

BIBLE REFLECTIONS FOR LENT 2024

These short passages are an aid to meeting God from this Sunday, during the first half of Lent. Another leaflet will follow after Mothering Sunday.

There is one passage per week which can be prayed with, using Lectio Divina, and returned to every day with a small commentary.

They are sourced from various places including Jesuit Spirituality, Working Preacher, Tom Wright and my own thoughts. They are loosely based on a general theme of WATCHING (SEEING) PRAYING and ACTING out. I hope that you find them helpful.

Revd Becky

Preparation for Lent.

Mark 9 v 2-13 The Transfiguration.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only. And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sunday 11th February

Jesus chooses just three of his disciples to share a very special event with him. It happens on top of a mountain – As Peter and the other disciples watch, Jesus is transfigured, right there in front of them.

MEDITATION: Read the passage.

Reread the passage as if you were Peter. Place yourself in Peter's shoes. What would he have felt when he saw Jesus change? When he heard God's voice? When Jesus said not to tell anyone? Consider why he would Jesus would have wanted Peter to share this moment.

Reread the passage as if you were Jesus. What would he have felt as he changed? As he stood next to Moses and Elijah? When he saw his friends? When he heard God's voice?

Notes to consider.

There are four moments to watch for: a marked change in Jesus' appearance; Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus; the cloud that came down and the voice. Mark says that Jesus and his clothes became brilliantly white and shone. He notes how the cloud covered the group and the mountain. Then there was the voice. It came from the cloud and declared Jesus, is 'my own dear Son' and added a command 'listen to him'. Christian tradition tells us the cloud is the Holy Spirit. The voice, speaking of 'my Son', is the Father. This episode is a revelation of the Triune God: one God in three persons. Here on the mountain Jesus is revealed as the Son of God. Peter voices the awe he and his friends feel in the presence of God. It is something Old Testament stories reveal again and again when people encounter God (see Exodus 3, Isaiah 6).

Why does Mark tell us all about this event?

In what ways can we 'listen to him' as God told the disciples to do?

Monday 12th February

Brilliance. We live in a world in which brilliance of a person is exalted, a goal in life to be the best one can be. Many experience pressure at work or in school to succeed. Here we are given a different sense of brilliance. The brilliant light of God, shown in Jesus the light of the world. The Transfiguration plants in our hearts and minds the brilliance of *eternity* on the mountain. Jesus is transfigured, alongside the prophet, and the law giver. We can therefore be emboldened for the journey together this Lent and in life as the body of Christ. We travel with all who have gone before us, knowing Christ is in glory. Eternity is our goal not worldly glory.

Tuesday 13th February

Listening. Lent is a time of letting go into the listening love of God as we pray. God who listens and speaks to the disciples, 'This is my beloved, Son...' Remind yourself today that you are loved by God. Perhaps repeat the word 'Beloved' as a meditation. God's love embraces us so that we can trust God is God. God's love embraces us so that we can love God and our neighbour.

Wednesday 14th February Ash Wednesday

Watch. As the disciple watched, they also knelt in awe and wonder- and fear. Peter rambles on, in fear, as he sees the presence of God's glory, in the transfigured Christ. We can imagine that we would probably do the same when our humanity is laid bare before God. As we see read the story of the Transfiguration today, we prepare to come to terms with our humanity, our earthly nature, before this awesome God in Christ and we acknowledge our utter dependence on God.

Thursday 15th February

High mountains represent meeting points in our scriptures. Moses meets God on Mount Horeb. When we are up high, we can take the long view. We can see forward and look back. Perhaps the Transfiguration was a gift to the disciples to hold onto when their discipleship was difficult. They looked back at the time of the Resurrection and understood. What sustains you when your own life or discipleship seems difficult and helps you to take the long view? Thank God for whatever comes to mind.

Friday 16th February

'And suddenly they saw no one but Jesus.' Sometimes the world, friends, family situations; our own preoccupation and worries come first, before we put aside time to meet Jesus. We can set aside some time today to just be and focus on Jesus.

Saturday 17th February

Transfigure us, O Lord,
Transfigure us, O Lord.
Break the chains that bind us;
Speak your healing word,
and where you lead we'll follow.
Transfigure Us, O Lord.
(Bob Hurd).

First week of Lent

Beating Temptation Mark 1:12-15

At once the Spirit made him go into the desert, where he stayed 40 days, being tempted by Satan. Wild animals were there also, but angels came and helped him. After John had been put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News from God. “The right time has come,” he said, “and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!”

Temptation – we all experience it – so did Jesus. He overcame through prayer and meditation on scripture. Read Mark 1 v 12-15 to yourself. Then out loud. Ponder it.

MEDITATION:

Why do you think Jesus had to suffer these temptations? What would it have felt like for him?

Why the desert?

Does Hebrews 4:15 shed any light on this?

How do you deal with temptations? Do you expect help from God?

ACTION: Jesus used Scripture to help him overcome the temptations he faced (Matthew 4:1-11). We can do the same. Speaking the words of the Bible aloud can strengthen the will and remind us of God’s help. Find a verse from today’s readings and make it your own prayer. You could write the words on a piece of paper and keep them beside your kettle. Pray them every time you make a drink.

Extra Informaion.

Mark sums up Jesus’ desert testing in just one sentence. Luke and Matthew tell us about the same event, but they give us the in-depth versions of the Devil, called Satan here, trying to tempt Jesus to sin. (Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11) Mark’s account only really gives us the headlines. Immediately after Jesus was baptised (Mark 1:9-11) the same Holy Spirit that came down on him as a dove now leads him out into the desert, apparently for Satan to tempt him. From Genesis 2-3 we learn that being tempted by the Devil in whatever form, is part of being human.

Jesus’ temptations were another way in which he shared the human experience. In the New Testament we find ideas and characters we may already have discovered in the Old Testament. Jesus’ forty days in the desert is something like the forty years spent by the Israelites journeying in the desert after their escape from Egypt, or Exodus. The Israelites suffered temptations and dangers, but always had God’s help. The Book of Numbers describes some of the events. In the Book of Job, Satan accuses Job in front of God. But God has a plan for Job, despite appearances to the contrary. In both cases God promises and is faithful. Jesus too learns that God is faithful to his promises. Mark does not elaborate. But he seems to be saying that temptations are part of life for the Christian. The good news for us is that they can be overcome with God’s faithful and loving help.

Monday 19th February

Life is short – eat dessert first! When I was younger, I always confused the spelling of dessert and desert. Jesus is taken into the desert, with the bare essentials of life- God. Think about what is essential in your life. Have you decided to give anything up for Lent so that you become more dependent on God?

Tuesday 20th February

The Spirit forces Jesus into the desert. Places that once flourished with crops in our world are becoming more desertous. Some people are forced into deserts because of climate change. As we reflect on what we consume, things that are not essential, and choose to change our habits, we also free others from the effects of our consumption.

Wednesday 21st February

40 days. Noah was in the ark for 40 days. There were 40 years in the desert for Moses and the people of Israel – these were a time of testing and spiritual growth during which God provided refreshment. What refreshes you? Reflect on what has helps you grow in your faith. Can you put more of this into your daily routine?

Thursday 22nd February

Wild animals. I don't know about you, but I often imagine Jesus in the desert completely alone, with his own thoughts and prayers and temptations. But animals are with him. Mark does not say whether these animals are threatening. They could be a sign of the new creation- Mark could be saying that Jesus is a second Adam and a new garden of Eden. We often hear of animals saving people, as companions for the homeless, skilled in sniffing out cancer. Thank God for animals.

Friday 23rd February

Angels. Comforting angels during Jesus desert life. Comforting angels during Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane as he struggles with the knowledge he will die on the cross. Who has been there for you when you have needed comfort? Thank God for them. How can you give someone comfort this week?

Saturday 24th February

Crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.
(Caroline M Noel).

Second week of Lent

'Why should we believe in Jesus?' John 2:13-25 13

It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. There in the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; and he ordered those who sold the pigeons, "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market place!"

His disciples remembered that the scripture says, "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire."

The Jewish authorities replied with a question, "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?"

Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again."

"Are you going to build it again in three days?" they asked him.

"It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!"

But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body.

So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.

While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover Festival, many believed in him as they saw the miracles he performed. But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew them all. There was no need for anyone to tell him about them, because he himself knew what was in their hearts.

LECTIO:

The Disciples remembered what scripture and the living Word has said and believed. They saw that scripture was fulfilled in Jesus actions.

Read the passage. Then out loud. Ponder it.

MEDITATION:

What light does Mark's account (Mark 11:15-17) shed on our understanding of this event?

The stallholders and the Temple authorities seem to have lost sight of, or certainly misunderstood, whom they were serving. How can we guard against this happening to us?

Consider the attitude of the Jewish authorities compared to the disciples?

What is their attitude to Jesus' words and actions?

What can we learn from this?

Further Information.

John the evangelist shows why a number of different people, including the disciples, believed or refused to believe in Jesus. Jews from all over the world came to offer sacrifices in the Temple. They purchased animals for sacrifice in the Temple grounds. But Jesus saw past the convenience to the stall holder's money-grabbing attitude; they turned a holy place into a market place. The disciples believed Jesus' actions in the Temple revealed a deep concern for God to be honoured. They interpreted Jesus' words in the light of Psalm 69:9 'For zeal for your house consumes me' and they believed he came from God. The Jewish authorities, however, saw Jesus' behaviour as a very serious offence. They demanded he show them a miracle to prove he came from God and with his authority. Jesus answered with a prophecy which no one understood at that time. The prophecy was that he would rise from the dead (verse 19). This mysterious prophecy made a deep impression on his disciples. They remembered it and when Jesus' resurrection took place, they understood these words as the prophecy they were. The Jewish authorities on the other hand ridiculed his words, refusing to consider they had any other meaning than the obvious one.

ACTION: Jesus wanted to honour God in all things. Think about the choices you will make. Do they honour God? Ask God to show you gently any actions or words that need to change over the coming weeks.

Monday 26th February

Jerusalem. The centre of power. Jesus enters the Temple and overthrows those who are misusing their power. Pray for all in authority, that they may use their power wisely. Pray for those who are experiencing injustice.

Tuesday 27th February

Challenging injustice. Jesus notices, names and acts to speak out against injustice. Ultimately this costs him his life. If we follow Jesus we follow this example. What injustices in the world can you speak out against- how will you do this?

Wednesday 28st February

Act on your thoughts from yesterday.

Thursday 29nd February

Tear it down and I will build it up again.

In the life of Jesus we see so many people come to him, whose lives have 'fallen down' or been 'torn apart'. Jesus listens to them and asks what they need. He also challenges the injustices they face. How can we trust that God can rebuild lives and places that have been torn apart- for that is what we see Jesus enable in the Gospels. How can we be active in listening to those who lives are 'off kilter' or or torn apart?

Friday 1st March

Tear it down and I will build it up again.

Ultimately it is God who brings life to the people of God, it is God who builds us up. We then build others up. There is a song that I use in acts of worship with children written by 'Sticky Faith', to the tune of Bob the Builder (if you remember that children's cartoon). It speaks of how we have a choice- to build others up or tear them down. Build up one another, Build up sisters and brothers... Can we build up? Yes, we can!

Saturday 2nd March

*When prayer gave way to profit, and pride closed many doors,
The Lord cried out in anger and made a whip of cords.
He shooed the sheep and cattle and scattered pigeons, too.
God's house was for all people-- not for a chosen few.*

*O God, you love the nations and call us all to pray.
Forgive us when our worship turns other folk away.
As Christ, in loving protest, fought prejudice and pride,
May we who follow Jesus now welcome all inside.
(Caroline Winfrey Galette.)*

Third week of Lent

John 3:14-21

As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour.

Those who believe in the Son are not judged; but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God's only Son. This is how the judgement works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. All those who do evil things hate the light and will not come to the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up. But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God.

LECTIO: God sends a Saviour.

Read the passage. Then out loud. Ponder it.

MEDITATION:

Read the whole of John 3.

Is there any link between Jesus and Nicodemus' discussion about the need to be born again and the love of God for people?

Do you feel like Nicodemus and need more explanation?

Or have you already received spiritual new life in Jesus?

Further information.

Today's passage is set in the context of an encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, a prominent religious leader. John has a different style to Mark and often provides more detail. John tells us about encounters Jesus had with various individuals. Through these exchanges we have insights into Jesus' personality and his mission.

Here Jesus draws a parallel between the reason he came to earth and an event from the time of Moses. As an expert in the scriptures, Nicodemus would have understood the story. (Numbers 21:4-9.) The Israelites sinned and God sent poisonous snakes among them. They repented and called out for help. God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole. When they looked at this snake they were healed. In the same way Jesus was lifted up and put on a pole, the cross.

For the Israelites that had been bitten, the sight of the bronze snake may still have been frightening. Certainly for the Jews the sight of a man on a cross was appalling. Now Jesus on the cross is a sign of salvation. Whoever believes in him can be healed of their sin and forgiven.

Dying on the cross Jesus offered himself to the Father as the sin bearer. He and the Father want everyone to receive forgiveness for their sins and to be given the grace and joy of life that flows from God, the Holy Trinity. Jesus won this victory for us when he died on the cross and rose again. God sent his son Jesus because he loves us.

CONTEMPLATION:

John 3:16 is one of the most quoted verses in the Bible. Read this verse over several times. Ask God to deepen your understanding of what this promise means for you and people you know. Listen in case God wants to speak to you in a special way.

Monday 11th March

Lifted up. Moses lifted up the snake- the thing that caused death in the desert. He made it visible. Sometimes there are things in life that are hard to look at. Many people who are bereaved describe how people cross the road rather than talk to them because they do not know what to say in difficult circumstances, when in society death is so hidden. Pray for those whose lives are hidden and yet we need to notice- the bereaved, those who are trafficked, those on the media whose lives are destroyed by violence.

Tuesday 12th March

Lifted up part 2.

In looking at the cross we see humanities capacity for destruction. We can only see the things that cause 'death' in us when we face them, but they are difficult to gaze at. Our own pride and self-protection prevent us from looking clearly at the things within *ourselves* that do not bring life. God always looks at us in love. Lent is a time when we can reflect on the depth of God's love for us and ask Lord, 'Show me what I need to see in myself that harms others, or your world. Lead me into new life'.

Wednesday 13th March

God so loved the world.

When we choose to believe in Jesus, we choose to follow God's teaching about the world and how to love all in it. For various reasons, some people choose hate over light, evil deeds over good deeds, and therefore according to John, they reject the light of the son of God. Others, however, agree with Jesus' quest to change or restore the world to its original intent from a world full of evil and injustice to a loving, just and caring world. For John, believing in Jesus has to be about what people believe in and act on regarding evil, hate, exploitation, and injustice. This is our challenge as believers too.

Thursday 14th March

Whoever believes.

Black leader Mary MacLeod Bethune (1875–1955), who grew up as a young girl in the Jim Crow South and whom Allen Dwight Callahan describes as "educator, activist, and presidential advisor," writes: With these words from John 3:16 the scales fell from my eyes and the light came flooding in. My sense of inferiority, my fear of handicaps, dropped away. "Whosoever," it said. No Jew nor Gentile, no Catholic nor Protestant, no black nor white; just "whosoever." It means that I, a humble 'Negro' girl, had just as much chance as anybody in the sight and love of God. These words stored up a battery of faith and confidence and determination in my heart, which has not failed me to this day.

Thank God that God is for all. This is a challenge to us too.

Friday 15th March

How do you include whoever in whom you pray for? In whom you know and network with? Neither Jew nor Gentile nor any other ethnic group; Neither Catholic nor Protestant nor those of any other or no faith at all; Neither Black nor White nor Brown nor any other race; Neither straight nor LGBTQ+; Neither those belonging to any of the opposing political parties. The list could go on; you get the idea.

Saturday 16th March

A man named Nicodemus to Jesus came one night.

He said, we know you've come from God; your wonders show His might,

In answer, Jesus did declare, Give heed these words are true;

You cannot see God's kingdom unless you're born anew.

(Susan H Paterson).