

2022

WORLD CHURCH LENTEN REFLECTIONS

*A seven-week Bible study to guide you through
Lent, written by the Methodist Churches in
Ghana, Ireland, Poland & Togo.*



Together, growing God's world Church
irishmethodist.org/world-mission

The Methodist Church is a global family; stronger for God when we collaborate and are open to learning with and from each other. These Lenten reflections come from Methodists in Poland, Togo, Ghana and Ireland and are available in an official language of each nation. Irish Methodist World Mission Partnership has co-ordinated this resource, honouring The Methodist Church in Ireland's vision of 'Living wholeheartedly as disciples of Christ for the transformation of the World'. Let us learn together.

We hope these reflections will inspire you on your journey towards Easter.



Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu
President of the Methodist Church in Ireland



Mrs Hazel Loney
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WORLD MISSION PARTNERSHIP



Irish Methodist World Mission Partnership (WMP) exists to enable Methodist people in Ireland to join with partners around the world to proclaim Christ's love and offer of salvation and to promote church growth. We do this by giving and receiving, teaching and learning, praying and being prayed for and serving and being served. WMP coordinates a number of activities and facilitates MCI's district links with world churches so that together, we can grow God's world church.

DISTRICT LINKS

North Eastern District - Methodist Church Ghana
North Western District - United Methodist Church in Poland
Southern District - Methodist Church Togo

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World Mission Partnership would like to thank the contributors and translators for making this Lenten study possible.

WEEK 1 02-06 March

Our names are Tim Dunwoody and Laura Kerr. We both work for the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI) and coordinate the work of their World Mission Partnership department. This helps MCI maintain its relationships with other churches around the world.



Tim lives in Belfast, is married to June and they have two grown up children. Laura is married to Peter and they live in a town near Belfast.



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



Matthew 6: 1-6 and 16-21 (New RSV)

"Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

5 "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

16 "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust[g] consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."



Context

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 is part of what is called 'The Sermon on the Mount'.

This was early in Jesus' ministry probably on a hill north of The Sea of Galilee.

It was heard by his apostles and the multitudes following him.

Some Bible scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount was Jesus announcing a new covenant between God and his people, replacing the old Law of Moses.

WEEK 1 *Commentary* *written by Tim Dunwoody*



My mum and dad had good traditional Northern Irish values as parents, probably the same values that most parents try to teach their children across the world. My sister and I were taught to say “Please” and “Thank you”, to be kind to others and never to show off. By “show off” I mean wanting to be the centre of attention and making ourselves look good in front of others. In the passage, Jesus talks about three things: prayer, fasting and giving to the poor. These were all good and demanded by the Jewish religion. However, Jesus warns that we are not to use them to show off to other people.

Giving to the needy

I remember a man phoning the office once to say he wished to give a large donation to the church to be used to tackle poverty. I found the conversation a little bit uncomfortable. They already had all the information they needed to make a donation so why did he need to make his generosity public to me? He could have given the money anonymously. The phone call seemed to be more about the man wishing me to know that he was being generous. Interestingly, the donation never appeared. Jesus states that when we give financial assistance to someone, don't broadcast the news.

In Ireland, the vast majority of people live relatively comfortable lives. And, when things go wrong, we have safety nets like insurance and government support. Most of us seem to be impressed by material plenty. Perhaps when people announce their generosity publicly, it is also about them saying that “I can do this because I have been financially successful. I am proud of these material things that I have.” Jesus warns that we cannot serve both God and money (later in Matthew 6).

Prayer

Prayer was an important part of Jewish life. Devout Jews prayed at dawn, midday and dusk (Acts 3:1). Perhaps some Jews made sure that they were in public at those times so that everyone could see how devout they were, praying in open spaces. Jesus questioned the motives of anyone who prayed to impress others. How then should we pray? Jesus does not dictate how we sit, kneel or stand to pray. Nor does he state any particular time of day. Of course, it should also be said that he does not totally condemn all public prayer. The two things Jesus does say about prayer here are 1) go into your room and close the door and 2) pray to your Father. Prayer is very much a private and authentic practice between an individual and God.

WEEK 1 *commentary continued*

Fasting

Fasting is widely practised in contemporary churches but it was only commanded in the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29). However, fasting came to be practised outside this: in times of sorrow, penitence, judgement or in preparation for intense prayer (Ex. 34:28). In the New Testament, Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before his public ministry. But for many, fasting had become a way to appear pious to others with had no true meaning. It was carried out to impress others. Jesus calls such people “hypocrites”. This word comes from the Greek, meaning actor. Jesus is saying that these people are pretenders, not the real thing and God knows this. God will reward what we do in secret to honour him, not what we do in public to impress people.

Jesus encourages us to seek eternal rewards not the temporary ones offered by the world. Reputations with others and wealth are not permanent. They will disappoint. Heavenly treasures do not devalue. They are stored by God who loves us. Also, most people, whether within the church or outside it can recognise an actor, a hypocrite, when they see them. Let us not fool ourselves for we do not fool God. He knows our hearts.



Questions to Consider

1. Why do we as Christians, sometimes seek to impress other Christians and non-Christians by how we pray, how we fast and how much we give to the needy? What does that say about us, our motives and our faith?
2. In verse 1, Jesus says that those who do these things with the wrong motives will “have no reward from your Father in heaven” and in verse 5, he says that “they have received their reward in full”. What do you think these two statements mean?
3. What practical things can you do to pray, fast and give in a way pleasing to God?
4. How can our private and authentic praying, fasting and giving show Christ in our communities and practically change society in His name?



Prayer of Commitment

Thank you Jesus, for telling us how we can please you and serve others with a true heart. Forgive us when we do things to make ourselves look good. May our prayers, fasting and giving be about us drawing closer to you and serving others with genuine love. Amen

WEEK 2 *07-12 March*

My name is Daniel Kułakowski and I'm currently on the 2nd year of my probation as a pastor of the Methodist Church in Grudziądz, Poland. I'm also studying at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw and Jan Łaski's Higher Seminary in Warsaw. I live in Grudziądz but I find myself travelling a lot to Warsaw where I'm working towards finishing my academic studies.



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



Luke 4: 1-13 (New RSV)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

5 Then the devil[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil[b] said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

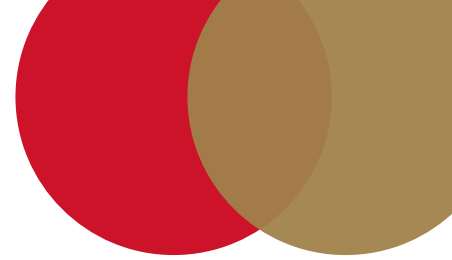
12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.



Context

Before beginning his public ministry of teaching and healing, Jesus went alone into the wastelands of Judea. He spent 40 days fasting - nearly at the limit of what a human body can survive without food. Historically, the wilderness is where God met the Jewish people at Sinai after their escape from Egypt and where he shaped them into his covenant people.

WEEK 2 *Commentary* *written by Daniel Kułakowski*



I grew up in a Methodist home in Warsaw. My parents are strongly believing Christians who have been teaching me Christian values since a young age. One of the things they told me about was the tradition of giving up things that we might enjoy during the time of Lent. The practice of Lenten resolutions and austerities is well known to Christians around the world. During this time of the year, we decide perhaps not to eat as many sweets or reduce the amount of time we spend in front of the TV, phone or computer screen.

We do not do this to make ourselves miserable. There is a greater purpose in the practice of Lent. Lent should enhance our relationship with our God and bring us closer to Him in our daily lives. It's similar to New Year's resolutions that some of us have whenever the previous year is coming to an end and we hope for new things to come – better things.

In this second week of Lent, many of us have already begun our Lenten practices (and if not, it's never too late). And we're reading today the Gospel of Luke, where we find one of the most well known passages that we meditate upon during this time of the year. Looking into this story we can find hope and example for us especially while we try to remain faithful to our own resolutions.

One of the things we can be sure of is that temptation will try to prevent us from success in keeping our Lenten fast or resolution.

In the desert, we are shown how temptations and the devil often attack. Temptations often come in a time of need or when we lack something we desire. In verse 2, we see that Jesus was extremely hungry; he did not eat for 40 days. Knowing this, the devil tempted Jesus to use his Godly powers to turn stones into bread and make the hunger go away. Later, knowing that Jesus is in a deserted place, in hot sun and far from comfort, the devil shows Jesus beautiful palaces and kingdoms with everything a man might wish for.

It is a lesson, a warning and a reminder for us that it is during the time of need, when temptation can attack. In the moment of our weakness, the evil one attempts to lead us away from the righteous path. We may not suffer the extreme hunger that Jesus did. In Poland, many of us are more likely to experience slight discomfort rather than really lacking food or shelter.

In Poland, we can find ourselves enjoying time reading a book, watching a film or maybe walking in a park. These are good activities but they can draw us away from time we planned to spend with God. We have no need to sin in order to satisfy our desires. The temptation can be to spend a few more minutes relaxing before turning to that Bible study or prayer.

WEEK 2 *commentary continued*

There's also another type of temptation. When we see somebody in need, perhaps we're in a hurry, so we avoid getting involved thinking that probably someone else will come around and help out that person.

Lent is there to help us practise overcoming these temptations. We may decide to completely let go of something and to spend more time that would enrich our Christian life or help others. With His help, we can be in control. When we face temptation, God won't let us fight something we can't overcome.

This Lent, I would like to encourage you to focus your thoughts on mindfulness of fasting. Remember that as Jesus promised, we're not alone. Even when we might feel abandoned, or too weak to fight the obstacles that try to make us leave the path of righteousness, we can turn to God. The Holy Spirit lives within us and He can lead us through the storms, the deserts and the temptations.



Questions to Consider

1. What do you recognise as temptation? How do you recognise it?
2. What practices help you overcome temptation?
3. How can these practices help you remain on track with your Lenten resolutions?
4. What else can we learn from the story of Jesus in the desert?



Prayer of Commitment

Almighty and loving God,

We thank you for your blessings and care each day. You are a faithful God and we want to praise you for everything that you have done and are doing for us. Help us to remain faithful to you, and love you even in the time of trial and temptation. To you and only you be praise and glory. In the Name of our precious Saviour, Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

WEEK 3 13-19 March

Gillie Hinds is the Lay Leader of the Methodist Southern District in Ireland. Rev Andrew Dougherty is the Superintendent of this District. Gillie lives in Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland, with her husband Ross. The Southern District incorporates most of the Republic of Ireland with 50 churches and 5,500 members. Much of Andrew's work is to encourage ministers, leaders and the people called Methodists to be outward looking with a focus on Mission & Discipleship. He also lives in Dublin with his wife Joyce and they have three adult children.



**"Living under the shadow of His wing
we find security.**

**Standing in His presence we will bring
our worship, worship, worship to the King.**

**Bowed in adoration at His feet
we dwell in harmony.**

**Voices joined together that repeat,
worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lamb.**

**Heart to heart embracing in His love
reveals His purity.**

**Soaring in my spirit like a dove;
holy, holy, holy is the Lord."**

*- Living Under The Shadow of His Wing
Restoration Music/ Lifestyle Music (1982)*



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



Luke 13: 31 – 35 (New RSV)

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

32 He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33 Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.'

34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

WEEK 3



Context

Presently, Jesus is in Galilee, but he's in the midst of a lonely journey to Jerusalem. He has caught the attention of Jewish officials who pay him a visit to warn him of Herod Antipas's death threat against him. Maybe they wanted to frighten Jesus so that he would flee Galilee (Herod's jurisdiction), and head towards Jerusalem, where they could more easily deal with him once and for all! Despite the circumstances, Jesus knew what he had to do. He was journeying towards his impending crucifixion, and would not be deterred by the threats of Herod or some Pharisees.

Commentary

written by Rev Andrew Dougherty

If you're like me, you might be more comfortable with a patriarchal view of God and regularly use male pronouns to describe God, such as Father, King, Lord or Master.

But, in this passage from Luke chapter 13, we are presented with a curious image of Jesus, that of a Mother Hen. A powerful simile of Jesus' unconditional love for humankind. Indeed, in the same passage, Herod is likened to a fox. If I were to refer to someone as a fox, I might mean he is clever, crafty or even handsome, but in biblical times it was a negative term, combining the idea of cunning with wicked. It was an expression of utter contempt.

As a young boy, having been born and bred in an Irish city, I had little or no experience of hens or chicks. My only experience of chickens, was the prepared ones bought by my late mother from the local butcher, ready to be roasted for Sunday lunch. However, the early listeners of this passage, would have been very familiar with hens and chicks and their actions and reactions. Hens and chicks would have been kept in most backyards, or even in houses, and would have been observed daily. The average Jewish adult or child, would have experienced hens reacting to a threat. If a fox appeared, Mother Hen would immediately respond, fussing and flapping her wings until all her chicks were gathered under her. If a fox got too close, Mother Hen would attack and put her very life in danger for the sake of her chicks.

Most commentators would agree that the 'Jerusalem' referenced in the passage is both the city and nation. But, moreover, it is symbolic of humankind, of you and I. The repetition in the passage of the word 'Jerusalem', emphasises Jesus' longing, the pathos in his voice, that we might find safety and shelter in him. He is using a profound image to communicate his love and concern for all: that of a mother bird gathering her brood under her wings.

WEEK 3 *commentary continued*

The picture of safety and protection under the wings of a bird is in fact a common image in scripture:

**‘Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings’**
- Psalm 17 v 8

**‘For you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy’**
- Psalm 63 v 7

There’s a story told of a fire that raged through a farm. Scores of people tried to save the farm animals. Unfortunately, the fire was so fierce that all the animals perished. The heat was so intense that it took several days before people could walk through the farm to examine the destruction. There were burnt animals everywhere. It was a dreadful scene. But, then one of the people heard a noise. Following the sound of the faint noise they came to a hen. Her body was charred and her wings were spread out. She, of course, was dead. However, when her feathers were lifted, the people were amazed to find a brood of live chicks under her wings! They were safe and secure. Their mother had given her life so that they might live.

Jesus continues to endeavour to gather his people, but his desire cannot overpower stubborn wills. We have to be willing!



Questions to Consider

1. What other possible reason(s) would some Pharisees want to warn Jesus about a death threat from Herod Antipas (v31)?
2. Who or what is ‘that fox’ in your life (v32)?
3. What does it mean to have ‘free will’ in the context of your Christian faith (v34)?
4. What concerns you about the spiritual condition of your nation? Your church? You?
5. What would it mean for each (Nation, Church, You) to gather under Jesus’ wings?



Prayer of Commitment

Thank you, Jesus, for always being there for us, even when we shun your love and sacrifice. Please continue to call us to be sheltered by you, as your children. May we love one another as you love us. Amen.

WEEK 4 20-26 March

Rev Leah McKibben is a minister in the Omagh and Fintona circuit of the North Western District, where Rev Dr Stephen Skuce serves as the District Superintendent.



"Oh Your cross it changes everything
There my world begins again with You
Oh Your cross it's where my hope restarts
A second chance is Heaven's heart.

Countless second chances
We've been given at the cross."

- *Second Chance*
Rend Collective



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



Luke 13: 1-9 (New RSV)


At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.² He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?'³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?'⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.'

⁶ Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.⁷ So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?"⁸ He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it.⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"



Context

At this point in Luke's Gospel, we see that Jesus' ministry and message is attracting a lot of attention. He is surrounded by a large crowd of people. In fact, there are thousands of people filling the streets; so many that they are trampling on one another (Luke 12:1). Jesus takes this opportunity to teach the crowd and his disciples, not preoccupying himself with popularity, but giving a cautionary challenge to the people about repentance and genuine commitment to God.



WEEK 4 *Commentary*
written by Rev Leah McKibben &
Rev Dr Stephen Skuce

Some people bring news to Jesus about the Galileans that Pilate persecuted and about those who died at Siloam when a tower collapsed. The crowd are curious to hear what Jesus will say about these incidents, but specifically they want to know why these deaths happened – had these people died because they were worse sinners than everyone else? Jesus doesn't enter into a debate of whether sin causes suffering, instead he takes the opportunity to encourage personal reflection. Rather than getting caught up in judgment of others, Jesus challenges the crowd to look at their own lives, to recognise that they themselves need to repent.

Lent is a season when we take time for self-examination. We look at our own lives and reflect on where we are on our journey with Christ. Rather than comparing ourselves with others, measuring our sin or success against theirs, we look inwards and upwards to discover what Jesus says about the condition of our heart.

Jesus goes on to tell a parable about a fig tree that had been growing in a vineyard for three years, taking up precious space but producing no figs. When the owner of the vineyard tells the gardener to cut it down, he protests, asking to care for it for one more year in the hope that it would be fruitful.

In this story there is an assumption that the tree should bear fruit. Following on from the instruction to repent or perish, we understand that as people who do repent and accept new life in Christ, we take our place in the kingdom of God just as a tree takes its place in the vineyard. If we have taken that place, we should bear fruit.

When Leah and her sister moved into their house there was an apple tree in their garden, but seven years later it had got too big for the flower bed. Leah shares, "The branches were stretching into the neighbours' garden and threatening to block all light from the house. Worse still, in our seven years in that house we hadn't even seen a handful of apples! The decision was made. The tree had to go. As we cut the tree down, getting lost in a muddle of branches, there amongst the leaves we discovered some fruit. It didn't look great – the green of the skin was a funny shade, and they all looked slightly misshapen – so we kept on chopping, until at last all that was left was a woody stump in the soil. Later in the day we looked at the small pile of fruit sitting on our kitchen worktop and, reaching for a knife, we cut into one to find out how it would taste. It tasted like a pear. It was a pear. Maybe we had been too quick to cut down a tree that was growing a wonderfully unexpected fruit."

WEEK 4 *continued*

As we continue our self-examination, we ask ourselves what fruit are we bearing in the kingdom of God.

Are we bearing any? Are we so caught up in looking for apples that we miss the pears; so preoccupied with trying to show the outworking of the Spirit in one way that we miss the sweetness of how we can show his love in another way?

The attitude of the vineyard owner shows us something of the patience and mercy of our God. The tree is useless and does not deserve to be taking up the soil that it is planted in, but the gardener intercedes for it. We find hope in this story, realising that, while there is a severity in the instruction to repent or perish, the grace of God does not give up on us. Our loving God helps us and enables us to be his disciples who flourish and flower in his kingdom – perhaps in unexpected ways.



Questions to Consider

1. As Christians can we be guilty of measuring other people's sins without looking at the sin in our own lives? Who do we think Jesus' teaching of 'repent or perish' is for?
2. We're not living out our purpose as Christians if we are not fruitful. What does this fruit look like? (Take a look at Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11)
3. Can we become so preoccupied with looking for apples that we miss the sweetness of a pear? Do you find it difficult to recognise what fruit you have? Perhaps friends or people in your Bible Study group can help you identify how you show God to others. Do you recognise God at work through others?
4. The gardener suggested that he could care for the tree to help it bear fruit. What things can you or others do in your Christian life to help you grow and become fruitful? (Take a look at John 15:1-17; Hebrews 10:23-25; Matthew 7:7-11; Romans 12:1-8; Philippians 4:4-9)



Prayer of Commitment

Loving and patient God, thank you that you invite us to be part of your kingdom, helping us to follow you and be fruitful. We are sorry that we are quick to judge others and too often do not recognise the wrong in our own lives. Help us to be repentant people, willing to live out our purpose and show your love to those around us.
Amen.

WEEK 5 28 March- 04 April

We are Rev Prince-Emmanuel Dogbe (top photo), National Head of the Directorate of Training, Christian Education and Theological Animation, Rev. Gaba Adodo Benjamin (bottom photo), Chairman of District of Lomé, Partnership representative to MCI and Mrs. Edith Sanvee, lay preacher. We all work for the Methodist Church of Togo (EMT) to achieve its vision and mission across the country. We are all married and blessed with children.



**"So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it some day for a crown."**

*- The Old Rugged Cross
George Bernard (1913)*



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



Luke 15: 1-3 and 11-32 (New RSV)

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable:
Then Jesus[b] said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with[c] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'[d] 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

WEEK 5



23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. 25 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father[e] said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”



Context

The parable of the prodigal son, is part of three similar parables (the Lost Sheep - 15:1-7, the Lost Coin - 15:8-10 and the Prodigal Son - 15:11-32) that Jesus told back to back when he went with His disciples through the land of Perea, on the east of the Jordan. It is a story filled with God’s redemptive grace and mercy that shows the nature of repentance, God’s unconditional love and forgiveness, and the Lord’s readiness to welcome and bless all who return to him and highlights how God seeks sinners. It fully sets forth the riches of gospel grace. The parables are addressed to the Pharisees and scribes in response to their grumbling about the way Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners. They criticised Jesus’ penchant for associating too intimately with “sinners”. They were offended Jesus would share his time and space with such people. The story highlights God’s seriousness about forgiveness and redemption.

Commentary

written by Rev Adodo Benjamin, Mrs Edith Sanvee & Rev Prince-Emmanuel Dogbe

Our commentary will address the character and spiritual condition of the main people in the chapter.

The behaviour of the Pharisees and scribes (v1-3) that prompted the parable, contrasts dramatically with the behavior of the tax collectors and sinners. They disapprove of Jesus’ too-friendly attitude toward sinners. They distance themselves from sinners, not understanding that they too, are sinners. They avoid doing business with sinners or mixing with them socially. But Jesus goes where the need is. A doctor who refuses to touch a sick person would not be of much use. Sinners on the other hand come gladly to hear Jesus.

WEEK 5 *commentary continued*



The father's love

The whole process of the father eagerly anticipating his son's return, running to him, greeting him with a kiss and ordering the celebration, the reinstatement and the new clothing, is a picture of how God patiently waits for us to repent, to receive a spirit of sonship. It is also an image of how the Father, runs to meet us, rejoices and embraces us when we come to our senses and long to return to the state of fellowship with Him.

The new clothing represents what we receive in Christ upon salvation: the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), the privilege of partaking of the Spirit of adoption (Ephesians 1:5). The father's forgiveness reassures us that, no matter how we have sinned, God will eagerly welcome us home, as long as we truly repent and return to Him.

The Prodigal Son

The Prodigal Son is a picture of foolish ambition that we all possess to be independent from God. He also portrays the state of the lost sinner or a rebellious Christian who has returned to a life of slavery to sin. He equally depicts what sin really does in a person's life. This points to the sinner when he/she discovers the destitute condition of his life. This is when a repentant sinner "comes to his senses" and longs to return to the state of fellowship with God.

Notwithstanding the motivation, he demonstrates a true humility, courage and repentance, not based on what he said but on what he was willing to do and eventually acted upon. He realizes he has nothing to offer, except a life of service, in repentance for his previous actions. With that, he is prepared to fall at his father's feet and hope for forgiveness and mercy.

This is exactly what conversion (Metanoia) is all about: ending a life of slavery to sin through confession to the Father and faith in Jesus Christ and becoming a slave to righteousness, offering one's body as a living sacrifice.

The older son

The story of the elder brother speaks to us when we succumb to self-righteousness. The older brother allows anger to take root in his heart to the point that he is unable to show compassion towards his brother. He was so consumed with issues of justice and equity that he fails to see the value of his brother's repentance and return. He prefers to nurse his anger rather than enjoy fellowship with his father, brother and the community.

WEEK 5 *commentary continued*

Likewise, so many Christians claim to be better than others and believe, because they have kept a man-made list of commandments, they are clean. They think they are too good to have brothers and sisters in Christ who come from questionable backgrounds. We need to remember that there will be people in our congregations who will closely resemble either of the characters. Indeed, they may be us.

This story is often told to highlight confession of sins, forgiveness and setting a path for change. It seems that Jesus told it so that we might relish God's abiding mercy. The Loving Father desires only to bless and to restore to love and dignity.



Questions to Consider

1. There are many characters in this chapter. Whom do you identify with? Why? Can you see yourself as the Pharisee? How? Or the sons - the one who went astray or the one who remained faithful? Is there a hardness in you sometimes towards those who maybe don't measure up in your eyes? How do you need to change?
2. Can you see yourself called to be the loving father figure? If you are a parent, would you be able to welcome home an erring child? How can you model the loving father character?



Prayer of Commitment

Lord, help me, this Lent, not to focus entirely on my sin but to keep my heart fixed on your love. Don't let me be distracted by any false image of myself, but allow me to hear your invitation to grow in your image, to reflect your love. Amen.

WEEK 6 05-11 April

My name is Rev Andrew Mbeah-Baiden. I am the Synod Secretary of the Northern Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana. The Northern Accra Diocese consists of 18 Circuits with 160 Societies and a total Christian community of 44,996.



I directly assist the Bishop with the Administrative work of the Diocese. I am married to Rebecca and we live in Adenta in Accra, Ghana. We have four (4) adult children, Andrew Jnr. (36), Benedict (34), Christian (32) and Gifty (26).



**"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride."**

*- When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
Isaac Watts (1707)*



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



John 12: 1-8 (New RSV)

"Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii[b] and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."



Context

It was six days before the Jewish Passover, when Jesus went to Bethany. Jesus, the Passover lamb of all who believe in Him, was going to be soon slaughtered. His blood was to be shed for the salvation of all who believe in Him. It was the custom of many to go up from the countryside to Jerusalem for the ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. The Jewish people prepared very well ahead of time for the Passover. Thank God that the observation of Lent offers believers the opportunity to prepare spiritually to remember the death of Christ, the Passover Lamb that God has given to the world.

WEEK 6

Commentary

written by Rev Andrew Mbeah-Baiden

A Dinner in honour of Jesus

Jesus was being honoured for His teaching and miracles. As we recount the great things Christ has done in our lives, as individuals and families, we must honour Him. And whatever dishonours Jesus must be done away with.

Mary a True Believer

A true believer in Christ is a person like Mary, who loved the Lord with her whole being, sacrificed all that she was and had, as well as giving herself out of a heart of pure love for the Lord.

Mary could not hold back from giving an expensive gift to the Lord. This mirrored God not holding back His only Son from us. There is nothing we can give to God that can be equal to the price He paid for our salvation. Our most expensive sacrifice does not come close to the ransom price the Lord paid to redeem us from the bondage of sin and death.

Perfume was the most precious thing to Eastern women in Jesus' time. Mary anointed Jesus to show how deeply she loved Him and believed Him to be the anointed one of God.

Mary also used her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus. One of the things that brings honour and beauty to women is their hair. For Mary to use her hair (her source of honour) was a demonstration of counting her richest gain but loss as compared to what Christ had done in her life.

This is what the hymnist expressed in the hymn "when I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died". She set aside her pride in order to demonstrate her love and faith in Jesus. Our pride must be cast aside; we must decrease, whilst Christ alone must increase.

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ (Phil 3:8)

Judas a Hypocrite Follower

A study of Judas' character in this passage reveals what can cause a disciple to become hypocritical and unbelieving:

1. Judas followed Jesus but he criticised another believer who acted to honour the Lord. He was indignant, rebuking and scolding (Mark 14:4-5). He looked at the speck of sawdust in his neighbour's eye and paid no attention to the plank on in his own eye (Matt 7:3). How often have we behaved like Judas; quick to point out other people's faults without noticing our own?
2. Judas expressed concern for the ministry but he had an ulterior motive. He said "why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor" (John 12:5). His comments were motivated by the fact that he was a thief and had been stealing from the group's money bag. He was angry at the loss of a chance to enrich himself. Today there are those who express concern for a ministry but do so in order to satisfy their own desires. May this not be true of us.

WEEK 6 *commentary continued*

3. Judas missed the opportunity to honour Jesus, but Mary grasped it. Jesus made the point that opportunities come and go. The privilege of ministering to Jesus would not always be available. Life is an opportunity to serve the Lord. The servants of the Lord must love and act while it is day. The night will come when no man can work. As followers of Christ, we need to make the most of every opportunity (Eph. 5:16).

Let us take the admonition of the Apostle Paul in Romans 13 seriously in this Lenten season:

‘And do this, understanding the present time.

The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

The night is nearly over, the day is almost here.

So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light’

- Romans 13: 11-12



Questions to Consider

1. At Bethany, a dinner was given to honour Jesus. In what practical ways can we also honour the Lord?
2. Mary poured her perfume and used her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus. In what ways can we also demonstrate our love for Jesus in this Lenten season?
3. What opportunities has God given us and how can we use them?
4. Judas criticised Mary for an act done from the heart for a good intent, forgetting his own selfish material motive. What are some of the ways in which we sometimes behave like Judas and how can we avoid them?



Prayer of Commitment

Thank you Lord Jesus, for the price you paid for our salvation out of love. Help us to deepen our commitment for you, that we would not in any circumstance be seen as just working in your church without any sense of true love for you in response to the love you demonstrated towards us on the cross. Amen.

WEEK 7 10-17 April

My name is Philip Agnew, and I am the Superintendent of the North Eastern District of the Methodist Church in Ireland. The District covers the eastern half of Northern Ireland, has 71 congregations including urban, rural, deprived housing areas, and well off areas. Pioneer mission reaches out to young people, Belfast city centre, people with mental health issues and students. We are challenged by church decline in the context of a secular culture. I support local churches in the development of mission and discipleship, and help with the identification of new forms of outreach. I live in Belfast, am married to Fiona, and have three adult children and one grandson.



"Hosanna, hosanna,
hosanna in the highest Lord we
lift up Your name
With a heart full of praise
Be exalted,
oh Lord my God."

- Hosanna in the Highest
Carl Tuttle



Prayer of Preparation

During this Lenten Season, as we journey along the road to Jerusalem, walking beside Christ, might we continue to reflect on his words and actions, taking time to examine our own hearts. Amen.



Luke 19: 28-40 (New RSV)

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'" 32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" 34 They replied, "The Lord needs it." 35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. 37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 38 "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" [b] "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" 40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

WEEK 7



Context

This begins a momentous eight days for Jesus that includes his death and resurrection. Publicly he had just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead and that news spread like wildfire. Behind the scenes, the religious authorities were plotting how to get rid of this so called messiah who was upsetting the status quo. What happens next brings everything to a head and changes history forever. Jesus arrives in Jerusalem.

Commentary

written by Rev Philip Agnew

I was working in London the day of the marriage of one of the British royal family. London is a busy bustling city, but that day there was a greater buzz, a sense of anticipation. The crowds gathered, the flags were flying and then the horses and carriages began to parade down the Mall. I had a birds-eye view from the balcony of my office. It was a great day!

I can only imagine a similar atmosphere that day in Jerusalem when the people heard that the new king of the Jews was coming. They wanted to see Jesus and lined the streets. What were the expectations of the crowd that day? What did they want Jesus to do in Jerusalem? The answer to these questions is, 'it depends'.

- For some they had heard about the miracle of the raising of Lazarus and hoped to see something special.
- Others were politically minded and dreamed this would be the beginning of the end of the Roman occupation.
- Some were religiously curious and wondered if Jesus was truly the messiah.

In the fulfilment of prophecy, Jesus announced who he was by riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. In middle-eastern culture a king entering a city riding on a donkey was making the statement that he was coming in peace. That in itself would have left those disappointed who wanted the overthrow of the Romans. But in the moment the crowds were excited and happy to proclaim Jesus as king and messiah, and he was happy to receive their praise. Their song proclaimed his status, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" [Jesus is king, the praise is valid, but this is a different king.

This king comes 'in the name of the Lord'; this king is about his Father's business. This king has no interest in armies, power and the trappings of human kingship; this king is about the kingdom of God, this king comes in peace.

- He comes that people would have peace with God
- He comes to show that the way of peace is to live in the will of God.
- He comes to rule by love rather than force

The sad thing is that this is the description of the messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. The Jews should have recognised their messiah, but in the end they rejected him.

WEEK 7 *commentary continued*

As we all know the mood of a crowd can quickly change. A peaceful protest can morph into violence. A football manager on a winning streak will be acclaimed, but after a run of defeats the booing starts. At the start of this momentous week, the crowds loved and supported Jesus, but five days later the crowd was shouting out 'crucify him!' What happened?

- Some wanted a nationalistic hero but instead they got a messiah who told them to love their enemies; many who loved the miracles drifted off when Jesus taught about the nature of commitment.
- The Pharisees wanted a legalistic messiah instead they got one who advocated grace to sinners.
- The religious authorities wanted a messiah that would keep their power intact; instead they got a messiah that condemned their abuses.

They rejected King Jesus because of the nature of his kingship. It is no wonder that when Jesus approached Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday; he stopped and wept and prophesied Jerusalem's destruction because the people rejected the true messiah.

Knowing what was ahead, this king rode into Jerusalem. This king, who had the power of heaven at his command, humbled himself even onto death on a cross.

This king died for his people and his enemies alike.

He died for you and me that we might be forgiven and have peace with God.

This is the king 'coming in the name of the Lord. Amen.



Questions to Consider

1. What is the nature of the kingship of Christ and how does this affect the way you think?
2. What does it mean to live 'in the name of the Lord'?
3. Have you ever been swayed by the crowd and found yourself acting in a way contrary to the will of God? When? How can you prevent this happening again?
4. How can we model peace in our homes, churches and community?
5. What do you think King Jesus would say about our church and religious practice today?



Prayer of Commitment

Thank you, Jesus, for your willingness to travel to Jerusalem, knowing what was ahead. Through your death on the cross we can know peace with God and with people. Help us to live under your kingship, and enable us to be a people of peace, love and grace. Amen.