



March & April 2022 for daily use...
Lent Bible reading, notes & reflection

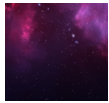
Written by Adam Poole, Jonny Guy & Johnny Douglas

No-one is ever the same after an encounter with Jesus.

Throughout Lent in these daily readings we will follow different people and their encounters with Jesus. Each week we'll meet a new person or group who met Jesus, noticing Jesus' reaction to them and their response to him. *May this read, reflect & pray pattern, really strengthen & nourish you...*

Join us as we journey with Jesus to the cross through the eyes of those who walked and talked with him. Each day there will be a key verse, a short reading, a reflection, and a prayer. *Perhaps we will see ourselves in some of these people or be struck afresh by Jesus' response to them!*

Week 1 : John the Baptist



Wednesday 2nd March

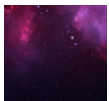
John the Baptist #1 - Jumping for Joy

'when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy!' (v44)

READ: Luke 1:39-45

REFLECT: The first encounter with Jesus that we're looking at in our Lent devotions takes place while both parties are still in the womb! John the Baptist is Jesus' cousin and as their mothers meet to rejoice in God's work baby John grasps a reality that takes many people a lifetime to get their heads around: Jesus is the bringer of joy for the whole world. Perhaps it takes the instinctive reaction of child, or even a baby in the womb, to really embrace this truth! What is your instinctive reaction to Jesus? Do you believe he is the bringer of joy?

PRAY: Lord Jesus would you give me a glimpse of your joy today. Amen



Thursday 3rd March

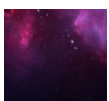
John the Baptist #2 - Preparing the way

'... but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry' (v11)

READ: Matthew 3:1-12

REFLECT: John is Jesus' older cousin, not by much, but we know in the family context that can mean a lot! However, John sees in his younger cousin an authority that few others catch on to very quickly. He knows that he isn't the main event, he is simply preparing the way. Sometimes we can so easily get caught out thinking that things point to us in God's big story, often resulting in us feeling anxious, stressed, and depressed. John knew Jesus was the saviour and he was not, and that is such a freeing reality to live by. Perhaps we need reminding today that Jesus is the hope for the world and we are not, our job is to point people to him.

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you are the hope for the world, not me. Help me to see areas of my life where I might be pointing more to myself than to you. Amen



Friday 4th March

John the Baptist #3 - The Baptism

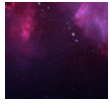
'But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?"' (v14)

READ: Matthew 3:13-17

REFLECT: John lived out in the wilderness, he dressed in camel's hair, he ate locusts, he knew he wasn't even worthy to carry Jesus' sandals... and yet Jesus came to him and asked: "Will YOU baptise ME?" I wonder how you would have reacted if you were John? This is so often the way of Jesus, the King who did not choose to begin his public ministry (his kingdom movement) in the city or the temple, but rather out in the wasteland by the Jordan

river. Do you ever feel your location or status restricts your chance of being used by God? The Bible tells us otherwise!

PRAY Thank you that no matter where I am you can use me in your kingdom plans. Would you use me today, right where I am, to bring a little bit of your Kingdom into the world around me. Amen



Saturday 5th March

John the Baptist #4 - Friend of the Bridegroom

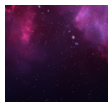
'He must increase, but I must decrease.' (v30)

READ: John 3:22-36

REFLECT: In our scene today, John is faced with a temptation. His own followers were starting to leave his ministry and were flocking over to Jesus' team. I wonder, how you might have reacted to this news? Perhaps we'd feel frustrated, anxious, or demoralised... But not John! He knows who he is and what he's called to do. John spells it out for his followers saying that in this wedding between God (the groom) and humanity (the bride), little old John is not the main event. His role is as the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices in the covenantal union that is taking place, cheering them on! But how tempting it would have been for jealousy to creep in. May we learn to be more like John and see Jesus as the main event, not ourselves!

PRAY: Lord Jesus forgive me for the times when I've seen myself as the main event. Would you increase in my thoughts, words and actions today. Amen

Week 2 : The Disciples



Monday 7th March

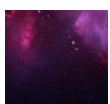
The Disciples #1 – Follow Me

'At once they left their nets and followed him'. (v20)

READ: Matthew 4:18-22

REFLECT: These men had secure jobs as fishermen and would have lived nearby (there was no bus in those days!). The presence of James & John's father suggests they grew up in this region and were due to take over the family business. But it all changes when Jesus comes and calls them away from the stability and expectations of family and society. Their decision to leave their boats makes clear that they were leaving one life and beginning a new one with Jesus. Jesus doesn't always ask us to move house or change job or choose him over family, but he sometimes does. What have you had to leave for Jesus? Would you be prepared to leave behind anything to follow him?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you invite everyone to follow you. Give us strength and faith to follow you, no matter what we have to leave behind. Amen.



Tuesday 8th March

The Disciples #2 – Jesus, friend of sinners

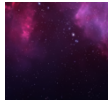
'But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' (v13)

READ: Matthew 9:9-13

REFLECT: Jesus' disciples were from different backgrounds, some of whom would have been suspicious of each other. One who may not have been popular was Matthew who, as a tax collector, was employed by the Romans (enemies of the Jewish people) and seen as a traitor. But he was not too immoral for Jesus. Jesus was prepared to go anywhere and eat with anyone, knowing that all people are made and loved by God, and desiring everyone to follow him. This raised eyebrows back then, and I'm sure there are people who we'd raise our eyebrows at if

we saw them on a Sunday morning - but Jesus wouldn't have his eyebrows raised, he'd be offering them a top up of tea and a second doughnut. How would you react if the most unlikely people turned up at church on Sunday?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you love and invite everyone to follow you. Use us to invite and welcome everyone to our church family. May we never prioritise our own comfort over your radical welcome to everyone. Amen.



Wednesday 9th March

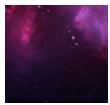
The Disciples #3 – Evangelism is natural

'The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah"'
(v41)

READ: John 1:35-42

REFLECT: Jesus personally called most of his disciples but here we see Andrew become one of the first Christian evangelists (arguably the shepherds at the nativity were the first, but let's not get distracted!). It's remarkably simple – he meets Jesus, realises he's the Messiah, and tells those he knows and loves. The word 'evangelism' is long and sounds complicated, but only because we make it complicated. In life if we have good news, we tell people about it – that's all evangelism is. We may feel we can't answer all the theological questions people might ask us, but that's a bridge we can cross when we come to it. One thing every Christian does have is a story of coming to have faith in Jesus and choosing to follow him, let's share that encounter with others and invite them to come and see for themselves!

PRAY: Jesus, thank you for saving me, and all you've done in my life. Give me opportunities to tell others about you, and the words to use when I do so. Amen.



Thursday 10th March

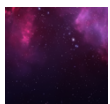
The Disciples #4 – The Unsung Disciples

'These women were helping to support them out of their own means' (v3)

READ: Luke 8:1-3

REFLECT: When we say 'the disciples', we usually mean the twelve, but in fact Jesus had many disciples, and we hear of some of them here. These women accompanied him on his journeys and were present at his crucifixion and resurrection, yet we don't know much about them. Their lives were just as transformed by Jesus as the 'famous' disciples like Peter and John, but they had different gifts that placed them in the background. The New Testament shows us that God's people are a *body* with many members – if we're a hand or nose people might know our name, but if we're a humble little toe we won't be noticed. It's difficult to keep serving when no-one thanks you. Are there people who we take for granted? How can we honour and thank them for their service?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you for all the gifts at work in our church family. Show us how we can use our gifts to serve one another, and help us to honour everyone, however prominent or in-the-background they are. Amen.



Friday 11th March

The Disciples #5 – Learning and Un-learning

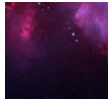
“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” (v3)

READ: John 9:1-5

REFLECT: It's comforting for us modern-day disciples when we see just how much Jesus' disciples got wrong. Here Jesus has to correct their cultural assumptions about this blind man – that he or his parents' sin has made him blind. None of us grew up in a vacuum and so we all bring cultural and religious assumptions to our reading of the Bible and understanding of God. Realising that a long-held conviction is in fact questionable or plainly wrong makes us uncomfortable. But we needn't worry – Jesus did not send the disciples away to theological college before

allowing them to follow him, but taught them as they did life together. Are we willing to let Jesus correct and teach us as we go through life with him?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you invite us to follow you *as we are*. Give us faith to stand firm for you, and humility to be taught and changed by you. Amen.



Saturday 12th March

The Disciples #6 – Washing Judas’ feet

‘After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”’ (v21)

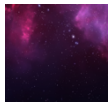
READ: John 13:1-30

REFLECT: Jesus washed his disciples’ feet during a meal; Judas left that same meal to go and betray Jesus; Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him. If we add those three things together, we’re left with one staggering conclusion – *Jesus knowingly washed the smelly, dirty feet of his betrayer*. Pause and think about how much Jesus loved Judas to do that.

What does this mean for us? Jesus says plainly that this was an example for us to follow (v15), calling us to love and serve everyone regardless of their posture towards him. We may have friends and family who we’ve loved and served for years to seemingly no avail, and it’s frustrating and devastating. But our call as Christians is to keep washing those feet, as our wonderful Saviour taught us.

PRAY: [*bring before God those whom you long to follow Jesus*]. Lord Jesus, fill me with your Spirit, and give me the love and patience and energy that I don’t have, to keep serving and loving everyone whom you have placed in my life. Amen.

Week 3 : Religious Leaders



Monday 14th March

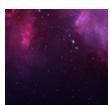
Religious Leaders #1 - Only God can forgive sins!

“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” (v2)

READ: Matthew 9:1-8

REFLECT: The Pharisees keep popping up throughout Jesus’ life and ministry and are rarely very positive towards him! It would be very easy for us to point the finger and look at the Pharisees as ‘the other’ but perhaps in our readings this week we might want to consider how we can all too often be like them. In our encounter today the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy for declaring the man’s sins forgiven. We might be quick to think “oh foolish Pharisees”, but perhaps there are times where we struggle to truly believe Jesus can and does forgive the wrongdoings either of our own or of others. Take time today to reflect on the scandalous love of God in Jesus to forgive our sins and invite us to new life in him.

PRAY: Jesus thank you that you have the power to forgive our sins and set us free from the guilt and shame we may be carrying. Help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Amen



Tuesday 15th March

Religious Leaders #2 - Company of sinners

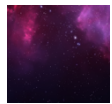
“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (v11)

READ: Matthew 9: 9-13

REFLECT: Continuing from yesterday’s scene, the Pharisees once again are on Jesus’ back, this time for his insistence to eat with tax collectors and sinners. In the Middle East still today eating with others is so greatly valued

and who you eat with is very significant. We see this all throughout the Bible from Abraham eating with the three visitors from God, to the final wedding feast in Revelation where God will feast with his people. Eating together is where community and friendship is formed, so it's really important we take note of who Jesus spends his meals with. It must have raised a few eyebrows! In COVID times we struggled to share a meal like we used to, but perhaps we can start to open up our homes once more now and consider who we would like to welcome in. Maybe you'd like to pray for discernment as to who needs your welcome and hospitality most right now, reflecting Jesus and his radical, counter-cultural hospitality.

PRAY: Lord Jesus show me who needs my hospitality and kindness right now. Give me creativity in displaying your wonderful welcoming heart to those you've put in my life. Amen



Wednesday 16th March

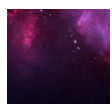
Religious Leaders #3 - Jairus

'Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet.' (v22)

READ: Mark 5:21-43

REFLECT: Up until now the Religious Leaders have been rather hostile to Jesus. You could imagine they were already talking about what they were going to do about him to keep the status quo. So, it's striking that in this story one of these very leaders goes in search of Jesus to heal his child. What might the other leaders have said? Jairus might have been shamed and dishonoured. And yet still he went to Jesus. How did Jesus respond? He saw Jairus, he saw his need and he brought his life-giving power into his home. You'll notice, however, that it wasn't just Jairus who encountered this life-giving power and compassion of God. Jesus not only looks to the needs of Jairus the Synagogue leader, but also to the unnoticed widow and her needs. Jesus does not discriminate but always has time to know, love and bring restoration to all who come to him.

PRAY: Lord Jesus help me to show compassion indiscriminately just like Jesus. I'm sorry for the times where I have been 'too busy' to help those who need my help. Amen



Thursday 17th March

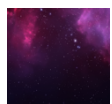
Religious Leaders #4 - The Sabbath

"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (v4)

READ: Mark 3:1-6

REFLECT: In a lot of ways Jesus and the Pharisees were on the same side. They both held God's words in very high regard and wanted to call people back to His way of living. The Sabbath was an important part of the Jewish tradition and God's law for two main reasons: First, because God Himself set the pattern of a day of rest, and second, because God's people were set free from slavery. The Pharisees appeared to have forgotten this. They saw God's laws as those spurred on by duty as shown by their lack of care for the man in need. However, Jesus saw these laws as the pathway to life and life in its fullest as summed up in loving God and loving others.

PRAY: Lord Jesus may we not seek to follow your ways out of begrudging duty, but may we live out of your love, freedom and the knowledge that your way truly is the best way we can live. Amen



Friday 18th March

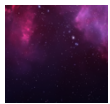
Religious Leaders #5 - The Critique

"You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean." (v27)

READ: Matt 23:27-28

REFLECT: Jesus may have been meek and mild, but this does not mean that he wasn't also strong and even harsh in his critique. And who are his harshest words aimed at? Hypocrites. The Religious Leaders had been piling the pressure on people around them to follow not just God's laws (which are good) but also any other sub-regulations they could think of! And yet they themselves were not dealing with their own hearts before God. Jesus says if we live this way, we might be shiny or righteous on the outside but what's the point of being shiny if we're just a tomb for death underneath it all! Jesus wants our heart, however dirty and messy... he can bring the shine!

PRAY: Lord Jesus I'm sorry for the times I've been more concerned with outward appearances than my heart and character. Give me your perspective to see that your eyes on me are the most important. Amen



Saturday 19th March

Religious Leaders #6 - The Plot

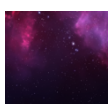
"You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." (v50)

READ: John 11:45-57

REFLECT: Jesus has just raised a man from the dead with plenty of witnesses and is en route to Jerusalem, now with a crowd paving the way, the Religious leaders are panicking: "This has gone on long enough we must restore the status-quo; Jesus must die!" And yet amid this evil plot the high priest himself, unintentionally, prophetically preaches the good news of Jesus Christ; that in this one man's death, God's people will be saved. Your mind might go to Joseph and the abuse from his brothers, on which he is able to reflect: "you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." God is at work, and can even use the evil plots of those seeking power and status. He is still working and still weaving in his plans and purposes. Nothing scuppers God's good plans. New life came through a Roman cross after all.

PRAY: Father, thank you that your plans are never thwarted by evil intentions. Thank you that Jesus' death brings life and hope to me. Help me to keep my eyes set on you through the valley of the shadow of death. Amen

Week 4 : Jesus' Friends



Monday 21st March

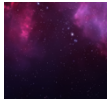
Jesus' friends #1 – Too busy to pray?

'But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.' (v40)

READ: Luke 10:38-42

REFLECT: Jesus had many disciples and followers, but he also had friends – including one set of three siblings. Today's passage is well-known and many of us may have been told 'don't be a Martha, be a Mary' – 'be wary of doing so much for God' that you lose touch with him'. It's a helpful challenge, though we should not go too far the other way and be suspicious of zeal. Martha's work wasn't wrong in itself; the issue was that she focussed on it so much that it distracted her away from Jesus. It's been said that 'if you're too busy to pray, you're too busy'. Are you too busy to pray? Perhaps Mary's example is a helpful reminder to stop and listen to Jesus. Jesus doesn't need our prayerless work to achieve his purposes.

PRAY: Father, thank you that you use us to do your work in the world. Grant us passion to serve you, and humility to pause and pray as we do. Amen.



Tuesday 22nd March

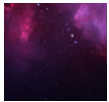
Jesus' friends #2 – Relaxed Jesus

'when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.' (v6)

READ: John 11:1-16

REFLECT: How much did Jesus know? He was truly human and 'grew in wisdom' (Lk 2:52), but was also truly God and at times knew things that no ordinary person could have. This apparent paradox has confounded people through time and we must hold it in tension, affirming both and ignoring neither. This passage emphasises Jesus' divine knowledge, as he waits two days before travelling to his ill friend rather than jumping on the first donkey available and racing to his bedside. Be careful to not interpret this relaxedness as a lack of caring – tomorrow's reading will emphasise Jesus' deep love for Lazarus. But it does show his complete trust in God and willingness to submit to his greater plan, even if it involved being away from a sick friend and his grieving sisters. Are we prepared to submit ourselves to God's plan, whatever it is? What do we need to wait and trust God for?

PRAY: Father, thank you that we can trust you to work everything for your good purposes. Help us to trust you, even in difficult and painful circumstances. Amen.



Wednesday 23rd March

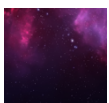
Jesus' friends #3 – Jesus wept

'Jesus wept' (v35)

READ: John 11:17-37

REFLECT: I once heard of a family who encouraged their children to recite a Bible verse before dinner, and unsurprisingly this was the most popular! At only 9 English letters and a whopping 16 in the original Greek, it's short - but it speaks loudly, and you could do a lot worse than commit this to memory. As mentioned yesterday, this counters any suggestion that Jesus' divine knowledge and perfect submission to the Father made him dispassionate or unaffected by the suffering he witnessed. The eternal *logos*, the second person of the Trinity, the divine personification of Wisdom, the great I AM... cried when his friend died. So, as we pray and live our lives, may we never forget the baffling and beautiful truth at the heart of our faith – that our loving Father and Creator cares deeply for us.

PRAY: Father, thank you that you love and care for your world and all people. Break our hearts for what breaks yours, and help us to love as you love. Amen.



Thursday 24th March

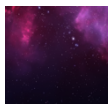
Jesus' friends #4 – 'Why, Lord?'

'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind have kept this man from dying?' (v37)

READ: John 11:1-37

REFLECT: This question has been asked through history in many forms. In centuries past God's people cried 'Could not he who loves us keep us from slavery in Egypt/wandering in the desert/exile?'. Since Jesus' departure many cried 'Could not our Father have kept us from persecution/slavery/holocaust/pandemic?'. We may have asked 'Why?' when personally experiencing or seeing suffering. The difficulty is that the answer is simple: 'Yes'. Yes, God *could* have kept Lazarus from dying - what's not simple is why he didn't. I look forward to the day when we can ask God and understand, but part of living by faith is trusting God through difficulty. We won't always understand why God allows what he does, but we can trust him to bring good from it, either in this life or the new creation. Until then, we have permission to join in with the psalmists in crying to God: 'Why, Lord?'

PRAY: Lord, we admit that we don't understand your ways, and we struggle to trust you in such a broken world. Help us to fight for justice and reconciliation, and trust you in a world lacking in both. Amen.



Friday 25th March

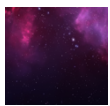
Jesus' friends #5 – The God we can touch

'Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.' (v3)

READ: John 12:1-8

REFLECT: That Jesus came to earth is something we can take for granted but is one of the most staggering things about our God. The more we think about it the more our heads should spin, and the more we should see of God's love for us. He entrusted himself as a foetus to a teenager, sent out disciples to speak and act on his behalf, and invited his friends to know him personally and intimately, as this scene beautifully shows. Mary shows her love for him in this act, and he shows his love for her in accepting it and defending her. Let us never take for granted that God invites us to know him, and one day will himself wipe every tear from our eye.

PRAY: Father, thank you that you know us, and invite us to know you. Restore to us the joy and wonder of our salvation today. Amen.



Saturday 26th March

Jesus' friends #6 – Co-persecuted with Christ

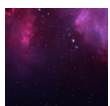
'So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him.' (v10-11)

READ: John 12:9-11

REFLECT: John's Gospel exposes corruption in the Jewish temple leadership. They failed to see that the Messiah they were awaiting was amongst them and responded to his preaching and miracles not with repentance, but by plotting to kill him. Jesus was persecuted to death, and this episode is one of the first showing Jesus' associates being persecuted in his name (though certainly not the last). As followers and friends of Jesus we are living, breathing challenges to the world around us, and witnesses to a greater reality. We should expect people to want to silence us just as they longed to silence Lazarus. One way we can help one another as a church is to comfort and support each other as we stand up for Jesus in hostile places. Where might Jesus be calling us to stand up for him? How can we support and encourage our brothers and sister to stand out for Jesus whatever the cost?

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you willingly accepted persecution and hatred to save us. Help us to stand up for you in all situations, whatever the cost. Amen.

Week 5 : Outcasts



Monday 28th March

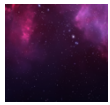
Outcasts #1 - The Unclean

'Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.' (v3)

READ: Matthew 8:1-4

REFLECT: If there's one piece of health and safety advice you couldn't afford to forget in the ancient world it's this: Don't ever touch a leper. Our passage doesn't tell us the reaction of the crowd when the leper turned up, but you can imagine panic, fear and even anger was in the air! Jesus would not have been judged for refusing the man's request, the leper was well and truly in the wrong here for entering a public scene. But Jesus was willing to heal the man. More than that he 'reached out and touched' him. Touch is such a powerful sign of welcome and embrace that can sometimes go far deeper than words. I wonder if following these COVID days, who might you look to embrace once more? Perhaps there is someone unexpected who God wants you to seek out and welcome as we come out of this season.

PRAY: Father, lead me to the people around me who are feeling lonely and isolated at this time. Help me to extend your welcome and loving embrace today in creative ways. Amen



Tuesday 29th March

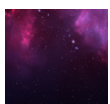
Outcasts #2 - The Oppressors

'Jesus said to him, "Shall I come and heal him?"' (v7)

READ: Matthew 8:5-13

REFLECT: Following on from yesterday's reading, Jesus is then approach by a very different kind of outcast (at least from the Jews perspective!). A Roman Centurion came to Jesus asking for help. This is shocking! They were the ones with the power over the Jewish people. Ruling, managing, policing, taxing, controlling all of Jerusalem's residents including Jesus! This particular Roman, however, tells of his servant's suffering, and Jesus is left with a choice to make. He could say: "That's what you deserve for all the hardship you've put on my people!", or he could have said "I'm sorry about that but my concern is for the Jews." But Jesus does neither of these things. Instead, he offers his help. There may be those in our lives who we may be reluctant to offer help towards when they come to us in need for a whole host of reasons. But Jesus doesn't hesitate here, in this moment he sees not an oppressor but a desperate man in need of a glimpse of God's goodness and light.

PRAY: Lord help me to never hesitate in sharing your goodness and light from whoever might ask. Amen



Wednesday 30th March

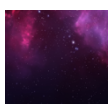
Outcasts #3 - The Sinners

"If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." (v39)

READ: Luke 7:36-50

REFLECT: "It was a respectable gathering until she showed up!" Good food, religious leaders and the popular traveling teacher Jesus. But into this scene walks this weeping woman who was known to be living 'a sinful life', and down she gets to wash Jesus' feet. How could she be so socially unaware? Doesn't Jesus know she's a sinner? Jesus did. And yet it is to her that Jesus extends God's grace and forgiveness. The upstanding ladies and gentlemen of the feast, did not welcome Jesus by washing his feet and greeting with a kiss, they did not anoint Jesus as the King he truly is, they did not love Jesus as this woman did. Perhaps this woman's awareness of her sin made her the perfect kind of person to see Jesus for who he truly is? The Pharisees did not see their own sin and so came to Jesus for their own purposes. The woman, however, knew her sins were many and so she came to Jesus for grace.

PRAY: Lord Jesus show me today how much grace and forgiveness you have poured out on me over the years. May it lead me to love you and others greatly. Amen



Thursday 31st March

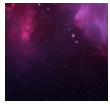
Outcasts #4 - Racial Differences

'But a Samaritan... came to where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.' (v33)

READ: Luke 10:25-37

REFLECT: As you reflect on the context in which Jesus is telling this famous story you can start to imagine the reactions. "A priest... surely... Oh no, well I guess he needs to keep clean for his duties. Fine... a Levite... oh, that's a bit strange, not even a second look from him. Okay maybe the next one's a pharisee or a rabbi... Hang on... did he say Samaritan? The imposters in our land, our enemies, the ones that throw rocks at us and mock us... okay maybe he'll walk by too... wait... he's stopping! He's the neighbour?!" Jesus challenges racial prejudice and divide and does not allow ethnic identities to stop us loving others as our neighbour. In the Kingdom Jesus is building these walls will fall and a family will form from all nations, all ethnicities, all cultures and it will shine as a light to the world.

PRAY: Father forgive me for my moments of prejudice and ignorance of others. Help me to live as a child of your inclusive family, welcoming and learning from all our brothers and sisters. Amen



Friday 1st April

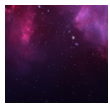
Outcasts #5 - The Weak

“Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.” (v20)

READ: Luke 6:1-26

REFLECT: Jesus was flipping the expectations for what God’s Kingdom will look like in his life and teaching. In our passage today he’s already gathered a crowd made up of outcasts and needy people. And into this context, he teaches on God’s Kingdom saying it’s for the poor, weak, broken, and excluded as opposed to the rich, powerful, and popular. This is the way God’s Kingdom works, but is it the way our church community works? Do we live by these values that the Kingdom is for those who choose the way of weakness, brokenness and exclusion? Or do we still cling to earthly riches, power and popularity and find our security there? Jesus chose the way of weakness and in doing so brought us life and hope in God’s Kingdom. May we learn to walk in his way.

PRAY: Lord Jesus help me to follow your example of weakness instead of worldly power and popularity. Help me to find my daily strength in you alone. Amen



Saturday 2nd April

Outcasts #6 - The Lost

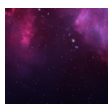
‘Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?’

READ: Luke 15:1-7

REFLECT: The Pharisees were muttering amongst themselves once again about Jesus’ insistence on eating with sinners and outcasts, and so Jesus tells them a profound story to illustrate the way *this King* values people. Jesus is the King who rules like a shepherd, tending his flock. Sometimes sheep wander away like the one in the story, maybe through sin, rejection, fear, or other bad shepherds. The Shepherd in the story doesn’t hesitate in rushing to find them and bring the lost home. Interestingly there is no rebuke, no warning, but extravagant grace. Jesus loves the lost, there is a special place it seems in the heart of God for those that have wandered. He longs to bring them home. Do you have friends or family who have ‘wandered’, or perhaps you’re in a season of ‘wandering’? May you/they hear the voice of the good shepherd calling you/them home. Pray for the lost today.

PRAY: Lord I lift before you _____ please bring them home, give me opportunities to journey with them on the path back to the fold. Amen

Week 6 : The Crowds



Monday 4th April

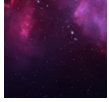
The Crowds #1 – The Comfortable Crowd

‘a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” ... another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” (vv19,21)

READ: Matthew 8:18-23

REFLECT: Jesus often attracted a crowd, and this week we’ll be looking at the various reactions they gave him. Today, two representatives from a crowd speak up and state their willingness to follow Jesus. Jesus, who clearly hadn’t been on an evangelistic training course, responds by bluntly stating the cost of following him – he won’t guarantee you a comfortable existence, and he wants to be first, above even family. Much more can be said about this, but for now, notice that it’s often easier to be part of a watching crowd than to do the right thing. It’s easy to be a fan of Jesus, but he doesn’t need or want fans – he wants *followers*. Are you a follower or a fan?

PRAY: Jesus, give us faith and courage to follow you, whatever it means. Amen.



Tuesday 5th April

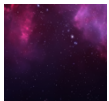
The Crowds #2 – The Unbelieving Crowd

“Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” (v38)

READ: Matthew 12:38-42

REFLECT: A large crowd (v15) has been watching Jesus healing, and is now listening to him. Within this crowd are representatives from many groups, including our friends the Pharisees and scribes (whom we looked at in Week 3), who watch with amazement and scepticism. Their question seems a reasonable one, and is one that many ask before becoming a Christian or in moments of doubt – ‘Lord, show me a sign’. However, this is no innocent spiritual seeker, but a test. Jesus has shown them more than enough for them to realise he’s the Messiah, but they simply refuse to believe him and ask for even more. Asking God for a fresh sense of assurance, or even some sort of ‘sign’, is not necessarily wrong - but let’s be careful of it turning into us testing him. He has given us ‘the sign of Jonah’ in rising from the dead on the third day – may we have open eyes and hearts to see and believe that, and trust him today and always.

PRAY: Lord Jesus, thank you that you rose again and defeated death. Grant us peace and trust when we struggle to believe. Amen.



Wednesday 6th April

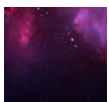
The Crowds #3 – The Listening Crowd

“Whoever has ears, let them hear.” (v9)

READ: Matthew 13:1-9

REFLECT: Some crowds are homogenous (such as a crowd of football supporters in a stand), but some are just a collection of people with a wide variety of views and perspectives, united only by circumstance. In this famous parable Jesus outlines four responses to him, and implies that people from all four camps are in the watching crowd, all listening but only some *hearing*. It sadly does not surprise us when people reject Jesus today, but it’s an odd thought that some who heard his literal words from only metres away rejected him and his message. But here Jesus explains why – whilst many listen to him, not all of them truly *hear*. He goes on to explain what the different surfaces are (vv18-23), and how different aspects of life and the world cause many to reject Jesus. With so many distractions around us, let us take time to not merely listen but truly *hear* Jesus.

PRAY: Lord Jesus, give us ears to hear you. Protect us from anyone or anything that would lead us away from you. Amen.



Thursday 7th April

The Crowds #4 – The Faithful Crowd

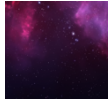
‘And they praised the God of Israel.’ (v31)

READ: Matthew 15:29-31

REFLECT: Crowds followed Jesus around wherever he went. Sometimes these crowds were merely assembled fans with no interest in becoming followers (see Monday). But in this instance, the crowd is a collection of faithful individuals, each bringing their needy friends and family to the great and compassionate physician. At first glance this may appear selfish and that they were taking advantage of Jesus’ powers, but their response shows this to be untrue: they did not run away having gotten what they wanted, but ‘they praised the God of Israel’. When we come to Jesus in prayer, it is not wrong to bring our requests for ourselves and others – he invites us to. But let us

begin and end with gratitude to God, and give him the praise he deserves – as Paul encourages, “in every situation, by prayer and petition, *with thanksgiving*, present your requests to God” (Phil 4.6).

PRAY: Father, thank you for all you have blessed us with. Protect us from taking any of it for granted and help us to be a thankful people. Amen.



Friday 8th April

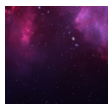
The Crowds #5 – The Testifying Crowd

‘The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (v11)

READ: Matthew 21:1-11

REFLECT: The excitement at Jesus’ arrival is palpable – a ‘very large crowd’ spread their cloaks, whilst yet more spread branches. He was surrounded by people ahead and behind, not just saying but *shouting* praise of Jesus and to God. Their behaviour stirs the whole city to ask what is going on, and they proclaim the reason for their excitement: Jesus. Whilst we should pray that our individual lives may show God’s love and provoke the interest of others, the biblical pattern is that God reveals himself through *communities*. Here, Jesus’ crowd of followers made such a racket that bystanders couldn’t help but ask why. As we gather throughout the week as church in both small and large groups, let us ask God to use us to demonstrate his love, so that bystanders can’t help but ask ‘why’, and we can gladly tell them ‘Jesus’.

PRAY: Jesus, may our love for you and each other help people to see you. Amen.



Saturday 9th April

The Crowds #6 – The Fickle Crowd

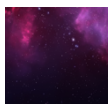
‘But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed’ (v20)

READ: Matthew 27:20-26

REFLECT: Just a few days ago, a great crowd gave Jesus an extravagant welcome into Jerusalem, such that bystanders felt compelled to ask ‘what is going on?’ (see yesterday). But now, a small group of his enemies are able to infest a crowd and turn them against him. Our Christian ‘crowds’, or communities, have the potential to do great good and great ill. They are the places where God reveals his glory and love to the watching world, but are also vulnerable to corruption from bad influences, often small numbers or even individuals. Let us pray for our church – that the Lord would protect us from anyone or anything who would seek to distract or lead us away from Jesus, and that we will be a crowd that stands up and stands out for Jesus in this world.

PRAY: Father God, protect us from anyone who would seek to sow disunity and falsehood. Give us discernment to reject such things and follow you. Amen.

Week 7 : Holy Week Encounters



Monday 11th April

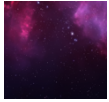
Holy Week Encounters #1 - Judas

READ: Luke 22:1-6

REFLECT: What led Judas to this moment of betrayal? He’d followed Jesus, eaten with him, seen the miracles, and yet something had been building up inside him. Perhaps it was greed, or maybe selfishness? But far more likely is that Judas was disillusioned. This Messiah he’s been following for all this time was not who he expected him to be. Instead of defeating the Roman oppressors in a glorious battle, he spent time with outcasts, rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and kept on going on about how ‘he must die’. Maybe Judas felt that this isn’t what he signed up for

3 years ago? The kind of kingdom Jesus was bringing stood in contrast to other worldly kingdoms. A Kingdom not built on pride but humility, a victory that came not through power but weakness. This can be uncomfortable, especially if the way of Jesus seems to not fit our way of doing things. The question is, will we give up and walk away, or will we walk with Jesus through the valley to fullness of life with him?

PRAY: Lord Jesus I confess that sometimes your ways do not always make sense to me. Help me to trust that you bring hope through trials, and resurrection life through the cross. Amen



Tuesday 12th April

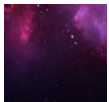
Holy Week Encounters #2 - Peter

READ: Luke 22:54-62

REFLECT: Peter was the main man, the spokesperson and leader of the disciples. He was called by Jesus to be the rock on which the church is built. But this is not his finest hour. To Peter's credit when all others had fled, he remained close to Jesus, but only at a distance, keeping his head down. It had all gone horribly wrong, hope seemed lost, and Peter is put on the spot three times to answer whether he's a friend of Jesus... And he blew it. Peter panicked, fearing judgement or worse, and he abandoned Jesus to die alone. Worse still at that moment Jesus passes by and simply in a look Peter is left thinking: "What have I done?"

Have you ever had a moment of deep conviction of sin that came from a prompting from Jesus by His Spirit? It can be crushing to know we messed up. But take comfort in the fact that Jesus did not give up on Peter, he was still to be his 'rock' on which the whole world will be changed. Forgiveness and grace were coming on the other side of the resurrection. (See John 21:15-19)

PRAY: Thank you that even though we mess up just like Peter, you are so ready to extend your forgiveness and grace to us through the cross. Amen



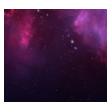
Wednesday 13th April

Holy Week Encounters #3 - Barabbas

READ: Matthew 27:15-26

REFLECT: Barabbas plays a pivotal role in Jesus' crucifixion, and yet we know very little about him. Luke 23:19 tells us that he was a riot starter and murderer. Perhaps he was trying to be a Messiah-like figure and took on the Romans? We don't know. What we do know is that he was found guilty, and Jesus was innocent. Jesus could have appeased Pilate at any point by denying the charges, and even now it seems Pilate is desperate for some word from Jesus to make this all go away. But Jesus is silent. Jesus was willing to go the cross, and see Barabbas go free. Jesus went to the cross for Barabbas. What a picture of the Gospel! Fanny Crosby's hymn 'To God be the glory' puts this truth beautifully: *'O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, To every believer the promise of God; The vilest offender who truly believes, That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.'*

PRAY: Thank you Jesus that no one is beyond your grace. Help us to share your grace, forgiveness and sacrificial love with anyone we meet. Amen



Thursday 14th April

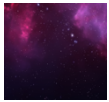
Holy Week Encounters #4 - The Soldiers

READ: Matthew 27:27-31

REFLECT: It wasn't just that the Son of God died. That's shocking enough. But more moving than that is the description that the one through whom all things were made, and in whom all things hold together was also mocked, taunted, beaten and belittled. They give him a crown of thorns to sarcastically call him a deluded and defeated king. But this was the crown chosen by Jesus from the beginning. When Jesus was tempted in the

wilderness by Satan he was offered a gold crown, so to speak, as nations bowed and gave him honour and glory. But instead, Jesus chose the crown of thorns, the crown of suffering. Why? In order to be the kind of King who gets into the gritty mess of his people to bring them out of it. Jesus went to the deepest depths of human suffering and sin in order to bring us hope of a way out. The soldiers gave Jesus a crown of thorns to show his defeat, but to Jesus it was the way of victory.

PRAY: Lord Jesus, it is hard to reflect on the mockery and torture you suffered at the hands of arrogant humanity. All we can say is thank you for all you endured in order to offer us hope in the face of pain in this life. Amen



Friday 15th April [Good Friday]
Holy Week Encounters #5 - The Thief

READ: Luke 23:32-43

REFLECT: 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' In these words, the thief on the cross is confessing that this man who hangs, broken and defeated upon a Roman cross beside him is in fact a King of a Kingdom. The crowd did not recognise this, Rome mockingly gave him the title 'King of the Jews', many of the disciples had given up hope. No one was declaring Jesus as the King in this moment, and how could you? We're outside the city walls, besides the rubbish dump and death is on the horizon for Jesus. No one saw a King in this scene... except this thief. We don't know what prompted the thief to declare this truth, but what we do know is the thief really 'got it' when no-one else did. How typical is that of the Jesus we have come to know on our journey looking at encounters with him? That a broken failure and outcast was the one to see Jesus for who he truly was when no-one else could!

PRAY: Lord Jesus as we look to your cross help to really grasp the kind of king you are and help us to live as people of your kingdom walking in humility, weakness, gentleness, and above all; love. Amen
