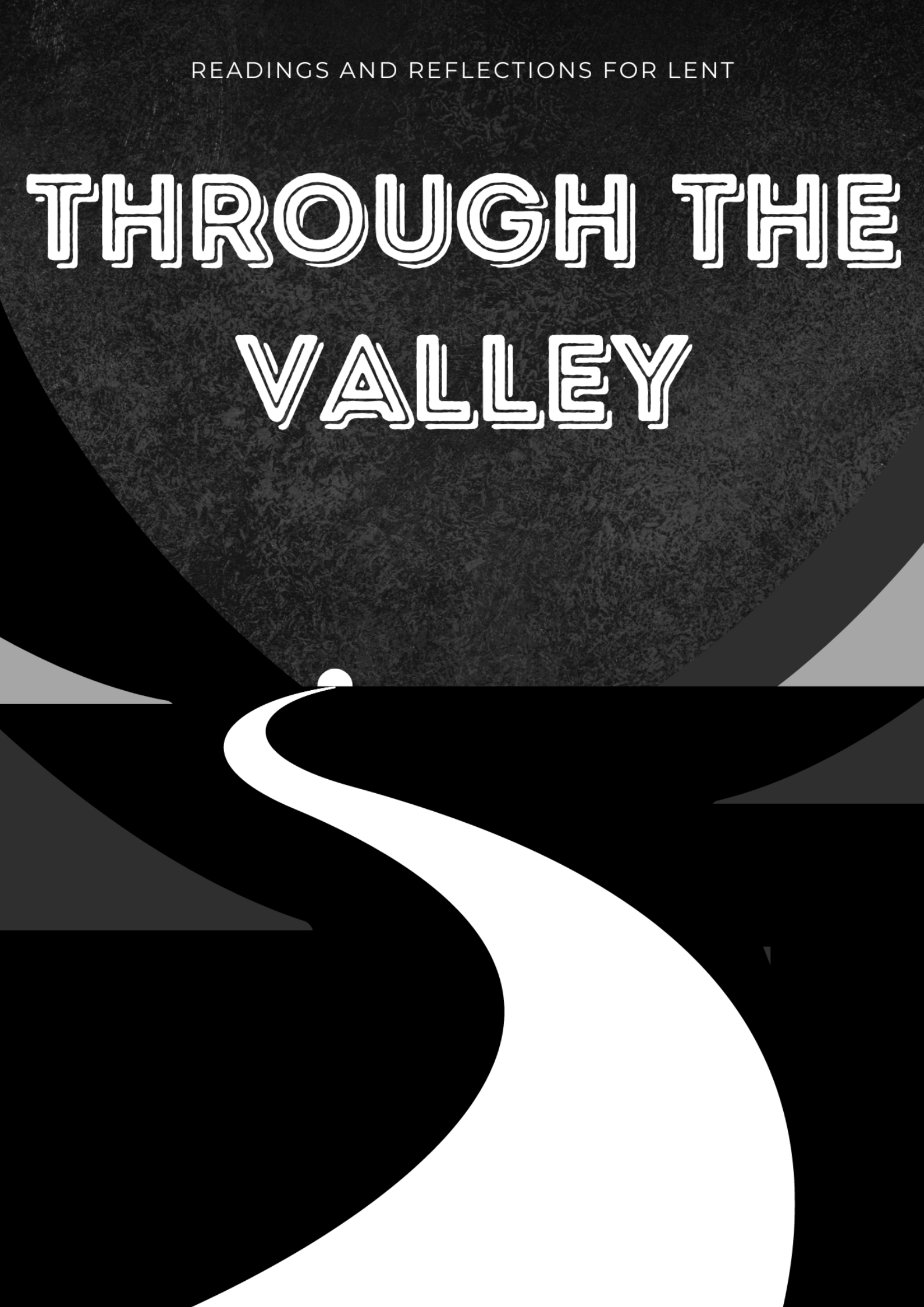


READINGS AND REFLECTIONS FOR LENT

THROUGH THE VALLEY



Day 1: Ash Wednesday

Read

Joel 2:12-13

Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and relents from punishing.

Reflect

Are you considering giving up anything for Lent? It's important to remember that giving something up goes beyond just trying to be "good," such as avoiding chocolate because it's not great for you. We give up certain things to create space for prayer and reflection.

Lent is a time for us to turn our hearts and minds towards God and to answer His call to return to Him fully and completely. As we read in Joel 2:12-13, God is always with us. He seeks us out, but we must actively look to bring our lives where God wants them.

During this season of Lent, remember that being a Christian is not just about following rules or performing outward displays of faith. It's about having a genuine transformation of the heart that leads us to follow Jesus and share His love with the world. As we reflect upon the sacrifice of Jesus and His love for us, let us strive to cultivate a deeper relationship with Him and allow His love to transform us from the inside out.

Perhaps this year, Lent can be a time to focus more on prayer, seeking justice, and asking God to turn our hearts towards Him rather than just giving something up.

Pray

Lord, this Lent, guide me beyond mere sacrifices. Turn our hearts to you. May my actions reflect real change, giving us a deeper connection to you helping spread your love. Amen.

Day 2

Read

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written,

"One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." '

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
"He will command his angels concerning you",

and "On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written,
"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him." '

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Reflect

It is a fact of the human condition that we are daily confronted with the issue of temptation. We convince ourselves that these temptations are inconsequential because they will not cause harm to ourselves, or to anyone else. However, allowing ourselves to follow the path of temptation, no matter how 'inconsequential' we may consider it to be, is to step out onto a dangerous path. Jesus, at the direction of the Spirit, allowed Himself to be truly tempted by Satan. Not only did He resist the temptation, He also left a model for us to follow when we are tempted: trust God, know God's Word, have God's priorities.

Prayer

Father we thank you for your example to us, when we are tempted to sin bring to our minds the need to trust in you. Amen

Day 3

Read

Psalm 51:1-3 and 10-12

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Reflect

I wonder if this psalm feels familiar to you.

The writer has done something foolish, impulsive, something they knew was a bad idea; something they knew, in their heart of hearts, was wrong. But now it is done, and there's no undoing it. It feels like it follows you everywhere you go, like everywhere you turn your sin is already there in front of you. It's a lonely, scary place to be. But it's not the end of the road. There is always time to turn to God, to bring our sins into the light, and to ask for God's mercy and forgiveness. It's not easy to say when we've done something wrong, but when we're in that lonely, scary place, it is the only path back to peace. The writer asks God to give them a clean heart and a right spirit, to wash away the wrong that they have done, and help them to live differently now and in the future. Lent is a time for reflection, and as we reflect, we will all find things in our lives that need God's forgiveness. Have confidence that God will give you a clean heart, and will strengthen your spirit every time you pray.

Prayer

O God, I trust in your endless mercy and love for me. Help me to have the courage to admit when I have done wrong, and give me the wisdom and strength to do better each day. Amen.

Day 4

Read

Isaiah 58

Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.

Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?

Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?

Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Reflect

In the time of Isaiah, the Israelites were doing all sorts of religious activities, such as offering sacrifices in the temple or observing the required fasts. But God was not pleased with their religiosity because they were neglecting justice and mercy. The “fasting” God desired for his people included freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, and caring for the material needs of the poor. God continues to be honoured in our deeds of compassion and justice. As James writes in his New Testament letter, “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you” (1:27). We don’t do such deeds in order to earn God’s salvation, but rather as a response to his grace. When we care for the poor in God’s name, he receives our actions as worship that honours him.

QUESTION

In what ways are you honouring God by caring for the poor or seeking justice for the oppressed?

What might you do this week to respond to Isaiah 58?

PRAY

Merciful God, help us to engage in the kind of “fasting” that you desire. May your church be on the front lines of caring for the poor and seeking justice for the oppressed. Forgive us, Lord, when we get so wrapped up in our “religious stuff” that we fail to seek justice and love mercy.

Day 5

Read

Mark 1:9-15

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven:

“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted [g] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Reflect

Following Jesus is no easy task.

Do you turn to Christ?

Do you repent of your sins?

Do you renounce evil?

Baptism is an outward sign of an inner change that we are reborn as God's children, and are made followers of Christ, members of his body the church, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

At Jesus' baptism, three events occur simultaneously, Jesus rises out from water, as the Spirit descends upon him like a dove, and a voice from heaven declares, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased." This reveals the three persons of the trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the relationship and unity between them. Jesus fulfils the decree and will of the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

If we want to follow Jesus, we too will need to be baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit so we can face and overcome temptation and accomplish God's will and purpose in our lives.

Pray

Father God speak to us, Lord Jesus guide us, Holy Spirit renew us, Amen.

Day 6

Read

Psalm 103

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live*
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Reflect

Forgiveness is hard! Especially if we want to forgive ourselves for past mistakes and hurt.

This Psalm calls us to remember that God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, which is good news when we can see ourselves beyond forgiveness.

We see that God not only forgives our sins but also casts them far away, so far they are as if forgotten. This is a powerful reminder that when we seek forgiveness from God, we are truly forgiven. There is no need for us to hold bitterness towards ourselves for the mistakes we have made. Instead, we should learn to forgive ourselves just as God has forgiven us.

Forgiving ourselves can be difficult, but it is essential for our spiritual growth. When we hold onto our mistakes and sins, we prevent ourselves from fully experiencing God's love and forgiveness. We must remember that we are human and will make mistakes. However, through God's grace, we can learn and grow from those mistakes.

Pray

Jesus, you know and love me. Help me to realise that when I ask for your love and forgiveness, it is freely given, and I am set free. Amen

Day 7

Read

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

Focus

Do you ever think about the people who may avoid you? It's quite easy to think about who you may avoid, but who may avoid you may take some thought. Sometimes, we can live in a world where we believe we are better than others or where others are better than us. Through this parable God reminds us that we should not focus on the sin of others. Instead, we should concentrate on ourselves and our relationship with God. The Pharisee in the parable was so focused on the sins of others that he failed to see his shortcomings. He was prideful and self-righteous, thinking that he was better than others because he followed the law more strictly. In contrast, the tax collector recognised his sinfulness and humbly asked for God's mercy. We should do the same. We should approach God humbly, acknowledging that we are all sinners needing His forgiveness. We shouldn't compare ourselves to others or judge them for their sins. Instead, we should focus on our relationship with God and strive to be more like Him daily. We should also not concern ourselves with the Pharisees of the world but have a focus on God

Prayer

God, of all compassion, have mercy on me when I judge others. Help turn my heart towards compassion for all and humility for myself. Amen.

Day 8

Read

Isaiah 43:18-19

Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

Reflect

Lent as wilderness - If you are..?

Self-denial;
Wilderness temptation?
The tempter taunts,
'If you are the Son of ...'

Go on – deny yourself.

Stones to bread –
Good Magician person?
Pinnacle leap –
With signs of 'death-defying'?

Go on – deny yourself.

Retirement is
Wilderness temptation.
'who are you now?'
Lost in the fog maybe.

Go on – deny yourself;

Give up the chocolate or the wine.
And question who you might become.

Not just finding
Bearings, landmarks,
But find yourself
'past roles' stripped away.

Go on – deny yourself.

Wilderness calls
Accusers to test us.
Actively on trial, followed
By still reflection.

Go on – deny yourself.

Can't gain myself
If I pass the buck
To the accuser:
Like worship them instead.

Go on – deny yourself.

Wilderness is
How we are, many times.
It both shapes us
And cries out to be shaped. - Joe Hasler

Pray

Lord God help me hold on to the promise that you will
bring us home even if around we see wilderness. Amen.

Day 9

Read

Matthew 6:1-6,16-18

‘Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

‘So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

‘And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

‘And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Reflect

I was driving to a church service entirely on autopilot the other day, and it got me thinking about why am I doing what I am doing. Am I going because it's a time to meet with God and others or because of a sense of stuck duty? At that point, it was a stuck duty, but as I do, I spoke to God and asked that I see my journey and attitude differently.

Today's reading also calls us to reflect on our motives for belonging to the Christian faith. Are we here because it looks good or because it's what we have always done? Are we here to impress others or to cultivate a deeper relationship with Christ?

In Matthew 6:1-6, 16- 18, Jesus warns us against doing good deeds to be seen by others and receive recognition. The same warning can be applied to our attendance at church. It is easy to fall into the trap of going to church because it is the thing to do or because we fear being judged by others. However, this misses the point of Christianity.

Christianity is not about social standing or appearances but should be pure and driven by a desire to deepen our relationship with Jesus.

Pray

God of all truth guide me not just to look good on the outside but be a true follower of you. Help heal the hypocrisy of my heart. Amen

Day 10

Read

Psalm 32

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Reflect

This psalm helps us to see how we can confess our sins to God and the freedom that comes from doing that. With sin comes feelings of guilt, and that can only be addressed when we take our sins to God, confess and seek His forgiveness. David is our spiritual "stain detective" as he counsels us how to remove the stain of sin in our lives. No matter what sin has marred your life, David directs us to the same solution. Forgiveness is found in God alone. David is excited about forgiveness and wants everyone to shout about it!

Pray

Gracious and loving God, open our hearts so that we are able to admit to you the fullness of our lives – that which is beautiful and good, and that which is hurtful and hateful. **Amen**

Day 11

Read

Luke 9: 23-27

Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.'

Reflect

To embrace the cross, is to accept the will of God.

We cannot escape the cross. It is where truth and reality meet. As disciples the cross is imperative to experience; not that we are nailed to a cross, but the sufferings of life become the cross that we must and will bear. The apostle Paul, wrote that '... we are conformed to the image of Christ through suffering'. I am not saying we should look for suffering, no, certainly not. However, God will fit us a cross according to his will and purpose.

But why you may ask? So that we would become aware of our own frailties, know ourselves better and be fitted to help others through what we have experienced. There is purpose and fulfilment in bearing the cross. Jesus' destiny was the cross, he suffered and died for us.

Through the giving of his life, we can experience life in the Holy Spirit. We cannot experience the life-giving power of the Spirit and a life with God, without the cross. God will fit us a cross, and give us the grace to bear it.

Pray

Father, we thank you for the example of Jesus, help us to give ourselves to your will, knowing that the cross we are called to bear will bring about your purpose and glory, and our salvation. Amen.

Day 12

Read

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely* goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

Reflect

Do you have someone in your life who has always been there? Through thick and thin, the ups and downs, who has been there when you've had problems of your creation or where things outside your control have happened? If you have a person like this, they are an invaluable true friend. Usually, they become more like family.

In this psalm, which contains the line where we take the book's name, we are reminded that we have a God who walks with us in the ups and downs of life, in the good and the bad, in the times of Joy. Even when death becomes too real and seems to cover and surround us, the psalmist reminds us that we have a God who looks after us and cares for us.

Life can all too often feel like we walk through a dark valley, especially if we look at what is happening in the world at the moment. As we journey through Lent, we look at ourselves and our world and ask God for forgiveness to turn our hearts towards him as we walk through life. Remember that we have a God who journeys with us as a good father and shepherd. He loves, protects, and journeys with us until he brings us home.

Pray

God, my Good Shepherd, lead me close to you so that I may know your presence with me even if I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Amen

Day 13

Read

Psalm 51:10-17

Create in me a clean heart,
O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed,
O God, O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering,
you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.

Reflect

This Psalm is a prayer of repentance and a plea for God's mercy. The Psalmist, king David, acknowledges his sin and asks for God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him. It is a reminder to us all that we are all sinners and need God's help to cleanse and renew our spirits. It is a plea for God to transform us from the inside out. Does this reflect how you feel today? Do you long for God to transform your life? Are you holding onto something that is causing you pain, ashamed of the way you behaved or a regret about something you have said perhaps? David realised that nothing will please God except a contrite heart, a heart that is not only sorry but one that is also ready not to seek what we want but to surrender to God's will. Only when we surrender to God's will, only when we offer to God our broken hearts as our sacrifice, can God renew us, heal us, and restore us. Is your heart ready for this?

Pray

Lord, I cannot hide anything from you, you know me inside and out. Like David, I cry out to you now, come into my heart, change me, release me from the pain of the past and lead me with your spirit to walk your way for my life, Amen.

Day 14

Read

Mark 8:31-33

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Reflect

Get behind me Satan! These are some harsh words from Jesus to Peter who seems to be wanting what is best for Jesus - for him not to suffer! Peter could not see the bigger picture or at least didn't want to. Jesus was going to the cross to reconcile God with humanity to bring life, forgiveness and closeness to God like never before.

The Christian faith is full of challenges, like Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. That leads to our forgiveness even though we don't deserve it. That leads to another challenge: Jesus also asks us to forgive others, which can sometimes seem impossible. Like Peter, we can try to argue or make another point, but at the end of the day, all it becomes is excuses that block us from God's plan and the fullness of life for us. Sometimes, we need to ask God for us to see the bigger picture to get ourselves out of the way.

Following God may lead us to question where we are going and maybe have others actively try to discourage us. Hold on to where God is leading you and ask God to help guide you; ask God to help you get out of your own way. It may not seem very easy, but it is where the fullness of life may be found.

Pray

Lord, guide me to follow you even if the journey seems uncertain or impossible. Let me trust that you lead me where I need to be, and it's where true life may be found.
Amen

Day 15

Read

Matthew 25:31-46

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Reflect

This reading reminds us of our call to serve others and to care for those in need to be a light in the world for Jesus. Jesus teaches that when we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and care for the sick and imprisoned, we serve Him.

Reflecting on our lives and relationship with God, this parable reminds us of the importance of loving and serving others. It is easy to get caught up in our own lives and concerns, but this parable challenges us to look beyond ourselves and see the needs of those around us.

When we take the call to look after those in need seriously, we are helping others and growing in our relationship with God. We are learning to see the face of Jesus in those who are hungry, thirsty, sick, and imprisoned. We are learning to love as Jesus loves and serve as He did.

How can you serve and see Jesus's face on those marginalised in our society today?

Pray

Lord God, Help us see your face in all those in need in our society and love them as you love us. Forgive us when we fail to look after the least and renew our hearts into ones of service. Amen.

Day 16

Read

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Test me and know my anxious thoughts;
And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

Reflect

Searching is more than just observing what is going on. When we search, we are looking with intent and purpose to find an object or the evidence we are looking for. A strategic approach and process may well make the task of searching long and difficult, and one where no stone is left unturned. While we are searching, we have no idea of the outcome. Will we find what we are looking for? Or not? Will we be joyfully rewarded or sadly disappointed?

“Search me, O God,” The psalmist’s invitation and prayer shows courage and trust in God and a willingness to be examined and tested.

We can live and travel through life by simply responding to what is happening around us, without really thinking about what motivates us and what our own intentions are. We can carry concerns and worries within our hearts that can sometimes prevent us from moving forward and reaching our true and full potential. We have such a mixture of feelings and emotions, and it is not easy to know or find the truth about ourselves. Like the psalmist, we can pause and reflect in prayer to discover the desires of our hearts and find the immense amount of God’s love and grace in our lives.

Pray- Examen

- Get comfortable and ask God to be with you.
- Pray to understand how God is acting in your life.
- Review your day – recall moments and your feelings
- Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances.

Day 17

Read

Luke 15:11-32

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

Reflect

The Parable of the Lost Son, shows how people get lost sometimes by living a rebellious and sinful life. But we are never so lost that God cannot find us. And when someone who is lost because of sin turns away from that sin, there will be a great celebration to welcome him home again!

This is how it is with God when we repent and turn away from our sins.

When we set out to return to Him, He is already running to meet us. He is already celebrating, because more than anything else, God wants everyone to be part of His kingdom. Sometimes we turn our backs on our true home—God's kingdom—but He will always celebrate when we humble ourselves and return to Him.

Pray

Dear God, I pray for a world that doesn't know you. I pray for those who are lost. God show yourself to those who don't believe. Allow me to be a source of your light to those who need you. **Amen**

Day 18

Read

Isaiah 55:6-9

Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Reflect

Through Lent, we are reminded of our need for repentance and forgiveness. Saying sorry is hard. It takes humility and trust. The good news is we have a God who forgives us no matter what we have done as long as we come humbly to God looking to change. But why does God forgive? How can God forgive?

The passage also reminds us that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours and that we may not always understand his love and forgiveness. It can be tempting to try and make God fit into a box of our understanding, to want to believe in a God we can fully comprehend. But the truth is, God is God, and his ways are beyond our knowledge.

The good news is that even though God's boundless love may be confusing to us, it is still good news! God's love is not limited by our understanding or ability to comprehend it. It is a love that surpasses all understanding and is freely given to us through Jesus Christ.

Let us remember that God's love and forgiveness need not make sense to us because God is God. Let us trust in his ways, seek him with all our hearts, and rest in knowing that his love for us is boundless and everlasting.

Pray

Help me God know your forgiveness and trust that your love and ways are more than I could ever know, Amen

Day 19

Read

Matthew 4:23-25

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.

Focus

Jesus was more than just a good teacher or prophet or wise man. He was also God come among us, the word made flesh. He performed miracles in one way to demonstrate what the kingdom of God is like – a place where all may find healing and wholeness.

As we face difficult times today, we can turn to Jesus for healing in all areas of our lives – physically, mentally, and spiritually. We can pray to him for restoration and wholeness, just as the people in Galilee did. Jesus is still healing today; we can trust him to bring wholeness to our brokenness.

It's important to remember that healing can come in many forms. While physical healing is certainly a part of it, Jesus is also concerned with our mental and spiritual well-being. We can pray for peace amid anxiety, clarity amid confusion, and strength amid weakness. Whatever our situation, we can trust that Jesus can bring healing and wholeness. As we pray, we can find our hearts and attitudes changed even if it may seem physically nothing has. Come to Jesus with whatever we suffer from, and he will meet us, bringing the change we need.

Pray

God of all health and life, bring me wholeness and healing in the midst of my pain and suffering. Amen

Day 20

Read

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh— my adversaries and foes— they shall stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

Reflect

“It is so dark. I can’t see anything.” A person who doesn’t know about Jesus or what he has done is living in spiritual darkness—spiritual separation from God. That is what unbelief is. It is darkness—spiritual darkness.

There is no light, no forgiveness, no salvation, no hope, no peace, no joy.

In this darkness we are unable to turn on the light of salvation ourselves. If by chance we realise our sinfulness, we might ask, "Is there anyone out there who can remove this darkness, remove this guilt, remove this hopelessness, remove this separation from God?"

The answer is YES.

- The one who is "the light for the nations."
- The one who has brought salvation to all people.
- The one who was conceived by the Holy Spirit as the true God yet born of a virgin as a true man.
- This is the one of whom Simeon spoke as he was holding the baby Jesus in his arms.

When you were baptised with the water and the Word, the light of faith was turned on. The blindness of unbelief was turned off, and spiritual life began. You received what Jesus did for you when he lived, suffered, died and rose again for you. Salvation is yours. Forgiveness is yours. Eternal hope is yours. Eternal peace is yours. Eternal joy is yours. The eternal light has been turned on for you. You and I need to grow in this light. Continue to use the means of Grace, the Gospel in the Word, and Sacraments. Don't keep this salvation to yourself. Share this good news! Who can I share this Good News with?

PRAY

Thank you, Jesus, for being my Saviour. By your Holy Spirit, you brought me out of the darkness of unbelief to the light of salvation. Keep me in this light of salvation, and guide and direct me with your Word and sacraments. Help me to share this Gospel message to the ends of the earth. Amen.

Day 21

Read

Mark 10:17-27

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother." ' He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Focus

This passage challenges us to examine our lives and consider what we love. Are we too attached to our possessions or wealth? Do we prioritize our material possessions over our relationship with God? The young man in this story was unwilling to relinquish his wealth, even for the promise of eternal life.

Jesus' response to the young man reminds us that true wealth comes from following Him. The things of this world will pass away, but our relationship with Him will endure. As we reflect on this passage, let us ask ourselves what we love and what we are willing to give up for the sake of following Jesus. May we be willing to let go of anything between Him and us, and may we find true wealth in our relationship with Him?

Pray

Lord Jesus, guide me to value what is important in this life and lead me to find treasure in your love and grace.
Amen,

Day 22

Read

Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,

they shall mount up with wings like eagles,

they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Reflect

How are you feeling today? If you are feeling tired and weary, this beautiful passage is for you. It speaks of God's infinite power and strength. The beginning of it reminds us that God is all-powerful and that we can trust in God to provide us with the strength we need to face life's challenges. Life challenges can wear us down, we can easily become dispirited about a project that's not working or prayer that doesn't seem to be answered. If this sounds like you, take heart, you are not on your own. Our faith journey, like our journey through Lent is a marathon not a sprint, and there will be times when we struggle. During these times we need to lean on God and trust God more. This passage can be as a source of comfort and hope for us as it reminds us that not only God provides us with the strength to face our obstacles, but also God gives us the strength we need to overcome them. So, if you are feeling tired or weary today, take comfort in these words of Isaiah, and remember that God is with you, giving you the strength, you need, to face whatever comes your way.

Pray

Lord God, I pray that as I rest trustfully in you, as I wait for you, you would renew my strength. Help me to soar like an eagle, and run and not be weary, and walk and not faint as I continue my journey through Lent. Give me the courage and strength I need to face life's challenges. I pray this according to your word, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 23

Read

Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

Reflect

Weary. It's a word that takes us beyond tired, beyond worn out, to a heaviness in your body and mind that sleep alone can't cure. When you're carrying a burden that you can't put down, something you can't stop thinking about, or even worrying about, it can feel impossible to rest. Jesus' words can feel very far away: come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

These are the moments we most need to hear Jesus' voice, when we feel exhausted and fearful of resting, even for a minute. We need to learn from Jesus' gentleness, and offer that gentleness to ourselves. Rest is part of God's plan for all of creation, so rest is part of God's plan for you.

How do we find the rest we need? Jesus invites us to be yoked alongside him like horses to a cart or oxen to a plough; to allow him to share our burdens with us. When we walk together with Jesus, his strength overcomes our weakness, and our heavy burdens become light. They do not disappear, but we are able to manage them. We are no longer weary, for our souls find rest in Jesus.

Pray

Jesus, I am tired, and I want to find rest. Help me to cling less tightly to my burdens so that you can carry them with me; help me to walk alongside you and rest in your strength. Amen.

Day 24

Read

Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

Reflect

This passage is used occasionally in funeral services, and you can see why it speaks of Hope and God removing pain and death from existence. When God makes all things new when he returns to earth, Jesus will make all things well.

I find comfort in the idea that all the pain and suffering we experience in this world will be but a distant memory.. It is easy to get bogged down in the trials and tribulations of this life, but this passage reminds us that there is a greater hope to hold onto.

The image of God making all things new is a reminder that no matter how broken or damaged things may seem, there is always potential for restoration and renewal. This promise is not just for individuals but for all of creation. God cares deeply about the world he has created and desires to see it flourish.

Holding onto the promise of a better future gives us the strength to endure the struggles of now. It reminds us that there is more to life than what we can see and experience now. The promise of a new heaven and earth gives us a glimpse into the character of God – one who is loving, compassionate, and always working for our good.

Pray

God meet me in my fear and pain and help me trust that you will make all things good. Amen.

Day 25

Read

Luke 11:1-4

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

Reflect

In the silence of the prayer

In the silence of the prayer,
All-consuming quietness
Conveys free and boundless eternity.

In the silence of the prayer,
All-embracing stillness
Is a moving wind of empathy.

In the silence of the prayer,
All-consuming adoration
Fills our soul with certainty.

In the silence of the prayer
Sometimes sounds pervade;
Irrespective of volume, exceptionally.

In the silence of the prayer,
Interruption is not a noise,
But stifled sense of stillness.

Piercing sounds as aggravated anger,
Inflicted bruising unneeded busy-ness,
Punctured peace feels like protest.

The noise maybe barely audible,
With items dropped not placed,
Or our bodies; careless and involuntary.

In the silence of the prayer,
Very quiet disruption
Violently disturbs rarely found infinity.

In the prayerful sense of heaven
Does beauty, wonder and appreciation
Embrace the angry protest of the busy?

Is the silence of our prayer
An envelope which brings
Petitions and shortcomings, alongside our adoration?
- Joe Hasler

Pray

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily
bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those
who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Day 26

Read

Isaiah 1:16-20

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed,
defend the orphan,
plead for the widow.

Come now, let us argue it out,
says the Lord:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;
but if you refuse and rebel,
you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Reflect

I got ink on one of my vestments, my best surplice. Getting that off was tough. Until Lucy, a lovely lady in church, said to give it to her when I get it back. Not only was the stain gone, but the stitching was fixed, and it was ironed the crispest it had ever been. I needed a higher power. I needed 82-year-old Lucy.

Today's reading calls for us to turn to God for forgiveness and love and then show them to others. When we turn to Jesus and ask for his forgiveness, we are granted the opportunity to start anew and remove the evil that has taken root in our hearts, not by what we do but through the grace of God. It's not how good we are; it all comes down to God's deep love. We can't do it alone; we need a higher power.

True repentance and righteousness go beyond asking for forgiveness and avoiding sin. We must also take action to ensure we live rightly after caring for those in need properly; just as Jesus has rescued us from our sins, we must look to be God's love and rescue in the world to those in need. When we repent and turn to Jesus' righteousness, we become more loving, compassionate, and understanding towards others. We start seeing the world differently and acknowledge every person's inherent value and worth.

Pray

Jesus forgive me where I have failed and care for my neighbour may I know love for them through your love for me. Amen

Day 27

Read

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Reflect

I am struck by how God's Kingdom operates in an upside-down paradoxical system in this reading. It's a system that challenges the norms of our world, where success is often measured by how big, clear or great one is. Instead, God's Kingdom values humility, meekness, and those who struggle. Through those struggles, we are blessed and experience the presence of God. This is a powerful reminder that God's ways are not our ways, and to experience the Kingdom fully, we must be willing to surrender our worldly aspirations and trust in God's plan for our lives. It's not an easy path, but when we do, we will find comfort, joy, and peace amid our struggles. May we all strive to embrace the paradoxical system of God's Kingdom and find blessing amid our challenges.

Pray

Blessed are those who seek your ways, O Lord. Grant us humility, meekness, and strength to embrace your upside-down Kingdom. Amen.

Day 28

Read

Psalm 103:8-12

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love
towards those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.

Reflect

How do you see God? I know that's a big question but just pause for a moment and think about it. Sometimes we make God in our own image rather than remembering that we are created in God's image. We put our thoughts about God on God rather than giving God the opportunity to reveal God's nature to us. If we grow up with an overbearing parent, that punishes us every time we do something wrong, we may come to believe that God, as our divine parent, will do likewise. Psalm 103 reminds us of God's real nature, that God is full of compassion and forgiveness. Perhaps you are thinking that there is something that God won't forgive me for, but you would be wrong. We might feel that we deserve to be punished and so we end up hurting ourselves and in doing we hurt those around us. But is this what God would want? God loves us unconditionally, whatever we have done; we are never outside God's compassion or forgiveness. Just pause for a moment and let that sink in! We cannot earn this; it is a gift of grace. God's forgiveness releases us to love, and God asks us to go and do likewise.

Pray

Lord, I thank you with all my being for your grace, compassion, and forgiveness towards me. I ask you to help me to show these same qualities in my own life and towards all those I meet. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Day 29

Read

2 Corinthians 13:5

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed.

But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong —not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Reflect

When was the last time you took a moment to reflect on your life? In our fast-paced world, it's easy to get caught up in the daily grind and forget about what's truly important. It's important to remember to take some time to be still and reflect on what matters most.

St. Paul, who always has a way with words in his letter to the Corinthians, encourages us to do just that. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, he asks us to examine ourselves and our behaviour. This may not be an easy task or done tactfully, but it invites us to reflect deeply on our lives. We must be honest with ourselves and ask if we live as we should be.

This reflection isn't just about our relationship with God but also with others. Are we treating those around us with kindness and respect? Are we being the best versions of ourselves that we can be? These are all critical questions to ask ourselves.

Taking the time to reflect on our lives and behaviour can be a humbling experience, but it can also be transformative. It allows us to see where we need to improve and what changes we need to make. So take some silence and ask yourself, are you living as you should? And what can you do about it?

Pray

Open my eyes, God, to where I am not living right. Give me space to stop, reflect on myself, and help me lead a life worthy of you. Amen.

Day 30

Read

Matthew 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflect

We all like our stuff, and there is nothing wrong with that. Being dual citizens, are we sending some of our stuff ahead of us?

It would seem from this passage; this would be plausible. We need to ask God to help us to have the faith, to practice what is revealed here. We are to have our focus on our eternal home, and not be building treasures up on earth. There are not many of us called to give everything away, but to be good stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

Where is our focus?

Where do we spend our time?

To be released from stuff can be liberating. However, it is only God who can help us to make the transition from an earthly focus to the heavenly. The season of Lent is sobering as it makes us face our mortality.

Throughout this season, let us be aware that in helping others we are storing up treasures in heaven.

Pray

Lord help us to be faithful stewards of what you have entrusted to us, for all we have is yours. Help us to be kingdom focused. Amen.

Day 31

Read

Psalm 32:8-11

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.
Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Reflect

I can be so stubborn. Changing my mind can be hard, usually when I think I am right. But this can backfire, especially if I turn out to be wrong. It can be hard to admit the mistake.

Stubbornness is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can be a helpful trait that allows us to stand up for our beliefs without being taken advantage of. On the other hand, it can cause us to become isolated and disconnected from others, including from God. The Bible teaches us to turn away from our stubbornness and to rely on God for guidance and support.

In Psalm 32:8-11, God promises to teach us and instruct us in the way we should go and to counsel us with his loving eye on us. This reminds us that we are not alone and have a loving God who wants to guide us in the right direction. As we reflect on our lives, may we be open to God's gentle guidance and choose to let go of our stubbornness so that we can experience the fullness of life that God has in store for us.

Pray

God, please soften my heart so that I may be open to listening to where you are leading and learn when to stand firm and let go of my opinion. Amen.

Day 32

Read

Luke 12:22-34

He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflect

This passage of Scripture is from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is teaching a large crowd about what it means to be a follower of God. He is inviting them to be transformed and to live as members of His kingdom. This is not the kind of kingdom that the people were expecting. In fact, much of what Jesus has said prior to this section in His sermon has probably been surprising to His hearers. He has turned upside down many of their, and our, preconceived ideas, about what it means to be a follower of God.

In this passage of Scripture Jesus addresses a problem common to all people: the issue of worry. Jesus wants His listeners to understand there are many more important things about life than worrying about how we look on the outside. Jesus is much more concerned with His followers tending to the inner things of life. Everyone can think of a time when worry controlled their thinking. When we are being ruled by worry, we cannot be a part of the Kingdom of God. Worry works against faith in the Lord.

Where is your treasure? You can't take it with you so what are you living for?

PRAYER:

Dear Jesus, Our lives are filled with many things we worry about. With all the problems in the world around us we find it hard not to worry. Draw us close to You. We trust You. We want our lives to be lasting, our treasures to be in heaven, and our satisfaction to be in living our lives with You. Amen

Day 33

Read

1 Thessalonians 5:12-21

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

Reflect

Practising Praying

In your warming rays of light
I feel the shadows go from sight,
The darkened corners dissipate,
Dissolved in love, incorporate
Within your holding tight.

In your warming rays of heat,
While gazing at your holy feet
The comfort of your closeness is
Your breath, and radiant qualities,
The coldness of my heart, defeat.

In your rays of gentleness
My heart is moved and so confess
I need the truth; you being there
For my desires to need repair
Of scattered broken-ness.

In the warming rays of prayer
I only know that you are there,
The light and heat, in gentleness
Lift me up, so I profess
To try to love and care.

Pray

Help me, God, pray genuinely and honestly to you so that
I may know the warmth of my prayerful communion
with you. Amen.

Day 34: Palm Sunday

Read

Matthew 5:13-16

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Reflect

Jesus challenges us all to be salt and light – to influence the world, and to be seen to be doing so. I'm still learning how to do this. What about you?

Salt and light

Yesterday, you were my God
I saw you, in the eyes of a stranger
I heard you, in their indignation
And I felt you, in their sorrow
And I did nothing

Today, you are my God
I saw you, growing my garden
I heard you rustling through the trees
And I felt your warmth, on my face
And I smiled

Tomorrow, you'll still be my God
I will see you, if I dare to look
I will hear you, if I am still
And I will feel you, working within my heart
For you are the same God

Pray

Yesterday, today, and forever help me to be salt, to those who need to taste, and light to those who are lost in their own darkness **Amen.**

Day 35

Read

Psalm 139 1-14

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the
light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as
bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.
For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit
me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very
well.

Reflect

As we travel through the season of Lent, we have before us the fact that as creatures, we are dependent on our Creator. We might think that the 'world revolves around us', but it does not. The Almighty in his mercy chooses to reveal himself to us. This is a God, like no other, who knows what he wants and how it will come about. 'Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you, the days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day'. We have nowhere to run and no where to hide. Come clean, know that God loves us and has prepared a life for us to live. Yes, we were created for his will and purpose. As a loving Father, who knows us better than we know ourselves. Lent is owning that we have a place in God's plan, to 'remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return....' but while we are here, to live with purpose, with the Spirit's energy to accomplish '... all those good works which thou hast prepared for us to walk in;...'.

Pray

Almighty God, we thank you for your grace and mercy, making known to us your love and that you are the definitive Creator, Redeemer and Judge.

Day 36

Read

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?'

Reflect

There's no doubt about it, this is a challenging reading. The gospel writer Luke tries to soften it by telling us at the beginning that it's about the need to pray always and not to lose heart, but the parable itself is a confrontation between a widow crying out for justice over and over again, and the disrespectful judge who eventually gives in just to make her be quiet. The comparison is stark – how much more will our just and loving God grant justice to us when we pray?

Yet many people will have the experience of praying with all their heart for something, and not seeing anything change. God's quick justice can feel slow, even absent, when you're praying and praying for something you aren't receiving. There is no easy answer to this feeling. We know that sometimes God answers prayers in unexpected ways, always God answers prayers in God's own time, and sometimes the answer to our deepest prayers is no, or not now.

Jesus asks if he will find faith on earth. I wonder whether one demonstration of that faith is that even when it feels hopeless, or our prayers feel lost or unanswered, we continue to pray.

Pray

O God, you are just and true, and faithful in all your ways. Help me to pray faithfully, to trust in your goodness and power, and to pay attention to the many ways that you might answer my prayers. Amen.

Day 37

Read

Isaiah 53:1-9

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Reflect

Man of sorrows, Lamb of God
By His own betrayed
The sin of man and wrath of God
Has been on Jesus laid

**Oh, that rugged cross, my salvation
Where Your love poured out over me
Now my soul cries out, "Hallelujah"
"Praise and honour unto Thee"**

Silent as He stood accused
Beaten, mocked, and scorned
Bowing to the Father's will
He took a crown of thorns **R**

Sent of heaven God's own Son
To purchase and redeem
And reconcile the very ones
Who nailed Him to that tree **R**

Now my debt is paid
It is paid in full
By the precious blood
That my Jesus spilled
Now the curse of sin
Has no hold on me **R**

Pray

Jesus, keep us faithful to you. When our faith is tested,
may we not betray your trust. May we always be your
servants, even in times of suffering. **Amen.**

Day 38: Maundy Thursday

Read

Matthew 26:20–30

When it was evening, he (Jesus) took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Reflect

On Maundy Thursday, we are reminded that we are all guilty of not following Jesus. Despite our best efforts, we fall short of the glory of God. However, this is not a reason to despair. Today, we are also reminded that we are all served, loved, and given the chance to know Jesus and follow him.

Jesus demonstrated this love by washing his disciples' feet, a humble act of service that symbolized his selflessness and willingness to do whatever it took to show his love for us.

As we consider our shortcomings and failures, remember that we are not alone. We have a saviour who loves and is willing to serve us, even when we do not deserve it. We are called to follow his example, serve others, and find life in him.

This Maundy Thursday, let us reflect on the love and sacrifice of Jesus and strive to follow his example every day of our lives. May we always remember that we are loved, served, and given the chance to know and follow him, no matter how many times we fall short.

PRAY

God of all forgiveness, help us turn to you and recognise where we have betrayed what it means to be your disciple. May we learn to serve as you serve us, love and forgive as you love and forgive us. Amen.

Day 39: Good Friday

Read

Psalm 51:16-19

For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Reflect

We all have thoughts and feelings about, well, our thoughts and feelings. But if we are critical of ourselves for thinking depressing thoughts or feeling sad, we might become even more distressed because we are thinking and feeling that way. We reprimand ourselves for not having enough gratitude. We feel unworthy for not having enough faith. We feel worse and worse as we critique our negative thoughts and emotions. If this train of thought continues, we will continue to spiral downward – unless something breaks us out of the pattern.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, a great 18th century rabbi, once said, “There is nothing as whole as a broken heart.” Understanding the rabbi’s words is the key to breaking out of this negative thought pattern. You see, the rabbi understood that a broken heart has great value. A broken spirit presents a wonderful opportunity. When we are down, we can approach God in true humility, and there is no more powerful way to approach God.

When King David wrote Psalm 51:16-17, he was heartbroken. David wrote this psalm right after being confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sin in sleeping with Bathsheba, a woman whose husband had been away at war. David had compounded his sin when, after discovering that Bathsheba was pregnant, ordered Bathsheba's husband to the frontlines, where he was killed. Nathan let David know in no uncertain terms that he had sinned and would incur the consequences. David was heartbroken – not just because he would have to endure physical punishment, but because of the damage that he had done to his soul and to his relationship with God. David understood the value of a broken spirit and heart. He continued, “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.” In this psalm, David declared that a broken spirit was even greater than an offering brought to the Holy Temple.

The message for us is to never despair over feelings of sadness or brokenness. Rather, we should embrace those feelings, and like David, offer them up to God as the sacrifice of a broken heart and as an opportunity to grow closer to Him.

PRAY

God, I surrender my broken heart to you. I need you more than ever, Lord. Give me the strength to rely on you during this time. Only you God can heal my broken heart, and only you can show me the life I am supposed to live.

Day 40: Holy Saturday

Read

Matthew 27:57-66

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Reflect

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting. In Matthew 27:57-66, we see Jesus being placed in a tomb, and we wait for Easter Sunday to fulfil the promise of His resurrection. We sit in a point of reflection of what his followers may have felt - the pain and hopelessness.

In our daily lives, we also wait for God. We face times of waiting in pain, mourning, and living without those we miss. We have times like Easter Saturday waiting in pain. However, we hold onto the promise that God can bring life out of death. This is what Easter is all about: the triumph of life over death.

Jesus' death and resurrection show us the way to life everlasting. It reminds us that whatever we face, God is with us and will make a life out of what seems like death. As we wait for Easter Sunday, we are reminded that God is faithful, and His promises will be fulfilled.

Holy Saturday is a day to reflect on our faith, remember Jesus's sacrifice, and hold onto the Easter resurrection. It is a day to trust in God, even in waiting and uncertainty. May we hold onto the God of life, even in the darkest moments, and trust that God will bring us to the other side.

Pray

God on this day of emptiness we wait for your new life to be born in us. Bring life to the places in our lives where death seems to real. Amen.

Easter Day

Read

Luke 24:1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Reflect

“He has forced open a door that has been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought, and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because He has done so. This is the beginning of the New Creation: a new chapter in cosmic history has opened.” — C. S. Lewis

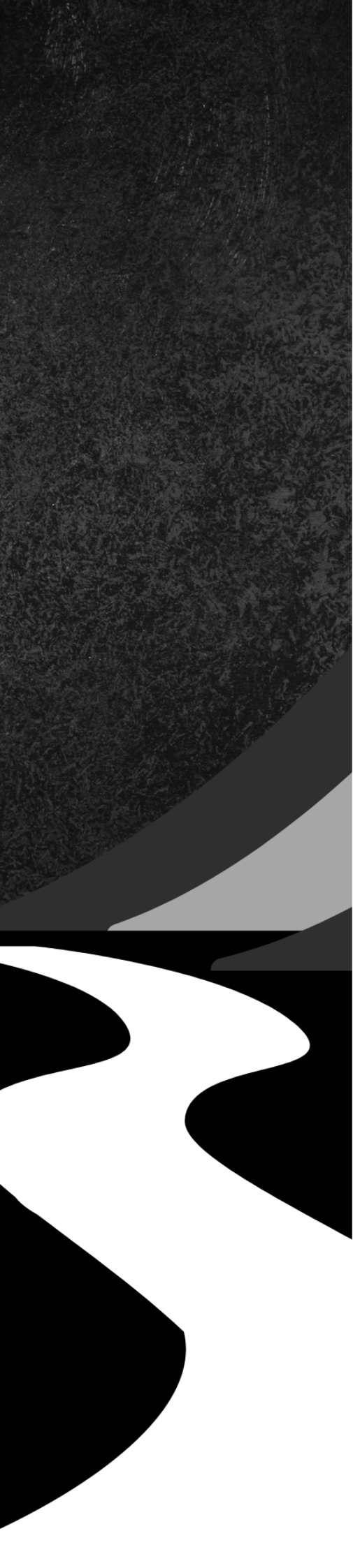
Today we celebrate Jesus' resurrection as C.S. Lewis states a time something new has happened.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a symbol of hope and victory over death. It demonstrates God's power over the forces of evil, sin, and death. It is through this resurrection that we are offered the gift of eternal life.

Easter is an invitation to a new chapter for us, to be reminded and affirm the gift of new life in Jesus to ask for the Holy Spirit to renew us and defeat in us those powers of death. And above all to thank God for his goodness, power and mercy shown at Easter.

Pray

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open
in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.



**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
Of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.**

Psalm 23

**This book is written by Anglican clergy from
the South Wales valleys and is meant for
everyone who wishes to walk this season
with God, which sometimes can seem like
the valley of death.**