

Reflections and Prayers



Lent 2021



Bridgnorth with Morville Parishes Team Ministry

Notes:

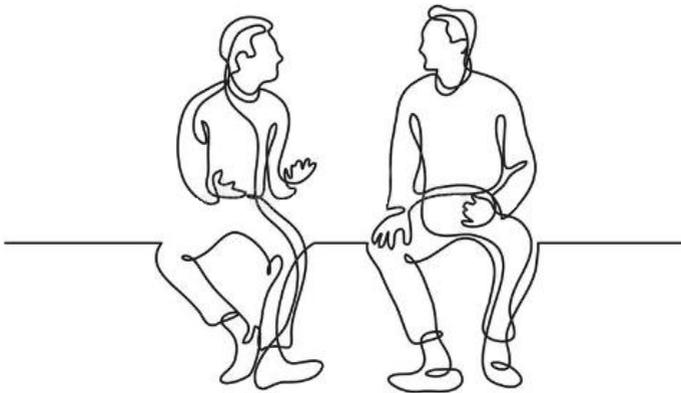
If you believe that God is prompting you, or you have thoughts you want to capture, please use this space to do so.

Lent 2021

The Bridgnorth with Morville Parishes Team Ministry

This booklet offers you a reflection for each day of Lent, some suggested prayers and a Bible reading.

We hope that you will find it helpful to read each day and reflect. If you have thoughts that you would like to share with others, or to talk over with someone please do contact the church. You can leave a post on the Facebook Page, write a letter to the clergy at the Team Office, or the Rectory, or you could even pick up the phone for a chat.



Our reflections have been put together using the Five Marks of Mission. These resolve that the church is to:

- Tell** – speak of Jesus
- Teach** – make disciples
- Tend** – care for the needy
- Transform** – society
- Treasure** – Creation

We have chosen to look at these in reverse order because that fits well with the themes of Lent.

During the next days of Lent, as we remember Jesus speaking of and showing the love of God to all whom he met, even when that love was a bit tough, we are invited to consider the ways in which the church speaks of and demonstrates the love of God here and now, and to think about fresh ways of doing that as we come through this difficult year. Kate, Tom, Clive, Marjorie, Jane, Simon and Sarah have offered the reflections that follow.

Notes:

- *As you reflect, what one thing might you recommend to your congregation/PCC to change about what we do, as we think about the purposes of the church?*

Ash Wednesday, February 17th

Prayer for today:

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Today we begin our Lenten remembrance, following Jesus through his baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, his turning towards Jerusalem where he comes as a King in peace, riding on a donkey, is betrayed, tried and put to death.

This year we have been privileged to share a little in the sufferings of Jesus as we have been locked down, isolated, and often bewildered and anxious.

We hope that one day we will be able to meet again regularly face to face, to enjoy conversation over a café, kitchen or pub table rather than over a phone line, or standing at the front door in a draught.

Bible Reading to pray with:

Colossians 1:24, 25

²⁴I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

Thursday, February 18th

After such a long absence from 'normal church' it is lovely to think that soon we might be able to meet again. I wonder what you look forward to most? And what you would be happy not to do again? This is a really good moment to think about what church is for, and how we might make it possible for more people to enjoy. Perhaps you could make a note here of one thing about church you look forward to, and one thing you would change if you could.

Looking forward to

Would be happy not to do again in church

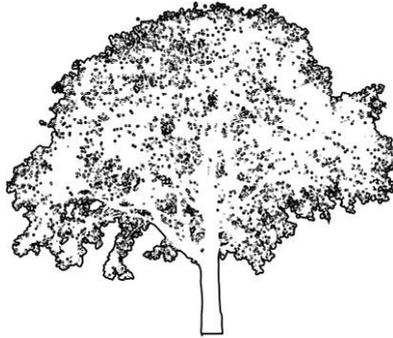
Prayer:

Lord God, thank you for your church, for our meeting together and worshipping you in song, word and sacrament. May the doors of your church be wide enough to welcome all who would like to come.

Amen.

Treasure

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.



Friday, February 19th

Sarah's ponderings

This first week as we remember Jesus in the wilderness, at the mercy of sun, wind and rain, we think about the place of the church in the wonders of creation. The Church of England invites us to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. In this way we are called as co – workers with God, and given the responsibility of caring for the places where we live: our homes, our environment. It might help to recall St Francis of Assisi who, more than many of us, so recognised his place in creation that he was able to summon all things to join in praise and worship of God.

Prayer:

Lord God, Creator of all things, help me to see how to treasure all that you have given me, and the place which I inhabit. Please inspire the church to live well in the environment. Amen.

Saturday, February 20th

Marjorie's musings

What do you think of when you hear the word "treasure?" Is it a pirate chest full of golden doubloons? That of course is the classic image, but treasure means different things to each of us. Where our treasure is, the Bible tells us, that is where our heart will be. (Matthew 6:21) And the converse is true. What we set our hearts on will be our treasure. It may be very valuable – or have no intrinsic value, none for anyone except us, like a child's lock of hair or the photo of a loved one. But for all of us, creation, above all, is something we must value; it has value for the whole of humanity and for each of us personally. It is a unique gift – the only creation we have - and so intrinsically valuable; and it is a gift from God to each of us so we all have ownership of it. But as with every other valuable gift there should be pride in ownership and we can show that by the efforts we make to preserve it – to *treasure* it. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1) But it is also ours because God has entrusted it to us.

To do – Plant a seed or a bulb, and as you watch it grow ask God to reveal to you through it the wonders of creation.

To pray for – Humanity to shoulder its responsibilities and recognize the true value of creation.

Sunday, February 21st

Clive's thoughts

In Genesis Adam was given a job to do – to look after the Creation, to "till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15), but as soon as humanity thought it had got God out of the way we instead exploited it and ravaged it. The very existence of suffering

testifies to a Creation that has gone wrong because we have gone wrong: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” (Romans 8:20-21). Our redemption in Christ is to lead to the redemption of the whole of creation. And so, just as our treatment of our fellow human beings should reflect the values of the Kingdom, so should our treatment of the environment in which we live. How can we live in a way that treats the world around us with the care that our Creator originally called us to give it?

Monday, February 22nd

Jane’s reflections

We only treasure that which is important to us, that which we value, and I’m not referring to an intrinsic monetary value here. A treasure can take many forms from a keepsake or memories of loved ones to our freedom of speech and our planet. I hope we treasure our Christian Faith too and that we will do all we can to safeguard it by telling others about it and teaching about how to tend and care for it and keep it alive and well. We do these things because we want to pass on the treasure to the next generation as part of our legacy, so that the world will have been a better place for having had us in it. Often I wonder why God would choose me, then I remember 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, the treasures in jars of clay. ‘But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being

given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

And when I do remember this Scripture, I get over myself, it's not about me and it's not about you, beautiful clay jars that we are. It's about the treasure within, it's about Him.

It is important that we are good stewards of all that God has given, every one of His gifts is precious and not to be abused or destroyed. This includes the gifts of the Spirit which are to be used and shared for the building up of the body of Christ, which is the church.

Dear Lord, it is important that we are good stewards of all that God has given, every one of His gifts is precious and not to be abused or destroyed. May we also treasure the gifts of the Spirit which are to be used and shared for the building up of the body of Christ, which is the church. Amen.

Tuesday, February 23rd

Tom's explorations

Scriptures to consider:

Psalm 96:11-13; Isaiah 45:11-12; John 1:1-3, Romans 8:18-25.

The history of our traditions of faith and religious practice will greatly influence the weight of importance we place on this Mark of Mission. For the last forty or fifty years, our growing awareness of what humans have been doing to this world of God's Creation has not yet mitigated our poor treatment of it. Indeed, the Church has even been at odds with those voices who call to preserve it; our theologies of salvation, that assume God will burn it all and remake it again, take some in completely the opposite direction.

Practically speaking then, there may be uncomfortable choices, if comfort is our usual guide. But

living lightly is remembering every day from where our blessings come. Recycling is not an option; it is a bare minimum responsibility. Pollution, food production, clothing, commodities: each will involve choices for justice that affect the planet and society. In doing so we speak up for the weaker partner, whose simple voice is too often drowned out by greed, or thoughtless consumption, or the idolatrous pursuit of human progress.

For we live here. This Creation is where we were placed – humanity, as the image of God in the temple of His praise. This is the Creation that he wishes us to partner with him in curating. This is the Creation that inspires joy and awe for its bountiful and pleasant places. This is the Creation that terrifies, and overwhelms, but turns us to look for the One who shaped it. The words of this Mark are important to note, therefore. As we safeguard, it calls us to consider again how we live: wastefully, wantonly; or in kindness and respect. There is work, and hard work, to be done in sustaining the systems and patterns that God has put in place for the flourishing of life. They are flexible, but they have their limits. But God is the God of *new* life; as we join with him we must renew the life of the earth, seek its welfare and prosperity in self-giving, as we would for one another in the Gospel, for this is *shalom* – the whole of life at peace.

Wednesday, February 24th

Kate's sharings

As a family we are walking #50miles in February to raise funds for The Children's Society. We have undertaken to walk 2 miles a day. What a glorious experience to prioritise an hour of walking (allowing for puddle jumping and talking) in God's glorious creation. It prompts us to litter pick and to tend. In addition, this pandemic has reminded us

of the fragility of life and the necessity of simplicity. We are learning to use less, to buy differently and to de-clutter. Jesus wants us unencumbered to follow his call! We have a way to go but we have properly embarked on the journey.

Rejoice with God in the beauty of his creation. If you are able, perhaps go for a prayer walk in an open space, or find images of animals and landscapes, listen to the sound of water and birdsong. Ask God to take you back through the creation story; light, sky, seas, plants, night and day, fish and birds, animals and insects and humans. Ask him to place on your heart a vision of something to tend that you can pray over and bless, or take action and nurture, something to do more of and something to do less of.

Genesis 1:28 – *28* God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

What one thing can you do today to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation?

Thursday, February 25th

Simon's thoughts

Mark's Gospel doesn't have a birth narrative. It begins with a brief description of John's ministry and then rushes to Jesus' baptism. But this cannot escape the extraordinary truth that in Jesus God has sent his own son to live in the Creation he

made. There cannot be a greater demonstration of love and joy and confidence in the future of what God has done. Jesus' presence demonstrates the pricelessness of what we have inherited, and what we are called upon to steward. For me this week therefore is about treasuring both in the sense of 'rejoicing in' but also 'caring for.' They are not so different. Maybe this is not you, but I have things that love and polish more than others. I am not obsessive about it, but nonetheless I am pleased once the duster has gone over it.

To do – find something in your home or garden in which you take pleasure. As appropriate either water it, or give it a polish, or whatever it needs and thank God for it. Remember that is a fraction of how God sees us and the world in which we live.

To pray – giving thanks for the world around us, the joy and beauty we can find in things great and small, and pray that in our thankfulness we will have a right understanding of how to value all that we have.

Notes:

- *How might you get involved in Treasuring Creation?*
- *What might you recommend to your congregation/PCC to change about what we do, as we think about the church's purpose to Treasure Creation?*

Transform

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.



Friday, February 26th

Sarah's ponderings

As we have spent a week reflecting on the way that we as church might treasure creation, I now invite you to consider how Jesus changed the world around him. We have recalled his temptation in the wilderness, and now consider how, filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit Jesus encountered his society. Maybe the most dramatic example is in his clearing out the temple, which was a violent and provocative act. More gently but no less firmly Jesus honoured the destitute, and the poor: healing the lepers, raising the widow of Nain's son, and valuing those whom society shunned; the tax collectors and sinners. As we share with Jesus in his ministry the church has a history of working in health and education, in relieving the needs of the poor and working for a more just society.

What one change might you make in the world around you?

What prayer might you offer for those in need?

Saturday, February 27th

Marjorie's musings

Jesus was always kind to sinners. He did not condone their sin but he was gentle with them and forgave them. But what really seemed to get up his nose was hypocrisy and injustice. So, it is not surprising that when he was asked to read in the synagogue, he chose the scroll of Isaiah 61 –

“... he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners ... to set the oppressed free ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

Don't make the mistake of thinking of Jesus just as meek and mild. He was very strong and he could be very angry and indignant when he saw the marginalised being treated unjustly. We need to share in his indignation – but also channel that indignation to spur us into action and change the world for the better – **for everyone.**

To do – If you don't already subscribe, think about joining or sending a donation to an agency like Amnesty that fights for justice and supports prisoners of conscience.

To pray for – God's Kingdom rule – Thy kingdom come; thy will be done.

Sunday, February 28th

Clive's thoughts

The consequence of humanity's desire to live independently of God is that the weak are oppressed by the strong, discord and violence are found in human affairs, and human pride and greed lead to wars in which one atrocity leads to another in revenge, and the innocent suffer on both sides. I have met people who suffered greatly in Japanese prison camps, but I have also visited Nagasaki and seen the effects of the atomic bomb. Jesus Christ reconciles us to God, and

reconciliation to God should lead to reconciliation with one another. We live in a time of tension in which the Kingdom of God has already appeared in the Person of Jesus Christ, but where the Kingdom of God will not be revealed in all its fulness until Christ comes again. We who have been brought under the Lordship of Christ have a responsibility to live as people of the Kingdom, and to do all that is within our power to show the difference that the Kingdom of God can make in human society, to ameliorate the effects of sin in human society. St Paul in his letter to Philemon doesn't condemn slavery in so many words, but the letter makes it plain that the Lordship of Christ makes the ownership of one human being by another a nonsense, and so Christians in the 18th and 19th century were foremost in campaigning against slavery, and yet slavery in other forms still exists today. How can we help to bring freedom where there is slavery, to bring unity where there is division, and reconciliation after the atrocities and ravages of war?

Monday, March 1st, St David's Day

Jane's reflections

We read in the Bible that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, an inward spiritual change that will manifest itself in outward actions. Colossians 1:10 says that it will be demonstrated in us when we are, 'bearing fruit in every good work [and] growing in the knowledge of God'. For me it is closely linked with social justice, we are called to make a difference, to stand up for and defend the oppressed and the voiceless. Even though part of Jesus' nature is His gentleness, it was not gentle Jesus meek and mild who captured my heart it was Jesus the radical who challenged the society of His day to be better than it was; calling out hypocrisy and injustice. For Jesus it didn't stop with a war of words there was action and we too need to act.

It is important that Christians today still call out hypocrisy and injustice wherever it is found, perhaps on issues such as modern slavery, prejudice and the destruction of our planet and its wildlife. We who have been transformed by the power of His Spirit should not stay silent.

Dear Lord, may we as Christians today still call out hypocrisy and injustice wherever it is found, on issues such as modern slavery, prejudice and the destruction of our planet and its wildlife. May we who have been transformed by the power of His Spirit have the courage to speak up and speak out. Amen.

Tuesday, March 2nd

Tom's explorations

Scriptures to consider:

1 Samuel 2:1-10; Amos 5:14-15; Micah 6:8; Luke 1:46-55.

Where do things begin? The structures of society, unjust or otherwise, always seem so big and unwieldy. We wonder, 'How can I challenge the injustice I perceive? It's too big for me.' There is much that could be said then, about support groups, or politics, or Facebook campaigns, or celebrity endorsement, or organising protests – all ways of grouping together in the face of injustice, helping us to feel stronger together, less overwhelmed by the scale of whatever problem we see.

But, in the face of such challenges, are these truly the best places to look for help? The witness of Scripture is clear on what this Mark of Mission calls for, that the transformation of the world will not happen by the world's means. God's Kingdom instead turns upside-down our usual expectation of the world order. The first will be last, the rich and

successful will be sent away empty, for God revealed his glory not by force but by dying on a cross for the sin of the world.

For this is where it begins: each one of us is responsible for how we treat others, in kindness or in contempt, and ourselves likewise. Justice is not about making us feel better, it is about supporting others to rise and stand up. Together we are responsible for each other's wellbeing. Individually and together we must allow God to conform us to the likeness of Jesus. Keeping ourselves accountable in integrity, as we ourselves are transformed, we can begin the work of transformation in the world around us. Then any injustice can be faced in the certain knowledge that God is already in favour of justice and equity. As we seek, not merely to quell violence, but to transform it into peace for the good of others, we can be confident of God's presence with us.

Wednesday, March 3rd

Kate's sharings

Before Christmas my good friend Sian and I were planning a Diocesan Christingle Service and to deliver over 1000 Christingles in a bag. Sadly, Sian passed away on Christmas Day and so I have picked up the mantle for her work supporting vulnerable children and young people through The Children's Society. I am intentional about awareness and fund raising. It takes a discipline of prioritisation which is never easy and is something I need to practise! Often though, the work of reconciliation and being a people of peace can be far simpler but possibly more profound. In this time of pandemic, God has really done a work in me to learn to not take offence. Offence arises from pride. Where others speak wrongly of us, or accidentally crash our agenda with their own, it is very rarely deliberate and if so, from a place of hurt or

fear. We can walk in forgiveness and grace. The battle is of the spirit not of flesh and God has already won.

Observe with God the channels through which you receive your news; newspaper, social media, radio, whatever. Ask God to stir your heart for the things that are unjust and to give you vision for the role you can take, through which God can release heaven into these situations. Allow yourself to be open and ask God to lead you in your own relationships as well as in wider issues of justice. Let it begin with us.

Romans 12:2 (NRSV) – ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

What one thing can you do today to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation?

Thursday, March 4th

Simon's thoughts

The last year has pointed up for us all sorts of ways that the world in which we live is unjust. It has also pointed up the ways in which we inadvertently collude with that injustice, often in our search for good value. In a week when we remember Jesus clearing out the temple it is a challenge to think of the whole of creation as God's temple, for he can certainly be worshipped in all of it. That places on us a challenge to stand against the structures which people find oppressive, the unfair contracts, the exploitation of weakness, and the abuse of those who are vulnerable, and the structural oppressions that exit simply through negligent planning. The ionic thing is that such exploitation is to the detriment of everybody, including those who perpetrate it as

it stunts the flourishing of both body and soul in this world and the next.

To do – Make an audit of either your clothes or your kitchen and ask where the items within it come from. What has gone into making them, and what harm may have been done in their manufacture. Think about sustainable or organic ways in which you can replace items through various outlets in town or online. Our Green Shop is a new co-operative shop in Mill Street you may wish to try amongst others in town.

To pray for – the knowledge to challenge exploitation of the environment and of people where we find it, and the willingness to sustain our efforts in doing so.

Notes:

- *Has God prompted you this week about justice? How can you be present to those who need reconciliation?*
- *What might you recommend to your church to change about what we do, as we think about the church's purpose to Transform society?*

Tend

To respond to human need by loving service.



Friday, March 5th

Sarah's ponderings

In this third week we begin to reflect on the gift of Mother Church, and our own mother's who, as best they could, nurtured us into life. So it is fitting that in our thinking about the mission of the church in responding to human need by loving service.

Jesus in his ministry responded to human need: feeding the five thousand and the four thousand when they gathered to hear him speak, he calmed the storm when his disciples were afraid, he arranged for the care of his mother, even as he hung on the cross.

In this time of lockdown we have learnt to be more careful of the needs of our neighbours and family members.

At the same time, Jesus was not afraid to ask for food, for shelter, to receive the support of others in the community, so we find him inviting himself to supper with Zacchaeus in order to accept the gifts of one who was otherwise shunned by his neighbours.

Let us pray for grace to give and to receive the love of others, and so to be the nurturing church in our community.

Saturday, March 6th

Marjorie's musings

Tending is not just about looking after and serving people – about what we do. It is also about a state of being, of *being tender*. Being tender with people stems from compassion, recognizing their pain and suffering with them. And if we are tender, gentle with people, if we are concerned about them and for them, then we will recognize their needs and we will want to serve them. We will want to provide for them and protect them in a practical caring way just as God cares for us, and as Jesus did when he healed people. We will show them the tenderness they need so much.

To do – Call or write to someone you haven't heard from for a while to let them know someone is thinking of them.

To pray for – That we may have tenderness in all our dealings with those around us.

Sunday, March 7th

Clive's thoughts

We live in a world where humanity has gone astray from God, and we have therefore made a mess of it, and so we live in a world of suffering and pain. Jesus offers wholeness; His miracles were not only signs of who He was, but also acts of compassion through which He offered wholeness to people suffering in a world tainted by sin. Jesus still offers wholeness, and His people are called to show His compassion to those who suffer in a world torn apart by sin. Paul's list of gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:28 includes "gifts of healing" (whether miraculous or not; it is mentioned separately from "deeds of power") and "forms of

assistance”, and this list is followed almost immediately by Paul’s famous description of the love to which we are all called, and of which Jesus Christ is the supreme example. Historically it has been societies touched by the Gospel of Christ that have been most touched by His compassion: Christians were looking after the poor long before there was a Welfare State, Christians were looking after the sick long before the NHS existed, and my own experience of being educated in a Church primary school founded in 1832, a school founded by a vicar in 1652 and a college co-founded by a bishop in 1509 shows that Christians were active in education long before there was universal state education.

Monday, March 8th

Jane’s reflections

If you tend to something you take care of it and look after its’ needs, often putting those needs ahead of your own. The choice is made because it has to be and no reward is required except the knowledge that the right thing has been done. A hero of mine is Maya Angelou and she used to talk about her grandmother who was a godly woman and how when Maya would ask what she should do about something or other her grandmother would tell her, ‘...just do what’s right sister, just do what’s right’. Many times we over complicate the choices we have to be of service and care for each other and our world. The Bible makes it quite clear what to do; when James and John are trying to jockey for position, much to the annoyance of the other disciples, they all were told what they must do, “..... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark10:43-45)

It's important to recognise the opportunities we have to tend and care for people and creation. Sometimes those opportunities will come knocking on our door; more often than not we need to be out there in the world looking for ways to love and serve our community. To do it not because it will make us look good but because as a disciple it is the right response to the truth that He first loved us.

Dear Lord, may we recognise the opportunities we have to tend and care for people and creation. Sometimes those opportunities will come knocking on our door; more often than not we need to be out there in the world looking for ways to love and serve our community. May we do it not because it will make us look good but because as a disciple it is the right response to the truth that You first loved us. Amen.

Tuesday, March 9th

Tom's explorations

Scriptures to consider: Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:26-27.

The passage from Matthew's gospel is well-known, and it would be easy to get worked up about who is in, and who is out, of the Kingdom of God. But the fundamental thing to consider, however God may eventually judge us, is that when it comes to knowing Jesus this passage speaks only of our practical and deliberate actions to help others. This is the counterpoint to our consideration next week on how and what we should teach of the faith; here is how it works in practice.

Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, quench the thirsty, shelter the destitute, relieve the sick, be present to those imprisoned. In many ways our modern society has been built up with structures of government and institution to do precisely these things. Sometimes this makes it very

complex to navigate exactly how we can still do these things ourselves and yet make an impact. Perhaps also we have all felt a little helpless in the face of the scale of the need that the world presents to us. And lockdown, well that hasn't helped our ability to get out and simply be present to people. Yet people are still people. People will still, do still have all of these problems in the 21st Century, as they had in the 1st. Loneliness, poverty, the extremity of illness – mental and physical – and the injustice of systems that respect the law, but not persons; all are still with us.

The clue for our response to these things is included in the Mark above. Loving service does not seek our own advancement; nor does it require more of us than we can give. We give out of what we have, and what God provides for us. If we want to offer more, ask for more with which to offer. Using what we have with the right motives was James' point to his hearers – to uphold the needy and stay holy, care for others and keep the faith. Such is the very heart of God.

Wednesday, March 10th

Kate's sharings

I (feel I) am notoriously poor at being proactive in making regular contact, sending cards, giving gifts, that kind of thing. In recent years, I've come to recognise that, although that is a weakness, my strength is that I am generally very responsive and a practical support when needed. But God does not let us rest in the things we are comfortable in. Through prayer and intentionality, I am increasingly becoming someone that is much more consistent in connecting with others (although I do still fail more than I'd like!) keeping them and reminding them they are in my prayers. In this time of pandemic, I have also learned to embrace technology to help others to connect in prayer,

study, worship and fellowship. It has been a huge gift. God is so good.

Think about with God the ways in which you serve or the ways that your heart is directing you. Perhaps list out the various groups and communities you belong to. Maybe find a map of the street or area you live in. Ask God to bless with you all of these interactions and to guide you in how he has called you to serve, especially in these difficult and restricted times. Our God is a creator God who equips us when we step out in faith.

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NRSV) – ¹⁰ Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹ Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

What one thing can you do today to respond to human need?

Thursday, March 11th

Simon's thoughts

The middle of Lent is a time I always find difficult. It feels to me as though time drags as I follow through with the disciplines I have set myself. This last year there have been moments when I have felt that a lot as routines and expectations have been constantly upended, and it has been at those moments when the kindness of family or friends and neighbours has meant more than they ever do. They have been an encouragement to me when I have felt low, but also an inspiration to encourage others, because in that I have been reminded constantly that giving and receiving love are the same coin, and that stepping out in service is as

life giving as receiving the service of others. Both are a necessary part of good community living, because a healthy community is about interdependence.

To do – the easy bit may be to suggest something you can do to bless a neighbor. A more difficult challenge would be to admit to the same person or someone else something where you could do with a little help.

To pray for – that we be equally willing to share our own needs as to be willing to meet the needs of those around us.

Notes:

- *Who are the people you know who need Jesus' healing care from us?*
- *What might you recommend to your congregation/PCC to change about what we do, as we think about the church's purpose to Tend to human need?*

Teach

To teach baptise and nurture new believers.



Friday, March 12th

Sarah's ponderings

As we celebrate Mothering Sunday, and recall our place in family we might remember one or two facts about Jesus' family life. He seems to have suffered, as many of us do, the label of his parents – 'is this not Jesus, the carpenter's son,' and the ridicule of his family – his brothers and mothers thinking that he had lost his mind. There is also evidence in the gospel of the care that Jesus received from his family: Joseph and Mary brought him up as a good Jew, made sure that he was educated in the Scriptures and the practice of his faith. We think of Jesus learning the carpenters' trade from his foster father. All of us have been fed, taught, encouraged by various people along the way. As the church we are asked to help one another in our growth in faith.

Saturday, March 13th

Marjorie's musings

I suppose few of us think of ourselves as actual teachers although we probably all fulfill that role at some point to someone. Our example and way of life are visual aids which show people what we believe, what things are important to us and that can be a very important lesson. Because probably the most important thing we will ever do is to encourage each and help others discover more about God's love – and that is something we can all do, for we are all on the same journey of faith. We teach together, learn together, grow together – and love together.

To do – Think of a teacher who had a great impression on you and give thanks for them.

To pray for – For all teachers everywhere, that they may have wisdom and patience.

Sunday, March 14th

Clive's thoughts

The risen Jesus told us, as we go, to “make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20). He doesn't want just converts, He wants disciples, disciples who learn from Him to become obedient to the truth, to turn from the old life of disobedience to the new life of faithful obedience to Christ. St Paul speaks of baptism as being baptism into Christ's death, so that “just as Christ was raised by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4). Just because we cannot be acceptable to God through our own righteousness and are justified freely by His grace, it doesn't mean that we can

believe what we like and do what we like. We are baptised in the name of the Trinity, because the God who is Trinity is the God who can save, and are therefore called to walk in sound doctrine, and we are raised to newness of life and are therefore called to a life of righteousness. We are to encourage one another to be disciples, and we are to encourage especially those who are new to the faith to learn the truth and walk in it. Those new to the faith of course includes children; throughout the Bible God's people are encouraged to tell new generations of the marvellous deeds of the Lord.

Monday, March 15th

Jane's reflections

Telling and teaching/preaching are of course closely linked. Romans 10:13-14 says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

Yet in trying to teach about the Christian faith I believe we not only need to tell people using words we have to show them by example. It is not good enough to hope that others will do as we say not as we do. For as we all know people watch people; and if the actions they are seeing do not match to the words they are hearing it tends to be the actions that will speak louder than the words. So we must endeavour to practice what we teach. From personal experience I know that the things that God challenges me about, the things I feel called upon to teach are often the lessons I need to learn, and it can be an ongoing struggle; one which generates a need that keeps me close to God asking for guidance and wisdom to get it right and mercy for the times when I get it wrong.

It is important to try and when, not if, but when we fall, to say, 'okay Lord I might have fallen a hundred times, but thanks to You I have got up again a hundred and one times.' Then with God's help, joy and humility keep trying to teach what you know of God's love.

Dear Lord, help us to share our faith and when, not if, but when we fall, to reach out to you and with your help get up and try again and with joy and humility keep trying to teach what we know of Your love. Amen.

Tuesday, March 16th

Tom's explorations

Scriptures to consider:

Deuteronomy 5; 6: 1-9, 24-25; Proverbs 1:8-9; Acts 19:1-10.

Teaching others in the faith has been a sacred duty for the people of God from of old. Just like any of the Marks of Mission it is one in which we should all participate in some way. This is the message given to the Hebrews on Sinai, and by Moses in Deuteronomy 6, above. Let the Ways of the Lord be as close to you as they possibly can be – bound on hands and head – and let everyone be engaged in doing so. Let families be involved, have ready and good answers for your children when they ask about the faith, for that is nurturing, not merely dictating, what should be learnt. Lead too by example, and encourage others in faith, not merely by saying the words, but by attempting to live by them.

When this becomes difficult, or we fear that we do not know enough, or understand enough, we remember that it is not in our own strength that we do these things. It never was. When Paul came to Ephesus for the second time he met

some Ephesian Christians who had believed through Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos. They had only heard of the baptism for repentance – John’s baptism – and so, in effect, knew only the form of the life they should lead. Paul then taught them something new, sought to nurture their faith and discipleship. When they were baptised in the name of Jesus and Paul prayed for them, they encountered the full splurge of God’s Holy Spirit filling them to overflowing with life and joy. In the same way, even now, it is the Holy Spirit of God the Father and our Lord Jesus who gives both form and substance to the life of faith. It is he who teaches us and leads us into truth. Our part in this is to join in and help as he directs us, caring for one another’s wellbeing in knowledge and understanding, teaching others to look to him.

Wednesday, March 17th

Kate’s sharing

Teaching can be a real challenge. Even in my early part of my ministry, I found it difficult to call out where I see God working in others’ lives in language that connects with them. In truth, I was fearful of undermining some great theological mystery or another worshipper’s truth. I have however come to trust that God will use me mightily if I speak with humility, share with honesty what I do and don’t understand and, above all, invite Him in to every conversation through prayer. I also keep seeking to understand more, through prayer and study. I try to spend time in ‘the quiet place’ with Jesus, but often I find it easier in community. I am very much a work in progress.

Spend time with God. Delve into his word. Perhaps find a reading plan or invite someone else to explore a book or study with you. Have a conversation with someone about what delights and/or overwhelms you about the bible.

Perhaps consider joining a home group or course. Pray and ask God to help you see the right opportunity to grow in your own confidence and understanding.

***Ephesians 1:17-19** – ¹⁷ I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.*

What one thing can you do today to teach and nurture new believers?

Thursday, March 18th

Simon's thoughts

In the last weeks of Jesus' life, in this period we remember as Passiontide, Jesus is not only involved in a lot of intense activity, but the Gospel records show a great deal of teaching, of crowds, or disciples, and even, or perhaps especially of those who are opposing him. Teaching can be about nurture in a gentle and encouraging way, but it can also be about challenge, confronting us to reassess long held view and prejudices. If a previous week was about transformation externally, then this week is perhaps thinking about internal growth and development as new disciples are made and older disciples made more Christ-like.

To do – we all learn in different ways so this is quite individual: you could make enquiries about taking up regular Bible Reading notes. We have a scheme run by Sheila Royle who distributes on behalf of the Bible Reading Fellowship, or if you like collective learning there are a

number of groups who meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly to encourage one another in faithful living, or maybe you are someone who learns through action and service, in which case talk to one of the clergy who can see where you might be best placed to do that.

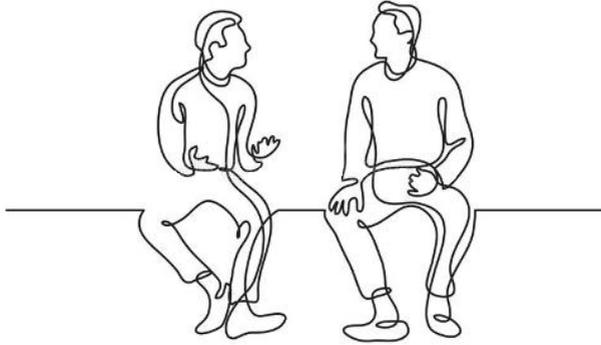
To pray for – a church where we can mutually encourage one another in learning and find places and ways in which we can share the ways in which God is developing us to be more Christ-like.

Notes:

- *How might you be able to teach others in the faith?*
- *What might you recommend to your congregation/PCC to change about what we do, as we think about the church's purpose to Teach the faith?*

Tell

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.



Friday, March 19th

Sarah's ponderings

In these last two weeks of Lent our minds turn to the suffering of Jesus as he approached the cross. His disciples still didn't understand the gospel truth that the kingdom of God is here and now, and among us, as it was among them. Jesus still demonstrated the power and the love of the kingdom in his words and his actions. We live now in a world where Christianity is a minority religion, and where many do not understand the importance and the power of the Christian faith. Indeed the church itself often seems to be a poor advert for the love and generosity of God. One way or another though the love of God still calls to all people and would welcome us to do the same, as co-workers with God.

Prayer: Would you dare to ask God for opportunity to share your faith in word and deed.

Action: Would you care to work with God to see your prayer answered.

Saturday, March 20th

Marjorie's musings

A few weeks ago we heard the story, in our Sunday Gospel, of the call of Philip. After his encounter with Jesus, his first action was to go immediately to tell his friend, Nathanael. And that should be the natural thing to do for any of us when we first meet Jesus, not because it is our Christian duty to proclaim the good news, although it is, but because the joy of meeting Jesus is so overwhelming that we want to share it with others. Well, that is fine, you might say, for the young, for new converts, still brimful of enthusiasm, but as we grow older and – in theory – more mature – we become more reticent. We fear rejection or even worse, ridicule, and so we hold back. If only we could all hold on to that initial excitement, we could transform the world – it's happened before!

To do – Go and tell someone how much Jesus means to you – even if it is only the cat.

To pray for – For Jesus to become so real to us that we long to make him real to others.

Sunday, March 21st

Clive's thoughts

To many the Kingdom, or rather the Kingship, of God seems like bad news. It rivals the Kingdom of self. Left to its own devices, human nature likes to think it's in charge. We like to be our own masters and do what we like. We think we are as we were meant to be, and, if there is a God, we want Him to accept us on our terms, just as we are to stay as we are, and we want Him to accept us for what we've done. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, tells us that God is in

charge, and we come to Him on His terms or not at all. So how is that good news? Jesus Christ is the good news. The good news is that God Himself has become a human being and has taken upon Himself the penalty for the disobedience that separates us from God by dying and rising again, that through faith in Him we can receive His righteousness and His risen life. The righteousness is His and not ours; so we don't have to attempt the impossible task of making ourselves acceptable to God by what we do; He accepts us as we are, but doesn't leave us as we are, but gives us the Holy Spirit to impart to us the righteousness that is already imputed to us through faith in Jesus Christ. That is good news that everyone needs to hear; so we shouldn't keep it to ourselves.

Monday, March 22nd

Jane's reflections

Telling people about our faith, something we know, something we believe to be true can be interesting especially if they don't agree with us. Yet I believe what is important to them and to God is that it's apparent that we know and sincerely believe what we are saying. People need to trust the messenger as well as the message. Today people are really good at picking up on spin and 'flouncy' sentiments that sound lovely but are not backed up by honest to goodness personal experience and an authentic relationship with Jesus which is grounded in a knowledge of biblical truth. Now I'm not saying we all have to be biblical scholars far from it. We do however all need to know about who Jesus is and why He came to earth, as well as that He loves and cares for us, before we can convince anyone else that he desires to do the same for them. When someone knows and loves you and you know and love them it is obvious to everyone, it is not just in the words we say it is how we say them and how

that love changes us for the better. So to tell the good news effectively we have to really know it and believe in it.

It's important to make the effort to spend time with Jesus, it might be time spent reading about Him, it might be time spent just being quiet and thinking about what He means to you and what you mean to Him. Then share those thoughts with someone, you may be pleasantly surprised by how blessed you both are.

Dear Lord, encourage us to spend time with Jesus, it might be time spent reading about Him, it might be time spent just being quiet and thinking about what He means to us and what we mean to Him; and help us to share those thoughts with others. Amen.

Tuesday, March 23rd

Tom's explorations

Scriptures to consider: Mark 1:1-15; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23.

Today we consider this thought that we must open our mouths and speak of Jesus. Is that difficult? Is that easy? When was the last time you spoke with someone about Jesus, who he is, what he has done?

What we encounter when we read these two Scriptures above are radically challenging no matter how long we have known him, but also are fundamentally encouraging in following this task. When Jesus stepped out into his earthly ministry through John's baptism, John had already come before him. John had been proclaiming the coming Kingdom and then, once John had been put in prison, so did Jesus. In the same way we are not starting from scratch in telling others. We have each other for encouragement, for companionship in the task. Likewise, we are part of a much bigger purpose – a purpose that the

Apostle Paul realized very clearly: that the Gospel brings great blessing. Paul, as any of us who have met the risen Lord will know, was compelled by his encounter – compelled by love, as he later put it – compelled to speak, not for reward except that the joy of the Good News of God’s acceptance of us is its own reward. When we see others turn to Jesus, there is great rejoicing.

We declare the Good News of God reclaiming Kingship of a Kingdom on earth that is good and peaceful and joyous and just, hopeful and full of life. But because we declare God is King, there will be those who would rather he was not. And, like Jesus declares above, the way into this Kingdom is through repentance – turning away from self-determination, pride and all other sin – recognising in truth that God is right in his claim to Lordship. So, like John or Paul, or Jesus himself, we messengers of the Good News may face opposition in our telling of it. Yet the Good News is not only something to proclaim, but is (as Mark reminds us) Jesus himself, and he is with us always.

Wednesday, March 24th

Kate’s sharing

Despite being a life-long Anglican, I am a relatively new Christian. On reflection language like “hearing the voice of God” although beautiful, was not always helpful. I didn’t know how to notice the supernatural nature of God prompting me. Sometimes it is the ‘normal things’ that are easy to miss. A thought, a picture, an encouragement from someone else, a quote, a bible verse. I did not have a living faith nor indeed a relationship with God. In praying and studying with others online through this pandemic I have been radically tuned into God. I can more readily recognise what he is doing and understand the significance for my life. It is in sharing that I have been able to encourage and engage

others, and they have been able to challenge and encourage me.

Speak with God and ask him to show you clearly where he is working even through this pandemic. Be alert for opportunities to share this with others. Pray for a Holy Spirit to give you a spirit of boldness and of joy that you would go out and share the Good News of faith and grow in your understanding and confidence in doing so.

2 Timothy 1:8-10 – ⁸ Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰ but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Thursday, March 25th

Simon's thoughts

Good news is infectious. Think of a few examples, the birth of a child, the announcement of an engagement, an illness healed, a new job, a new car and so on. The list could be considerable. There is just something about sharing a piece of news that gives pleasure to others, and the joy of seeing someone's face light up with pleasure is always a delight. Our faith should be like that and more, because if it is indeed central to our being then it will be something we cannot keep quiet about, and know the pleasure of having others join us in it. This week especially when we think of the end to which Jesus was to go the demonstrate God's love, followed by the absolute triumph of the Resurrection remember the joy of the story

To do – Make a list of things to celebrate in your relationship with God that you could share.

To pray for – Bring before God five people you know to whom you would rejoice to tell the Good News of Jesus' love, redemption and triumph.

Friday, March 26th

We come to the end of our consideration of the mission of the church in Lent, and we come to a change in the journey with Jesus. Next week will be Holy Week. There will be reflections and services each evening online, and available in paper copy through the usual distribution. Please continue to keep company with Jesus in your prayers.

As we come through lockdown, into a greater freedom, we will go on addressing ways of being church together. Each week you have been invited to offer a development that the church might make. Please take this time today to revisit these reflections, and do communicate your ideas to the clergy, churchwardens or PCC of your parish.

Saturday, March 27th

Scriptures to consider:

Job 38 – 42:6; Psalm 104; Acts 1:7-8, 4:23-24,

There has been a lot written and said over the years about the mission of the Church. Some now say that we are merely joining in with the larger mission of God, that the Church is only one part of what he is doing. And certainly, for the Sovereign Creator of the universe to whom every knee will bow, and whom every tongue will confess as Lord, whether willingly or no, his ways are beyond our knowing. But he came into our midst, as one of us, to be with us, and humanity – a physical body, part of his own Creation – was

taken up into divinity. The commission of telling this wondrous word was given to those who believe on His Name – and that is us. It falls to us then, whatever else God might be doing in the world, to seek his face, to pray and ask him to heal our land – for we are his witnesses to all the ends of the earth.

We ask, Father God, that you would empower us by your Holy Spirit, in joy and in love to tell others of your welcome in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ; to teach others of your truth and your grace; to tend to the hurts and needs of others for your Name's sake; to turn our whole lives towards you, that in integrity we might transform the structures of society and show forth peace and forgiveness in the world; to value and treasure all that you have entrusted to us, that at the last we might hear that great 'Well done!' to faithful servants; and not only so, but be welcomed into your presence as your children, to love you, and enjoy you forever.

Amen.

Notes:

- *As we end our Lenten reflections, how is God calling you to tell others about Jesus and his Kingdom?*

Notes:

- *What might you recommend to your congregation/PCC to change about what we do, as we think about the church's purpose to Tell the Good News?*
- *Think on all five Marks of Mission and ask God where you find your place in his purposes.*