

**17th February - Ash Wednesday**

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven,  
Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."

**Luke 9:51**



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## Introduction by Darren Prince

Today is Ash Wednesday. On the church calendar it is the traditional start of the 40 day countdown to Easter (with six Sundays thrown in too - apparently Sundays are meant for celebration so they don't count!)

Lent is considered a time to pray, fast, give towards those in need, and prepare ourselves for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. I like it because it aims me towards the Cross - the central turning point in history, the high point of our faith as followers of Jesus.

Easter sometimes has a way of sneaking up on us, coming and going quickly before we've really absorbed what it means. Lent slows us down a bit and sets our face towards the Cross in a more focused and intentional way. It's the slow-road to Easter - more like a lingering country walk than an all-out sprint.

Jesus set his face towards the Cross as well. Luke's Gospel points out more than the others that Jesus knew he was headed towards Jerusalem to die. *"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."* (Luke 9:51) Notice the chapter reference there: Jesus is already aimed at the Cross, something that won't

happen for another 14 chapters in Luke's account.

We want to use the coming weeks to do the same; to slowly journey towards the Cross in the weeks leading up to Easter. The GSM Leadership Team and other church members have put together scripture reflections looking at the meaning of the Cross: its purpose in scripture, and its significance in our lives.

We won't send you forty of them - just one a week on the Sundays during Lent and then one daily between Palm Sunday and Easter. We invite you use these reflections to engage with this season of "Lent in lockdown" in an intentional way. Forward them on to friends if you'd like. Read them together with others in your household or small group.

This is just another way we'd like to stay focused and together in a season of separation. Focused on what matters: at the forgiveness, freedom, healing, rescue and victory won for us through Christ's death and resurrection. Resolutely aimed, like Jesus, at the meaning of the Cross.



**Psalm; 22**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from the words of my groaning?  
My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, but I find no rest.

Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;  
you are the praise of Israel.  
In you our ancestors put their trust;  
they trusted and you delivered them.  
They cried to you and were saved;  
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

But I am a worm, not a human being;  
I am scorned by everyone, despised by the people.  
All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.  
“He trusts in the Lord,” they say,  
“let the Lord rescue him.  
Let him deliver him,  
since he delights in him.”

Yet you brought me out of the womb;  
you made me feel secure on my mother's breast.  
From birth I was cast on you;  
from my mother's womb you have been my God.  
Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.

Many bulls surround me;  
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.  
Roaring lions that tear their prey  
open their mouths wide against me.  
I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint.  
My heart has turned to wax;  
it has melted within me.  
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
you lay me in the dust of death.  
Dogs surround me,  
a pack of villains encircles me;  
they pierce my hands and my feet.

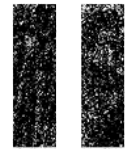
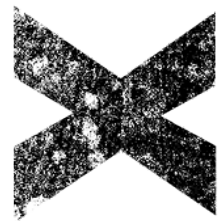
All my bones are on display;  
people stare and gloat over me.  
They divide my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment.

But you, Lord, do not be far from me.  
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.  
Deliver me from the sword,  
my precious life from the power of the dogs.  
Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;  
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

I will declare your name to my people;  
in the assembly I will praise you.  
You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!  
Revere him,  
all you descendants of Israel!  
For he has not despised or scorned  
the suffering of the afflicted one;  
he has not hidden his face from him  
but has listened to his cry for help.

From you comes the theme of my praise  
in the great assembly;  
before those who fear you  
I will fulfill my vows.  
The poor will eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord will praise him—  
may your hearts live forever!  
All the ends of the earth  
will remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
will bow down before him,  
for dominion belongs to the Lord  
and he rules over the nations.

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;  
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—  
those who cannot keep themselves alive.  
Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord.  
They will proclaim his righteousness,  
declaring to a people yet unborn:  
He has done it!



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## GOOD SHEPHERD **MISSION**

### Reflection by Darren Prince

If all of the Bible points to Jesus, and Jesus himself was slow walking his way to the cross, then we should be able to find signs of the cross on the least likely pages of scripture. **Psalm 22** captures the agony of the crucifixion in gripping poetry, but, amazingly, it does so centuries before the events take place. Jesus knew the psalm well enough to quote its first lines as he hung on the cross: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

So, did Jesus quote Psalm 22 because the poetry pointed exclusively to him, or because it expresses something of a shared human experience? Of course this could be a “both-and” rather than an “either-or.” How many of us have felt abandoned or forsaken at some point in our lives? Like there’s no answer when we cry out? Like night and day we can get no rest? Like trouble is near and there’s no one to help? (If you haven’t been there at some point in your life, I’d actually like to meet you!)

I like Psalm 22 because it’s honest about what it means to be human in a world that’s falling apart. It’s raw. And it’s exposing. It reads like it could be a randomly plucked page out of my journal; and yet Jesus quotes from it right there on the cross.

Jesus didn’t just enter our fleshy humanity: the headaches and the heartbreaks. He entered fully into our experience of insult, betrayal, and isolation. He became sin for us *‘so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And look at how far he went to win us that right-ness before God:

*“all who see me mock me”*

*“let the Lord rescue him”*

*“my bones are crushed”*

*“my mouth is dry”*

*“they pierce my hands and my feet”*

*“they divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”*

Jesus suffered all of this so that we could make this poetry our own: *“Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.”* *“You are my strength - come quickly to help me.”*

What does the Cross mean to me? Psalm 22 reminds and reassures me that Jesus is worthy of all praise because, indeed, “He has done it!”

## First Sunday in Lent - Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

**Matthew 4:1-11**



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### Reflection by Pip Chisholm

There's been quite a lot of talk of this pandemic, with its lockdowns and restricted movement, as being like a desert or wilderness. A time when things that bring us comfort, and the usual ways of living, have been stripped away and put just out of reach.

In this story we see Jesus, at the start of his ministry, led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where, along with none of the comforts of home, friends and family, he was also fasting. For forty days - the time from pancake day to Palm Sunday.

Maybe it's not a surprise then that the first thing Satan tempts Jesus with is food. Jesus in his humanity must have been longing for his hunger to end. But Satan is tempting Jesus with more than just ending his hunger, he is pointing out who Jesus is as the Son of God and tempting him to abandon the Father's spiritual purpose for him, to meet his physical needs.

The verse Jesus uses here, comes from Deuteronomy 8v 2-3 where Moses is reminding the Israelites that their time wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt was *'to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands ... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the*

*Lord.'*

The temptation here was to forget the Lord and make things easier in the desert. Jesus shows us the temporary relief is not worth it, that living is more than physical food and closeness with the Father a greater gift than a loaf of bread.

At the end of Jesus' victory over Satan, Satan leaves and angels attend Jesus - the Father cares for all his needs. This victory at the start of Jesus' ministry is a foretaste of his final victory over Satan at the cross.

I know I have many material comforts and can still go out to work, but I have found the last weeks of these restrictions difficult to manage. I am tempted to moan, withdraw from my responsibilities, to focus on what I don't have.

When I remember Jesus on the cross, I see not only the power to resist those temptations, but to be drawn into the bigger picture. Because Jesus resisted the temptation to avoid the pain of the cross, I can know, in the here and now, the closeness of being God's child and the comfort of every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And that makes me want to know him more.



"Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."

**1 Peter 1:17-20**



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### Reflection by Simon Martin

When I was about 16, my godmother bought me a violin from a car boot sale. She didn't think much of it – she saw it languishing in a pile of junk and bought it for me. I had a look inside it through the small 'f' holes in the violin. I saw an old tattered label on which was written "Guarneri". We looked it up (in a book!) and found that Guarneri violins are second only to Stradivarius violins in terms of price – today the violin called the Vieuxtemps Guarneri is valued at around £16m. We got over my violin teacher to see what he thought and sadly it turned out that it was a copy. But for a while we thought we were holding onto something which was going to pay off the mortgage and set us up for life. Did that change how we treated that instrument as we waited for the arrival of my violin teacher? You bet it did.

How we respond to Christ's death on the cross is a function of how much value we put on it. Peter points to things that the world at that time would value more than anything – silver and gold – and say how insignificant these things are compared to the price paid for our rescue from the futility of life without Jesus. Peter points to two things as making Jesus's sacrifice especially valuable: the fact that he was perfect, and the fact that his sacrifice was planned.

That someone would die when they had absolutely no guilt or anything else justifying their death is shocking enough – that it was planned before the world was created, and that Jesus

knew for all that time the sorrow, grief and pain he would go through, makes it all the more amazing.

What is our response to be? Peter says we should live our lives in response to that – as foreigners, not making this world our home, but looking to the new heavens and new earth after Jesus returns as our true citizenship. We live in reverent fear of God who will judge each person's actions, believer and unbeliever alike, in the light of the price that was paid for their rescue.

The ending of *Saving Private Ryan* is – spoiler alert - Private Ryan witnessing the death of Captain Miller, the leader of the group sent to rescue him, most of whom have also died. With his dying breath Miller whispers to Ryan: "earn this". The camera morphs from Ryan in a street in northern France to him, many years later, standing at Miller's grave in a Normandy cemetery. Ryan has lived his life in response to the sacrifice that came his way, and seeks reassurance from his wife that he has been good enough.

Praise God that for those that follow Jesus we don't have the same doubt – there is no way we can earn the salvation that Jesus brings, and we will never be good enough to justify our rescue. But we have one thing in common with Private Ryan – that knowing what was done to rescue us should have a profound impact on how we live our lives.

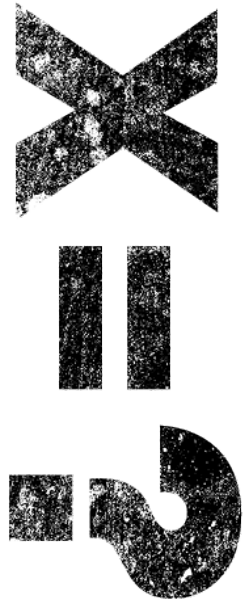
### Third Sunday in Lent - Isaiah 53:4-12

Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.  
By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was punished.  
He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.  
After he has suffered,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.  
Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

**Isaiah 53:4-12**



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## GOOD SHEPHERD **MISSION**

### Reflection by Afsar Ahmed

These verses are part of the 4th Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12) and are packed with prophecy of the Suffering Servant. They vividly portray His rejection, sacrifice, striking, condemnation, silence, suffering, appearance, prayer, death, burial, future and exaltation.

Who is this Servant (11)? According to Matthew 8.17, when Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick He fulfilled prophecy in Isaiah 53.4: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." In Luke 22.37, Jesus said that the prophecy in Isaiah 53.12 ("And he was reckoned with the transgressors") would be fulfilled by Him. Jesus is the Servant.

Who are the sheep of verse 6? I'd suggest they are "my people" (8), that is, the LORD's people. Sheep tend to be simple, senseless, silly and stupid. They often stray and become separated from their shepherd and end up stuck in serious situations. The sheep commit sin and become separated from God and at enmity with God. They are focused on themselves but the Lord is focused on His sheep. The Suffering Shepherd bore the sin and met the deepest and darkest need of His straying sheep. The sheep are now at peace with God, healed and justified (4-6, 8, 10-12).

In April 2019, a Canadian tourist was walking along the Pembrokeshire coast and noticed a sheep perilously stuck halfway down a cliff face above an inlet of water from the sea. He climbed down the cliff to the sheep and carried it with one hand as he scaled the cliff face with the other hand. According to witnesses, there were several "hand in the mouth moments" as he rescued the stranded sheep.

This illustrates what our Suffering Shepherd Jesus has done for us when we were stuck on the cliff face of sin, separated from God. Sadly, old habits die hard! After following the Lord for 42 years, I still find myself straying from the Lord instead of staying with the Lord. My mind strays, my eyes stray and my heart strays and I find myself making silly, stupid and sinful mistakes. If you find yourself straying, I encourage you to stay as close as possible to Jesus. Only when we focus on Him and follow Him will we be in the best position of staying with Him and not straying from Him.

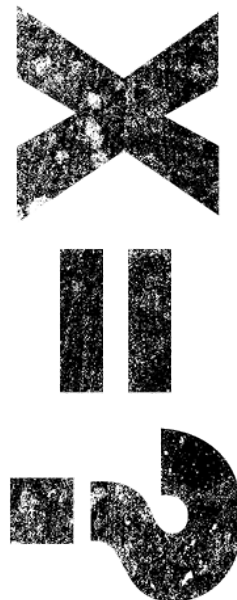
*"Mary... sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching ... one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10.39b, 42)*

## Fourth Sunday in Lent - Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

**Luke 15:1-7**



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### Reflection by Anna Wright

This term in the Friday morning women’s group we have continued to go through the book of Luke. A few weeks ago, we got to the ‘Parable of the Lost Sheep’. I thought, “Here’s a familiar story that I won’t learn anything new from”, but, as often happens, I was wrong. Here’s what struck me.

The shepherd leaves 99 sheep and goes to search for the 1. What a ridiculous idea. Surely it is more economical and more sensible to just look after the 99? It’s only 1% lost, is it worth the effort? 99 is enough, would anyone even notice the 100th?

Fortunately for us we follow a God who notices the one, and each of us matter to him. Yes, he does know how many of us are following him and who is lost. He doesn’t shrug his shoulders or decide we are not worth it. God comes to look for each of us and, when we are found, heaven celebrates!

In this pandemic it is easy to feel that we have all just become statistics of who has had covid and who hasn’t, or to feel forgotten as we stay at home and don’t see anyone. However, this isn’t how heaven works. With God we are all important, never forgotten and always valuable. Every single one.



## Fifth Sunday in Lent - Galatians 2:20

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'

**Galatians 2:20**



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### Reflection by Mike Mitchell

#### The Cross in Time Past and Present

Christ's death on the cross is a historic event opening up an entirely new future for humanity, including us living today! He identified completely with our fallen nature, became sin, so that by faith alone in Him, we can die to sin and have a restored relationship with God.

What a relief that we no longer strive by our own ability to try and keep God's commands! We cannot keep all God's laws perfectly and so can't be put right with God that way – legalism is a dead end.

'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' is not a mystical experience in which our personalities are obliterated, and involvement in the world shunned. It is about living in the everyday world, no longer seeking God's acceptance by our own efforts. We live by faith in Jesus' death, once and for all time, to rescue us from drowning in deep waters, and plant us to flourish in wide-open spaces.

**Galatians 5:24:** *'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.'*

The cross breaks the grip of sin, but our old sinful nature – 'the flesh' - lingers on. In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul spells out aspects of our lives we may need to deal with: sexual impurity, religious idolatry, self-centred living and socially destructive behaviour.

We are told to crucify, to take decisive action daily to put to death the sin that clings, or we cling to. There is no shortcut to godliness of character, but under the new rule of the Spirit, we can daily grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus taught that, *'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.'* (Luke 9:23)

Does our life resemble a doughnut more than a cross?

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

*"Say to Daughter Zion, See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

### Reflection by Darren Prince

I've been wondering: why is this day in the church calendar called Palm Sunday instead of Smelly Coat Sunday? Sure, there's the reference to the branches cut from the trees to line Jesus' path. But take a look: the coats get mentioned twice. First, the disciples lay their cloaks on the donkey for Jesus to sit on. And then a 'very large crowd' spreads their coats out on the road. In my imagination, that's a lot of jackets and not so many palm branches.

Maybe we prefer the sanitised version. We want to look up at palm branches waving in the sky and announce the arrival of a new king. But that's like pretending Christmas is all tinsel and fairy lights instead of a manger and some sheep dung. Lower your palm branches and look down at the road for a minute. The king is riding on a donkey! He's sitting on his friends' coats!

And the story doesn't end there. The donkey, and the crowd that follows, is walking right over those discarded jackets. It's a royal procession - customary for that place and time - but it's messy and smelly, with footsteps and animal tracks. Just imagine how dirty those coats would become on the road, trodden on by the feet of the donkey. How many people do you think picked up their trodden coats after the parade had passed and wore them home? Were they ever clean again? Were they ever worn again?

So here's a Smelly Coat Sunday activity for the whole family: go to the local city farm and ask for a sack of manure, preferably from a donkey. Next, take all of your winter jackets and spread them out on the floor. (You might want to do this outside, or place a layer of newspaper down on your work



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surface). Now dump the sack of manure out over your coats. Go on, don't hold back. Lastly, and this step is optional, stomp your feet across the coats and manure, just to make sure things are really well mashed together.

Those dirty coats express our worship, but in some ways they also represent us. That's what our lives are like without a Saviour. When we come to Jesus, we throw ourselves down into the dirt before him in full surrender. The prophet Isaiah describes it like this :

*All of us have become like one who is unclean,*

*and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.* (Isaiah 64:6)

Even our righteous acts are like filthy rags! Hey mister, that's my good coat your animal is walking on!

But King Jesus does more than arrive on a donkey. He arrives to die. And he dies to clean us up from the inside out, not just our garments. That's what I love about the Cross: that what we lay down in surrender to the humble King becomes spotless because of his blood. Stain free. White as snow. Clean because of Calvary.

Revelation shows us the end of the story, long after our filthy rags are washed clean at the Cross:

*"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,*

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,*

*and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*it was granted her to clothe herself*

*with fine linen, bright and pure"—*

*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

(Revelation 19:7-8)

I'll wave a palm branch to that!

## Monday of Holy Week - Mark 11:15-18

“... they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And He would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.

And He was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers”. And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy Him, for they feared Him, because all the crowd was astonished at His teaching.”

**Mark 11:15-18**



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### Reflection by Sally Dixon

In the Temple in Jerusalem, the open court of the Gentiles was where the nations were to be welcomed into the presence of God, that they might worship. Here though the money-changers had set up their tables and the animal vendors were selling their perfect sacrifices - with inflated exchange rates and prices.

With it being Passover the Temple was overflowing. Hear the hustle and bustle. Hear the people shouting. Hear the animals making ... well, animal noises! Chaos.

Is it really possible to find God and worship?

#### **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**

*“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ... God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”*

Jesus stands at the door of our temple - is He allowed beyond the foyer? What are the noises and distractions? What squatters have taken up residence? Through the open doors and windows of our seeing, hearing, reading, thinking, buying, time ... what have we let in?

Does Jesus have access just to the neat and tidy parts of our temple? The acceptable bits? Is He just allocated a small

corner? Or full access? What is really ruling? What is the junk that needs jettisoning?

Jesus took decisive action as He overturned the money-changers’ tables and drove out those making their sales. As children of God, we stand in our authority, to evict what has no right to be present in our temple.

Let’s invite the Holy Spirit’s searching gaze to examine and show what has been allowed in through our eyes, ears, mind, heart, mouth.

Holy Spirit be our radar, detecting invaders.

Holy Spirit strengthen our will to say no and to slam doors shut.

Let’s confess what He reveals has taken a throne in our temple and invite Jesus to take that throne instead.

Amen

*Thank You Jesus for the Cross:*

*Your reminder that I’m so BAD, I desperately need saving; and I’m so LOVED, You willingly died for me.*

## Tuesday of Holy Week - Revelation 5:1-14

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center before the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people.

And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals,  
because you were slain,  
and with your blood you purchased for God  
members of every tribe and language and people and nation.  
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth."

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

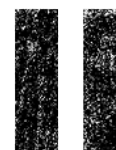
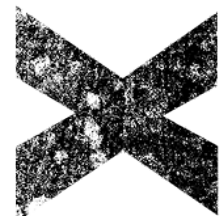
"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

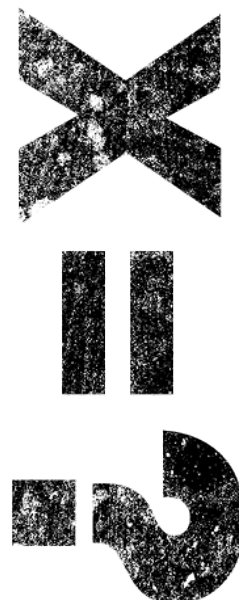
"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!"

The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

**Revelation 5:1-14**



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## GOOD SHEPHERD **MISSION**

### Reflection by Meg Mitchell

John, Jesus' disciple and apostle had this vision. The one sitting on heaven's throne was holding a scroll. An angel asked "Who is worthy to break the seven seals and open the scroll?" No one could open it or look inside it. So John cried and cried. Then one of the elders said "Don't cry, the Lion of Judah, the descendant of Abraham has won. He can open the scroll."

Then a bleeding Lamb stood in the centre of the throne. This Lamb had seven eyes and seven horns. God is all seeing.

'Seven' in the bible is sometimes seen as a symbol of completeness and others see it as a sign of what is really real. When the Lamb took the scroll, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb and prayerfully sang this song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth."

Then millions of angels encircled them and sang loudly: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise."

Then every creature in heaven and on earth and under the

earth and on the sea and all that is in them sang: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever." The four living creatures said "Amen" and the elders fell down and worshipped.

During Jesus' 33 years in this world, he obeyed God's will completely. Crucifixion was seen at the time as shameful, a total disgrace and was used as the worst punishment to defeat the worst in society.

Subversively God planned in his wisdom to use Jesus' crucifixion to show us His power and the purity of Jesus. There was no other good enough to pay the price of mankind's sin - Jesus shed his blood to die for all, to come alive again and so to reconcile us to God. What an example of self-giving love leading to victory.

So for us, as we follow Jesus, let's worship, praise and thank him with the song words in John's vision. With Jesus strengthening us, let's help his Kingdom come. We can pray, be and act in ways pleasing to God.

Let's experience joy serving and witnessing for our Saviour, even when there is suffering too.

How shall you and I honour our Shepherd Lamb today?

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.

Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, my God.’”

First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them”—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

#### **Hebrews 10:1-18**

#### **Reflection by Sian Warden**

Some years ago, I spilled printer ink on the living room carpet. A strategic mixture of Vanish and moving the furniture has partially solved the problem, but the stains remain. Every time I glance in that direction, I can see it and am reminded of my mistake.

In a far more profound way, God’s people in the Old Testament had a continual reminder of their failures. Day after day, year after year, the priests slaughtered bulls and goats, shedding their blood for the Israelites’ sins. On one level, this temporarily dealt with the problem. But far from making them perfect, it showed them every time that they had failed in multiple ways. It was like a sledgehammer crashing into them again and again saying they were guilty.

But the wonderful news from this passage in Hebrews is that we live in a reality to which the animal sacrifices were only a shadow, or a signpost. Jesus became the perfect, sinless sacrifice for all of our sins, for all time. This once-for-all act



GOOD  
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**MISSION**

2,000 years ago means that our sins are completely dealt with and forgiven. The transformation of our hearts, impossible under the old system, is now a reality.

Like the Israelites, we too can sometimes feel worn down by our sins and tempted to continually dwell on them. I am tempted to beat myself up about what I have done, or failed to do. But when that happens, I can look to Jesus, turning to him in repentance and faith, and know that my sin has been dealt with once and for all. This is the reality, even if I can’t always see it – the holy God sees me as perfect, even when I feel far from it.

TS Eliot wrote that ‘humankind cannot bear very much reality’. But in fact, the opposite is true – we need reality. We need to know the joyous, true reality of Jesus’ once-for-all, perfect sacrifice, to which the mere shadows of the Old Testament law pointed, so that we can live and rejoice in the freedom that it gives us.



They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

**Mark 14:32-42**



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### Reflection by Andy Wright

In the Jungle Book, one of the funniest scenes is when Mowgli is imitating the bear Baloo, arching his back, waddling his legs and swinging his arms. He wants to be an animal so he can stay in the forest. But he isn't. He belongs to the man village and, as he's grown, it's become more and more apparent that he isn't a real beast of the forest.

At the heart of the gospel is the fundamental truth that Jesus is human. He's not God pretending to be human – feigning our joys and sorrows to try to fit in. Jesus is God but he is also completely human.

And it's essential that he is. Only as a human could Jesus substitute himself for us, bearing the judgement of God on all humanity.

This passage shows us part of what that means. We see Jesus's overwhelming sorrow and fear, as he anticipates the pain and suffering of the cross and the judgement of his Father which he is about to bear.

The passage is from the perspective of the disciples, so it tells us of their human weakness – but its focus remains on Jesus. At its heart are these key words: 'Yet not what I will, but what

you will'. There's a great irony as the disciples should be living these words of submission to Jesus, but they've neglected his instruction and fallen asleep – three times. In the next 24 hours, Jesus will live these words himself, submitting in shame, exclusion and death to the will of his Father.

We know nothing of Jesus's pain as he contemplated what lay ahead; and we only know in theory the wrenching of the trinity as it was torn apart (temporarily) in judgement; but we can relate to the pleas and desperate cries of Jesus. We know the reality of our frailty, perhaps at the current time more than usual. We all have our Gethsemane-like moments of anguish.

For me, this passage is what Lent is all about as we anticipate the cross. It reminds me of Jesus's humanity and purpose; it fills me with thanks as I reflect on what Jesus prepared to endure for us; and it challenges me, in any circumstance or choice, to surrender my will in submission to the One who made me.

Through any ordeal, or in any temptation, may we be people who say to our perfect, loving, heavenly Father: 'Yet not what I will, but what you will'.

## Good Friday - Matthew 27:32-54

As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

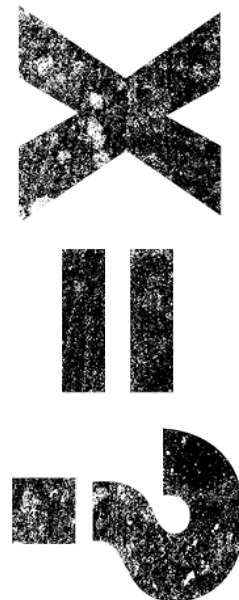
And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

**Matthew 27:32-54**



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## GOOD SHEPHERD **MISSION**

### Reflection by Katherine Gough

Many of us have been followers of Jesus for quite some time; remembering Good Friday and celebrating Easter each year. This may feel like a familiar passage. We have no need to feel sadness on Good Friday because we have the hope of Easter Sunday. We know how this story ends. But the danger in reading a passage that is so familiar is that we read it without imagining what it would have been like the first time. We risk losing the significance of the situation and the impact on our lives.

Imagine being along the road to Golgotha and seeing Jesus, whom we have followed, devoted the past months, years to following; have loved, respected and admired. This Jesus, now struggling to carry a large heavy cross on his bleeding back while blood trickles down his face from a thorny crown. So weak that the soldiers need to ask an onlooker, Simon, to carry the cross on his behalf. Taking the walk of utmost shame and pain, the walk of a criminal to a criminal's death.

Imagine seeing him being fixed to the cross; the sight, the sounds, the smell, the level of pain. Then hanging there, naked, between two criminals, seeing him gasping for breath, hearing the jeers of those around. I would have felt utter grief, and utter anger at those doing this to him; utter despair and confusion that it had come to this, when I had so much hope and expectation of what I thought Jesus was going to do.

And then, when Jesus dies darkness envelops us. The earth shakes and the rocks split. Being in an earthquake whilst a sudden darkness descended, whilst rocks split, and your Lord had just died, leaving you unsure of what would happen to you must have been utterly terrifying. Then, in the following

days you hear of the dead appearing to friends; the confusion, the fear, the anger, grief and sadness must have been overwhelming. There would not have been the luxury of turning the page to read what happened next.

We probably wouldn't have known at the time what we know now; that the temple curtain splitting from top to bottom was God showing us that Jesus was, is, the sacrifice that ends all sacrifices. No more priests, animals, bloody sacrifices needed to meet God.

The centurion, hardened by overseeing many crucifixions, had never witnessed a death like this one. He became the first to recognise that Jesus was the Son of God. He had his spiritual darkness broken through.

As we read this familiar passage do we have an understanding of how sinful we are, how dark our sin is, how big a price Jesus paid? Do we understand that the anguish of being nailed to the cross and jeered at was nothing compared to being forsaken by his heavenly Father, whilst he took the punishment that we deserve.

If our realisation of our sin grows, our gratitude to God and our love for him will increase. This Good Friday, let us not skim over the crucifixion of Jesus in order to get to the joy of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. Let us allow the gravity of what Jesus did for us sink in so that it impacts on our relationship with him; on our attitudes, the way we treat each other, on the way we live our lives and share our hope and faith. So that on Easter Sunday, and every day we can say with assurance, "Surely, Jesus IS the Son of God".

## Easter Saturday - Matthew 27:57-66

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

**Matthew 27:57-66**

### Reflection by Jenny Bollans

A few years ago the vicar of the Church where my friend was expecting to get married refused to conduct her wedding on her chosen date: Easter Saturday. On that day his Church and many others around the country would be closed for services. The pews would be covered in black cloth and the Church itself would sit in darkness, recalling the suspended state of Christ's followers in the period between Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection. Maybe you knew that already but it was a new one on me!

With the spectacle of the cross over, the smell of death still lingering, the graphic scenes of an innocent son, friend and teacher fresh in the minds of those who loved him, Joseph of Arimathea arranged the burial of the One he followed. Finishing what he came to do, 'He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away'. We don't know what Joseph did next but I doubt it would be too dissimilar from what you or I would have done after the death of a loved one.

Then Saturday came. With Jesus still in the tomb, the Chief Priests and Pharisees prepared for their worst case scenario: that Jesus' followers would nick his body and then claim he had risen from the dead. So Saturday was spent securing and sealing the tomb where Christ's body lay. I don't know about you but it sounds a bit like my Easter Saturday: a bit of DIY whilst consuming too many hot cross buns and eating my weight in Cadbury mini eggs!

Sitting between the drama of Good Friday and the sheer joy of Easter Sunday, Easter Saturday can feel like a 'nothing'



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kind of day. We know how the story ends, so we aren't like the Chief Priests and Pharisees wanting to make sure we're not being duped by Jesus, nor are we in mourning like the disciples.

However, Easter Saturday is a space that many of us find ourselves occupying at one time or another, maybe for lingering periods in our lives. Caught between the mourning and the moving on; waiting in the space between pain and joy; sitting with our bewilderment and grief that it's not quite yet how we longed for it to be; living in the reality of the now but longing for the not yet.

Even on this Easter Saturday, a year long into a pandemic none of us were prepared for, maybe you are in limbo of the fed-upness of lockdown but waiting in hope and anticipation for the 21st June (don't change it, Boris!!) To a greater or lesser extent, we are all waiting.

This Easter Saturday, we can rejoice that, unlike the disciples, we aren't in a suspended state, waiting to see how the story ends ... because we know that tomorrow comes! And because of that, we can have hope, peace and joy in the waiting. So whether you are waiting for unbelieving loved ones to come to faith, or living with a body that is packing up and looking forward to your heavenly one, or maybe you're sat with prayers that you have prayed, longing for the day they are answered - be encouraged - Sunday is coming! Hallelujah!

That, for me, is the beauty of the cross.

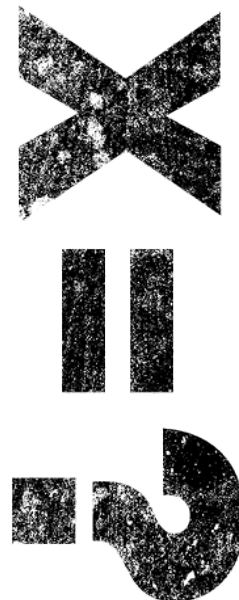


## Easter Sunday - Ephesians 1:17-21

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

He exercised this power in Christ by raising him from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavens — far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

### Ephesians 1:17-21



GOOD  
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## Reflection by Ryan Lynch

I would like to take a sideways reflection at Resurrection Sunday from the angle of one of Paul's most significant heartfelt prayers for the believing followers of Jesus Christ who lived in Ephesus.

Below is my list, healthier than chocolate Easter eggs, of some of the spiritual goodies from Paul's prayer that can be absorbed without worrying about the calories.

I've highlighted the one that touched me most to ruminate on this Resurrection Sunday. I'd encourage you to also write your own list of spiritual goodies and highlight one for rumination that really speaks to you.

Spirit of wisdom  
Revelation  
Knowledge  
Eyes of our heart enlightened  
Hope  
Calling  
Wealthy glorious inheritance  
Identified as saints  
**Immeasurable greatness of his power**

Recently I received an electric shock from a faulty plug. I felt the jolt of electricity enter my body through my left index finger, surge up my arm and across my chest. It was powerful enough to throw me backwards, thankfully (unharmful) onto a sofa. I was surprised, stunned but weirdly, heart pounding, invigorated.

Can you see where I'm going with the spiritual parallels with my highlighted verse? I truly desire to experience an increasing measure of the resurrection power of God in my life. Last week's, last month's, last year's dose is history.

I want it new every morning.

I sincerely hope that the majesty, wonder and sheer awesomeness of Resurrection Sunday electrifies your faith today in the risen, exalted and enthroned sovereign Lord Jesus Christ.

*(For further reflection, please watch the spoken word video [linked here.](#))*

