

A Journey Through Lent



by Helen Buchanan

Day 1

Being Human

Why did Jesus wait until he was 30 to start his mission? One answer could be because of family duties he had to undertake as head of the household.

Jesus was a diligent, Jewish son so would have taken over the family business when Joseph died, as he was the first born child. We know his parents went on to have more children as they are mentioned in the Gospels. This probably happened after Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth, after King Herod died. So the nearest sibling to Jesus would have been at least three years younger. In Jewish Law, the next brother closest in age, was able to take over Jesus' role when he was old enough. So eventually the day came whereby Jesus could hand over the reins and begin God's work.

After being baptised by John the Baptist, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be alone. This was a very inhospitable place but Jesus knew he would not be disturbed there. It would have been hard to endure the intense heat of the daytime and the cold night's, with wild animals roaming about. There is no doubt it would have been physically challenging for Jesus. But the Holy Spirit had led Jesus there for another purpose, the fully human Jesus was about to face the temptations of the devil.

“At this time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.”
Matthew 4. 1-2

After 40 days, Jesus would not only have been hungry but be suffering the affects of starvation at this point. We know humans will die after 3 or 4 days, without water but water is not mentioned so we can presume Jesus had a source. Maybe he took a goat skin full of water to keep him going, he would certainly have needed it to survive.

Hunger has hit the headlines over the past year and it has shocked people to learn about the high levels of food poverty in the UK. Thankfully, because of Marcus Rashford's FSM Campaign, vulnerable children received their entitlement to food vouchers over the holidays. The campaign was successful twice last year, in the summer and Christmas holidays, ensuring 2 million children received one healthy meal a day. But the fight goes on to feed our nation's estimated 4 million socially disadvantaged children. So what can we do to help? Keep topping up the food bank donation point this Lent.

Day 2

The Preparation

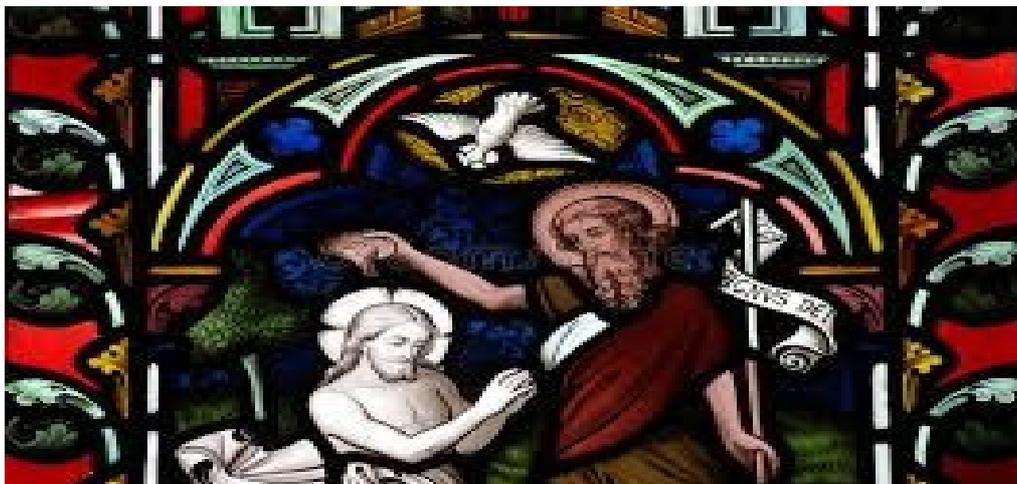
One day, whilst John was busy baptising people in the River Jordan, Jesus approached him and asked to be baptised. Jesus was without sin and had never put a foot wrong so John was taken aback by this. John had been busy preaching about preparing the way for the coming Messiah but it would be at this moment, when a voice spoke from Heaven, John knew it was Jesus.

But if Jesus is God made flesh, why would he need to be baptised? Surely Jesus did not need his sins washing away and forgiving?

The act of baptism for Jesus, was an act of humility and an important example to us all. It was an act of respect for John and his mission, proving to his cousin, Jesus was the One he had preached about. But in addition, on this special occasion, something supernatural happened when the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus as the Messiah . This act empowered Jesus to start his mission.

After being baptised , Jesus was immediately now under the Holy Spirit's direction. The Holy Spirit then led Jesus into the wilderness for the next part of the Messiahs preparation and Jesus' life would never be the same again.

The Holy Spirit who transformed Jesus at his baptism, is the same the Holy Spirit who hears us reaching out in prayer each day . But it is because of the sacrifice Jesus made, that we can now call upon the Holy Spirit ourselves and we too can receive the guidance and gifts of Christ's Holy Spirit.



Day 3

Endurance

But why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the desert into such an inhospitable environment for a human being? Maybe it was a place Jesus would be guaranteed peace and quiet but what was there another reason?.

It is entirely possible Jesus never intended to stay as long as he did but got absorbed in prayer with God his Father. The Bible does not say whether Jesus took any supplies but at the very least he would have needed water. Jesus would have seen how his cousin John lived off the fruits of the land so would have known what was safe to eat, and what was not. Even with this in mind, 40 days is a very long time to be out there in such an extreme environment. Jesus had gone from a comfortable home , with enough food to eat, to a place that was also unsafe. Was physical denial really necessary?

Giving up things during Lent, is a tradition many still follow today. It is meant to improve our self-control, patience and our appreciation of things. It is meant to strengthen our spirit, to increase self discipline and reign in our earthly desires. For this to have an impact on us, we must give up something we love so it's a genuine sacrifice. However, Lent is also a period of reflection, a time to take stock of things, a time for meditation and renewal.

An alternative to “giving up” things is also to just “give” and this is particularly good for children and young people.

A good idea is to keep a “Giving Diary” to record daily “gives” in. This is not all about money but acts of kindness and service to others. It could be doing some shopping for the housebound or picking up litter outside your home. It could be ringing to check on a friend to ensure they are okay, the list is endless. Lots of things are possible that are still Covid Safe. You could even have a Family Giving Book which everyone writes in to encourage the concept of giving and serving .

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.”

Matthew 25. 40

Day 4

Spring Cleaning

Most of us hope that by experiencing a period of discipline and denial, we will become stronger spiritually. Lent gives us a chance to spring clean our bad habits in a bid to improve ourselves on our Christian walk. It is easy to make superficial changes such as a new hairstyle but that's of no use on our spiritual journey. Self gifting never produces a lasting improvement in how we feel.

To change ourselves from within requires a lot more effort and guidance and this can only be done in union with the Lord. To get that guidance, we need to ask for help in prayer. But to overcome our bad habits, we need to be honest about them in the first place. Do we gossip too much? Are we moaners, quick to complain? Do we feel hard done by, thinking life has been unfair? Do we limit our prayers to family and friends, ignoring the world beyond? Do we harbour grudges from a time long ago? Are there still people we would rather avoid than forgive? Do we feel we are fine exactly as we are? The list of human frailties is endless.

Lent is the time we can work on both our outward behaviour as it often a manifestation of our inner thoughts and attitudes. We must not miss that opportunity to use the season to do this so we can emerge stronger and more spiritually aware in preparation for the season of Easter.

***“Create in me a clean heart of God, and put a new
and right spirit within me.” Psalm 51.10***



Day 5

Knowing we are Vulnerable

The stress and worry of modern living, coupled with the COVID crisis, leaves us weary and open to temptation. We can soon slip into a mind-set where we think we deserve to be rewarded for everyday living. An occasional treat is fine but it is so easy for it to become so much, much more - another takeaway, another glass of wine, another chocolate biscuits. Eventually it can become a bad habit or at worst a crutch to support us psychologically.

The temptation to satisfy our senses is a primal biological urge. The very first temptation of Adam and Eve, was to eat forbidden fruit from a tree. Jesus also faced the same desires when, after weeks of prayer, he found his appetite. Jesus was genuinely starving when the devil offered to turn a stone into bread.

“If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made into bread.”
Matthew 4. 3

But this was not just a temptation to eat, it was something far more cunning, it was the temptation to perform a miracle on demand, Jesus knew he would then find the sustenance he so needed. But Jesus resisted saying

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by the word of God.”
Matthew 4. 4

These words of defiance show Jesus’ reliance on God was stronger than his reliance on food. How much do we rely on God, to sustain us?



Day 6

If At First You Don't Succeed...

Despite having lost the first challenge, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem to stand on the highest point above the temple.

Although the exact spot is not given, Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, records the highest point as Herod's Royal Portico, towering 138 metres above the Kedron Valley. Visually that is about 30 metres taller than St Paul's Cathedral so a very great height indeed. From there Jesus was given a panoramic view because the devil had the supernatural power to do this, something Jesus does not deny is possible.

This time the devil quotes the scriptures to justify his next temptation.

“For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Psalm 91:11-12

It was a clever tactic by the devil trying to persuade Jesus that if he really was God's Son, then the Scripture promised that Jesus would be saved. All Jesus had to do was to throw himself from this great height and God would save him. But Jesus outwits the devil by replying –

“It is written: you shall not put the Lord your God to test.”

Matthew 4. 7.

Jesus is also referring here to the earlier words in Deuteronomy 6.16 . This says God will protect his children but also expects us to exercise sound judgement too. God does not approve of reckless behaviour and this sends a clear message to us that we have our part to play when tempted even if we ask for God's help.

Day 7

Lessons from the First 2 Temptations

The first temptation of Jesus was aimed at making him **doubt** his relationship with God by making Jesus perform a miracle to cater for his own needs.

The second temptation was used by the devil to entice Jesus to be overconfident in his standing with God. The devil wanted Jesus to **recklessly** endanger his own life to prove God would save him.

These two temptations, called on our human vulnerability to doubt and to be reckless, both of which are ever present in society today. Even faithful Christians may doubt their own salvation when they are feeling down about themselves.

However, there are also some Christians who can go the other way, Christians who continue to live their lives as repeat offenders with reckless behaviour thinking God will always forgive them. But we all have a part to play in our salvation so we must keep making an effort to live as God wants us to.

The second temptation showed Jesus interpreted the Scriptures in harmony with other passages. Whereas the devil interpreted passages of Scripture purely to serve his own ends. Jesus was quick to show what the devil wanted was at odds with the true meaning of God's Word.

Jesus answered him, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Matthew 4. 7

What can we learn from the second temptation? The words spoken by Jesus in Matthew referenced the much earlier words from Deuteronomy. Jesus knew his Scripture and how the coming of the Kingdom would change things for all. Cherry picking parts of the Bible to suit our own needs, is something Christians must be very careful not to do, especially those with a long standing faith. If taken out of context, it is possible to use Bible verses to go against Jesus' universal law to "Love your neighbour". But there are still over zealous Christian groups who apply Old Testament verses as a means of judging and criticising others.

The only way we can protect ourselves is by sound Biblical knowledge coupled with being culturally and historically aware of the original context these words were spoken in.

Day 8

Read All About It

Once the devil had started a battle of wits using the scriptures, Jesus was more than ready to take him on.

Jesus would have been taught by Mary, to learn the scriptures off by heart. Then at 8 years old , he would have attended lessons at the local Synagogue where he would have also learned to read and write. It is because of a boy's Jewish education that Palestine became a semi-literate society . However, although boys were learning the scriptures in the Synagogue, the girls were not allowed to take part. Their tuition was from their mother only meaning few learned to read and write.

We can see by the devil's actions, it is too easy to twist interpretation of Bible verses and what they mean. A mistake easily made when a verse is isolated from its context without explanation. If Jesus had not been so well versed, things could have been disastrous for humankind. The test was greater because the devil had put before Jesus very plausible temptations.

Like everything in life, relying on just one person's point of view can be no good for us. Most misdemeanours start by hearing someone else's view when we are feeling weak. Instead of walking away to regain our spiritual strength, we give in to temptation. That voice can come from anywhere, an advert on the TV, a phone call, spending time with someone you know will lead you into bad ways. It's not all about food and drink though because we all know people who enjoy a good gossip and its too easy to join in. Temptation is so often portrayed as something dramatic but in reality, it leads to a down ward spiral and a significant deterioration of our Christian walk.



Day 9

The Power and the Glory

The devil was not about to give up just yet and leave Jesus in peace, instead he had another trick up his sleeve.

***“The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him. “All these things will I give you if you fall down and worship me.”
Matthew 4. 8-9***

It is worth noting that Jesus does not question the devil’s ability to grant him all the kingdoms of the world. So the devil must have had those supernatural powers to be able to show Jesus the vision of power and status achieved by ruling the whole world.

But this final temptation went far and violated the first commandment of God.

“You shall have no other Gods before me.” Exodus 20.3

Jesus’ response was quick for the devil had violated the law that we should worship God and serve him only. To this Jesus responded,

“Be gone Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”

Matthew 4. 10

Jesus had triumphed and the devil had failed in his bid to derail the Son of God.

But the human Jesus had endured physical suffering and spiritual temptation. Jesus knew now what it is like to face temptation when physically weak. Jesus, aka God himself, knew what it was like to be human and face temptation .

But by enduring this, Jesus had shown us how we need to be vigilant to temptation and be able to resist it. We can do this by recognising the sin we commit behind every temptation and by knowing God's Word, we will see the wrong and right way is to conduct ourselves. Finally, we must not act in haste so we have the time to see what is before us. Only then can Jesus strengthen us when confronted with temptation.

Day 10

One Solitary Life (author unknown)

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant.
Until he was 30, he was a carpenter, and then,
for 3 years he was an itinerant preacher.
He wrote no books. He held no office. He never owned a home.
He never lived in a big city.
He never travelled further than 200 miles from the place he was born.
He never did any of the things that accompany greatness.
The authorities condemned his teaching. His friends deserted him.
One betrayed him to his enemies for a paltry sum.
One denied he knew him.
He went through a mockery of a trial.
He was nailed on a cross between two thieves.
While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only piece of
property he owned on earth, his coat.
When he died, he was buried in a borrowed grave.
Twenty centuries have come and gone,
yet today he is the crowning glory of the human race.
He is the adored leader of hundreds of millions of the earth's
inhabitants.
All the armies that ever marched and all the navies that ever sailed, and
all the governments that ever sat, and all the rulers that ever reigned –
combined - have not affected the life of mankind upon the earth so
profoundly as that One Solitary Life.



Day 11

The Power of the Spirit

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was now ready to start his mission but he knew he must not travel alone and would need support. This was just as much about practical things like finding somewhere to stay and food to eat, as it was about ensuring he had witnesses for after he had physically left Earth.

So after being baptised and tempted in the desert, Jesus recruited his first 4 disciples, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, then James and his brother John. All were fishermen, knew Jesus well so none of them hesitated to follow Jesus as he declared -

“Come and follow me, and I will send you out to fish people.”
Matthew 4. 19

Next Jesus appointed 8 more disciples and he begins teaching in Galilee, the area he grew up in. Very soon Jesus found himself courting controversy in his local Synagogue, annoying the leaders with his knowledge and wisdom. So Jesus moved on and wherever he went he had a profound effect on all who heard him preach.

Soon, people took notice of him , including the Roman Governors, the rulers of Israel's provinces, and the Jewish leaders. Jesus' popularity grew but so did jealousy and mistrust from those in authority. But no matter how hard they tried they could not find a reason to arrest him.

It's a strange thing in human nature how jealousy can turn so quickly to hate. Often people who do good deeds face a backlash and it can be off putting. Onlookers can accuse those who do good deeds of self interest, or having another agenda. If you have ever found yourself in this position, offer what you do to God and ignore your critics. For it is God who knows the good intentions of our heart, he misses nothing. God will bless those who genuinely put the needs of others first. God sees everything we do but likewise God sees the things we don't do too. So this Lent grasp every opportunity you can to help others.

Don't let the pandemic demotivate us and make us feel there is little we can do as it is not the case. Everyone knows of at least 5 people who would benefit from a chat or a card through their letter box. You yourself may be housebound but your spirit does not have to be.

Day 12

God Made Flesh

It still remains a challenge to accept the huge concept that God should come down to earth in Jesus. Even more amazing is that God should decide to come as a vulnerable baby, waiting 30 years before doing anything on earth. If we want to know what God is like (we are made in his image) then we should look at the qualities found in Jesus.

Jesus describes his relationship with God as “Father and Son” and that can leave us with many unanswered questions.

When did Jesus realise he was God's Son, or did he always know it?
What kind of relationship did Jesus have with his earthly father Joseph?
How old was Jesus when he realised Joseph was his stepfather?
How did Mary break this too Jesus or was he divinely informed ?
Also did Jesus always know he had supernatural powers? Perhaps it was after His baptism and the challenge by the devil that Jesus became fully empowered? It certainly was a unique and incredible relationship between God and Jesus, as he surrendered his life to God's will.

***“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?
The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own. But the Father
who dwells in me does good works.”***

John 14. 10

Regardless of his obvious authority, Jesus often acknowledged God's role in a miracle he performed. He also told the recipient to do that also and to go and praise God.. Jesus often felt exhausted spiritually after spending time with the people and would take himself away to spend time with God . Jesus built his relationship with God by turning to Him in prayer for advice, inner strength and renewal.

Every human being has a unique and mind-blowing relationship with God available to us if we nurture it. Jesus was fully human, we are human and God created us all. If we develop our belief in God, we develop our relationship too. The Holy Spirit can empower us just as the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus. This empowerment will in time, fill us with love, patience, self-control, faithfulness, gentleness, hope and peace – the qualities of God our Father. Dipping in and out of our relationship with God, will not sustain it,daily contact will.

Day 13

Wonderful Works

Jesus ministry was marked by an amazing amount of supernatural feats, often changing lives in an instant and they were witnessed by many. The four gospels record 36 miracles Jesus performed and each miracle demonstrated Jesus' supernatural power to heal and take control of the forces of nature.

The healing miracles, included curing physical ailments, exorcisms and resurrections of the dead (Lazarus and Jarius' daughter) demonstrating Jesus' authority. Yet some people still did not believe in him.

The nature miracles included Jesus turning water into wine, feeding the 5000, walking on water, and calming the storm. But Jesus always gives credit where credit is due, to his Father in Heaven. Jesus calls upon God to help him, then gives thanks to God for the divine help he has given.

When Jesus' opponents accused him of performing exorcisms by the devil's power, Jesus declared he performs miracles by the "Spirit of God" (Matthew 12.28) and the "Finger of God" (Luke 11.20). In John's Gospel, these miracles are described as "signs" to prove his divinity and Jesus' mission. But Jesus did not use a miracle just to prove his authority even though he was asked. Neither did Jesus use miracles to increase the number of his followers, faith still played a part.

The miracles in the Gospel often include teaching about faith. In the cleansing of the 10 lepers, or the raising of Jairus' daughter, the beneficiaries are told their healing was due to their own faith in Jesus. This is an amazing message that our faith can heal if this is God's will. But we do not know what plans God has for us so must use our faith to believe it will always be for the best .

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"

Jeremiah 29:11

Day 14

Incidental Kindness

Never underestimate the impact we make when helping someone in a small way. Sometimes we can feel a tad overwhelmed by the thought of Jesus' life of serving in comparison to ours. Jesus set the bar high and how we come even close ourselves? Sometimes that amount of goodness seems an unattainable standard to reach. Thank goodness then, that Jesus does not expect us to be the **same** as him, we just to **try to** be the same, and there is a big difference.

Serving others is at the heart of our Christian walk whether we are doing this mostly inside, or outside our homes. There are certain times in our lives, with families of our own, that our children dominate our lives because they are dependent on us. But it's important children grow up not to thinking they are the centre of your universe and nobody else matters. New born babies are ego centric and it is parents that develop in dependence, empathy and understanding in their child. Psychologist refer to emotional intelligence when a child considers the feelings of others and responds to this. The good news is that Christian values and guidance, helps children and young people develop emotional intelligence. It also encourages us to serve others.

A life of service can be many things. It may be in vocational work as a teacher, vicar, nurse, carer, paramedic,, doctor, dentist, a firefighter, conservationist, or a police officer. The list is endless! The service you give may be for a charity, a church, or the community or you may be a neighbourhood champion. It could be none of these more obvious vocations and you may be a book keeper who is diligent, conscientious and considerate at work.

Or it could be a life of service making sure each day is filled with incidental acts of kindness and thought for others. God will lead us where we can best help others if we ask God to. God does not expect us to be as perfect as Jesus but God does expect us to make an effort and cultivate a kind heart, a thoughtful mind and helpful hands.

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? If one of you say to them, “Go in peace, keep warm and well fed” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”

James 2: 14 - 16

Day 15

Showing Love

The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, are at the heart of Jesus' teaching. Jesus promises a new life in the Kingdom for all those people who accept his message and make every effort to have a life of service. This means trying our best to show love and kindness throughout life's journey.

However, a crucial part of this is to say sorry for the things we do wrong along the way. It is not just about saying sorry for the big things that go wrong but what might seem trivial as well. For if our wrong doings go unaddressed, it affects our ability to love God and to show love to others. Jesus reminds us just how big a part God should play in our lives when he says,

“You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, and with all our soul and with all your mind.”

Matthew 22. 37

No matter how much we try loving God, it will be one of the most complex and perplexing tasks a human being will undertake. For it depends on maintaining communication with God by talking in prayer. Praying is not just about speaking words but also for listening to God to find out what God wants of us and it is a moment of renewal. We will all feel better after prayer.

We are very fortunate God knows what is best for us and helps us as we try to give our commitment to loving Him. We are also loving and pleasing God when we treat others in a loving and considerate way. This isn't always easy with people we cannot agree with, relate to, or understand, but to try is what is asked of us. What is important to God is that we keep on trying.

One of the more obvious ways to love God is when we worship our Maker. When we gather together whether online, or in a church, a chapel, to sing songs of praise and adoration, read psalms of appreciation, to share the prayer Jesus gave us and confess our wrong doings.

When we join in a service, by whatever means, we are devoting our time to God, we are putting God in the centre of our lives. We are ring fencing 30, 40, 50, 60 minutes of our time to give God our total attention (give or take the odd lapse in concentration !). And God loves us for it.

Day 16

The Parables

When we read the Parables, it is important to know who the intended audience was for Jesus' stories. Some stories were told by Jesus directly to teach his Disciples, some were aimed at the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees or the Sadducees, others for the general public. Without knowing the audience, we can easily misconstrue what the parable mean. That is why its worth a period of study devoted to finding out the background to each of Jesus' stories.

All the parables have universal themes which still talk to us today. There are 46 in the New Testament but 3 of those repeat a story just changing the characters . Some parables are only one sentence long, others are longer with significant stories. They often contain symbolism that relates the physical world to spiritual matters. Jesus uses common themes of the kindness and generosity of God and the perils of turning away from God along with the consequences of doing so.

Some parables are easy to interpret such as the Good Samaritan whereas others like the Labourers in the Field, hired at different times of the day, yet paid the same, have a more profound meaning.

A good activity in Lent is to have a brainstorm and write down as many parables as you can remember. You could do it with a friend and then see how many you have missed out. Once you have your list, try and find those you missed out and read them over the season. If you cannot find time to do that, revisit the less familiar ones and see if you can understand what Jesus was trying to teach us.



Day 17

The Sermon on the Mount

In the earlier part of his ministry, Jesus provided his followers with a blueprint of a Christian life. It was whilst preaching and teaching on the side of the mount he gave a long sermon which included “The Beatitudes”.

The word “beatitude” comes from the Latin word “beatitudo” meaning blessedness. The expression means divine joy and perfect happiness to the people of Christ’s day. More recent Bible interpretations have helped to make the teachings easier to understand. Jesus uses the word “blessed” nine times to describe the kind of people we will be when we inhabit the Kingdom of God. As you read the Sermon on the Mount, think of people both here and abroad which each Beatitude could apply to and then say a pray for them.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those that 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 be shown 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 because of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecute the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5. 3 - 12

Day 18

God's Command

When we think of getting along with other people, some people are easier to be with than others. Even the Disciples squabbled amongst themselves as they travelled with Jesus on his 3 year mission. Sometimes we even fall out with people we get on with sometimes because of discontentment with our own lives

One problem is our susceptibility to compare ourselves with each other. Conversations can easily drift towards holidays planned, gadgets acquired, achievements gained and possessions owned. The media doesn't help much as it projects lifestyles that are largely unobtainable without a lot of money. So is it healthy for us to dwell on this? Is money the thing that makes us feel secure or does our security come through knowing God?

Nowadays there is a widening gap between the haves and have nots. In 1997, 3 million children lived in poverty, today it is 4 million. The arrival of the "buy to let" mortgage product in 2004 sadly inflated the cost of both renting and buying a home. Rents have gone up so much whereas mortgage rates have gone down so low, renting can be double the price of mortgage payments in some areas. For many families with both parents working, rent can cost 50% of their income.

God's great command is to love one another which includes loving those whose paths we would not normally cross. If we learn to live well on less, we can reach out to those who are struggling, by increasing charitable support and by donating food to food banks more often. But this will require us to resist our urges more often to acquire things to reward ourselves.

By resisting the urge to "keep up with the Jones", we will be making a good long term investment in our inner selves instead of our outer life. The God news is God promises the best returns!

***"Accept one another just as Christ accepted you
in order to bring praise to God."***

Romans: 15. 7

Day 19

Just Give

“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

Matthew 10. 8

Freely give the Gospel of Matthew proclaims! Give what? Our time? Our money? Our patience? Our help? Our possessions? The list could be endless.

Jesus wants us to give freely and perhaps trying to give something away for the 40 days of Lent, is a good place to start. It can be habit forming. Right now you may be thinking “I haven't got that much to give away I don't need myself”. We'd probably look through our cupboards, and on our shelves, sorting out a bag for the charity shop.

We'd probably then think about our food and would probably need to buy more so we could donate the appropriate items to a food bank. Things like long life milk, sugar, teabags, coffee, tinned fish and meat, pasta, rice, beans.

Currently, charities are asking businesses and the general public, to donate working laptops for children who do not have access to one. Over 1 million children need a laptop yet the government has only made available 400,000 for schools to distribute. One inner city school in the news, ordered 60 for their pupils and only received 9. The need is great and children are missing out on their education in the meanwhile.

Another thing we could give away is our time. It could be as simple as stopping to talk to someone who you see out and about, especially those living on their own. Maybe volunteer to shop for someone through the Red Cross, Age UK or for someone you know.

You may have a special talent you could share with others such as knitting a cardigan for the Premature Baby Unit, something always needed.

When we start each day thinking “what can I give away today?” it focuses our minds on others, and not ourselves. Being generous blesses not only those who receive but those who do the giving aswell.

Day 20

The Bridge to God's Heart

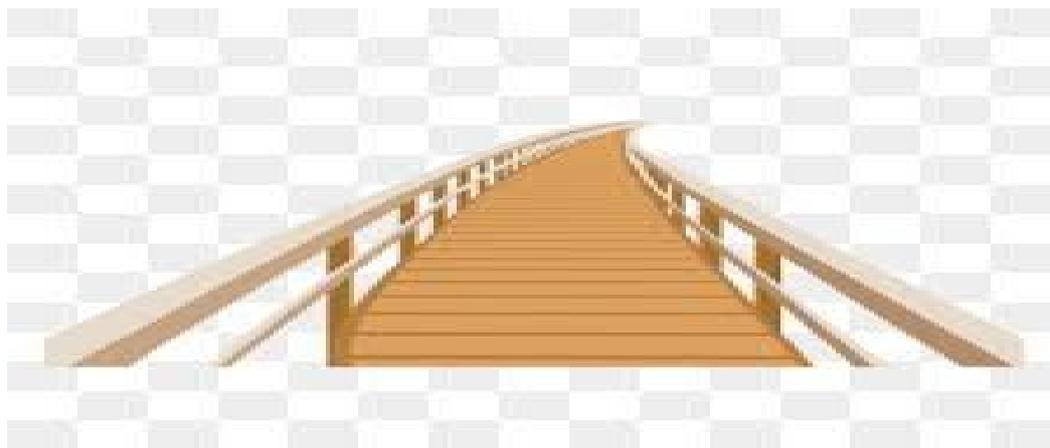
“God made him who had no sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5. 21

Every winter somewhere in the UK suffers catastrophic flooding and it can make depressing viewing on the evening news. People's homes get devastated, businesses are forced to close and lives become disrupted. Hearts are broken when families have to leave their homes and wait until the water subsides to see the damage. Flood victims easily get forgotten when not headline news yet it may take months, or even years before their home is fit to live in.

Just swollen river seems to rise so quickly, so our busy lives seem to rise up with problems too. Even when a river appears to be running smoothly, underneath the currents swirl and fight against each other. This can happen in our lives too when we think everything is going swimmingly yet underneath we have tensions and pressures occupying our thoughts, separating us from God.

Just as it would seem impossible to cross a swollen river, so it can feel just as impossible to get to Heaven. Thankfully, God has already taken care of this by providing a bridge to do this. That bridge is our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ. All we have to do is step onto that bridge, believe and let God lead our lives.



Day 21

Let's Talk

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Philippians 4.6

Praying is mentioned constantly in the Bible as it's part of our relationship with God, but there's can be a misapprehension there's a right and wrong way to do it. Sometimes we think this because we haven't found what works best for us. Even though prayer is not about a format or style but the sincerity of the heart.

Praying comes in many forms, many of which are worth exploring to inspire us and for a change. Some people continue the habit formed in childhood, by praying at bedtime before they go to sleep. Others prefer the morning when they first wake up, before they start the day. Some of us have a regular quiet time to read the Bible and pray. Others speak to God by reading other people's words. For some it remains hard to turn thoughts into prayers even knowing God knows what we want to say before we say it. This can leave us fearing God will never hear us, as if it is a fault of our own.

There are those who prefer traditional prayers, using formal language such as that of the Common Book of Prayers, whilst others prefer only contemporary words. It is well worth keeping a prayer journal from time to time, as if writing a letter to God. This proves useful when our faith is flagging as we can look back and see where God was working in our lives.

Some people like to pray out loud, whilst others in their head. Some pray more easily with music on whilst others need total silence. Then there are those who only pray when they attend church or other such place and nowhere else. Whatever your method of prayer, we are all free to choose however we want we communicate with our Creator. The only thing that matters is that we do it. We'd never dream of ignoring a friend so should we ever be ignoring God? Sadly we all do.

Every day brings countless opportunities to pray - sitting on a bus, driving our car, doing the ironing, mowing the lawn, sewing or baking, in fact any place, anytime, anywhere. Pray as if it were as natural as breathing, just pray.

Day 22

A Prayer by St Francis of Assisi

Lord God, living and true:
You are love,
You are wisdom,
You are humility,
You are endurance,
You are rest,
You are peace,
You are joy and gladness,
You are justice and moderation,
You are all our riches,
And you suffice us.
You are beauty,
You are gentleness,
You are our protector,
You are our guardian and defender,
You are our courage,
You are our haven and our hope,
You are our faith, our great consolation,
You are our eternal life,
Great and Wonderful Lord,
God Almighty,
Merciful Saviour.

Amen

Day 23

Time to Forgive

“If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in Heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done.”

Matthew 6. 14

Our lives are busy making it easy to ignore unresolved issues, things we want to deal with another day then never do. These issues can often involve whether we have really let go of a hurt. Lent is an opportunity to think about a broken relationship and see whether we can repair it again. Also to think about Jesus coming to repair our broken relationship with God and recall what he had to go through to achieve this.

Is there someone we still feel resentment towards today? Is there someone we know who we've been keeping at arms length because of something that happened years ago and yet it still troubles us? The greater the hurt, the longer it can take to forgive someone. Sometimes forgiveness is not easily achieved and it will take time and effort to get there.

At first, we tend to keep reliving the hurt seemingly over and over again. But be assured that through prayer and a forgiving heart, **it is** possible to find a way to let the bitterness go and move forward again. Most importantly, what is at the heart of forgiveness, is to cancel the need for the apology we think we are still owed. We must stop ourselves expecting this because often that apology will never come.

Just as we are unconditionally loved by the Lord, so we must unconditionally forgive without any strings attached. It's tempting to think “ I will be fine the next time she calls but I am not going to call first”. It's an easy trap to fall into to not make the first move when we are deeply hurt.

But Jesus' teachings are clear, that until we forgive a wrong doing, then we won't be forgiven by God. However, we can take comfort knowing God can help us to forgive. After we decide this, the true healing can begin and any memories left will no longer cause the feelings of bitterness it once did and our inner peace will be restored

Day 24

Directions Please?

Jesus answered. "I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me."

John 14. 6

Thomas is asking Jesus how he can get to Heaven and Jesus' response is direct and to the point. The only way to get to Heaven is through Jesus our Saviour.

Christ's words can be rather daunting and we may even worry we are not up to the challenge. But the good news is this, when we offer our lives to Jesus, we will get a spiritual Sat Nav to guide us to the place of everlasting life.

This Sat Nav will sign post us to the right way of living, the right way of thinking, and the right way of "giving" in our lives. And the more we look for guidance, the stronger the signal becomes, and the better reception we can get.

There is also help to be found in the Gospels of Jesus - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The letters of St. Paul also greatly expands on the teachings of Jesus, giving the detail we need to follow Christ's excellent example.

And the good news is, we will not go unrewarded for the efforts we make nor will we be ill equipped for this life. For we will be given the gifts of Christ's Holy Spirit, to sustain us on our journey. Christ may not be with us physically any more but the power of his Holy Spirit will always be here.

So lets continue to ask for Christ's direction in our life so we may -

- show love to the unlovable,
- tolerance to those things we do not understand,
- grow in loyalty and faithfulness,
- be gentle and kind in all we do
- and make us a peacemaker in this world.

Day 25

The Real Deal

Jesus said to him "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'worship the Lord your God, and serve him only' then the devil left him and angels came and attended him."

Matthew 4. 10-11

We have an important question to ask ourselves in Lent, do we believe the temptations were a serious threat to Jesus? Could his mission all really ended right there by Jesus giving in to temptation ?

Jesus had lived for 30 years without ever putting a foot wrong and was without sin so surely he would have been spiritually invincible. Surely the divine part of Jesus could have easily dealt with the devil's temptations but as being human as well perhaps that is the essence of the challenge. For Jesus had taken on all human vulnerabilities.

Jesus would have become physically weak after 40 days in the desert. To be genuinely tempted, Jesus must have also seen the potential benefits of all the things the devil was offering. Interestingly, Jesus never once doubted the devil's ability to deliver on the temptations. Jesus knew the evil one had power because he knew evil was in this world. The temptations were real challenges. Jesus was hungry to the point of starvation and wanted food so the devil offered it. Jesus knew angels could catch him if he was to fall and Jesus knew world domination was possible if he so should wish it.

It had taken so much out of Jesus physically, mentally and spiritually to overcome the temptations , that when it was all over, angels came and tended him. Was this so he could receive food and drink instantly? Was this to ensure the devil did not try his mischief yet again? Was this to empower Jesus and prepare for what was to come? We may never know, but we can take comfort from knowing that if we make Jesus centre of lives we will be stronger to deal with any temptations that come our way – and there will be plenty!

Day 26

10 Lessons

The temptations of Jesus were so significant because they were to decide who would be the ruler of the earth. Here are 10 lessons we can learn from them.

- **Jesus was really tempted, and we will be too.**
- **There are good forces and evil forces on Earth.**
- **Trying to prove something to others can get us into trouble.**
- **Jesus found the right answers in the scriptures. We too, will find the right words in the Bible.**
- **Just because you can quote the Bible, doesn't mean you are a Christian, the devil could, and was not.**
- **Evil can pervert and twist the truth.**
- **We must not be reckless with our bodies.**
- **We must not swap spiritual rewards for physical rewards.**
- **We can accumulate things in this world that are not good for us spiritually.**
- **Jesus is there to help us when we are tempted , he knows the challenge we face but we do have to ask.**



Day 27

Sending out an SOS

No matter how much faith we have in Jesus, we all have moments when we feel unworthy, when words fail us and when our thoughts are a mess. We all face moments of sadness and despair with many happening world wide during this pandemic. Sometimes it calms our spirit and gives us hope if we say the same prayer over and over again. -

Lord Jesus

When I cannot speak, hear me.

When I cannot feel, hold me.

When I cannot like myself,

Love me as you always love me,

Despite myself.

Keep me firm in the knowledge

that I am yours,

And that you hear the prayers of my heart.

Amen

S.O.S

Day 28

Baby Steps

“Who are you to judge someone else's servant? They stand or fall before their own Lord and they will stand because the Lord has the power to make them stand.”

Romans 14. 4

If you ever watch a toddler as they are learning to walk then you'll know it takes months for them just to stand up. And as they learn to walk, they lose their balance and keep falling over but it's part of the process to becoming vertical. There are many false starts and wobbles when a baby become a toddler but parents are always there to offer words of encouragement “Come on, you can do it”. Lots of praise along the way like “Well done” along with lots of cheers. A good parent would never dream of saying, “Well that wasn't good enough was it?”

Just like a child who is learning to walk, we too are a work of progress in God's eyes. Like any good parent, God does not expect instant success and wants the best for us so wills us on. As our understanding of God grows, so too will our spiritual maturity even though there will be doubts and setbacks along the way. We will stumble, we will make mistakes, we will wobble and resort to behaviour we will regret. Yet if we are truly sorry, God will always forgive us. God will also provide the encouragement we need in just the same way a parent helps their child's first steps to walk.



Day 29

Made in His Image

Christianity is about relationships and one thing Jesus demonstrated was how he valued his family. Jesus also trusted his friends to accompany him on his ministry, even though they had no experience to do the job. Jesus wants to be involved in our lives too, wanting us to be close to him the way he kept friends and family close to Him. So is that how we see Jesus too?

Jesus' very first miracle was to sort out a wine shortage at a friend's wedding, hardly something we would have thought was a priority to God. But it would be wrong to presume this because Jesus wants to be involved in everything we do and not to exclude the fun times. Perhaps we are not as good at involving Jesus in the good parts of our life. But Jesus is there for everything - our joy and our sorrows, the pleasure and the pain, the ups and the downs of whatever life throws at us. Jesus wants to be there through everything. Jesus also wants us to treat each other the same way too.

This pandemic has actually shown the inherent goodness in humankind and it has been heart warming to see this. People have shown great compassion and offered hope to many, bringing lightness to those in a dark place. The virus has reminded us that we should be living our lives with consideration and kindness to others. One upside of this awful time is how communities have been galvanized into action to help those in need around them. There have been millions of acts of kindness that go unreported, showing the world is still a good place to live in. Children and people of all ages have played their part to improve the lives of others, in particular those in most need.

“Help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6. 2



Day 30

Forgiveness

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, but only what is helpful for building others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Ephesians 4. 29

“All you need is love...” The Beatles sang but love can be very hard to muster when you have been physically and emotionally damaged by others.

Successful marriages work when two people love each other and when this love is great enough to forgive their own human frailties and bad habits. Happy families work for exactly the same reason, and good friendships.

The day after the Paris terrorist attacks, a husband of a woman who had died in it, said he would not grant the terrorists their wish to hate them. He did not want his wife's legacy to be to fuel more hate. It was something he did not want his children or the world to feel too. What a very special example this was from a person whose partner had died in such a horrific and inhuman act , perpetrated by people consumed by evil. This was reported widely in the newspapers and on television because it became a beacon of light at a time of sadness and despair. This man was respected by many for his refusal to let hate breed in his heart.

When we face what seems like a desperate situation, we can work together to achieve the kind of change that we cannot achieve alone. And when we enlist the help of God we can achieve the impossible.

Forgiving people can be hard when the hurt they inflict on loved ones echoes deep emotional pain within us. We are called upon by God to resist hate and resentment becoming at home in our hearts. In our determination to do this, God will help us by giving us new eyes to view the situation and a new strength.

It may take us a long time to get over a hurt but by keeping a loving heart, and by not letting not revenge or desire to punish overwhelm us, then we can find a friendship where there no longer was one.

Day 31

A Fresh Start

Lord God,
Forgive me for so often ignoring the grime
which seals my life:
the grubby little sins collecting in the nooks
and crannies of my heart:
the cobwebs of guilt hanging from it's walls.

Shine your Spirits light into the dark
hidden crevices within me,
Expose the murky fantasies, desires,
ambitions and hopes which lurk there.
Help me to deal ruthlessly with anything within
which grieves you

Strengthen my resolve to go through
with internal spring cleaning
then let me taste a fresh your understanding,
kind and patient love.

I praise you for the assurance that,
before I draw near to you, you come close to me;
and that you long for me to enjoy a fresh
new start with you.
Amen

By Joyce Huggett "A Fresh Start With God" (2003)

Day 32

Being Humble

“The greatest treason is to do the right deed for the wrong reason”.

Murder in the Cathedral by TS Eliot

These words are taken from the short play “Murder in the Cathedral” written by T S Eliot in 1935. The play is based on the martyrdom of Thomas Becket and his friendship with Henry II that led to his downfall. The words so clearly say that to be a hypocrite is ultimately to betray oneself. Shakespeare said something similar about how important it was to be a sincere person when he wrote, “To thine own self be true” (Hamlet).

As followers of Jesus, we must remember that God wants us to be humble in all we do. Jesus does not want us publicising our good deeds so we get credit from others. We shouldn't be advertising our positive actions to make a good impression on others. The Lord knows what we are doing and for the reason, the Lord is the only person who matters in these things.

Sometimes however, a good deed does become public knowledge because it needs to be to attract extra support. For example, if you are being sponsored to run a marathon. When this happens we need to remember to remain humble in our achievements and keep the charitable cause at the centre of our minds so that it informs our actions and our words. As Jesus reminds us -

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever becomes humble, like this child, is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Matthew 18. 3-4



Day 33

Do you Believe in Miracles?

Jesus' divine self had supernatural powers demonstrated in the good works he performed. These extraordinary acts of kindness came in the form of miracles and there are plenty recorded in the Gospels. Jesus' divinity shone relentlessly from him and his miracles proclaimed Jesus authority in Heaven, and on earth.

Do miracles happen today? There can be no doubt they do but some doubt they do, putting it down to science.

In 1990, my 10 year old son fell critically ill with a mysterious virus which confounded the doctors and specialists who cared for him. He spent weeks in intensive care on a life support machine and I was told to prepare for the worse. Darkness overwhelmed all my family. My 3 year old daughter also fell ill with the same virus, spending four days in hospital, in isolation, but easily recovered. Life was grim and the doctors could offer little hope to us. Weeks past, his school friends recorded a tape to play to my son, his friends in our road collected money for a gold cross and had it blessed, everybody prayed relentlessly and time stood still. There seemed to be nothing but grim news from the doctors every day and it was hard to keep up hope week after week.

I tried to cope by just focusing on the now, living in the moment, not thinking about what might be, or dwelling on what had been, easier said than done. I often prayed loud and angry prayers during my frank appeals to God for help. In the end I resulted to bargaining with God or trying to "Take my life not Brendan's" I begged desperately. I thank God my son lived but it caused partial sightedness, mild cerebral palsy, gall stones and 3 years to get over it. At times the physical aftermath of illness was very painful and it had a deep and lasting effect on my son's life and ours.

One day, at his Neurologist appointment, the doctor admitted he remained baffled by my son's recovery, adding that it was nothing short of a miracle. The word "miracle" was repeated again by the Ophthalmologist and then the Child Development Specialist too. But it came as no surprise to me, I already knew it was a miracle when I saw my sons recovery confounding the nurses faces as my son came out of a coma. Yes, miracles do happen, and I have been blessed and privileged to have it happen to my son.

"Father, not my will, but yours be done."

Luke 22. 42

Day 34

Knowing Jesus

We know more about Jesus than we probably realise, particularly his human self. Physically, he was of Middle-Eastern origin so would have had dark hair and olive skin. Prior to becoming a teacher, he would have been clean-shaven, as was the tradition, then once he started preaching, he would have grown a beard as Rabbi's do. His height would have been typical of a man of that time between 5'6 - 5'8 maximum.

Personality wise, Jesus was a good judge of character picking his 12 disciples mostly from his friends. Jesus showed great knowledge and wisdom when faced with the intimidation of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He was a natural storyteller and would have been quite entertaining to be able to command a crowd of 5000's attention. Jesus was a natural storyteller.

Jesus was a man who was prepared to stand up for his principles even being prepared to overturn the money changers tables at great personal risk. But in doing so he also showed he was capable of channelling anger in a controlled and focused way. A lesson for us all.

Jesus was immensely brave and courageous when he endured death by crucifixion. He showed physical endurance not only when tempted in the desert but when he coped with unspeakable acts of torture and a brutal death. Jesus was able to do this because of his immense love for us and for his Father in Heaven. Jesus found physical strength in love.

Jesus never owned his own home or collected possessions even though he was courted by many rich followers. Instead, he relied on friends to support him and never worried where his next meal will come from, placing all his trust in God. Jesus gave his whole life for us and now asks us to do the same for him. Some things we do are better late than never.



Day 35

The Final Straw

After keeping well out of the way from the authorities by hiding in Bethany, Jesus faces a grim realisation. He realises he is being separated from being with the people He loved. He realises he can no longer play hide and seek with his persecutors. The time had finally come to step out and fully identify himself as the one true Messiah the people had been waiting for.

Jesus could have done this in many ways but he chose a simple one, to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. He then preached openly knowing he would have to face the full wrath of the Jewish authorities. So when Jesus openly criticises the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, Jesus' authority is questioned. Meanwhile Judas Iscariot strikes a bargain with the Jewish leaders to tip them off when Jesus is alone. As a reward he received 30 silver coins. Judas had been the Treasurer of the group for 3 years but he was a political rebel and wanted the Romans out of his country. This was probably Judas motive for doing this.

The net is now closing in on Jesus and he knows it. So Jesus arranges for his disciples to meet him in an upper room. The Last Supper is the final meal Jesus shares with the twelve. At this meal, Jesus predicts that one of them present will betray him and he predicts that Peter will deny even knowing him before the evening is out. But how did Jesus know this? What part of Jesus, human and divine, could know what would happen at the meal and after? Not even the Disciples knew what Jesus was talking about because Jesus had evaded the enemy for so long.

On that night Jesus, very deliberately, takes the bread and wine and shares it with his disciples saying: ***“This is my body which is given for you.”***

And then he gives them a cup of wine saying:

“Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood which seals the Covenant between God and his people.”

But the significance of this moment was not understood by the Disciples until after the Christ's death. After this they left the upper room and went to the Mount of Olives, all except Judas Iscariot who had gone to tip off the elders. The net was closing in on Jesus and his time on earth was coming to an end.

Day 36

The Smell of Fear

The Feast of the Passover was the most important feast day of all for the Jewish people and everyone wanted to go to the Holy City to celebrate it. The Jewish authorities wanted to arrest Jesus before the feast to avoid civil unrest and it was Judas Iscariot who made this possible in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The very human Jesus was full of fear and anguish over his coming execution. This was evident when Jesus spoke to Peter -

“The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Matthew 26. 36-38

How very human it is not to want to be alone when being faced with something daunting and Jesus struggled to accept what lay before him. So he prayed relentlessly for hours, trying to find the spiritual strength to be able to face execution. He saw the Disciples asleep nearby, no doubt affected by the wine drunk earlier and Jesus felt desperately alone and fearful. At some point Jesus had a spiritual crisis asking God **“ If it is possible take this cup of suffering from me”**. But after talking with his Father in Heaven, Jesus had a change of heart and no longer asked to be spared. Jesus knew he must be prepared to bear the burden of our sin with his own body and he accepts his fate upon the cross .

We must never underestimate how hard it was for the very human Jesus to accept God's will must be done. Jesus really suffered mentally that night in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was only 33 years old and no one wants to die with the best years of your life still ahead of you. Jesus truly feared the physical pain and torture he was soon to be facing. But sometime that night Jesus found the courage to be the obedient son and surrender himself to God's will.



Day 37

The Longest Night

If you ever suffer a night of anguish and pain, be comforted by knowing that Jesus has been there too. It is always night time our worries and anxieties come to the surface, especially for those living alone.

Once arrested on the Thursday evening Jesus spent the rest of the night on trial. When Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, could find no reason to sentence Jesus to death, he relied on an unruly crowd to do it for him instead.

“The soldiers to the Governor took Jesus to the Governor's palace and called the brigade together for some fun. They stripped him and dressed him in a red toga. They plaited a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a stick in his right hand for a sceptre. They knelt before him in mockery: Bravo, King of the Jews. Then they spat on him and hit him on the head with a stick. When they had had their fun they took off the toga and put his own clothes back on him. Then they proceeded out to the crucifixion.

Matthew 27. 27-32

When we revisit the crucifixion every year, the pure horror and cruelty of the very act digs deep into our souls. Jesus not only gave his life for ‘me’; he did so in the most horrific, degrading and barbaric way. Cliff Richard recently said he finds Easter hard because of having to recall the barbaric way Christ died. He says by contrast he feels the birth of Christ should be celebrated not just at Christmas, but every day of the year as God had come to dwell amongst us.

Finally, just before Jesus died he whispered **“It is finished.”** Jesus was not talking here about the act of execution but meant Jesus had completed his earthly duties and the sacrifice was met.

This was not a cry of defeat but a cry of triumph and achievement. Those very last words are what we should focus on, even though we know the best was yet to come. The bridge was about to be restored once again! Out of all the other faiths, Jesus is the only religious leader to be executed and give his life for others.

Day 38

Holy Saturday

The Disciples ran away in fear from the Garden of Gethsemane, all except Peter. They went to a safe place and waited together, too frightened to leave. They were devastated by the authorities finally catching up with Jesus and appalled to know Judas had betrayed them all.

The other followers of Jesus must have been stunned by what had happened when the news spread of Jesus arrest. Some people had seen Jesus as a wise teacher but others hoped he would be the rebel leader who would rise up and free them from a life under Roman rule.

The eleven Disciples, hiding together behind locked doors, were filled with the fear they would be arrested next. They would have cried and mourned the loss of Jesus and suffered the intolerable pain and numbness bereaved people feel. But they also feared about themselves as self preservation took hold. The Disciples stayed hidden from Thursday night to Sunday and only came out when Mary came to tell them the good news of Jesus coming back to life.

Jesus' enemies were no doubt celebrating and gloating after what they believed was a successful execution. But little did they realise the incredible significance of this execution because they had never bothered to listen to Jesus' words. The crucifixion was only the beginning not the end.

“(Jesus) said ‘we're going to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence him to die. Then they will hand him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip and crucified. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead.’”

Matthew 20. 17-19



Day 39

Christ is Risen

How wonderful this sounds today - as joyful as it was on that first Sunday morning. Imagine going to the tomb expecting to find a cold corpse and instead to find a living Jesus! This was the biggest miracle of them all!

Mary must have felt ecstatic and couldn't wait to tell the Disciples. It's interesting how Mary had not hidden away like the Disciples and was prepared to go and anoint Christ's body without any fear for her own safety.

There Mary found that God had touched Jesus and he had burst through the limitations of his earthly body, revealing himself as the Risen Christ , the Saviour of the world. How magnificent and how thrilling it must have been !

Today, Christians everywhere can repeat with thanks and praise, those profound words of Job:

***“I know that my Saviour lives and at the end,
He will stand on this earth.”***

Job 19. 25-27

Nicky Gumbel, wrote in his 2004 book “Questions of Life” how the Good News of Christianity is that God loves us and will never leave us in the mess we make of our lives. God came to earth, in the person of His Son, to die **instead** of us, not as well as us. And by doing this, Jesus breaks the barrier of death and restores our relationship with God. The bridge is open and we are welcome to cross it ! We have our part to play too by following Jesus and putting him first in our lives. Then, when our earthly life is done, are we free to cross the bridge Christ's sacrifice created , so we can live forever with the Lord.



Day 40

Don't Keep it to Yourself

We can be guilty of keeping our faith a private thing and be uncomfortable about discussing it. But that's exactly what Jesus wants us to do and not just with fellow Christians either. Faith is something we all need to be more open about. We wouldn't be Christians today if someone hadn't shared their faith with us so it's crucial we do the same. We are part of that chain that keeps the faith alive and even better, grows it. But how do we share our faith and where do we start? The good news is that Jesus does not expect us all to become evangelists for that's a gift in itself. It took a visitation of the Holy Spirit to help the Disciples and they'd already spent 3 years as apprentices of Jesus.

We do not have to even become evangelists, as there are plenty of people who have a gift to do that. Instead, we can be Christians, doing ordinary things to help people, made special by the Holy Spirit. Our actions should show we are Christians but we must also be more open about our faith. If you have had a prayer answered, then tell someone. If we go to church to worship, then tell someone. If we feel powerless to help someone, then tell them you will pray for them instead. You could also wear a cross, or a fish to put your faith on show. When we meet new people and they ask us about our lives, let them know we are Christians, for it shouldn't be the very last thing people find out about us.

A survey by the Church of England in 2015 found 56% of people surveyed said they were Christians yet only 10% of those people ever went to church. If you have only just become a Christian, one of the great things about church is that everyone who goes is a Christian. You are among people who believe!. Of course the real challenge comes on the other 6 days of the week and that's when we need to share our faith more and it's never too late to start!



Thank you for taking time each day to read this booklet.

May the Lord bless you and take care of you,

Be happy and let your faith in Jesus grow.

Live in harmony and peace with your family and others,

**And may God's love,
and the Holy Spirit's friendship be yours forever.**

Amen