

# Lent 2023

Daily Bible readings,  
meditations and prayers  
22 February – 9 April 2023





# Contents

Introduction	2
Foreword	3
Ash Wednesday	5
First Sunday in Lent: Scripture	9
Second Sunday in Lent: Psalm 23	16
Third Sunday in Lent: The Early Psalms	23
Fourth Sunday in Lent: Proverbs	30
Fifth Sunday in Lent: Suffering	37
Holy Week	44
Easter Day	51

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St Columba's Church of Scotland,  
Pont Street, London  
Linked with St Andrew's, Newcastle



Crown Court  
Church of Scotland,  
Covent Garden, London

## Introduction to Lent 2023

The days of Lent are set aside as pilgrimage and preparation for our eventual embrace and celebration of Easter. They echo Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Lent might be thought of as a "treasure hunt," granting opportunity to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection; perhaps a time to reassess and reorder what is important. Jesus' hard road to the Cross, symbolised by our journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter, is reminder and inspiration. We hope the daily scripture, thought and prayer provided here will nourish your spirit as you travel the season. Particularly if currently enduring your own "hard road", or that of a loved one, we hope you will find strength and encouragement.

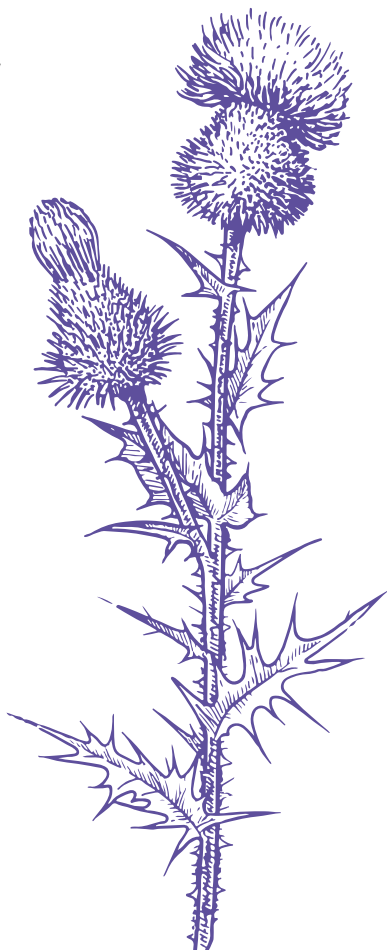
We are very grateful that Andrew Anderson has prepared these daily meditations, drawing on the wisdoms of many years of ministry. The book is offered on behalf of three Church of Scotland congregations - Crown Court, London and St Columba's, Pont Street linked with St Andrew's, Newcastle - that share geography (London) and association (Newcastle.) The book is a gift, and you are encouraged to share it freely with friends, family or neighbours. It is both to sustain you and to act as a bridge to others.

May this Lent be a time of precious discovery, however hard your road.

God of all seasons,  
in your pattern of things  
there is a time for keeping  
and a time for losing,  
a time for building up  
and a time for pulling down.  
In this holy season of Lent,  
as we journey with our Lord to the cross,  
help us to discern in our lives  
what we must lay down  
and what we must take up;  
what we must end  
and what we must begin.  
Give us grace to lead a disciplined life,  
in glad obedience  
and with the joy which comes  
from a closer walk with Christ. Amen.  
*(Common Worship)*

**Revd Scott Rennie**  
**Minister, Crown Court**

**Revd Angus MacLeod &**  
**Revd William McLaren,**  
**Minister & Associate Minister,**  
**St Columba's, Pont Street**



# Foreword

I am greatly honoured to have been asked to prepare these readings, meditations and prayers for the Churches of Scotland in London: St Columba's, Knightsbridge, Crown Court, Covent Garden, and St Andrew's, Church of Scotland in Newcastle. I hope they will prove useful and be an encouragement to many in these churches and beyond.

I have prepared this material with two kinds of people in mind. First, it is for those who are leading very busy and demanding lives, but who would like to have the opportunity each day for a short time of prayer. Secondly, it is for those who find prayer difficult, and who want a simple plan to encourage them, and help them start.

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, and going through to Easter Day, there is a separate page for each of the days made up of a short reading from the Bible, a meditation, and a prayer.

Although these are grouped together under a different subject for each of the weeks of Lent, each day centres on one thought and stands on its own. It can be read quite quickly, but can be augmented by suggested further reading, and the reader can add to the prayer in their own words.

My hope is that these readings, meditations and prayers will prove to be a rich blessing as we prepare to celebrate Easter. May we in the churches strengthen our commitment to follow the risen Jesus Christ, and to work for his worldwide kingdom of justice, peace, and righteousness.

**Andrew Anderson**, Oxford, January 2023

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*Andrew and his wife, Hazel, were members of St Columba's Church from 1971 until 1977, when Andrew went to New College, University of Edinburgh, to train for the ministry. He was ordained and inducted in 1981 to Greenside Parish Church, Edinburgh, where he served for 30 years before retiring to Oxford in 2012. In recent years, he has conducted services and preached on a number of occasions at St Columba's. He is a member of the Presbytery of England and the Channel Islands.*

# Ash Wednesday, 22 February

## Jesus is Tempted

***Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1.)***

Today is Ash Wednesday, and it marks the start of the season of Lent, widely observed across the Christian Church. For the next 40 days we will remember that the Gospels record how Jesus began his ministry by fasting 40 days in the desert. This was a time when he was tempted by the devil, and his resistance, and response, to these temptations prepared him for his coming ministry.

The word Lent comes from an old English word meaning “lengthen”, marking the lengthening of the spring days. Lent ends at Easter, the greatest Christian festival. We will look at the crucifixion on Good Friday, and the resurrection on Easter Day. These are the central events of our faith that enable us to celebrate the promise of Jesus’ victory over death, sin, and the devil, and our hope of eternal life.

Many people use Lent as a time of self-discipline: to pray, to fast, to read the Bible (and maybe other Christian books). May we take time each day to prepare ourselves to receive again — or for the first time! — the Good News of Jesus Christ.

***Almighty God, as we start this season of Lent help each one of us to use this time to pray, fast, and read about Jesus so that we may see him afresh as the Saviour who died for us, the Lord and Master whom we follow in faithful obedience, and the Friend in whom we trust, Amen.***

Further reading: Matthew 4:1-11

# Thursday, 23 February

## The First Temptation

*The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:3,4.)*

The Christian faith is a most materialistic faith: it takes material things seriously. In his ministry Jesus turned water into wine and fed the hungry with bread and fish. We have recently celebrated Christmas, acknowledging that Jesus is God's Word made flesh. The Church is obedient to its calling when we make it a priority to see that the material needs of others are properly met.

But here, in the first of the devil's three temptations, Jesus rebukes the devil by reminding him of the importance of Scripture, and the necessity of putting God's Word, his teaching, first before anything else.

We do indeed live in a material world, and need to take good care of it, and share its generous provision with others. We can do that best when God's Word, the Bible, is read, studied and understood, and we live accordingly.

Will we commit ourselves to that?

*O Lord and Father, guide me by your Holy Spirit as I read your Word, the Bible, to understand and rejoice in the truth you reveal to me there. And bless with all necessary resources the work of the Bible Societies and the Bible translators who labour to make your truth known to all peoples everywhere. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Further reading: Matthew 4:1-11



# Friday, 24 February

## The Second Temptation

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down..." Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:6,7.)*

In the second of his temptations the devil here tempts Jesus to perform a spectacular trick, to jump from the roof of the Jerusalem temple and thereby to cause the angels to come and save him from harm. People would surely follow someone who could give such a wonderful sign!

In his ministry Jesus did indeed perform signs and wonders, and people became his followers. But — look closely at the accounts in the Gospels — often Jesus power is restrained, and relatively few witness his miracles.

What Jesus wants us to see is not primarily his power to perform miracles, but his love and compassion towards people in their needs, the sick, the hungry, the poor, the ignorant. And he wants us, as we have the opportunity and the means, to follow his example.

*Dear Lord Jesus, direct us to see in your divine teaching and healing ministry not so much your power as your love and care towards those in need. Open our eyes to what we can do for those around us, in our communities, churches and in the world, and so let others see you in us, and be drawn to you for themselves. In your precious Name, Amen.*

Further reading: Matthew 4:1-11

# Saturday, 25 February

## The Third Temptation

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"*  
(Matthew 4:8-10.)

In this third temptation the devil, Satan, tempts Jesus to worship him, in return for which Jesus will be given the whole world.

Let's be honest with ourselves: this speaks to us! Often what tempts us is wealth, power, status, fame and influence, worldly reputation and achievement. These can easily become the chief motives for how we live.

In themselves these may be good. But, as in so much of our Christian lives, there is something better, and more important: our love for, and worship of, God our Heavenly Father and Creator. Jesus calls us, in all humility, to turn daily, weekly, to our Heavenly Father, and to seek to give him through praise and prayer the glory and honour of which he alone is worthy.

Only after that do we go out to serve others in his Name.

*O great triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank you for your Church, here and across the world, and we thank you for the lives and witness of those we love still but whom you have drawn into your nearer presence. Help us to worship you with equal faithfulness, to make a priority of that worship, and to serve you gladly, without counting the cost. Amen.*

Further reading: Hebrews 2:10-18

# First Sunday in Lent, 26 February

## This Week: Scripture

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.  
(Psalm 119:105.)*

This week we will look at Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God. We will see what it says about itself, and what it says about how Christians should use it.

This verse from the Psalms is one of the most famous and oft-quoted verses, simply and vividly teaching us both about the divine authority of the Bible, and the profoundly good effect it can have upon us.

We can trust that the Bible is God's own word to us, God speaking to us. Countless times, particularly in the Old Testament, we read, "And the LORD said..." That's right! What we read is God himself speaking to us through human words on the printed page.

If we accept this, then it floods our lives with light, as a lamp illuminates our path on a dark night. We know how we should live.

*Almighty God and Lord, thank you that you have not left us in darkness but have given us the light of your Word in Scripture. As we seek to serve others in Jesus' Name, illuminate our path that we may think, say, and do what is pleasing to you. We pray for your blessing on Scripture and Christian Union groups in our schools, colleges and universities, that they may be channels of your divine light in our world. In Christ's Name, Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 119:105-112

# Monday, 27 February

## The Maker's Instructions

*Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so you may be careful to do everything written in it. (Joshua 1:7,8.)*

Early on in their story, God's chosen people, the ancient Israelites, after they had escaped from slavery in Egypt and wandered for years in the desert, were led by Moses to the Promised Land. The leadership passes to Joshua, and, before he and the people cross the river Jordan into the new land, God gives them clear instructions.

They are to obey the commands that God gave through Moses, referred to here, as in so many places, as "the law". If they are to enjoy success and lead good and fruitful lives, then they must be obedient and do what God says. They are to think about and meditate on what God has said constantly.

We too are called to read the Word of God regularly, and to meditate on it constantly.

*Loving Father, help me regularly and diligently to study the Bible. May I understand more of how you want me to live, upholding the principles of justice and equality for all, and care and compassion for those in need. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Further reading: Joshua 1:1-9

# Tuesday, 28 February

## Joy and Delight

*But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2.) They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. (Psalm 19:10.)*

Right from the start the Bible teaches us not just to take it seriously, but to accept it as God's own Word, God himself speaking to us. It therefore comes with divine authority. We might say it is "the Maker's instructions".

But it should not be a chore, some kind of necessary but dull duty. Reading, studying the word of God should be, and can be, a joy, a delight, something that brings us not just guidance and encouragement, but real pleasure.

In Psalm 19 (above) the Word of God, the law of the Lord, is infinitely special and precious, to be valued even more than gold, and sweeter, and to be savoured, even more than honey.

That can be our experience too! Who wouldn't want that?

*Loving Lord Jesus, help me to discover the pleasure there is in studying and learning about your teaching and commands. May our public life be informed by biblical truth, for the good of all. Raise up women and men in government, in the professions, and in business and industry who respect and uphold your law, and so bring our nation joy and blessing. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 19:7-11

# Wednesday, 1 March

## God's Promise

*"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."  
(Jeremiah 31:33.)*

This week we have been looking at Scripture, the Bible, which should play a central part in the lives of Christian believers. This is particularly so for us in the Kirk, the Church of Scotland, as part of the family of Reformed Churches. The sermon, in which the Word of God is read and taught, is central to our worship.

We have seen that Scripture, the Word, or often the "law", of God should be rightly understood as God speaking to us, through human writers, but with godly, divine intent. We are commanded to take it seriously, and to obey it. It can be, and should be, a delight and a pleasure to us.

In today's verse, from the prophet Jeremiah, we see how God's law was entirely fundamental to the people of the Old Testament. It was a sign of the promise (covenant) that God had made with them: they were his people, and he was their God.

*O God, grant your Holy Spirit to our churches that our ministers may faithfully preach your word, and your people respond in obedience, trusting your promise to be their God. Bless our university faculties, our Bible colleges, and our seminaries that men and women may be trained in their turn to be faithful teachers. Amen.*

Further reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

# Thursday, 2 March

## Trusting Jesus

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Luke 24:27.)*

During this season of Lent, we are preparing for Easter, with its glorious and confident proclamation of salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

The Gospels record several appearances of Jesus after he was raised from the dead. In one of them, Jesus appears to two of his disciples while they are walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. At first, they don't recognise him. But then he reveals himself to them, and explains how his coming as the Messiah, the Christ, and his sufferings and death, were all foreseen and prophesied in the writings of the Old Testament.

This is a remarkable example of how Jesus himself viewed, and used, Scripture. We see here that for him it carried divine authority, and could be trusted to show us God's will and saving purposes.

*Dear Lord Jesus, we thank and praise you for the wonderful revelation of yourself to us, witnessed in Scripture. Give us opportunities to witness to others, our families, friends, neighbours and workmates. May they see something in us that draws them to you. May they find in you their Saviour, and Master, and Friend. In your name, Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 24:13-35

# Friday, 3 March

## The Spirit's Work

*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

*(2 Peter 1:20, 21.)*

We have seen this week that, though written through human agents, the Bible can be rightly understood as originating with God himself. He is its divine author. That's why we should take it with the utmost seriousness.

In these verses in Peter's Second Letter, particular emphasis is made of the part and place of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.

It is the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity, who writes Scripture. Therefore, when we read and study Scripture, the Bible, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us understand it, to interpret it correctly, and to apply it properly in our daily lives.

We need a teacher to teach us what the Bible is all about. We have one: he is the Holy Spirit.

*Holy Spirit, today I pray for the national mission of our churches, striving to bring the Gospel to every part of public life. May those Christians working in broadcasting, publishing, in the social media, in sport and entertainment, be alert to you and your gentle persuasion, so that truth, righteousness, justice and peace may increasingly prevail. Amen.*

Further reading: 2 Peter 1:12-21



# Saturday, 4 March

## True Inspiration

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16,17.)*

In the Bible the word for Spirit is sometimes translated as "breath".

We can properly think, therefore, of the Spirit of God as his breath. In the work of his Holy Spirit, God inspires this work by and with his breath, breathing into it his own life.

No wonder, then, that the early Church preached this high view of the origin and authority of the Bible. In the life of the Church, the Bible is truly inspired, and so can be trusted to instruct, train and discipline us as we grow in our Christian lives.

The great early church Father, St Augustine, had a simple, but profound, prayer: "Lord, change the world, and begin with me." If this is what we want, let Scripture be our inspired teacher.

*Almighty God, help me to understand better your Scriptures, and to accept their inspiration. May I see how the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, was foreseen by the prophets of the Old Testament. May I trust entirely in his saving and atoning work on the cross. May I experience for myself his new, risen life. Amen*

Further reading: 2 Timothy 3:10-4.8

# Second Sunday in Lent, 5 March

## This Week: Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (Psalm 23:1.)*

The 23rd Psalm must be the best-loved of all the Psalms. For countless people, Christian believers and others, these familiar words have brought comfort and assurance, in times of joy as well as times of distress and loss. We will look at this Psalm this week.

The simple truth declared here is that God, the Lord, is our shepherd, and we are his sheep. In the loving-kindness of God towards us, in his concern to remain near us, and to watch over us, to provide for us and guide us, we see and experience for ourselves how we are blessed as we trust him completely, through good times and bad.

In Bible times sheep, in small groups and large flocks, were a common sight. So were shepherds. The care of a good shepherd for his sheep was noticed and appreciated. How strange, but beautiful, that our God should show himself in this way to us!

We are never alone, and, in faith, we can know for certain that God is with us. We want for nothing.

*Lord, and Heavenly Father, thank you so much for all your goodness to me across the years: the good things that you have given me through my home and family, through my friends, through work done and duties fulfilled, in times of rest, and in health and strength. Truly I want for nothing! Help me, ever grateful for these things, to be channels of your good gifts to others. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 23

# Monday, 6 March

## The Shepherd's Work

*He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. (Psalm 23:2,3.)*

In the 23rd Psalm God, our Heavenly Father, reveals himself to us in the tenderness and care of a loving shepherd for his sheep. He shows us that in him we want for nothing.

In the heat and dryness of ancient Palestine it was not easy to find grass and refreshing water for the sheep. But that's just what a good shepherd did. The sheep would struggle to find food and water for themselves, but the shepherd led them to it, and so provided the sheep with what they needed.

We live in challenging and uncertain times, and we need good leadership in our families, communities, businesses, schools, churches, nations. Here in this Psalm we have the good leadership of a loving shepherd, expressed in a servant-heartedness that is a model for the leadership we need.

*Father God, we pray for our leaders and all set in authority over us. We pray for our King and the royal family, for the governments in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, and for their elected representatives. We pray for our leaders in business and the professions, in teaching and education, in broadcasting and social media. May all called to lead seek, in all humility, the peace, unity and good of our nations and our communities. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 23

# Tuesday, 7 March

## The Lost Sheep

*He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
(Psalm 23:3.)*

The book of Psalms is the songbook of the Old Testament. Many scholars accept that Psalm 23 was written by Israel's great King David. David, as a boy, had been the shepherd for his family's sheep. He knew at first hand what caring about your sheep involved. He knew what he was talking about.

He knew that sheep are not really very clever: they can easily get lost, or stuck somewhere; they follow each other into dangerous places. Not unlike us!

Good guidance is precious, we know that. How often, facing a confusing or difficult situation, and needing to make a decision, we search for something, or someone, who will guide us to decide wisely, set us on the right path. We want a reliable authority, and we need good advice.

We have exactly that: in the Bible, in God's Word, we have our maker's instructions. How many testify that, in following our Scriptures, they find blessing indeed, for themselves and those around them.

*Loving Father in heaven, I pray that your Holy Spirit would come upon me afresh to open my eyes and my heart to the wonders of Scripture, the Bible, and to the righteousness that comes from obedience to what you teach. Give me a new hunger and thirst for your truth, and the joy of seeing this touching me in all I say and do, for my own blessing and the blessing of those around me. Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 15:1-7

# Wednesday, 8 March

## Comfort in Sorrow

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4.)*

There are few experiences in life more testing and demanding than bereavement, the loss through the death of someone close and precious to us. It is something hard, even impossible, for us to prepare for. But we are not without help.

The words of our text today have proved a mighty help and comfort to many in times of sadness and distress.

They give us the fine picture of a good and loving shepherd, caring for his sheep, protecting them from harm, and leading them through often difficult circumstances, even into and through “the valley of the shadow of death.”

Grief and sorrow are hard to bear, and can be destructive. Yet the Lord, our loving God, guards and protect us with the rod and staff of the shepherd in his hand. We are not alone!

*Lord Jesus Christ, you are our good Shepherd, and in you we lack for nothing. Be especially close today to all who mourn the death of someone dear to them, whether recently, or long ago. In the darkness of their distress be a light of comfort, and in their bewilderment and loss be a sure and certain hope. In your precious Name, Amen.*

Further reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16

# Thursday, 9 March

## God's Generosity

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (Psalm 23:5.)*

So far this lovely psalm, Psalm 23, has given us the picture of God, the Lord, as a loving shepherd, caring for his sheep. Now the picture changes to God as a perfect and hospitable host, inviting us as his guests to the feast he has so generously prepared.

Who are "my enemies" who have to sit and watch us? Scholarly opinions vary. But, perhaps, they are our inner sins: selfishness, pride, ignorance, prejudice.

In other words, God in his free grace gives us out of his abundant and unconditional goodness, undeserving sinners as we are, such good things as pass our understanding. He anoints us as a mark of his welcome, and his generosity is so great that the cup he fills for us overflows!

Isn't this a picture of the forgiveness and new life God longs to give us in Christ?

***O Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit, in the story of Jesus you have given us the good news of the Gospel, our sins forgiven and our world renewed. May the abundance and generosity of your love for the world become more and more evident in the establishment of peace, security and justice for all peoples everywhere. May your Church strive for this in every place. Amen.***

Further reading: Malachi 3:6-12

# Friday, 10 March

## The Blessings of God's House

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:6.)*

As we grow older and the years pass, we can look back and see something of the rich history of our lives, a mixture of the good, and the bad.

Here, in this most precious verse, the Psalmist looks forward and sees his life as supremely blessed by God, blessed by the sheer goodness and loving-kindness of God constantly surrounding him. There is a line from a favourite, old hymn:

“Count your blessings, count them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”

We too should be thankful, aware of the abundant grace of God, and the unsearchable riches of Christ, always there for us.

Best of all, as with the Psalmist here, we may know the eternal comfort and security of being amongst the Lord's own people, his Church, for all its imperfections.

*Holy Spirit, I pray today that you would bless your Church, the church to which I belong, the churches of our nation, and the churches across the world. May they be faithful to their commission to go to all the world with the good news of Jesus. May this good news bring life and health, justice and peace, to more and more people, and may many be brought to confess Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 15

# Saturday, 11 March

## The Good Shepherd

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11.)*

This past week we have been looking at the 23rd Psalm in which the Psalmist, King David, gives us the beautiful and intimate picture of God as a loving shepherd, deeply committed to the welfare of his sheep.

In the New Testament, in John's gospel, Jesus takes this revelation of God and, astonishingly, applies it to himself: I am the good shepherd. The teaching is clear: the care, kindness, protection and provision of God, the Divine Shepherd, is exactly what we, turning to and trusting in Jesus, are promised.

And, more, this good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, pointing to the Easter story of the cross and resurrection.

In the death of Jesus we come to the heart of his saving work for us: he receives our punishment, and we go free, free to worship and serve him in the service we give to others. That's why he came, and how much he loves us.

*Father God, our Father, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as I continue through this season of Lent, may there be times, many times, when I can look forward to Easter, and rejoice in the Good Shepherd, Jesus, who laid down his life for me, one of his sheep. May that confession help me to become like him in the service I give to others. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Further reading: John 10:1-21



# Third Sunday in Lent, 12 March

## This Week: the Early Psalms

*For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1:6.)*

Last week we looked at the 23rd Psalm. This week we will stay in the Book of Psalms, and look at some verses from the early Psalms.

The Psalms are the songs of the Old Testament temple in Jerusalem. They bring us close to the worship of God's ancient people. They are a wonderful resource for us, with their profound insight into how we live before God.

Psalm 1 shows us clearly that we have a choice in how we live. We can decide to lead good and fruitful lives. Or we can decide to lead wicked lives, away from God. Every day we make lots of decisions, great and small, about what we say, what we do, and how we relate to others.

Will today see us deciding for goodness and righteousness, or not?

*Dear God, help me today to choose the right words, do the right things, and to love in the right way all those I encounter at home, at church, and wherever I may be, that my day may be spent in a way pleasing and honouring to you, and loving and supportive of others. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 1

# Monday, 13 March

## The Night Sky

*What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? (Psalm 8:4.)*

The Psalms are associated with King David, the greatest of the Old Testament kings, and the ancestor and forerunner of Jesus.

In Psalm 8 David contemplates the glory and vastness of the night sky with the moon and all the stars, and he is struck with this thought: we human beings, men and women, are so small and insignificant in comparison with this, why should God bother with us?

But the truly wonderful thing is that God does bother with us. He cares for each one of us so much that he sends us Jesus to be our Saviour and our Lord and our Friend. Nothing can be more comforting than this. What a faithful and loving God we have!

*Great Creator God, we are amazed at the wonder and majesty of your creation. Open our hearts to see how much you care for us, and how you will watch us today to see what we do. By your Spirit make us more and more like Jesus in his goodness and kindness that we may please you in the way we deal with others. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 8

# Tuesday, 14 March

## Self-Confidence

*I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Psalm 16:8.)*

We are all troubled with a lack of self-confidence, at least from time to time. For some of us, a lack of self-esteem, the thought that we are unworthy, is serious, and affects the way we think, and live.

This Psalm tells us that when we turn to God, and trust him, he draws very close to us, as near as our right hand. So our anxieties and our fears, and our lack of self-confidence and self-worth, can be challenged, and put to rest.

We can start to live in a new way.

May that give us confidence today!

*Lord Jesus, the thought that you are very near to me is wonderfully comforting and encouraging. Help me to remember that truth throughout today, that in the way I speak to, and treat, others around me I may reflect something of your goodness and kindness. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 16

# Wednesday, 15 March

## The Word of God

*The ordinances of the LORD... are more precious than gold... [and] sweeter than honey... (Psalm 19:9,10.)*

In this famous and beautiful Psalm, the writer stands amazed at the glory of God revealed in the skies, and particularly in the daily brightness and the warmth of the sun. We like sunshine too!

But even more wonderful to the Psalmist is God's Word, his law, his ordinances, the Bible. In memorable words he says it's more precious than gold, and sweeter than honey.

How true this is! Many have found that, as they read the Bible, for all its length and complexity, they discover its authority, its relevance, and its goodness. How precious and sweet that is!

*Heavenly Father, give me a longing to read the Bible, your Word to me and to us, and to discover its goodness and usefulness, that more and more I may find it my guide for faith and life. For the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 19

# Thursday, 16 March

## Climate Change

*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1.)*

The Bible clearly teaches that God is Creator and Sovereign, he made the earth, it is his, and he commands us to look after it and take care of it.

But there is rising alarm in our own country and across the world at the real changes taking place in our climate which many scientists blame on our unwise and excessive use of fossil fuels. Heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, storms and floods are increasing in frequency and severity, most unfairly affecting many poor and vulnerable peoples who have themselves contributed nothing to the problem.

Churches are at last alert to this threat. Many prophetic voices from Church leaders and members are being raised calling for urgent and radical action to slow, halt and, if possible, reverse the worsening situation, and save the good earth that God gave us.

*Almighty and ever-generous God, thank you for the gifts of your good earth with its rich provision for our food and our enjoyment. Forgive us our sin of greed and selfishness that has degraded and poisoned the water, air and soil. Open our eyes to the harm we have caused, to ourselves and all living things, and bring each one of us to a renewed commitment to look after and care for your good creation. Amen*

Further reading: Psalm 24

# Friday, 17 March

## Pleasing God

***Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4.)***

The word “delight” is a lovely word: it speaks of joy, of pleasure, and of goodness.

The Bible tells us that God delights in us, when we turn to him and trust him, and seek to obey him. He delights in our prayers and worship and service, when we offer these things to him sincerely and lovingly.

But, equally, we delight in these things also. God gives us a deep sense of reward and satisfaction when we try to establish and develop our personal relationship with him. Life can so easily seem meaningless, with many things we do not understand. But learning to trust and obey God through Jesus Christ gives life a purpose, and brings joy and delight indeed.

***Help me this day, dear Lord, not to forget you, but to remember you in all my busyness, to speak and behave in ways that please you, and that bring me the delight and blessing of knowing your presence and your pleasure. For Jesus' sake, Amen.***

Further reading: Matthew 5:1-12

# Saturday, 18 March

## Waiting on God

*Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10.)*

Psalm 46 is a great Psalm, and prayer, for trusting in God, whatever troubles and storms we may be going through. This applies not just in our personal lives, but in community and national life also.

We may be passing through a time of deep disturbance in our own lives, struggling with difficult relationships, or situations, at work or at home or with friends. Or we may be anxious about what's happening in society and in the world around us.

God remains in charge. He will not be mocked, nor will his loving purposes for us be thwarted. Let's look to him as our rock and refuge, find the time to wait upon him and be still, and to know that he, and he alone, is God.

*Almighty God, you are our sovereign Lord, and we seek refuge in you. Give us the confidence to deal with the troubles around us in loving and constructive ways, and to find that stillness comes from knowing you. In our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.*

Further reading: Psalm 46

# Fourth Sunday in Lent, 19 March

## This Week: Proverbs True Wisdom

*The proverbs of Solomon... for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair... (Proverbs 1:1,2.)*

This week we are going to look at the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. This is part of what we call "Wisdom" literature, those books and passages in the Bible that teach us what God's mind is on many everyday but important matters. It has been called "divine common sense."

Many different subjects are covered in a host of often short, pithy sayings: anger, money, pride and humility, honesty and corruption, work, relationships, parenting, business practice, laziness, drunkenness, and many others. We shall take one of these each day.

A recurring theme of Proverbs is the contrast between being righteous and being wicked. God encourages us to be, and to do good, and avoid evil. This is what it is to be truly wise!

*Lord God, make us truly wise in learning about and following your teaching day by day. Show us how to lead lives that are right, just and fair, pleasing to you, useful to others. May your wisdom grow in our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Further reading: Proverbs 1:1-7



# Monday, 20 March

## The Fear of the Lord

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Proverbs 9:10.)*

The Book of Proverbs teaches divine common sense, through which the Lord shows us his mind on living wisely and well. This contrasts with living foolishly, which is going our own selfish way.

Various verses throughout the book emphasise that this wisdom starts when we “fear” God; that is, when we approach him with deep reverence and awe, mindful of who he is, the pure, holy, righteous and gracious Lord who loves us, and who longs for us to know him better and love him more.

We read the Bible so as to acquire this wisdom, and understand more of how God wants us to live, worshipping him in fear and awe, serving him gladly and willingly as we learn to put others before ourselves.

*Our gracious, good and righteous Lord, help us to see you as you are. Bring us to you in holy and reverent worship. Send us out in humble service to those around us, making us truly servant-hearted. For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

Further reading: Proverbs 9:1-12

# Tuesday, 21 March

## Gentleness

***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1.)***

How easily our carelessness and impatience can provoke an angry response from us! When our irritation and frustration cause us to speak harshly, how easily that makes the situation worse. We all know that from bitter experience.

In one of the most famous, and most persuasive, verses in Scripture, God cautions us against angry words, and counsels instead a gentle, patient and quiet conversation.

When we try this, we see how well it works to diffuse anger and conflict, and promote harmony, peace, and understanding with family, friends, colleagues.

What a good place for Christians to set an example. There's real wisdom here!

***Gentle Jesus, guard my words and my conversation today. Warn me against harsh words that stir up anger in others. Prompt me to think and speak kindly, generously and thoughtfully. Or, if not, keep me quiet! So may your Name be praised. Amen.***

Further reading: James 3:1-12.

# Wednesday, 22 March

## Generosity

***A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. (Proverbs 11:25.)***

Generosity is a lovely thing. It implies an abundance, a fullness in giving, that goes far beyond the fulfilment of an immediate duty. It is closely associated with grace, which is the measure of loving-kindness shown towards the undeserving.

We see this generosity in God's provision for us in his good, abundant creation, and, above all, in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

Moreover, as Jesus taught us, generosity by us will be met by generosity towards us.

There's more wisdom here!

***O Holy Spirit of the living God, set a spirit of generosity in my heart today that, in my words, in my actions, and in all my behaviour, I may be truly generous towards others. If that proves to be costly, let me give cheerfully and gladly. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.***

Further reading: Luke 6:37-42.

# Thursday, 23 March

## Humility

*When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2.)*

Older translations, perhaps more memorably, have it, "Pride comes before a fall." The point is clear: how often, when we let pride and self-satisfaction cloud our better judgment, something happens to bring us down to earth!

In Proverbs God's wisdom is often described in terms of contrasts. Here pride is contrasted with humility, and humility is commended as something wise and good.

Humility is a particular Christian virtue, held in contempt by the Greeks and Romans, but taught by Jesus as something special and distinctive.

Let us embrace humility today!

*Heavenly Father, may I be your humble servant today. Stop me from speaking and acting proudly and self-righteously. When I am with others, may I be much more willing to listen to them than to flaunt my own successes and achievements. Make me quick to praise others and appreciate the good in them. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 18:9-14

# Friday, 24 March

## Honesty

***Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making. (Proverbs 16:11.)***

Honesty is always commended in God's teaching on wisdom, and it is a common theme in Proverbs.

In all the business of life, false and corrupt practices are condemned, while open and honest relationships and transactions are held up as the norm. To see and know the difference is to be wise.

Dishonesty and corruption are always and everywhere evil and wrong, and often prove counter-productive. Not just in ancient times, but in our own time many continue to suffer the corrosive and unjust effects of corruption. Christ's Church and people should be salt and light in this regard.

How do we think we stand here?

***Father God, open our eyes when we are tempted to do wrong, to tell lies, to cheat, and to try corruptly to gain advantage over others. May integrity, probity, uprightness, and wholesomeness distinguish your people in all they say and do and are. In this make us worthy of Jesus. Amen.***

Further reading: Matthew 7:24-29.

# Saturday, 25 March

## The Good Wife

*A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. (Proverbs 31:1.)*

This past week we have been looking at the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, where God teaches us what true wisdom is, and how we should live day to day.

The book ends with a remarkable passage in which a wife is beautifully praised for all her wisdom and good works in her home and beyond. She labours hard for her husband and her family, and is properly mindful of her duties to the poor. She is a successful businesswoman in her own right.

The Gospels tell us how respectful and kind Jesus was towards women. Let us be glad that the Bible teaches so clearly the dignity, equality and complementarity of men and women.

*Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, thank you for teaching us what it means to be wise, and wherein lies true wisdom. Help us and your Church to promote the equality of women and men, and, especially, help us to value and safeguard the unique work and witness of women and girls. For the sake of Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Further reading: Proverbs 31:10-31.

# Fifth Sunday in Lent, 26 March

## This Week: Suffering

*"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?" (Lamentations 1:12.)*

This week, in our journey through Lent, and continuing our preparations for Easter, we shall look at the the question of suffering.

It is a deep human instinct that we want to avoid suffering, whether physical pain, mental distress, or emotional anguish. We believe this to be no part of God's plan. Jesus went around doing good, healing the sick, comforting the sad, and raising the dead.

But suffering is prominent in the Bible story. God's people bring suffering upon themselves through their repeated disobedience and unfaithfulness. The Book of Lamentations, as an example, is all about this.

That God should bring suffering upon himself, therefore, in the person of Jesus his Son is a great mystery. We wrestle to understand it. Yet this is just what Easter is about.

*Loving Heavenly Father, we confess that we share together in the sin that brought suffering and death into the world. Open our eyes to the offence we have given you, and the hurt we have brought to others. Forgive us our sins, our greed and selfishness, our intolerance, our disobedience. And create a right spirit within us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Further reading: Lamentations 1:1-16

# Monday, 27 March

## The Cost of Discipleship

***“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:27.)***

Throughout his ministry, Jesus called men and women to follow him as his disciples. He made it plain to them that following him came with a cost.

The Gospels tell us that the first disciples “left everything” to follow Jesus. When he spoke about this he did so in terms of “carrying a cross”, a reference to his own death, but also clear teaching on what it will cost us to be disciples.

We are thinking of suffering this week. We must accept that being a Christian is no light matter, but must be undertaken with all seriousness. It will cost us in every way: money, time, work, prayer, relationships, priorities. As athletes, seeking to be their best, subject themselves to the most rigorous and demanding self-discipline, so we must exercise self-denial, and “carry our cross”.

Hard? Yes! Off-putting? Possibly! Rewarding? Certainly!

***Lord Jesus Christ, help me to hear clearly your call to follow you. Help me to accept the demands of discipleship and its cost willingly, gladly. Help me to bear my cross. For your sake, Amen.***

Further reading: Luke 14:25-35



# Tuesday, 28 March

## Crucifixion

*Here they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side, and Jesus in the middle. (John 19:18.)*

Crucifixion was a horrible, cruel and fearful form of death, widely used by the Romans to execute slaves and criminals.

All four Gospels record that Jesus was crucified. Perhaps mercifully, they spare us the details. (If we want to know what was really involved, then we need to see one of the passion plays, such as that performed every ten years at Oberammergau in Germany, or we should watch the 2004 Mel Gibson film, *The Passion of the Christ*, or we should study the *Crucifixion* of the German Renaissance painter Matthias Grünewald.)

But Christ's suffering was not confined to what happened on the cross. He was betrayed by a disciple, denied by another, deserted by all. He was humiliated in an unjust trial, mocked and beaten, and so weakened that another had to carry his cross to the place of execution.

What suffering compares to this? Yet we believe God in the person of Jesus, his Son, takes this upon himself, to take away the sins of the world, yours and mine. Amazing grace!

*Almighty Father, how your heart must be broken at the ugliness of human sin, and the continuing pain and suffering we inflict upon one another! As followers of Jesus, bring us by your Spirit to a renewed commitment to a peace that stands on your truth and righteousness, and is expressed in justice and compassion. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Further reading: John 19:28-37

# Wednesday, 29 March

## The Wondrous Exchange

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds, we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5.)*

800 years before Christ, the Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, spoke in remarkable detail and with great foreknowledge of the death of Jesus. This week we are thinking about suffering. In this verse, and in the adjacent verses, we are given a profound insight into why Jesus suffered and died.

What Isaiah describes here has been called a “wondrous exchange”.

Our sins, many and varied as they are, and the world which we have broken and spoiled, rightly bring us under the judgment of a holy God. But we, of ourselves, can do nothing to save ourselves. So God, because he loves us, takes our punishment upon himself. Jesus “exchanges” his perfect righteousness for our sin and wrongdoing.

There is an old hymn which describes the cross as the place “where heaven’s love and heaven’s justice meet!”

Just so!

*Lord God and Father, let me understand afresh the wonder of your atoning love for me, that in the death of Jesus you took my place and set me free. May that truth encourage me to share the good news of Jesus with those around me. Amen.*

Further reading: Isaiah 53:1-12

# Thursday, 30 March

## What love!

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6.)*

I have a friend who once told me he wants these words on his gravestone!

Centuries before the events of Good Friday, the prophet Isaiah foretold the death of Jesus, and explained its significance, and how we should understand it.

He gives us the picture of humankind like sheep, prone to wander into danger and get lost. We leave the safe path, and go astray. But Jesus, who calls himself the Good Shepherd, comes to rescue us. In obedience to his heavenly Father he bears himself the punishment for our sin. We go free, forgiven.

Our little word "love" hardly does this justice. Perhaps "grace" is better, conveying as it does a love that is unconditional, unmerited, and supremely self-giving. Amazing grace!

*Almighty God and Lord, just as Jesus prayed for his followers, "that all of them may be one," we pray for the unity of your Church. May understanding, respect and goodwill bring us more and more together, and help us to see ourselves as brothers and sisters, and together in love to fulfil your great commission "to go and make disciples of all the nations." For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

Further reading: Isaiah 53:1-12

# Friday, 31 March

## The Necessity of Suffering

***However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. (1 Peter 4:16.)***

As we prepare for Holy Week and Easter, we have been looking at suffering, and particularly the suffering of Jesus in his passion and death.

In the early Church Jesus' followers quickly discovered that being disciples brought its own suffering and cost. Bearing the name of Jesus Christ, being known to be his followers, exposed Christians to discrimination, oppression, persecution, even martyrdom.

Sadly, in too many parts of the world today, Christian faithfulness and obedience brings its own cost. For us, too, being faithful disciples can expose us to discouragement, hostility and ridicule.

If this is our experience we are not to be surprised, or ashamed. Rather we can draw comfort and strength, and praise God, that we witness to our Saviour's precious name!

***Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Help me today, whether at home, or at work, with family, friends, neighbours or colleagues, to be fearless in serving Jesus Christ as I seek to serve others. If any opposition disturbs or discourages me, make me bold and resolute in upholding the Gospel. Amen.***

Further reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19

# Saturday, 1 April

## The Suffering Servant

*"But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:27.)*

Christian believers confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and King, and Master. And so he is, and we worship him as such.

But Jesus spoke of himself also as a servant. We have the profound and compelling example of Jesus, who came among us, suffered and died, as a supreme act of service. He says of himself that he did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life for others. God in Christ uses suffering as a supreme act of service.

Those of us who are drawn to Jesus, and who commit to following him, have this example of sacrificial service before us. If we want to be his people we too must be prepared to show to others the same servant-heartedness.

The Church is at its best, and flourishes, when we are the world's servants.

***Father God, open my eyes to the many needs around me, and the many opportunities I have to meet the needs of others. Make me servant-hearted, and quick to give of myself. May I not heed the cost or sacrifice when I know that I do your will. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.***

Further reading: John 13:1-17

# Sunday, 2 April, Palm Sunday

## This Week is Holy Week

*"Blessed is the king, who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
(Luke 19:38, quoting Psalm 118:26.)*

Today is Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and was welcomed joyfully by the crowds, who laid palm branches in his path. It marks the start of the last week of Jesus' life before his crucifixion, which we call "Holy Week". This week we shall look at some of the events of that week as reported by St Luke.

Two prophecies in the Old Testament refer distinctly to the events of Palm Sunday: in Psalm 118:26, and in the prophet Zechariah, 9:9. Both refer to the coming of a "king". Zechariah foresees this king, Jesus, riding on a donkey, which was recognised as a sign of peace.

We, now that King Charles III has ascended the throne, are reminded of what it means to have a King. Kingship speaks of authority and of ruling, of sovereignty, and the King deserves our respect and support as his people.

So in King Jesus we see his divine authority and rule, expressed in love and service, the supreme act of which is his death on the cross for our sakes.

*Heavenly Father, we pray for our King and the Royal family, and all who hold authority over us. May they rule with justice and in peace, upholding the rights and freedoms of all. And bless the Church in all its branches as it fulfils its mission to our nation, bringing the good news of forgiveness of sins, and of the hope of a world transformed and renewed in Christ. In his Name, Amen.*

Further reading: Mark 11:1-11

# Monday, 3 April

## Good Work

*Then [Jesus] entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers'". (Luke 19:45,46.)*

The first event reported by Luke in this last week of Jesus' life is something recorded in all four Gospels.

Jesus enters the temple and is greatly distressed to see the stalls of the money-changers dealing in the temple tax, and the traders selling animals for the sacrifices. In the account in John's Gospel Jesus violently overturns the traders' tables and drives them away.

What distresses and angers Jesus is how the Lord's holy temple, a truly sacred place deserving the respect of reverence and quiet prayer, has become a marketplace, with the noise and distraction of commerce and business.

We are warned not to allow our sacred buildings and spaces to be similarly degraded, whether simple chapel, fine church, or great cathedral. And we acknowledge our longing for places to be set apart for prayer and worship.

***Almighty God, we pray for all those who work in commerce and business, in factories, offices, shops, and warehouses, and we pray for those in banking and in the financial services industry. Raise up Christian women and men, who, strengthened by prayer and worship, bring to their work integrity, honesty, and responsibility, and compassion. For Christ's sake, Amen.***

Further reading: Luke 19:45-48

# Tuesday, 4 April

## National Life

***"Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"... [Jesus] said to them, "Then give to Caesar, what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (Luke 20:22,25.)***

In his account of Holy Week, Luke records the religious authorities, the chief priests and teachers of the Jewish law, trying to trap Jesus with a series of trick questions. Here they ask a question about whether taxes should be paid to the occupying Roman authorities — a trick question indeed!

Jesus responds by asking for a Roman coin and, pointing out the image of Caesar which it bears, declares, famously, that we should pay what we owe to Caesar and what we owe to God.

My guess is that we are all reasonably up to date with our public taxes: in our system it is, rightly, difficult to evade paying our taxes. But what about our financial support for our church? Occasionally? From what's left over after all else is paid? 5%? A tithe? More?

***Almighty God, we pray for all in government, national and local, for members of our parliaments, and for local councillors, and for civil servants. We pray for those who uphold justice, through the legal profession, the courts, the police, the prison service, and those who collect our taxes. May honesty, and the rule of law prevail throughout our land. Raise up Christian women and men who will bring their own good and godly influence to our national life. Amen.***

Further reading: Luke 20:20-26



# Wednesday, 5 April

## True Generosity

***“All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” (Luke 21:4)***

There is much in the teaching of Jesus about money. Money, of itself, is neutral. But, as Jesus points out, we can use it well, for good, or badly, for ill. How we regard and spend our money says a great deal about us.

Luke records Jesus watching worshippers putting money into the temple treasury. Some wealthy people put in much. A poor widow puts in very little, just two small coins.

Jesus is amazed, and points out to his watching disciples that this poor woman has, in a real sense, given more than anyone else.

What a wonderful thing for us that Jesus here gives dignity and respect to the poor and those of very little means!

The challenge is clear: if this poor woman can do that, what can we do?

***O God of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, when I am presented with the needs of my church, help me to give generously and cheerfully. Take away my reluctance to part with my money, and grant me rather to be grateful for what you have given me, and glad to share this with others. Amen.***

Further reading: Luke 21:1-4

# Thursday 6 April, Maundy Thursday

## The Sacraments

*And [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, given for you; do this in remembrance of me... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:19,20.)*

Our Church celebrates two sacraments: Baptism, and Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper. The great reformer, John Calvin, who still, through John Knox, remains influential in Scotland, helpfully teaches that sacraments are signs, mysteries, that point us to the great truths about Jesus.

On the night of the Thursday of Holy Week, and the day before his crucifixion, Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord Supper. He was with his immediate disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem celebrating the Jewish feast of the Passover. He shares with his disciples some bread and wine, simple and common things in themselves, but to become hugely significant.

Jesus says the bread is his body, and the wine is his blood. Thus he acts out simply what will take place the next day, Good Friday. Every time we share in the Lord Supper, we re-enact the events of that first Easter, and remind ourselves of the love and sacrifice of our Saviour.

*Father, I pray that I may treasure the sacraments of your Church. May I rejoice and draw regular encouragement from my Baptism. May I draw strength and inspiration from the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. As I fix my eyes upon Jesus, may he empower and equip me anew for his service. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 22:7-23

# Friday 7 April, Good Friday

## What Better News?

*Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46.)*

As chaplain in a local primary school in Edinburgh, I was often asked by the children why, if Jesus died such a horrible death, we called it "Good Friday"?

How would you answer that?

I tried to explain to the children that the Bible clearly teaches that, through his death, Jesus achieved, we might say "bought", something uniquely special for us. As we come to Jesus in faith, without claiming any merit, or worth, or good deeds, he takes our sins, the bad things that we do, and the unworthy people that we are, and forgives us. More, he welcomes and receives us as his sisters and brothers. We are promised our place with him in heaven.

What could possibly be better news than that?

And, believing that, and wanting to see our broken world healed and restored, won't we want to share such good news with others?

*Heavenly Father, on this most solemn and serious day, Good Friday, help me to see my need, and to confess that need so gloriously met in Christ. Bring forth from your Church here and around the world resounding thanks and praise, and send us out to declare this Good News everywhere. Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 23:44-49

# Saturday, 8 April

## Holy Saturday

*The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid in it... But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. (Luke 23:56.)*

There is no other day in the Christian calendar quite like today, the Saturday, the day after Good Friday and before Easter Day.

We know how the story ends. Jesus is dead and buried, and his followers rest on the Jewish Sabbath. We know he will be raised to life the next day, the first day of the week, on the Sunday.

Jesus had told his disciples that he would be raised from the dead. But they did not believe him. We can well understand that very great sadness, bewilderment and fear filled their hearts as they waited to see what would happen.

For these past 40 or so days we have looked forward to Easter. We have, as it were, waited and prepared ourselves.

Now the greatest day in all creation has come upon us!

*Almighty God and Lord, take away my doubts and confusion about the claims of the Christian faith. Let me have growing confidence and clarity for all that Jesus secured for us in his death and for the hope of what is ours in his risen life. Help me to be a good witness. Through Christ the Lord, Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 23:50-56

# Sunday, 9 April, Easter Day

## Resurrection!

*"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen!" (Luke 24:5,6.)*

These words of the angel to the women who had gone to Jesus' tomb on the first Easter morning summarise and focus the Easter story for us.

Against all expectations the women find the tomb empty, and the body of Jesus gone. They were confused and frightened, and, when they went back to the other disciples and told them, the disciples didn't believe them.

Yet Jesus' resurrection from the dead that first Easter morning, following his crucifixion, has become the rock on which the Christian faith is built.

One of the proofs offered for Jesus' resurrection is the way his scattered and confused disciples were transformed, becoming witnesses to his continuing, risen life. They founded the church, and took the Gospel into all the world.

*Dear Lord Jesus, we pause to humble ourselves before you, and to acknowledge the mystery of your resurrection. Help us to accept its wondrous truth, and, as we wait for Jesus to return, to rejoice in your promise that you, our risen Lord, will be with us always. May that guide and direct our thoughts, words and actions today and always. In your precious Name, Amen.*

Further reading: Luke 24:1-12.





