



Woven – a Lent Course

2021 Lent Course



Woven
God's Story. Your Story. Every Story.

6-Session course for small
groups or personal Bible studies

AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE DISTRICT CHAIRS

As people of faith we know that our story and God's story are woven together, not because we wish it to be so but because God is interested in the smallest detail of our lives. The God who knit us together in our mothers' wombs is the same God who knows the number of hairs on our heads and who loved us and the whole world enough to send Jesus to show us the way of love.

Lent is a season during which we reflect on our personal relationship with God and on every Christian's responsibility to engage with the world as it is. We notice again God's prompting to move on from personal reflection, through shared study, towards lives of love in action. We remember that Jesus travelled a journey from his baptism, through the wilderness and beyond, to a ministry of teaching and healing, of challenging injustice and of holding the powerful to account. We will remember the cost that Jesus paid for standing up for those who were most vulnerable and we will look towards the eternal hope that lies beyond the sacrifice.

Michaela Youngson

Jongi Zihle

Nigel Cowgill

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#WovenIntoGod

#WovenWithOthers

Scripture quotations and readings taken from the Holy Bible, The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) except where indicated otherwise

You can download an electronic copy of this course at
methodistlondon.org.uk/lentcourse2021

Using the course

Each of these Bible study sessions begins with the same Lenten prayer, which reflects the shape of the journey that Jesus took at the beginning of his ministry. The prayer reminds us that when we struggle within our own wilderness God is there ahead of us, ready to support us, to 'send angels to minister to us' and to send us into the world ready to live out our calling.

The readings selected for the course are those of the Sunday Lectionary readings for Lent, beginning with a few verses from the appointed Psalm. You might want to read the Psalm together in your group but also to include it in your own daily prayers, so that the rhythm and poetry of the Psalm becomes something you carry with you each day. Most of the Gospel readings are from Mark's Gospel and there are some notes below to help you put the text into the wider context of the Bible.

When it comes to reading the Gospel passage, take your time. Read it through once, then sit in silence for a few minutes. Now read it again slowly. If you are the group leader, invite members of the group to close their eyes and imagine the scene described by the passage. The purpose of these Bible studies is to encourage people to feel confident in responding to scripture, taking time to reflect on their own reactions to the text and what God might be saying to each person or church community.

Each session includes 'Other Voices', offering a literary extract that can be used to stimulate reflection.

After the time of discussion, there is an opportunity to consider if there are any actions that you might want to take as individuals or as a group. This is not to pressure people but to encourage an engagement with scripture which allows it to inform who we are and the way we live our lives as God's people in the world. Actions might include helping at a Food Bank, writing to MPs about a situation of injustice, finding out about the Methodist Way of Life, becoming a Church Can partner (supporting All We Can's work with Methodist partners around the world) – there are so many ways to respond to God's love! Information about these agencies and more are found at the back of the booklet.

Each session includes suggestions of hymns or songs, which might be sung or listened to. If singing is not possible, the words of the song can be read as a poem.

Each session closes with prayer. Firstly, a time of open prayer when people can be encouraged to offer their own thoughts and responses and then a prayer of blessing.

Notes for group leaders

This style of Bible study is immersive and allows the text to speak to those present from their own experience, from each other, and from what they have learnt in church, Sunday School or in their own studies. It is important to give sufficient time and space to allow people to find their own way into the passage and to hear what God may be saying to them through it.

Each person will have their own perspective on the text. Try and facilitate the conversation so that everyone has a chance to share what stands out in the text for them or what it means to them. This will be a new approach to Bible study for some, particularly the use of imagination, so be sensitive to this. It might be worth imagining when looking at a text, that you are all looking at a different part of an elephant and none of you have the full picture – no one is wrong in their description of the elephant, but they can only describe what is within their range of sight!

Avoid offering fixed answers about what you as leader, or any other scholar, says the Scripture means. However, you might find the following notes helpful in stimulating conversation.

Malcolm Guite's poem 'Bible Study' expresses beautifully the methodology behind this resource.

Bible Study

Open the text again to every question:
Its lexicon of possibility,
Its origin and form and *Sitz im Leben*¹,
Its deep resistance and its clarity.
Untwist the thread of prejudice that binds you,
Pattern the fragments and reshape the shards,
Be lost in reading till the reading finds you,
Discern the Word that underpins the words.
Begin at the beginning, make an end
Of all your old evasions, make a start
Counting the countless stars, the grains of sand,
And find in them the fragments of your heart.
Open the text again, for it is true,
The Book you open always opens you.²

- **Mark's style as a Gospel writer.**

Mark writes in a simple and direct way, and at a very fast, almost breathless pace, using phrases such as 'and then', 'immediately' and 'just after'. There is an urgency to Mark's message and he wants his readers to understand that a decision needs to be made! He does not include a lot of detail. Some members of the group will remember more details about the events described, such as Jesus' baptism or the Transfiguration. It is worth looking at the other gospel accounts of these events to help people identify the priorities of each writer.

- **Mark's understanding of Jesus.**

Most scholars agree that Mark is the earliest written of the four canonical gospels (not long after 70AD). Matthew and Luke base much of their writing on Mark's text. His priorities are to show Jesus as sent by God – carrying God's authority and that Jesus will suffer in order for God's will to be done. He does not include the birth narrative and the earliest texts end at the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb with no reference to resurrection appearances.

- **Who was Mark writing for?**

Mark's writing seems to be for gentile Christian communities, and Jesus does not refer to himself as 'Messiah' within Mark's Gospel, only referring to himself as 'the Son of Man'. Even when Peter declares Jesus to be 'The Christ', Jesus cautions his followers not to tell anyone. This can be contrasted with Matthew's Gospel which goes to great lengths to place Jesus within the Messianic prophetic traditions of Israel.

¹ *Sitz im Leben* – 'Setting in life' – this term is often used by those seeking to understand the original context of a fragment of scripture.

² 'Bible Study' from *Parable and Paradox* by Malcolm Guite. Canterbury Press, 2017. Used with permission.

- **The Passion Narrative is the climax to Mark's Gospel.**

One third of Mark's Gospel is a description of Jesus' Passion – from Gethsemane, through arrest, trials, flogging and crucifixion. The whole gospel points to the fact that the 'Son of Man' will suffer, that God will be glorified through that suffering and those who follow Jesus will also share in that suffering (8.34, 10.39). Time and again those listening, whether it is the disciples or the religious leaders, do not understand (either because they can't understand or because they choose to be blind) and the threat to Jesus from the powerful builds throughout Mark, until the inevitable happens.

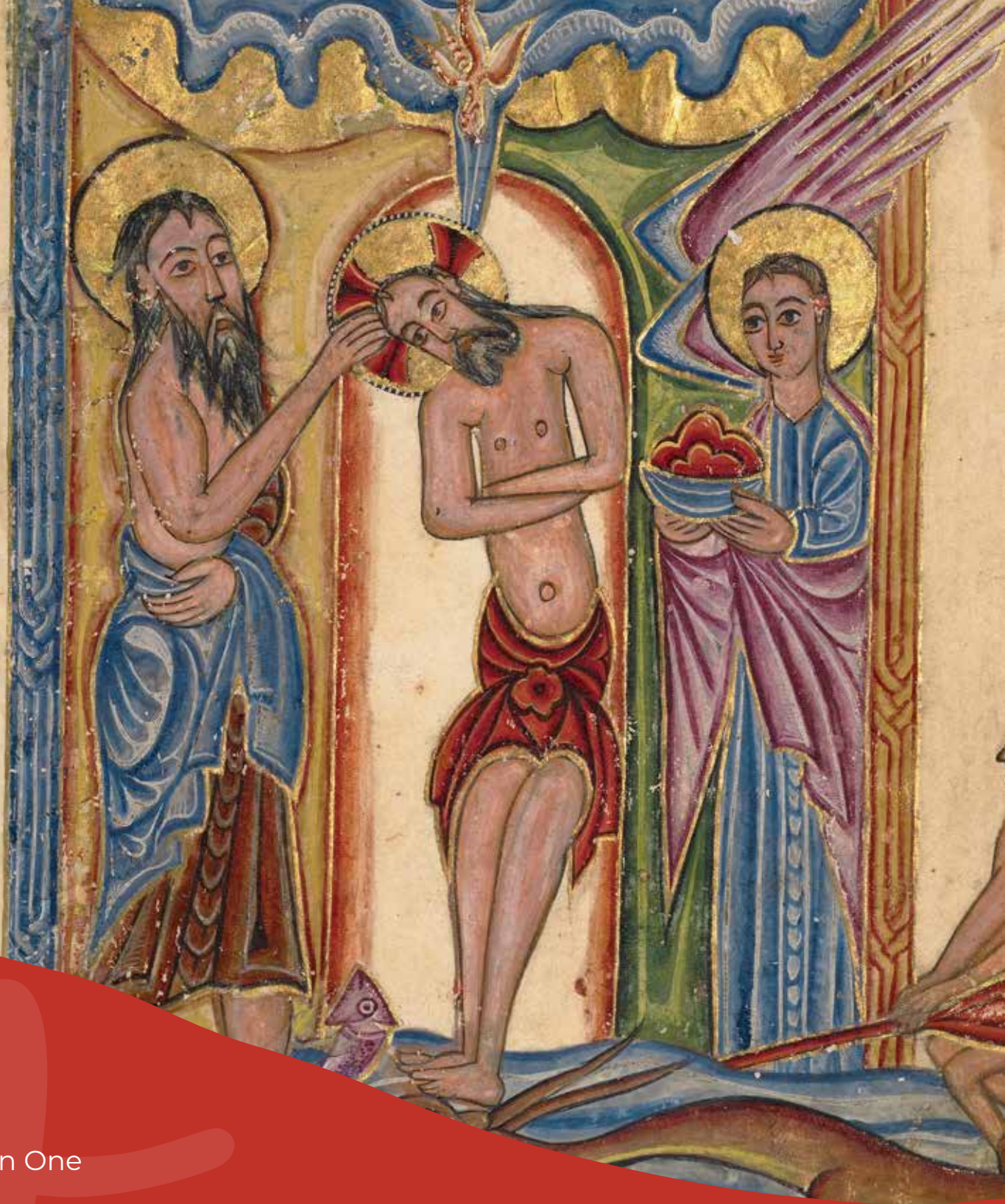
- **John's passage about the 'cleansing of the temple'.**

This is a passage that often shocks people – whilst the bible rarely portrays Jesus as meek and mild, for many Christians they have inherited an understanding of Christ as the silently suffering servant. His anger at the goings on at the Temple make some people uncomfortable. It is most likely that his anger was aimed, not at the liturgical events within the Temple itself, but at the traders who ripped people off by charging too much for animals for sacrifices and the money changers, who charged exorbitant and excessive exchange rates for temple currency. This is not to assume that the leaders of the Temple were not implicated. We are quick to assume that bad things don't happen in the life of churches – even though we know this makes no sense. It would be good to explore with your group – a. what is appropriate anger and how that might be acted upon and, b. what are the things about our church and its life that might make it difficult for some people to participate?

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Personal Reflections

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Session One

INTO THE WILDERNESS



Lenten Prayer

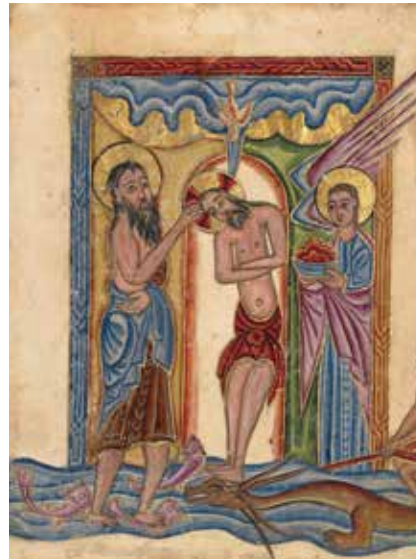
God who calls us on our journey, as we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness,
help us to cast aside those things that get in the way of hearing your word.
Help us to seek you in the places of bounteous beauty and of barren bleakness.
Help us to seek you in the faces of friends and in the smiles of strangers.
Help our devotion to be made real in the actions of our lives.
When we have looked deep into our own hearts and struggled with who we are,
send angels to minister to us and draw us out from our own wilderness
to fulfil our calling to serve you.
In Christ's name. Amen.¹

.....

PSALM

Read these verses two or three times slowly, to allow the words to catch the imaginations of those present. You might say them all together or each person read them aloud in turn. Be sensitive to those who find reading aloud challenging and those for whom English is not their first language.

Psalm 25.4-5



2

GOSPEL READING

Read through the passage, then allow a moment's silence. Read the passage slowly, invite people to close their eyes and hear the scripture with their imaginations.

Mark 1.9-15

.....

Engaging with the text

- What image or phrase stood out for you in the reading of the text?
- What surprised you in the text? Perhaps something you had never noticed before or something you thought was there but is not.
- There are three stories within this passage, which one appeals to you? Why?
- What does 'wilderness' mean to you?

¹

Prayer - 'In the wilderness' from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005.

²

Image – Baptism of Christ, 1615, Artist: Mesrop of Khizan, Copyright: Creative Commons, <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56064>

Other Voices

From Anne Frank's Diary

Anne was a Jewish child hiding from the Nazi's in WWII. Once discovered, she and all her family were taken to concentration camps; her father was the only survivor.

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder, which will destroy us too. I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end and that peace and tranquillity will return again.

In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out.³



Engaging with other voices

- What do you notice in the quote from Anne Frank?
- Anne continued to believe 'that people are really good at heart.' How do you respond to that belief?
- Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus as upholding his ideals in the face of a gathering storm of violence and the abuse of power. What do we hold onto in the face of a world that seems to be a wilderness for many, even at times for ourselves?

Taking Action

- What actions might you, your group, your church, take in response to scripture and your discussion?

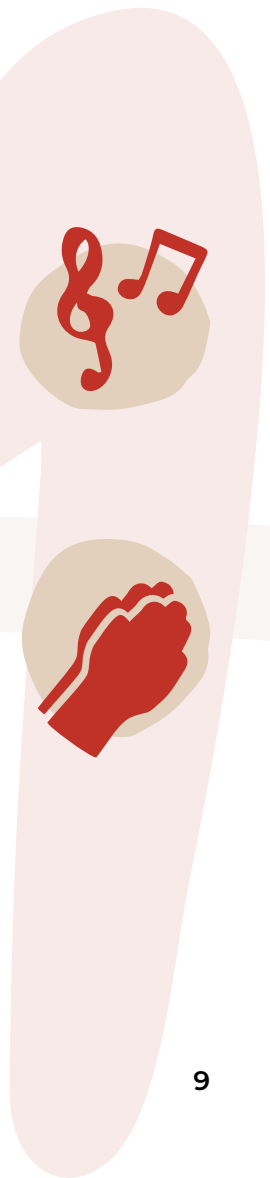
Songs

You might like to sing together, or listen to a recording of one of the following songs:

StF 240 - When we are tested and wrestle alone

StF 228 - Hail to the Lord's Anointed!

StF 351 - In Christ Alone



Prayers

Allow a time for open prayer, followed by The Grace, or the following Blessing.

**Generous God, bless each one of us. Bless those we love. Bless the homes we return to.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit, that we might grow deeper in wisdom,
more passionate in faith, and more committed in our loving.
for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Amen.⁴**



³ Extract from *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. Penguin, 2007.

⁴ 'Prayer of Blessing' (altered) from *The Weaver, the Word and Wisdom* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2007.





Session Two

ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP



Lenten Prayer

God who calls us on our journey, as we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness,
help us to cast aside those things that get in the way of hearing your word.
Help us to seek you in the places of bounteous beauty and of barren bleakness.
Help us to seek you in the faces of friends and in the smiles of strangers.
Help our devotion to be made real in the actions of our lives.
When we have looked deep into our own hearts and struggled with who we are,
send angels to minister to us and draw us out from our own wilderness
to fulfil our calling to serve you.
Christ's name. Amen⁵

PSALM

Read these verses two or three times slowly, to allow the words to catch the imaginations of those present. You might say them all together or each person read them aloud in turn. Be sensitive to those who find reading aloud challenging and those for whom English is not their first language.

Psalm 22.23-24



6



GOSPEL READING

Read through the passage, then allow a moment's silence. Read the passage again, slowly, invite people to close their eyes and hear the scripture with their imaginations.

Mark 9.2-9

Engaging with the text

- What image or phrase stood out for you in the reading of the text?
- What surprised you in the text? Perhaps something you had never noticed before or something you thought was there but is not.
- Which character do you identify with most in this passage?
- Why might Jesus order his disciples not to tell people what they had seen?
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⁵ Prayer - 'In the wilderness' from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005.

⁶ Night Sky over St Davids, Photo Credit Rob Youngson, website: <https://robyoungsonphotography.com>

Other Voices

Finding Arcturus – by Richard Wagamese

I hadn't heard my people's legends of the Star People then. The world of foster homes was a white world, and I lived in the absence of legends. The only stories I had, school-book tales of dogs and families, never really rang true for me. A part of me craved the revelation of secrets and the sky was deep with mystery. I loved sinking myself into it. I hadn't read yet about light years or the rate of expansion of the universe or galactic clouds or even the Milky Way. Instead, I was transfixed by something that far exceeded the scope of my one small life. Magic existed in the holes between the stars. I could feel it...

When I moved south after I was adopted, the sky was overpowered by the harsh city lights, and the stars seemed farther away. It was a curious feeling, being lonely for the sky...

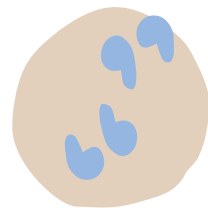
One night a man showed me how to find Arcturus. He was a fellow stargazer, a neighbour who lived down the street... The night he showed me how to find Arcturus, the sky was as clear as I'd ever seen it there. The man stood a few feet away, his face pointed up at the sky, and asked me if I'd heard of it. When I said I hadn't, he began to talk.

Arcturus is called the Bear Watcher, he said, because it follows the Great Bear constellation around the poles. Arctis is Greek for bear, and it's where the word "arctic" comes from. Arcturus is about thirty-seven light years away from us and the fourth brightest star in the sky. He told me all that while looking up and away from me. I felt the awe in his words.

He told me to look at the Big Dipper, find the star at the end of the handle, then hold my hand out in front of my face, bend the three middle fingers in and put my little finger on that star. Where my thumb sat was Arcturus.

When I did it I smiled. For the first time the stars seemed reachable. All through the years of my boyhood, whenever I felt particularly lonely I would hold out my arm, fold my fingers, find Arcturus and feel comforted.

What that nameless man gave me that night was wonder⁷.



Engaging with other voices

- What do you notice in the extract from *One Native Life*?
- During a difficult time in his life, the writer finds wonder in the most mundane of circumstances. What has prompted you to awe and wonder?
- We often talk about how close we feel to God, what language might we use to describe the 'otherness' or 'holiness' of God?
- How might we share with others our encounters with wonder?

Taking Action

- What actions might you, your group, your church, take in response to scripture and your discussion?

Songs

You might like to sing together, or listen to a recording of one of the following songs:

StF 706 - Longing for light

StF 261 - Transfigured Christ, none comprehends

StF 259 - Jesus, on the mountain peak





Generous God, bless each one of us. Bless those we love. Bless the homes we return to.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit, that we might grow deeper in wisdom,
more passionate in faith, and more committed in our loving.
for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Amen.⁸



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Session Three

TURNING THE TABLES



Lenten Prayer

God who calls us on our journey, as we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness,
help us to cast aside those things that get in the way of hearing your word.
Help us to seek you in the places of bounteous beauty and of barren bleakness.
Help us to seek you in the faces of friends and in the smiles of strangers.
Help our devotion to be made real in the actions of our lives.
When we have looked deep into our own hearts and struggled with who we are,
send angels to minister to us and draw us out from our own wilderness
to fulfil our calling to serve you.
In Christ's name. Amen.⁹

.....

PSALM

Read these verses two or three times slowly, to allow the words to catch the imaginations of those present. You might say them all together or each person read them aloud in turn. Be sensitive to those who find reading aloud challenging and those for whom English is not their first language.

Psalm 19.1-4



10

GOSPEL READING

Read through the passage, then allow a moment's silence. Read the passage again, slowly, invite people to close their eyes and hear the scripture with their imaginations.

John 2.13-22

.....

Engaging with the text

- What image or phrase stood out for you in the reading of the text?
- What surprised you in the text? Perhaps something you had never noticed before or something you thought was there but is not.
- How do you feel about Jesus showing anger?
- When is it right for us to show anger? What actions are appropriate when challenging injustice?

⁹ Prayer - 'In the wilderness' from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005.
¹⁰ Image: Jesus drives out the merchants, Artist: JESUS MAFA, Copyright: Creative Commons
<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48271>

Other Voices

Righteous Anger

The Revd David Haslam is a Methodist presbyter, who has worked for justice throughout his ministry. The following is an extract from his book, *A Luta Continua* and is set in the context of the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

That was also the year when twelve Methodist ministers attempted to enter South Africa House and chain ourselves to the furniture, in protest against the police raid on the offices of the South African Council of Churches. Some succeeded with their padlocks, others were bundled out, but we then spent an hour in prayer in front of the building in London's Trafalgar Square before departing. That site was of course the place of many demonstrations over the following years, including a shanty hut built by members of my Harlesden congregation next door on the forecourt of St Martins in the Fields, which was then demolished by the South African "police" as they came to deport the residents to the Bantustans. It was also the place of my only arrest, for standing guard at the entrance dressed in military uniform with fellow campaigner Martin Bailey, though no charges were brought...¹¹



Engaging with other voices

- What do you notice in the extract from *A Luta Continua* (*The Struggle Continues*)?
- Does anything surprise you?
- David Haslam and his colleagues and church members effectively stood in the 'portico of the temple', challenging the injustices of a system that oppressed women, children and men. What are the tables that need turning in our society and in the world today?

Taking Action

- What actions might you, your group, your church, take in response to scripture and your discussion?

Songs

You might like to sing together, or listen to a recording of one of the following songs:

StF 701 - Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience

StF 699 - God of justice, saviour to all

StF 700 - God weeps



Prayers

Allow a time for open prayer, followed by *The Grace*, or the following *Blessing*.

Generous God, bless each one of us. Bless those we love. Bless the homes we return to.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit, that we might grow deeper in wisdom,
more passionate in faith, and more committed in our loving.

for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Amen.¹²



¹¹ Extract from *A Luta Continua* by David Haslam. Resource Publications, 2016. Used with permission.

¹² 'Prayer of Blessing' (altered) from *The Weaver, the Word and Wisdom* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2007.

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Session Four

NO CONDEMNATION



Lenten Prayer

God who calls us on our journey, as we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness,
help us to cast aside those things that get in the way of hearing your word.
Help us to seek you in the places of bounteous beauty and of barren bleakness.
Help us to seek you in the faces of friends and in the smiles of strangers.
Help our devotion to be made real in the actions of our lives.
When we have looked deep into our own hearts and struggled with who we are,
send angels to minister to us and draw us out from our own wilderness
to fulfil our calling to serve you.
In Christ's name. Amen.¹³

.....

PSALM

Read these verses two or three times slowly, to allow the words to catch the imaginations of those present. You might say them all together or each person read them aloud in turn. Be sensitive to those who find reading aloud challenging and those for whom English is not their first language.

Psalm 107.1-3



14

GOSPEL READING

Read through the passage, then allow a moment's silence. Read the passage again, slowly, invite people to close their eyes and hear the scripture with their imaginations.

John 3.14-21

.....

Engaging with the text

- What image or phrase stood out for you in the reading of the text?
- What surprised you in the text? Perhaps something you had never noticed before or something you thought was there but is not.
- Do Jesus' words remind you of other words in the gospels? If so, which?
- What does it mean for Jesus to be 'lifted up'?

¹³ Prayer - 'In the wilderness' from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005.

¹⁴ 'From Darkness to Light', photo credit: Andy Mackay, via The Worship Cloud. www.theworshipcloud.com

Other Voices

‘Turning the dark on’

Methodist Minister, Revd Catherine Bird, explores in her book *The Divine Heart of Darkness*, how the experience of darkness can lift our spirits, challenge our hearts and minds, and draw us closer into the heart of God.

My love affair with darkness began as a child. I recall a ritual performed by my mother who, every evening, would caringly leave a tea light at my bedside... Whether I had requested it, or whether my mother had simply assumed I would be afraid and brought it spontaneously, I really don't know. I certainly don't recollect that the dark held any particular terror for me. Yet I loved that night light and would wait expectantly for it. Not because the gentle light it shed made me feel safe but rather, I now realise, because it allowed me to see the dark. Not to see in the dark, but to see the dark. Somehow, instinctively, subconsciously I suppose, I recognised in the faint radiance of the small flame that it was the dimness itself which offered the restful, enfolding, reassuring experience, and that the depth of shade offered an ambience to be welcomed, not feared. It was the darkness, made visible by the light, that offered me peace comfort and rest, not the light itself.¹⁵



Engaging with other voices

- What do you notice in the extract?
- Does anything surprise you?
- The writer challenges our assumption that the dark is bad and the light is good – after all – the darkness and the light are both alike to God. How do you respond to this idea?
- What does darkness mean to you? In what ways might our often instinctive fear of ‘the dark’ prevent us from seeing the fullness of God’s love and activity?

Taking Action

- What actions might you, your group, your church, take in response to scripture and your discussion?

Songs

You might like to sing together, or listen to a recording of one of the following songs:

StF 434 - Rock of Ages, cleft for me

StF 345 - And can it be

StF 332 - Lord, I lift your name on high



Prayers

Allow a time for open prayer, followed by The Grace, or the following Blessing.

Generous God, bless each one of us. Bless those we love. Bless the homes we return to.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit, that we might grow deeper in wisdom,
more passionate in faith, and more committed in our loving.
for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Amen.¹⁶



¹⁵ Extract from *The Divine Heart of Darkness* by Catherine Bird. Sacristy Press, 2017. Used with permission.

¹⁶ 'Prayer of Blessing' (altered) from *The Weaver, the Word and Wisdom* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2007.





Session Five

A GRAIN OF WHEAT



Lenten Prayer

God who calls us on our journey, as we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness,
help us to cast aside those things that get in the way of hearing your word.
Help us to seek you in the places of bounteous beauty and of barren bleakness.
Help us to seek you in the faces of friends and in the smiles of strangers.
Help our devotion to be made real in the actions of our lives.
When we have looked deep into our own hearts and struggled with who we are,
send angels to minister to us and draw us out from our own wilderness
to fulfil our calling to serve you.
In Christ's name. Amen.¹⁷

PSALM

Read these verses two or three times slowly, to allow the words to catch the imaginations of those present. You might say them all together or each person read them aloud in turn. Be sensitive to those who find reading aloud challenging and those for whom English is not their first language.

Psalm 51.1-2



18



GOSPEL READING

Read through the passage, then allow a moment's silence. Read the passage again, slowly, invite people to close their eyes and hear the scripture with their imaginations.

John 12.20-33

Engaging with the text

- What image or phrase stood out for you in the reading of the text?
- What surprised you in the text? Perhaps something you had never noticed before or something you thought was there but is not.
- Do Jesus' words remind you of other words in the gospels? If so, which?
- What does it mean to 'serve' Jesus?

¹⁷ Prayer - 'In the wilderness' from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005.

¹⁸ Image: Wheat and Chaff. Photo Credit Alan M Barker via The Worship Cloud
www.theworshipcloud.com

Other Voices

The Least of All Seeds

This poem by Malcolm Guite reflects on Matthew 13.31-32 – another example of a tiny seed making all the difference.

Least of all seeds; a singularity,
complete compression of the infinite,
Still point containing all polarity,
Sown in the field of being by your love.
Simplicity begets the intricate;
A coming cosmos, waiting to explode,
Flings out this whirling world in which we move,
Brings us to birth within our own abode.

So too your kingdom comes: a single seed
Too tiny to be seen, sown in the womb,
And then sown deeper still, to meet our need,
A second sowing in the stone cold tomb.
Till in your spring and growth, alive and free,
You raise us to the branches of your tree.¹⁹



Engaging with other voices

- What do you notice in the poem?
- Does anything surprise you?
- The poet weaves together ideas of birth and death. Where can you see signs of death and new life in your own community?
- How is Jesus' promise of life beyond death good news in the world today?

Taking Action

- What actions might you, your group, your church, take in response to scripture and your discussion?

Songs

You might like to sing together, or listen to a recording of one of the following songs:

StF 271 - Come, wounded healer

StF 272 - From heaven you came

StF 273 - Here hangs a man discarded



Prayers

Allow a time for open prayer, followed by *The Grace*, or the following *Blessing*.

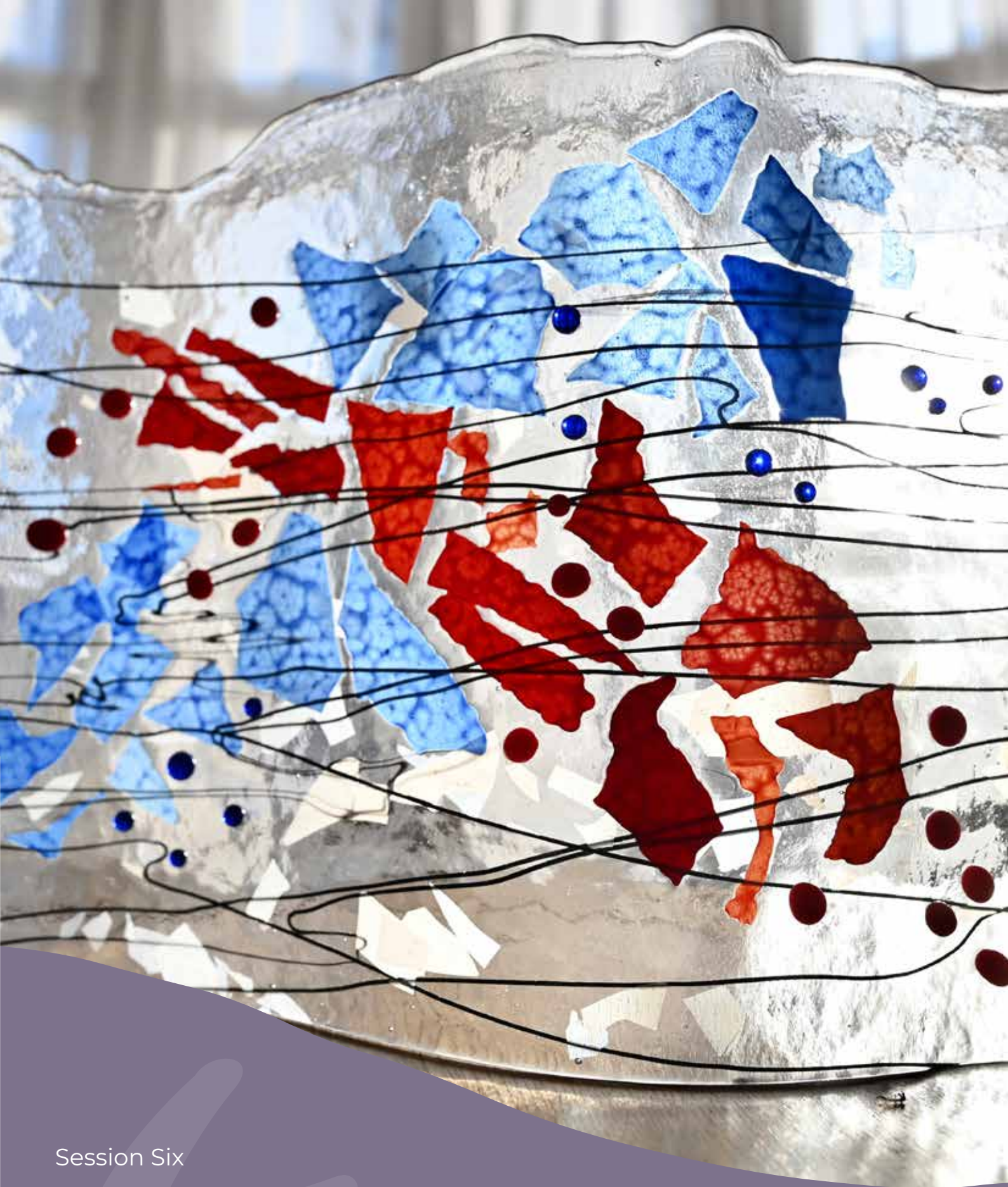
Generous God, bless each one of us. Bless those we love. Bless the homes we return to.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit, that we might grow deeper in wisdom,
more passionate in faith, and more committed in our loving.
for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Amen.²⁰



¹⁹ 'The Least of All Seeds' extract from *Parable and Paradox* by Malcolm Guite. Canterbury Press, 2017. Used with permission.

²⁰ 'Prayer of Blessing' (altered) from *The Weaver, the Word and Wisdom* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2007.





Session Six

PASSION: ANOINTING AND BETRAYAL



Lenten Prayer

God who calls us on our journey, as we remember Jesus' time in the wilderness,
help us to cast aside those things that get in the way of hearing your word.
Help us to seek you in the places of bounteous beauty and of barren bleakness.
Help us to seek you in the faces of friends and in the smiles of strangers.
Help our devotion to be made real in the actions of our lives.
When we have looked deep into our own hearts and struggled with who we are,
send angels to minister to us and draw us out from our own wilderness
to fulfil our calling to serve you.
In Christ's name. Amen.²¹

.....

PSALM

Read these verses two or three times slowly, to allow the words to catch the imaginations of those present. You might say them all together or each person read them aloud in turn. Be sensitive to those who find reading aloud challenging and those for whom English is not their first language.

Psalm 31.14-16



22

GOSPEL READING

Read through the passage, then allow a moment's silence. Read the passage again, slowly, invite people to close their eyes and hear the scripture with their imaginations.

Mark 14.3-11

.....

Engaging with the text

- What image or phrase stood out for you in the reading of the text?
- What surprised you in the text? Perhaps something you had never noticed before or something you thought was there but is not.
- How do you feel when hearing Jesus predict his death?
- The women demonstrated extravagant love for Jesus. How do we show our love of him in our lives and in the world?

²¹ Prayer - 'In the wilderness' from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005
²² Detail from Pietà (Mary holds Christ's body) a study in fused glass by Michaela Youngson.
Photo Credit: Rob Youngson <https://robyoungsonphotography.com>

Other Voices

In Simon's House at Bethany

I pushed past his friends, those who were always with him, ignoring their grunts of displeasure and censure. I knelt down in front of Jesus and banged the jar on the hard floor. It cracked and two perfect halves of alabaster clay opened in my hands. The smell, oh, the smell! It was intoxicating, a perfume so sweet it seemed to smell of the very flowers of heaven. Yet it was not a sickly smell, there was something of musk and earthiness and human love about this ointment. The rushing stopped. My breathing steadied and, in what seemed like slow motion, I stood. I raised the pieces of the jar above his head and allowed the oil to pour over his hair, his neck, his forehead, his shoulders. It seemed to pour on and on, flowing with love and healing and life. Inside myself I felt anointed, liberated, healed and loved, loved beyond all telling.

Jesus sat very still. He received the gift, in all its messiness and all its glory, he accepted it. Jesus received me, accepted me in all my messiness and all my glory. As the last of the ointment dripped like honey from the broken jar, I sank to my knees at his feet. I wept, oh, how I wept. I wept for all the love I had finally understood and for all the love I had never experienced. I wept for Jesus in my knowledge that his journey would soon become one travelled in the dark. I wept with the knowledge that this man was truly God's child and that his presence brought God into my world.²³



Engaging with other voices

- What do you notice in the extract?
- Does anything surprise you?
- The writer offers an intimate view of the events, from the woman's perspective. How is our understanding of any Bible story altered if we see it through the eyes of different characters?
- Try retelling the story of the anointing at Bethany from the point of view of Simon, the woman, Judas, Jesus, an onlooker, even the person who sold the ointment to the woman! What becomes fresh in your understanding?

Taking Action

- What actions might you, your group, your church, take in response to scripture and your discussion?

Songs

You might like to sing together, or listen to a recording of one of the following songs:

- StF 612 - God give us life when all around spells death
- StF 615 - Let love be real, in giving and receiving
- StF 618 - Sacred the body God has created



Prayers

Allow a time for open prayer, followed by The Grace, or the following Blessing.

Generous God, bless each one of us. Bless those we love. Bless the homes we return to.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit, that we might grow deeper in wisdom,
more passionate in faith, and more committed in our loving.
for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Amen²⁴



²³ 'Simon's House at Bethany' extract from *Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005.

²⁴ 'Prayer of Blessing' (altered) from *The Weaver, the Word and Wisdom* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2007.

A decorative background featuring a large, light gray, stylized number '6' that occupies the lower half of the page. Overlaid on this and the rest of the page are several horizontal dotted lines in a dark gray color. There are also some faint, light-colored curved shapes in the background, including a light orange one on the left and a light gray one on the right.

RESOURCE SHEET

Books used in preparing the Course:

- A Luta Continua* by David Haslam. Resource Publications, 2016
- Black Theology* by Anthony G. Reddie. SCM Press, 2012
- Making the Colours Sing* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005
- One Native life* by Richard Wagamese. Douglas & McIntyre, 2008
- Parable and Paradox* by Malcolm Guite. Canterbury Press, 2017
- The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. Penguin, 2007
- The Divine Heart of Darkness* by Catherine Bird. Sacristy Press, 2017
- The Weaver, The Word and Wisdom* by Michaela Youngson. Epworth Press, 2005

Images used in the Course:

- Cover photo, 'Passion in the City' in fused glass and wood, by Michaela and Sandy Youngson
- Baptism of Christ, 1615, Artist: Mesrop of Khizan, Copyright: Creative Commons, <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56064>
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- Detail from Pieta (Mary holds Christ's body) a study in fused glass by Michaela Youngson. Photo Credit: Rob Youngson <https://robyoungsonphotography.com>

Some Ideas for Action

- Church Can** - for more details visit www.allwecan.org.uk and check out the work of our **Global Relationships Team** at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-worldwide/global-relationships/>
- How is the church working for peace and justice?** Check out the work of JPIT, the Joint Public Issues Team at <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk>
- Action for Children** - visit <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk>
- MHA** - visit <https://www.mha.org.uk>
- Food Banks** - various organisations exist. Look online for details in your area
- Contact your MP** - <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-an-mp-or-lord/contact-your-mp/>
- Methodist Way of Life** - Find out more at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/>
- Sharing Good News** - Check out <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/>



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We'd love to hear your comments, feedback or reflections on this course. To submit yours, visit methodistlondon.org.uk/lentcourse2021 or call **020 4526 3857**



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