Kings 1:10, Elijah calling down fire from heaven; but that could never be the way for Jesus. There was however clear opposition to Him in that village and His answer was unmistakable, they "went to another village". Might there not be times for us when, rather than pursuing a point, we should just walk away.

After rebuking James and John for their evil suggestion, Jesus had key conversations with three men, the outcomes of which could have been life-changing for all of them. Sadly, however, they are like the seed sown on rocky ground or among thorns in the parable of the sower; they want to follow Jesus but they either have conditions attached or have not thought through the hardships or consequences which may follow. The obligation to bury one's father may have been a solemn obligation in that society but even that was to be secondary to the call of Jesus; did Jesus not say elsewhere that whoever loves father more than Him is not worthy of Him? (Matthew 10:37). Cynically one may also want to ask at this point whether or not father had yet actually died! We may have no experience of ever trying to plough a field but the illustration given cannot possibly be lost on us; the ploughman must always look ahead and steer accordingly. Where may Jesus want us to go, not yesterday but tomorrow? Are we ready to follow Him?

PRAYER

Search me Lord and know my heart. Amen. (after Psalm 139:23)

Thursday 2nd April

Luke 10:1-24

Surely, no-one in their right mind would ever want to go into a situation which was like being a lamb surrounded by a pack of wolves! Yet this was exactly what Jesus expected of those He sent out as heralds ahead of Him at this time. Clearly, by now He had acquired enough followers to pick 72 for this purpose! However they had become followers, He now wanted 72 of them to become heralds; they must now prove their faith by obedience in response to His call. Mindful of the dangers and difficulties ahead of them, Jesus sent them out in pairs, not individually. We may see a timeless principle there, how individual believers should be necessary support each other, both in fellowship and service.

It goes without saying that you must firstly be a follower before you can be a herald. Can we not however go further and believe that God's call to us now is that we should be both, however we understand that and work that out in our own situations? Are not the marching orders to the 72 applicable to every Christian? We cannot read this passage without sensing the urgency behind this call of Jesus. Tom Wright has written that the heralds were not "offering people a new religious option which might have a gentle effect on their lives". No, they were offering people a last chance to repent and turn to Christ! What sense of urgency underpins our witness?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, the labourers are few. What about me? Amen.

Friday 3rd April

Luke 19:1-10

"He wanted to see who Jesus was". Never doubt how earnest Zacchaeus was for a first hand meeting with Jesus. Had he heard of what happened when Levi, a fellow tax collector, previously had such an encounter? (Luke 5:27).

He would now let nothing stand in his way! He must have been very brave to mix with such a large crowd since he was such a hated figure, collecting money for the occupying Romans and probably pocketing no small sums for himself. In that crush it would only have taken a quick thrust from a knife to finish him off! Then again, could he, as a prominent civil servant, risk the ridicule of climbing a tree like a child? Yet, he did just that!

Years ago in Sunday School we had a children's song with Jesus inviting Zacchaeus to climb down with the words: "You come down, I'm coming to your house for tea". The reality, of course, is that Zacchaeus more than took Jesus into his house; He took Him into his heart! His life was changed; look how he would now seek to repay all his past wrongs. Jesus was quite emphatic in His response, "today salvation has come to this house". Zacchaeus was then described as "a son of Abraham", clearly meaning that he was now by faith in a new relationship with God. He was living proof of the claim that "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

PRAYER

"O come to my heart, Lord Jesus; there is room in my heart for you". Amen. (Emily Elliott)

Saturday 4th April

Luke 19:28-44

It was the Jewish Festival of Passover, the annual joyful remembrance of how, centuries earlier, the people had been released from slavery in Egypt. The city would have been crowded! Every male Jew living within 20 miles of Jerusalem was required to attend the festival and, additionally, thousands would have come from further afield to join in the celebrations. It has been estimated that up to 2 million people may have been there. What an audience then for Jesus to stage what was actually a fulfilment of prophecy, and a clear demonstration of His identity. The prophet

Zechariah had written: "see your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9)

There can be no doubt that Jesus planned and stage managed His triumphal entry into the capital city. He could not of course have orchestrated the reaction of the crowd; they clearly saw it as a royal occasion, "blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord" (verse 38). Yet a few days later, as Jesus endured that mockery of a trial before Pontius Pilate, the same voices may have cried "we have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). Crowds can be so fickle! Anybody can! What about me?

Jesus that day was a marked man. He had recently raised Lazarus from the dead, so annoying the religious leaders that they were plotting to kill Him. Nevertheless, His resolution was firm, a truth we proclaim when we sing on Palm Sunday "Ride on, ride on in majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die".

PRAYER

"O sacred head once wounded, with grief and pain weighed down". Amen. (Bernard of Clairvaux)

WEEK 7: JESUS THE SAVIOUR

Monday 6th April

Luke 22:7-23

Passover is the defining moment of Jewish hope, remembering a divine rescue from death through the sacrifice of a perfect lamb. But for Jesus he is not looking back in religious remembrance or redemption, but forward to its fulfilment, its God-given purpose: "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the Kingdom of God!" God's coming kingdom, his perfect rule, is to be discovered in a new moment – in broken bread: "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me!"; and in sanguineous wine: "This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you!"

It was outrageous; enough to trigger a long-prophesied moment of betrayal! But it was not the outrage of overthrowing old traditions; nor proclaiming new kingdoms. The outrage is found in two tiny words ... "for you!" The divine Son of God, the Messiah King of his people, the Fulfilment of God's Word, was the sacrifice to save them, and us! Even Passover called for the death of an innocent in place of the guilty; but this new covenant sealed with his self-sacrifice, this new commitment of God at the cost of his Son, was the ultimate sacrifice – infinite glory and perfection to answer humanity's ultimate radical rebellion. And as all the created order would justly cry out – "they're not worth it"; the Son of God shouts out, "I love you!" – this is "for you!"

PRAYER

Lord, you have valued my worthless life by the life of your Son; you have covered my rebelling and reluctance by a love I can never deserve or repay! Thank you! Amen.

Tuesday 7th April

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, where just days before the crowds of Jerusalem had swarmed out to proclaim the Messiah's coming; but now that lip-service had soured, the religious leaders were openly opposing him & secretly plotting his death, even one of the 12 disciples, Judas, was hell-bent on betraying him. At that moment in the garden, with the opposition before him, and anticipating the agony of torture & death, the real battle of the cross was joined. Jesus prayed! No-one else could do it, the disciples were too tired, they didn't see that heaven & hell for them were hanging in the balance, but Jesus did!

What was the temptation Jesus wrestled with until he sweat blood?

To avoid the battle, to give in to pain & suffering, to run away from the cross, to put himself before the needs of his people. An easier road to travel – who wouldn't want that? But this king knelt. This was no cheap devotion- 'Father if you're willing take this cup from me'; ...but he knew he must obey, not just on his own behalf, but on behalf of all his people or else they could never be saved. "Not my will but yours be done!" That was the real battle, the prayer that accepts the will of God, through the pain & suffering, that obeys whatever the cost so that God's light may shine in the darkness.

PRAYER

Lord, For the times when my apathy or fear tempts me take an easier path than You want for me- may Your will, not mine, be done! Amen.

Wednesday 8th April

Luke 23:26-43

So after the whipping, a tortuous procession - too weak to carry his own cross, surrounded by the wailing women of a city that had betrayed their Messiah. Then complete humiliation: placed between criminals, stripped naked and nailed to a grisly cross, dying a slow, painful, bloody death. An innocent man condemned, yet still taunted by his persecutors: He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.

But he was the Chosen One - chosen for suffering & death, to take the place of his people under the judgement of God. Evil & rebellion must be judged and put to death, but it's a price none of us can meet, for our sins condemn us. There is no hope unless another pays the price for us. That was the irony: to save others, Jesus would not save himself. He can only pray that by his work, sinners would be forgiven: Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing!

Yet even his executioners mocked him, labelling him- The king of the Jews. Once again, the tempter's voice is heard, from a Roman guard: 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself!' and from those dying beside him: 'Aren't you the Christ, Save yourself and us!' What sort of king accepts defeat and death without a struggle?

Yet one person does call him king, a thief crucified beside him, who confesses his sins We're punished justly, for we're getting what our sins deserve; & entrusts his life & future to the King: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus's reply granted not only immediate forgiveness, but spelt out for him & us what it means: immediate & complete acceptance with God; assurance that at

death he'd be received into the presence of his king, in a paradise free of pain, tears, sin or death. 'Today you'll be with me in paradise!' That is still his promise to all who trust him, his death is our hope - the way to life.

PRAYER

Lord, Your death is my only hope of life! May your grace forgive my mockery and your forgiveness secure my life eternally. Amen.

Thursday 9th April

Luke 23:44-49

Where was the Father as the Son hung dying? For 3 hours, spiritual realities broke into our physical realm: the sky went black, as the Father withdrew his presence and blessing, from his Son, as Jesus bore the evil, sin, selfishness and twisted horror of a rebellious world, for his people. The darkness of a fallen world was focussed in the sin-bearing Saviour on that cross.

But then in glorious triumph, the penalty was paid, & the temple curtain, the symbol of the impossibility of a sinful person to enter the presence of God, that curtain was torn in two. 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit'; the job was done, the way to heaven had been won for his people, who submit themselves in faith to his salvation & rule. God's justice was satisfied, the sacrifice of atonement was made, a way to God without sacrifices or ceremonies had been opened to his people, through a new high priest, a perfect mediator, a loving Lord. Even the life-hardened centurion saw: this was a righteous man, right before God himself. The way to God is open, the glory & joy of God's presence has been made accessible, not by way of religion, but way of a cross, of trusting a Saviour, submitting to a Lord & living to make known his glorious salvation. So as Hebrews puts it: 'Let us fix our eyes on Jesus the author & perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame & sat down at the right hand of God. Consider him, so you will not grow weary & lose heart' (Hebrews 12:2-3).

PRAYER

Lord, For the times when I have been reluctant to fully enter in to life with you, forgive me and receive my spirit to live for Jesus' glory. Amen.

(NOTE: because of the nature of these notes – Lent ends on the day before Easter Sunday – and because Luke's Gospel has a whole chapter after the death of Jesus, we find ourselves reading about the resurrection on Good Friday – which may seem rather strange. So, if you want to hold back and read these final notes on Saturday and Sunday – feel free!)

Friday 10th April

Luke 24:1-12

"Where there's life, there's hope!" That is why that first day of the week the scattered demoralised followers of the dead prophet of Galilee, felt only fear, confusion and consternation. There was no hope in an empty tomb, just no body to grieve over or anoint. There was no hope when angels appeared, only the fear that they were harbingers of more death. There was no hope when they were reminded by angels that Jesus said he would die and rise again, just confusion because such words are meaningless beyond death... surely?

Where is the hope? It is there, in the words of promise, from someone who never broke his word. It is in a message that death is not be the last word on Jesus – life is! It sounded like nonsense, wishful thinking, straw-clutching self-delusion, the fantasies of grieving women, even to the apostles who had heard Jesus' promise first-hand – except that the guarded tomb now lay empty, and the story was angels were telling a message of life not death. Hope! It wasn't seeing that led to them believing – it was trusting! They trusted that this incredible man would keep a promise he had made to beat death, so that they could have the hope of life! And he makes that promise to us too! The empty tomb is its historic undeniable evidence. The gospel message is its witness. But the promise of Jesus is our hope, that the death-conquerer will be our life-giver, and that trusting his promise is the sure pledge of our eternal future. There is always hope, because he is eternally alive!

PRAYER

Lord, Our life has an eternal future because you have made the promise to conquer our death by your grace. Help us live always in the light the hope we trust, for the glory of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday 11th April

Luke 24:13-35

“Why are we waiting?” Don't think this is the cry of frustrated punters after an entertainer no-show; this is the cry of the Christian! With the benefit of seeing the end from the beginning, why did Jesus wait nearly all of the day before revealing himself to the two disciples on the road? Why not just appear, proving his life, inspiring them to worship? Why leave them struggling in sorrow and confusion, when his appearing would have given instant clarity and conviction?

The answer lies in the purpose Jesus has for our lives. His promise to us is an eternal renewed life with him forever, but that day is 'not yet' because of the purpose he has given us for now on this earth. Jesus didn't reveal himself, because his purpose was to get them talking about him and listening to him! They talked about his powerful life, his death on a cross, and the rumours of resurrection. Then prompted by Jesus, they talked through and recalled the promises of God and the prophecies of the life-giving Messiah. And at the end of their journey, they did what they had been told to do by Jesus, breaking bread remembering him. They talked and listened to the gospel, the good news of Jesus, our Saviour and King.

We are still here with a purpose to share his good news – and it is in sharing it that Jesus opened their eyes to realise they were doing it with him! “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us!” It is in sharing it that we are promised the presence of Jesus: “...behold I am with you always, to the very end of the age! (Matthew 28:20) Why are we waiting? People need saving and we have the words of eternal life to share!

PRAYER

Lord, You have given us good news to share and a world in which to declare it. Give us courage and opportunity to tell others about you; and help draw closer to you as we do it, as you promised us! Amen