

LENT 2026

# GOD'S STORY— YOUR STORY

THE  
DIOCESE  
OF  
BLACKBURN

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE



# PREFACE

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## **Dear Friends,**

The time of Jesus is ancient history. Jerusalem is a long way away. Can it really be true that what happened over there, back then, has anything to do with me?

This Lent we trace the story. On Ash Wednesday, we start the book of Acts, with Jesus' initial followers waiting. Waiting for God. Dependent. Is the Jesus story now over? Life, death, resurrection. A wonderful moment in history? No, this moment, over there, back then, was just a start.

Together, we will read the story of those first decades of the Church. How God led His people and transformed them from a small, fragile group of just one race and nationality into a great movement, including many races and nationalities, the rich and poor, young and old, those with disabilities and folks from the establishment. A community full of the presence of God, constantly surprised by God's overflowing kindness and mercy.

On Easter Day as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, Acts will reach its climax. The end of the story? No way. You might as well ask if Jesus' resurrection is the end of the story. Acts ends with the good news about Jesus being preached boldly and unhindered in Rome – in what for them was the centre of the world. The boundaries and barriers had

been broken. God had brought the Christian story from the margins to the centre, and from there it will go to the ends of the earth, even to Lancashire!

It is a great story. Day by day, we will read about real people in all their variety, grasping God's love for them, and being transformed. We will notice how God is at work, His Spirit always seeming to be one step ahead, leading the way. We will see opposition and hardship and people stay loyal to Jesus. But it is more than that.

This is not just a great story. It is our story. If you read this on a bus in Preston or on your sofa in Blackpool, you are reading the beginning of a story which has become your story. Volume 3247 of Acts would be about you. For nothing has changed. The good news of Jesus is still spreading. The boundaries and barriers are still being broken. People in all their variety are still turning to Jesus, receiving the Spirit, and joining the Christian community.

It also holds up a mirror. Acts can open our eyes to see how God might be at work here. Now. If God encouraged, challenged and worked through them, maybe God is doing the same in us today? If only we would notice, take courage and step up.

Charles Wesley's great hymn 'and can it be?' declares "Tis mercy all, immense and free;

For, O my God, it found out me." The great story starts in Acts. It has found out you – it is now your story – but what of our neighbours? My prayer is that, as you read Acts this Lent, you will rejoice that God's story is your story, and step out with His Spirit so that it becomes their story too.

**The Revd Canon Professor Jeremy Duff, Principal,  
St Padarn's Institute.**

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# ASH WEDNESDAY

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### READ **Acts 1:1-5**

*'For John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Spirit not many days from now.'* **Acts 1:5**

Like many people I am both amazed and terrified by the growing power of AI. The risks are plain to see. But recently, when confronted with an especially dull and long paper for General Synod, I entered it into AI and said, 'Can you summarise this in five sentences?' And it did. What's not to like about that?

But who needs AI when you have that master writer St Luke? In the first five verses of the Acts of the Apostles he summarises his whole Gospel with absolute mastery and precision. The teaching of Jesus, the choice of the apostles, the cross, the resurrection appearances – it's all there in fewer than 150 words!

Any good summary will focus on the main theme, and here that theme is obvious. It's the Holy Spirit. It is through the Spirit's power that Jesus taught the disciples. Then his final instruction is for them to wait in the dangerous city of Jerusalem for the Father's promise to be fulfilled. And what is that promise? It is baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is the gift of Pentecost.

With Luke, we now set off on the most extraordinary journey through the Acts of the Apostles. Many have wondered if a better title might not have been the Acts of the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit's work brings fire to every page of this wonderful book. In the Spirit the Church will be formed and, equipped with the Spirit's gifts, its members will heal, teach, change lives, and proclaim Jesus with such irresistible and subversive power that it will carry many of them to martyrdom.

And concurrent with our journey through Acts will be the journey of Lent. In this holy season, a precious time of repentance and of simple living, we will wait in prayer with the Apostles. And as we wait expectantly, the Father's promise is fulfilled in us. At Easter, the Spirit will be stirred up in our hearts so that we too can proclaim the saving work of Jesus and be witnesses to his resurrection.

So let the journey begin!

### LET US PRAY

*Come Holy Spirit of God and inspire us as we set off on the journey of Lent. Set our hearts on fire with love and inspire us afresh to proclaim the saving work of Jesus. Amen.*

**The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.**

# THURSDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY

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READ

**Acts 1:6-14**

*'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?' Acts 1:11*

What have you lost recently? Keys, glasses, a sock to make a matching pair? Perhaps you have lost something that has resulted in ongoing consequences like a passport when you were expecting to go on holiday. You will know, therefore, not only that sense of frustration but the stress of retracing your steps and looking repeatedly in hope that the lost would be found.

Maybe when I asked what have you lost recently your first thought was sadly the loss of a loved one, for which I am sorry. Grief leads us often on a quest to find our loved one again, to connect, to remember, to feel, to smell, to hear, and experience something of them one more time to the point where it breaks our heart, loss is unsettling. The singer Cat Burns wrote "...grief is love with no home."

The disciples lost their friend, their saviour, their Rabboni at the cross, yet the resurrection gloriously announced the conclusion of death's curse and they were reunited again. But the tangible connection was short lived when Jesus ascended. We don't have insight into how the disciples felt but we know they simply kept looking for what they had lost: 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?'

What can we note from their moment of stationary faith? First, they heard and acted upon the messengers of God because remaining in the place of loss does not change our situation but can cripple our future. Second, they chose to keep in the company of believers who shared their resurrection hope because finding our tribe is good for our soul. Third, they sought the calming balm of prayer together, because it can stabilise our uncertainty and restore us in grief.

The disciples were not going to find Jesus again if they stayed on that mount, they would find Him in the drama of Pentecost, when all that was lost would be restored in tangible ways beyond what they could ask or imagine, empowering this eclectic tribe of women and men.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, help us not to stand still but look forward in the places you call us to. Amen.*

**The Revd Jenny, Urban Ministry Enabler.**

# FRIDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 2:1-21**

‘...everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ **Acts 2:21**

I was unlocking my bike when I saw a couple of lads I knew hanging about. For a bit of fun, I challenged them to a cycle race up the hill. They eagerly agreed, confident of their ability to beat a middle-aged vicar. What they didn't know was that I have an electric bike. This allowed me to sail past them, to shouted accusations of cheating.

I had unexpected power.

The reading describes Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit breaks into the lives of the still confused disciples. Luke, the writer of Acts, seeks to describe the indescribable, saying it was like 'wind' (v.2) and 'fire' (v.3). The impact is obvious though; the frightened disciples are changed and begin to confidently speak of 'the wonders of God' to all people (v.11).

They had unexpected power.

This is remarkable because when God showed up powerfully in the past, people tended to be afraid (see Exodus 20.18-19) – but everything has now changed. On the cross Jesus felt the absence of God's presence and power when 'the sun was turned to darkness' (v.20). Jesus went through all that to put us right with God so through faith in Him you and I can have confidence of God's presence and power in every moment.

As we look forward to Easter, and our Diocesan Centenary Missions later in the year, sharing the difference that Jesus makes to you, might be something you find a bit tricky.

But you and I have God's unexpected power.

So, let's pray that we might speak in His Power, trusting that everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Come Holy Spirit. Fill me with Your unexpected power to speak about all that Jesus has done, so that all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Amen.*

**The Revd Ben Marston, Vicar, St. Paul's Hoddlesden & St. Barnabas Darwen with St. Mary's Grimehills.**



# SATURDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 2:32-41**

*'This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.'* **Acts 2:32**

I wonder how you feel when you hear these words? Are we like the people in Acts 'cut to the heart' responding with the words 'what shall we do?'

I am thankful that in 1985 in a small Methodist chapel; Tenby a man stood up and shared these words. The witness of that one person touched my ten-year-old heart and led me to say 'Yes' to Jesus. It's a personal decision that has continued to influence and shape my life for the last forty years.

Being a witness is not easy. Look at Peter, he denied knowing Jesus and yet at Pentecost with the Holy Spirit's help he had the courage to stand boldly before the crowd and proclaim the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ is risen. As a result, three thousand people's lives were transformed. Now that's a Parish Statistic for Mission worth submitting. I pray that we might see thousands of people across Lancashire this Easter responding to Jesus' invitation, repenting, being baptised, lives transformed.

But it's more than numbers, the people in Acts were ignited by the Spirit of God. I wonder what it would be like if we let go of fear and asked the Holy Spirit to give us courage to be powerful witnesses for Christ. To be 'All for Jesus'.

This Lent can I encourage and challenge you to follow Peter's example to say 'No' to fear and 'Yes' to sharing your story. Let's make this Lent count in building the Kingdom of God across Lancashire. May we answer the call to witness to our families, friends, work colleagues, and neighbours and pray in verse 39: 'For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Father, thank you for the truth that you raised Jesus from the dead. We celebrate your victory over sin and death. We pray for the boldness to be faithful witnesses to your Risen Son in our daily lives. Amen.*

**The Revd Sarah O'Donoghue, Diocesan Renewal Officer.**

SUNDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> FEBRUARY

# THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



READ

**Acts 2:42-47**

*'Every day they continue to meet together...'*  
**Acts 2:46 (NIV)**

When I was a youngster, there was a tv programme called 'why don't you?' Some of you may remember it. Its theme tune was simple, culminating in the line, 'why don't you... switch off your television set and go and do something less boring instead.' Children were encouraged to do just that. During Lent we are invited to 'do something else' to pause as we prepare to journey through Holy Week. Perhaps it's not only to switch off our television sets - but to step away from social media and endless scrolling. It may seem like we're connected - but we may still feel alone and isolated.

In our reading today we are given a beautiful picture of the early Christian community - marked by a shared daily rhythm of life: 'Every day they continued to meet together' (v.46) and 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved' (v.47). It suggests spiritual growth and witness were connected to relationships, through meeting together and shared prayer. What did they do? They met, ate, prayed together, and shared together a rhythm of daily life.

Acts 2 reminds us that genuine connection requires presence. Meeting together regularly, builds trust, and creates space where faith can be encouraged, doubts can be voiced, and burdens can be shared...and praying together is central to this shared life. Praying together reminds us we are not alone in our struggles or hopes. In daily life, this might be family prayer at the end of the day, a small group meeting during the week, or even pausing with a friend to pray in a moment of need. In this way we invite God into the ordinary everyday circumstances of our lives.

In the passage we read that the Lord added to their number daily. Their shared life was a visible witness, and actions can speak more loudly than words. When others see relationships marked by care, humility, and joy, they may wonder what sustains such a way of life. By committing to regular fellowship and praying together, we can show in our communities how our faith is lived out...and that God continues to work daily through ordinary faithfulness. So why don't you... switch off your television set and go and do something else instead.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, may our words and actions reflect Your love, so that our lives point others to You. Amen.*

**The Venerable Jane Atkinson, Archdeacon of Blackburn.**

# MONDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 3:1-16**

*'the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.' (Acts 3:16)*

When a friend was going through a very tough time, the issues were so big that it felt like there was little I could do practically to help, but I did ask 'can I pray for you?' I didn't have much to offer, but by praying for my friend I shared what I did have with her; something more than any tangible gift I could have given her.

In our reading today, we find Peter and John being confronted by someone experiencing an extremely tough time having been unable to walk since birth. He seemed to have no hope except for relying on the generosity, or perhaps pity, of others. Wonderfully, Peter and John saw this man and were bold to share what they had with him. They knew that what, or rather, who, they had to share was worth so much more than the coins the man was expecting to receive from them. Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!' (v.6). And he did! Suddenly, through Jesus, this man had the ability to walk again, and even more importantly he had grounds for solid hope, based on Jesus and not on others.

Sometimes we can feel apologetic when 'all' we have to offer is prayer and sharing the hope we have in Jesus with others, but we are reminded today of the incredible power of Jesus, for whom no problem or struggle is too big.

Whilst we do not see the types of healings our passage describes as often today, we can be confident that Jesus' name is just a powerful today, still bringing hope and healing to many people in many ways. Trusting that those who are following Jesus can look forward to a time when there will be full and perfect healing, in body, mind, and spirit. So, this Lent, as we prepare to celebrate Easter and Jesus' triumph over death and darkness once again, let us consider who around us is still in need of the hope and healing which Jesus brings and let us be bold to share the most precious gift we have with those around us.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, thank You that Your name is powerful and that You are still at work today, bringing hope and healing. Please give us the courage to share You with those around us this Lent, and always. Amen.*

**Natalie Print, Lay-member of St Leonard's, Langho.**

# TUESDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 4:5-18**

*'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.'* **Acts 4:13**

The healing of the lame man has caused consternation and uproar. The natural order and pattern of life have been disturbed, and leaders are unsettled. Something must be done. Arrest. Prison. A night in a cell. Comforts stripped away. Is Peter trembling and full of fear? No, when questioned by the authorities he speaks boldly and powerfully. His message is compelling. Salvation is found in Jesus. Healing and wholeness of life can be yours through the name of Jesus.

We might read this passage and think it has no relevance to our life today. But we'd be wrong. Look at the detail. 'Peter filled with the Holy Spirit.'... 'They saw the boldness of Peter and John...uneducated, common men...they had been with Jesus.' The Holy Spirit is the power source. His filling and dwelling in these ordinary people just like you and I, gives us hope. We can do the same; we can pray for friends and neighbours to be healed, in the name of Jesus. God the healer longs to heal His children today. He yearns for all His children to walk in wholeness of life. It isn't complicated, it doesn't need long formula prayers: 'In the name of Jesus Christ, be healed'.

The Holy Spirit overshadowing us can give us boldness to speak about Jesus to anyone, to family members, the person behind the checkout in the supermarket. What's your story? How has Jesus met and changed you? Where has He healed you? What has he saved you from? Share your story. You don't need a theology degree or be a communications expert you simply need to daily be with Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit so that you can speak and pray with boldness and courage. God wants ordinary people everywhere to be filled with the Holy Spirit to do acts of kindness. After all what is more kind than being an instrument in the hand of God to help bring healing or salvation to someone just like you.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Spirit of the living God fall afresh on your people that we might see healings and salvations in our community today, Amen.*

**The Revd Hannah Boyd, Vicar of All Saints, Higher Walton & Holy Trinity, Hoghton.**

# WEDNESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 4:32-37**

*'Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.' Acts 4:32*

This scene in the early Church takes our breath away. The resurrection's astounding power still hums in the air, and the community responds with a radical, tangible unity. Saint Luke does not merely record doctrinal agreement, but a profound interior harmony: they were "one in heart and soul." This unity of affections, will, and identity became startlingly tangible, as no one claimed personal ownership of their possessions.

Here lies a verse to pierce the soul, especially in this season of Lent. Our journey towards the Cross is an invitation to examine our separations—not only from one another, but within our very selves. How often is our heart divided from our soul? Our beliefs from our actions? Our faith from the stewardship of our means? We are quick to claim things as "mine"—my rights, my time, my resources, my opinion. And with each claim, we build invisible walls.

The miracle of the early Church was a grace-driven renunciation of such claims. This did not flow from any forced ideal, but from a resurrected truth: if Christ is indeed Lord, then nothing is ultimately "mine." He holds the final title. Lent calls us to a soft-hearted, open-handed surrender. It is a season to practise the art of not claiming what we call our own. Perhaps it is relinquishing a grievance we have nursed, or sharing a hoarded resource.

As we walk these forty days, we ask for the Spirit to knit our divided hearts into one, to align our minds with His, that our lives may increasingly manifest a generous, unclaimed grace. In this dying to self-possession, we find the true life of communion.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, knit our divided hearts into one, that we might live in the generous communion of your Spirit.*

**The Revd Cornelius Ashgar, Assistant Curate, St Laurence's  
& St Peter's, Chorley.**

# THURSDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 5:12-26**

*'Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.'* **Acts 5:20**

Recently I read a locked-door mystery thriller. To intrigue his friends, a man sat behind a desk in a room. His lovely assistant double locked the door and loud music played. When it stopped, she unlocked an empty room. Where was the occupant? She again double locked the door, the music played, and when the door was unlocked, there the man was behind the desk. How did they do it?

If we read today's verses from Acts, we find a locked prison mystery. When the High Priest and his henchman arrived, the prison was guarded and locked, but where were the prisoners? The reading reveals the mystery: God sent his heavenly assistant to free the Apostles, not to fool the High Priest, but to stand in the Temple, to 'speak to the people the words of this life'. So off they went to carry on the work that God had given them.

Sometimes, when I read passages like this, I feel a bit of an also ran. After all, Peter and the rest were only ordinary people. But Jesus saw something in them that nobody else saw. He taught them and sent His transforming Spirit, empowering them to become the people He always knew they were.

So, what about us? We are learning from Jesus through the power of His Holy Spirit. So why aren't we powerful like Peter and the rest of the Apostles? After all, like them we are ordinary people in whom Jesus sees what nobody else sees

He knows what gifts He has given each one of us. And He knows who we really are, so it's no use envying other people's gifts, apostles or no. We have our own gifts to claim and use. Yes, I know we are trained to be self-deprecating, but, like the Apostles, we too must prayerfully use the gifts God gave us. Perhaps the Christian life is a process of becoming the person God created, our own particular gifts arising from who we really are. Rather than despising our gifts, let us rejoice that we are God's loved creation.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, grant us grace and courage to use our gifts and to glorify you. Amen.*

**Dr Awena Carter, Lay-member of Lancaster Priory.**

# FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY

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READ

**Acts 5:27-39**

*'The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree.'* Acts 5:30

If anyone ever asks you "what is the Bible about?" there is a very simple answer: "it's all about trees". In the beginning God placed humans amongst two trees, one of knowledge and one of life. Our first ancestors disobeyed God by eating from the tree, and it was our undoing. Yet as St Peter tells us in today's passage, God undid our undoing by another tree. The tree of the cross. By this tree we come to know what God is like, and its fruit is life eternal.

In our reading today from Acts, Jesus' disciples have (again) been brought before court. Faith in Christ's cross has a cost, and like innumerable Christians after them they are suffering its consequences. For them, as for us, the world could be a scary place. Scarier still our choices matter. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge, they brought death and destruction not just upon themselves, but upon all humanity. Likewise our choices affect not only us, but have consequences for others. Often however hard we try we cannot undo the effects of our sin.

Although we cannot undo the past, God is always transforming what was meant for evil, for ultimate good. Just as the cross was meant for ultimate evil, to destroy the one truly innocent and good man, yet God made it to be the greatest thing in all history, the new tree of life. Likewise despite the sins we have committed against others and the way we have marred God's image, in the end God's saving purposes cannot be undone. As we heard in our passage 'if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow' it.

In Lent we are to come afresh to that tree on which Christ saved us, and let it be the trellis by which our life grows cross-shaped. At the very end of the Bible in the last chapter of Revelation the tree of life reappears. All those who have found life through the tree of the cross will come and live beside it, and its leaves will be 'for the healing of the nations'.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus Christ, who died upon that tree for our salvation, help us to fashion our lives according to Your most blessed cross and passion until we come to that place where we will know true life forevermore. Amen.*

**The Revd Calum Mullett, Assistant Curate, St George the Martyr, Preston.**

# SATURDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY



READ

**Acts 6:1-15**

*'And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.'* **Acts 6:15**

Can you believe it? A congregation where factions disagree with one another? Well – I never!

Here we see a cultural divide – the Greek Jews making allegations that their widows are receiving less charity than the Hebrew widows. Trying to appease the complainers, a team of young Greek men are given the job of ensuring that the Greek widows are served fairly – among them Stephen.

But, the allegations still come, thick and fast. Stephen starts to be accused of misrepresenting Moses. The church members, at a loss as to the veracity of such claims, seem to demonstrate herd mentality, launching a full-scale assault on Stephen, whose innocence shines out from his face in a radiant glow. He is transfigured by his faith in Jesus, his Lord. Have you ever experienced such a sensation?

What can we take from this? If we know we speak in truth, honesty, and faith, we should know, as Stephen did, that we have Jesus on our side. Let His wisdom guide us. Let us have the courage to tell it like it is.

In reading this, however, sadly, we know what is to happen to Stephen – a young man, so victimised by the herd that he is stoned to death. His courage is shown in how he continues to stand firm even when he can see where this assault will lead.

But, what has happened? Are those who hurled the false allegations along with the stones remembered by name and honoured through the millennia? No. But Stephen is.

May we hold in our hearts this day in Lent, the image of that wonderful, brave young man, his face radiant with the power and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us remember that nothing, not even death, can separate us from Divine Love.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Dear Lord, Give us confidence to shine like lights in the darkness as we speak your word and demonstrate your love in our lives. Amen*

**Sarah Marshall, R.E. Lead, St. Mary's C.E. Primary School, Mellor.**



**SUNDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> MARCH**

# THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



**READ**

**Acts 7:44-60**

*'the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands ... 'what kind of house will you build for me?' Says the Lord.'* **Acts 7:48-49**

One of the joys of my role is that I spend many Sunday mornings in a different church each week. I get to travel around the diocese visiting the congregations who are the Christian presence in their community. Oftentimes the church building stands at the centre of the local society; be that in the middle of a housing estate, the middle of a shopping centre, or surrounded by the fields of a rural community. Physically the church building stand as a reminder of the presence of Christ right at the heart of everyday life.

And what a joy those buildings are, the architecture, the history, the place where families have gathered at the most important times of their lives to mark significant events. But actually, the bigger joy is not the buildings, despite their beauty, but the people contained within.

We read today in Acts God clearly telling us He does not live in the building, God is not confined to what happens in church on a Sunday morning and neither should our faith be. The worship we will partake in today is important, but of greater importance is the way we honour God in our everyday lives.

If we consider our bodies as temples for the Holy Spirit how does that change the way we act, the way we speak, and the things we devote our time to? Are we living our lives 'all for Jesus' or do we box our faith into an hour each Sunday morning, something we can tick off as having done that we don't need to think about until it comes round again the next Sunday.

The Christian faith spread across the world, and indeed only reached us in the UK, because Christians down the centuries have lived their lives all for Jesus. They have devoted every part of themselves to Him, given over control of their lives, and in doing so have found incredible freedom and joy.

If God does not live in churches made by human hands, what kind of house are you building for Him to live in?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Father Almighty, give us confidence to live our lives all in for Jesus, come to us today and make our bodies the dwelling place of your Spirit. Amen.*

**The Revd Canon Anne Beverley, Director of Ministry.**

# MONDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 8:1-8**

*'Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.'* **Acts 8:4**

The first Christians must have been terrified. Their friend Stephen has just been killed for speaking about Jesus. And the little church in Jerusalem is smashed apart as families grab what they can and run. Luke tells us in today's reading that "they were all scattered".

But that isn't the end of the story. Remember back in Acts 1? The risen Jesus said to His follow that they would be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Now, in Acts 8, that promise is lived out. The scattering that looks like defeat becomes the way God moves the story forwards.

One member of the early church, Philip, ends up in Samaria. That is supposed to shock us: Samaritans were the sort of people that good Jews kept at arm's length. Yet here we see the Gospel crossing a boundary as it is proclaimed to people who, in the eyes of many, should not be included.

Philip speaks about Christ. God heals the sick. Those tormented are set free. And Luke sums it up like this: "There was much joy in that city." What began as persecution in Jerusalem becomes joy in Samaria. What starts as chaos becomes a key turning point in the book of Acts: as the Jewish, Jerusalem-based, community of Jesus starts to become a multiethnic and international movement.

I imagine that many of us know what it is to feel "scattered". A broken relationship. A move you didn't choose, a job lost. Perhaps this Lent you feel far from where you once were, unsure what God is doing.

Acts 8 reminds us: God has not lost control. Maybe the place where you did not plan to be, is the very place where God wants to use you. The people you now sit next to at work, in the café, on the bus, may be the people to whom God wants you to bring his joy.

This Lent you might like to ask: where have I been scattered? Who is in front of me now? And how might I live in a way that points to Jesus, and brings joy?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, when I feel scattered or pushed to the edge, open my eyes to see where you are at work, and use me to carry your good news across the boundaries in front of me.*

**Jen Read, Senior Church Buildings Officer and Licensed Lay Minister.**

# TUESDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 8:14-25**

*'Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.'* **Acts 8:17**

In the NHS, you can't pay your way to the top of the waiting list, to the front of the queue at A&E, or to get the freshest chips in the dinner queue. In a world where money gives you power and influence, there is something refreshing about being unable to buy your way out. Simon finds out that this is true in God's economy too!

Simon sees people receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when Peter and John lay their hands on them. He can see that this is a good and important gift. Yesterday we read about the acts Philip was doing in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what Simon saw, and he wanted some of it.

Simon's enthusiasm in some ways seems commendable, he really wants the Holy Spirit. But there is something unsettling about his request. He says he wants to receive the gift so that whoever he lays hands on may receive it too. Simon has practiced sorcery and knew how to draw a crowd, was he thinking this new "holy spirit trick" could make him some more cash? He wants it so much that he's prepared to pay for it. Peter is not impressed and tells him he can't buy the gifts of God with money.

God's gifts are free—they are not given just to those to people with enough money at the end of the month to pay a Holy Spirit monthly subscription. Neither are they just given to those with the right background, qualifications, or style. God's gifts are free, no one is barred from them. Have you asked God for His gifts?

The book of Acts is a testimony to the Holy Spirit, its power and people's response to it. As you continue to read through, I wonder what response you might feel to the Holy Spirit? The gift is given freely but is so amazing that we see people dedicate their lives to God and respond to his generosity with praise.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Holy Spirit, please fill us with your life. Amen*

**The Revd Amy Bland, Chaplain, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust.**

# WEDNESDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



**READ**  
**Acts 8:**  
**26-40**

*'The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.'* **Acts 8:34-35**

'Guilder, Why aren't you answering the questions like everyone else?' 'Sir, I don't understand.' 'What do you mean you don't understand?' 'You've been here – everyone else seems to get it.' 'But Sir, I need more help to understand.' 'Well, maybe a lunchtime detention will help you understand.'

I passionately believe that God wants to meet us where we are, in ways we understand, to transform our lives for the better – so let's be open to God investigating the Good News of Jesus together!

**Passage:** Philip hears God's, go to a desert road, he meets an Ethiopian official returning from worship in Jerusalem, reading Isaiah. Prompted by the Spirit, Philip runs to the chariot and asks if he understands the passage. The man admits he needs help and invites Philip to join him. Philip explains the Good News about Jesus from the scripture. The Ethiopian believes, is baptised, and goes rejoicing, while the Spirit moves Philip on.

**Point:** Have you ever really wanted to understand something but just couldn't? I know that feeling – I often gave up, messed around, or daydreamed. Today, we have the internet and even AI tools to help us learn, though sometimes they can make things more confusing! In this beautiful passage, two big truths stand out: 1) The gospel is for everyone – every person, every nation. 2) Seeking God and listening to Him matters – and it's okay to ask questions and look for answers

**Practice:** Let's practice our faith in Jesus! Philip listened to God, shared the good news, and explained scripture. The Ethiopian was open, seeking God, asking questions, and rejoicing in the answers. We can do the same: listen to God's Spirit, explore faith in Jesus, journey with others, keep asking and learning. Keep investigating Jesus with these devotions, or join an introduction to Christianity, try some theological study, and see where God's Spirit leads you.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Prayer Heavenly Father, we boldly ask that you speak to us in ways that we understand, so that we can see how amazing you are. Help us to investigate faith in Jesus and help us to share Jesus with others too. So that your good news may reach everyone. Amen*

**The Revd Matt Guilder, Vicar of St Cuthbert's Church, Over Kellet.**

# THURSDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 9:1-19**

*'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.'* **Acts 9:6 (NIV)**

The conversion of Saul is probably the best-known Christian conversion story of all. A tale of one man's quest to destroy Christians, who makes a sudden and remarkable 180-degree turnaround, and becomes the most prominent leader and letter writer of the early church. It is certainly inspirational.

Although Saul, who becomes Paul, is the main character in this passage, he is not the only person involved in this pivotal experience of God. There are men travelling with Saul who are rendered 'speechless', who led a blinded Saul to the city. There is Ananias, whose response to the instruction to seek out the Church's greatest persecutor is one of some apparent reluctance. And of course there is Jesus, who appears to them all in voice, or vision, and who answers their questions: to Saul "Get up and go", and to Ananias "Go! This man is my chosen instrument..."

In prayer, we petition God for our needs or the needs of others and the world. We might ask for guidance, or bring our feelings or fears, and seek comfort. But how often do we remember to ask for patience, and really take the time to listen for an answer? Or for preparedness, especially to have our worldview challenged or changed as Saul's was?

The experience of conversion, for those who are open to discover the path God has set before them, is not usually a one-off, or a major life shift as it was for Saul. It happens again and again; in the countless times we wait on God to hear the word 'Go!' To share our faith in new places or with a new person.

What question do you have for the Lord today? And are you prepared to wait patiently for an answer, even one that might challenge your worldview or send you to uncomfortable places? And notice that, like Saul, you are not alone. God will ensure there are others around you to guide you in moments you can't see a way ahead and bring others to you to help discern the way.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, help us to wait on your Word and hear your call today,  
that we will be obedient to the path set before us. Amen*

**The Revd Lucie Lunn, Dean of Women's Ministry and Vicar of the Heart of Lunesdale Benefice.**

# FRIDAY 6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 9:32-34**

*'And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.'* **Acts 9:42**

The Good News of Jesus was fast spreading through the region and it seemed like an exciting time to be a disciple of Christ. And yet, even for faithful believers, sickness and death reared their ugly heads and brought with them real human emotions of grief and sadness. Tabitha is described as someone who was full of good works and charity and was clearly loved by many. These early Christians were not immune to the suffering and pain that this world brings but what they did have was the understanding and belief that there was power and transformation in Jesus' name.

And so, those around Tabitha, sent for Peter urging him to come "at once" - even though her illness had led to death there clearly was a faith in the impossible that perhaps, just perhaps, if Peter came something miraculous could occur. And it did! Faith in the impossible, despite what the world would say, despite what their human eyes might see, was a clear distinguishing feature of the early church.

It is also a call for us as the church today that in the face of suffering and sadness we too would be people of hope and faith - believing in healing and trusting in the power of Jesus to show up, whatever that may look like. And Tabitha's miraculous healing wasn't just good news for her and those who loved her; the story of what had happened spread throughout the whole region and "many believed in the Lord".

I wonder what good news stories we have of God moving in our lives? Who have we shared them with? Our call as believers is not just to tell others about Jesus, but about those specific things that He has done and the miracles He's woven throughout our lives, so that others might see how good and kind and wonderful He really is. Let's be people who tell of the good things that Jesus has done for us so that many in our communities too can believe.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord God, help us to be sharing the good things that you have done for us so that many more people in our local communities would come to know and trust in you. Amen.*

**Sarah Harvey, Lay-member of St Gabriel's, Blackburn.**

# SATURDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 10:1-20**

*'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'* **Acts 10:15 (NCB)**

I wonder what is important in your relationship with God. Are there things that you cherish? Things that you might consider as the only way to pray, to read the Bible, to 'do church'? Do you also consider the way other people do things the wrong way. I am sure none of you have ever uttered the words – 'That's not how to do a, b, or c!' Or even – 'How can they call themselves Christian when they do x, y or z!'

One of the delights of travelling is to experience another way of life. However, as an Army wife I enjoyed knowing that church would always be what I expected because I always took my own Vicar with me. (My husband was the Vicar and really he was taking me with him!) But occasionally he would be whisked off to dangerous places and I would be left with a stranger leading Sunday worship. It was always different because we all have our own way of doing things in church. Sometimes it was good and sometimes it was brilliant: a new flavour was being offered. Occasionally we can be so set in our ways that God has been shut out! (There was only one time I threw my teddy's out of the pram and decamped to another church, but I returned – that is a much longer story than I have space for here.)

In today's reading God shows Peter that He is doing a new thing. So often we box God into a very small box, but He is much bigger than we know or understand. I am very grateful for all those times when He has surprised me: in the Sunday service on Radio 4, in the liturgy of a Greek Orthodox Church, in the quiet of a Benediction service in central Munich, in the exuberant energy of children at School Worship.

I wonder what is in the way of God surprising you this Lent? I would encourage you to set aside any prejudices you have about church, God, worship and prayer. Allow God in. Be surprised by God.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Father God we are sorry for those times when we think we know best. Help us this Lent to meet Jesus in a new way. May we be courageous in allowing the Holy Spirit to surprise us. Amen*

**The Revd Claire Cooke, Lead Tutor for Formation at Emmanuel Theological College.**

SUNDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

# THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



**READ**  
**Acts 10:34-39**

*'...the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard  
the word...' Acts 10:44*

This year marks one hundred years of the Diocese of Blackburn and there is much planned for this celebratory year under the banner of 'All for Jesus'. Perhaps you've already seen the logo dotted over the website, heard about it through your church or school – you may even have bought an 'All for Jesus' mug! The idea is that in this special year we re-commit to give our all for Jesus, laying our lives down before Him afresh. The wonderful thing about the passage before us today is that it marks the pivotal point in the Bible when the Holy Spirit revealed that Jesus is not just for a chosen few but that He is for everyone. It's the moment that reveals that the inversion of our centenary logo is also true – 'Jesus for All'.

Through Peter's vision and meeting with Cornelius that we read about yesterday, Peter has come to realise that "God shows no partiality" (v34). This is a remarkable statement from a man who previously believed the opposite to be true. But note that up until now Cornelius and Peter have only referred to God? The next thing to happen is that Peter introduces Cornelius and his household to Jesus. Peter begins to preach about Jesus and in verses 36-43 we read a brilliant summary of who Jesus is and why He came, that He died, rose again and that all can receive peace and forgiveness in His name. Amazingly, before Peter evens finishes his talk, the Holy Spirit falls on those present and they begin to praise God and speak in different languages (commonly known as speaking in 'tongues'). This was irrefutable proof for those present – Jesus really was and is the Saviour of all who believe in Him.

Are there people that somehow, deep down, you don't think can truly know Jesus? Perhaps you may be reading this thinking that for some reason you don't feel worthy to know Jesus. This passage tells us that both these thoughts are wholly wrong. Jesus is 'for all'. Why not try talking to Him or about Him with others – like Peter, you may be surprised by what happens!

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Jesus, thank you that all can come to know you and that  
your grace, peace and love know no limits. Amen.*

**Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery and Deputy Diocesan Secretary.**



# MONDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

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**READ**  
**Acts 11:1-18**

*'When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God.'* **Acts 11:18**

How many coincidences does it take for us to recognise God's prompting? I am sure that, like me, many of you will have experienced the joy of God's promptings in your lives. In today's portion of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is recognising a key dimension of Jesus' call to baptise and make disciples of all nations. He is drawn out of himself and led by gentle steps into the great Apostle we know and love.

We start, like Peter, being converted and transformed in ourselves, then we witness to our families and friends, then perhaps more widely in our own town and nation, and then we take that Gospel message to the ends of the earth. We could call it the ever-widening circle. But in all this we must remember to listen for God's prompting and invitation. For at every step, the Lord is with us, and a crowd of strangers become our brothers and sisters.

Peter has accomplished a great work at God's prompting, baptising the whole household of the Roman centurion Cornelius, and it has transformed his outlook on the difference between Jew and Gentile. He explains this to the circumcision party in an ordered fashion, so that they might know how he has been directed by the Holy Spirit. This prompting, like Jesus' own commission, also restores the hope for Israel to be a kingdom of priests for all nations (Exodus 19:6).

So often we play catch-up with the promptings of God. In many ways this is a blessed assurance, because it means that God is going ahead of us. It is also true when we seek the Sacraments which our Lord longs to share with us. As Christians we are called to be lights in the world: to shine brightly with love of the Gospel truth, not dimly in fear of the world's falsehoods. And when we recognise what the Lord has already laid before us, may we rejoice with exceeding joy and praise God for his goodness.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Heavenly Father, incline our hearts to serve you this and every day for your glory and the building up of your kingdom, in Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**The Revd Tristan Meares, Assistant Curate, St Catherine's, Burnley.**

# TUESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



**READ**  
**Acts 11:19-30**

*'When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.'* **Acts 11:23**

It must have been quite remarkable to have been a member of the church in Jerusalem and hear that, despite the very real threat of persecution, their members who 'had been scattered' had been preaching the good news about the Lord Jesus and the church was growing. I imagine them being overwhelmed by a wave of emotion and deep sense of joy that only the Holy Spirit can bestow. The news is spreading, and the numbers are growing. How can they make sure that it continues and faith is sustained? They decide to send Barnabas.

Why Barnabas? Because as it states clearly in v. 24 'he was a good man' and not only that, he was full of the Holy Spirit and had the gift of exhortation. People with this gift are often referred to as 'encouragers'. They are people who inspire perseverance, support, motivate, and strengthen faith. Exactly what the church in Antioch needed. Barnabas was glad when he met the people in Antioch and he, 'exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose'. By using the word exhort Luke is telling us that Barnabas didn't just say a kindly 'well done, don't give up', Barnabas was strongly urging them to remain true to the Lord. His words were more than kind encouragement they were a call to action

Stay steadfast and true, keep moving forward and grow in your faith. Barnabas knew that what was needed to ensure continuation of growth and sustainability of faith was an intentional increase in knowledge and understanding of the source of that faith. He goes and collects Saul (Paul) and together they spend a year teaching and exhorting the people of this new church.

Reflect for a while on the actions of Barnabas and think about the ways in which you could exhort those around you in aspects of their Christian life. Perhaps there are people you know who need to hear words that gently, yet strongly, urge them to steadfastly remain true to the Lord despite the daily challenges of life.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, please give me the right words of exhortation to say to (insert a name here), so that their faith in You may grow stronger. Amen*

**Lisa Fenton, Primary School and Academies Adviser.**

# WEDNESDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

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**READ**  
**Acts 12:1-11**

*'And immediately the Angel left him'.  
Acts 12:10*

Leaving is hard to do, even when we want to. Many of my family have died in the same hospital in Manchester, and even though I have never lived anywhere near it since my birth, I go back when I have to. A few years ago, sitting in a park nearby taking a break from the bedside vigil, a man came along to me and chatted, asking what I was doing and said 'I could tell you're not from round here' and I said 'I am from almost exactly here, just I have not lived here for a long time' and we both realised that it is a big world, which draws us back to where we began whether we want it to or not.

We are drawn back by family, love, faith (hopefully all three are comfortable with each other in our hearts) and sometimes by what may be the pattern of our lives. Herod Agrippa I, who begins today's passage in a murderous way, is part of a line of murderers. His Grandfather, Herod the Great, commanded the slaughter of the innocents in a wish to kill Jesus. His Father, Herod Antipus, had John the Baptist beheaded and his son, Herod Agrippa II, went on to try St Paul. A legacy of hatred and blood, so opposed to the love and the blood of the Cross of Christ. Our own families of blood and of faith can also leave legacies which are life changing – for better or for worse.

This passage reminds me that God has a sovereign will, and that no matter how we may struggle, or be wrongly imprisoned, or indeed killed for our faith, He is in control of all things, and through our work and the work of the Angels, His will is done, on earth as it is in Heaven. We have an echo of Mary here, with Gabriel asking her to be the Mother of the word first spoken, before the Angel left her, as the Angel also leaves Peter. We will be guided and left from time to time, and brought back in strange ways, but the Word made flesh, the word first spoken is Love. And love never fails us.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Give us Lord the courage now, in the middle of Lent, not to leave you. Amen.*

**The Revd Andrew Teather, Vicar, St Stephen-on-the-Cliffs.**

# THURSDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



**READ**  
**Acts 13:1-12**

*'While they were worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...'. Acts 13:2*

A magician, a governor, and a guy who's just changed his name. It sounds like something straight out of the Harry Potter books – but Acts 13 gives us all that and more. And it starts with a group of people praying and fasting.

In a church where there wasn't exactly an abundance of leaders, the Holy Spirit spoke. In obedience, they sent Barnabas and Saul on the first intentional mission trip – a journey that began in Jewish communities and moved towards Gentile ones in Cyprus. Along the way, they drew the attention of the proconsul (governor) and his advisor – a magician masquerading as a prophet. Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas the sorcerer, opposed the Gospel, but the Holy Spirit, speaking through Saul, confronted his heart and left him blind. Sound familiar? Except this time, instead of repentance like Saul's own story, it was the proconsul who believed. What a story! And, as if that wasn't enough, it was at this point that Saul changed his name to Paul.

It all started because a church prayed, fasted, listened and responded.

Last year, some members of our parish organised a week of 24/7 prayer, inviting our congregations, as well as the local schools and neighbouring churches, to sign up for a slot. Sometimes I stole time from sleep to pray quietly by myself, listening for God's voice and reading His Word. Other times I had the privilege of praying with locals curious about the giant marquee pitched on the old church's foundations. It's hard to measure the full impact of the prayer tent, but I know of people encountering God in powerful ways and of others who wouldn't normally attend church step into a place of prayer.

I wonder what will happen as a result of our prayers and fasting in this season?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Holy Spirit, in our prayer and fasting, help us hear Your voice.  
Give us confidence in Your calling and courage to obey. Amen.*

**Sarah Marston, Making Disciples Coordinator.**

# FRIDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 13:38-52**

*'Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'* **Acts 13:46**

Therefore choose.

Decisions, decisions, so many decisions to make in life. As I type this my wife and I are booking a holiday. Where should we go, which hotel should we book. Should we go cheaper and have some spending money, or book a nicer place which is closer to the sights. First-world problems, undoubtedly, as others face far starker choices about what to do without today.

Some choices don't really matter. We're lucky enough to be able to afford a holiday and of the topics before us both will give us a nice time away. Other choices, like those facing the people in today's reading, are literally life and death

Paul and Barnabas have been faithful to their calling and have been successful, in fact very successfully, preaching the gospel in Antioch. Imagine if this scene happened at your church, or any church in our diocese, where 'almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord' (v.44). Wow! Yes, please, more of this! But with gospel-faithfulness comes demonic persecution: 'when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him' (v.45). This has always been the case, and always will be the case, until our Lord returns. People are forced to choose and we don't really like making decisions.

We like to prevaricate. We like to imagine that all will be well, whichever road we take. But some decisions are necessary and critical. Life or death. Heaven or hell. Light or darkness. We must pick! And then, when we have picked, we must share, we must tell, we must offer the same life or death choice to others. To not pick life is, by default, to choose death, and so many are sleep walking into death. We're afraid, I know I am, because we do not want the opposition which comes with clearly, and faithfully proclaiming the gospel... and yet lives depend upon it.

Therefore choose.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the gospel which gives us the possibility of choosing life. Help us not to prevaricate but to choose the Lord Jesus, and then offer Him to our friends and loved ones. Amen.*

**The Revd Mike Print, Parish Priest, St Leonard's, Langho.**

# SATURDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

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**READ**  
**14:8-20**

*'turn from these vain things to a living God.'*  
**Acts 14:15**

Can you imagine Paul's shock. What started out as an innocent response driven by compassion for a man's suffering suddenly saw Paul and Barnabas being hailed as gods! Rather than seeing the power of Jesus working through them, the onlookers wrongly assumed that the Greek gods had performed the miracle.

The two apostles must have wondered where they'd gone wrong. But what we see in this encounter are the foibles of humanness and that the unexpected can happen even when we're doing our best to serve the Lord.

The fear of the unexpected shouldn't keep us from trying to preach the gospel. This account reminds us that the fruit of our efforts should always be credited to God and that often He turns up often in the most surprising ways, our job is to simply keep on keeping on.

Trial and error have a place in following Jesus, so let's not be afraid to take risks for the Lord, trusting that He can work through our weakness and that he will never condemn us for trying. Jesus simply asks that we remain teachable and above all that we begin with where people are at and end with pointing them to him.

I want to give the last word to John Stott who said this in his BST commentary on the book of Acts 'We need to learn from Paul's flexibility. We have no liberty to edit the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ. Nor is there any need to do so. But we have to begin where people are, to find a point of contact with them ... Wherever we begin, however, we shall end with Jesus Christ, who is himself the good news, and who alone can fulfil all human aspirations.'

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, we know that sometimes things don't turn out quite the way we expect or hope for. Let us approach such situations with open hearts, always speaking of you, knowing that in doing so we can bring glory to your world. Amen.*

**The Revd David Craven, Vicar, St George the Martyr, Preston.**

SUNDAY 15<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

# THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT



**READ**  
**Acts**  
**14: 21-28**

*'...they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.'* **Acts 14:21-22**

Reading from the start of Acts 14, you'll recall that Paul and Barnabas' last sermon divided the city of Iconium. So much so, that the Gentiles and Jews colluded and planned to stone them both in response. Moving on to Lystra; crowds from both Iconium and Antioch flooded in, stoned Paul, dragged and left him for dead outside the city. And yet, in the very first line of today's passage we learn that Paul (and Barnabas) not only returned to these same cities but continued to preach there too. It begs the question, why would you return to cities where a death warrant with your name hangs and where you were left for dead?

If we ran a Lenten 'health check' on your local church family, what results might come back? Not weekly attendance statistics or the busyness of your church calendar. But what do the internal workings of your church look like? How well is the heart of your church beating? Is your local church physically and emotionally healthy or does it feel like you're rolling from one struggle to another?

It's amazing to read that Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, whilst experiencing exponential growth in church attendance, were also places where deep spiritual struggles co-existed. Paul and Barnabas faithfully returned to these places to deliver a message of strength and encouragement not just for then, but also as a safeguard for the future.

Today's passage packs a powerful punch stating, 'through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God' (v.22). Whether you are on a missional high or a pastoral low, we must all look inwards; identify our strengths and weakness, name them and seek the strength and encouragement needed to 'continue in the faith' (v.22). Not just during the season of Lent but throughout the year ahead.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Dear Lord, help me to look both inside myself and my local church. Help us identify where we might need support and create opportunities for us to encourage one another. Amen.*

**Abigail Saunders, PA to the Bishop of Burnley.**

# MONDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 15:1-20**

*'The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad.'* **Acts 15:3 (NIV)**

In this passage from Acts, Paul and Barnabas are on an important mission. A serious disagreement has arisen in the early Church, and they are travelling to Jerusalem to speak with the apostles and elders. It would have been easy for them to focus only on their destination and the problem ahead. Yet, as they travel through Phoenicia and Samaria, they deliberately stop and share stories of what God has been doing among the Gentiles – people who were not previously part of God's people. And Luke tells us that this news "made all the believers very glad".

This detail is easy to overlook, but it matters. Paul and Barnabas did not treat sharing their faith as something separate from everyday life or reserved for special moments. Even while travelling, even while dealing with conflict, they made time to talk about Jesus and how lives were being changed. They simply told the story of what they had seen God doing.

This is encouraging no matter what stage we are at on our faith journey. Sharing Jesus does not mean having all the answers or delivering a polished speech. Paul and Barnabas didn't give lectures; they shared real stories of real people whose lives were being transformed by God's grace. In the same way, we are invited to share what Jesus has done in our own lives.

That can sound very simple. It could be saying, "I used to feel alone, but knowing God has helped me feel less afraid." Or, "My faith has given me hope when things have been hard." Or even, "I'm still figuring this out, but following Jesus has changed how I see people."

As we go about our daily lives – at work, at school, with friends or family – we will meet people who are curious, hurting, or searching. Like Paul and Barnabas, we don't have to stop everything or be perfect. We can simply tell the story of what Jesus is doing in us, and trust that God will use it.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Loving God, give us open eyes to see the people we meet and gentle courage to share, in our own words, what you have done in our lives. Amen.*

**The Revd Jon Price, Rector, St James', Brindle.**



# TUESDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts**

**16:6-15**

*'After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.'* **Acts 16:10 (NIV)**

Have you ever seen the TV programme *Race Across the World*? The basic premise is that pairs of people compete to be the first get from point A to point B with a limited budget. Last year the celebrity version of the show took place in Central America and some of the journeys were quite dangerous: sometimes they couldn't travel at night or they would be on a bus that was stopped because of road blocks and patrols and they had to find alternative ways of getting to their destination.

In our Bible reading today, Paul is trying to get the Good News of Jesus out to as many people as possible. We reach a point in the journey where Paul is wanting to travel to Asia Minor – or northern Turkey as we know it today. He is frustrated at every turn because he is being prevented from entering that area by the Holy Spirit. Quite how the Holy Spirit prevents them is not clear, perhaps they too were stopped by road blocks and danger. Instead, as he rests and regroups, Paul gets a clear message in a vision of where he needs to be: to travel further north west to Macedonia. It is there that Paul's ministry takes off once again and he is able to share the Good News of Christ, leading to the formation of the church in Phillipi.

There are times in our lives where we can feel stuck and frustrated. Where our plans and journey with God is not going the way we want it to and it seems like the Holy Spirit is preventing us from taking a certain course of action. During those times it's tempting to force through or even just give up. Instead, we need to take the example of Paul and regroup. If we pray and listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling us, we too may find that the path opens up to us in new and exciting ways.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, send your Holy Spirit to guide me so I may always do your good and perfect will. Amen*

**Jen Read, Senior Church Buildings Officer.**

# WEDNESDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 16:16-34**

*'And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household".'*

**Acts 16: 31**

Yesterday's reading highlighted a pivotal moment in the spread of the gospel. Paul and Silas barely had time to celebrate this spiritual triumph before being beaten and restrained in stocks in a Philippian jail. You would expect this to be unnerving. Prisons then were harsh places where they faced brutal punishment, severe health risks, and an uncertain future. The disruption of their mission was the least of their worries, however instead of ruminating on their predicament, at midnight, Paul and Silas raised their voices in prayer and song. Instead of worrying, they worshipped. In an unexpected turn of events, an earthquake happened and finding the cells open, the jailer assumed the prisoners had escaped. Under Roman law, he would have faced execution if they had, and gripped by fear at the thought of his own fate, he was ready to take his own life. But Paul's voice offered him a lifeline, and in that moment, the jailer discovered a freedom far greater than the physical releasing of chains he was so familiar with: freedom in Christ.

The contrast between the Roman jailer and Paul and Silas in this passage is compelling. The jailer was an official of the most powerful empire, with keys, authority, and physical freedom. But his freedom was an illusion. He would take his own life before suffering the shame of not doing his job for Rome. Paul and Silas had been beaten and chained in the dark cell. They were not powerful or free. Yet this story reminds us that freedom is not defined by circumstances. After the earthquake broke their shackles and opened the prison door, Paul and Silas didn't even try to run away!

Having power and money doesn't make us free. Real personal freedom is something else. You can be physically free yet spiritually bound by fear, guilt, or pride. Or you can be chained in a cell and still experience the deep peace that comes from knowing Jesus. Reading this passage in the season of Lent invites us to examine where we seek freedom. Is it in control, comfort, or success? Or is it in Christ, who alone breaks the chains of sin and death?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, thank you for the freedom You offer me – a freedom that no chains can hold, and no worry can take away. Break the bonds of fear, pride, and guilt in my heart, and lead me to the true freedom I can find in you alone. Amen*

**Sarah Earnshaw, Diocesan Children's Work Adviser.**

# THURSDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



## READ **Acts** **17:16-34**

*'[Paul] reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market-place every day with those who happened to be there.'* **Acts 17:17**

I find it impossible to read today's Scripture without my mind turning to the seventeenth century writer and civil servant John Milton. Best known these days for his poetry, notably *Paradise Lost*, Milton was in his time a powerful and controversial advocate of freedom of speech.

In 1644 he presented a treatise entitled *Areopagitica* to Parliament, in which he argued that just as Paul in Acts 17 was able to step into a Pagan setting and argue for the truth he had received from God, so people should be at liberty to argue their truth in the public arena, without censorship or other threat. Milton, inspired by Paul, was audacious in using his formidable intellect to try to open up space in which God's truth could be spoken, debated and received. He believed that through reasoned open debate, rather than imposed wisdom, people could come together to discuss and agree on the meaning of God's Word. This was radical thinking in the extreme, and at its time of publication Milton's *Areopagitica* was largely ignored. Yet his work, anchored by today's Scripture reading, prepared the way for modern arguments in favour of freedom of speech.

It goes without saying that in many places around the world, speaking truth is as dangerous now as it was for Paul and for Milton. Yet even in our own country, with all the safeguards our democracy affords us, it still takes immense courage and great clarity of heart and mind to speak counter-culturally to organisations and groups of people we feel need to hear an alternative and greater truth.

Many of us have had challenging experiences at work, in church, or among family or friends, for seeking to set ourselves and others free by starting conversations and speaking truth as we have received it. May we have the courage to follow in Paul's footsteps, and dare to speak the name and purpose of the God we serve.

## LET US PRAY

*Father God, help us to speak the truth into those places which most need it with courage, conviction, and love. Amen.*

**The Revd Canon Jenny Gaffin, Canon Precentor, Blackburn Cathedral.**

# FRIDAY 20<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts 18:1-17**

*'and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.'* **Acts 18:3**

I became a Christian in 1988, just a few months after starting my degree in German Studies at the University of Manchester. Having never really read the Bible before, I found the book of Acts particularly compelling; filled with miracles, visions, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, I was desperate to learn more. Today's verse may seem fairly mundane on the surface, but it was passages such as this that opened my eyes to the idea that God, the maker of the universe, had a plan for my life.

This passage in Acts offers a glimpse into God's plan for Paul, his mission and purpose. In verses 1 and 2, we learn that he had left Athens, prior to arriving in Corinth, and here he meets Aquila and Priscilla. It is not chance that they are tentmakers by trade, just like him; this divinely orchestrated encounter grants Paul the means to work and support himself, enabling him to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath where he reasons with the Jews and Greeks. In verse 5, Silas and Timothy join him in Corinth; their assistance freeing Paul to devote himself exclusively to preaching that Jesus is the Messiah. I love how this demonstrates the provision of God in different ways at different times, yet Paul's purpose remains constant – he is to share the Good News. I'm struck too by Paul's need for others to pursue this calling; he needs to work and he needs community; he cannot do this alone.

I look back over the 35+ years since my own decision to follow Christ and can't fail but to see the hand of God at every turn. He has brought people into my life at just the right time, provided financially in miraculous ways, and opened doors in the workplace that I would never have believed possible. Like Paul, we all have our story to tell; let me encourage you to know yours, to share it and to anticipate the next chapter, confident in the knowledge that God has a plan and you do not journey alone.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, I thank you that you have a plan for my life and that you have called me to be part of your family. Give me ears to hear your voice and guide my decisions today, that I may serve you in all I do. Amen.*

**Rachel Rongong, Headteacher, St Michael's CE High School, Chorley.**

# SATURDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH



READ

**Acts**

**18: 24-19:10**

*'Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.'* **Acts 18:26**

One of my favourite sitcoms growing up was *Father Ted*\*. Trying to meet the spiritual needs of their parishioners, three priests demonstrate they are far off the mark in offering spiritual companionship. Their funny antics bring great hilarity and entertainment.

We all need good, positive, and yet challenging spiritual companions. Priscilla and Aquila were blessed in spiritual companionship by Paul. They then nurture Apollos, as Paul had done for them. They guide him in areas where he could grow because he had little knowledge of what Jesus had done through death and resurrection. Then we hear of Paul, sharing with a group of twelve Ephesian disciples. Like Apollos, they sense their need to be close to God through the Messiah – but they had gone no further than that. Paul encourages them to go deeper, to trust in everything Jesus is and has done, and to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

In these two examples of faith, we see nurture and growth. Lent is a time of going deeper; of living in the fullness of what we know and delving into what we don't know. God wills us to turn to Him this Lent and be transformed. Apollos acknowledges the need to be guided in faith and doesn't hold back. He's like a sponge willing to soak up the richness of faith. The twelve, are transformed and empowered to share the Good News. Often, we need others to help us to discern where we might need to grow. Look around you for those spiritual companions through whom God can show you the way. Or, are there people to whom you could offer spiritual guidance, to bring about transformation?

By the power of the Holy Spirit, working in and through us all, we come to know the abundance of God's boundless love. Paul, Priscilla and Aquila were channels of God's love. We are channels of God's love today, enabling those around us to experience that love in all its fullness.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Loving Lord, enable us to journey in faith with our spiritual companions this Lent and Easter, as we grow together in love. Amen.*

**The Revd Canon Tracy Charnock, Vicar, Holy Trinity & St Peter, South Shore.**

**\*Some of the humour in *Father Ted* is now outdated.**

SUNDAY 22<sup>ND</sup> MARCH

# THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



**READ**  
**Acts 19:23-41**

*'Gods made with hands are not gods.'*  
**Acts 19:26**

What do we worship today? In Ephesus, the people worshiped Artemis, and their economy thrived on making silver shrines for her. When Paul preached that “gods made with hands are not gods,” it shook the foundations of their society. The gospel didn’t just change hearts—it disrupted business, culture, and identity.

Our idols may look different, but they are just as real. How many of us long for the latest car, the perfect house, or designer clothes? How many pour passion into football, almost worshipping the players who walk onto the pitch? We cheer, we chant, we wear their colours. Yet even in that world, some players point beyond themselves—making the sign of the cross, reading Scripture, giving glory to Jesus Christ when they win. They remind us that true greatness belongs to God alone.

It’s easy to point at others’ idols, but Lent calls us to examine our own. What competes for our devotion? Success? Comfort? Approval? Christianity is not a private belief tucked away for Sundays—it transforms society. When Jesus is Lord, everything changes: our priorities, our values, our actions.

As we launch our diocesan vision this year, schools have asked us to be more prophetic—to speak truth into injustice. Schools already stand with families facing hardship, but the gospel calls us to go further: to challenge systems that harm and to hold hope high. That’s what Paul did in Ephesus. He didn’t attack people; he proclaimed truth. And truth shook the city.

As we prepare for Easter, let’s turn from the things that cannot save and fix our eyes on the One who can. Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour—not just of our hearts, but of the whole world. When we worship Him, idols fall, and lives are renewed.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, reveal the idols in my life and give me courage to turn from them. Help me to point others to You in word and action, that Your kingdom may come on earth as in heaven. Amen.*

**Iain Parks, Director of Education.**

# MONDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> MARCH

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**READ**

**Acts 20:7-16**

‘But Paul went down and bent over him, and embracing him said, “Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.” **Acts 20:10**

Many of us know what long nights feel like. Not only the nights when we fall asleep exhausted, but the nights when sleep won’t come at all, when pain, worry, or waiting stretches ahead. Patients often tell me how night-time can drag, each minute weighed

down with uncertainty. Families and friends keep loving vigil beside a hospital bed, offering comfort when words dry up, praying quietly, holding a hand, refusing to leave. And through those same hours, nurses and doctors tend and reassure, with a dedication that turns darkness into a place of care. These moments remind us that God often works through the gentle persistence of others, through watchfulness, compassion, and the simple gift of being present when our endurance is most tested.

It is into this very human experience of Eutychus in Acts 20 that we read of a church gathered late into the night, an upper room full of lamplight, Paul speaking at length, and a young man perched on a windowsill gradually nodding off. He falls and yet when Paul embraces him, life is restored. This passage reminds us that God meets us not only when we are alert and composed, but in our tiredness in those moments and places where life feels heavy or fragile. The early Church in that upper room shows us what Christian community is meant to be, a fellowship of encouragement, where we pick one another up, where the wounds and anxieties of life are held in love and hope. Paul continued speaking ‘until dawn,’ as if to say that faith is often sustained by staying with one another through the night hours of the soul. This story also whispers something sacramental. They gathered on ‘the first day of the week’ to break bread, a reminder that at the heart of our faith is not our own strength but Christ’s abiding presence.

As we journey through Lent, perhaps this passage invites us to trust that when we fall, or when the night feels long, Christ’s embrace is already reaching toward us, and the community of faith is ready to help us rise again. God keeps watch with us until the dawn.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus Christ, stay with us through the long nights of the soul, lift us when we fall, and keep watch with us until the dawn. Amen*

**The Revd Clive Lord, Hospital Chaplain, Blackpool Teachings Hospitals.**

# TUESDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



## READ **Acts** **20:17-38**

*'But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.'* **Acts 20:24**

In this reading, Paul is speaking to the church leaders in Ephesus. He knows he won't see them again, so what he says really counts. He reminds them that following Jesus means being humble, staying grounded in God's word, paying attention to what can pull us off course and giving ourselves generously to God and to others.

It's a powerful message for church leaders, but it's also meant for all of us – as we move through everyday life with our families, our work, the bills we juggle, the illnesses we face and the uncertainty we carry.

There's one verse that really stands out to me – verse 24. This is what Paul says: "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul isn't saying his life doesn't matter. He's saying that his life finds its meaning in following Jesus. What matters most isn't comfort or success, but faithfulness—keeping going, finishing the race God has set before him.

Most of us aren't called to travel the world or face prison for our faith. But we are called, every day, to follow Jesus where we are: loving our families, being kind at work, caring for others when we're tired ourselves, and holding on to hope when life feels heavy.

The race Paul talks about isn't a sprint. It's a long journey. Some days we'll run well; other days we'll just keep putting one foot in front of the other. And that's okay. God isn't asking us to be impressive – just faithful.

So, if this Lent you're feeling weary or wondering if you're doing enough, hear this encouragement: faithfulness matters. Staying the course counts. God is at work in your ordinary, everyday lives. You don't have to be perfect. You just have to keep going, one faithful step at a time.

## LET US PRAY

*Faithful God, give us grace to keep going one faithful step at a time, trusting that you are at work in our everyday lives. Amen.*

**The Revd Carolyn Leitch, Vicar, St Nicholas, Fleetwood.**



# WEDNESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



**READ**  
**Acts**  
**21:17-36**

*'They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs'* **Acts 21:21**

Have you ever been misunderstood or misrepresented? How did this make you feel? What were the consequences? In our current digital age, there seems ever greater potential for someone's words, actions, or position on a hot topic to be taken out of context, framed in an unfavourable way, or simply lied about. Sadly, the same can happen within the church community when our differences cause disagreement and conflict. This is what happens in today's reading.

Some Jewish Christians had been misled; believing that Paul was dissuading Jewish Christians from keeping Torah. Paul's teaching of the Church's agreed position that Gentile Christians need not convert to become Jewish by adopting circumcision or other Jewish practices had been twisted and misrepresented (v.25). The 'fake news' that Paul encouraged Jewish followers of Jesus to reject their cultural heritage and traditions spread (v.21); the rumour mill was in full flow (vv.22-24). This led to some Jews, feeling fearful and threatened, to jump to conclusions and assume Paul had done something he hadn't (vv.26-29). This intra-church disagreement soon 'goes viral,' spilling out to the wider society causing confusion, discord, violence, and ultimately a situation where there is so much noise, hostility, and misinformation that the truth can no longer be heard (vv.30-36). The truth is lost and Paul, the church, and wider society all come to harm.

In this penitential season, we are called to reflect on our own lives as followers of Christ. Do I describe someone else's beliefs or conduct in a way they would not recognise? Do I attribute unfounded motives to someone's behaviour? Do I relay 'facts' in a less flattering way than necessary? Do I allow someone to believe something about someone else I know to be untrue? As we dwell on the actions and consequences in today's passage, let's resolve to T.H.I.N.K before we speak and act: T.H.I.N.K. Is it True? Is it Helpful? Is it Inspiring? Is it Necessary? Is it Kind?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*God of truth, help me to think and speak of others in ways that are truthful and loving so that our church and community may flourish, and Jesus' name be praised. Amen.*

**The Revd Andy Meeson, Bishop's Chaplain.**

# THURSDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



**READ**  
**Acts**  
**22:3-22**

*'And he (Ananias) said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.'* **Acts 22:14-15**

I wonder how you first heard about Jesus and his love for you? Perhaps, like me, you grew up in a Christian home and heard about Jesus from family members. Or perhaps, you came to faith through the witness of another Christian. However we came to faith, our stories are precious because they tell of God's work in our lives

In today's reading, Paul tells his story about how he came to believe in Jesus. We also read about Ananias who helps Paul as he starts out on his faith journey. We can see God's hand on both men's lives as they respond obediently to God.

Beginning with Paul, we see him battered, standing in chains, surrounded by a riotous mob of Jews and perplexed Roman soldiers. Grasping this opportunity, Paul tells his story. He explains how he grew up in Jerusalem as a well-educated Jew. He understands how his listeners feel because he too had been zealous for God and had even approved of the death of Stephen. Longing for his listeners to believe, he describes how his life had been transformed by his encounter with Jesus.

Whilst our experiences of coming to faith may differ from Paul's, we can be encouraged by his example. Paul told his story simply in a way that his hearers could understand. We too are called to share our stories of knowing Jesus. We can learn from Ananias' example too. He obeyed God and helped Paul significantly. He prayed for his healing, affirmed that God had called him, encouraged him to be baptised, and know that he was forgiven.

Who can you share your story with? Who can you pray for today?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Heavenly father, we thank you that you are at work in our world and in our lives. We pray for opportunities to tell others about Jesus and to welcome those new to faith into our church families. Amen*

**Joy Rushton, Being Witnesses Manager.**

# FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



**READ**

**Acts**

**22:30-23:11**

*'The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.'* **Acts 23:11**

You may have read in the Advent Devotional that I wrote on Haggai, how the Lord spoke three times the words 'Take courage' to the people of Israel experiencing discouragement in rebuilding the temple. Fast forward and we find that the Lord is speaking these very same words again, this time to Paul. I wonder if this is a message that the Lord is giving us and church communities in these challenging times?

Paul here, finds himself in a place that none of us would choose, he's in custody but temporarily released to appear before the Jewish High Council. He must have been fearful, discouraged, and misunderstood, finding his ministry stalled with little hope for the future. Yet, in this time of despondency, the Lord appears, stands right beside him and speaks the words he most needs to hear 'Take courage...' Not "must do better" or "work harder" but instead he's gifted with the very presence and promise of Jesus. God is reassuring Paul that just as he has spoken about the Good News of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Paul must take courage and do the same in Rome.

It is the nearness of the Lord in our own difficult times which gives us the confidence to carry on, like Paul. It is trusting in the Lord's promise that He will never forsake us and by the power of His Spirit we will overcome times of adversity. For courage comes from the knowledge and assurance that what God promises He will bring about.

So again, take courage...in whatever you are facing...the courage to keep on praying for what seems to be impossible. Take courage to forgive the person who has wronged you. Take courage to step out in faith for where the Lord is leading you. Take courage to trust that the Lord is at work in your life. And for the Church, may she take courage in believing and acting on the promise of Jesus that '...the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' (Matthew 16:18)

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus, whatever I may be facing today may I hear the words "Take courage" and help me to be bold in my witness of your love, forgiveness and grace. Amen.*

**The Revd Karen Herschell, Rector, The Hodder Valley & Diocesan Rural Renewal Officer.**

# SATURDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> MARCH



## READ Acts 24:1-21

*'And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defence".'* **Acts 24:10**

In simple terms, this passage from Acts tells the story of Paul, who's been brought before a powerful leader called Felix by some religious authorities. They accuse Paul of causing trouble, but when Paul gets the chance to speak, he calmly shares his side. He explains that his beliefs aren't a threat, but rather a continuation of God's promises. Paul stands firm in his faith, even when misunderstood and misrepresented. Instead of responding with anger or resentment, Paul models patience and respect, refusing to exclude or dismiss anyone, even those who oppose him.

Paul's experience is a striking example of inclusion. He doesn't shut people out or respond with hostility. Instead, he invites everyone – accusers and listeners alike – to consider God's message. In his words and actions, we see a reflection of God's amazing love: a love that doesn't discriminate, that reaches out to all, regardless of background or beliefs. Paul's story reminds us that God's love is not just for a select few, but for everyone, everywhere; no one is outside the embrace of grace.

What does this mean for us today, especially during Lent? It's a gentle reminder to practice inclusion in our own lives. We're invited to look beyond differences, to welcome others with open hearts, and to share kindness instead of judgement. When we follow Paul's example, we become channels of God's love—making space for those who might feel left out or misunderstood.

As we journey through Lent, let's reflect on how we can embrace inclusion and embody God's amazing love. Whether at home, work, or in our communities, may we find ways to invite others in, showing them that they matter deeply to both us and to God. This Lent, let's remember: God's love knows no boundaries, and each of us is called to be part of a truly inclusive story.

## LET US PRAY

*Lord, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude and awe for your amazing love and boundless inclusion. Just as Paul stood firm in his faith and testified to your truth, we too seek to stand strong in our faith and proclaim your goodness. Amen.*

**The Revd Paul Robinson, Vicar, St Ambrose, Leyland.**

SUNDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

# PALM SUNDAY – HOLY WEEK

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READ

Acts 24:24-25:12

*'I have done nothing wrong'. Acts 25:10*

Above are Paul's words on several occasions in today's text. In scenes like Jesus before Pilate, we see where true power lies in the exchanges with Roman leaders and the man of integrity before them.

Felix and then Festus do not want to make a decision because it's in the 'too hard' category, so they obfuscate, prevaricate and then pass on. There is also a desire for monetary gain and a fear of offending the Jewish leaders. So, our passage ends with a passing up the ranks to Caesar.

Of course, it's always easy to criticise such weakness in a leader but I wonder if you have ever been in a situation where you haven't wanted to decide because it's just too hard. There are times when it's difficult to act with integrity because it is easier to please people. It remains one of the great challenges of leadership, in all forms, but especially politics where there's always another election coming. However, you don't have to be in a position of senior leadership for this to be the case. We all have power in our own homes, in our families, at work etc. There will always be times when we are tempted to just let it go and wait for someone else to take the responsibility.

This part of Acts is a reminder why this will never do for the Christian. When there is a decision to be made, in this case, to deprive someone of their liberty or not just because of fear of others, then the only action is the righteous one. You will note that we are told Paul spoke of righteousness to Felix who it says knew the 'Way' (the earliest name for the Church) and was disturbed by it. Truth will always disturb weak leadership when people know what they should be doing.

So, today may we acknowledge our responsibilities and resolve to use them. We may never have the power of Caesar, but we can make sure we do the right thing in all circumstances.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Loving God, by your grace help me always to make decisions for the good of all. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

**Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster.**

MONDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

# HOLY MONDAY



READ

**Acts 24:24-25:12**

*'I found that he had done nothing deserving death.'* **Acts 25:25**

In this passage, Paul finds himself on trial in a formal room full of figures of authority – kings, military commanders, governors all with influential voices. There must have been an intimidating atmosphere of expectation and judgement as Paul stood at the centre, a leader himself, but whose authority came from his conviction and faithfulness to God rather than position or title

Paul does not act defensively, but responds with integrity, telling the truth about his own past and standing by his strong beliefs. He doesn't try to impress his audience but leads with honesty, putting faith in God rather than valuing approval.

In my role as a Headteacher, I know how it feels to stand in front of audiences like Paul—in governor meetings, Ofsted inspections, or even a school hall full of parents, where my decisions are questioned and judged, and my leadership scrutinised.

As Paul shows, faithful leadership doesn't guarantee agreement from everyone. It is helpful to remember that despite striving to teach and serve others with clarity and consistency, criticism may still come. The passage reminds me that my role as a school leader is not to please or impress others, nor defend myself, but to act at all times in the interest of the children in my care with integrity; faithfully following in the footsteps of Jesus, to carry out God's work.

Despite being on trial, Paul uses his situation to speak the truth, still courageously teaching and shaping the thinking of others, despite being a prisoner. This reminds me, and anyone working in education, that our influence is not removed by limitations or constraints, but can merely be refined to overcome the challenges they present.

Like Paul, we should all remember that however difficult or uncomfortable the situation, there is always an opportunity to speak with wisdom, to model courage to others, and to grow in grace.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, give me the wisdom and courage to speak with integrity, to trust You with outcomes that I cannot control, and help me to model faithfulness in every room that I enter. Amen*

**Dawn Lindley, Headteacher, Langho & Billington St Leonard's CE Primary School.**

TUESDAY 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH

# HOLY TUESDAY

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READ

**Acts 26:12-32**

*'And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?'* **Acts 26:15**

Have you ever heard of people being described as “walking encyclopaedias”? I suspect there wasn't much Paul couldn't tell anyone about God. Which makes the story in our reading today all the more surprising. Surely no one knew God better than this theological heavyweight. If there were religious league tables in knowing about God, Paul would have easily topped the group with a comfortable goal difference. And yet, when God actually spoke to him directly, Paul's response was wonderfully awkward: “Who are you, Lord?” Paul had to ask for an introduction! He suddenly realised he didn't really know God at all.

That encounter with Jesus changed everything Paul knew about God and faith. Along with his restored sight and new name came an opened heart and a transformed life. Here's the uncomfortable question for us: do we believe this kind of transformation still happens today, or have we quietly settled for a Jesus we admire from a distance, rather than one we actually encounter? This year, as Blackburn Diocese celebrates 100 years, we're using the strapline “All for Jesus.” Now that sounds bold, looks great on banners, but is also deeply inconvenient because being all for Jesus means really knowing Jesus rather than knowing about Him.

Knowing Jesus led Paul to consider everything else to be “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). He didn't care for anything other than helping people to know Jesus themselves. It led to people like Festus thinking he'd gone mad, got him thrown in prison, facing death threats, suffering beatings, being stoned, shipwrecked, as well as facing many other hardships before eventually being martyred for his faith. But Paul had planted many churches, brought many people to know the Lord and, through his example and his writings he has led millions, no billions of people, to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Now, we may not have been struck blind or gone through half of what Paul did—but if we know Jesus we each have a story. It may be quieter, slower, but it is no less powerful. The question is: can we tell it?

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord, stir up our faith so much that we cannot help but tell others about you and to live a life all for Jesus. Amen.*

**The Revd Barbara Hunter, Vicar of the Parish of Oswaldtwistle.**

WEDNESDAY 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL

# HOLY WEDNESDAY



**READ**  
**Acts**  
**27:1-20**

*'When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.'* **Acts 27:20**

As we stand on the eve of Maundy Thursday. We are not yet at the cross, but we can feel the gathering sense of what is to come. On this eve of Maundy Thursday, this verse reminds us that when light feels distant and hope is low, God is still present – close, gentle, and faithful in waiting. As a hospital chaplain, I meet people every day living through days like this. Illness can take away the things that usually guide us: routines, plans, confidence in the future. Days blur into one another. The storm may not be dramatic, but it is constant – waiting for results, coping with pain, wondering what tomorrow will bring.

This verse does not try to cheer us up or offer quick reassurance. It simply tells the truth: our hope was abandoned—it ran out. That matters. Sometimes faith is not about feeling hopeful, but it is about being honest. The day before Maundy Thursday is like that. Jesus is about to share a meal with His friends, knowing betrayal and loss are close at hand. Nothing is fixed or right yet. The darkness is already there, even around the table.

In my hospital, I often see how important this honesty is. People do not need easy answers. They need space to say, “This is rubbish, this is hard, it isn’t fair,” without being told to stay positive. Often the most caring thing is just to sit quietly with someone—wherever they are.

Maundy Thursday reminds us that God meets people in these ordinary, painful moments. Jesus washes feet, breaks bread, and stays close – not because things are about to get better, but because love does not disappear when hope feels distant. That same love is present every day in hospital: in quiet kindness, gentleness of touch, with friends, families and staff keeping watch through the night. Even when the way ahead is unclear, we know that no one has to face the storm alone. Maundy Thursday reminds us that God meets us. When the way ahead is uncertain, Christ kneels with care, offering service, closeness, and love. God does not wait for the skies to clear before drawing near.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*God of the storm, when the light has gone and hope feels lost, stay close to us and hold us through the waiting. Amen.*

**The Revd Deacon Rachel Fielding, Chaplain, East Lancashire Hospitals NHS**



THURSDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL

# MAUNDY THURSDAY



READ

**Acts 27:21-32**

*'Take heart.'* Acts 27:22,25

During the Covid pandemic a few years ago a few people in our parish family painted stones as symbols of their hope. One that stands out in my memory quoted the phrase "Let your faith be bigger than your fears"

In our passage today, we find Paul aboard a ship caught in a violent storm. The crew are terrified and hope seems lost. And yet, in the midst of all this chaos, Paul reassures his companions, saying 'Take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you'; in other words, "let your faith be bigger than your fears"

Paul's confidence stems partly from his trust in God's promise, for an angel had assured him that whilst he would stand trial before Caesar, all aboard the ship would be spared; but also from his own experience of God's protection in other stormy times in his ministry.

On Maundy Thursday, we remember Jesus' final moments with His disciples before His crucifixion. Like Paul, Jesus faced a storm—one of betrayal, suffering, and death—yet, He remained steadfast, trusting in God's plan and ministering to His disciples. He washed their feet, and gave them a new commandment: to love one another as He had loved them. Jesus then shared a meal with the disciples which many of us will share in this evening as the Church, in one of the most beautiful and moving liturgies of the whole year, celebrating the Eucharist of the Last Supper, as feet are washed, as we take time to pray with Jesus in Gethsemane, and as altars are stripped bare, reminding us that 'they all forsook him and fled' leaving Jesus to face the storm alone.

Paul's words in today's passage remind us of the power of faith in the face of fear. Just as Paul trusted God's promise, we are called to take heart, to trust in the love and salvation offered through Jesus. Maundy Thursday challenges us to reflect on our own faith and to embody Christ's love, even in the storms of life. As we remember Our Lord's sacrifice, let us also be inspired by Paul's courage and unwavering trust in God's providence.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Let us pray: Lord, in the storms in our lives, may we take heart, may our faith be greater than our fears. Amen.*

**The Revd Damian Porter, Vicar of Torrisholme and Westgate.**

FRIDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL

# GOOD FRIDAY



**READ**  
**Acts**  
**27:33-28:5**

*'And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.'* **Acts 27:35**

Saved!

In this passage from Acts we reach the climax of the disaster when the ship that Paul was on suffers tremendous damage and is broken up. The passage is full of jeopardy. Soldiers who are considering killing the prisoners to ensure they can't escape, a storm that has raged for days with no signs of abating, confusion of where the ship actually is, and the ship itself breaking up and at risk of sinking. We are presented with a picture of fear and uncertainty that is hard to imagine.

Good Friday carries striking parallels to this story. It is a day of darkness, pain, and fear. The difference, however, is stark: on the cross, Jesus faced certain death, while those on the ship clung to hope guided by Paul. Yet both moments reveal how faith transforms fear. The cross is a place where we can turn when we feel the darkness, despair and fear of life. Jesus encountered it first and in Him we can find comfort and hope. The pain may not go away but Jesus provides us with the strength to go on and assurance that He is with us in those difficult times.

Amid the chaos on the ship Paul's response is extraordinary. From his conversion onward, he learned to depend fully on Christ. That deep trust enables him to remain calm and confident, even as danger looms. He breaks bread and gives thanks—an act echoing the Last Supper—bringing hope to all aboard and in that moment, faith becomes tangible.

Against all odds, 276 people survive, washed ashore safely. In life's trials, we cannot guarantee such endings. But we can follow Paul's example—and Jesus'—by laying everything before the Father in prayer and trusting Him completely. It is good to be reminded that God hears us, even in the storm.

This Good Friday, as we reflect on Christ's passion, may we be inspired to depend fully on Him, be thankful that through His grace and sacrifice we are saved, and embrace the personal relationship He offers.

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Lord Jesus helps us to full rely upon you whatever life may bring. Amen.*

**Canon Stephen Whittaker, Diocesan Secretary.**

**SATURDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL**

# **HOLY SATURDAY**

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**READ**  
**Acts**  
**28:7-22**

*'Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans'* **Acts 28:17**

Back in the 90s, many Christian young people sported a WWJD ('What Would Jesus Do?') wristband to encourage holy living in word and deed. It's not perfect theologically (much of the time, we can't do what Jesus would do; some of the time we shouldn't); but it probably did more good than harm. The conclusion of Paul's story invites a mirror-image question: WWBDTJ – 'What Would Be Done To Jesus?' – for the Apostle's experience so clearly echoes that of his Lord that we are surely meant to notice the pattern.

Paul heals the sick (vv8-9), keeps the Law with integrity (v17), and proclaims the hope of Israel and the kingdom of God (vv20, 23). Yet he is handed over to the gentile Romans at the instigation of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (v17). Found innocent, the Roman officials look to release him (v18), but pressure continues for the death penalty (v19) despite the lack of evidence (v17). His case gets passed up from one Roman official to another (v20) and eventually ends, beyond Acts itself, with his judicial murder.

Of course there are significant differences between what happened to Jesus and what Paul underwent. But the similarities are striking and instructive. Faithful followers of Jesus may expect, in some measure, to share in the experience of irrational hatred, cruel rejection, and unjust suffering that He endured.

Today is Holy Saturday: the day the Church remembers that there is nothing which Jesus would not undergo in saving solidarity with us. As the Apostles' Creed summarises, not only was Christ crucified, died, and was buried, but also 'descended to the dead' (traditionally, 'into hell'). The Lord of Life drained the bitter cup of Death to its very dregs that He might know and experience our death from the inside, to its fullest degree, and overthrow it from within.

In that light, it is no great thing if Paul – or I, or you – suffer for a season in solidarity with Him. We can scarcely compare our experience with Christians who face violent persecution; but if ever we feel cruelly mocked, unfairly judged, discriminated-against, or disliked because of our faith, we should draw strength and comfort from our participating in the pattern set by Jesus and first paralleled in the lives of his Apostles. After all, WWBDTJ.

**The Revd Dr Tom Woolford, Vicar, All Saint's, New Longton.**

SUNDAY 5<sup>TH</sup> APRIL

# EASTER SUNDAY



**READ**  
**Acts**  
**28:23-31**

*'...proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.'* **Acts 28:31**

Happy Easter! Christ is Risen!

Today we reach the end of Luke's blockbuster of the "Acts of Jesus through the Apostles". Our magnificent epic, which started in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, now reaches its closing scene in Rome, the centre of the civilised world. Our final scene is homely and domestic. In his own home, the apostle Paul is welcoming anyone who comes to see him, 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance' (v.31). I love those words – 'without hindrance'. The gospel is unstoppable. Boundaries and barriers have been broken down. The Holy Spirit is no respecter of social distancing, as a friend of mine said in lockdown.

Today we celebrate Jesus risen from the dead. No respecter of the crowd-pleasing judgement of Pontius Pilate. No respecter of the gates of hell. No respecter of the sealed tomb. The Holy Spirit 'raised him from the dead and seated him at [God's] right hand in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1. 20).

But is this the end of the story? No. It's just the first chapter of the adventure story that continues as our story too in Lancashire today. The gospel is unhindered. The Spirit crosses every boundary. But He divides opinion. 'And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.' (v.24)

If the kingdom of God and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is true, how can this not be blindingly obvious?

It was ever thus. This was the prophecy of Isaiah (quoted in vv.26-27 of our passage today). It was also the story on the first Easter day. Disbelief, cynicism, even fake news from the very start: 'You must say: 'His disciples came by night and stole him away'...' (Matthew 28:12-15)

In the words of St Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (quoted by St Bede): "We are so dull and full of sleep that we miss the Glory that is all about us. If only we would open our eyes!"

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

**LET US  
PRAY**

*Jesus, Our Risen Lord, would You wake us from sleep, would You open the eyes of our county and nation to see You in all your Glory. Amen*

**The Rt Revd Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster.**



# WHAT'S NEXT

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We really hope you've enjoyed walking through Lent with this booklet. If you're wondering how you can continue with this pattern of daily reading there are a whole host of resources available to you. For ease of access, many resources are now available either online or as apps. A few suggestions are:

## DAILY PRAYER

[churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer](http://churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer)

Daily Prayer is available free as an app or on the Church of England Website and gives complete services for Morning, Evening and Night Prayer in both contemporary (Common Worship) and traditional (Book of Common Prayer) forms.

## BIOY

[bibleinoneyear.org](http://bibleinoneyear.org)

With BIOY each day you receive a Psalm or Proverbs reading, a New Testament and an Old Testament reading. It also provides daily audio and written commentary to walk you through each day's reading, to provide fresh understanding of the texts.

## HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

[blackburn.anglican.org/bible-study](http://blackburn.anglican.org/bible-study)

## BIBLE PODLETS

[bdeducation.org.uk/podcasts/bible-podlets](http://bdeducation.org.uk/podcasts/bible-podlets)

Bible Podlets is a Bible study and discussion podcast for primary aged children to do with adults. Each episode has fun games/activities, an engaging Bible reading in the form of a news story, and discussion, with places to pause and talk together about the topic. You can download discussion notes from the resources area of the site.

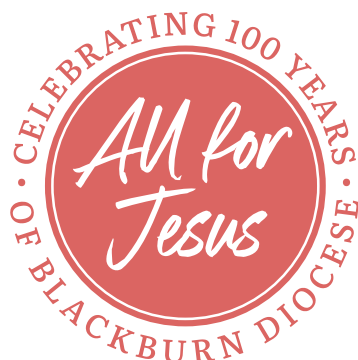
If you prefer a hard copy resource, Christian bookshops carry a large range of Bible reading material, from daily reading notes to study books on particular themes or books of the Bible.

## BISHOP'S BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Access Bible studies created by Bishop Philip, Bishop Jill, and Bishop Joe, designed for small groups or individual use, directly in the Fruitful App, accessible anytime, anywhere.

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Heavenly Father,  
in our Centenary year  
we rededicate ourselves and our Diocese to you.  
Send the Holy Spirit to give us  
confidence in our witness,  
generosity in our service,  
and love for our neighbours,  
that your Church may be renewed  
and many come home to you,  
through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

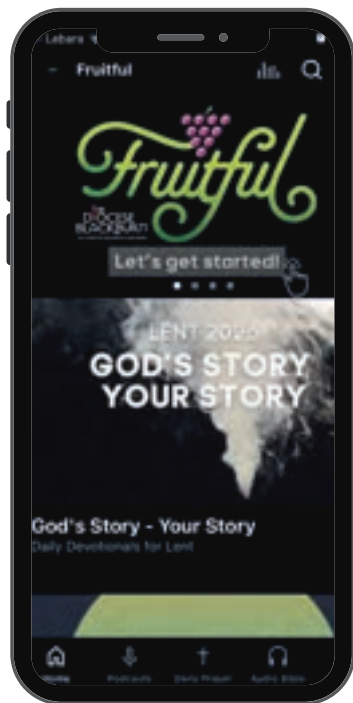




THE  
DIOCESE  
OF BLACKBURN  
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE



*Our daily devotional  
available anytime,  
any place.*



*Join us for our diocesan*

**BIG DAY OUT**

*in Blackpool*



**Saturday 16th May**

**11am - 3.30pm**

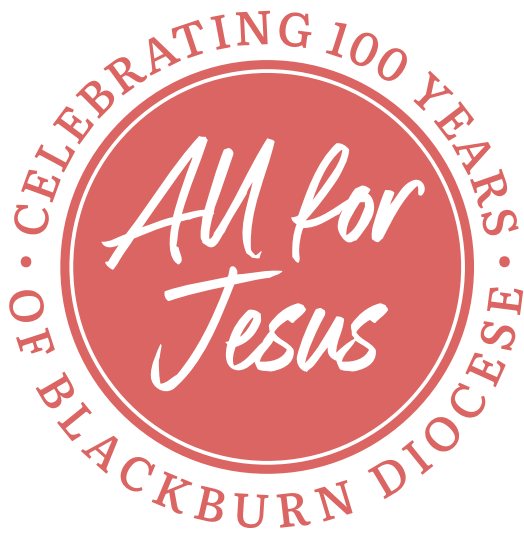
A celebration needs a party, so we are inviting you to have a 'Big Day Out' in the centre of Blackpool; a place that has played such an important role in the history of the diocese.



*more info  
to come*







*All texts in this booklet are taken from the  
English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated*

Designed by Morse-Brown Design

We'd love your feedback on this resource!

