



LENT

REFLECTIONS

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Front cover design by Jacinth Land, 2018

Welcome to Lent Reflections by members of the Ashbourne Circuit

As we begin Lent, we are at a time when the nights are just starting to draw out and the days lengthen. It reminds us that we seek to draw out our faith; to lengthen or grow spiritually.

Perhaps a little like Christmas, Lent is marked rather differently when you mark it with faith. Yes, we may decide to 'give something up' for Lent, but these days we are just as likely to take positive action, to try to find ways in which we might begin to co-operate with God's grace.

In this, we follow in the footsteps of generations of Christians who have prepared for Easter joy by journeying through the often demanding contemplation of Lent. From Ash Wednesday through to Easter, we are on a journey from our "giving up" to Christ's "giving all"!

This then is the witness in our lives of the journey we are on. Our lives have to show the nature of that journey and the God we travel with. The pilgrimage through Lent is about what's going on inside us.

And for many of us, part of that is a course of Lent readings such as this booklet. We have much to offer one another as we follow this journey of faith together.

I hope and pray that as we read these reflections we will be inspired, challenged and affirmed and that above all we will reflect on the season of Lent itself – the offering of God's love and forgiveness, friendship and grace.

May this Lenten season prepare us for the celebration of Easter.



Rev Tim Morris

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in this project - not just the contributors, but also those who have prayed, who have encouraged and who have advised. There are many hidden contributions behind the written ones! Thank you also to Jacinth who created the wonderful artwork for the cover and to Wendy and to Stuart who have made up the steering team.

It has been an amazing and exciting experience to read these reflections as they have arrived in my inbox. I find that I am in awe of the generosity of thought, insight and experience offered by members of our Circuit. Behind these words lie lifetimes of discipleship and faith. Not an idealised faith - but faith as it is lived, day in and day out.

As we work our way through this booklet to the celebration of Easter, let's also find a moment to celebrate this opportunity to listen to one another and to learn from one another.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Fiona

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

**27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

How amazing - created by God and actually in His image; yes each individual, regardless of race, gender, age, social or economic status, culture, education or country made in His image. After five days of setting the scene and making a place inhabitable, God finally created someone who would rule over all created beings. What a variety of human beings we are today with a vast array of hopes, fears, aspirations and desires. We share Godlike qualities showing mankind has a mind which can respond to His promptings.

Yes, God created us all, innumerable humankind, to have a relationship with Him, to live as those created in His image. Is my relationship with God as that of Saviour and Lord through the sacrifice of Jesus? The God who made us has a call on our lives. By the power of the Holy Spirit let us seek to please Him.

Father and Creator God, during this Lent season draw me into a deeper relationship with you and to respond as one made in your image. Amen

Joyce Odell

Genesis 3:8-13

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

11 And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

This reading from Genesis tells us about change, right from the beginning — where Adam and Eve, before they sinned, when they heard the voice of God would come running towards him to meet him, but now God becomes a terror to them and they “hid themselves”. Another change occurs: their relationship with God is broken. A sad moment because all God has ever wanted was —“I will be your God and you will be my people.” But because of our humanity, like our first ancestors, we often make a mess of things, and we try to pass the blame on to others, and find ourselves ashamed and afraid. Then we find that God keeps showing up, calling our names, seeking us out, building us up and bringing reconciliation and peace. The power of Gods’ grace in our lives.

Lord, help us to understand ourselves better, how in the situations of our life you speak to us through our own prayers and those of others. Grant to us, the courage to begin right where we are - NOW. In Jesus’ name. Amen

Sandra Lewer

Genesis 12:1-3

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

**2 “I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;**

**I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.**

**3 I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”**

Reading that the Lord told Abram to go ‘to the land I will show you’, a command that Abram obeyed, despite having no idea of where he was to go, reminded us of the time when God arranged our marriage. We didn’t know each other at all at that stage, and neither of us had any idea of how it would turn out, but we trusted God and were obedient.

In return for his obedience, Abram was promised great things by God, although he would not live to see every promise fulfilled completely. When God brought us together, we were convinced that it was because he had a purpose for us – to do his work together. In doing this, we trusted that he would bless us and would make us a blessing to many. He has certainly blessed us, and we continue to trust that our work is not yet completed.

Lord, help us to be willing to obey you and trust you for the consequences. Bless us and make us a blessing to others.

Brian and Lorraine Hawkins

Exodus 3:2-6

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Have you ever “watched” a piece of Scripture?

As a three-year-old, I did. My granddad was a wonderful storyteller, and he word-painted this for me.

I could see “Noses” looking after the sheep and goats as they searched out the poor clumps of grass in this very dry ground and in the background was a huge hill (no mountains in Suffolk).

To my amazement red, orange and yellow flames appeared in a bush and I could feel the heat and hear the sound of them, but they didn’t turn the branches black or shrivel the leaves. Seeing “Noses” approach this mysterious sight, God’s voice told him to stop and take off his sandals because he was on Holy Ground. My childish imagination knew that his feet were going to suffer on that rocky soil.

Dear Lord, help me to recognise You in the ordinary and extraordinary. Please help me to say “Here I am!” when you call my name. Amen

Margaret Heaton

Exodus 20:1-2

And God spoke all these words:

2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Pondering these words, we know them well as the introduction to the 10 commandments which God spoke to Moses all those years ago.

They're not a promise of future deliverance; more a statement of what God has already done. I have brought you out of Egypt; out of the land of slavery. It is done!

No one ever chooses to be a slave. For countless years slavery has been a way of life. But are we, you and I, enslaved in any way? I'm thinking of things like bad habits, a temper; or perhaps we are enslaved by our emotions? Or maybe...?

I come before the Almighty, seeking His Face, and remembering God's words to his peoples, “I am the Lord your God who has delivered you...”

And I can only come to Him with a thankful heart, that He is able to do just that.

Anne Wills

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

As a family we have been thinking about how God is with us in everything. That he is with us in all the many ordinary things we do, such as at school, work, talking with friends and playing sport. These verses have challenged us to think about how we can reflect God's love in all the things we do and our interactions with others.

These are challenging verses for parents and children alike as life is often very hectic and busy. We need to make time and space for God in the business of family life. We have been reminded of the importance of doing simple things together like chatting at meal times or going for a walk.

So we have set ourselves a family challenge. Each day during lent we will spend time together talking about what we have done, how God has helped us and how we have shown God's love to others in our day. We will learn from each other ways to demonstrate God's love to others.

Sam, Isaac, William, Rachel and Nigel Glossop

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

One day, at a specific point in time “the year that King Uzziah died”, Isaiah stepped into the Temple as usual but came out totally transformed, called upon by God to be His chosen prophet. Isaiah experiences the reality and presence of God in a powerful way and is immediately overwhelmed by his own sinfulness: “There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful ...” (v5) Simon Peter had a similar experience. After the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5, he says, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!”

We may never be called to be a prophet or apostle, but we can all open ourselves up to experiencing the presence and power of God. Peter had to step into the boat. Isaiah stepped into the temple. We must also step into God’s presence through worship, meditation, prayer and Bible Study, to allow God to speak to us in a new way. It is no good standing on the shore, or outside the door, for ever.

Cathy Stubbs

Isaiah 42:1-4

**Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.
2 He will not shout or cry out,
or raise his voice in the streets.
3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
4 he will not falter or be discouraged
till he establishes justice on earth.
In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”**

Then in Matthew 12:17-21 (New Living Translation):

'This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Him' Isaiah 42:1-4

See Matthew 12:18b 'Look at my servant whom I have chosen. He is my beloved and I am very pleased with Him. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.'

The underlined verse is a precious verse.

After my husband went to be with the Lord two years ago, I had to come to terms with a different life in many ways.

And the Lord stepped in.

He reminded me that, when Jesus returned to Heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to be our comforter, our guide. He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. Romans 5:5 and so many verses in Romans 8. The whole chapter is amazing. Do read it. It helps me every day.

Ena Staniforth

Isaiah 53:3-7

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

One of my favourite hymns is Man of Sorrows (Hymns & Psalms no. 228), and it springs to mind when reading the passage above. The Jewish people of Jesus's time, however, did not seem to be expecting a messiah who would fit this description. The Zealots for example wanted a warrior king/leader who would free them from Roman tyranny and re-establish an earthly kingdom of military and religious might, not one who would be stricken, afflicted, crushed and led to his slaughter, meekly like a lamb. But the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, died for us so that we might not be spiritually dead but be united with God the father. "By his wounds we are healed." As a man of sorrows, amongst other things, Jesus reveals to us the nature of God; kind, empathetic, loving, someone who truly identifies with us and with whom we can identify. What a saviour.

Lord Jesus, you know what it is like to feel sadness and sorrow just as we do. Help us to turn our sorrow into positive action, as you did, and in doing so reflect the love of God for all humanity. Amen

Peter Dawson

Jeremiah 31:31-33

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to[d] them,[e]” declares the Lord. 33 “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF REVELATION

In 1970 I sat my finals at university. I had twelve three hour papers, all with three questions demanding three one hour essays. The technology used was a fountain pen and ink, and I would add a stiff wrist. By 1995 when I finished my theology diploma it was done with a word processor. Technology had changed!

So in the technology of faith for Israel and us! Jeremiah alludes to the old Covenant or law, once written on tablets of stone. It was a law observed from a distance, and broken. Now something new, for Jeremiah says this will change. A covenant not on tablet of stone, nor by pen and ink (see 2 Corinthians 3), but written by the spirit of God in our minds and on our heart. It will not be something to go and see or learn about, but it will in the FULLEST sense of the word, be within us and of us, and for Him.

All this from the God who made us, the Christ who saved us and by the Spirit of God, who in this case is the active scribe of God’s plans and purposes for you and me. He helps us write our own journal of God’s love.

*“You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say
Men read what you write, if it’s false or it’s true
Now, what is the gospel according to you?”*

David Leese

Psalm 8:3-4

**When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?**

Looking up at the sky often delights and surprises me. Do you remember the unusual blood moon last year? I love the crescent moon, harvest moon and the full moon when we can sometimes see great definition even with the naked eye. Moonlight helps when driving on dark roads and in remote dark places in the world the stars of the night sky appear as twinkling diamonds on black velvet.

In Scripture we are reassured and reminded that God abundantly loves us and generously cares for us. We are not always as bright and beautiful as the stars but we can shine brightly and illuminate the lives of others even though sometimes our brightness may be obscured by the circumstances we find ourselves in.

These verses help us to appreciate some of the amazing works of God's creativity in the world around us and above us and we can be comforted that we are a vital part of God's plan and that we are beautiful and precious to Him.

**Dear God,
Your glory is revealed in the heavens!
May the wonder of all that you have created cause us to worship you,
yield to your will, serve according to your purpose and be in love with
you and all that you have created.
Amen**

Ruth Mallard

Psalm 22:1-3

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

**Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?**

**2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.**

**3 Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.**

This reminds me of Henri Nouwen's meditation on Rembrandt's picture 'Return of the Prodigal Son'. Rembrandt depicts the returning son in torn underclothing barely covering his thin emaciated body, his feet are scarred and only one held in a worn-out sandal, his head is shaved. This is a picture of the anguish of abandonment. The son has lost all that was once who he was, he has nothing left. Rembrandt shows the hands of the father on the son's shoulder, one soft and gentle as of a mother and one muscular and broad as of a father. Both hold the son. In the silence of our abandonment, in the noise of our abandonment, is the very presence of God. We can trust that touch of love, tender and powerful, to turn around and find life again.

**God, our father and our mother, touch our hearts and our minds with
the unbroken thread of your love present even in the anguish of
abandonment. Amen**

Ruth Barratt

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...

A number of years ago in Cirencester Museum I noticed a delicate ring engraved with a motif of Jesus the Good Shepherd dating from the Roman period. This personal object spoke to me of a real daily faith. Surely we need the inspiration of this still in our nation, our church and our own lives. John's gospel highlights Jesus offering us His guidance, His protection and care. The challenge is will we be wise and obedient in following His voice and bringing our ways to Him?

I still have a lovely memory when I was contemplating engagement to marry (Yes it is the same girl!). I had asked friends for their prayers. I recall I experienced a great reassurance as the words, "they will go in and out and find pasture" seemed to live in my mind as I sought the way forward; that was 41 years ago

Now in later years I still need to hear the spiritual song "steal away to Jesus, steal away home." The Good Shepherd will lead and guide us in our daily walk.

Mike Dennison

Mark 1:14-15

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Events in the gospel of Mark move on at a rapid pace. We are only in the first chapter and already Jesus has been baptised by John and spent time being tempted in the desert. These couple of verses are slotted in before he calls his first disciples.

Jesus is back on home soil in Galilee. His confidence is obvious – he proclaims the good news, speaks with clarity, not under his breath. His message was to be unmissable to anyone nearby. How often do we miss opportunities to proclaim the good news in our community?

Jesus calls on us to repent and believe the good news. Repent is a verb, a word of action not feelings. So to repent is to change direction.

Think today about how you could change direction in your life. Pray for help to be able to turn and face a different direction. If you are able to, stand up and face a different way and thank God for his forgiveness.

Clare Sales

Mark 9:2-4

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

I have often wondered what the disciples and Jesus talked about between the events recorded in the Gospels, and when he invited Peter, James and John to accompany him, was their talk Godly or about mundane concerns.

Perhaps these three disciples were not 'cerebral' but found 'visual' images easier to comprehend. Jesus was wanting Peter, James and John to understand the relationship between God and himself. If you had asked the disciples who were the most important men in the past they would have said Moses (the law giver) and Elijah (the greatest prophet) but continuing this time-line would come the Messiah, and the transfiguration is the visual manifestation showing the disciples the Godly link to the past, the present and future.

The disciples had only known Jesus in human form but the transfiguration now gave them a greater realisation of Jesus's deity.

Pray that way we too may glimpse God afresh this Lent time.

Joy Watts

Mark 9:7

Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Most of us have walked up a mountain and been amazed by the wonderful views of God's creation. But when Jesus took some of his disciples up to a mountain top, they were to witness something even more incredible. First of all, they had an amazing view of Jesus, all dazzling white, talking with Moses and Elijah! Then as a cloud descended, it not only obliterated their view, but a mysterious voice started speaking to them. It was actually God talking to them directly! Can we imagine how they must have felt?

God confirmed that Jesus was his own son and he commanded them to listen to him. In our busy lives we need to stop and listen too. Things often get in the way of us spending time in conversation with Him. If we follow this command and listen to what Jesus says, God is ready to accept us, too.

Lord, help us to put aside distractions and temptations, so that we can truly listen to Jesus. Amen

Wendy Haslam

Mark 10:15

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

So, Jesus interrupts his preaching and teaching to bless children brought to him, an act which upsets the disciples who want to keep him from unwelcome distractions. Jesus rebukes his disciples, and his subsequent invitation to the children to come to him have inspired many twee art works over the years in a similar vein to the media’s fascination with photos of stars and politicians holding babies.

But as we know, the children at our Church are not a distraction, they are an important part of our Church family and have a lot to teach us. In Powersource recently we (a small group of under 10s) shared some chocolate. This was Very Exciting. One small person positively bounced with joy in anticipation of the treat – it was an immediate “Yes Please”, not “what kind?”, “what will it be like?” “will I like it?”. Some children have a great ability not to overthink things – maybe this was how Jesus was asking us to be when we receive the kingdom of God.

And what might the kingdom of God be like? We think it will be peaceful, happy, beautiful and full of life and people. What do you think?

Today eat some chocolate (or something else you love) and think about how happy it makes you!

Powersource

Mark 10:24-27

Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

A challenge and an assurance

Jesus's words in verses 24 & 25 seem like a challenge to all of us. For me, they are a challenge to continually think about our priorities and whether we are thinking of God or money. The verses follow the interaction between Jesus and the rich man, who was told to go and sell everything had and give the money to the poor. Elsewhere in the Bible, we hear Jesus explaining that we can't serve both God and money.

As we think about Jesus's ultimate sacrifice this lent-time, let's challenge ourselves to make more earthly sacrifices than usual. But whatever we do, it can seem so paltry and meagre compared to God's generosity to us. But the Bible passage continues and we hear Jesus speaking these amazing words of assurance: "all things are possible with God."

The reality is that anyone can come to know God and have eternal life with Him. This is truly astounding and something for all of us to hold onto.

Stuart Green

Mark 10:29-31

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

The words of Jesus are uncompromising. Following Him is costly. We may have to give up much and face difficulties, but we will always gain more by following Him.

The world values self, status, power and wealth, but the Kingdom of God is different. Everything is upside down, back to front. This is a recurring theme in the Bible. Shepherds, considered the lowest of the low, were the first to hear and respond to the news of Jesus’ birth. Wise Men were the last to arrive. It was women, with no status, who were the first to encounter the risen Christ.

We should not be surprised when we experience God through unexpected people and in unexpected ways. May we be willing to play our part in this upside down kingdom, remembering that God can use the ordinary to do extraordinary things.

Lord, you call us to a life full of surprises where all things are possible. Help us to be faithful to your calling. Amen

Alison Morris

Mark 10:32-34

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

“Jesus led the way” – to Jerusalem and the cross. Today Jesus also leads us into, and through, some tough situations. As we openly face them we need to look to God’s end result, in this case the Resurrection.

Sometimes these hard challenges will be very personal yet, as we follow Jesus into them, we find not only His comfort and enabling but a lasting result that is good in every way.

Sometimes the challenge has far wider consequences, as when a leader takes on a God-given responsibility that is demanding, even fearful. Again, we can find the strength to follow Jesus as we walk closely and consciously with Him. The end result, too, transcends all our expectations!

Richard Odell

Mark 10:43-45

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

James and John sought to be seated with Jesus in a position of honour.

Nowadays, people desire celebrity status and wealth; whilst Muhammad Ali, the boxer, used to proclaim ‘I am the greatest’ at every opportunity.

However, there are many who don’t seek greatness, who will go down in history because of their beliefs and actions:

- Nelson Mandela devoted his life to ending apartheid in South Africa, was an advocate of human rights, and a champion for peace and social justice.
- Mother Teresa, a nun who spent her life to serving the sick, the poor and destitute, spending many years in Kolkata, India.
- Terry Waite, envoy to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who went to secure the release of hostages in Lebanon, was held in solitary confinement, yet bears no ill feelings.

Lord Jesus, you showed us the way; help us to lead our lives the way you taught us. Amen

David Heaton

Mark 10:46-48

As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Any reference to the terrible handicap of being without sight can bring back a poignant memory for me.

Many years ago I accompanied a cousin for her appointment in the local Hospital Eye Department. Though she had been having problems, we were totally unprepared for the diagnosis. Her sight would become less and less, until it had gone completely. She wept a little, while all I could think of doing was to hug her tightly - feeling totally inadequate - very uncomfortable - in fact seemingly largely useless. In time, however, she had stoically accepted her situation, she told me how much it had meant to have had me in particular alongside that day!

I realised then as never before, that words are not always the answer in challenging situations. Undoubtedly Jesus heard our unspoken prayer 'Lord Have Mercy' as was the cry of Bartimaeus all those years ago.

Perhaps some of you have had similar experiences, which you would like to share with your group.

Margaret Hasler

Mark 11:1-3

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’

Have you heard of those practical jokes “Go to the leader and ask for a long stand” or “Go to the store and ask for some tartan paint”. Jesus was asking his disciples to go to a village they were presumably not familiar with, take a colt that didn’t belong to them, and give what must have seemed like an implausible explanation! There is so much that could go wrong here. Maybe there wouldn’t be a colt there? Maybe they’d be accused of stealing? Maybe they’d be laughed at with their explanation of why!

We can sometimes hear the call from God to do something, which sounds to us like the equivalent of asking for tartan paint, or walking into a village and taking a colt. The disciples had such great faith in Jesus that we read in the next verses that they did go as they were asked and it all worked out well. They were part of God’s great plan, and we can be too. Listen to what God needs you to do, have faith and do it!!

Catherine Green

Mark 12:10-11

Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:

**“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
11 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”**

There are two things that strike me as I look at these verses. Firstly is the simple question that Jesus asks.... ‘Have you not read in the scriptures?’ An encouragement to us to be familiar with verses from the Bible, in this case Psalm 118.

Secondly is a very striking concept of a stone that was rejected as useless by the builders became the cornerstone, the very foundation of that building. It reminds us of a key principle of our faith that seemingly difficult things can actually happen and what can seem like failure and rejection God can turn around.

Loving Father God. Help me to learn more of your word each day. Help me to really understand that you can make all things new and that you are the firm foundation upon which our lives are built. Amen

Helen Walker

Mark 12:15-17

“Bring me a denarius and let me look at it.” 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

For me this provides a clear distinction between the responsibilities we have in society and our relationship with God. There are many images to which we can respond in the modern world and we are free to choose. Our responses define our place in society. We may think our responses make us good citizens but it is our spiritual relationship with God that ultimately defines us.

God’s image is not on a coin or a poster. God is everywhere and in everything. What we owe to God pervades all we do, heart and mind. It’s a bit like the glue that sticks everything together. To give back what we owe is to let God be reflected in all that we are and do.

Let us strive towards recognising that we owe everything to God and that to pay Him his due is to let Him be reflected in all our thoughts, words and deeds.

Gwen Kelsey

Mark 12: 28-31

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’”

Here was a genuine question which demanded a genuine response. Jesus answered by giving two commandments which sum up the Christian life – love God and love others.

In your Christian life, do you ever feel like you are going through the motions? Christian life can be mundane and lack direction if we take our eye off the ball and forget our responsibility to love God with everything we have. But if our relationship with him is right, then our love for him will shine out to others.

And if we don't like our neighbours?

Jesus responds by saying “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

So we are called to love everyone, whether we like them or not.

Unconditional love is a challenge for us but remember that God understands our humanity, forgives us and gives us the strength to persevere if we put him first.

Father,

You know us so well and how many times we let you down whilst trying to follow these commandments. And yet you still love us and shower us with your grace, mercy and compassion.

Thank you Lord.

Amen

The Thursday Night Housegroup

Mark 12:42-44

But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything— all she had to live on.”

The poor widow showed that she had great faith and trust in God. She gave away all she had, whereas the rich only gave a small proportion of their money. She knew that God would look after her and provide for her needs. This inspires us to give all we can, not just money, but also our time to help others.

Did the widow feel pressured by others into dropping her coins in the box? God knows what was in her heart, and what is in our hearts when we give. So are we really being generous? Or are we just giving away spare money, which doesn't really affect us?

We might not have much money, but even if we give a little, it can still make a massive difference. We know a young boy locally ,who has raised £20,000 for the Derby hospital ward, where he is receiving treatment.

Both are an inspiration to us all!

We thank you Lord for all that you give us. Help us to give freely, too, without expecting something in return. Amen

Mustard

(Young People's group aged 11-17)

Mark 13:30-31

Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

Words. We're surrounded by them. Written, spoken, tweeted, texted... more and more words. We often speak hurriedly, as if we need to cram in more and more words. We read quickly – just too many words to take in.

In an age of mass communications, words seem easy and yet can be hard to erase. You've sent the text, sent the email – too late to pull it back and unpick it.

In an age of comparatively little permanent record, Jesus makes a bold claim using a typical exaggerated picture. His words will last even longer than heaven and earth last. They are that powerful.

Our words won't last half so long as his.

But they are still valuable in this time and in this place. Our words of encouragement and of compassion, of prayer and of witness, of invitation and of welcome.

Lord Jesus, help us to offer kindness in our words and to offer your love in our actions. Amen

Fiona Green

Mark 13:32-33

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

There are 2 movements around today which seem overly concerned with trying to predict, and prepare for, the ‘end of time’, the Second Coming. These are the ‘End Timers’ and the ‘Preppers’.

In this passage, Jesus is warning us not to spend our time worrying about what might happen, and when, for we can’t KNOW this. We need to make the best use of the time we have now, being alert and diligent, using the time to watch and pray. Preppers are obsessed with filling containers with all kinds of items which might help them to survive the end of the world, but it is a fruitless exercise, as He will come ‘as a thief in the night’, and we must not be found sleeping.

Many of us, when faced with crossroads moments spend time worrying and trying to predict the future. Some seek the help of fortune tellers, but it is a useless exercise. We would be better served by prayer, asking for help and guidance.

Additional useful passages could be Acts 1: 6-7; Matthew 24:32-33 & 42-44; Luke 21: 29-31.

Betty Hadley

Mark 14:6-9

“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.⁷ The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

What do we see in her, this woman who ‘did what she could’?

Jesus said she had done a beautiful thing, a lovely thing. He denounced the petty judgment of others; what may be sensible, right or wrong. He sees her heart. ‘She has done a beautiful thing to me.’

Is it her spontaneity that draws us, her action upon impulse? There is something uncluttered and uninhibited in her approach to Jesus; something simple, purposeful, extravagant, unheeding, unknowing, childlike. Isn’t love like that? Unthinking.

Perhaps she looks on Jesus with the same eyes as Peter when he stepped out of the boat onto the Sea of Galilee – in that moment, as close to God as anyone can be – all faith and love. *For He can well be loved, but he cannot be thought.* ¹

‘She did what she could’. God asks no more of us.

*may my heart always be open to little
birds who are the secrets of living
whatever they sing is better than to know
and if men should not hear them men are old* ²

David Bale

¹ The Cloud of Unknowing, Book 6

² From a poem by ee cummings – may my heart always be open to little birds who are the secrets of living

Mark 14:22-25

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. 25 "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

My childhood years were spent in Ballidon – a small village with 14 houses, a quarry and a church. We grew up in a loving Christian home. On my Confirmation Day my mum was in hospital and dad had been killed in an accident earlier in the year so a woman from the village – Aunty Barbara took me. She gave me a lovely book of hymns and prayers, and I still treasure it after 62 years! She also took me for my First Communion. I was nervous but I should have remembered these words:

Lord, help me to remember that nothing can happen to me today that you and I cannot handle together.

I feel very privileged to kneel at the Communion rail, to always feel very calm and peaceful. I wonder how the disciples felt as Jesus gave them bread and wine.

My years as a worship steward have been so happy and rewarding. I have been able to learn a lot and hopefully give a lot. The one job I have always enjoyed has been to serve Holy Communion, so meaningful in every way.

'Trust and obey, for there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.'

Chris Dakin

Mark 14:32

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

What do we do when faced with seemingly insurmountable difficulties? Become depressed or self-pitying? Panic?

Jesus was facing the most testing time of his life. He knew exactly what was going to happen to him. He knew that for God’s plan of Salvation for us to work, he faced physical, mental and emotional anguish whilst at the same time being humiliated and hated. A very dark and lonely place.

So, what does Jesus do? He goes and talks to His Father to ask for the strength to cope and he asks his earthly friends, the disciples, to support him by waiting with him.

Dear Father, when we face difficulties, may we come to you for help and strength. Thank you for giving us friends and family who are there to support us. May we be aware of anyone who is struggling alone and may we be there for them.

Rosemary Webb

Mark 14:35-38

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus with friends and then alone with his Father.

In most of the Gospel accounts we see Jesus as a leader, a miracle-worker and storyteller. In these verses we see a 33 year old man in need of the company of friends, and then shedding his leadership role, becoming the vulnerable, fallible human son seeking his Father's wisdom and comfort.

He did not want to die, nor experience the suffering that would entail, but he handed himself over to his Father for His will to be done whatever that may be.

Some words from the Covenant Service, recently uttered by many of us, appear to be particularly relevant:

I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things. Wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure.

How willing am I to fulfil my part of this covenant? Am I really willing to put myself, my worries, my doubts and uncertainties into the hands of my Heavenly Father and accept whatever may result from this?

Heavenly Father, help me to be true to the commitment I made and to readily accept whatever your will may be for me. Amen

Gwenda Alcock

Mark 14:48-50

Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled.

Jesus is with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is night/early morning and he is praying and occupied with his own very urgent needs; suddenly he is disturbed by a group of armed and dangerous men led by Judas; they have come to seize him using violence if necessary. They have disregarded who this peaceful man is, have not thought about when would have been a simpler or easier time to arrest him, they are doing what suits them best and are pursuing their own agenda.

Reading this made me think of three things. And all of them to do with interruption and inconvenience to me!

How many times have I sat down to watch my favourite television programme and the phone rings? The same phone which has been quiet all day when I had TIME to answer it.

Or - How many times have I been packing up at work with 10 minutes to go until home time and someone arrives with a problem that has to be dealt with today?

Or - How many times have my children announced as they are cleaning their teeth for bedtime that tomorrow is fancy dress day at school and they have to come dressed as a famous person (or other stunning deliverable) for 9.00am tomorrow morning?

All of these events are an inconvenience to me; they upset my time, they cause me to rearrange my plans and they create stress and frenzied activity not for my own gain but for someone else's.

Will I hear the call of the spirit at a convenient time? Will God's timescales and purpose fit with my own? What will we I be asked to give up and will I be ready? I know that nothing will be asked of me that I am not able to give, but will I be willing to give it?

Rachel Murt

Mark 14:72

Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

In grief we sometimes stumble to function. We may need to withdraw to a quiet place and be alone. We want time to remember and grieve. And if someone close dies unexpectedly, the questions can loom large and maybe don't easily resolve.

So Peter has just seen Jesus die like a criminal on the cross. Confused, the messages of his teaching haven't sunk in. What did three years as a disciple mean?

Imagine what Peter might have been thinking . . .

I can't cope.

I just need to get away, put the horrors of the last few days aside
Yes . . . it's easier to blank it out, and deny I could ever be a rock that a kingdom would be built on.

And now what's that noise - a cockerel, crowing . . . twice.

But I promised, 'I will never deny you Lord'

Oh, what have I done?

So could we do differently, or are tears the only reaction that can allow for love to break in and lives be restored.

He knows me.

He knows me inside out and upside down.

He knows my weakness

And he accepts and loves me, unconditionally.

Give Thanks.

Richard Barratt

Mark 15:12-15

What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

13 "Crucify him!" they shouted.

14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Pilate had found Jesus "not guilty", so why did the crowd want him to be crucified?

The Chief Priests incited the crowd to choose Barabbas over Jesus but the crowds were very aware that Jesus was not acting like the long-promised King of the Jews. They had reacted with deep anger and huge disappointment. On reflection, I wonder how I would act when part of a hostile crowd? Would I be led by the crowd or stand out for what I believed?

What if my life doesn't go in the way I would want or expect it to? Would I react in an extreme way with anger and disappointment?

As Christians, we are not alone. We have been given the Holy Spirit to help, encourage and guide us through the difficult times and the decision-making – all we need to do is ask for help.

Father – we ask that your Holy Spirit will be with us today in all we think and do.

Thank you, Lord.

Amen

Helen Flinn

Mark 15:23-26

Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

By not focusing on the gruesome details of our Lord's crucifixion this passage helps me to focus on three other details of this momentous event.

Firstly, the efforts of Jesus' friends to alleviate his suffering, offering him wine mixed with myrrh, a common Jewish practise to those who were going to die. But Jesus did not even taste this offered drink, facing death with nothing to dull the pain or cloud his faculties.

Secondly, the casting of lots for His clothing; not only a prophetic fulfilment but also a reminder to us that we do not take our belongings with us when we die.

Thirdly, the charge notice pinned to His cross; "The King of the Jews". John 21:19-22 records that Pilate had it written in three languages; Hebrew, the language of the nation; Latin, the official language of the Romans and Greek, the common dialect and the language of the foreign population.

Lord, I know you suffered on my behalf, accepting the full measure of agony on my behalf. Whilst I cannot fully understand why you would want to do all this for me, I thank you daily that you did. You are the King of my life and my saviour. Amen

Jacqui Marsh

Mark 15:38-39

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

At his last breath, the curtain of the temple torn from the top to bottom meant there is now no barrier for us to enter into the inner sanctuary of God’s temple. We now have direct access to pray to God through Jesus Christ, anyplace and anytime, Jesus is our passport to God.

The centurion was a high ranking officer of the Roman Army who commanded many soldiers; answerable to the tribune who was accountable to the legate (commander of the Roman Legion). He was a man of repute and trustworthiness, but also a man with battle-hardened experiences. He supervised and had Jesus beaten, whipped, crowned with thorns and nailed to the cross – and yet he must have been so moved by the spiritually charged atmosphere of that day to speak out from his heart aloud “Surely this man was the Son of God”

Lena Tettelaar

Mark 15:46

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb.

Devastated. That is how Joseph would have felt. Joseph loved Jesus and this was not how he expected Jesus's ministry to end. Jesus, the bringer of God's grace and truth – dead. How can that be? It's easy for us with the benefit of knowing what comes next, but for Joseph that was the end – things would just go back to how they had been before.

Often things happen in our lives that leave us disappointed or even devastated. But, if we trust in God, he has a strange way of surprising us with what happens next. Darkness is turned to Light.

Lord God our Father,

We thank you that the tomb was not the end of the story but the start of something wonderful. We ask your Holy Spirit to help us trust you when things seem bleak, that you might surprise us with your peace and blessings.

Amen

Paul Haslam

Mark 16:2-7

Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

It's one thing to be told what it's like to jump out of a plane at 15,000 feet. It's quite another thing to experience it for yourself!

That's what Easter Day faith is all about. The women are told “he is risen!” But to experience it? “Go and there you will find him”. Not only would they meet the risen Christ, he would also “go ahead of them”, travelling the way they were to go.

Faith is often found on the journey, on the way, testing things out, taking risks and going to the place where we are called. It is often then that the story we've heard becomes real for us.

**God of resurrection surprises,
journey with us as we travel the road of faith.
May we find you not only at the journey's end,
but on the way there too.
Amen**

Tim Morris

This book contains 40 short reflections, all of which have been written by members of our fellowship in the Ashbourne area, with accompanying passages from the Bible.

The book can be read on your own as part of your personal prayer life, or with others to prompt discussion and new ideas.

We hope and pray that you will find the reflections useful as you journey through Lent, towards Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

