

Lent 2021

Making space for reflection

In the last 12 months we have absorbed and adjusted to a lot of new experiences and challenges. Many of us have upskilled, particularly with areas of technology that help us to be in touch remotely, and many of us have found the constant demand of adapting exhausting. This Lent I am inviting you to take some time each week to reflect, to process some of the events and developments of the last year, to notice God at work through these times and to connect some of that experience with the Bible and the deep questions of faith. I hope that you will find this time helpful, refreshing and that it will deepen your discipleship as we continue our journey as people of hope through these turbulent times.

Michael Nich

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Introduction

Each week is laid out in the same way, beginning with a very brief introduction to the topic, some suggested Bible passages, questions to prompt reflection and further resources should you wish to continue engaging with the topic.

The material can be used by individuals or in groups online. If you are gathering virtually to talk about your reflections, you may want to establish a pattern of meeting that gives everyone chance to speak, or to break into smaller groups if there are a large number. It is worth thinking about some ground rules for your gatherings, particularly as discussion online can feel quite different to in-person meetings. This may be especially important for the more sensitive subjects. There are some helpful principles for living well together – and talking well together – at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/PAG-PP-website.pdf>

Bible Passages

Each week there are several suggested passages that may help you make connections with the topic that is being reflected on. You may only want to look at one passage or reflect on all of them; other passages may also come to mind, do use those as well. Read around the suggested passages a little bit, particularly if they don't seem familiar, so that you can see the context in which they come in the particular chapter and book.

Questions for Reflection

The questions included do not have right or wrong answers! They are designed to encourage you to notice your responses to the topic and to pay attention to God as you reflect on this area. Neither are they the only useful questions you might ask; you may well have other questions that seem more helpful to you - if so do explore those. One of the aims of the questions is to help explore the topic in the light of Scripture and to make space to notice where God is at work, and how God might be speaking to us today.

Further Resources

There are lots of resources available on all of the topics included in these Lent reflections, we have included some links to help you get started with further exploration.

Week One: Belonging in Community

If you had drawn a diagram at the beginning of 2020 of the communities you are part of, how those communities gather and what they mean to you, it would no doubt be at least a bit different to the one you would draw today, at the start of Lent 2021. For many people new communities have formed during the past year with support networks forming in local areas, less opportunity to see friends and family and the limited ways in which we have been able to gather physically as church.

Suggested Bible Passages to reflect on:

- Exodus 20.1-17
- Ruth 1 (or the whole book!)
- Mark 14.22-25
- Luke 15.11-32
- Acts 2.43-47
- Romans 12.1-13 (or 1-22)

Questions for reflection:

How does thinking about questions of belonging make you feel? Why do you think that is?

Where are you still part of local rather than networked communities? To what extent do you interact with people who you haven't chosen to form friendships with?

What are the big themes at the heart of this issue? How does the Bible speak to you about those themes?

What is the key question or challenge for you? How does the Bible help you form the question and explore some responses to it?

Further resources:

- How have communities responded to Covid: <https://publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/01/the-community-response-to-coronavirus-covid-19/>
- Volunteering during lockdown: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer/volunteering-coronavirus>

Week two: Connecting in a Digital World

Since the first lockdown in March 2020 many of us have become reliant on the online world for work, worship, socialising, even for shopping and entertainment. This has changed how we connect with others and of course it has excluded some who do not or cannot use technology in this way. This week you are invited to think on the quality of relationship that is formed through these online platforms, and how the move towards a digital world has felt for you won connection with God and with others.

Suggested Bible Passages to reflect on:

- Genesis 1:26-7
- Isaiah 61:1-3
- Ruth 2:14-20
- Matthew 18:20
- Hebrews 10:23-25
- Philippians 4:4-9

Questions for reflection:

How does thinking about questions of virtual connection make you feel? Why do you think that is?

What do you think has been gained, and what has been lost?

What are the big themes at the heart of this issue? How does the Bible speak to you about those themes?

What is the key question or challenge for you? How does the Bible help you form the question and explore some responses to it?

Further resources:

- <https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/online-worship-and-resources/>
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/church-england-digital-labs>

Week Three: The 'new normal'

During the summer of 2020 many people started to talk about the 'new normal' – what life would be like as we emerged out of the pandemic. As we went back into lockdown and faced the winter, this conversation lost some of its energy. However, it is a reality that things have changed during the last year and we have the opportunity to make some choices about which changes we build on, and which we abandon. The diocese is responding to this opportunity with a programme called Shaping for Mission, thinking about how we intentionally shape the church for sustainable mission in a changed and changing world.

Suggested Bible Passages to reflect on:

- Isaiah 43: 16 – 21
- Lamentations 3:1-33
- Luke 10:1-23
- Acts 6:1-8
- 2 Corinthians 5: 16 - 21

Questions for reflection:

How does thinking about the future and a 'new normal' make you feel? Why do you think that is?

What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the church at this time?

What are the big themes at the heart of this issue? How does the Bible speak to you about those themes?

What is the key question or challenge for you? How does the Bible help you form the question and explore some responses to it?

Further resources:

- Information about the Shaping for Mission programme can be found at <https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/shaping-for-mission/>
- The international organisation More in Common report called 'The New Normal?' looking at the impact on society of Covid-19 across 7 countries and based on surveying over 14000 people. <https://www.moreincommon.com/newnormal/>
- Article: 'What shape might the church need to take in a (post) Covid-19 world?' by Revd Dr Julie Gittoes is available at: <https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/what-shape-might-the-church-need-to-take-in-a-post-covid-19-world/>
- LICC a running online training on 'Leading a Church in a Post-Covid Frontline Landscape', details at: <https://licc.org.uk/events/leading-in-a-post-covid-landscape/>

Week Four: Racial Justice

The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 drew attention to the reality of racial injustice in America and prompted a wave of black lives matters protests across the world. Closer to home, the toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in Bristol itself caused a wide range of responses. Much of the coverage and conversation of these events and their aftermath was highly charged and raise many issues of value, justice, identity, prejudice and questions about the way society is structured.

Suggested Bible Passages to reflect on:

- Genesis 1.27
- Micah 6.8
- Galatians 3.28
- James 2.1
- Revelation 7.9

Questions for reflection:

How does thinking about questions of racial justice make you feel? Why do you think that is?

What are the big themes at the heart of this issue? How does the Bible speak to you about those themes?

What is the key question or challenge for you? How does the Bible help you form the question and explore some responses to it?

Further resources:

Diocese of Lichfield

- The Ministry Shift Extra 05 – Black Lives Matter
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHXMJcX5jVk>
- The Ministry Shift extra - Episode x07: Black Lives Matter #2
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=danW-Y1bA3U>
- A Short Thought on Racism, Revd Jim Trood
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggM0S1fXjfs>
- A Short Thought on Racism, Wayne - St Matthew Walsall
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6GBHpsOWJU>

Other:

- Churches Charter for Racial Justice <https://www.birminghamchurches.org.uk/churches-charter-for-racial-justice/>
- [Prayers and Reflections on Racial Justice \(compiled June 2020\)](https://derby.anglican.org/our-mission/download)
[https://derby.anglican.org > our-mission > download](https://derby.anglican.org/our-mission/download)
- The Race Equality Code <http://www.theracecode.org/>
- <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/white-privilege-guide-for-parents>

- <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/blog/how-systemic-racism-affects-young-people-uk>
- <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/04/ftse-100-companies-lack-ethnic-diversity-on-boards-report-claims.html>
- (Podcast) Azariah France-Williams & Natalia Nana – Black Aliens and White Allies (N235) <https://www.nomadpodcast.co.uk/nomad-podcast/>
- (Video) The Bible and Resisting Racism https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daBDHD-vA_w
- (Video) Black and British A Forgotten History Season 1 Episode 2 Freedom - David Olusoga <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tjq1X3TZ02U>
- (Video) Raising Awareness Video - Church of England Evangelical Council <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiUb57Fytog>

Books

- Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church, A.D.A France-Williams
- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism, Robin DiAngelo
- Need to Talk About Race: Ben Lindsay

Week Five: Living in Love and Faith

Living in Love and Faith (LLF) is a set of resources from the Church of England to encourage and enable conversations about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. The resources are intended to help people study and pray together and to think about some of the issues surrounding questions of identity, sexuality, relationship and marriage, which many people regard as the most contentious and divisive issues in the Anglican Communion today.

Suggested Bible Passages to reflect on:

- Genesis 2:18-25
- Ruth 1
- 1 Corinthians 13:
- Galatians 3: 26-29
- 1 Peter 4:7-11

Questions for reflection:

How does thinking about questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage make you feel? Why do you think that is?

What are the big themes at the heart of this issue? How does the Bible speak to you about those themes?

What is the key question or challenge for you? How does the Bible help you form the question and explore some responses to it?

Further resources:

A wide range of further resources can be found at churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith

If you'd like to discuss how your church could explore Living in Love and Faith further, including the five-week LLF video course, please email diocesan LLF Advocate Pete Bate: pete.bate@lichfield.anglican.org

Week Six: Climate Crisis

Scientists have known for a considerable amount of time that humans have been doing irreparable damage to the environment. In 2019 the UK, along with many others declared a state of Climate Change emergency. The lockdown of 2020 enforced many lifestyle changes that had a positive impact on the environment and for some people was a space in which they re-evaluated their own lifestyle choices. Christians have a particular duty to the care of creation, as expressed in the Anglican Communion's five marks of mission:

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

Suggested Bible Passages to reflect on:

- Leviticus 25:2-5 & 23
- Leviticus 19:9-10
- Leviticus 26:3-4
- Isaiah 24:4-6
- Romans 8:19-23
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
- Colossians 1:15-17

Questions for reflection:

How does thinking about questions of environment, climate change and the impact on creation make you feel? Why do you think that is?

What are the big themes at the heart of this issue? How does the Bible speak to you about those themes?

What is the key question or challenge for you? How does the Bible help you form the question and explore some responses to it?

Further resources:

- <https://greenchristian.org.uk/>
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change>
- <https://operationnoah.org/>
- <https://arocha.org.uk/>
- Riders on the Storm: The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being, by Alastair McIntosh (2020) Birlinn
- Saying Yes to Life, by Ruth Valerio, (2019) SPCK
- Planet Wise, by Dave Bookless, (2008) IVP