



TRAVELLING WELL TOGETHER THROUGH LENT - AN INVITATION

Updated with 2024 Calendar

INTRODUCTION

As a Diocese we are seeking to use a new language – not so much of initiatives as of invitation; an invitation to travel well together. And this year through Lent there is a range of resources for the journey.

In what follows you can find:

pp 3 – 6	A summary of our shared diocesan values
p 7	Links to the specially recorded video reflections from across the Diocese, each followed by questions. These can be used individually and are also a really helpful resource for Lent groups
pp 9 – 54	A simple reflection on the daily Gospel readings for each day of Lent and Holy Week
pp 56 – 63	Some texts for reflection

First, some words reflecting on the nature of this invitation to travel well together through Lent and indeed beyond.

- Our *purpose* is to love God and to love our neighbour; to worship faithfully and empowered by the Holy Spirit witness to the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ as we serve the extraordinarily diverse array of local communities in Essex and East London.
- Our *approach* is to enable and empower parishes and worshipping communities to discern how they are to be God's people in their own very different local contexts and as part of one diocesan family.
- Underpinning our approach is an invitation to a way of being articulated by *shared diocesan values* which might shape how we travel together, support each other and provide mutual accountability.

OUR SHARED DIOCESAN VALUES:

Awareness of grace.

God always provides the resources required for the mission of the church to continue. An awareness of grace engenders a spirit of thankfulness and enables us to notice what we have, rather than grieve for what we lack.

Valuing the small, the vulnerable and the marginal.

Our calling is not to strain after worldly success, influence and power but to be a faithful and gentle presence and trust that God will use our conversations, encounters and all our efforts in ways we may never fully understand. Where there is growth we will rejoice and offer encouragement, whilst always remembering that God also treasures that which is small and fragile and we are invited to do the same.

Focusing outward.

We are called always to look to the needs of those beyond the Church. When we fail to do this we risk becoming embroiled in our own internal divisions. Instead we are invited to join in God's mission, embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, to share the good news, to serve our neighbours, and to work for greater justice, especially for those who are most oppressed and marginalised.

Sustaining healthy rhythms.

We are invited to live life in all its fulness. This requires us to take personal responsibility, making time for leisure, recreation, prayer and service. It also requires us to support one another, sometimes carrying those who are struggling most.

Kindness, mutual respect, gentleness and humility.

These are virtues which are often underestimated and undervalued. They flow out of Jesus' command that we should love one another. To embody them we need to practice them intentionally, treating others as we would want to be treated ourselves and assuming the best of one another. This will enable us to develop greater trust.

Generously collaborative.

A willingness to work well with others in a spirit of open honesty and transparency and with appropriate realism and accountability. To form partnerships that welcome challenge and help celebrate our differences, mindful of our need for one another. Together we are greater than the sum of our parts, together our narrow vision is broadened, together we make up the body of Christ.

Faithful, creative, courageous and open to the unexpected and surprising.

There is a paradox in our faith which requires us to hold in tension the calling to be faithful to the traditions we have received, whilst at the same time open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who continues to lead us into all truth.

I. Moving forward

So what might this approach look like as we move forward and how might it differ from what has gone before? What, in short, is your response, both individually and locally? What will be the vision of your church as you seek to fulfil your particular vocation and live out God's call in practical ways? What does loving God and serving your neighbour look like in your area?

This approach seeks to build on what has gone before. There is much that Transforming Presence brought to the life of our Diocese

and to different local contexts. There is nothing about its four priorities (to inhabit the world distinctively, evangelise effectively, serve with accountability and re-imagine ministry), that any of us would disagree with or wouldn't want to promote. But it is now time to build on its foundations by emphasising, at a diocesan level, not *what we need to do* (that will be articulated locally) but, guided by shared values, *how we are to live*. Where there are elements of Transforming Presence, for example MMUs, that are of value to a local context then they should continue to be utilised. Where MMUs have not proved possible or fruitful there should still be an awareness that the future is about partnerships. A willingness to work well with others is increasingly important.

- For those who appreciate icons, this approach, rather like the Rublev icon of the Holy Trinity, seeks to draw you in – it beckons you to join in and participate.
- The approach is invitational. Parishes, deaneries and worshipping communities will be invited to make use of the approach and consider how the values speak to and support their own local context.
- These values will underpin how we take decisions more widely for the diocese including complex and difficult decisions. Our hope is that the values will also help decision making in more local contexts: in deaneries and parishes, providing a framework for conversations.
- Enabling and empowering parishes, deaneries and worshipping communities to discern how they are to be God's people in their own very different contexts and as part of one diocesan family, means moving beyond top-down diocesan initiatives and programmes.
- This approach will require a change in how parishes, deaneries and worshipping communities are supported by the diocesan office and area teams. In keeping with the diocesan values, our

intention is to undertake a listening and engagement exercise during 2023 to understand from parishes and worshipping communities how we can develop our approach to providing support and resources. This will help to shape staffing and structures so that parishes can be best supported.

- Over the coming months we will continue this conversation in order to introduce and develop the approach and we will provide a study guide for those who would like to engage more deeply with the values.
- Meanwhile, if you would like a conversation or further support in how to use this document and the values, please contact your Archdeacon and/or Area Dean.

Prayer

God of the journey,
you invite us to travel well together
as the body of Christ
in the Diocese of Chelmsford:
enlarge our hearts with
 an awareness of your grace,
 the knowledge of your presence,
 and an openness to your calling,
that, with gratitude for the past,
we may step out with confidence into
your future;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
Amen.



VIDEO REFLECTIONS FOR GROUP OR PERSONAL USE

Our website hosts a series of video reflections that can be used for reflection and discussion by individuals or in groups.

LENT WEEK 1: Philippians 2.1-11

A reflection from The Revd Sharon Quilter, Chelmsford Diocese Racial Justice Officer and Curate in the Halstead Area Team Ministry

LENT WEEK 2: 2 Corinthians 5.16-21

A reflection from The Revd Janet Nicholls, Diocese of Chelmsford Rural Adviser and Agricultural Chaplain

LENT WEEK 3: Ephesians 1.3-14

A reflection from the Rt Revd Lynne Cullens, Bishop of Barking

LENT WEEK 4: Ephesians 2.8-22

A reflection from the Rt Revd Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester

LENT WEEK 5:

A reflection from The Revd Dave Chesney, Vicar of Ascension, Victoria Docks and Area Dean of Newham

Each Video ends with a series of questions.

[You can watch the videos here](#)

PRAYER FOR EACH DAY OF LENT AND HOLY WEEK

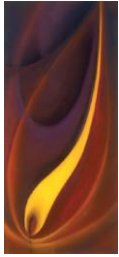
For each day of Lent and Holy Week a very simple form of prayer is provided which can equally well be used by an individual or in a group. Each page opens with some words from the psalms and an invitation to be still in God's presence.

A simple reflection is then followed by a passage from the Gospels, and then you are invited to reflect on what God is inviting you to notice.

Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 14 February 2024

ASH WEDNESDAY



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
Have mercy, tender God, forget that I defied you.
Wash away my sin, cleanse me from my guilt.
Creator, reshape my heart, God, steady my spirit.
Do not cast me aside stripped of your holy spirit.
Words from Psalm 51

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Do not face us, O living God,
with the choice of a world without justice
or a future without mercy;
in your mercy, establish justice
and in your justice, remember your overflowing mercy
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent - a period of 40 days when we are invited to do some work on ourselves as we seek to go deeper with God. In today's Gospel - part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' first "discipleship training" talk - Jesus is seeking to help us to see that there must be a clear connection between what we believe and how we act, a fundamental integrity and authenticity. Today think about what God is inviting you to work on in your life to deepen your friendship with God.

Matthew 6.1-6, 16-21

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 15 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Even suffering
taught me your way.
Your law is better
than untold wealth.
Your hands shaped me;
inspire me to learn your wisdom.
The just see me and rejoice,
because I hope in your word.
How right your judgements, Lord,
how wisely you humble me.
Comfort me with your love,
just as you promised.
Words from Psalm 119

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Faithful God,
let your word be the treasure of our hearts,
that we may delight in your truth
and walk in the glorious liberty of your Son
Jesus Christ. Amen.

Peter has just made his declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. Immediately Jesus now seeks to make clear both what is going to happen to him and what the cost of following him really looks like. This was difficult for the disciples to grasp, and difficult for us too. Like the disciples, we will constantly misunderstand, constantly make mistakes. But Jesus knows that and even loves us for it. Lent is a season that invites us to recognise that we are all too human, but that's precisely why God came to share our humanity.

Luke 9.22-25

Jesus said to the disciples, 'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Then he said to them all, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 16 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Blest are those you instruct, God,
those you teach your law;
they find comfort in evil times,
till a grave is dug for the wicked.
You never desert your people, Lord,
never abandon your chosen.
Right and justice will return,
bringing peace to the honest.
Words from Psalm 94

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Lord God, judge of all,
before whom no secrets are hidden,
let your justice shine out
and your righteousness sweep wickedness from its throne,
that we may live free from fear and stumbling;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fasting is one of the traditional disciplines of Lent, and an observant Jew in the time of Jesus would fast twice a week. But Jesus' response to the disciples of John the Baptist is not a breach of tradition but an invitation to recognise that Jesus' ministry marks a whole new beginning. This Lent - especially as we continue to journey through uncharted territory - how do we invite God to make a new beginning in us?

Matthew 9.14, 15

Then the disciples of John came to Jesus, saying, 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?' And Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 17 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The Lord keeps faith for ever,
giving food to the hungry,
justice to the poor,
freedom to captives.
The Lord opens blind eyes
and straightens the bent,
comforting widows and orphans,
protecting the stranger.
The Lord loves the just
but blocks the path of the wicked.
Words from Psalm 146

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Lord of all,
our breath and being come from you,
yet our earthly end is dust;
as you loose the bound and feed the hungry,
so bring us in your mercy through the grave and gate of death
to the feast of eternal life,
where you reign for evermore. Amen.

The calling of Levi (who is almost certainly the same person as Matthew the apostle and evangelist) is a powerful and demanding demonstration of what the kingdom of God looks like. Levi is an outcast from his own people three times over - as a Jew who taxes fellow Jews; as a Jew working for the Romans, the occupying power; as a human being who makes his living through extortion. And yet this is precisely the right person for Jesus to call. And Levi responds immediately in a "kingdom of God" way by throwing a party for "tax collectors and sinners", the last people on anyone's invitation list. What does the kingdom of God look like in our daily lives?

Luke 5.27-32

After this Jesus went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up, left everything, and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax-collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SUNDAY, 18 February 2024

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
God's voice strikes fire,
makes the desert shudder,
Qadesh shudder in labour,
deer writhe in labour.
God strips the trees.
Give strength to your people, Lord,
and bless your people with peace. *Words from Psalm 29*

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Open our ears to hear you, O God,
and our mouths to proclaim your glory
and the beauty of your holiness
as revealed to us in your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today we hear Matthew's powerful account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, straight after his baptism and before he begins his ministry. Traditionally Lent mirrors Jesus' time in the desert – not just in length but as an invitation to face our demons, to do some work on ourselves. For us – as for Jesus – this is the training ground, an opportunity to see ourselves stripped down; an opportunity to think about what and who really matters to us; an opportunity to give time to those spiritual practices which truly help us to be open to God and enable us to be of service to others. Where is your desert this Lent, and what do you plan to do there?

Matthew 4.1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' '

Jesus said to him, 'Again it is 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; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

MONDAY, 19 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The Lord keeps faith for ever,
giving food to the hungry,
justice to the poor,
freedom to captives.
The Lord opens blind eyes
and straightens the bent,
comforting widows and orphans,
protecting the stranger.
The Lord loves the just
but blocks the path of the wicked.
Words from Psalm 146

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Lord of all, our breath and being come from you,
yet our earthly end is dust;
as you loose the bound and feed the hungry,
so bring us in your mercy through the grave and gate of death
to the feast of eternal life,
where you reign for evermore. Amen.

Today's reading is the first part of the parable of the last judgement. The second part simply rams home the message: that those who do not feed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and those in prison have no place in the kingdom. Note that this is not addressed to churchgoers or simply Christians but to everybody. This Lent, how do we respond to the challenge of these works of mercy?

Matthew 25.31-40

Jesus said to the disciples, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

TUESDAY, 20 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
My soul, bless the Lord, bless God's holy name!
My soul, bless the Lord, hold dear all God's gifts!
Bless God, who forgives your sin
and heals every illness,
who snatches you from death
and enfolds you with tender care,
who fills your life with richness
and gives you an eagle's strength. Words from Psalm 103

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Merciful Lord, as we come from dust and return to dust,
show us the face of our Redeemer,
that in our frailty we may bless your name
and praise you all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, using a prayer that echoes many familiar phrases from Jewish tradition and which has become the core prayer of the Christian tradition. It is worth noting the differences between the translation used here (which is an accurate translation of the Greek of the New Testament) and the versions we typically use in worship, which largely reflects the Latin influence on the early English translation. The biggest thing to note here is that Jesus does not use the word "sin" or "trespass" but "debt". Reflect today on the difference this could make to you.

Matthew 6.7-15

Jesus said to the disciples, 'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.

Ask God what God wants you to hear today.

Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.

and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 21 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever,
yet you brought up my life from the depths, O God.
As my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, O God,
and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.
With the voice of thanksgiving, I will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay;
deliverance belongs to the Lord!
Words from the Song of Jonah

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Lord of mercy and redemption,
rescue us, we pray, from the depths of sin and death;
forgive us what we do wrong,
and give us grace to stand in your presence,
to serve you in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's reading can seem quite opaque to us. In Matthew, Jesus uses the fact that Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish as a parallel to the three days he will himself spend in the tomb before the resurrection. In today's passage from Luke the emphasis is different: Jesus' point seems to be that even the people of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached, and even though something greater than Jonah is going in the ministry of Jesus, his contemporaries are choosing not to respond to Jesus' preaching. This – and the reference to the Queen of Sheba – is a very strong way of Jesus saying to his contemporaries: "are you simply not bothered?" How do we respond to that challenge for ourselves?

Luke 11.29-32

When the crowds were increasing, Jesus began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgement with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!'

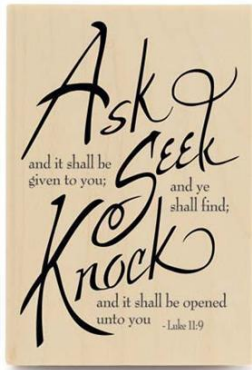
*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 22 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Join me in praising the Lord,
together tell of God's name.
I asked and the Lord responded,
freed me from all my fears.
Turn to God, be bright with joy;
you shall never be let down.
I begged and God heard,
took my burdens from me.

Words from Psalm 34

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Send your holy angels
to watch over us, O God,
that on our lips will be found your truth
and in our hearts your love;
so we may ever taste your goodness
in the land of the living;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's passage is part of Jesus' first teaching session with his disciples, sometimes called the "sermon on the mount". He uses wonderfully comic and exaggerated examples from human behaviour to illustrate his big point about the generosity of God who invites us into his presence to enjoy God's gifts. Jesus ends this section with a piece of wisdom common to most faith traditions and ethical philosophies: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you". Ponder the challenge of these words today.

Matthew 7.7-12

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 23 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Who is fit to climb God's mountain
and stand in his holy place?
Whoever has integrity:
not chasing shadows,
not living lies.
God will bless them,
their saviour will bring justice.
These people long to see the Lord,
they seek the face of Jacob's God.
Stretch toward heaven, you gates,
open high and wide.
Let the glorious sovereign enter.
Words from Psalm 24

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O Lord of hosts,
purify our hearts
that the King of glory may come in,
your Son, Jesus our redeemer. Amen.

Today's passage is from early on in the sermon on the mount. Jesus is seeking to challenge the disciples to live up to their calling. He uses the typical technique of the traditional Jewish teacher, quoting lines from the Hebrew Bible. He then says essentially "but I need you to go further than that!" He is holding them to a higher standard than that typical in contemporary society. This is part of Jesus' challenge to us – how are we to live with integrity?

Matthew 5.20-26

Jesus said to the disciples, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 24 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

God's perfect law
revives the soul.
God's stable rule
guides the simple.
God's just demands
delight the heart.
God's clear commands
sharpen vision.
God's faultless decrees
stand for ever.
God's right judgements
keep their truth.

Words from Psalm 119

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Faithful God,
let your word be the treasure of our hearts,
that we may delight in your truth
and walk in the glorious liberty of your Son,
Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a slight problem with Jesus' opening line in today's reading in that the Old Testament does very definitely say "love your neighbour" (Leviticus 19:1), it does not say "hate your enemy". It is assumed that Jesus is repeating a saying current among particularly fanatical contemporaries. Whatever the source, Jesus is again encouraging his followers to go further than received wisdom or accepted versions of what a good Jew looks like. What is the "more than" that Jesus is asking of us?

Matthew 5.43-end

Jesus said to the disciples, 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SUNDAY, 25 February 2024

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
Even suffering
taught me your way.
Your law is better
than untold wealth.
Your hands shaped me;
inspire me to learn your wisdom.
The just see me and rejoice,
because I hope in your word.
Words from Psalm 119

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

God of loving mercy,
in this place of our pilgrimage
turn your laws into songs,
that we may find your promises
fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This passage is the final part of Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. In Jesus Christ God has come in search of us and invites us to respond by going in search of God, living out of the absolute assurance that God has saved the whole created order. "Cosmos" is the word used in the text of John's Gospel. That is the scope of God's love, a love without limit in which God invites us to share.

John 3.13-17

Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

MONDAY, 26 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Your mercy, Lord, spans the sky;
your faithfulness soars among the clouds.
Your integrity towers like a mountain;
your justice runs deeper than the sea.
Lord, you embrace all life:
How we prize your tender mercy!
God, your people seek shelter,
safe in the warmth of your wings.

Words from Psalm 36

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O God, the well of life,
make us bright with wisdom,
that we may be lightened with the knowledge of your glory
in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Mercy stands at the heart of the Christian Gospel as a promise for everyone. Jesus speaks about mercy, loving kindness (and they are the same word in Greek) again and again, and he makes mercy visible in his acts of healing and ultimately in his death. "Mercy triumphs over judgement" is one of the great lines of the New Testament. Works of mercy have always been deeply characteristic of Christian communities - concern and action for the sick, the poor, the vulnerable. Indeed, when churches are not engaged in these ministries it is always a sign that something has gone wrong. Here Jesus tells us that mercy is at the heart of God. This Lent how are we to place mercy at the heart of who we are and how we live?

Luke 6.36-38

Jesus said, 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

TUESDAY, 27 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

How right your judgements, Lord,
how wisely you humble me.
Comfort me with your love,
just as you promised.
Shower my life with tenderness,
for I delight in your law.
Shame the proud who slander me,
I ponder your decrees.
Words from Psalm 119

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Blessèd are you, O Lord,
and blessèd are those who understand
and keep your law:
help us to seek you with our whole heart,
to delight in your commandments
and to walk in the glorious liberty
brought us by your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Although we are very used to the word "almighty" in prayer and worship, the word is hardly ever used in the Bible, and in the New Testament it is found only in the unique poems in the book of Revelation. In that context Jesus' radical criticism of power has even more force and constitutes a massively disruptive challenge to our own assumptions. The greatest being a servant, as in today's passage, and the first being last set out a powerful agenda for us. In John's Gospel they reach a climax when Jesus stoops to wash disciples' feet the night before he dies. How do you respond to the upside-down values of the kingdom of God?

Matthew 23.1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practise what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 28 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Shout joy to the Lord, all earth,
serve the Lord with gladness,
enter God's presence with joy!
Know that the Lord is God,
our maker to whom we belong,
our shepherd and we the flock.

Words from Psalm 100

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

As we enter your courts of light, O Lord,
may we rejoice in your power to save
and praise your faithfulness, day by day;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus is about to face the ultimate trial of his life, and as he seeks to make clear to the twelve what is going to happen, an argument breaks out among them about who is the most important. It is a powerful clash at the heart of the Gospel and invites us to reflect deeply on our own assumptions. There is real sting in Jesus' words - those who will be on Jesus' left and right in his kingdom in a few chapters time will be two convicted thieves. Today allow Jesus to confront you with your assumptions about power and importance.

Matthew 20.17-28

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised.'

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him. And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.' But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.' He said to them, 'You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.'

When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 29 February 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The Lord bends down
to see heaven and earth,
to raise the weak from the dust
and lift the poor from the mire,
to seat them with princes
in the company of their leaders.
The childless, no longer alone,
rejoice now in many children.
Words from Psalm 113

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Faithful God,
rescue us from our faithlessness
that we may fulfil our vows to you
and ever call on your holy Name. Amen.

Today's Gospel is one of the most hard-hitting passages in the teaching of Jesus. It is a parable - a word that can equally well be translated "metaphor" - and designed to make a powerful impact. And indeed, it does - so deep that in the middle ages it was simply assumed that God did not hear the prayers of the rich. As you meditate on this passage today, how does it challenge your assumptions?

Luke 16.19-end

Jesus said, 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us." He said, "Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." '

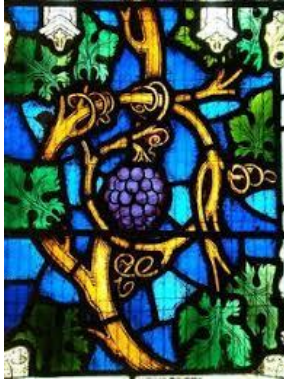
*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 1 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Restore to us, God of might,
the light of your presence,
and we shall be saved.
You brought a vine out of Egypt
cleared out the nations to plant it;
you prepared the ground
and made it take root
to fill the land.

Words from Psalm 80

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Lord, as we look for the light of your countenance
restore in us the image of your glory
and graft us into the risen life
of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus tells today's parable with a clear target in view: his fellow Jews. Again and again God has sent his messengers to him and they have mocked and ignored them. Now he has sent his own son, and they are going to kill him rather than recognise who he is. As a result they will be dispossessed and the "vineyard", the promise of God to his people, will be given to others. God is always calling us back to his love - how open are we to hear God's call?

Matthew 21.33-43, 45-46

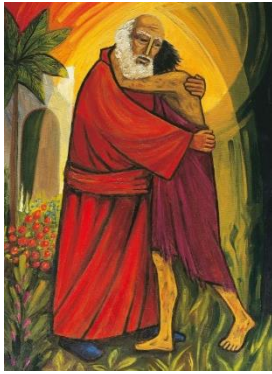
'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 2 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
How long, O Lord, before you return?
Pity your servants,
shine your love on us each dawn,
and gladden all our days.
balance our past sorrows
with present joys.
and let your servants, young and old,
see the splendour of your work.
Words from Psalm 90

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Christ your salvation has dawned for your people:
prosper the work of our hands
that the promise of your glorious kingdom
may be fulfilled in our midst;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The parable of the wasteful son is probably better called the parable of the two sons. At the heart of this deeply moving parable is the contrast between the mercy shown by the father and the resentment shown by the brother. Here Jesus invites us to consider how we would respond.

Luke 15.11-end

Jesu told them this parable: 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might

Travelling Well Together Through Lent

celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” ’

Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.

Ask God what God wants you to hear today.

Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.

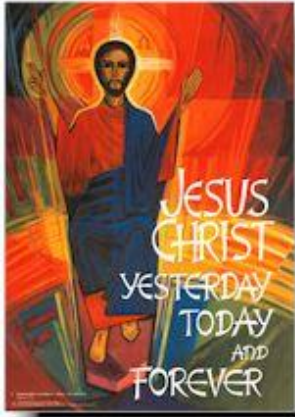
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SUNDAY, 3 March 2024

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

God dwells in his holy temple,
the heavens hold God's throne;
the Lord watches the earth, .
eyes fixed on all nations,
weighing both righteous and wicked,
rejecting the violent.
God sends a rain of fire,
allots them a scorching wind.
The Lord loves justice,
the just will see God's face.
Words from Psalm 11

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O God, who from the midst of your holy temple
behold all the dwellers upon earth:
guard your faithful in the time of trial
and save us from the dangers and temptations of this life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus is on the borderland, as so often, and encounters a stranger he should have nothing to do with. But – again as we learn to expect from Jesus – he steps over the boundary and enters into an extraordinary conversation which (as often in John's Gospels) progresses by a series of misunderstandings. The invitation to us today is to make the woman's prayer our own – to express to the Lord our longing for the water of life.

John 4.7-15

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

MONDAY, 4 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
Do not abandon or desert me,
my saviour, my God.
If my parents rejected me,
still God would take me in.
Teach me how to live,
lead me on the right road
how good God is
while I am still alive.
Trust in the Lord. Be strong.
Be brave. Trust in the Lord.
Words from Psalm 27

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O God our defender,
give us the light of truth and wisdom
that all our hope may be fixed on you,
and on your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

This is an enormously painful moment in Jesus' ministry. He has gone to synagogue in his home town and set out his teaching using challenging words from the prophet Isaiah about God's love and healing. But these people who have known him all his life simply don't get it. Soon it descends into a war of words and Jesus responds in kind using very unflattering examples from the Old Testament. This so angers the worshippers that they go as far as seeking to kill him. It is straight after this that Jesus moves his centre of operations to Capernaum. Reflect today on the experience of rejection. What healed that for you? And how do we prevent ourselves from rejecting others? How do we respond to God who will always accept us unconditionally?

Luke 4.24-30

Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

TUESDAY 5 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
Celebrate, all you saints,
praise this awesome God,
whose anger passes quickly,
whose mercy lasts a lifetime –
as laughter fills a day
after one brief night of tears.
Words from Psalm 30

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Hear our prayers, O Lord, and have mercy upon us;
turn our heaviness into joy
and clothe us with gladness and salvation
that we may give thanks to you for ever. Amen.

Mercy stands at the heart of today's reading. What Jesus gets across in this powerful parable is that there is a mutuality about mercy: as we receive mercy, we learn to practice mercy. As you reflect on Jesus' teaching here, think about how it felt for the first slave to have his debts written off. And how did it feel for his fellow slave not to receive forgiveness. How much do we imprison ourselves and others when we fail to receive mercy or show mercy?

Matthew 18.21-end

Then Peter came and said to Jesus, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 6 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

God's perfect law
revives the soul.
God's stable rule
guides the simple.
God's just demands
delight the heart.
God's clear commands
sharpen vision.
God's faultless decrees
stand for ever.
God's right judgements
keep their truth.

Words from Psalm 19

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Let the Sun of Righteousness arise, O God,
with healing in his wings;
may he come forth as the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride
and make your people acceptable in his sight;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In today's passage, note that Jesus' criticism of his Jewish contemporaries is not a criticism of the Jewish law but of the religious authorities' inability to see that the whole point of the law is to enable people to create a community where the needs of each are met and all can flourish together. As Jesus himself says, he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfil the law.

Matthew 5.17-19

Jesus said to the disciples, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

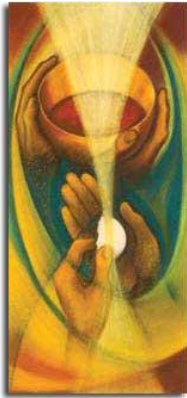
*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 7 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Lord our God, save us.
Gather us from the nations
to give thanks to your holy name
and rejoice in praising you.

Blessed is the Lord,
the God of Israel.
from eternity to eternity.

Let all the people sing
"Amen! Hallelujah!"

Words from Psalm 106

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O God almighty,
who in your enduring goodness
recall your erring children to unending life:
spare us who declare the mighty acts of your salvation,
for we have sinned, as all our forebears;
this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's passage can strike us as quite bewildering. Jesus cures someone who is mute. His healings are always telling us more about what God is like. A God of healing, mercy and joy for the poor. Here the crowds are amazed at the healing, but it also draws criticism and opposition. What follows – which is quite confusing to us – would in fact have been completely familiar in the time of Jesus. It is exactly the kind of argument that Jewish teachers engaged in all the time. For us, it is the last line that Jesus invites us to respond to. Are we making a choice for Jesus? For mercy? For love?

Luke 11.14-23

Now Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.' Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven. But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? —for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted and divides his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 8 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

I will lift my voice,
sing of you, Lord, to all nations.
For your love fills the heavens,
your unfailing love, the sky.
O God, rise high above the heavens!
Spread your glory across the earth!
Deliver those you love,
use your strength to rescue me.

Words from Psalm 108

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
you redeemed us from the slavery of sin
for freedom as your children:
feed us on our way with the bread of heaven
and quench our thirst with living water;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's reading contains what is often called Jesus' "summary of the law". It has become embedded in Christian worship and in many ways it is the simplest and most profound summary of what it means to be a follower of Jesus: "Love God, and love you neighbour as yourself." This is however not original teaching. Jesus is simply combining two Old Testament texts: Deuteronomy 6.4 ("Hear, O Israel...") and Leviticus 19.18 ("Love your neighbour as yourself"). That reminds us that we must never forget our origins. Today, reflect on this beautiful encounter between Jesus and a scribe – for once not an argument or disagreement but a real meeting of minds. Like the scribe, sit at Jesus's feet and hear him say these words to you.

Mark 12.28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.

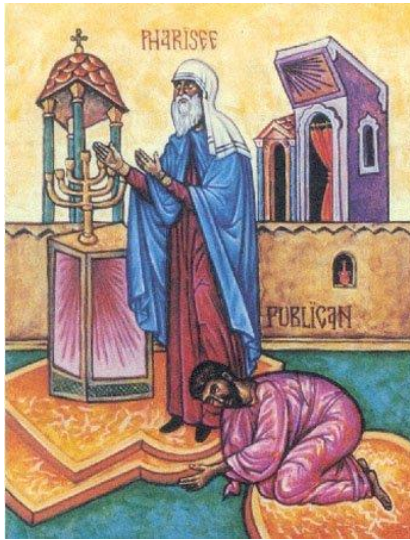
*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 9 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Hear me, Lord, and act,
I am poor and helpless.
You are my God,
watch over me,
for I am loyal to you.
Save me your servant,
for I trust you.
Each waking hour
I beg your mercy, Lord.
Bring joy to me your servant,
I offer myself to you.
You are good and forgiving,
loyal to all who call upon you
Words from Psalm 86

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

God of mercy, who in your great love
drew your Son from the depths of the Pit:
bring your people from death to life,
that we may rejoice in your compassion
and praise you now and for ever. Amen.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus loves using contrasts – men / women; old / young; rich / poor. Here the contrast of the worthy Pharisee and the worthless tax collector is powerful. Part of what gives it power is its shock value. For Jesus' first hearers, the prayer of the Pharisee is exactly the right prayer and the tax collector has no place being there at all. And as so often in Jesus' teaching, it turns out to be completely the other way round. It is the despised tax collector who goes home put right with God. Reflect today on how the recognition of our own need for mercy can open us up to love more deeply.

Luke 18.9-14

Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income." But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SUNDAY, 10 March 2024

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT – Mothering Sunday



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Lord, you embrace all life:
How we prize your tender mercy!
God, your people seek shelter,
safe in the warmth of your wings.
They feast at your full table,
slake their thirst in your cool stream,
for you are the fount of life,
you give us light and we see.
Grant mercy always to your own,
victory to honest hearts.
Words from Psalm 36

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

O God,
the fountain and source of everlasting life,
in your light we see light:
increase in us the brightness of knowledge
that we may be lightened with the radiance of your wisdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today – Mothering Sunday – the Gospel reading presents us with Jesus' care and concern for his mother even as he dies on the cross. It is profoundly moving that mercy and compassion are still at the absolute centre. Mothering Sunday – marked almost uniquely in the UK on the fourth Sunday of Lent – invites us each year to reflect on our care for one another in our families and communities, to build up our common life so that all are welcome and the needs of each are met.

John 19.25b-27

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

MONDAY, 11 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

My soul, bless the Lord,
bless God's holy name!
My soul, bless the Lord,
hold dear all God's gifts!
Bless God, who forgives your sin
and heals every illness,
who snatches you from death
and enfolds you with tender care,
who fills your life with richness
and gives you an eagle's strength.
Words from Psalm 103

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

As your merciful goodness endures for ever, O Lord,
remember the frailty of your children;
deal with us not according to our sins
but, in your compassion, redeem our life
and crown us with your mercy and loving-kindness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus' first miracle – turning water into wine as a sign of God's abundance and care – took place at Cana, and he returns there now, where a chance encounter with a pagan official leads to his second miracle as he heals the son of an official. Jesus sounds almost resentful – “people are just asking for signs and wonders, but they still won't really get what is going on!” The healing is almost perfunctory – at a distance, no words or actions. Simply “your son will live”. In part Jesus seems to be making the point that people need to look for more than just a miracle – or that the real miracle is when people (like the pagan official) set out on a genuine journey of faith in response to the mercy of God.

John 4.43-end

When Jesus came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival. Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.’ The official said to him, ‘Sir, come down before my little boy dies.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.’ The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

TUESDAY, 12 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The troubled call out; God hears,
saves them from all distress.
God stays near broken hearts,
heals the wounded spirit.
The good endure great trials,
but God comes to their rescue
and guards their every bone
so not one is broken.

Words from Psalm 34

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Send your holy angels to watch over us, O loving God,
that on our lips will be found your truth
and in our hearts your love;
for his sake who died for love of our love,
even Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Jesus, in Jerusalem for the pilgrim feast, heals a chronically ill man on the Sabbath. This is the third of the miracles (or signs as John's Gospel calls them). The purpose of the miracles is to tell us about the character of the God we meet in Jesus – the God of compassion and love, but also the God who will cross boundaries to heal. Here the boundary is the commandment to keep the Sabbath. All the Gospels make it clear that Jesus was a Sabbath breaker and that this was a massive cause of dispute and division. How do we follow Jesus in crossing boundaries of taste and tradition in order to reach out to people in need?

John 5.1-3, 5-16

There was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be made well?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.' Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.' But he answered them, 'The man who made me well said to me, "Take up your mat and walk." ' They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Take it up and walk"?' Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, 'See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.' The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Chelmsford Cathedral – Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 13 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
I believe, even as I say,
“I am afflicted.”
I believe, even though I scream,
“Everyone lies!”
What gift can ever repay
God’s gift to me?
I raise the cup of freedom
as I call on God’s name!
I fulfil my vows to you, Lord,
standing before your assembly.
Words from Psalm 116

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Faithful God,
rescue us from our faithlessness
that we may fulfil our vows to you
and ever call on your holy Name. Amen.

Today’s passage continues directly on from yesterday’s healing miracle on the Sabbath and is Jesus’ response to people complaining that he has healed on the Sabbath. Whereas for instance in Mark’s Gospel no one works out who Jesus is until the crucifixion, in John’s Gospel Jesus is absolutely clear from the outset that he is God, regularly using the Old Testament name of God (“I am”) about himself. Here Jesus meditates on that theme and the unique sense of communion between the Father and the Son. That is the relationship that we are offered, God’s loving invitation. How do we feel drawn to respond?

John 5.17-24

Jesus said, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes. The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Anyone who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 14 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

All peoples shall remember and turn,
all races will bow to the Lord,
who holds dominion over the nations.
The well-fed crowd kneel before God,
all destined to die bow low.
My soul lives for the Lord!
My children will serve, will proclaim God to the future,
announcing to the peoples yet unborn, "God saves."
Words from Psalm 22

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Merciful God, your Son came to free us from sin,
overcoming death and rising in triumph:
may we, who are redeemed by his blood
be made ready to meet you face to face;
this we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Readings from John's Gospel run more or less daily through these weeks running up to Easter itself, including Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, which more easily break down into small sections focussing on a particular event in Jesus's life, John contains much more extended narratives. That makes it hard to just read the excerpts. So there is a real encouragement to each of us to read John's Gospel as a whole and to seek to get a grip both on the framework and the extraordinary portrait of Jesus that it contains.

John 5.31-end

'If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true. You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth. Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. I do not accept glory from human beings. But I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 15 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

May mountains bear peace,
hills bring forth justice.
May the king defend the poor,
set their children free,
and kill their oppressors.
May he live as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, for ever.
May he be like rain on a field,
like showers that soak the earth.

Words from Psalm 72

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Your kingdom come, O Lord,
with deliverance for the needy,
with peace for the righteous,
with overflowing blessing for all nations,
with glory, honour and praise
for the only Saviour,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In John's Gospel – in a way quite different from Matthew, Mark and Luke – Jesus regularly visits Jerusalem for the Jewish pilgrim feasts. These are times when Jerusalem would be crowded with Jewish pilgrims from all over Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Jesus chooses this as an opportunity to make it clear who he is and what his purpose is as God's Messiah. How would we have responded if we had been present in the Temple hearing Jesus speak?

John 7.1-2, 10, 25-30

After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He did not wish to go about in Judea because the Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him. Now the Jewish festival of Booths was near. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in secret.

Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.' Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, 'You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me.' Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 16 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Write this down for those to come,
a people created to praise our God:

“The Lord watches from on high,
searches the earth from heaven.

“God hears the prisoner’s groan
and sets the doomed free
to sing the Lord’s name in Zion,
God’s praise in Jerusalem.

There the nations and peoples
gather to serve the Lord.”

Words from Psalm 102

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God’s presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Have pity on our frailty, O God,
and do not cast us away,,
for you are our eternal refuge;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today we see the second of three appearances by Nicodemus in John’s Gospel. Here he is standing up for Jesus against the hasty and vengeful reaction of his Jewish colleagues. The passage as a whole poses a question to each of us – “who do we really say that Jesus is?”

John 7.40-52

When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, ‘This is really the prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Messiah.’ But some asked, ‘Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?’ So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, ‘Why did you not arrest him?’ The police answered, ‘Never has anyone spoken like this!’ Then the Pharisees replied, ‘Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed.’ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, ‘Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?’ They replied, ‘Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.’

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SUNDAY, 17 March 2024

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
Lord, defend me! I have walked with honesty,
I trusted the Lord without wavering.
Test me, try me, Lord, probe my heart and soul.
Your love is ever before me, I walk boldly with your strength.
I wash my hands in innocence and walk around your altar,
singing a song of thanks, telling your wonderful deeds.
Lord, I love your house, the place your glory rests.
Words from Psalm 26

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

As your merciful goodness endures for ever, O Lord,
remember the frailty of your children;
deal with us not according to our sins
but, in your compassion, redeem our life
and crown us with your mercy and loving-kindness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bethany is a special place for Jesus – the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, just on the other side of the Mount of Olives. The Gospel; draws our attention to Jesus' powerful emotional response to the death of his friend. The word translated "greatly disturbed" is very strong in the original text. We see here something of the vulnerability of God – a vulnerability that we will see at its extreme point when we stand at the Cross on Good Friday. But of course the raising of Lazarus just as Jesus moves towards his own death is an extraordinary promise.

John 11.38-45

Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb of Lazarus. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

MONDAY, 18 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The wicked track the faithful,
hoping to condemn them.
But God never abandons the just,
nor permits a verdict against them.
Wait in hope and keep God's way,
the Lord will give you power.
You will have your land
and watch the wicked fall.

Words from Psalm 37

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Blessed and holy God,
ever merciful and forgiving,
may we turn from what is evil
and do what is good in your sight,
for you have saved us by the cross of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

This famous passage was added very early on to John's Gospel - a great instinct probably by an early scribe as it has become such a powerful reflection on the mercy of God. As you reflect on this scene, where are you standing? - with Jesus? with the woman? with the angry crowd? How do we balance the demands of justice and mercy? And how do we hear for ourselves the words of Jesus: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone"?

John 8.1-11

Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

TUESDAY, 19 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

God ascends the mountain
to cheers and trumpet blasts.
Sing out your praise to God,
to the king, sing out your praise.
For God rules the earth;
sing praise with all your skill.
God rules over nations,
high on the sacred throne.
Words from Psalm 47

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

As Christ was raised by your glory, O Father,
so may we be raised to new life
and rejoice to be called your children,
both now and for ever. Amen.

“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he”. The phrase translated “I am he” here is the name of God in the Old Testament (Exodus 3.14). Jesus uses this phrase again and again, particularly in John, as he makes it absolutely clear that he is God, and that he and the Father are one. The God we know in Jesus Christ has won the victory and is leading the whole created order to glory.

John 8.21-30

Again Jesus said to them, ‘I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.’ Then the Jews said, ‘Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, “Where I am going, you cannot come”?’ He said to them, ‘You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.’ They said to him, ‘Who are you?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Why do I speak to you at all? I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.’ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. So Jesus said, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.’ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

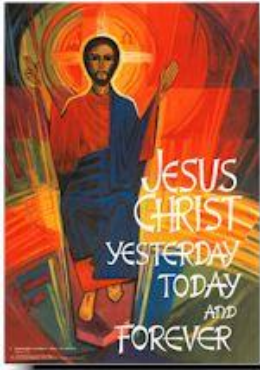
*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Chelmsford Cathedral – Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 20 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The Lord is tender and caring,
slow to anger, rich in love.
As far as east from west,
so God removes our sins.
As tender as father to child,
so gentle is God to believers.
The Lord knows how we are made,
remembers we are dust.
Words from Psalm 103

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Merciful Lord, as we come from dust and return to dust,
show us the face of our Redeemer,
that in our frailty we may bless your name
and praise you all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

"The truth will make you free" says Jesus in today's reading. It is a phrase echoed by St Paul in his phrase "for freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5.1). Again and again John's Gospel emphasises that God's purpose in becoming one of us in Jesus Christ is to save the whole creation - and that through his death and resurrection God has saved the world. We are invited to live out of that extraordinary truth.

John 8.31-42

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' They answered him, 'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?' Jesus answered them, 'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.'

They answered him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did, but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are indeed doing what your father does.' They said to him, 'We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself.' Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 21 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

“On Zion, my holy mountain,
I anoint my king.”

I repeat the Lord’s decree:

“You are my son,
today I give you birth.

Ask and the nations are yours,
even the far-off lands.

You will strike them with an iron rod,
shatter them like clay pots.”

Words from Psalm 2

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God’s presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Most high and holy God,
lift our eyes to your Son
enthroned on Calvary;
and as we behold his meekness,
shatter our earthly pride;
for he is Lord for ever and ever. Amen.

Again in today’s passage Jesus uses the name of God - I am (Exodus 3.14) of himself in a context where he has already infuriated the crowd. In John it is clear that one of the main reasons Jesus is sentenced to death is because his behaviour is regarded as blasphemous. This is an important theme – that the God who chooses to come among us in Jesus Christ crosses every boundary to stand with us.

John 8.51-end

Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.’ The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, “Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.” Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, “He is our God”, though you do not know him. But I know him; if I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.’ Then the Jews said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.

Ask God what God wants you to hear today.

Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.

and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 22 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Lord, I give myself to you.
I trust you, God; do not fail me,
nor let my enemies gloat.
No one loyal is shamed,
but traitors know disgrace.
Teach me how to live,
Lord, show me the way.
Steer me toward your truth,
you, my saving God,
you, my constant hope.
Words from Psalm 25

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Free us, God of mercy,
from all that keeps us from you;
relieve the misery of the anxious and the ashamed
and fill us with the hope of peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the Gospels - and a particularly strong theme in Luke and John - is Jesus' absolute communion with the Father. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity does not mean that God has three separate identities. "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" are not three names for different parts of God but a single name for God. So in Jesus Christ we see our God made visible. That is why the Jewish authorities accuse him of blasphemy, but also why he commands the faith and allegiance of so many - in the end not because of signs and wonders but because of who he is.

John 10.31-end

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, 'I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?' The Jews answered, 'It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God.' Jesus answered, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"? If those to whom the word of God came were called "gods"—and the scripture cannot be annulled— can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, "I am God's Son"? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, 'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.' And many believed in him there.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 23 March 2024



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

The Lord is my shepherd, I need nothing more.

You give me rest in green meadows,
setting me near calm waters,
where you revive my spirit.

You guide me along sure paths,
you are true to your name.

Though I should walk in death's dark valley,
I fear no evil with you by my side,
your shepherd's staff to comfort me.

Words from Psalm 23

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Do not face us, O living God, with the choice of a world without justice
or a future without mercy; in your mercy, establish justice
and in your justice, remember your overflowing mercy
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are at a crucial point in the Gospels. Jesus has just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, which has emboldened his opponents to seek his death. Passover is approaching and the crowds are beginning to arrive in Jerusalem for the pilgrim feast. John notes that the Jewish high priest makes a remarkable prophecy - that Jesus will die for the people and "gather into one the dispersed children of God. This is precisely what lies at the centre of the week ahead. By his death and resurrection, Christ has broken down every barrier. As ever, the challenge for us is how we are to live out of that promise.

John 11.45-end

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, 'What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.' But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.' He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, 'What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?' Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.

Ask God what God wants you to hear today.

Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings.

and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SUNDAY, 24 March 2024

PALM SUNDAY



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
Pity me, Lord, I hurt all over;
my eyes are swollen, my heart and body ache.
Grief consumes my life, sighs fill my days;
guilt saps my strength, my bones dissolve.
Guide me, lead me.
Forgotten like the dead, I am a shattered jar.
But I trust in you, Lord.
I say, "You are my God, my life is in your hands."
Snatch me from the enemy, ruthless in their chase.
Look on me with love, save your servant.
*Words from Psalm 31, one of the
psalms Jesus recites from the cross.*

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Lord Jesus Christ, you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant,
and in obedience died on the cross for our salvation:
give us the mind to follow you and to proclaim you as Lord and King,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Jesus enters Jerusalem in triumph. He is greeted by crowds excited that he comes riding on a donkey, a sign that this is a different kind of Messiah from the one they were expecting – a Messiah of humble service, not power and might. Yet within a few days the same crowds will call for his death. Reflect today, at the beginning of Holy Week, on our complex human loyalties; on our ability to betray. And yet also on the mercy and love of God shown in the most perfect way – the God who always welcomes us home.

Matthew 21.1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?' The crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

MONDAY, 25 March 2024

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

How good it is, how wonderful,
wherever people live as one!
It is like sacred oil on the head
flowing down Aaron's beard,
down to the collar of his robe.
It is like the dew of Hermon
running down the mountains of Zion.
There God gives blessing: life for ever.
Words from Psalm 133

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

God of mercy and healing,
always waiting to show us your love,
your anointing restores wholeness
to a world that is broken:
bind up our wounds,
and lead us into new life. Amen.

This week the readings focus on the last days of Jesus' life. Today's Gospel is the moving account of Mary of Bethany, one of Jesus' closest friends, anointing Jesus. This is both a sign of Jesus' approaching death and a beautiful expression of love. We are invited to pour out our love in response to the Lord who pours out his love for us. How can we express this?

John 12.1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

TUESDAY, 26 March 2024

TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

Have mercy, tender God,
forget that I defied you.
Wash away my sin,
cleanse me from my guilt.
I know my evil well,
it stares me in the face,
evil done to you alone
before your very eyes.
Words from Psalm 51

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Take away, O Lord, the sin that corrupts us;
restore by grace your own image within us;
give us the sorrow that heals
and the joy that praises,
that we may take our place among your people,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

This week the readings focus on the last days of Jesus' life. Jesus knows that this is what he came for, his purpose. He pleads with the Father and yet he knows that his journey to the cross is the road to glory. Whilst this is hard for us to take, it is the core of what it means to follow Jesus.

John 12.23-28

Jesus said, '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.'

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

WEDNESDAY, 27 March 2024

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
As a deer craves running water,
I thirst for you, my God;
I thirst for God,
the living God.
When will I see your face?
Tears are my steady diet.
Day and night I hear,
“Where is your God?”
Words from Psalm 42

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The readings continue to focus on the last days of Jesus' life, and today we hear Jesus speaking with his disciples at the Last Supper. The sense of foreboding is become intense, and we watch helpless as we see Judas beginning to act. “It was night” towards the end of the passage marks the beginning of a new phase in the passion, the time when Jesus is handed over. Place in God's hands today those parts of your life where you feel there is darkness and need – invite God to lead you into light.

John 13.21-32

Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you are going to do.’ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival’; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

THURSDAY, 28 March 2024

MAUNDY THURSDAY



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

I am filled with love,
for the Lord hears me;
the Lord bends to my voice
whenever I call.

What gift can ever repay
God's gift to me?
I raise the cup of freedom
as I call on God's name!

Words from Psalm 116

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

*As we walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
may we call upon your name,
raise the cup of salvation,
and so proclaim your death, O Lord,
until you come in glory. Amen.*

The English word “Maundy” comes from the Latin “mandatum” and refers to Jesus’ new commandment to “love one another as I have loved you”. In today’s Gospel Jesus acts that out in a deeply shocking way – by acting like a slave and washing his disciples’ feet, something no Jew was allowed to do. The love that will take the Lord to the cross and the love he invites us to know for ourselves and to share with the world.

John 13.2b-17

During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’ After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord’s Prayer.

Prayer for Today

FRIDAY, 29 March 2024

GOOD FRIDAY



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!

We adore you, O Christ
and we bless you.
By your holy cross
you have redeemed the world.
Holy God:
holy and strong:
holy and immortal:
have mercy on us.

Words from the traditional Good Friday services

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

John's account of the death of Jesus is normally read in church on Good Friday. In the last verses, reflect particularly on Jesus' final words "It is finished". This is not resignation or despair. The word Jesus uses here expresses purpose – "I have completed my purpose". He is both acknowledging death but also telling us that he has completed the purpose for which he came. The apparent defeat of the cross is in fact God's victory.

John 19.23-30

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.
Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer for Today

SATURDAY, 30 March 2024

EASTER EVE / HOLY SATURDAY



O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise!
The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!
My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'
Verses from Lamentations 3

As you enter into prayer today, take a moment to be still. Come into God's presence with a deepfelt desire to meet with God now. Know that God is the God who sees you and that God is looking at you now with great love. Pause for a moment and be still.

Most merciful God,
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ
delivered and saved the world:
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross
we may triumph in the power of his victory,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

There is a deep silence about Holy Saturday. The Lord rests in the grave. We watch and wait but we watch and wait in hope, knowing that the risen Christ comes with the dawning of the day. Whatever you are doing today, seek to find some space to reflect on the journey of the last week – and indeed on the whole of this last year as we wait for the dawn.

John 19.38-end

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

*Spend some time reflecting on the reading, mulling it over.
Ask God what God wants you to hear today.*

*Offer your personal prayers and thanksgivings
and offer the day to God in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving.*

End this time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer.

SOME TEXTS FOR REFLECTION FROM THE BIBLE AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION

BIBLE PASSAGES

Colossians 3.12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Psalms 63.2-9

- 2 God, my God, you I crave;
 my soul thirsts for you,
 my body aches for you
 like a dry and weary land.
- 3 Let me gaze on you in your temple:
 a vision of strength and glory.
- 4 Your love is better than life,
 my speech is full of praise.
- 5 I give you a lifetime of worship,
 my hands raised in your name.
- 6 I feast at a rich table,
 my lips sing of your glory.

- 7 On my bed I lie awake,
your memory fills the night.
8 You have been my help,
I rejoice beneath your wings.
9 Yes, I cling to you,
your right hand holds me fast.

Verses from Psalm 139

- You search me, Lord, and know me.
2 Wherever I sit or stand,
you read my inmost thoughts;
3 whenever I walk or rest,
you know where I have been.

4 Before a word slips from my tongue,
Lord, you know what I will say.
5 You close in on me,
pressing your hand upon me.
6 All this overwhelms me -
too much to understand!

7 Where can I hide from you?
How can I escape your presence?
8 I scale the heavens, you are there!
I plunge to the depths, you are there!

9 If I fly toward the dawn,
or settle across the sea,
10 even there you take hold of me,
your right hand directs me.

11 If I think night will hide me
and darkness give me cover,
12 I find darkness is not dark.
For your night shines like day,

darkness and light are one.

13 You created every part of me,
knitting me in my mother's womb.

14 For such handiwork, I praise you.
Awesome this great wonder!
I see it so clearly!

15 You watched every bone
taking shape in secret,
forming in the hidden depths.

16 You saw my body grow
according to your design.

You recorded all my days
before they ever began.

17 How deep are your thoughts!
How vast their sum!

18 like countless grains of sand,
well beyond my grasp.

23 Search my heart, probe me, God!
Test and judge my thoughts.

24 Look! do I follow crooked paths?
Lead me along your ancient way.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd,
I need nothing more.

2 You give me rest in green meadows,
setting me near calm waters,
where you revive my spirit.

3 You guide me along sure paths,
you are true to your name.

4 Though I should walk in death's dark valley,
 I fear no evil with you by my side,
 your shepherd's staff to comfort me.

5 You spread a table before me
 as my foes look on.
 You soothe my head with oil;
 my cup is more than full.

6 Goodness and love will tend me
 every day of my life.
 I will dwell in the house of the Lord
 as long as I shall live.

Philippians 2.1-11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

2 Corinthians 5.16-21

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Ephesians 1.3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as

a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 2.8-22

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of

God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

SOME TEXTS FROM CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Thomas Merton
From The Power and Meaning of Love

The union that binds the members of Christ together is not the union of proud confidence in the power of an organisation. The Church is united by the humility as well as by the charity of her members. Hers is the union that comes from the consciousness of individual fallibility and poverty, from the humility which recognises its own limitations and accepts them, the meekness that cannot take upon itself to condemn, but can only forgive because it is conscious that it has itself been forgiven by Christ.”

Maria Boulding
From The Coming of God

Though God is an almighty lover, he can find himself shut out, and he longs to find an open door of vulnerability in us. It is extraordinarily hard for us to realise this, conditioned as we are by a secular ethic of success and a religious ideal of moral perfection which may owe little to the gospel. God calls us, implants his life in the deepest centre of our being at baptism, and loves us into growth. He does not propose to us some lofty, rigid ideal to which we must attain by our own unaided human resources. We are more sinful than we know, more deeply flawed than we can recognise by any human insight; but grace works in us in the deepest places of body and spirit. We must live from our weakness, from the barren places of our need, because there is the spring of grace and the source of our strength When we stand before God in the truth of our need, acknowledging our

sinfulness and bankruptcy, then we can celebrate his mercy. Then we are living by grace, and we can allow full scope to his joy.

Ben Quash
From Abiding

The Church ... is the sort of community that transforms its members. This may happen imperceptibly over a lifetime but it transforms them nonetheless - and that it happens over a lifetime is exactly the point. The Church is not an interest group, and its members do not come together because they are all like each other (or even because they like each other) but because they believe that they are all God's redeemed children. If they try to walk away from each other, they will meet each other again at the foot of the Cross, through which Christ has broken down the barriers between his children and made them one (whether they like it or not).

John Medcalf
I dream of a church...

I dream of a church where love and people
are more important than stone and steeple.

I dream of a church with an open door,
where no one is privileged except the poor.

I dream of a church where milk and honey
will flow more freely than power and money.

I dream of a church where young and old
will be inspired to change their world.