

Sunday 6th March: Zaccheaus



Read ... Luke 19. 1-10

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

Luke's Gospel tells the story of Zacchaeus, a tax collector who stole and hoarded wealth until an encounter with Jesus transformed him. Not only did he change his dishonest ways and return what didn't belong to him, he also gave away his own wealth to his local community with extravagant generosity. In that radical transformation, had he perhaps had his eyes opened to the needs of the people around him?

Let's Pray ...

Lord Jesus, as we begin our Lenten journey, help us to do as Zacchaeus did, welcoming you into our homes and embracing the transformation your Spirit longs to work in us. Give us courage to make restitution, where greed and selfishness have poisoned our relationships, and open our eyes to the needs of those around us, that we might respond with generosity.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Jesus, you wait for us. Waiting at the roots of a tangled sycamore tree. You know where we hide and you know how tightly we cling to the knotted, gnarled branches, glad to be hidden by the leaves.

And so you wait. Waiting for us to look down; to discover your face looking up.

Today I must stay at your house.

The words jolt us, the unexpected catches us by surprise. And it's then, scrambling down without dignity, that we can begin the journey of a life time; journeying with you. Breaking butterfly-wise from the chrysalis of what we used to think gave shape and meaning to who we were.

Suddenly our hearts are opened and we see our neighbours as if for the first time, with a love that gives without counting the cost. A love which calls us, knows us, and sends us to love the world with openness and generosity, spreading our arms as widely as a sycamore leaf.

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)

Sunday 13th March: Caring for the poor



Read ... Deuteronomy 15. 4-11

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

In this week's Scripture reflection we consider some verses from Deuteronomy which contain instructions to God's people about providing for those living in financial hardship.

The passage begins with the hopeful promise that there need never be any poor people in the land because there will always be more than enough to go round, and ends with the resigned acceptance that there will always be poor people in the land; a recognition perhaps that, left to our own devices, we humans tend to lack the fair-mindedness and generosity to ensure nobody goes without.

God our provider, we give you thanks for what we have, and ask your forgiveness for the times when we hoard our resources out of fear or insecurity. Help us to work for a fairer, kinder world, where those who have more than they need give to those who don't have enough.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Lord, it is so easy to look the other way from another's suffering. We have our own concerns, the calls on our resources are never-ending.

So we cross the street and we look the other way, pretending we never saw the misery of extinguished hope in another's eyes.

We inhabit a desert place where bread is not broken to be shared.

Where the poor huddle beyond the bright pools of light spilling from our windows; the starving children exist hundreds of miles away; the homeless man continues sleeping rough in the rain; the refugee spends all she has on an uncertain channel crossing.

We cannot, by our own strength, bring about lasting change.

But by your strength, O Lord, teach us this day to see with your eyes and to find in the monochromatic darkness of our own perspectives, the shimmer of your life, and in places where we thought there was no hope, surprise us with something more than hope; your gift of joyful generosity.

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)

Sunday 20th March: The widow's mite



Read ... Luke 21. 1-7

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

Today we meet a widow who refused to let poverty, or the fear of it, get in the way of her generosity, giving not out of a surfeit of wealth but a surfeit of love. Dropping her last pennies into the temple treasury must have required enormous trust.

Jesus seems to have known something of her situation so perhaps they'd met. Perhaps seeing him there gave her the courage for risky generosity.

Jesus Christ, when the choice to be generous feels all too risky, help us to lean on you, the one who sees us and knows our need. Gift us the faith to trust you in our letting go.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Jesus, how can a single coin, cradled in the chapped palm of an unnamed woman, come to mean so much? It is so small. Small enough to be lost, discarded, forgotten. A chip of bright silver, its edges rounded smooth like sea-glass tossed by the waves onto the shore.

And yet, in its smallness, its insignificance, it is still noticed by you.

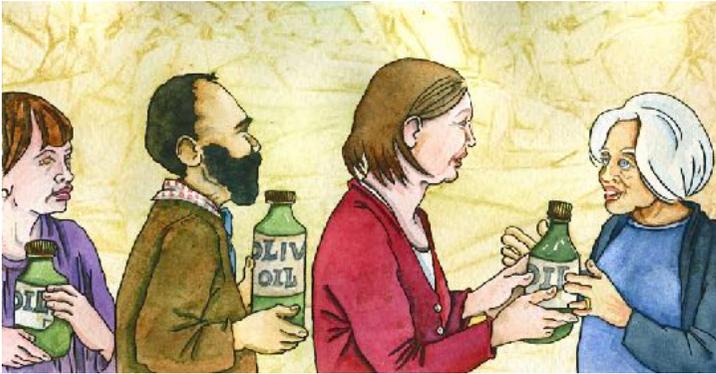
Noticed, held, known, and treasured in your heart. In your eyes, it becomes the pearl without price, the precious gift we all imagine offering you. Carrying that precious disc of silver, the widow chooses to ignore the rationality of the world.

We imagine what it might be like to give lavishly. But few of us dare to match imagination with such anonymous action.

But in her heart, in the deep well of her soul, the radiant waters break free, gushing up to eternal life. And in that moment, she is the wealthiest widow in the kingdom of heaven.

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)

Sunday 27th March: The widow's oil



Read ... 2 Kings 4. 1-7

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

This week's Scripture reflection introduces us to another woman who had lost her husband and now faced crippling debt. There was provision available for her; there was a miraculous outpouring from heaven to meet her need; but she could only access it through the generosity of her neighbours who brought her their empty jars to use.

It may feel as though all we have are empty jars, but in giving them, might we unlock provision and abundance for others?

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of community, of neighbours, friends and colleagues. Teach us to be generous in the sharing of what we have - our time, our energy and our resources - that together we might make room for all that you want to give.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Lord, how often do the demands of others strike us as peculiar or unnecessary. The widow asks her neighbours for their empty oil jars. Perhaps they thought the request was peculiar, but these neighbours are gifted with the willingness to let miracles happen.

So with an exuberant clatter the neighbours arrive, with more jars than necessary.

'Come,' we imagine them calling to each other. 'Come, and offer your empty jars and in return receive the gift of seeing them filled to overflowing!'

It is like the day when a wedding was blest with an unexpected abundance of wine. Wine pouring extravagantly from stone water jars.

It is the sort of miracle that can only happen amidst the ordinary and the mundane. Bread multiplied and broken. Miraculous nets bursting with fish.

'Come,' we too are invited to offer our ordinary lives to you. 'Take our empty, borrowed, cobweb covered oil jars and fill them. Fill them to overflowing!'

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)

Sunday 3rd April: The Good Samaritan



Read ... Luke 10. 25-37

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

A man from Samaria was travelling along a particularly dangerous road when he saw another man who had been robbed and left for dead. They were enemies by virtue of the history between the communities they'd been born into, but the Samaritan doesn't seem to have given that a thought in his haste to be generous.

Lord, forgive us when differentness quenches our generosity; when we are reluctant to reach out to those of a different race, class or religion to us. Confront us with our prejudices. Challenge us over our preconceptions. Grow in us the joy of reaching across cultural divides, to give and receive, to learn and connect.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Jesus, you know how to weave a good story. You know how to catch our attention and to carry the point to its ultimate, astonishing conclusion.

Once you sat in the afternoon sunshine with the shadows dappling your face and you told a story about neighbours.

Broken bones, broken skin, broken faith in the entire human race. A day spent listening to the footsteps of the ones who were supposed to help.

A day spent listening to footsteps passing, passing, passing. Footsteps fading, fading, fading into indifferent silence.

And the eventual, breathless surprise at the one who does approach, who kneels, who lifts, who carries, who offers extravagant care.

And then the question is turned to confront us.

Who are we in the story. What are the choices we will make today, tomorrow, the day after. Will we allow our days to be disrupted by the unexpected need of another?

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)

Sunday 10th April: David and Mephibosheth



Read ... 2 Samuel 9. 1-13

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

King David had just lost Jonathan, his dearest friend, yet his grief didn't close his heart. Instead, that potent combination of love and sorrow overflowed in a longing to show extravagant generosity to someone ... anyone ... who might have mattered to Jonathan.

Spirit of comfort, tend in us the wounds of sorrow and loss. Cleanse us from bitterness and sooth the sting of disappointment with the balm of hope. As we journey through grief together, may we find new wellsprings of love opening up within us and overflowing in compassionate generosity.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Lord, you call us to care.

To care, even when our hearts are breaking with grief.

Even when we stand on the very brink of the valley of the shadow of death

You wait and you watch, on the high ground of our lives, at the fringes, in the unexpected deep-down places, and you offer us the strength to reach out from our own sorrow to find another who weeps.

In simple broken bread, a banquet is shared. A gift is given and received. We learn afresh what it means to reach out across the chasm.

Sometimes it takes us time to let go, time to turn back against the rushing tide of our lives, to see the need we can help to fill.

Call us to take the time.

To see in the eyes of the other your unmeasurable gift.

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)

The Alabaster Jar



Read ... John 12. 1-8

Look ... at the picture, noticing what catches your attention

Reflect ...

In Jesus' time, a jar of pure nard would have been so costly that it would probably have been the family heirloom. Irreplaceable. The guarantee against crisis and poverty for decades to come. Yet love is a powerful force which always spills over in generosity. When we love deeply, we cannot help but want to give and give, never counting the cost.

Jesus, you gave yourself completely, for love of the Father and for love of the whole of creation. Forgive us when indifference dulls our compassion; when cynicism quenches our kindness; when selfishness stifles our care. Kindle in us that kind of love which can't help but give the best we have, to you and to one another.

(Reflection and Prayer written by Lyndall Bywater - Diocesan Changing Lives Prayer Network Co-ordinator)

Jesus, we dare to offer you the one gift we have, offering it with lavish abandon.

We come in our vulnerability, we come in openness of heart. We come with our gift cupped in our two hands.

We come because we dare to walk with you. Because we want to journey with you.

To watch, to weep, to wait and to hope with you.

We have failed so often. Life has hurt and broken us. We kneel at your feet. Jesus, dip us into the mystery of turning to find you.

In the cool of the morning and on the first day of the week, we want to hear you call our name.

Transform our understanding, so that we, your fragile earthen vessels, can bear the beauty of the breaking and hold in our brokenness the gift of life, life in all its fullness.

(Reflection & Image by Primrose Northrop)