

# **TO HUMBLE ONESELF OR HUMILIATE ONESELF?**

**Which is the way of Christ?**



**LENT 2024**

Lent resources shared by  
Bromley United Reformed Church,  
St Mark's United Church, Greenwich,  
Hayes Free Church,  
& Dulwich Grove United Reformed Church

A bit like Advent, in Lent we look towards a very specific point in the life of Jesus. Our destination is not quite the same as Christmas, and so the journey there offers us a unique opportunity: to take some time and reflect on our lives as Christians.

This year, our daily reflections are based around the gospel readings we will encounter in our Sunday worship. We have designed a scheme that we hope gets us delving deeper into scripture, as well as reflecting on what Jesus's example means for how we live our lives.

There is a weekly pattern that runs, from Thursday to Wednesday, although the weeks are numbered according to Monday to Sunday. This denotes that there is nothing for Sunday in this booklet. However, our Sunday worship is part of this. Therefore, if you know you are going to miss a Sunday, why not ask the preacher if you can have a copy of the sermon!

There are some days which have long reflections, laying some foundations and thoughts ahead of Sunday. Other days there are not reflections, just prayer. Some days, the time for reflection is a list of questions for you to contemplate. Please give yourself time to be quiet, to reflect, and to be with God. Overall, there is an ebb and flow across our reflections which echoes the ebb and flow of worship.

All our scripture readings are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

We hope that this material will be of help as you journey through Lent and prepare to follow Jesus to the cross and the tomb.

*Stephen Fellingham*  
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# WEEK 1

## Ash Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> February

### Luke 23.33-35

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!'

### Reflection

What sort of reaction do the words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," provoke within you?

In a moment of stillness, hear those words of Jesus from the cross. Let them wash over you and through you. How do they make you feel?

Do those words humble you or do you feel humiliated by them? Do they put you back in step with God? Or are you stood at a distance from God's path wondering how you might get back there?

Today is a day to take stock of where you are with God, but it is not a day where you should feel all is lost. Today is a day to be humble and be humbled as we hear afresh the words of the apostle Paul to the church in Corinth: "In Christ's name: be reconciled to God."  
(*2 Corinthians 5:20b*)

## **Prayer**

In your hands I place my past:  
all my sins you know so well.  
Your forgiveness, Lord, I need,  
for my guilt is great indeed;  
even greater is your love—  
mercy more than I can tell.

Teach me what is true and good;  
let me hear and understand!  
In the choices I must make  
show my heart the way to take,  
so that I may always tread  
on the path which you have planned.

*Words from hymn by Martin Leckebusch  
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## **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Mark 1.1-8**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,  
'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way;  
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
"Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight" ',

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, 'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not

worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'

## Reflection



The Temptation of Christ by the Devil  
*Metropolitan Museum of Art, CCO, via Wikimedia Commons*

What do you see in this painting? Take some time to look closely.

It is one of those frescos that is hard to make out, but from its title you can tell that the image has nothing to do with the scripture you have just read. Yet, John the Baptist told those that gathered around him that one was coming who was more powerful than him.

What comes with power, though? Temptation, greed, a sense of superiority? Was any of this what we see in Jesus?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by remaining faithful till death,  
you show us the road to greater love.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by taking the burden of sin upon yourself,  
you reveal to us the way of generosity.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by praying for those who crucified you,  
you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by opening paradise to the repentant thief,  
you awaken hope within us.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
create in us a pure heart,  
renew and strengthen our spirit.  
Let your Word draw near  
to live in us and protect us, now and always. Amen

## **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Mark 1.9-15**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

### **Reflection**

We cannot get to Jesus without going through John the Baptist first. It could be said that even Jesus could not get to be Jesus without John, either, because his baptism by John in the Jordan River is included in all four of the Gospels. Mark's is the briefest account, which is typical of Mark's style—indeed, the whole story takes up a scant three verses. But that's Mark for you: he is forever in a hurry to get the story of Jesus published. He wastes no time, uses no unnecessary words, and strips many incidents down to a mere skeleton of a narrative outline.

Perhaps the first striking feature to these verses is how suddenly Jesus appears from out of nowhere. Mark skips Christmas altogether. So imagine you were someone who had never before heard of Jesus. Imagine you had never before read Matthew or Luke and so had no clue that miraculous things had happened surrounding Jesus' birth. But one day you picked up Mark. The first verse would tell you this was a gospel, a piece of good news, about someone named Jesus Christ, said to be the Son of God. Then, in verse 9, this mysterious and very ordinary person suddenly walks in, slowly taking form as he approaches you from the hot desert sands.

Notice Mark's sense of mystery. See how unobtrusively, how humbly Jesus just shows up at the Jordan. He is just a face in the crowd, lining up at the river's edge, waiting his turn, and then getting immersed in the Jordan the same as everyone else there that day. There is no fuss, no grandeur. Jesus comes to the river, gets baptised. But then something dramatic happens. Immediately upon coming out of the water he sees these heavenly signs. Mark doesn't say whether anyone other than Jesus saw and heard what came next. It may have been Jesus alone who saw the heavens torn open, saw the Spirit descend as



a dove, and heard the voice of the Father. If anyone else saw it, Mark doesn't say.

But Jesus did witness the rending of the heavens and the Spirit's anointing of him. He heard the love of his Father. And just as you think that all this must portend nothing short of grand and glorious things, something rather arresting takes place. Because immediately, without missing a beat, the same Holy Spirit who alighted on Jesus' head like a gentle dove transforms into a far fiercer looking bird who grips Jesus in its talons and then hurls him out into the desert wastes. The English translation that the Spirit "sent" Jesus to the wilderness is a pretty weak rendering of a Greek verb that literally means to throw, to expel, to hurl someone with force. This is not merely pointing a finger in the general direction you'd like a person to go. The Spirit doesn't issue Jesus a polite invitation to the wilderness—the Spirit picks Jesus up like some bouncer at a nightclub and throws him into it. When Jesus picks himself up and dusts himself off, he finds himself in a most ugly, spiritually dangerous place. He finds himself in the company of the devil out in the middle of the wilderness, which is the biblical symbol for all that is chaotic about and wrong with this fallen creation.

Yet that's just what you wouldn't expect as you move from verses 10/11 to verse 12. After all, Jesus is no sooner baptised and immediately God showers him with love and favour. That surely looks wonderful. But if there was any question as to what the nature of this particular anointing was, it becomes immediately evident: when the Holy Spirit descends on you and God expresses his love for you, the first order of business is a blunt, brutal engagement with evil. Why was Jesus baptised and, furthermore, anointed by God? Well, it wasn't the first step into a comfortable life of fame and glory as the world defines those things. This wasn't a ticket to the top but to the bottom. His ministry would plunge Jesus deeper into all that is wrong with life. Earthly glory and heavenly glory are two very different - even diametrically opposed - things.

## **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Psalm 25.1-10**

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;

teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,

for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,

for they have been from of old.

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for your goodness' sake, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

### **Prayer**

Loving God,

you teach us, you lead us,

you protect us, you forgive us.

Help us to trust you more each day

as Source, Guide and Goal

now and always. Amen

# WEEK 2

## Monday 19<sup>th</sup> February

### Mark 1.9-15

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

### Reflection

- Was there anything that surprised you in this gospel reading?
- Was there anything from the reflection on Friday and the sermon on Sunday that made you think?
- What do we learn of humility from Jesus?

### Hymn

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
great David's greater Son!  
Hail in the time appointed,  
his reign on earth begun!  
He comes to break oppression,  
to set the captive free;  
to take away transgression,  
and rule in equity.

He comes with succour speedy  
to those who suffer wrong;  
to help the poor and needy,  
and bid the weak be strong;  
to give them songs for sighing,  
their darkness turn to light,  
whose souls, condemned and dying,  
are precious in his sight.

He shall come down like showers  
upon the fruitful earth;  
love, joy, and hope, like flowers,  
spring in his path to birth.  
Before him on the mountains,  
shall peace, the herald, go,  
and righteousness, in fountains,  
from hill to valley flow.

To him shall prayer unceasing  
and daily vows ascend;  
his kingdom still increasing,  
a kingdom without end.  
The tide of time shall never  
his covenant remove;  
his name shall stand forever;  
that name to us is love.

*James Montgomery (1777-1854)*

## **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Mark 1.16-20**

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were

in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

### **Reflection**

As to what happens next in the story, the gospel of Mark seems rather predictable. A larger-than-life character comes on the scene and immediately has people dropping everything and following. Yet, this is all taking place in Galilee not Jerusalem! Those that first followed Jesus are not religious people or students of the law; they are everyday people who work hard to do the best for their families.

If one wants to start a revolution, the persuasion of common people is generally the place where you start. There are many arguments for this—some less flattering than others. Yet, when Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good news, was he wanting to start an uprising? Or did he go to Galilee because in that humble countryside, he could really demonstrate what the coming of God's kingdom was all about.

### **Prayer**

Gracious God, you walked this world with power,  
yet not as the world understands it.

Through Jesus Christ  
you preached good news to the poor,  
proclaimed release to the captives,  
recovered the sight to the blind,  
and the liberated the oppressed.

With the aid of the Holy Spirit,  
let that work continue in us  
as your church, Christ's body today. Amen

## Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February

### 1 Peter 3.8-9

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

### Reflection

So, what does it mean to be humble?

Take a moment and really consider this question.

Jesus sets us on a path that takes us to glory—the glory of God!

### Prayer

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ  
fasted forty days in the wilderness,  
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:  
give us grace to discipline ourselves  
in obedience to your Spirit;  
and, as you know our weakness,  
so may we know your power to save;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Collect for the First Sunday in Lent,  
Methodist Worship Book*

## Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February

### Mark 8.27-30

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

## Reflection



What do you see in this painting? Take some time to look closely.

There is a real repour between Jesus and Peter in this painting. But there is also the sense that Peter did not always completely think through what he said before he said it. In our gospel reading for today, Peter speaks truly of who Jesus is. However, what comes next demonstrates he might not have entirely grasp what fully meant.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by remaining faithful till death,  
you show us the road to greater love.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by taking the burden of sin upon yourself,  
you reveal to us the way of generosity.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by praying for those who crucified you,  
you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by opening paradise to the repentant thief,  
you awaken hope within us.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
create in us a pure heart,  
renew and strengthen our spirit.  
Let your Word draw near  
to live in us and protect us, now and always. Amen

## **Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> February**

### **Mark 8.31-38**

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

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it,



and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

## **Reflection**

Mark 8 is a kind of theological fork in the road. This chapter is the hinge of Mark's gospel. Not only is this the exact middle of Mark in terms of chapters and verses, it is also theologically the mid point at which the ministry of Jesus takes a decisive turn toward the cross. Jesus seems to know what he is doing and also where he is going - whether he wants to go or not. For the disciples this does present a kind of fork in the road. But they want it both ways. They want to stick with Jesus and be his followers while at the same time insisting that Jesus follow them down the path they want to take.

Among other things, Mark 8 is a classic text that reveals to us something we already know but don't like to admit: it is difficult to be a follower.

We all do our fair share of following in life but it's a lot easier to do if the leader we follow inspires us with the promise that the road we are traveling together is leading somewhere good. But what if the person behind whom you want to fall in line is very clear that the path he must take is going nowhere? A road to humiliation in the eyes of the world. That is the fork in the road the disciples encountered in Mark 8.

In the verses that lead into this passage, Jesus has asked, "Who do people say that I am? Who do you say that I am?" Peter gave an answer that was at once right and wrong. It was right in the sense that he correctly identified Jesus as God's Son, the Messiah sent to save the world. But that same answer was wrong in the sense that Peter's definition of the Messiah was incorrect. Peter thought the Christ would be an earthly king with political clout. The disciples wanted to follow

Jesus alright, but they were hoping that the path would lead to a throne in a palace somewhere. They wanted jobs in the Sanhedrin, not a seat in the bloody muck at the foot of a cross. They were expecting Jesus as Messiah to defeat the Roman overlords and gloriously lead their country back to independence.

With that running through their minds, it was confusing to hear Jesus go on to say that soon he'd be rejected, scorned, and killed. He also said that after three days he would rise again from the dead, but by the time he got to that part, the disciples were hardly even hearing him anymore.

This prediction of suffering and death sent the disciples into a tailspin. They did not want to hear this. Since Peter was a kind of leader among the disciples—and since he had just been the one to apparently understand Jesus' identity—he quite naturally intervened. We don't know exactly what he said but we do know Jesus' response. Turning around to look back at the other disciples he rebukes Peter harshly. That little detail is important. Before he tells Peter how wrong he is, Jesus first turns around and looks back at the other disciples. Peter had pulled Jesus away from the rest of them but before answering Peter, Jesus turns and looks back.

Why did he do that? What did he see when he looked at the disciples? At the very least he probably saw approval in their eyes for what Peter had just said. They agreed. This was no way to talk. But for a fleeting moment did Jesus see something else? Was he tempted to see in this band of disciples the possibility of his going another way? After all, Jesus had something going here. He had attracted a following. His ministry had been very popular. At the beginning of this chapter Jesus fed 4,000 people. That is quite a crowd. Was Jesus tempted to go along with their dream of earthly glory. Peter is telling Jesus there is another way to go that won't involve rejection, suffering, and death. And maybe Jesus considered it for a moment. He looked at the disciples as a kind of second glance. Maybe Peter was right. These people would surely

follow Jesus if, at this theological fork in the road, he decided to march to Rome and lead a rebellion. Do we have here a foreshadowing of the garden of Gethsemane when the human and divine natures of Jesus seem to be struggling with each other until the divine nature triumphs with Jesus acceptance of his path to the utter humiliation of the cross? This of course may well be fanciful, but then again... As Jesus glanced over at the other disciples almost as though he was considering Peter's proposal. It was very tempting, but where temptation lurks, the devil is at work and so as Jesus snaps out of this trap, it is no surprise to hear him utter the name of Satan. Peter's suggestion, and the support it was getting from the other disciples, was the devil's work for certain! And so Jesus wakes up, sees the truth, tells Satan to get behind him even as he brings back into the forefront the things of God. And then calls the crowd along with the disciples to say, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

So we have the same temptation. To follow Jesus involves this choice as we stand at the Mark 8 fork in the road.

## **Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Psalm 22.23-31**

You who fear the LORD, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;  
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor  
the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me,  
but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.  
May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.  
For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,  
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.

### **Prayer**

Merciful God,  
some of you children are joyfully singing your praise.  
Others are languishing in despair.  
Through Jesus you are acquainted with our grief  
and in him we have resurrection hope.  
Bind up those who are broken,  
bless those who are dying,  
shield those who are joyous,  
and lead us all to your house,  
where we may feast together at your table. Amen

# WEEK 3

## Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February

### Mark 8.31-38

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

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

### Reflection

- Was there anything that surprised you in this gospel reading?
- Was there anything from the reflection on Friday and the sermon on Sunday that made you think?
- What do we learn of humility from Jesus?

### Hymn

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown in you, and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?  
Will you risk the hostile stare, should your life attract or scare,  
will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,  
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when You but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.  
In your company I'll go, where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

*Graham Maule & John L. Bell.*

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## **Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Mark 9.1-8**

And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

## **Reflection**

Peter's runaway mouth strikes again! Or are Peter's reactions just human and very church like? When confronted with something that is truly spiritual, hard to understand, let alone put into words, the church so often turns to the practical to glorify God. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*, but when we are humbled to act, we then must always consider to whose glory those actions will bring.

## **Prayer**

Awesome God, we are humbled by your power and glory that is at work in the world and our lives, and we want to honour you.  
Yet we know our responses are often flawed, and not all the glory is give to you.  
As we listen again to Jesus, let the Holy Spirit lead us so that in thought, words, and deed we proclaim you, now and always. Amen

## **Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February**

### **1 Peter 3.10-12**

For 'Those who desire life  
and desire to see good days,  
let them keep their tongues from evil  
and their lips from speaking deceit;  
let them turn away from evil and do good;  
let them seek peace and pursue it.  
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,  
and his ears are open to their prayer.  
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'

## Reflection

What does it mean to be humble?

We asked this question of ourselves last week. From further delving into scripture, does your answer stay the same? Is being humble as easy as it first sounded?

Jesus's path to glory passes through sacrifice and shame, are we really prepared to follow that way?

## Prayer

Christ, Son of the living God,  
who for a season laid aside the divine glory  
and learned obedience through suffering:  
teach us in all our afflictions  
to raise our eyes to the place of your mercy  
and to find in you our peace and deliverance.  
We make our prayer in your name. Amen

*Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent,  
Methodist Worship Book*

## Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> February

### John 1.29-34

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me." I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.' And John testified, 'I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.'



## Reflection



Cleansing of the Temple by Andrey Mironov  
777, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

What do you see in this painting? Take some time to look closely.

This is Jesus as we tend not to see him. He is raging; he is causing people to cower in fear! The peace of God has appeared to have taken flight! Yet, this is “the lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world,” says John the Baptist. How do we reconcile these two sides of Jesus?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by remaining faithful till death,  
you show us the road to greater love.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by taking the burden of sin upon yourself,  
you reveal to us the way of generosity.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by praying for those who crucified you,  
you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by opening paradise to the repentant thief,  
you awaken hope within us.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
create in us a pure heart,  
renew and strengthen our spirit.  
Let your Word draw near  
to live in us and protect us, now and always. Amen

## **Friday 1<sup>st</sup> March**

### **John 2.13-22**

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

## Reflection

Jesus' driving out the moneychangers is one of the most famous stories in the gospels. All four gospels record this incident, although not all in the same way. But this story unsettles and perplexes us because seen from a certain angle, this seems to be a rare occasion when we catch Jesus, of all people, in a non-Christlike act! With a whip in his hand and fire in his eyes, this Jesus seems a far cry from the man who was otherwise so gentle, so meek, so mild.

Precisely because we are talking about Jesus, the ways by which this story confuse us multiply. If this were done by someone we know and respect and would not expect to lose his temper – e.g. Gary Lineker - we would simply chalk this up as a rare but all too human lapse. But as Christians, we don't want to say that about Jesus. We can't chalk this up to a sinful lapse. So rather than let this story cause us to revise our opinion of Jesus, our tendency is to figure out how what we already know about Jesus can help us understand this story. Somehow this is consistent with who Jesus was. But how? For now I will leave aside the problem of the positioning this story early in Jesus' ministry in John's gospel and at the end in Mark, Matthew and Luke.

In this reflection we shall just think about what seems important to John about this incident. To begin we can note the obvious point that before this story is finished, Jesus will make clear that ultimately the true temple will be nothing other than his own body. Jesus will become the "temple" because it will be the sacrifice, and then the resurrection, of his body that will fully, finally, and once and for all accomplish what had been the goal of the temple all along; namely, the forgiveness of sins and so the reunion of God and his people. The temple in ancient Israel was the place where you sacrificed animals as an atonement for sin. "Atonement" refers to that which makes God and humanity "at one." But in the case of Jesus, his own body will become, at one and the same time, the temple and the sacrifice. Because of that, Jesus will eliminate the need for any temple with ongoing sacrifices. In this passage we also get a total misunderstanding after the religious leaders

demand a miraculous sign by which to prove Jesus' authority. But what they take to be a "miracle" of an instantaneous rebuilding of a grand physical structure is really the grand miracle of Jesus' sacrifice. They want a sign of power. Jesus will finally give a sign of weakness through which the grandest power in the universe will be unleashed.

Actions we perceive to be radically out of character for a given person grab our attention. We tend to think that Jesus was so mild and gentle that his taking up a whip was a bizarre, out-of-step thing for him to do. But once you realise how closely Jesus identified with the house God where God dwelt- the Temple - then you realise that Jesus reacted this way for the same reason he later cried out when the soldiers drove spikes through his hands—this desecration hurt! This business at the temple was personal because it touched his very body. If we are now members of Christ's Body, his living temple of faith, then it is because Jesus went so far as to die for us. If we understand how the church came about and what it really means to be a member of it right now, then zeal for God's house will also consume us in ways that may well be radical indeed.

The paradox of the Lenten Season is on great display in this passage. The paradox between earthly success and heavenly success - earthly glory and heavenly glory - strength and weakness - power and humiliation.

## **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March**

### **Psalm 19.7-14**

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the LORD are sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;

the fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring for ever;  
the ordinances of the LORD are true  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey,  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.  
But who can detect their errors?  
Clear me from hidden faults.  
Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
do not let them have dominion over me.  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

### **Prayer**

Amazing God,  
your glory is revealed in your creation and law,  
and your love is revealed in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.  
You have freed us from sin and death.  
You have given us wisdom and joy.  
Now, by the power of your Spirit,  
make our words and thoughts worthy offerings of praise  
in Jesus' name. Amen

# WEEK 4

## Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March

### John 2.13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

### Reflection

- Was there anything that surprised you in this gospel reading?
- Was there anything from the reflection on Friday and the sermon on Sunday that made you think?
- What do we learn of humility from Jesus?

### Hymn

Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name!  
In works of sovereign power  
come shake the earth again,  
that all may see, and come with reverent fear  
to the living God,  
whose kingdom shall outlast the years.

Restore, O Lord, in all the earth your fame,  
and in our time revive  
the church that bears your name,  
and in your anger, Lord, remember mercy,  
O living God,  
whose mercy shall outlast the years.

Bend us, O Lord, where we are hard and cold,  
in your refiner's fire;  
come purify the gold:  
though suffering comes, and evil crouches near,  
still our living God  
is reigning, he is reigning here.

Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name!  
In works of sovereign power  
come shake the earth again,  
that all may see, and come with reverent fear  
to the living God,  
whose kingdom shall outlast the years.

*Graham Kendrick & Chris Rolinson*

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## **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 2.23-25**

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

## **Reflection**

These few verses after Jesus's outburst in the temple almost complete the image of Jesus not as we know him. Not only has he got into a rage, from these words of the gospel writer, he appears to have trusted no one! Yet, the gospel of John is not just a description of the humanity of Jesus, it is of his divinity too. Jesus knows what is in each of our hearts, so does not need another to tell him. Therefore, as Jesus cleared out the temple, what do we need Jesus to clear out of our beings?

Take a moment to reflect.

## **Prayer**

You know us completely, God.  
You know what is in our hearts and minds,  
and what will come from our lips before we say it.  
Therefore, cleanse us and restore us  
so that we may live the holy life your desire of us  
through Jesus Christ, Amen.

## **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March**

### **1 Peter 3.13-16**

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.



## **Reflection**

What does it mean to be humble?

Yes, that question again! The actions of Jesus in the temple may not be exactly describable as humble. They were definitely not actions carried out with gentleness and reverence. Jesus was, however, sanctifying the temple, making it holy for God. He was making the temple the place of humility that it should have been.

## **Prayer**

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy  
but first he suffered pain,  
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:  
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,  
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Collect for the Third Sunday in Lent,  
Methodist Worship Book*

## **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March**

### **Numbers 21.4-9**

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

## Reflection



The Brazen Serpent by James Tissot  
*Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

What do you see in this painting? Take some time to look closely.

This is a painting of the story that we have been told in Numbers 21, yet there are aspects of image that point to something/someone else. Moses is not just lifting up a bronze serpent, he is pointing to a serpent draped on a cross. To what does this elude? Is there a connection between the people of Israel and the world today?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by remaining faithful till death,  
you show us the road to greater love.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by taking the burden of sin upon yourself,  
you reveal to us the way of generosity.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by praying for those who crucified you,  
you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by opening paradise to the repentant thief,  
you awaken hope within us.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
create in us a pure heart,  
renew and strengthen our spirit.  
Let your Word draw near  
to live in us and protect us, now and always. Amen

## **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 3.14-21**

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come

into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

## **Reflection**

Few people would dispute the assertion that John 3:16 is the single most well-known verse in the Bible. Martin Luther called this verse "The Gospel in Brief."

We are familiar so with this verse, and we rarely recall its original context: namely, Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus. It seems most people assume John 3:16 doesn't need a context—it's so beautifully concise that it stands alone, but we will understand it far better if we can examine it in the setting of the story from which it originally emerged. For centuries we've rarified John 3:16, illuminating it with blazing spotlights, making it all soft and fuzzy around the edges. Because the verse is so delightful and lovely, we assume that the story in which it was first spoken must be equally delightful, bright, airy, lovely, and full of light. In a real way, however, the opposite may be closer to the truth.

Because the story in John 3 contains a fair share of darkness, scepticism, and death. The first hint that this is so comes when John tells us that Nicodemus came to Jesus "at night." Nicodemus emerges from the shadows of the night and eventually all-but disappears back into those shadows, too. We know very little about Nicodemus: he is mentioned five times in John's gospel but nowhere else. We do know he was a Pharisee and a pretty powerful one at that since he sat on the Jewish ruling council known as the Sanhedrin.

Nicodemus was a religious VIP. (He probably would have done very well in the pandemic!) If you were a Jew living anywhere near Jerusalem in those days, you knew who Nicodemus was—you'd recognise his face when passing him on the street. Of course, fame cuts two ways: nice as

it was to be recognised everywhere he went, this fame was not so nice when Nicodemus went some place where he didn't want to be seen.

In the case of John 3, the place to which Nicodemus wanted to go was the house where Jesus was staying. But an upstanding Pharisee such as himself generally avoided the company of lesser religious figures. This Jesus was clearly a religious revolutionary who had recently nearly destroyed the whole Passover festival by literally whipping the Temple into a frenzy as he drove out the moneychangers.

But for some reason Nicodemus felt the need to see this man anyway and so he waits until the public eye shuts for the night, until most windows in Jerusalem were dark. Then, at night, he pays Jesus a visit.

Nicodemus begins the conversation in a rather officious, pretentious way. "Rabbi, we know you have come from God because of the wondrous signs you've been doing."

To begin with Nicodemus is not in a questioning mood. He doesn't ask a question but delivers a verdict. Jesus' reply to this opening salvo is rather surprising: "You'll never see God's kingdom unless you are born again." Jesus is taking a theological pin and pricking Nicodemus' over-inflated ego. Nicodemus remains arrogant He seems to treat the whole conversation as some sort of public school debate in which he has all the cards because of his superior education and knowledge.

Jesus goes on to expand on what he said to make clear he's talking about a spiritual re-birth—a second birth that only God's Spirit can accomplish. As he was talking there was a gust of wind and Jesus says, "Did you hear that? The wind blows here and there but you never really know where it comes from, when it's going to come, or where it may go next. God's Spirit is like that, Nicodemus. It comes to some and not to others, it comes unexpectedly but with gale-force strength. When the Spirit blows into your heart, you are made new from the inside out—fresh and young like a newborn baby." At this point Nicodemus starts taking Jesus seriously, "How can these things be

true?" he pleads. "And you call yourself a teacher of Israel?" Jesus replies. "You're going to have to start all over again and be re-born by God's Spirit." And then Jesus does something quite unexpected: he reaches back to Numbers 21 and evokes the image of that bronze serpent Moses lifted over the people as a cure for snakebites. The Israelites had to look at an image of the very thing that was afflicting them, and somehow doing so helped. Possibly the earliest known vaccine!

In the same way, Jesus says, the Son of Man will be lifted up and if you look at his death, your problem with death will be solved. Jesus is raised up on a cross in death. The wages of sin is death, and so death is our problem as sinful people. Somehow when we cast our eyes on Jesus 'death, we receive the gospel vaccine, as it were. But what that means is that the way a person gets "born again," as Jesus has been describing this to Nicodemus, is precisely by being crucified with Christ. New birth comes through the humiliation (in the eyes of the world) of Jesus on the cross-and this is the context for John 3:16. We all love the promise of eternal life, we all are drawn to the promise that we will not perish, and we like the apparent simplicity that all we need to do to get these good things is "believe." But seen in its proper, wider context, those famous words of verse 16 assume a far more startling, almost chilling, profile. Because the main thing you need to "believe" to be born again is that Jesus 'death helps you. We need to dispense with the idea that we can help ourselves, pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, earn salvation, or in any way get by on our own. Nicodemus had to give up the belief that his conviction that religious credentials cut any ice with God. Nicodemus had to die to all that. But the funny thing about being dead is that the dead person is, by definition, completely unable to do another thing. You are powerless. If you're dead the way Jesus was dead on the cross, your only hope is that someone will resurrect you, raise you back to new life. That's how you get born again: first you die -but birth is like death: it just happens to you. Babies don't decide to be born nor do they birth themselves.

And that surely is a key feature to John 3, but one that we miss when John 3:16 is isolated or becomes a verse that forces “the moment of decision” on a person. “Believe in Jesus and you will be saved: so do you believe or don’t you? Make up your mind!” But the larger imagery of this passage indicates that this whole matter of salvation is God’s work from start to finish. If it happens to a person at all, then it’s as mysterious as a gust of wind that suddenly hits you on a clear blue day: “Where did that come from?” we wonder out loud. We don’t know, it just happens.

The way into God’s kingdom is through death. That’s scary in a way the isolated version of John 3:16 seldom conveys. But if you can follow Jesus to the cross and believe the scandalous idea that somehow his horrible death helps you, then already in this life you get the gospel ‘vaccine’—an inoculation that will keep you safe when your own death arrives one day. That’s what Jesus lays out for Nicodemus, and now for us, in John 3.

## **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> March**

### **Psalm 107.17-22**

Some were sick through their sinful ways,  
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;  
they loathed any kind of food,  
and they drew near to the gates of death.  
Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress;  
he sent out his word and healed them,  
and delivered them from destruction.  
Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,  
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

## **Prayer**

Good and loving God,  
in Jesus you know the paths your children walk  
and all that can frighten and discourage us.  
Make your presence real to us as we make our journey,  
that at any time and in every circumstance  
we may remember your blessing and rejoice! Amen

# **WEEK 5**

## **Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 3.14-21**

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’

### **Reflection**

- Was there anything that surprised you in this gospel reading?
- Was there anything from the reflection on Friday and the sermon on Sunday that made you think?
- What do we learn of humility from Jesus?



## **Hymn**

We walk by faith and not by sight;  
no gracious words we hear  
from Him who spoke as none e'er spoke,  
but we believe Him near.

We may not touch His hands and side,  
nor follow where He trod;  
but in His promise we rejoice  
and cry, "My Lord and God!"

Help then, O Lord, our unbelief;  
and may our faith abound  
to call on You when You are near  
and seek where You are found.

That, when our life of faith is done,  
in realms of clearer light,  
may we behold You as You are  
with full and endless sight.

*Henry Alford (1810-1871)*

## **Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 3.31-36**

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

## **Reflection**

These words from the gospel of John do not follow directly on in the narrative of the gospel. They do, however, follow on from what we have already read. They again reiterate what Jesus's role was/is about in the world. They also draw our attention to our relationship with God made possible because of Jesus.

Again, take a moment to reflect on how things are between you and God.

Open your heart; try and offer your own prayer.  
Or if words escape you, just sit quietly and listen.

## **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March**

### **1 Peter 3.17-22**

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

## **Reflection**

What does it mean to be humble?

Yes, that question again! The road along which Jesus has been travelling has taken a distinctive twist. Where Jesus seems to be leading us is towards humiliation. There is nothing humble about this, surely? Yet to give one's own life, to suffer for others—it is kind of humbling to know Jesus did that for us.

## **Prayer**

O God, rich in mercy,  
you so loved the world that,  
when we were dead in our sins,  
you sent your only Son for our deliverance.  
Lifted up from the earth, he is light and life;  
exalted upon the cross, he is truth and salvation.  
Raise us up with Christ  
that we may walk as children of light.  
We ask this through Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
holy and mighty God, for ever and for ever. Amen

*Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent,  
Methodist Worship Book*

## **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 12.12-19**

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,  
'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—  
the King of Israel!

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:  
'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,  
sitting on a donkey's colt!

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The

Pharisees then said to one another, 'You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!'

## Reflection



What do you see in this picture? Take some time to look closely.

This picture does not immediately reflect that triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It does, however, set the scene for what the gospel writer of John comes on to suggest, much of what is witnessed takes time to flourish into knowledge and truth.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by remaining faithful till death,  
you show us the road to greater love.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by taking the burden of sin upon yourself,  
you reveal to us the way of generosity.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by praying for those who crucified you,  
you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by opening paradise to the repentant thief,  
you awaken hope within us.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
create in us a pure heart,  
renew and strengthen our spirit.  
Let your Word draw near  
to live in us and protect us, now and always. Amen

## **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 12.20-36**

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—“Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, ‘We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?’ Jesus said to them, ‘The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.’

### **Reflection**

“Sir, we would see Jesus.” It was some Greeks who first said this line. Probably they said it in Greek, too, which is why they approached a disciple who had a Greek name and who had grown up in a town, Bethsaida, that had a mixed population of Jews and Greeks. Maybe these seekers didn’t speak Aramaic and so needed to find the one disciple they knew could interpret for them. It is not clear whether these Greek-speaking people were Jewish converts or Gentiles who had come to Jerusalem to take in the Passover sights and sounds. But whoever they were, they had heard of Jesus and wanted an introduction.

That hardly made them unique at that precise moment. Jesus was rumoured to have raised a man named Lazarus from the dead. The man had been laid to rest in a tomb for four days already when this rabbi from Nazareth reportedly called him out. Amazing! Perhaps this is why John’s gospel presents the New Testament’s most understated account of the Triumphal Entry. That entry was an important event to

be sure, but in John the recent raising of Lazarus looms much larger, including for these Greek strangers. They simply must see the man who could do what Jesus recently did.

So they make their request to Philip, who in turn pulls his brother Andrew into the action as well. The two of them then go to Jesus and tell him that these people want to see him.

But it is just here where the story makes an odd turn. There is no indication that Jesus paid any attention to Philip or Andrew; no indication he ever meets these people who said, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” Indeed, there is a quirky irony that in verse 21 there is a request to see Jesus and yet in verse 36 we are told that Jesus hid himself from those who made this request and everyone else—indeed, in John’s gospel Jesus will not appear in public again until he does so nailed to a cross.

Why would Jesus hide from some earnest seekers? Because Jesus’ “hour” had come. The time to see him had come and gone. Now it was time for him to be “hidden” in death. “My heart is troubled.” And then he says that it’s time to die, time to go the way of a seed of wheat so that greater fruitfulness could be generated.

Well, the crowds didn’t like this one bit. They are heard saying we’ve always been taught that when the Messiah showed up, he’d stay with us forever. So why are you talking about death and departures? Are you the Christ or aren’t you.

In reply Jesus says something about light and darkness, something I’m sure not one person in ten understood. And no sooner does the Light of the world say this that he hides from view.

So far as we know, the those who asked to see Jesus never did.

But suppose a few days later those same people passed by that figure impaled on a spit of wood at Skull Hill. Jesus couldn’t hide himself from anyone that day. He was on public display, literally nailed down at

last. Conversely, however, Jesus could not go to anyone himself, either. You had to come to him that day if you wanted to see him. The question is: would anyone bother, would anyone dare, could anyone stomach the sight?

“When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself,” Jesus predicted in verse 32. Just in case we are tempted to think that this “lifting up” meant the glory of Easter or the Ascension or something, - glory as the world understands glory- John tells us that it was his raw and hideous death Jesus was referring to there.

Jesus would draw all people to himself on that cross, but would anyone come? Would anyone let themselves be drawn, or would they hide their faces, turn aside, run away, look for someone else who appeared to be going somewhere worth following? Would anyone understand that Jesus’ real glory was in this humiliating death? The gospels so often goes in different directions from the rest of the world.

“Sir, we would see Jesus” they said to Philip. In a way, everything Jesus said in verses 23-36 was an extended answer to that request, as though Jesus were saying to these people, “It’s OK that you want to see me, but wait a few days. I invite you to come and see me on Friday afternoon. You won’t be able to miss me. You’ll know me when you see me. I’ll be the suffering and dying one. But I hope you’ll come to see me anyway.”



## **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March**

### **Psalm 51.1-2, 10-12**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Prayer**

Merciful God,  
we cannot stand before you  
unless our hearts are cleansed  
and our spirits are made right by your redeeming.  
Thank you for your merciful forgiveness,  
and even more for your transforming love  
made know in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Amen

# WEEK 6

## Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March

### John 12.20-36

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.'

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

## Reflection

- Was there anything that surprised you in this gospel reading?
- Was there anything from the reflection on Friday and the sermon on Sunday that made you think?
- What do we learn of humility from Jesus?

## Hymn

O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve thee to the end;  
be thou for ever near me,  
my Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
if thou art by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway  
if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me;  
the world is ever near,  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear;  
my foes are ever near me,  
around me and within;  
but, Jesus, draw thou nearer,  
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking  
in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion,  
the murmurs of self-will.  
O speak to reassure me,  
to hasten or control;  
O speak, and make me listen,  
thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised,  
to all who follow thee,  
that where thou art in glory  
there shall thy servant be;  
and, Jesus, I have promised  
to serve thee to the end:  
O give me grace to follow,  
my Master and my Friend.

O let me see thy foot-marks,  
and in them plant mine own;  
my hope to follow duly  
is in thy strength alone:  
O guide me, call me, draw me,  
uphold me to the end;  
O give me grace to follow,  
my Saviour and my Friend.

*John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)*

## **Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March**

### **John 12.37-43**

Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. This was to fulfil the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

‘Lord, who has believed our message,  
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’  
And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said,  
‘He has blinded their eyes  
and hardened their heart,  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.’

Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But

because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

### **Reflection**

Time and again in the gospels the question is raised as to what was seen and understood by the crowds that surrounded Jesus. There are many times when true belief is demonstrated. There are many times that, without fear, people flocked around Jesus and spread the word that Jesus was in town. Yet, there are occasions, such as we have just read about, where people did not see or were fearful of being seen. This did not stop Jesus. This was, however, why Jesus had to be lifted up on the cross.

Where are you in the crowd? Actively searching for Jesus and hanging on his every word? Or are you worried about what others might say or your own image in the world?

Are you afraid of the possibility of humiliation if you take on Jesus's definition of being humble?

### **Prayer**

We promise to serve you, Lord,  
to plant our feet in your footmarks.  
The road along which you lead  
does not always go where we expect;  
it can lead into lands and territories  
where we are not at ease  
and who we are is challenged.  
Guide us, call us, draw us,  
uphold us so that we do not fear,  
just have the grace to follow. Amen

## Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March

### Jeremiah 31.31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

### Reflection

What does it mean to be humble?

Well, where is your relationship with God? Are you living within that new covenant that Jeremiah spoke of to houses of Israel and Judah and completed in Jesus's death and resurrection?

### Prayer

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death.

Breath upon us with the power of your Spirit,  
that we may be raised to new life in Christ,  
and serve you in holiness and righteousness all our days;  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Collect for the Fifth Sunday in Lent,  
Methodist Worship Book*

## Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> March

### Mark 10.46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

### Reflection



Entry of Christ into Jerusalem by Pietro Lorenzetti

*Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

What do you see in this picture? Take some time to look closely.

This is not a picture of the healing of blind Bartimaeus. Nor does it suggest that the people could not see who was before them on a donkey. Yet, what did they see? Was the crowd seeing who blind Bartimaeus heard?

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by remaining faithful till death,  
you show us the road to greater love.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by taking the burden of sin upon yourself,  
you reveal to us the way of generosity.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by praying for those who crucified you,  
you lead us to forgive without counting the cost.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
by opening paradise to the repentant thief,  
you awaken hope within us.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
create in us a pure heart,  
renew and strengthen our spirit.  
Let your Word draw near  
to live in us and protect us, now and always. Amen



## Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> March

### Mark 11.1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." ' They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,  
'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

### Reflection

We have all seen many formal state occasions. Just last year we saw the coronation of King Charles III. Like London and other cities of power, Jerusalem was accustomed to a fair amount of pomp and circumstance. Mark here is not portraying such an event. Compared to those kind of events Jesus' entry into Jerusalem looks a little sad. He's riding on a donkey, not a white stallion nor a state coach, with people's coats and some palm branches paving the way, not some red carpet. There is no formal greeting by any dignitaries. Instead Jesus hobbles in

on this little colt, takes a look around and then wordlessly leaves the city to go back to where he is staying. In the shadow of Jerusalem's wealth and prestige, this entry looks anything but triumphal.

Jesus' self-chosen mode of getting into Jerusalem is ironic. It is meant to be humble, is purposely different from the way society defines a grand entrance. The people, of course, are hoping that Jesus will be a new leader who will lift the yoke of Roman oppression. There is something a little edgy about their cries of "Hosanna!"—a cry that literally means "Save us!" They are pleading for help, hungry for liberation. They maybe sense that coats in the street are no match for red carpet on palace steps, but they hope that Jesus will change that; hope that the man who turned water into wine would transform their jackets into plush carpeting and their cries for help into the rallying slogan of a new revolution.

But he doesn't. No sooner is Jesus in the city and he leaves again. Just before he leaves after the fuss has all died down we are told that Jesus wandered over to the Temple. Mark writes that Jesus took a good look around, inspected "everything," but then because it was late he left. The next day he comes back, but this time things are very different. But now we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Let's go back into the Temple with Jesus. What did he see? Presumably the same things he would see the next day. He saw a Temple in which the place set aside for Gentiles to pray was clogged with merchants. The sound of commerce, not prayer, filled a part of the Temple near and dear to Jesus' heart. Jesus sees all this that Sunday, takes it all in, but then does nothing about it. It must have made him angry already then. Yet he waits.

By the next morning when Jesus re-enters Jerusalem, not only is there no fanfare this time around, but Jesus seems to have a full head of steam built up, too. On the way into the city he curses a fig tree for not having any figs. Then, upon getting back to Jerusalem, Jesus marches straight into the Temple and wreaks havoc. He hurls a damning

indictment against the people, borrowing a phrase from Jeremiah to condemn the people as a band of robbers.

What a difference a day can make! But if it were not for verse 11 we might not recognise the vital link between Sunday and Monday. Because verse 11 lets us know that Jesus thought long and hard about what he had seen Sunday evening. The cursing of the fig tree and the expulsion of the moneychangers were not some sudden outburst of temper. No, Jesus had been thinking about this for a while. He'd slept on it. Or maybe he didn't get much sleep but instead prayed. By morning he knew what he had to do. He may be angry, he may be in a bad mood, but it is a righteous anger, a well-thought-out mood. He has weighed this issue and bathed it in prayer. And so he acts.

At his first entry the people welcome Jesus in. At his second entry Jesus chases some people out. At his first entry the people wave branches. At his second entry Jesus withers a fig tree's branches. At his first entry the people shout, "Save us!" At his second entry Jesus pleads for the salvation of others. At his first entry the people shout blessings. At his second entry Jesus issues curses.

## **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March**

### **Psalm 118.26-27**

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God,

and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,

up to the horns of the altar.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you are the foundation of our life and faith.  
Even when the world rejects you, we sing your praise.  
Help us love and serve others  
even when they reject us and you.  
In your name there is healing,  
in your death there is life,  
in your resurrection there is hope,  
and at your return every knee will bow.  
Come, Lord Jesus, come and be proclaimed. Amen