

WALKING WITH JESUS

Walking with Jesus through Lent includes studies for Lent groups for each week of Lent, based on the Sunday gospels for Year C. Studies for Holy Week are based on Servant Songs from Isaiah. Background notes from contributors across the Diocese of Melbourne aid our praying of the text.

Walking with the Prophets through Lent, a booklet for personal daily devotional prayer and reflection following Old Testament readings from the Psalms and the Prophets, based on the daily lectionary readings. The Scripture selection for each day is printed in the booklet. Thoughtful brief notes enrich our response to God. Free from the website.

Praying Scripture: Leader's Guide contains suggestions for groups using *lectio divina*, Ignatian meditation, the African method of praying Scripture, Puritan meditation, and the Scripture Union method of meditation on Scripture. Also contains resources for groups new to praying Scripture. Free from the website.

Editor: Jill Firth

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209 Flinders Lane Melbourne VIC 3000 Australia

CallingMelbourne2Prayer

Roland Ashby, Jill Firth, Lek Koswig, Rachel McDougall, Jamie Miller,
Alison Taylor, Philip Swain, Philip Trowse, Hedley Beare.

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THROUGH LENT

Studies for the Sundays in Lent Year C and Holy Week

Anglican Diocese of Melbourne 2016

Three resources are available for Lent 2016

- ***Walking with Jesus through Lent***
- ***Walking with the Prophets through Lent***
- ***Praying Scripture: Leader's Guide***

Details of these resources are found on the back cover of this booklet.

These resources were prepared for the Diocese of Melbourne for Lent 2010 by Melbourne Anglicans, and are reprinted for Lent 2016. The Editor wishes to thank the contributors.

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All resources can be downloaded free of charge from www.melbourneanglican.org.au

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Notes on *lectio divina* based on Margaret Crooks, 'An introduction to *Lectio Divina*', available at www.melbourneanglican.org.au

Notes on Ignatian Meditation based on notes by Alison Taylor.

Notes on African Bible Study are taken from <http://takomaparkpc.org/AfricanBibleStudy.html>

Walking with Jesus through Lent

From crucifixion to resurrection is the journey of our Lord at this time and the centre of our Christian hope. For those of us who would deepen our following of Christ over the seasons of Lent and Easter, these times are careful preparation and reflection on a precious gift that we receive from those who have prepared the studies.

The Gospel of Luke provides the narrative structure of Jesus' journey to the cross. The use in turn of each of Matthew, Mark and Luke allows for the differences between the three synoptic gospels to provide a fresh perspective on the journey to our Lord's passion and resurrection, to be experienced in a challenging freshness each year.

This Prayer study material continues that tradition. I hope that in entering into it you know Christ more nearly and more clearly.

Archbishop Dr Philip Freier

Praying Scripture in a Group

We listen 'with the ear of the heart' to the Scriptures as we desire to hear God speak to us. We listen attentively and reflectively, asking questions such as:

'What do you want of me?'

'How can I hear what you are saying and allow it to shape my life?'

'Is there an invitation here for me?'

'Does the Word relate to what is happening in my life now?'

'How does it make me feel? Why?'

Access to journaling materials (pens, notebooks or writing paper) and to a Bible or a printed copy of the text for each participant is useful. The Ignatian method of imaginatively entering the gospel story is a variation on this method (see next page).

Preparation

We are invited to take a few minutes to put aside distractions so we can focus on our time with the Lord. This could be by singing, silence, listening to a CD or live music, or a breathing exercise. Ideas for a breathing exercise, for introducing groups to praying Scripture, and various methods of Scripture meditation can be found in the booklet ***Praying Scripture: Leader's Guide*** on the website.

Lectio Divina

Read (lectio)

The text is read aloud, slowly and thoughtfully. We listen prayerfully to the text. A leader may read the background notes aloud or give a short introduction. Groups unfamiliar with the text may need a short time for questions about the meaning of the text.

We hear the text read slowly again one or more times (up to 3 times) using a different reader for each time the passage is read, pausing for reflection between each reading. We notice the word or phrase or image that particularly draws our notice, and attend to it.

Reflect (meditatio)

We take time for individual reflection and/or journaling, maybe ten minutes to half an hour – the leader should use a clock! We sit with the text, allowing it to penetrate our minds and hearts. We may gently repeat our word or phrase. We may probe the text with our minds. We are open to the impact of this text in our own lives.

Optional group sharing

Sharing focusses on our personal response to the text – joy, dismay, confusion, anxiety. Divide into smaller groups if appropriate. Sharing is optional. Confidentiality is to be respected. The leader may share. Group members do not comment or give advice on each other's sharing. The leader thanks each participant but does not comment on the sharing. When all group members who wish to share have done so, the group takes a moment of silence to honour the sharing.

Respond in prayer (oratio)

The group may pray silently, or pray aloud in pairs or triplets or as a larger group. We talk with the Lord about what we have been reading, and about our responses to the text. We ask him how it will apply to our lives.

Remain (contemplatio)

We remain together in the presence of God, soaking in his love for us. We might sit with a phrase or idea from our reflection. We savour the presence and action of God. The leader may like to play a track from a CD or sit in silence.

Return to daily life (ruminatio and evangelizatio)

How will this text and my reflection and prayer impact my daily life? We seek to carry our insight or experience out into our everyday world. We continue to ponder a phrase or image or question. We seek to walk with Jesus through each day.

Ignatian Meditation

Read

Read the Bible story several times over. I imagine how the Trinity of divine persons sees this world and its different people. I imagine Jesus in the story. I see in my imagination the particular scene in which the gospel story is set –the Sea of Galilee, hill country, olive groves, or the narrow and winding streets of Jerusalem. I imagine the scene in as much detail as possible and I take in its sounds and smells too. I take lots of time, not rushing at all.

I now pause to bring to mind anything that I particularly desire from this time of prayer, and ask for God's grace for this. Perhaps I seek God's forgiveness or his peace or his guidance.

Reflect

I place myself in the scene that I have imagined. I may be one of the main characters in the story, or I may be in the crowd observing what is happening. I follow the dialogue and the action, perhaps being drawn to take part myself. Again, I take as much time as I need.

Respond in Prayer

When I am ready, I approach Jesus and I speak with him and listen to him. What do I say? What do I hear? I have now entered into a conversation with God, rather than simply speaking or listening to him. I may share with him intimately whatever it is I feel, seeking always to know Christ intimately and to follow him more closely in his mission.

Remain

When I have finished my colloquy, I sit in God's presence for as long as I need. I end my time of prayer by saying aloud the Lord's Prayer or another prayer that I know by heart.

Return

What is it that I will now do as a result of my prayer? I offer my intention to the Lord. I seek to walk with Jesus as I return to my everyday life.

The African Bible Study Method

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church in 2009.

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. One person reads the passage slowly.
2. Each person identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention (1 minute).
3. Each shares the word or phrase around the group (3-5 minutes, NO DISCUSSION).
4. Another person reads the passage slowly (from a different translation if possible).
5. Each person identifies where this passage touches their life today (1 minute).
6. Each shares (3-5 minutes, NO DISCUSSION).
7. Passage is read a third time (another reader and translation if possible).
8. Each person names or writes "From what I've heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be? Is God inviting me to change in any way?" (5 minutes)
9. Each person shares their answer (5-10 minutes, NO DISCUSSION)
10. Each prays for the person on their right, naming what was shared in the other steps (5 minutes).
11. Close with the Lord's Prayer and SILENCE.

Lent 1: Background to Text

Lent is a time to take stock, spiritually. It is a time to take the image of the refreshment of the soil around the fig tree that was not bearing any fruit, to actually start growing again. It is a time to be honest about our own particular and specific vulnerabilities. It is also a time to be thankful and not afraid. Yet still, it remains most definitely a time when Christians are encouraged and urged to take serious account of what is most likely to throw us off spiritual course, as individuals and as a Christian community. From temptation to transformation. The Christian journey towards hope. The sometimes baffling, never easy, always 'asking more of us than we think we have' way we have, of trying to join together as followers of Jesus the Christ.

Today's gospel, the traditional series of the temptations in the wilderness immediately following on from the grace-filled experience of the baptism of the Lord by John, highlights the struggle. A battle is engaged. The first parrying begins. The battle is between that which is utterly and ultimately good and of God and that which is evil and utterly not of God. Temptations uncovered here are presented in terms of a potentially attractive abuse of power, the seductive attractiveness of the superficial and shallow, and the possibility of attempting to bargain and barter, to impress the gallery cheaply. They are real and possible temptations. If embraced they would have brought immediate results. There could have been apparent success. They would also have had consequences.

In this gospel for the first Sunday in Lent, Luke is quite clearly wanting to teach and encourage. In having these challenges to the Lord placed right at the earliest possible moment in his ministry, they stand as examples of how Christians generally might try to respond. Times of trial, the actuality of temptations to settle for less than the best, are the daily experience of us all.

John Davis

Luke 4.1-15

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Lent 2: Background to Text

The theme of today's reading is fruitful living in the service of God. Jesus has been speaking to the crowds and calling them to prepare for the coming of God's kingdom when the Son of Man will return (Luke 12:40). He calls the people to interpret the signs of the times (Luke 12:54 – 56). In response, the crowd alert Jesus to the murder of some Galileans who had gone to offer sacrifices in the temple. Is this what Jesus has been speaking about? Is this one of the signs of the times?

Jesus deflects the conversation back to his hearers. Rather than respond with political action he calls for spiritual reflection. This disaster did not occur because of the particular sins of these Galileans. Rather it is his hearers who are under God's judgement. All need to repent and turn to God. Jesus repeats the message with reference to another disaster known to his hearers (v 4).

The use of the aorist tense (a single decisive action) in verse 5, challenges Jesus' hearers not to put off to another time what he is calling them to do. A failure to take decisive action will leave the hearer at great risk in God's coming judgement.

The parable which follows underlines this point and emphasises the need to respond quickly. Jesus compares Israel to a fruitless fig tree (see Micah 7:1-7, and note the earlier use of v 6 in Luke 12:53). As the owner of the vineyard, God places His people on notice. They ought to be cut off immediately but He gives them one more chance to repent and be fruitful. As John the Baptist had declared "the axe is already at the root of the tree" (Luke 3:9).

History tells us that Israel failed to heed Jesus warning, and a new people were grafted into God's purposes. Yet this was not to be a cause for Gentile boasting (Romans 11:17-21). The call to repentance and a life of dependency upon God is a call for all of God's people in every generation. God's patience is a gift for us all (2 Peter 3:9).

Richard Trist

Luke 13.1-9

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Lent 3: Background to Text

The familiar Lukan motif of necessity figures in this brief and enigmatic passage. Jesus refers to the necessity of his own work with the phrase, "I must be on my way..."13:33 He speaks of the impossibility that a prophet of Israel should die outside of Jerusalem (v.33) suggesting the necessity of his own death and of Jerusalem's involvement in that death. The solemn character of v.35 implies the further necessity of judgement on Jerusalem for its treatment of this prophet.

The Pharisees warn Jesus to leave the area because Herod wants to kill him. The warning of the Pharisees may be genuine or deceitful, but Jesus dismisses it in any case. He announces that his work of casting out demons and healing people will continue "today and tomorrow," and then "on the third day" he will complete his work. Whatever the Pharisees or Herod might have planned for Jesus, those plans will fail because his own plans (or God's) have priority. Not only does Jesus work continue, but also the place and agent of the opposition to Jesus will not be determined by Herod or the Pharisees. Jesus will not be overpowered in Herod's Galilee, but in Jerusalem. Jesus' words anticipate both his own rejection by Jerusalem and that which will await his witnesses. Stephen explicitly refers to Israel's treatment of its prophets (Acts 7:52) and later on Paul must defend himself in Jerusalem. Ironically, tragically, the city that houses God's Temple also houses a persistent refusal to hear God's word.

The word of judgement against that city and its people sounds clearly in this passage: "Your house is left to you." (v.35). Understated though this saying may be, its implications are chilling. Jerusalem is handed over to its own devices, which means that Jerusalem cannot stand. Similar sayings in the Hebrew Bible call to mind the desolation of the city without God's protection. 1 Kings 9:7-8, Ps.69:25-26, Jer. 12:7, 22:5. Over against this word of judgement stands Jesus poignant lament: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing." Here Jesus applies to himself imagery of protection that the Hebrew Bible often applies to God. Deut. 32:11, Ruth 2:12, Ps.17:8, 36:7, 91:4, Isaiah 31:5. Neither God nor God's Son may be likened to the fox that preys on the young of others, but rather to the hen that gently cares for her young.

The passage closes with the ironic note that Jerusalem will indeed see Jesus on that day "when you say, 'blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'" v.35. This quote from Ps. 118:26 appears again in Luke 19:38, when Jesus does enter Jerusalem to the accolades of the crowds. There also the Pharisees warn Jesus to stop the reaction of the crowd, and there Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and its fate. In the early sermons of Acts, Christians proclaim both that those dwelling in Jerusalem were responsible for the death of Jesus and that even that action was part of God's plan. (Acts 3:14-15, 17-18) That theme is anticipated even here, for Jerusalem is responsible for the action against Jesus, and yet that action is part of the larger divine necessity that propels Jesus toward Jerusalem. (v:32-33.)

Robert Presland

Luke 13.31-35

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Lent 4: Background to Text

The first hearers of Jesus' story about the man who had two sons would have immediately thought of the stories of others fathers and sons already familiar to them from their Hebrew scriptures. They would have recalled the archetypal telling of humanity's first murder when one of Adam's sons, Cain, killed his younger brother Abel. Or, recalled the sagas of the patriarchs Abraham with Ishmael and Isaac, and later Isaac and his twin boys Jacob and Esau. Western Christians are disadvantaged in not knowing the cultural complexities embedded in the story. These are multiple and must be allowed to reshape our reading if we are to discover the full impact of the parable.

The younger son's request amounts to wishing his father were dead and by 'cashing up' his share of the estate and then squandering it (sexual immorality is not implied), the son has put himself beyond inclusion in his society. The older son, who should have intervened between father and errant son, is silent until the son returns. Is he complicit in something that will later lead to his outburst of 'righteous' anger? When he returns, the younger son expects to face his father's rejection. In fear and shame he must have anticipated the custom known as 'the cutting off' and expected a clay pot to be broken at his feet to symbolise the community's repudiation of him. None of this eventuates. Instead, in flagrant violation of social norms, the father picks up his skirts and runs to greet the son. Now, rich people lived in the centre of villages so no one would have missed this scandalous display of reconciling love. Worse is to come when the father grabs the son before he can kiss his father's feet and instead kisses his son on the neck. The father orders sandals to be brought, the footwear of free men and publicly restores his son's status before witnesses powerless to overturn the father's gesture.

The God portrayed in Jesus' parable is far more outrageous and extravagantly in love with humanity than we comprehend. The challenge to preachers is to do justice to the original context of the parable and convey the power of that welcoming love in a very different, though no less needy world.

Colleen O'Reilly

Luke 15.11-32

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Lent 5: Background to Text

It is a quite deliberate move on Jesus' part towards Jerusalem and his crucifixion according to John. In the Greek text, each of these first three verses is linked to what has happened before by beginning the verse with 'therefore'. The chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they should let them know so they could arrest him (11:57). Therefore (v.1), John tells us, Jesus heads to Bethany, a short 2 mile trip from Jerusalem, a short 2 mile trip from those looking to arrest him.

And being at Lazarus' home, therefore (v.2) they give a dinner party in Jesus' honour. Martha, as we expect of her, is showing her love for the Messiah by serving the food, fussing over the table. The previously dead-for-four-days Lazarus is at table with Jesus, alive and well.

And Mary, as we would expect of her, is at Jesus' feet, showing her love for Jesus, anointing his feet with costly nard, the pure kind, heavily fragranced, no additives – her action carrying a meaning greater than she realised. Therefore (v.3), John writes as a nose witness as much as an eye witness, she took a pound of costly perfume, anointing Jesus, an act Jesus interprets as pointing to his pending death (12:7).

The love and devotion of these three siblings for their Lord isn't the only thing this dinner party shows up. Judas, about to betray Jesus, we read, here betrays his own interest: money. And money preferably in the common purse, which he kept, in both senses of the word. Custodian of the kitty, and freely helping himself to the money. No cost analysis benefit in this anointing for him.

Heather Patacca

John 12.1-8

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Palm Sunday: Background to Text

(an ecological reading)

An unriden colt, the colt's owner, the multitude of disciples and the stones, we mustn't forget the stones, are some of the players in the drama unfolding incomprehensibly before the eyes of the twelve. Incomprehensibly because even after Jesus tries to explain three times how these days will unfold – with violence and death – the twelve still haven't grasped how ugly it is going to get before things get better.

We, the readers, feel the menace and uncertainty. We identify our own flawed and frail hearts in the collective heart of this adoring crowd. These are hearts that, within a week, will have turned, like the turning of a tide, running with equal power in the opposite direction. The turning of the tide is now anticipated by some of the Pharisees; 'Teacher,' they say to Jesus, 'order your disciples to stop.' The reader takes comfort in the thought that, on this occasion, the Pharisees seem to represent a minority voice which, with any luck, won't be heard above the exultant bible-quoting crowd; *'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord'*. Surely, Jesus has the numbers!

At this point, how reassuring are the stones. They are quietly sitting there, as they have for millennia, declaring God's glory in their own stone-like manner. They can be relied on. In fact, they'll take over if and when humans cease to offer their human-like praise, perhaps picking up where they left off. While the people praise God's deeds of power, the stones carry their own wonderfully dynamic story of God's powerful action in creation over geological time.

The stones carry more than inchoate praise. They also carry the groaning and the longing of creation as creation waits for the revealing of the children of God. At one level the stones must despair as they witness human beings in the act of thwarting their own divine destiny yet again and, in doing so, keeping the rest of creation in the thrall of decay. In spite of the human jubilation and expectant hope there is every indication that even this most promising of moments in history is going to end badly.

Peter Martin

Luke 19.28-40

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Monday in Holy Week: Background to Text

The people of Israel were held captive by the Babylonians after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the only hope for escape, Isaiah wrote, would be through God's intervention. The people could not rely on their own initiative, political alliances, material wealth or strength. Isaiah understood theologically that they were being held captive because of the apostasy of Judah under King Ahaz.

To get behind this passage think about how you might feel if you were punished by your parents and sent to your room. What would it feel like when you are allowed out?

This is the first of four "Servant Songs" (see also Isaiah 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). In this song Isaiah announces the coming of God's servant to deliver the people from their captors. A servant whose mission will be to bring forth justice to the nations, to liberate people everywhere from conditions which oppress them, conditions such as sickness, poverty, blindness, and political persecution. This servant will be anointed by God's Spirit. The servant will act with firmness and gentleness until justice is established in the earth.

Explore the terms used to describe this servant's relationship to God (vv. 1-7). See Matthew 3:17. Who is the servant that Isaiah is speaking about (Isaiah 41:9)? What kind of servant have they been (Isaiah 26:17-18)? Why will God's servant 'not shout or cry out'? (See Proverbs 8:1-4; 9:13ff.) What is meant by a bruised reed and smouldering wick (v.3; see 36:6)?

Many recognise characteristics of Jesus ministry in this passage. Have you ever experienced any of these qualities yourself? Acts 13:47 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26 challenge us to apply the term "the servant" to all who call themselves Christian. How does this inform and challenge our own character; our priorities; and our mission?

Geoffrey Traill

[Some of these questions come from Serendipity Bible for Groups. USA. 1981]

Isaiah 42.1-9

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Tuesday in Holy Week: Background to Text

The unnamed Servant ... who is he ? Perhaps an individual "Isaiah" (a name which means "the Lord is salvation"). Perhaps a personification of the "ideal" Israel.

The Servant speaks to a people who have experienced exile, humiliation, hopes dashed. A people who have lost their bearings and who wonder if God has any future for them.

The Servant speaks with a pedigree which he cannot claim any credit for – from a position of not having first himself chosen God, but having been chosen by God. He has received a divine call from before his birth, long before the possibility of any response. He has received a divine call from a God who already knows who His servants will be.

The Servant speaks, conscious of his own inadequacies, and from a poor track record in the face of opposition. He is not feeling up to the task, but he knows the task is not shaped to his own abilities but to God's power.

Thus the Servant speaks, knowing that he is equipped for the task, albeit only with words, but they are words which he will be empowered to speak well and convincingly. They will be sharp words, and they may hurt. They contain hidden potential, and will achieve their purpose long after he has uttered them.

The Servant speaks of a vision more broad and more ambitious than those of the prophets and seers who have preceded him: a vision to be promulgated to way beyond Israel's borders, to the islands of the sea and to other remote places; a vision of God not giving up on His chosen ones and – even more than that – a vision of God directing them to a world-view of God's sovereignty, a world-wide mission: the salvation of all people.

Tim Gibson

Isaiah 49.1-7

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Wednesday in Holy Week: Background to Text

An autobiography frequently reveals the thinking, emotions and fears of a person who has faced great difficulty. In Isaiah 50:4-9a we are allowed into the thoughts and feelings of the Servant as he faces abuse and humiliation as a result of obedience.

The individual who speaks has been formed by God's word. God's word wakes, instructs and teaches him (v4). This individual is only identified as the servant in the postscript (v10). The character of the servant is in stark contrast to the behaviour of Israel. Israel failed to hear God (v2), did not care for others (1:17) and was unable to be taught or to learn (48:8). The servant, in contrast, speaks God's words which sustain others. This is a prophetic task.

The job of a prophet was to confront the idolatrous and godless behaviour of the people. It was a costly task. The obedience of the servant to God's instruction leads to humiliation and abuse (v6). But this servant does not hide his face. Humiliation and shame can be life threatening for some but this prophet is not shamed. Setting his face like flint (v7), a stone so hard it can be used to sharpen knives, communicates strongly that the servant is not humiliated and possesses an inner strength. The source of his inner strength is the Sovereign Lord, repeated 4 times in this passage.

The use of legal language which follows (v8-9) serves to emphasize that the inner strength of the servant comes from the Sovereign Lord. The servant trusts absolutely that the Lord will vindicate him even though it has not happened as yet.

The passage begins with God's instruction and finishes with God's help. This servant is totally dependent on God and like no other.

Philippa Lohmeyer-Collins

Isaiah 50.4-9a

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Maundy Thursday: Background to Text

It's remarkable to think that sharing in a simple meal precedes the two great salvation events of the Old and New Testaments. In Exodus 12 Moses and Aaron are given instructions from the Lord on the Passover Meal. In the Gospels Jesus shares in the Passover Feast. They were both last suppers. They were both suppers that were then established as permanent commemorations for the people of Israel and then the people of the new covenant.

The Passover meal was the culmination of the conflict with Pharaoh and would take place when the tenth and most terrible of plagues was inflicted on Egypt. It was also to be the marker and occasion for the liberation of God's people, their rescue from 430 years of slavery. The meal was simple – a whole roasted lamb to be shared by the whole household. It was to be accompanied by bitter herbs and unleavened bread. It was to be eaten in haste – cloaks tucked into belts, sandals on feet and staff in hand. "Eat it in haste, it is the Lord's Passover" (12:11).

From the broken body of the sacrificial lamb, the shed blood was to be daubed on the sides and tops of the door frames. When the angel of death passed through the land this would be the sign that their household was to be passed over. "No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt" (12:13). The Lord acts and the Passover takes place. The people of God are spared and then rescued from slavery. This meal is then to be commemorated for the generations to come.

The Passover is a powerful reminder of God's commitment to spare and rescue his people. "When your children ask 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes,' (12:26,27). We too pause to remember Jesus' blood that was shed to allow us to be spared and rescued.

The fear of death still haunts humankind and we know that by God's grace we no longer need to be fearful, but by faith we are filled with joy and hope.

Stephen Hale

Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds." (Hebrews 10:19-24 NIV)

Good Friday: Background to Text

Holy Week and our Lord entering Jerusalem: alongside the Suffering Servant. Now to Good Friday and all it signifies. These powerful words from Isaiah chapters 52 and 53 are rich in imagery. What would they have meant for the people of Israel both then and now? Whoever the Jewish people understood the servant to be – individual, Israel, a leader to come or the Messiah figure – the concept of the Suffering Servant is very significant for us as Christians. This passage is the key to our understanding the significance of the life and death of Jesus Christ.

We see in the positive introduction that the servant will prosper and be exalted. And yet he was disfigured and despised and rejected – not because of his own failings and indiscretions, but because of the actions and behaviour of others. In words made famous in song and sacred music, we are reminded that this person was wounded for our transgressions. His voluntary sacrifice of self and resulting loneliness and isolation enabled others to be made whole or restored in their relationship with God. In vivid pictures we see the sheep scattering and running every which way – a common sight in Isaiah's day, as was the offering of the sheep as a sacrifice to God. Aaron sacrificed animals on behalf of the people, while the scapegoat which had the sins of the people placed upon it, was sent off and set free to remind them of the mercy of God reaching out to them (see Leviticus 16: 20-22).

We see in Acts 8: 26-40 the account of the Ethiopian eunuch meeting Philip and coming to understand the Christian message through Philip's explanation of this passage. Peter encouraged believers by quoting from this passage as well – see 1 Peter 2:23-25. As we meditate on these words, may the abundant love and generosity of our Lord Jesus Christ fill our hearts with thankfulness in the midst of the grief and enormity of the Passion.

Bishop Barbara Darling
(We acknowledge that Bishop Barbara went to be with the Lord in 2015)

Isaiah 52.13-53.12

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Holy Saturday: Background to Text

On Holy Saturday, the Church waits at the Lord's tomb, meditating on his suffering and death. As the ancient office hymn conveys:
"His cross stands empty in a world grown silent. Through hours of anguish and of dread; In stillness earth awaits the resurrection while Christ goes down to wake the dead..."

Yet, Holy Saturday is a curious day culturally, even for disciples of Jesus. There is all the excitement of Easter Weddings. Lots of elegance and nervous energy. There are Church mowers going early. People bringing flowers. Away from Church, people are shopping. And, of course, there is plenty of sport: from fishing to football.

It can seem as if Good Friday is all the time we can offer for "watching and praying," Life gets busy again, even for very good reasons... In this context, the lamentation Psalm 31 speaks to our souls anew.

The fact that the Psalms are either lamentations or praise reflects our humanity, across the centuries of difference between ourselves and the people of Israel: our instinctive address to God is one of lament in the face of distress. Even people who never usually pray will cry out to God amidst sufferings which convey our powerlessness.

Such lamentations may lead to a promise of praise of God, even an amendment of life, if God does so rescue us. The most fulsome praise of God in the Psalms comes amidst the experience of rescue. As were the people of Israel, so are we.

Except on Holy Saturday, when we are at the turning-point of all history. The Psalm encourages us to mediate on these questions:

What would life look like if Jesus stayed in the tomb, never to rise? Where would be our hope if God's reconciliation were not accomplished in Christ? To whom would we lament and for what purpose?
Where would be our refuge (vs 1); who would be our rock (vs 2-3), to whom would we commit our spirit (vs 5). Where would be the steadfast love in which we can trust? (vs 6-7).

Psalm 31 on Holy Saturday invites us to ponder what is at stake as the Church waits at the Lord's tomb.

Bishop Philip Huggins

Psalm 31.1-8

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Easter Sunday: Background to Text

Jesus had been crucified. He was dead and hastily yet lovingly buried by followers who risked ridicule and ostracism in doing so. Now, as if signalling a new beginning, 'on the first day of the week, very early in the morning...' other loving and beloved followers came to ensure his body was treated respectfully and with dignity. How shocked were they? Confronted by a vandalised tomb, possibly robbed and desecrated!

Having cautiously entered the stone-cold gloomy space, trying to piece things together, their state was troubled even further. Two unknown men of somewhat transfigured appearance intruded. How should these grieving frightened women react? Was it awe, was it servility, was it fear, or was it some unknown knowing that caused their bow to the ground?

Then, at last, something familiar and comprehensible – human speech. In such a time one would hope for a reassuring statement. Instead, a question, but one pregnant with meaning and hopefulness: 'why are you looking in the place of the dead for someone who is alive?' Soon thereafter followed the reassuring statement, and such an emphatic one – 'he is not here; he has risen!' 'He has risen' – how, what, where, why? All answered by a rehearsal of words and events lodged in their memories but, for good reason, buried. Now truth, reality, hope begin to dawn as does the day, because – 'they remembered his words.'

Reporting to the men who were yet to stir, the women may well have asked 'how can they not believe our exciting news and dismiss it as nonsense?' How indeed – as often it is today.

One man stirred. Peter ran and entered the tomb. To investigate? To confirm? To dispute or to comprehend? No body, but burial wrappings, what could this mean? 'He went away wondering to himself what had happened.'

At this place where time and eternity intersect, the hinge point between this age and the age to come, the seed of the unobserved resurrection event germinates in witnesses of the empty tomb, fertilized by the message of two mysterious men: 'He has risen!'

Bishop Paul White

Luke 24.1-12

Read the text

Reflect on the text

Respond to God in prayer

Remain in God's presence

Return to daily life

Contributors

Philip Freier

John Davis

Richard Trist.

Robert Presland

Colleen O'Reilly

Heather Patacca

Peter Martin

Geoff Traill

Tim Gibson

Philippa Lohmeyer-Collins

Stephen Hale

Barbara Darling

Philip Huggins

Paul White

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