

From
Cradle,
to
Grave,
to
Glory



PART TWO
LENT

THE DIOCESE OF BLACKBURN

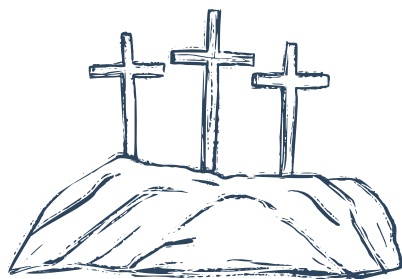


P R E F A C E

A long time ago in a galaxy, seemingly, far far away a wise old man wrote to a young and up-and-coming Christian with these words: *'all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness'* (1 Timothy 3:16). For six years it has been my privilege to edit our diocesan devotionals as we have studied our way through various books of Holy Scripture, and I hope, along with me, that you have learnt a lot about God and His written word. As I have gone on through the Christian life I have been convinced that whilst growing our knowledge of God is important, there is a danger that we end up knowing about God without necessarily knowing God Himself, and that to know God Himself takes being with Him and allowing Him to be with us. So this Lent I hope that you take the opportunity to study the Gospel of Luke but I pray that you will do more than merely study, you will also get up and join in. The Gospels were written not merely so that we could know with confidence what happened 'back then' but far more importantly so that we could be with Jesus now, and by being with Him now *'take up our cross and follow Him'*.

How do we do that? Great question! Since very early on the Church has encouraged us to use Lent as a training ground in Gospel living. To use the next forty-something days as an athlete might use a training schedule to get ready to run a race. Like an athlete we're encouraged to put aside good things in order to get ready for better things; perhaps to give up some food, some TV, some phone-scrolling, and to use the space which giving up those things provides to deliberately make more room for God. Here is where, I hope, this devotional can help. Make space for prayer, or if you pray already make space for more prayer, both on your own and with your local church. As you read the Gospel of Luke, as you read the true story of Jesus coming out of the desert and deliberately walking towards the cross, may we, all of us, choose to do the same, in our hearts, in our minds, and critically in our everyday lives. As you read each one of the following Scripture passages and reflections allow yourself some silence afterwards to ask the Lord 'how can I live this out today?' and then sit in that silence expecting an answer, however that may come. Our Lord spent His time on earth, beginning even before the cradle, walking towards the cross so that He might take you and me with Him to Glory. May this Lent be a time when more and more we rise from our sofas, and from our armchairs, to walk more deliberately with Jesus as He goes to the cross, that through this spiritual exercise we might be '*trained in righteousness*', preparing ourselves for living with Him in Glory.

The Revd Mike Print, Editor of the *Diocesan Devotionals*.



C O N T E N T S

ASH WEDNESDAY

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HOLY WEEK

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READ: LUKE 4:1-13

'Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.'
Luke 4:1-2

In my role as Diocesan Renewal Officer, I spend much of my time with parishes praying for and seeing signs of growth and renewal. Today, Ash Wednesday, offers each of us an opportunity to embark on a 40-day adventure of personal growth and renewal.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus, freshly anointed at His baptism, is immediately led by that same Spirit straight into the barren desert. In this empty space, the enemy offers subtle traps: to turn stones to bread, to bow for instant power, and to force God to prove His love. Every temptation invited Jesus to bypass the wilderness and rely on His own strength rather than His Father's timing.

But Jesus didn't give in. He showed us that being hungry is not a sign of God's absence, but the exact place where absolute dependence on God is forged. Hearing the liturgical words at our Ash Wednesday service, *'Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,'* frees us from our need to be God, to have all the answers, or to strive for perfection.

Wearing the ash cross reminds us that we are a work in progress, beautifully limited, and deeply loved by God. We are called to serve others, doing the best we can, knowing that it is only by the Holy Spirit's strength that we can do the work entrusted to us.

As you begin this Lenten season, you might feel like you are standing in a wilderness of your own. The temptation over the next forty days will be to take a shortcut—to fix it yourself or demand a sign. Instead, try to sit with the discomfort. The invitation to follow Jesus into the wilderness is a call to strip away distractions, fears, and self-preoccupations to deepen our dependence on Him.

The Revd Sarah O'Donoghue, Diocesan Renewal Officer.

LET US PRAY

Lord, thank You for the desert seasons. Forgive me for grabbing at quick fixes. Help me to see my hunger as an invitation to rely on You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 4:14-44

'[Jesus] began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' '
Luke 4:21

One of my guilty pleasures is watching murder mystery programmes, and I particularly enjoy the BBC's 'Death in Paradise'. My favourite part is at the end of each programme, when the detective gathers all the suspects together and gives a summary of how the crime has been committed, holding all in suspense as he reveals 'whodunnit'.

Our passage for today also brings about a big reveal—not 'whodunnit' at the end of a murder mystery, but rather the revelation of who Jesus is, coming right at the beginning of His ministry. He has gone to His home town of Nazareth, and attends the Synagogue, rising to read from the Prophet Isaiah. Having done so, He sits to teach. But instead of teaching in the normal way, He simply says, 'today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

In other words Jesus is letting the congregation know that the Messiah foretold by the Prophet is none other than Himself—the kid from Nazareth who has returned to His home town to fulfil this ancient prophecy. And this has implications—good news for the poor; liberty for captives; the year of the Lord's favour. And yet, it is also perceived as a threat—a threat to the authority of the leaders no doubt. So much so that Jesus is driven out of the town to be thrown off a cliff, but He escapes before it can be done.

This has implications for us today. If we are to recognise Jesus as the Messiah—if we are to be His followers in the twenty-first century, then we need to be prepared to proclaim His message of good news. And to recognise that this is good news in particular for those who are marginalised.

Are we prepared to reflect Jesus' promises to prisoners and refugees; to those that society casts out? Are we prepared to be agents of His love, even when it is unpopular, or risks bringing us ridicule? For only then can we truly be those who proclaim the year of the Lord's favour in the world of today.

The Revd Canon David Arnold, Vicar, The Parish of the Good Shepherd, Accrington.

LET US PRAY

Lord God, thank you for Jesus our Messiah. Help us to be agents of His good news in the world of today, standing up for the marginalised, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

READ: LUKE 5:1-16

'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Luke 5:8b

These words are a startling response. After a long, fruitless night of fishing, Jesus instructs Simon Peter to let down the nets again. Peter responds, addressing Jesus as *'Master'* (v.5) then, having highlighted his previous endeavours and failure, adds: nevertheless *'at your word I will let down the nets'* (v.5). This speaks volumes. Peter obeys Jesus, disregarding his own efforts. No questions, no pushback. Just humility and obedience. The result is an overwhelming catch of fish. Faced with this demonstration of power, Peter is fearful and becomes acutely aware of his own sin and unworthiness in the presence of Jesus. But Jesus does not *'depart'* from Peter, as Peter requests. Instead, Jesus says, *'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men'* (v.10). We're then told that Peter leaves everything, forsakes all, and follows Jesus. Peter's response is the only response: humility, repentance, and obedience.

How often are we like Peter? Instead, we strive in our own strength, trusting in our own agency, failing to acknowledge that true fruitfulness comes only through obedience to God, not through works. Lent calls us to wrestle with our understanding of grace — to cease from our own labours and to take up our cross and follow Him.

The account of the man with leprosy deepens this lesson. The leper approaches Jesus in humility: *'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean'* (v.12). Jesus again responds to humility and faith with mercy — reaching out, touching the man, bringing healing and restoration.

Finally, amidst growing crowds and demands, Jesus withdraws to the wilderness to pray. How often do we carry on in the world, busying ourselves, failing to obey the command to *'Be still and know that I am God'* (Psalm 46:10)? Only through stillness and the emptying of ourselves can we hope to hear His voice and follow Him.

Belinda Haigh, Headteacher, St Gabriel's CE Primary School, Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, like Peter, I confess I am not worthy. Like the leper, I come seeking Your mercy and cleansing. Draw me to yourself that I may be transformed by Your saving grace. Amen.

READ: LUKE 5:17-5:39

'[Jesus] said to him, 'Follow me.' ' Luke 5:27

I hate chess! I watch people playing and think, "That looks fun!" But then I play someone who loves it, they take all my pieces and tell me I can't make certain moves! If I'm honest, I hate it because I don't understand it. No one has really taken the time to show me how to play or inspired me to enjoy it. We can often be dismissive of things we don't understand, especially when they seem different.

Learning the Jesus Way: Jesus is teaching, people have come to hear Him, and friends bring their mate to Jesus. But the Pharisees and teachers of the law ask, 'Who is this?' They don't get it. They are missing the moment. Jesus heals the man, and everyone is amazed and gives praise to God.

Following the Jesus Way: Jesus continues to be radical. He invites Levi, a sinner in the eyes of the religious leaders, to follow Him. Levi walks away from everything and then holds a banquet for Jesus with his other 'sinner' friends. Jesus explains that He has come to help sinners turn back to God.

Living the Jesus Way: The teachers keep asking questions, but are they really listening? Are they learning, following, or even interested in living the Jesus way? Jesus offers a new way: not rigid rules, but a life of following Him and receiving His grace and love.

Perhaps the teachers were so committed to their own perspective that they couldn't understand the Jesus way. They missed the point because they weren't open to an alternative.

Maybe they simply needed someone to come alongside them, help them understand, show them the way and inspire them. That's Jesus. Through His Spirit, He wants to do this for each of us—to share His way with us.

The Revd Matt Guilder, Priest in the Diocese of Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

Dear God, help me to learn, follow, and live the Jesus way. Help us to extend a radical welcome to others, just as Jesus did. This Lent, show us your love in a new way and encourage us on the way. Amen.

READ: LUKE 6:1-11

'And he said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.' ' Luke 6:5

I am old enough to remember when almost everyone attending church on a Sunday would wear their 'Sunday best', or smartest clothing. Times have changed and dress standards are more casual, but that idea of 'Sunday best' lives on.

There is, of course, something good and honourable about dressing smartly for church, but if we are not careful, being overly attentive to how we dress or behave can lead us into wrong ideas about our faith.

In today's passage, we see that in the days of Jesus, there were strict rules about how people should behave on the sabbath. Successive generations of religious leaders had added a complex series of rules to the very basic laws the Lord had laid down about the sabbath day. As a result, keeping them had become an intolerable burden.

Such was this ridiculous situation, that even picking an ear of corn was seen as a grievous breach. Caught red handed, the sabbath police rebuke the disciples. Later, on another sabbath day, Jesus came across a man with a life-limiting disability. Filled with compassion, Jesus heals him. Instead of rejoicing in the man's healing, Luke tells us the sabbath police are *'filled with fury'* (v.11).

Imagine being so obsessed about observance to religious ritual that you would be furious at this. It is easy though to fall into this way of behaving. Many people have reduced church attendance to adherence to a set of customs and routines, and can become indignant, even *'filled with fury'*, at those who fail to follow these established conventions when they come into our churches hungry or in need of healing.

To do so is to miss the point. The sabbath was given to us as a gift. In stopping for this twenty-four hour period of rest, we can allow God to refresh, sustain, and even heal us physically and spiritually. For most, that will come on Sundays, where in Word and Sacrament we are able to able to encounter afresh the One who is the *'lord of the Sabbath'*.

The Revd Steve Haskett, Director of Mission.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, thank You that in the sabbath You invite me to stop and encounter You afresh, so that You can feed and refresh me spiritually and physically. Amen.

READ: LUKE 6:12-19

'[Jesus] came down with them [the twelve] and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people. ' Luke 6:17

When a Prime Minister chooses a new cabinet, the official photograph says: 'This is my team, chosen by me to get the job done'. When the first baby of a new generation is born into a family, multiple family photos will record that 'A new chapter has begun'. When a bishop ordains new priests, the mandatory hats-on everyone-smiling photograph at the cathedral door, joyfully declares 'The work of the church goes on'.

And when Jesus chose His twelve apostles, something a bit like an official photo-call took place, but because there were no cameras present, Luke captured the moment for us in verse 17 of today's reading. There Jesus is standing alongside His twelve apostles. He's commissioning them and presenting them not only to His followers, but also to the watching world. And Luke presents this group picture, of Jesus and His apostles, to us his readers.

But what does this picture say to us? I imagine it to say something like this:

'I've prayerfully chosen these apostles to do a job. A new chapter has begun for God's people and these twelve will lead and guide them. The work of My church will go on, nothing can stop it. These twelve will have My gospel, so read it, listen to it, believe it, respond to it, learn it, don't change it, don't dilute it or disguise it, preach it, repeat it, gossip it, preach it again, don't be ashamed of it, cling to it, remind one another of it – because it tells you who I am and what I've done for you. My miracles have shown you I have power to heal, and My gospel, which these apostles will teach you and pass on to you, will be the power of God for the salvation of those who believe it.'

As together during Lent we read through Luke's Gospel, let's try to notice the extraordinary variety of people who come to believe in Jesus, the Saviour of the world, and as 'Joyful Followers of Jesus', let's resolve to tell as many people as we can, the unchanging good news about Him.

David Gascoigne, Licensed Lay Minister at St Chad's Church, Poulton-Le-Fylde.

LET US PRAY

Lord, we praise You for the gospel of salvation which we have received from the apostles, please help us to faithfully pass it on. Amen.

READ: LUKE 6:20-49

'But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.' Luke 6:27

Retail companies spend lots of money every year thinking up pithy strap-lines to grab your attention. Think L'Oreal, think Nike, think McDonalds and you'll be able to quote their advertising strap-line back at me! Jesus has chosen His new team and now they must get on with ministry. If we were to sum it up in a strap-line it would be *'live differently!'*

This rich and beautiful passage is our statement for kingdom living. Can I encourage you to find ten minutes today and slowly and prayerfully meditate and savour this passage in all its rich depth and beauty. What you will discover is a manifesto for behaviour.

Jesus invites us to not live and behave as the world does. We need to look weird and odd when we seek out our enemies to lavish love on them, when we persistently pray for those who ill treat us, when we give our possessions away to bless those in need. People should be able to look at our crazy lifestyle, our odd habits and our counter cultural actions and say 'wow, they're weird, what on earth motivates them?'

The answer is Jesus. Jesus who travelled to the cross for our sakes. Who suffered and died to save us. In this season of Lent let's find time to evaluate our life and behaviour and say is there enough evidence to convict me of following Jesus? Have I blended in or stuck out like a sore thumb? Whatever our answer we can simply come to Jesus and, if necessary, say sorry and use the rest of the season to take up new habits and behaviours. To go out of our way to find enemies and outsiders to allow our paths to cross so we can bless them. To be generous with our possessions and time, to love the unlovely without limits. This is the beautiful invitation to ministry living that Jesus places before us, will we accept?

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

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, give us courage to live outrageously and lavishly for the sake of bringing the lost home to find You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 7:1-17

'Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.' Luke 7:7

The sick healed and the dead raised! Jesus did all this just by speaking. Isn't He amazing!

Today's passage can be split into two parts, in the first, verses 1-10, we are introduced to a centurion; a sort of Roman military captain. The centurion is a curious character because he is part of the elite, used to having servants attending to his every need. Why would he as a Roman citizen seek Jesus out? Why would he care that Jesus has come to town? He surprises us further with a great humility, saying that he is not worthy for Jesus to come under his roof. The secret to the centurion's strange behaviour is revealed by what he says to Jesus, *'But say the word, and let my servant be healed.'* The centurion had great faith in Jesus' words, so much so that even our Lord marvelled at his faith. Indeed, the centurion understood that Jesus could heal with His word as much as with touch. And Jesus did, as the servant was miraculously healed! A reminder that faith can come in the most unexpected of forms.

Speaking of unexpected, what is more shocking than literally raising someone from the dead? Jesus did this too in our passage's second part, verses 11-17. This time, it is Jesus approaching the situation, having compassion on a widow at her own son's funeral. You can imagine the tragedy and loss at such an occasion. Jesus had compassion on the widow, saying *'Do not weep'* (v.13) and then commanded to the open coffin, *'Young man, I say to you, arise'* (v.14). Jesus' word brought life where there had once been death. Jesus' words quite literally have the power to change lives, even the power to challenge death! Not only a foreshadowing of Jesus' own resurrection (spoiler alert), it also shows that Jesus loves us deeply and intervenes when we cry out to Him.

What a joy it is to come to Him in prayer and know that He is willing and able!

Jotham Bate, Stewardship Resourcing Officer.

LET US PRAY

Thank you Lord that your word has power, in any circumstance or situation, even over death. Amen.

READ: LUKE 7:18-35

‘What then did you go out to see?’ Luke 7:26

I recently heard about a woman who was fearful about the reaction of her family if she told them who she had voted for. She lied to remain acceptable. Different outlooks still remain a cause of breakdown even in close relationships, which is why we speak of ‘vision’ rather than ‘outlook’ because of the primary relationship with God who helps us to see what is true.

Luke makes a comparison between the imprisoned Baptist and Jesus who comes to free us from the sin which deprives us of the fullness of vision.

John has summoned two of his disciples who dutifully deliver his message verbatim. There is no reason to doubt their loyalty, but the personal experience of Jesus is no longer known by the imprisoned John. Jesus remains out of sight. By contrast Jesus has acted in such a way in the sight of those around Him to have made an indelible impression upon them. He accompanies this with searching questions which clear away that self-deception we are all prone to and which is incompatible with the vision Jesus is presenting them with.

John’s ‘disciples’ are now referred to as ‘messengers’ – the quality of relationship has changed, and the ‘messengers’ have ‘gone’ without hearing Jesus’ questions.

Lent is a time for Jesus to search-out or clear away the sin which blinds us to this vision. Lent is a time to look for signs of the Resurrection. As we arrive for worship we can ask, ‘what have I come to see?’ In the back of my mind is the answer elsewhere in the Gospels, *‘we wish to see Jesus.’* (John 12:21).

The fears of the woman I began with are real pastoral issues. The vision Jesus creates within us informs us of the heavenly kingdom but also of a world we want to see in the here and now, and so we are presented with the challenge of how we accompany those who feel their integrity is compromised by others. As we do this we can perhaps see ourselves as ‘wisdom’s children’ in the ways we can still bear the fruits of integrity even when faced by the judgements of others.

The Revd Guy Jamieson, Vicar, Little Marsden, Nelson.

LET US PRAY

Father, by following the way of the Cross dispel the darkness which deprives our sight of You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 7:36-50

‘Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ Luke 7:47

In today’s passage, we’re instantly struck with the extravagant behaviour of the woman—compared to the somewhat dismissive efforts of Simon the Pharisee—to welcome Jesus into His home. Whilst Simon didn’t even do the minimum expected of a host, the woman did all this and more, when she poured not just a little but the WHOLE JAR of her valuable oil onto Jesus. Not only was it lavish and costly for her, but she’ll also have done it with the judging stares and glares of all those around her. Why would she do this?

Jesus helps Simon find the answer in His parable of the two debtors. The woman knows the extravagant love of Jesus. She’s deeply aware of her sin. She knows her big debt. But she, like the debtor who owed more and was therefore more thrilled when his debt was cancelled, has experienced the joy of being able to live in peace, knowing her sin is no longer weighing her down, thanks to the lavish forgiveness of Jesus.

What about you? Are you aware of the depths of your sin, not revelling in them but revelling in the forgiveness you’ve received from Jesus? Does knowing how much you’ve been forgiven make you want to live your life with joyful abandon, throwing the best of your time, your possessions, your whole self into loving and following Him, no matter the cost? Or are you often more like the Pharisee, trusting in your outward show of good behaviour, but unaware of the darkness in your heart? Being told you’re a sinner, but not truly believing it deep down, and so not really appreciating Jesus’ sacrificial death for you?

It’s only when, like the sinful woman with her alabaster jar, we realise the depths of our sin, we can look with a deeper love at our glorious Lord Jesus and be thankful for His lavish love. Living our lives in peace, throwing ourselves and all we have at His feet, knowing we’re following the only one whose love for us, opinion of us and future for us is what truly matters.

Rachel Anderton, Lay-member, The Redeemer, Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, as we look towards the cross this Easter, we’re sorry for our half-heartedness towards You, when we don’t see how precious You are. Please forgive us for trusting in our own actions, and give us a right awareness of our sin, not to despair but to enable us to look to You with joyful abandon, knowing Your extravagant love and commitment towards us as Your precious children. Amen.

READ: LUKE 8:1-21

'Take care then how you hear...' Luke 8:18

How good are you at listening? I don't just mean hearing what someone says but really listening? We've all been in situations where we have misheard or misunderstood someone because we haven't paid full attention, distracted by our phone or our thoughts. The whole section of Luke today could be summed up in the phrase 'hear the word of God and put it into practice.' Lent affords us the gift of attending more to the word and considering how we put it into practice.

At first, this passage reads like different stories or episodes thrown together, but understood through the lens of listening to and acting on the word, there is natural cohesion. The passage opens with an introduction to those travelling with Jesus, a mixed bag – those healed from disease and demonic influence, the twelve disciples including fishermen, tax collectors and political hot-heads and Herod's household manager. All of them have heard the word and responded by following Jesus.

Jesus then tells a story about the potential condition of the human heart and its ability to hear the word of God. Whether disturbed by the enemy, rootless, distracted by the cares of the world or fertile, the message conveyed is that it is possible to hear the same message and respond in different ways. The challenge is to hear the word and bear fruit with patience.

A life of patient fruit-bearing looks like a lamp on a stand that those who enter may see the light. When we let our light shine that which was previously hidden in the darkness is suddenly revealed; brokenness in need of healing, the demonic in need of release, confusion in need of clarity, sin in need of repentance and forgiveness, death in need of life; each the result of letting the word in, acting on it and letting its light shine.

This is what it means to be in the family of God. Jesus' final statement is not rejection of his earthly family, far from it; He is offering a broader view of family and community made up of those who hear His word and do as it says. Let's be those who desire to be in His family.

The Revd Craig Abbott, Head of Children, Youth and Chaplaincy.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, give us fertile hearts that we may be known as those who are part of Your family, known as those who hear Your word, receive it with joy and act upon it in humble, obedient service. Amen.

READ: LUKE 8:22-56

'He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' Luke 8:25

'Where is your faith?' Jesus asks in today's reading. It is a question that invites us to pause and reflect. How might you answer it? Whether you're exploring the Christian faith for the first time or have been a Christian for many years, it is a helpful question to consider.

Verses 22 to 56 leave us in no doubt where our faith can confidently be placed. They are a resounding affirmation of the power and authority of Jesus Christ coupled with the peace and calm He can bring out of chaos. First, He shows power over nature, rebuking the wind and waves – *'and there was calm'* (v.24). Second, He shows power over evil spirits, commanding the evil spirits to come out of the man – following which the man sat at his feet, *'clothed and in his right mind'* (v.35). Third, He showed power healing the woman who simply touched Him and was *'immediately healed'* (v.47) as Jesus felt power go out of Him – saying to her, *'go in peace'* (v.48). Finally, He demonstrates power over death, taking the lifeless child by the hand and saying *'arise'* (v.54) following which she got up and her spirit returned – and her parents were *'amazed'* (v.56).

Each of the four examples start with people who are in distress, filled with fear and great suffering. They all look to Jesus. Some approach Him with remarkable faith, others with fear and uncertainty, but in every case His power and authority are sufficient and peace and calm follow.

Few, if any, of us go through life without experiencing seasons of worry and distress. Some will face times of deep suffering, uncertainty, and fear. In such moments, we may wonder whether Jesus can really help, especially when our problems seem overwhelming or beyond resolution. Yet these verses make it clear that nothing lies beyond His power and authority. While Jesus does not always remove our difficulties immediately, He promises His presence in them, and He is able to sustain us with His peace even when circumstances remain difficult. As He says in verse 50, *'Do not fear, only believe'*.

Let's consider the opening question again – *'Where is your faith?'* If you feel able, why not pray the prayer below taken from Psalm 25 in response.

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

LET US PRAY

"In you, Lord my God, I put my trust." Amen.

READ: LUKE 9:1-20

'who do you say that I am?' Luke 9:20

Life is often shaped by the questions we ask. Questions of identity and purpose, meaning and significance. Who am I? What am I doing here? Does my life matter? I was a football obsessed child and am still a huge football fan today. I was also a shy child, I remember being described as 'he wouldn't say boo to a goose'— which is true, I wouldn't, would you? Anyway, one summer I was at soccer school and for whatever reason my coaches for the week got my name wrong, Paul instead of Pete (easy mistake to make!). As I was shy and nervous I didn't correct them and went by the wrong name all week, until I won a trophy at the end of the week and told them my correct name! Who am I, what am I doing here, does my life matter?

I believe your life does matter and your life can have meaning and purpose. Today's passage reveals more about who Jesus is, the One who has power and authority over

the forces of darkness, the power to heal the sick, He is the proclaimer of Good News, He is the King of the Kingdom, He is the provider of our daily bread. Then He asks His disciples a particularly pertinent question, *'who do you say that I am?'* What would your answer be?

Author and Church leader Judah Smith wrote a book entitled 'Jesus Is ____?' The book invited its readers to fill in the blank and answer the question. I once led a day of lessons in a secondary school locally and asked the students the same question, they had some brilliant answers; 'Jesus is LOVE', 'Jesus is LIFE', 'Jesus is the Son of God', 'Jesus is the Saviour of the World'. What would your answer be? How would you fill in the blank; 'Jesus Is ____?' Peter's answer was a declaration of faith; remember this is before the Cross and the Resurrection; but Peter declares *'The Christ of God'* (v.2).... the Holy One, the Chosen One, the Promised One!

Canon Pete Baker, Co-Senior Leader, Life Church Lancashire.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, we look to You, we put our hope in You, we declare that You are the Christ, the Holy One, the Chosen One, the Promised One! As we look to You we believe that we will be transformed into Your likeness, and that our lives will be filled with Your life, in Jesus' name and for Your Glory we pray. Amen.

READ: LUKE 9:21-36

'And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.' Luke 9:23

Seeking comfort comes easily, I often find myself drawn to the parts of the Bible that bring comfort, reassurance, and peace. Yet in this passage, Jesus speaks first about suffering before revealing His glory. His words are both challenging and deeply personal: 'Take up your cross daily and follow me.' As I reflect on this during Lent, I am reminded that discipleship is not simply about believing in Jesus; it is about allowing Him to shape the way I live each day.

The word that strikes me most is 'daily'. I sometimes think of following Jesus in terms of the big decisions or significant acts of faith, but Jesus points instead to a continual, everyday surrender. It is found in the small moments: choosing patience when tired, offering forgiveness whilst hurting, letting go of pride, or making time for prayer when life feels busy. The cross I am called to carry may not be dramatic, but it does require trust and obedience.

As the passage continues, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain and is transfigured before them. For a brief moment, they see His glory unveiled. I wonder if they needed that vision because of what lay ahead. They would soon witness rejection, suffering, and uncertainty. The glimpse of Christ's glory reminded them that God's story does not end with the cross.

I need that reminder too. There are seasons when the path of faith feels demanding and when God's purposes seem unclear. Like Peter, I would rather stay on the mountain in places of certainty and spiritual encouragement. Yet Jesus calls me back down into everyday life, encouraging me with the truth of His word and the assurance of who He is.

This Lent, I am challenged to trust in God's word and to trust that even when the way ahead feels difficult, Jesus is who He says He is and He is with me, so I can take up my cross daily for His glory and my good. In the lead up to Easter let's take up our cross by laying aside our pride and fear of man, to invite people to come and hear the Gospel, so that they can see the glory of Jesus and follow Him too.

Lara McNally, Lay-person, Trinity Community Church, Accrington.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, help me to follow You faithfully each day, trusting You in both the mountain-top moments and the valleys of ordinary life. Amen.

READ: LUKE 9:37-62

'When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.' Luke 9:51

In the Oval Office is the Resolute Desk, made from the timbers of H.M.S. Resolute; eight U.S. Presidents have used it. Imagine the world-changing decisions which have been determined there. How much pressure there must have been to give up on them. Sometimes resolve can be a dirty word, seen as inflexible or rigid. But resolve is not a bad thing.

It captures something of our Lord Jesus. His resolve is our salvation. Twice we are told of Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem (vv.51, 53). Jesus knows who has sent Him (v.48) and where He is heading. He will be taken back up into heaven to reign (v.51). But He also knows what must happen before that. The glorious Son of Man will submit Himself to the gruesome acts of men (v.44). Yet still He determines to complete His mission.

This resolve might seem less majestic than His miracles (v.43). But pause to marvel at Jesus' resolve on our behalf. Pray for this truth to sink into our ears. Such resolve was costly. He patiently bore with faithless humanity for it (v.41). He faced opposition for it (v.53). He gave up comfort for it (v.58). Yet He resolved to live, die, rise, and ascend for us. He held back wrath so that He could first offer grace (vv.54-55). He did it for His Father's majesty and our forgiveness and inclusion. Give praise to Jesus!

Jesus likewise calls us to follow Him (v.59). We can only resolve in His power. But resolve we must. To live dependent on Jesus in the face of evil (vv.37-43), to seek His understanding (vv.43-45), to serve the least (vv.46-48), to discern true gospel work, even if it looks different to ours (vv.49-50) and to prioritise Jesus' kingdom. We will only be able to do so in the joyful strength of Him who first resolved for us. Which might the Lord calling us to resolve to do today?

The Revd Paul Bye, Vicar, St Paul's Ansdell & Fairhaven.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, thank You that Your resolve is my rescue. Give me resolve to follow You today. Amen.

READ: LUKE 10:1-20

'And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.' Luke 10:2

Over the years, I have been privileged to listen to many people talking about their vocational story. Every one of them is different, but there is one theme which unites them all - a strong sense of call by God. This can come in various ways, through our prayers, through the reading of Scripture, through the words of other people who may say to us, 'have you thought about...?' To hear that call we need to be listening to God, alert to what He is saying to us and whatever we may be called to in life, that by following Him we are the labourers in the harvest field. That field may be in church, in the community, in hospital, school or prisons, in industry or offices, wherever we spend time with others, that is our field.

However, Jesus calls these seventy-two for a specific purpose—like John the Baptist—to prepare the way for Him in the towns and villages He is going to visit. We do not know who they are, but they must have responded to Jesus' call to them. To prepare them for being sent out He gives them instructions: 'Go in twos, not alone, to prepare the way for Me; pray before you travel especially as the way won't always be easy; travel light, don't chat to those you meet on the way as you need to be focused on My work; accept hospitality and share resources, but do not expect everything to go well. There will be those who hear, and those who reject. At the end come and report back, celebrating that work and witness which has been blessed by Me'.

This Lent, take time to reflect on how God might be calling you to be one of His labourers in the harvest field and where you might be being sent to work. We are promised that we do not go alone, Jesus is always with us through the Holy Spirit and we can work only in the power of God. Where we see blessings in our lives, let us be thankful and rejoice with the Lord.

The Revd Canon Fleur Green, Vicar, St John Baptist, Broughton.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, open my ears and my heart to Your words and help me to accept Your call this day. Amen.

READ: LUKE 10:21-42

'But Martha was distracted with much serving...' Luke 10:40a

What a sense of relief Jesus must have felt, when famished and exhausted from His journey, He finally arrived at the home of his dear friends, Martha and Mary. Our Lord was no stranger to hunger and thirst, of feet that ached, or of legs ready to give out. He adopted our humanity in full, and came as a servant – allowing Himself the vulnerability of being dependent upon other servants for His needs.

Jesus entered their home, and was grateful for the opportunity to sit and rest His weary bones. Martha sprang into action preparing a meal for Our Lord, while Mary positioned herself at Jesus' feet, eager to listen to all that He was saying.

No doubt Martha caught bits of what Jesus was saying as she set the table and carried food to and fro, but we're told she was 'distracted with much serving'. The word *'distracted'* might be better translated as 'pulled away' or 'dragged away'. The implication was that she desperately wanted to savour Jesus' words as well, and to sit at His feet just as Mary was, but she allowed her perceived duties to pull and drag her back into the kitchen. It was this conflict that led to her outburst.

Martha had been doing what she thought our Lord needed most. She had not realised that despite our Lord's needs, at that moment, He desired her company over her service. How often do we make the same mistake? How often do we, in our fervent desire to serve Christ, mistakenly think that He needs our work and cannot do without us? How often do we allow 'doing for Christ' to take priority in our diaries over 'being with Christ'?

Make no mistake, Jesus calls us to a life of service. We can serve Him just as surely as Martha did – *'as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'* (Matthew 25:40)...But this Lent, let us focus and ensure that sitting at Jesus' feet, and listening to His Word, is the priority of our lives – and the reservoir from which all mission flows.

The Revd Joe Kochanski, Assistant Curate, Parishes of Rufford and Tarleton.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, grant us Mary's hunger for Your word and Martha's heart for serving, that our whole lives may glorify You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 11:1-13

'And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.' Luke 11:9

There's a scene in Shakespeare's play 'Hamlet' where King Claudius is praying and we hear him say to himself, *'My words fly up to Heaven, my thoughts remain below, words without thoughts never to Heaven go'* (Act 3, Sc 3). I wonder if you have ever experienced that feeling when you're trying to pray but your heart's not really in it, or you don't have the words, or maybe you're not even sure that anyone is actually listening? – I know I have sometimes felt all of that. Today's reading from Luke provides a solution to this problem.

We find the passage about The Lord's Prayer in both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. In Matthew (6:9-13) we have a much fuller version of the prayer but Luke deliberately strips things back to the essential components, providing us with a template for those times when prayer seems to be hard or thin, or the words just won't come. The essential components outlined by Luke consist of:

- adoration 'Our Father, Hallowed be Thy name';
- a desire for our needs to be met 'Give us this day our daily bread';
- a request for forgiveness of sins and finally,
- we ask that God will save/deliver us.

On days when prayer won't come we can, at least, reach for the prayer that many of us know by heart. Whenever I say The Lord's Prayer, I'm reminded of an evening, during my curacy, when I visited the home of an elderly lady who was close to death. As I anointed her head with oil, she appeared to be almost gone and totally unresponsive. I asked the family to join me in the words of The Lord's Prayer and, as we began to pray those familiar words, I saw the lips of this dying woman begin to move, as she prayed them with us.

For many of us, The Lord's Prayer is more than just empty words; it is a part of us and it comes from somewhere deep within. So if, at times, this is the only prayer you feel able to pray, it will be enough.

The Revd Canon Cindy Rigney, Vicar, Dolphinholme with Quernmore and Over Wyresdale.

LET US PRAY

Loving Father, in those times when prayer seems hard, help us to trust that You stand ready to open the door to all who seek You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 11:14-54

‘Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering.’ Luke 11:52

During a recent holiday my sister and I visited a church in Santorini to sit quietly inside. After a while, I was aware of someone nearby and heard the sound of keys. We stood to go, but the lady with the keys indicated for us to stay, pointing to the way we could exit. When we left, we walked through a beautiful hidden garden where we met the lady with the keys. In broken English she told us she supported the sisters of the convent there and tended their garden. It felt such a blessed encounter to chat. The lady with the keys—she had the power to lock us out, yet instead showed incredible hospitality and welcomed us in.

Luke 11:52: *‘Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.’* Jesus challenged those who should have been helping people to know God, yet their focus had become distorted. They paid attention to religious detail while neglecting justice and the love of God. They had knowledge of God’s teaching but it seemed they didn’t allow it to transform their own lives.

I see these words like a mirror in which we are invited to see ourselves—not to point the finger at others, but to reflect on ourselves and our own motivations and priorities. Might we possess *‘the key to knowledge’* but fail to use it well? What about our way of doing things—our traditions, our structures, even our expectations—do we unintentionally make it harder for someone to encounter the living God?

And what if we turn the woe into a blessing like this? Blessed are you who have found the key to knowledge: you have discovered God’s love and use what you have discovered to open the door for others.

What are the keys God has entrusted to us and are we using them to open doors for others? May our knowledge of God become more than something we possess; may it enable us to deepen our relationship with Him and help others discover His love too.

The Venerable Jane Atkinson, Archdeacon of Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, may our lives bear witness to Your love that others may encounter You and know of Your life transforming love for themselves. Amen

READ: LUKE 12:1-34

‘For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’ Luke 12:34

Jesus gets right to the heart of some very familiar struggles here, pretending, fear, greed and worry. Underneath them is one simple question: Do I really trust that God is enough?

We spend so much time trying to make ourselves secure. We try to manage how people see us. Worrying about what might go wrong. We collect things we think will make us feel safe. We tell ourselves that if we just had a little more—more money, more success, more control, more approval—then we could finally relax. But Jesus says, *‘Seek His Kingdom’* (v.31). Look at the sparrows, Jesus says. They don’t spend their days worrying. Yet God sees them. God cares for them. Then Jesus says: *‘you are of more value than many sparrows’* (v.7). You are seen. You are known. You are loved.

My 5-year-old hasn’t quite mastered pretending yet. If he’s happy, the whole room knows. If he’s frustrated, the whole room knows that too. There’s no carefully edited version of himself. He just is. Watching him can be strangely convicting. How much energy do I spend editing myself—at home, at the school gate, even at church? Trying to look like I’ve got it together when underneath I’m worried, tired or insecure?

Maybe that’s part of what Lent is for: learning to stop pretending and learning to trust.

But what does *‘seeking the Kingdom’* look like? It’s not complicated. It means putting Jesus at the centre of ordinary life. Choosing generosity over grasping. Prayer over panic. Serving rather than being noticed. Forgiving instead of keeping score. Looking for someone to encourage. Sharing what we have. Asking, *‘What would love look like here?’* It’s choosing God’s ways in the small, everyday moments. Because where your treasure goes, your heart follows.

Jesus isn’t asking us to try harder not to worry. He’s inviting us to trust more deeply. To loosen our grip. Stop performing. Stop hoarding. To stop living as though everything depends on us. You don’t have to pretend. You don’t have to prove yourself. You don’t have to have it all together. Your Father already knows what you need. Today, you can simply seek His Kingdom.

The Revd Ian Sarginson, Vicar, Buckshaw Village Church.

LET US PRAY

Father, thank You that You know me and I am worth more than many sparrows. Forgive me for building bigger barns when You invite me into a bigger Kingdom. Today, I choose to seek Your kingdom first. Amen.

READ: LUKE 12:35-59

'You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.' Luke 12:40

This opening pronoun, **you**, is so deeply personal. Who is Jesus talking to? He's talking to you and to me. We can have a tendency to think that certain verses in Scripture are just so very applicable to Samantha at No. 8, Uncle Chris, or just perfect for that person sitting on the back row in church, but Jesus is saying it to **you**, *'You also must be ready.'*

If the *'unexpected hour'* was today, and Jesus returns as you're reading this devotion, would this be the most wonderful surprise or a shocking revelation of the worst ever missed opportunity?

If someone on a city street is offering free chocolate in the latest Cadbury's promotion, most of us would be excited and willing to accept the offer, made all the sweeter because it's free. Yet the greatest 'free' gift of all, is so often rejected, ignored, or dismissed out of hand. God's gift of Salvation costs us nothing, but to God the Father and His precious only Son, the price was immeasurable. Why would we turn away from the One who is offering us an everlasting relationship with the living God of Hope, Joy, Justice, and Peace?

I'm sure you've seen the satirical slogan, 'Jesus is coming - look busy!' on T-shirts, mugs and posters, but when Jesus does return, and He absolutely will (Jesus Himself refers to this numerous times in the Gospels), being 'busy' is not the key. It's how we've responded to Jesus in our life that will really count, not what good works we've done or even how busy we've been working for Him, great though these things are. When Jesus returns, will we have accepted Him as our Lord and Saviour or rejected His invitation of love, forgiveness, and life with Him forever. For now, His priceless offer of grace is still open so, 'Be ready!'

Catherine Seagrave, Headteacher, Lea Endowed CE Primary.

LET US PRAY

Holy Spirit, give us the faith to open our hearts and lives to Jesus and His amazing love. Amen.

READ: LUKE 13:1-9

'No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.' Luke 13:5

It's easy to believe in karma when everything is going your way. Good things happen to good people; I'm doing fine, so I must be doing ok. Most of us carry a version of that moral mathematics around with us.

The people in today's reading believed something like that too. They came to Jesus with terrible news: Pilate's soldiers had killed worshippers from Galilee. Behind their report sat a question: What did those Galileans do to deserve that? Jesus responds with a question: Were they worse sinners than anyone else? *'No, I tell you.'* What about the tower that collapsed in Jerusalem and killed eighteen people? Same question, same answer. No.

Notice that Jesus does not explain why they died. Jesus is silent on the one question that we all wanted answered after a tragedy. Instead Jesus turns the question round, away from the victims and towards the crowd: *'unless you repent'* Jesus says, *'you will all likewise perish.'*

Here is why the moral mathematics of karma is so dangerous. If suffering equals guilt, then my comfort proves my innocence, and I never need to change. Jesus takes away that comfort from everyone, from the respectable and the disreputable alike. Because once the reality of sin is factored into the moral equation, everyone is running at a minus. Every one of us has fallen short of God's best, and so every one of us needs the same thing: to repent.

That is hard to hear, but it is also very good news. Because God won't let you pretend that your success in life is evidence of your righteousness, and God also refuses to equate disaster with punishment and God stands with arms open to anyone who turns to Him.

Lent is the season for reflecting on these hard truths, so I pray that you find time today to reflect and rather than asking, 'What did those people do to deserve that?' Ask a braver question: 'Where I have I missed the mark?'

The Revd Canon James Lawrence, Canon Missioner, Blackburn Cathedral.

LET US PRAY

Merciful Lord, forgive me for ways I fall short, thank You that You will always meet me as I turn towards You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 13:10-21

‘What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden.’ Luke 13:18-19

Consider for a moment how the scene of Jesus healing the woman in the synagogue would have played out today. Groups on their phones, filming the event, not really engaged but standing at a distance, witnessing a joyful healing immediately followed by fury and anger. This is social media gold—all action captured and shared for amusement, entertainment, and outrage with no interpretation needed. And yet, I wonder how many would have stayed around to hear Jesus’ explanation of what they had seen?

At first glance, today’s reading seems to contain two separate themes: the healing of a woman on the Sabbath, and Jesus’ description of God’s kingdom as a mustard seed and yeast. Yet Jesus deliberately links them.

When the woman was healed in the synagogue, reactions varied. Some were amazed, others intrigued, and yet others were furious. It was in this context—amid this mixture of joy, hope, outrage, and controversy—that Jesus asked, *‘What is the kingdom of God like?’*

Rather unusually, Jesus answers His own question, and in a surprising way. God’s kingdom is like a mustard seed: something small, easily overlooked, yet full of promise and potential. Through this act of healing, Jesus planted a seed of the kingdom. It was a moment of restoration, freedom, and hope pointing to the greater work God was, and is, doing in the world.

Seeds often seem insignificant when they are sown, and not all survive. Yet every seed carries the possibility of growth and flourishing and fruit. In the same way, every act—even every small act—that brings healing, freedom, or encouragement can help reveal the kingdom of God.

We are reminded to recognise opportunities to pray for those burdened by life’s chains, whatever form they take, for when those chains are broken, even in small ways, the possibilities of God’s kingdom are released.

Sam Johnson, Chief Executive, DBE Services.

LET US PRAY

Loving Lord, free me from the things that keep me from seeing the hope, promise, and possibilities of Your kingdom; and help me to proclaim and reveal Your kingdom to others. Amen.

READ: LUKE 13:22-35

‘Lord, will those who are saved be few?’ Luke 13:23

‘If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had expected to see there; and third—the greatest wonder of all—to find myself there.’

This saying, attributed to John Newton, would make an apt reflection on today’s reading. Jesus is asked about whether *‘a few’* will be saved (v.23). His answer has three wonders.

First, some people are missing from salvation that we may have expected to be there. Those who have eaten and drunk with Jesus and listened to His teaching on the streets are shut out (vv.25-26). Those who had presumed to share in the kingdom with the Patriarchs and Prophets can only look on in frustration and bitter despair (v.28). Herod, the ruler over Jesus’ home region opposes Jesus and seeks to kill Him (v.31). Even, Jerusalem, the city God chose for His House, finds herself in opposition to God’s saving work and unwilling to accept Jesus’ invitation (v.34).

Second, there are some surprising members of *‘the few’*. Those who are far away, scattered in the four corners of the earth will feast in God’s Kingdom. In fact, ‘Johnny-come-latelys,’ will go in ahead of those already there with Jesus (v.29)!

But the final wonder is perhaps the most important. In typical fashion, Jesus’ initial response reframes the question, subverts faulty presuppositions, and reconceptualises ideas. Rather than pontificating about *‘the few’*, Jesus says, ‘focus on you.’ He says, *‘Strive (literally agonise) to enter through the narrow door!’* (v.24). Jesus longs for you and me, and anyone who will listen, to be saved. This is what spurred Him to Jerusalem to die at Passover (vv.32, 35b). This is what moved Jesus to lament in anguished love over the city’s reluctance to believe (v.34).

Will only a few be saved? Jesus says, ‘many or few, just make sure it’s you!’

The Revd Dr Andy Meeson, Bishop’s Chaplain.

LET US PRAY

Help me, Lord, attend to my own salvation today, and let me enter through the narrow door, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

READ: LUKE 14:1-14

'But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.' Luke 14:13-14

Who to invite to the party? That question brought particular stress at children's birthdays. Who to invite? Just best friends? Those expecting a return invitation, or everyone, to avoid offence? What about Jesus' words about the simple and yet complicated question of who to invite to a party? Is it really just about parties, or is it about something so much more important?

At the start of this chapter of Luke, we feel a change in the focus of the narrative. Suddenly our attention is drawn even more to God's heart for those who have not been seen, valued, or invited until now. Here Jesus' teaching and behaviour challenges those religious leaders who want to show that they are worth being noticed—who think they know who matters, and who doesn't. Jesus talks instead about those who aren't at the table, the people perhaps who had wandered in from the street. Those on the outside, looking in.

Who do you invite to the party? Who deserves a seat at the table? The challenge to Jesus' hearers at the time was practical and real—don't just focus on status, religious credentials, and your own judgements of worth. Instead, step back from joining the race to be noticed, to be seen to matter. And as you step back, invite those who don't seem to matter, those who perhaps God is noticing far more than you do. Work out your invitation list according to the upside down values of Jesus, and see people's worth through His eyes...

How about us? Who do we invite to the party? Who deserves a seat at the table? Who do we truly value in our churches, who do we hope and pray may show up on a Sunday morning? How do we value those who may feel that they are on the outside, looking in? And then how about our own lives? Who do we spend time with? Is it time to step back from trying to be noticed and liked, spending time instead with those who really need to know that they are valued by God?

The Revd Helen Scamman, Start of Ministry Officer.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, may we take joy in valuing those who don't feel they deserve a place at Your table. Amen.

READ: LUKE 14:15-34

'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God' Luke 14:15b

It can't be emphasised enough how often Jesus turns over common expectations. Today we have a continuation of a passage where Jesus says don't have privileged dinner parties but invite those who need feeding. Of course, many churches mirror this with food banks or subsidised or free meals. It is a beautifully commendable way of living out the gospel. It can also disturb us and so it should.

I remember many occasions as a parish priest when those who had no home or were living in temporary accommodation would come to us in desperate need. We did all we could to help. That said, few of us would have found it easy or comfortable to invite them into our homes for a meal. Indeed, there are many reasons nowadays why we would be strongly advised against doing that. However, the essence of the teaching is also lived out in our eucharistic hospitality. Holy Communion is not just for the holy, as it were. Well, in fact it is, as they are those who are in need and seek to set themselves apart (the true meaning of holy) for the things of God. Some of those people will be just like us. Others may come from different backgrounds. The truth of the matter is that this hospitality, like all hospitality, should be for all who need it

To emphasise this, today's passage ends with Jesus making it absolutely clear how countercultural this is. He is using rhetoric when He uses the language of hate. He means nothing can come between our taking up the Cross and following Him even if that is our closest familial relationships. Similarly, we are called to have the bearing and the experience of those who in being 'salty' make a difference both in preserving taste and enhancing.

Today, we may be called to review what we seek to do to be hospitable to those in need and we may be called to wonder how truly thankful we are for the great feast of Thanksgiving - the Holy Eucharist. May we never take that for granted.

The Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster.

LET US PRAY

Faithful God, make us more like Jesus each day by Your grace and make us each day a People of Thanksgiving. Amen.

READ: LUKE 15:1-32

'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Luke 15:6b

I love exploring our beautiful county on foot – but very occasionally my sense of direction lets me down! Not so long ago, I was on a walk in the Trough of Bowland and I became increasingly aware that I was terribly lost, in the middle of moorland without any obvious features or paths.

Lent is a time for reckoning with your lostness.

You may be all too aware of the ways in which, as the prayer book puts it, you 'have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep'; or it may be harder to see where you have gone wrong. This is where the practices of Lent and these parables help. They give you different pictures of lostness. Some will resonate with you more than others. The sheep wanders, the coin is missing, the younger son walks out; yet all are lost. All need to be found.

But if Lent ends with your lostness then you have missed the destination.

At the heart of these parables is the joy of finding. Whether it is the shepherd who abandons the ninety-nine to find one lost sheep, the woman who searches all night to find her coin, or the father lavishly welcoming the wandering son. All three show you that God is determined to find and rejoice over that which has been lost.

Eventually I blundered my way off the Bowland Moor and back to my car.

Being rescued from your spiritual lostness though takes more than blundering in the right general direction. The events of Easter show you that it cost the Father everything. But that is how determined God is to rescue and rejoice over lost people, like me and you.

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

LET US PRAY

Loving Father, although I was very lost, thank You that You came to find me and bring me home. Amen.

READ: LUKE 16:1-13

'No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.' Luke 16:13

Well, this parable certainly makes you think and scratch your head. No wonder it isn't as well known as the Lost Sheep or Prodigal Son.

As He often did Jesus is teaching the people around Him using a story about a situation that they could relate to. A manager has mismanaged his master's property, he has lost his job and finds himself in a fix because his future is now very uncertain. The manager has an idea and goes about ensuring that his future will be secure. His actions are dishonest, and he is praised for it.

This is what makes the parable a tough one to figure out. Dishonesty is not what Jesus usually teaches. This is because what Jesus actually wants His listeners to hear, is the message that what the manager does, is use the resources available to him to future proof his life and that's what is praiseworthy. Jesus wants His followers to understand that in the same way a businessman thinks long term so must they.

Jesus is encouraging His followers to think and behave just as shrewdly as the manager in the story. To use their talents, money, and possessions in ways that will future proof their lives. The difference is that they are to live and use their resources faithfully in ways that please and honour God. By doing this the reward will be a warm welcome into the dwellings of eternity. There is no better long term plan than this.

In verse 13 Jesus makes the famous statement that 'you cannot serve God and money', only one can be the master. There is nothing wrong with having money so long as it is not the most important thing in your life. If we serve God with our money and make Jesus the master of our lives, then eternity will be our future.

Lisa Fenton, Adviser to Primary Schools & Academies and SIAMS Lead.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, I hope and pray that I will use wisely the resources You have given me in ways that please and honour You. Amen.

READ: LUKE 16:14-18

'The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached.' Luke 16:16

I love spending my holidays in Northumberland, beneath vast skies that often feel otherworldly. Dark, clear nights are brought to life, made spectacular by a seemingly endless array of shining stars. Yet, despite the stars, these nights remain dark.

At times we struggle to see the continuity of God's boundless love amid the darker passages of the Old Testament as clearly as in the New. Yet in today's passage, Jesus explains that his ministry both fulfils and continues the Old Testament story. The *'Law and prophets'* is shorthand for the Old Testament, which reveals the character, promises and purposes of a holy and compassionate God.

Jesus tells the Pharisees that John the Baptist marks a decisive turning point (v.16): the kingdom promised in the Law and the Prophets is now being proclaimed and fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the only way to our heavenly Father. And yet, Jesus also makes clear that God's Word cannot be set aside; *'it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the law to become void'* (v.17). He demonstrates its continuing moral authority by speaking about divorce (v.18). Although Scripture regulates divorce and permits it in limited circumstances: unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9) and abandonment (1 Corinthians 7:15), Jesus returns His listeners to God's original design: marriage is a covenantal union between husband and wife that must not be discarded for convenience.

Like the stars that offer glimmers of light during a Northumbrian night, the Old Testament reveals the character and ways of God. Yet when Jesus comes, and even though the stars of the night are still present, it is as though the sun has risen and illuminated everything. Jesus does not extinguish the starlight of the Old Testament; he enables us to see God more clearly, as the bright shining Sun.

The people of the Old Testament came to God by grace through faith in promises still awaiting fulfilment in Christ. As people of the new promise, we come to God through faith in Jesus, in whom those promises have been fulfilled through His death and resurrection. Through the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live in faithful obedience.

The Revd Alex Oehring, Rector, St Bartholomew & Holy Trinity Colne.

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, reveal Your glory in Jesus Christ and help me to live in faithful obedience. Amen.

READ: LUKE 16:19-31

'Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed... and none may cross from there to us.' Luke 16:26

After reading today's passage, perhaps it leaves you wondering why Lazarus spends the rest of eternity being comforted, while the rich man faces endless torment. Why the apparent reversal of the fortunes they had in life?

What Jesus wants to draw our attention to today is all about kindness, because these two men are receiving—like for like—what they gave in life. Despite sickness and extreme poverty in life, Lazarus having been kind and generous, is now receiving good things. Meanwhile, the Rich Man receives back the little he gave. He'd become familiar enough with Lazarus to have learned his name; yet the outcast he'd have once ignored, or have even had beaten away from his presence, has suddenly gained potential use to him as a servant in the ever-after.

However willing Lazarus may be though, a great chasm stops him offering aid he'd otherwise have given. It's bigger even than the gap that existed between the two men while they were alive. So vast now, there's no crossing it; no chance to meet or change how things will remain for the rest of eternity. The Rich Man, after a lifetime of opportunities, has missed his last chance.

Maybe it's too challenging to face the remaining days of Lent in abstaining from temptation, in doing as Jesus did. Or perhaps giving something up for a few weeks doesn't make you feel you're a better Christian. Since I must confess to the latter, I spend every Lent in being extra-vigilant for opportunities to live out Jesus' teachings. Like this one.

God knows that we can't read each other's minds; the chasm in today's passage aptly reminds us of that gap. And He sent us His Son to remind us to give love as we expect to receive it. Before it's too late for change. So whenever I can help, I also ask what's needed. If I genuinely need help, I hold faith in there being another Christian soul out there... just waiting to hear me ask for it.

Adam Conley, Authorised Lay Minister, Darwen St Peter's.

LET US PRAY

Loving Jesus, keep us honest in our needs, and willing in good deeds. Amen.

READ: LUKE 17:1-19

'So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.' ' Luke 17:10

Several years ago while I was training for ordination, I took part in a church placement with my now husband Matt. On Ash Wednesday, we joined a church service held on Zoom, and partway through we came to the line which read 'we pray for grace to repent and amend our lives'. Matt leaned over to his laptop, clicked on our order of service to capitalise the word 'grace', and turned to me as though it was now my sole responsibility to amend the lives of the congregation.

Of course the word 'grace' here refers to God's grace, and it's a term that is especially common in our liturgy during the season of Lent. It reminds us that despite our best efforts, there is nothing we can do to earn God's favour. It is a gift given freely costing us nothing, and yet costing God His only Son.

In our passage from Luke, Jesus speaks to His disciples and asks them to imagine how they might treat a servant. He makes the point that it would be rather unusual for the servant to expect to dine with their master and receive their gratitude for simply doing their job. Likewise, our best service does not bring gain to God or give us any kind of a claim on Him.

This is perhaps harder for those of us who have been Christians for a long time to grasp, compared to those of us who are newer to faith. It can be tempting to fall into the trap of thinking that the more good deeds we do and the more we please God, the more right we have to be in good standing with Him. But the law of grace chucks that all out the window.

Unlike the servants, God does invite us to come and recline at table. In the sacrament of communion, Jesus' grace is offered to us in the bread and the wine. May we receive them more mindfully this Lent, as we pray for grace to repent and amend our lives.

The Revd Grace Gaze, Rector of The Bowland Benefice.

LET US PRAY

Father God, help us to grow in grace this Lent, as we prepare to celebrate the gift offered to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

READ: LUKE 17:20-37

'Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.' Luke 17:26

Noise, noise, noise; everywhere around us there's noise. Adverts scream 'buy this', 'watch this', 'try this'. Social media calls us to self-obsession. We can scarcely escape from the endless flood of texts, calls and emails.

What are we focused on amidst all this noise?

Humans have always tended to get caught up in the here and now. As in Noah and Lot's days, it is so easy to focus on 'marrying' (v.27), 'eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building' (v.28). None of these things are bad in themselves; far from it, for they are part of God's good creation. Yet humans tend to take these good things and make them everything. We all too often make an idol of our present busyness.

To this, Jesus' words in our passage strike a shot across the bow. We are not called to have our focus on the present (nor for that matter on a nostalgic past, nor a merely humanistic future). To be a Christian is to confess that Christ will come again. Therefore we must do all that we are called to do in this life knowing that one day Christ will return, just as surely as we see the lightning flash across the sky. We don't know when, but before too long, God is going to call curtains on human history. All the good that we have done will be ushered into God's new creation, and all humanity's evil and sinful doings will be destroyed. We are called to live every day in the light of this reality.

So where has our focus been this Lent? Has it been on what God has done, and what He will do? Or have we found ourselves caught again in the noisy all-consuming now?

With what is left of Lent, let's get things back in perspective. Jesus our loving saviour will come again and put all things right; let that be the focus and the backdrop to all we do.

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

LET US PRAY

Almighty God, merciful and loving judge, help us not to place our hope in this passing age, but to put all our trust in the coming Kingdom of Your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

READ: LUKE 18:1-14

'[Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.' Luke 18:1

Jesus is a teacher par excellence. Much of His earthly teaching was by story. His own brand of story – the parable. After our Centenary Conference last summer, this is the feedback I kept hearing in stereo. 'Gosh, I loved your husband's take on the parables.'

What so special about Jesus' brand of story? Well, what Jeremy's noticed is that parables are not just earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. The trick is to look for the 'twist in the tale'. Jesus has the most wonderful sense of humour.

So let's try it here with these two parables where Jesus is teaching about prayer. First the Judge, then the Justified.

First, the Judge. He gives into nagging! That's not supposed to happen. He's no good as a judge. My sons were desperate for a puppy. They nagged and nagged for several years. I held my nerve. Then one day, my youngest said: 'Mum, I know you're never going to get us a puppy, so can I have a snake?' I was so relieved, I instantly said yes. So Dante came to live with us. This is not the way the law works. Judges' decisions are final. You can't keep appealing and re-appealing. That would be unfair. But God is not like us, says Jesus ... God loves a nagger! Keep on asking. Don't give up.

Second, the Justified. It's the tax collector who repents! That's not supposed to happen. Tax collectors were violent collaborators, selling out their nation to the Romans for money. They're far from model Jews. Pharisees were popular teachers of their day, loved by the people. But this tax collector is honest, he's asking for real, from the heart: *'God, be merciful to me, a sinner'* (v.13).

The desert fathers and mothers, 4th century hermits in the Egyptian desert, used to pray a version of this prayer over and over again. It's humble. It's direct. It quiets the mind. Why not try it today?

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

The Rt Revd Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. Amen.

READ: LUKE 18:15-17

'Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' Luke 18:17

Many years ago, when I was a headteacher, there was a little boy called Bobby. He was nine years old and had experienced more hardship than many adults. His home life was chaotic. One parent struggled with alcohol, the other with drugs. Domestic violence was a regular reality. Social workers were frequently involved, and foster placements came and went.

One morning, Bobby was sitting in my office as we talked about another move to a temporary foster home. As you can imagine, it was a difficult conversation. Yet in the middle of it, he looked at me and said something I have never forgotten: 'I trust Jesus will help because you trust Jesus will help.' I was stunned. I had never sat Bobby down and tried to persuade him in that moment. But he had listened. Somewhere in an assembly or act of worship, he had heard me share how Jesus had walked with me through difficult times and how I trusted Him to be present whatever happened. Bobby had seen that faith and made it his own.

When Jesus welcomed the little children in Luke 18, He was teaching something profound. Children have a remarkable capacity to trust. They don't pretend to have all the answers. They come with open hands and open hearts.

As Director of Education, with responsibility for supporting children and young people across our diocese, this passage always makes my heart sing. Children often understand something that adults can forget. We can become weighed down by disappointments, scars, worries, regrets, and endless questions. We think we need to have everything sorted before we come to God.

But Jesus says otherwise. The kingdom is received like a child receives a gift: not because we have earned it, not because we understand it fully, but because we trust the One who gives it.

This Lenten season invites us to do what Bobby did. To bring our challenges, hurts, and uncertainties to Jesus and simply trust that He will be there for us. The journey to Easter begins not with having all the answers, but with knowing the One in whom we place our trust.

Iain Parks, Director of Education.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, help me to come to You with the simple trust of a child, believing that You are always with me and will never let me go. Amen.

READ: LUKE 18:18-30

'One thing you still lack.' Luke 18:22

I spend much of my working life with children and the adults who care for them. And one thing I've learnt is that human beings are rather good at holding on to things. Sometimes we hold on because they are precious. Sometimes because they make us feel safe. And sometimes, if we're truthful, we hold on simply because letting go feels frightening.

The man who meets Jesus in today's reading seems to have life pretty well sorted. He is successful, wealthy and has tried hard to live a good life. He asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus looks beyond all the things he has done and goes straight to his heart: *'One thing you still lack.'* For this man, it was his wealth. Jesus wasn't simply interested in his bank balance. He was interested in what had hold of his heart.

Perhaps that is a question worth sitting with during Lent. What am I holding on to? It might be money. But it might be our reputation, our comfort, our need to be right, a mistake we cannot forgive ourselves for, or our determination to keep control of what happens next. We can spend an awful lot of our lives gripping the steering wheel with both hands. Jesus invites us to loosen our grip.

That doesn't mean life suddenly becomes easy. The disciples realise how difficult Jesus' words are and ask, *"Then who can be saved?"* (v.26) Jesus gives them—and us—perhaps the most important words in the whole passage: *'What is impossible with man is possible with God'* (v.27). Christian faith isn't about having everything sorted. It isn't about being perfect. It is about trusting that when we cannot see the whole road ahead, God can! Perhaps today we don't need to fix everything. Perhaps we simply need to ask ourselves what we are holding on to—and whether we trust God enough to loosen our grip, just a little.

Canon Andy Purcell, Headteacher, St George's CE Primary, Chorley.

LET US PRAY

Loving God, help me loosen my grip on the things I cling to, and give me the courage to place them into Your hands. Amen.

READ: LUKE 18:31-34

'And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.' Luke 18:33

This is the third time Jesus predicts His own death in Luke's Gospel. I have never been especially taken with these passages, preferring to imagine the human side of Jesus, that could not know what lay around the corner. Like those first disciples, I have never really grasped the truth.

Now, as someone living with cancer, I read them in a new light, as the reality of death and the hope of resurrection, are brought into focus. For Jesus, this is not simply a matter of predicting the future, but as he tells us, it is a set of events through which something wonderful *'will be accomplished'* (v.31). The disciples don't get that, and perhaps I have not yet fully grasped it either!

In his 'Canticle of the Sun' St Francis of Assisi famously speaks of Brother Sun and Sister Moon to emphasise our shared dependence upon our loving Creator. Less well known, and perhaps more difficult to embrace, is the final verse of the Canticle:

'Praised be you O Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from which no living man can escape [...] Blessed are those whom death will find in your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.'

St Francis was not a miserable man, nor for that matter was Jesus, their lives were full of love and joy, lived out in the face of poverty, suffering and opposition, but with the grace to embrace both life and death, or as the hymn-writer Thomas Ken puts it 'and live this day as if thy last'.

As we seek to ponder, through Lent and Holy Week, the mystery of what Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection, we pray that His purposes will be worked out in our lives, and when the time comes, in Sister Bodily Death too. Today's prayer forms the final line of St Francis' Canticle.

The Revd Canon Martin Keighley, Vicar, Poulton, Carleton, & Singleton.

LET US PRAY

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks, and serve Him with great humility. Amen.

READ: LUKE 18:35-43

'Lord, let me recover my sight.' Luke 18:41

A blind man receives his sight through Jesus' words: *'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well'* (v.42).

This is a miracle, and the word miracle comes from the Latin *miraculum*, meaning 'an object of wonder'. We often think of miracles as extraordinary events, but sometimes the greatest miracle is how God changes the way we see.

I wonder if this blind man's recovery applies only to physical sight. We often assume that seeing is simply a matter of our eyes, but many things cannot be fully seen with physical vision alone. We cannot always recognise another person's struggles, hopes, faith, or burdens simply by looking at them. True sight involves a deeper awareness, an ability to perceive what lies beneath the surface.

My ordination marked the beginning of a new chapter, but it was also a season of grief following the death of my mum. Grief has a way of narrowing our vision and drawing our attention to loss, absence, and uncertainty. In those moments, I found myself needing God's healing not for my eyes, but for my heart, so that I could see beyond my pain and recognise his presence, purpose, and grace amid sorrow.

Even in grief, faith helps us see a greater reality. Through Christ's resurrection, we are reminded that death does not have the final word and that those who belong to Him are held securely in his love. This hope does not remove our sorrow, but it allows us to look beyond it.

As we journey through Lent, we may be seeking spiritual sight: the ability to recognise Christ's presence. We find *miraculum*, the wonder of His faithfulness and grace, not just in dramatic healings, but in the quiet moments of insight.

The Revd Heesoo Warner, Assistant Curate, Barrowford St Thomas
& Newchurch-in-Pendle St Mary.

LET US PRAY

Lord, open the eyes of our hearts. Help us see Your presence in our struggles, see others with compassion, and find Your hope in our uncertainty. Change the way we see, and fill our ordinary days with the wonder of Your grace. Amen.

READ: LUKE 19:1-10

'And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.' Luke 19:3

The Mona Lisa is perhaps the most famous painting in the world; every day it attracts between 20,000 and 30,000 visitors. One year, on an anniversary trip to Paris, my wife and I decided to pay her a visit. If you've been to the Louvre yourself, you'll know that the painting is both very small and very difficult to get anywhere near. Having arrived at the museum, we saw the jostling crowd of tourists, caught a brief glimpse of the painting and quickly decided not to bother trying to get a better look. Put off by the crowds, we went and had a look at the other things the museum had to offer, satisfied that we had technically 'seen' the Mona Lisa without having really experienced it for ourselves.

Zacchaeus had surely heard the stories and seen the massing excitement as Jesus arrived in Jericho, but knowing about Jesus wasn't enough: he needed to see who Jesus was for himself. What he found, though, was a barrier between him and Jesus: a huge crowd obstructing his view.

What are the things that crowd our own view of Jesus? What busyness, distractions, routines or patterns of thinking get in the way of us really seeing Jesus? There is so much in life that can crowd Him out and obscure our view, even when we're trying to seek Him.

Rather than give up—as I did with the Mona Lisa—Zacchaeus persevered. He made the effort to get away from the crowd and there, once he could see Jesus clearly, he had an encounter that saw the grace, forgiveness, and love of Christ change the course of His life.

Just as he was present in Jericho, Jesus is “passing through” our lives each day – present and active in the world, ready to meet with us. How can we follow the example of Zacchaeus and get away from the crowd, to find space away from the things that distract our attention and obscure our view of Jesus so that we might see Him for ourselves, hear His voice and have our lives changed?

Sam Lee, Ignite Project Manager.

LET US PRAY

Lord, help me to seek You. Show me those things that get in the way of knowing You and help me to make space to meet with You and know You more, so that my life might be changed. Amen.

READ: LUKE 19:11-27

‘When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business.’ Luke 19:15

Imagine this was you—someone has given you an incredible amount of money and said, ‘I’m going away. Do something with this.’ What would your response be? To hide it under your mattress and think problem solved—it’s safe now! That would be ridiculous! I think we all know that Jesus’ parable isn’t really about money, but what we do with what we’ve been given, and how we can multiply it. What a challenge to help us refocus on our Lenten journey.

We often think Lent is about sacrificially giving something up for forty days—chocolate, social media, coffee, etc. But maybe Lent isn’t just about what we remove from our lives; maybe it’s about what we do with the extra space. If we give up an hour of scrolling, what could we do with that hour? If we decide to complain less, what do we replace it with? If we say we want to grow closer to God, are we actually giving Him any of our time?

The servant who buried his mina didn’t waste it by spending it, investing it, or taking any kind of risk. Instead, he wasted it by doing nothing at all with it.

Sometimes doing nothing feels safe. We can’t fail if we never try; or get embarrassed if we never speak up; we can’t make a mistake if we never take a risk. But think of this—we also might miss the chance to do something amazing.

By now our Lenten disciplines will be well entrenched. As we prepare to enter Holy Week, maybe we could review our journey. How successful are we being in multiplying what God has given us?

Lent doesn’t have to be about becoming perfect. It can simply be about doing something with what God has already given us and making it grow because at the end of the day, wouldn’t it be great to hear Jesus say, ‘Well done, good servant’ (v.17)?

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

LET US PRAY

Holy Spirit, challenge us this day to recognise the gifts we have been given that we are not using to their full potential. Give us the courage to use them to build Your church and bring You glory. Amen.

READ: LUKE 19:28-48

‘He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.’ ’ Luke 19:40

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rides a young donkey into Jerusalem, and He does this in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, written five hundred years earlier. Zechariah is addressing the ‘daughter of Zion’ (Zechariah 9:9), a poetic way of speaking about Jerusalem and the people of Israel. He speaks of the Messiah, that is, the future king whom God will send to free His People – the Messiah riding into Jerusalem on a young donkey.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Zechariah 9:9

This prophecy was well known to the Jewish crowds in Jerusalem for the feast day; well known to the disciples who are travelling with Jesus. So when the disciples set Jesus on a young donkey, and when Jesus rides the donkey into Jerusalem, they are proclaiming that Jesus is the promised Messiah. This is also why the disciples lay out their cloaks before Jesus, like an ancient red carpet. It’s why the disciples begin to sing from Psalm 118, a psalm used in pre-exilic Israel for the entry of the king. It’s why Jesus says that if the people were silent, the city itself—the stones of Jerusalem—would cry out. All these: different ways of proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah, entering Jerusalem in royal procession.

And so Jesus’ triumphal entry presented people that day with a choice, a decision. Will they respond in joy, and acclaim Jesus as the Messiah, as the disciples do? Or will they respond in fear, siding with the panicked religious leaders who seek to silence the disciples and to destroy Jesus?

Today, just as on the first Palm Sunday, Jesus is king – and He enters our lives. Will we turn to Him today in faith and joy? Or will we turn away? That is the question Palm Sunday poses for each of us. How will we respond today?

The Rt Revd Dr Joe Kennedy, Bishop of Burnley.

LET US PRAY

Jesus, king of kings, grant that we may hail You as Messiah and come to You in faith today. Amen.

READ: LUKE 20:1-19

'I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' Luke 20:13

Jesus' parables so often confound common sense. If your servants and messengers have been roughed up by rebellious tenants surely you're more likely to call in some armed back up rather than risking sending your own son. But that is what the landlord in the parable does – pointing to the God who risks everything, even His own precious Son. As we begin this most holy week of the year it is sobering to hear Jesus tell this story to those who question His credentials. Jesus is the Son who has been sent and will be killed by rebellious tenants – i.e. the religious leadership of the day. But He will be vindicated by His resurrection and become the source of salvation to all who turn to Him, whilst those who judge Him will face their own judgement.

But let's not get too far ahead. Before the resurrection comes the cross. The beloved son thrown out of the vineyard and cruelly killed. Surely it's an act of monumental stupidity to send your son to rebels just hoping that they will love and respect him.

But taking such a risk can be very powerful. Kenneth Bailey in his fascinating book 'Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes' tells the story of the late King Hussein of Jordan facing an attempted military coup in the 1980s. The king flew to the barracks where the plotters were meeting, went into them unarmed and quietly said to them that what they were planning would cause civil war and the death of tens of thousands, but that 'There is no need for this. Here I am! Kill me and proceed. That way, only one man will die.'

King Hussein opted for vulnerability and it worked – the rebels were shamed by his nobility and rushed forward to pledge their loyalty. Jesus' adversaries didn't back down so easily. But in both cases we see the depth of commitment that leads to costly self-sacrifice. In Jesus, God made Himself small, weak, vulnerable, reject-able and mortal. In that weakness He shows His true power, overcoming evil with good.

The Revd Toby Webber, Vicar, St George's and All Saints', Chorley.

LET US PRAY

Father God, from the depths of our hearts we thank You for giving everything for us—even Your beloved Son—keep us ever faithful and never let us doubt the depth of Your love. Amen.

READ: LUKE 20:20-47

'And they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.' Luke 20:36 (NIV)

I am sure we have all found ourselves in one of those situations, at some point, where we have wanted or needed to respond to an unexpected rude remark or question, and discover the perfect pithy comeback comes to mind...several minutes after the conversation is finished!

When questioned about our faith and belief, it can be difficult to find the right words in the moment, especially if the questioner is being deliberately cynical or unkind. Here we see Jesus facing exactly that sort of opposition.

With a question over coins for Caesar and a hypothetical scenario posed that reads like a misnamed musical 'One Bride for Seven Brothers!', this passage is so full of trick questions and obscure ideas that it is quite difficult to navigate. But navigate the traps and inquisition Jesus does, answering with a quite brilliant answer and wise observations that silence His detractors, 'For they no longer dared to ask him any question' (v.40). It is a moment I love. But let's face it, it doesn't stop the personal attacks on Jesus, or the negative trajectory by people in power that will lead to His death on the cross.

Jesus is not actually concerned about appearing to be quick-witted, or being seen to better His opponents. He is concerned about teaching about the nature of the Kingdom of God and denouncing those leaders whose entitled behaviour ensures attention is given to them and not turned towards God, to whom it is due.

In a culture that too often prizes the clever taken down on social media, or amplifies shock tactics and clickbait headlines, how might we speak in another way, about our faith, sharing the hope we have in Christ and in the truth of God's Kingdom?

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

LET US PRAY

Lord, with thankful hearts may we learn to share our faith and experience of You with humility and grace, that we may offer a glimpse of Your kingdom and speak the truth of Your word. Amen

READ: LUKE 21:1-22:6

'And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.' Luke 21:9

A few years ago, a friend sent me a meme over WhatsApp. It showed the Norse god Odin with the caption: 'Jesus promised the end of evil and suffering. Odin promised the end of ice giants. I don't see any ice giants. Your move, Jesus.' It raises a smile—but it isn't actually true (and I don't mean about the ice giants, about whom I reserve judgement).

Jesus did promise an end to evil, suffering and death. But He didn't promise that for this age. He promised it for the day when He returns to make all things new. Until then, He warned us to expect wars, earthquakes, famines, and plagues. He promised His own people not an easier, happier life but hatred, betrayal, and martyrdom. Jesus' prophecy was first fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70, but it has continued to ring true in every generation since. Suffering is sadly part of human experience, and Christians continue to face persecution across the globe (Open Doors and the Vatican both claim nearly 5,000 Christians were martyred last year alone). Jesus tells us this in advance so that we are not surprised, nor imagine that politics, economics, or technology will finally put the world right – human capacity for selfishness and evil will always keep pace with human ingenuity. Only Christ's return *'with power and great glory'* (v.27) will bring the peace, justice, and redemption for which we long.

So how should we live in the meantime? Jesus' answer could be summed up by that famous wartime slogan: Keep Calm and Carry On. *'Do not be terrified,'* he says. Every generation has had what seemed its 'end of the world' moment: many readers will remember the Cold War, Chernobyl, the AIDS epidemic, the hole in the ozone layer, Y2K, 9/11 and, of course, COVID – all these seemed at the time like life as we know it could be over for ever. But here we still are. We should face today's challenges just as urgently, but we need never despair. The latest catastrophe is not the end of the story. More than that, Jesus says, *'This will be your opportunity to bear witness'* (v.13). Dark times give Christians the chance to shine with unusual brightness. Our words of hope, our acts of kindness and our steadfast faith all point beyond this broken world to the coming kingdom of Christ.

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

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, help us neither to despair at the darkness of this world nor to be distracted by it, but to bear faithful witness until You come in power and great glory. Amen.

READ: LUKE 22:7-30

'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' Luke 22:19

Familiarity breeds contempt. I remember when we were living in Oxford, I was walking around with someone who was visiting and they were walking slowly, wowed by the many beautiful buildings. Having lived there for a couple of years, I took the beautiful views and surroundings for granted, and the scenes which had once also wowed me had become too familiar.

As we consider our reading today, recounting the events of the Last Supper, I fear that the same could be said for our approach to the events we read of here. If we have attended a Eucharist/ Communion service more than a couple of times, we will most likely be familiar with the words of Jesus *'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'* (v.19) and *'this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'* (v.20, NIV). It can be easy to nod-along, or to tune-out from these familiar words, but today, this Maundy Thursday, I encourage us each to focus on these words and the events of the first Maundy Thursday afresh, not allowing familiarity to breed contempt at the magnitude of what Jesus was proclaiming at the Last Supper.

Despite Jesus' disciples still squabbling about who was the greatest (v.24) and Judas preparing to betray Him (v.21), Jesus, the Son of God, was preparing to willingly give His body and blood, His very life, for His disciples, and for us. Rather than washing His hands of His faltering disciples, He chose to go on to sacrifice His life that they *'may eat and drink at [His] table in [His] kingdom'* (v.30). Wow. What incredible kindness and grace. I find this amazing and so very reassuring, as I too, am one of His faltering disciples. Thank God that He chose not to wash His hands of me, but instead He gave up His life that I may be forgiven and may find a place in His kingdom.

Reflect again on the passage above, and ask God to allow you to see what He was doing with fresh eyes, for it is truly amazing!

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

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, thank You that You chose to give Your body and blood, your very life, for us, that we might be part of Your kingdom. Forgive us for when we take all that You have done for granted. Please help our gratitude for all that You have done to grow and to show itself in our lives. Amen.

READ: LUKE 23:13-49

'And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' 'Luke 23:34

To spend time at the cross of Jesus is to gaze at the very heart of God. It's a moment of such significance and scope that, like standing before a great painting or a magnificent building, we struggle to take it all in. Today, Good Friday, gives us time and space to try to do that. And we must, because as Jesus prayed for those who had called for the death penalty (v.21) and who drove the nails through His hands, He asked for their forgiveness not because of their innocence (for who that is innocent needs forgiving) but for their ignorance. This precious prayer in which Jesus lived out His own teaching, that we should be those who pray for those who ill treat us, has its roots in the servant song of Isaiah 53, that looked forward to the One of whom it could be said, 'he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors' (Isaiah 53:12).

Where then should we start if we are to grasp the wonder of the cross? Well, we might position ourselves next to those who stood by watching as the rulers scoffed (v.35) and the soldiers mocked (v.36). They didn't see that the One who hung there was God's chosen king, who opted not to save Himself, in order that He might save others. We will never truly understand the depth of that, but we mustn't shy away from seeking to. For it is the good news of salvation, that makes forgiveness possible and draws us to truly know God and the extent of His grace and the beauty of His glory that is seen in Jesus. John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*, wrote another hymn imagining what it would be like to stand and look at the cross. It ends with these words:

*Thus while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too!*

*With pleasing grief and mournful joy
My spirit now is filled,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live by him I killed.'*

The Revd David Whitehouse, Vicar, St Andrew's, Leyland.

LET US PRAY

Father, forgive us when we fail to see in the cross the glory of our king, the depth of Your love and the wonder of all You have done to draw us into Your kingdom. Amen.

READ: LUKE 23:44-56

'Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!' And having said this he breathed his last.' Luke 23:46

'The world in solemn stillness lay', may be words from a Christmas Carol, describing that first Christmas night, but I imagine they are as appropriate for that first Good Friday. This solemn stillness though embodied disappointment, despair, regret, loss. These would have been just a few of the many emotions which would have been felt by those who stood before the cross and followed to the tomb.

Yet, in that solemn stillness, Jesus' last words would no doubt continue to resound in the hearts of those who had heard them. When Jesus was about to breathe His last, His words express His complete and utter trust in the Father. This is the Father who never abandoned Him and will never abandon humanity. For even whilst Jesus was in the tomb, God was active behind the scenes.

When we experience loss, or feel alone and at our lowest point, that is when God comes ever closer. At the time we don't always notice, but just like on that first Holy Saturday, in the silence, there remains the sacred presence of God. Heaven touching earth.

Today is Holy Saturday. Its purpose lies not in action, but in waiting. It is the quiet before the dawn and the silence that holds the promise of resurrection. We are invited to rest in the holy presence of God and trust as Jesus did. Today is also a day of great anticipation, for we know the resurrection already touches every part of us and the world. We know the joy of what is to come on Easter Day. Of course, inevitably, many of us will have a busy day today: buying food for the Easter dinner, cleaning our churches and adorning them with flowers, putting finishing touches to the Easter services, planning the Easter egg hunt—and the list will go on for some!

On this holy day of profound spiritual significance, let's all try to find time to be still and dwell in God's presence. And there, in solemn stillness, we wait to hear the angels sing, heralding in the Day of Resurrection.

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

LET US PRAY

Loving God, on this Holy Saturday, enable us always to trust in You, to find rest in Your abiding presence, and to live as people of resurrection hope; we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.

READ: LUKE 24:1-12

'These words seemed to them an idle tale.' Luke 24:11

Today, billions of Christians across the world will gather to give thanks for the most remarkable miracle. They will worship with unqualified joy, they will celebrate with song and dance and feasting. Because the tomb is empty and Jesus is alive.

By comparison, it seems odd that on the first Easter Day the reaction was so underwhelming. The women were perplexed. The apostles were downright disbelieving. What an idle tale! These followers of Jesus are profoundly traumatised. They have just seen their Lord endure the most humiliating and painful death imaginable. Are they really going to believe some crazy claim about an empty tomb?

So opinion is divided. Some believe. Some do not. And that's the whole point.

The entire Christian faith stands and falls on one crazy claim. That a cold corpse, placed into a tomb, has returned to life. If that is indeed an idle tale, then Jesus was a delusional fool and we are mugs for believing in Him. We are still sentenced to death. We are still in our sins. Our lives have no purpose beyond what we can achieve ourselves. And that is of course what most of the world's population think.

But if Jesus is alive, then absolutely everything about the entire cosmos is transformed. If He is alive, then death and sin are destroyed and we are sharers in His Resurrection life. If He is alive, then the old order has passed away and all creation is made new.

And each one of us must decide. *'He is not here, for he has risen'* (Matthew 28:6). The most important decision any human being will ever make is whether they believe that angelic claim. Because if we can say, 'Yes, Jesus, I believe that you are alive,' then our lives are utterly transformed for all eternity.

So this Easter, look into the tomb and make your own decision. Make that decision in the deepest place of your heart. And if you can believe, then rejoice. Because Christ is risen. Alleluia!

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.

LET US PRAY

Lord Jesus, help us this Easter Day to look into the empty tomb and decide afresh to trust You and follow You, for in rising from the dead You have set us free. Amen.

READ: LUKE 24:13-53

'they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem' Luke 24:33

We'd been on the road for hours and now we were lost... well not exactly lost, we knew where we were, we knew where we wanted to be, but we didn't know how to get from where we were to where we wanted to be. The car was hot, our daughter was seriously unhappy, in a way only small children can be after a long journey, and we were stressed. Along came a man in a van, he could see we looked confused, he could see we didn't know which way to go, so he stopped, rolled down the window, and then led us to our destination. Praise God for that man in a van!

The disciples in our passage are going in the wrong direction. Everything has been taking place in Jerusalem. They've seen the events of Good Friday and now they are getting out of town. Are they fleeing or are they just going back to life as it was before Jesus? Whatever the answer they are leaving the place where Jesus told them to be. They have heard the news of the resurrection (vv.22-24) but that hasn't stopped them leaving, hasn't stopped them going in the wrong direction. A man appears (much like our man in a van) except this isn't merely a man as the disciples are about to find out. This is the One who began in the cradle, went deliberately to the grave, and is now on His way to glory. But on His way to glory, Jesus detoured to find these lost sheep, *'interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself'* (v.27) and fed them with the Eucharist (v.30), and, in so doing, points them back in the right direction.

We've all been there. We've all been lost, or stuck, or even merrily going in the wrong direction whether spiritually or physically, and found that God has given us someone to guide us back to the right road. I hope that for you this Lenten journey with St Luke has helped to highlight some ways in which, perhaps, you were heading off course. That perhaps with the help of some additional time to pray, by reflecting upon the Scriptures, and hearing from some members of our diocesan family who have thought deeply about the readings, you have been helped to get back on track. If so I encourage you to embrace this new beginning and then keep following Jesus in the right direction as He sends you to proclaim *'repentance and forgiveness of sins [...] in his name to all nations, beginning..'* (v.47), well, right where you are.

The Revd Mike Print, Parish Priest, St Leonard's Langho & CME Officer.

LET US PRAY

Father, let this Easter period we have entered not be an end to our journey but merely the beginning of the next period of following You. Use us, we pray, to spread the Good News of Your resurrection, in both word and deed, to all we come across. Amen.

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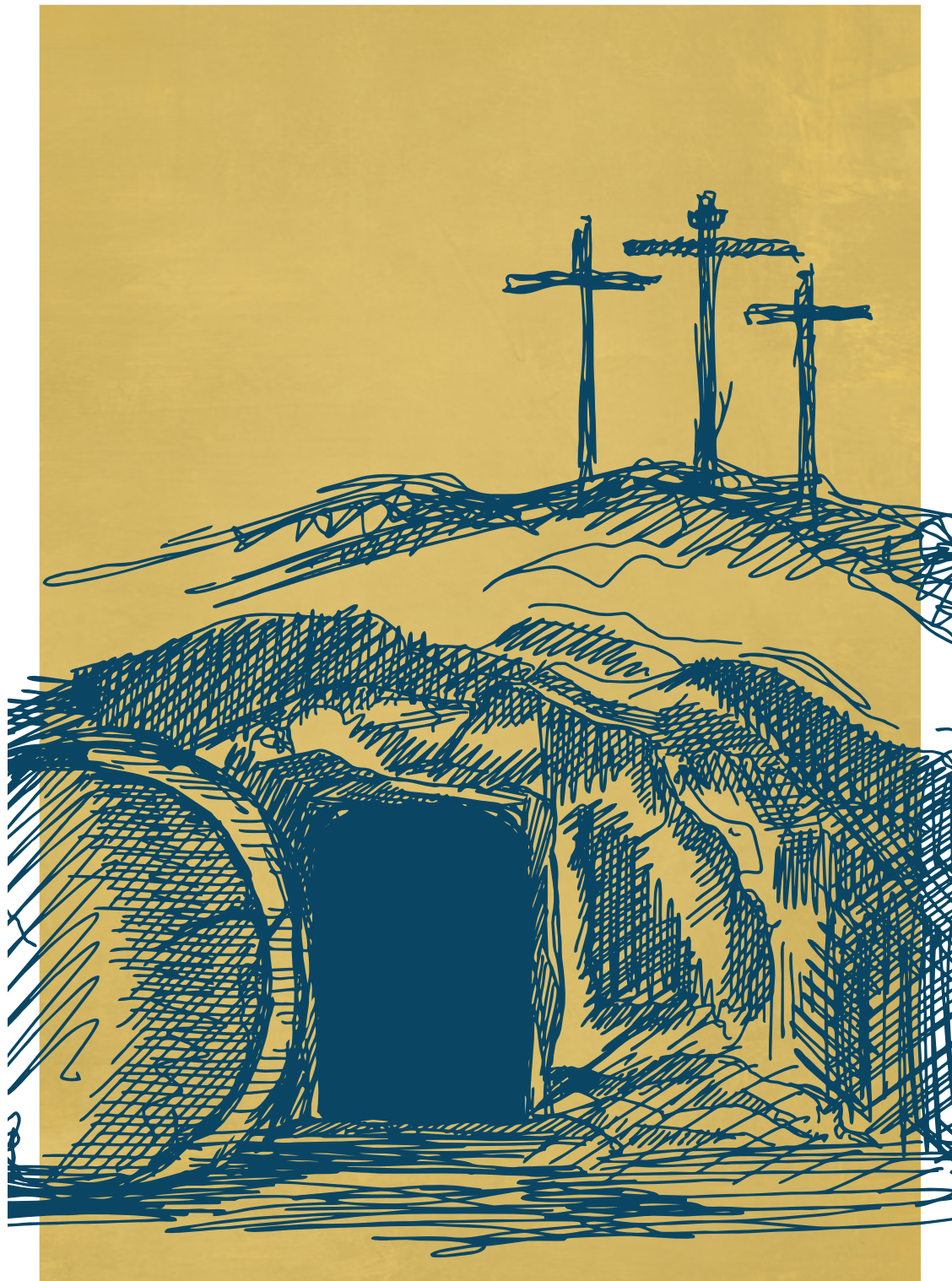
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The Bible verses are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise indicated.

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