

Sitting at Jesus' feet

Sunbridge Road Mission
Lent Devotions 2021

The title of this booklet comes from Jesus' encounter with Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

⁴¹ 'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'

Martha has let the good get in the way of the best. Jesus is clear that the only thing that is truly 'needed' in our lives is being with him. Listening to him. Sitting at his feet.

It is so easy for us, like Martha, to become distracted from what matters most. As individuals and as a church we can be very busy worrying about good things – even serving God – but neglect the one thing that really matters, being with Jesus ourselves.

Lent is the 40 day period running up to Easter. Many of us will associate lent with fasting or giving things up. Traditionally, however, the purpose of giving things up has always been to make space to focus on God. Just like Martha, sometimes we need to clear out some good things to make space for the best.

The aim of this booklet is to help us as a church to spend time with Jesus in the weeks leading up to Easter, as we read through the second half of John's gospel. In John 13 Jesus gathers his disciples around him in the upper room to prepare them for his death. These chapters are an ideal place for us to focus as we too come to sit at Jesus' feet and focus upon his death in preparation for Easter.

Each day there is a reading, a comment, some reflection questions, and a prayer. It only needs to take 10-15 minutes, although of course there is plenty of opportunity to expand it. The readings are dated, so if you miss a day, feel free to leave it and pick up from whatever day you find yourself on. There are no readings on Sundays, which provides an opportunity to catch up, or do something else.

Each week there is also a different way of spending time with Jesus to try (prayer walk; journaling; silence; singing; Scripture meditation; arrow prayers). All of will find different ways that help us sit at Jesus' feet, and this is a good opportunity to grow in our relationship with him.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if at Easter, in a few weeks time, we could look back and say that like Mary we have chosen what is best. Listen to the way Jesus speaks in John 15:5 (words we will come to in a few weeks time):

'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'

Week 1: Make space to be with Jesus

Find a regular slot in your day where you can spend at least 10-15 minutes being with Jesus using this Lent devotional. It is important you find a space that is unhurried and free from distractions where possible. Many people find the beginning of the day the best time to do this before the busyness of the day begins, but it doesn't have to be in the morning. You may, like Martha, have to stop doing some good things to make room for the best thing. Make sure you then put this time in your diary so that other things don't crowd it out.

Day 1 – Wednesday 17th February

Reading: John 13:1-5

13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.

Comment

Whilst we are only half-way through John's gospel, Jesus' earthly ministry is reaching its climax. Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem for the Passover, gathered in an upper room, where he is preparing them for his coming death, resurrection, and return to his Father. John makes it very clear here that Jesus is in control in all this. He knows what is going on. He isn't caught off guard. And even though his enemies surround him (Judas, the devil), he is the one calling the shots. He has come from God and the Father has put all things under his power.

Reflection

What is so remarkable about the way Jesus chooses to use his power here?

How is this so different to the way we see power used in the world around us today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you sit enthroned over all things, and yet you chose to use your power to serve. Thank you for choosing to forsake the splendour and honour of a King and instead humbly take on the posture of a slave. Thank you for the depths of your love and commitment to us as your disciples. Amen

Day 2 – Thursday 18th February

Reading: John 13:6-10

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'

⁷ Jesus replied, 'You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

⁸ 'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.'

Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'

⁹ 'Then, Lord,' Simon Peter replied, 'not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!'

¹⁰ Jesus answered, 'Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.' ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

Comment

Peter resists Jesus because he wants to honour him. What Peter hasn't realised is that he can only belong to Jesus by allowing Jesus to cleanse him. This symbolic act of foot-washing points us forward to the cross, where Jesus will wash us in a far more profound way. Through his blood he cleanses us from our sin. We can only belong to Jesus if we will come to the cross and allow Jesus to wash us clean.

Reflection

Peter found it hard to receive help from Jesus. Where do we see this same heart issue in our own lives?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I'm sorry when I resist your help and try to come to you in my strength. I need you to wash me from the dirt and filth of my sin. Thank you for your sacrifice upon the cross, through which I am fully forgiven. Thank you that because of what you have done for me, I have a part in you and come before you today washed and clean. Amen

Day 3 – Friday 19th February

Reading: John 13:12-17

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ¹³ ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord”, and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Comment

Jesus washing his disciples feet points us to our need to receive cleansing at the cross, but it also acts as a model for how we are to serve one another. Jesus is our Lord, our Teacher, our Master, and we are called to follow him, learn from him, and walk in his ways. If he was willing to humble himself in service of others, who are we to think we are above that!

Reflection

Dirty feet is less of a problem today than it was in the first century. What might it look like for us at Sunbridge Road Mission to humbly serve one another?

Prayer

You will be blessed if you do them.

Take a moment of quiet, and ask God to show you opportunities you have to serve those around you this week. As his Spirit puts specific things on your heart write them down, and make sure you do something about it.

Day 4 – Saturday 20th February

Reading: John 13:18-30

¹⁸ 'I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfil this passage of Scripture: "He who shared my bread has turned against me."

¹⁹ 'I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.'

²¹ After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.'

²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he means.'

²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'

²⁶ Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, 'What you are about to do, do quickly.' ²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Comment

Without interpretation, Jesus' death looks like everything has gone wrong. A good man brought down when his close friend sold him out. Jesus here is preparing his disciples (and teaching us) so that we realise what is really going on. These events have been spoken about in Scripture long ago (Psalm 41:9). It is clear that Jesus is no hapless victim, he knows exactly what is going on, and everything happens with his permission. What is more, as Satan enters Judas, we begin to see that these events are far more than a falling out between friends. The cross is a great battle between God and his enemies. As Judas goes out night falls.

Reflection

Think for a moment about the experience of betrayal for Jesus: injustice; ungratefulness; pain. What would you have found hardest about Judas' actions?

How do you feel knowing that Jesus chose to go through this in love for you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you could have stopped Judas at any point and yet you chose to endure the pain of betrayal. Thank you that you were willing to be betrayed – cast out by a friend – so that we who deserve to be cast out, can instead be called your friends. Amen

Week 2: Prayer walk

At some point this week, go on a prayer walk. This could be walking around your neighbourhood or getting up onto the moor. If walking is difficult you might choose instead to sit outside. Sometimes getting physical space from the tasks and people that normally occupy our focus can help us to focus on God. Jesus himself used to regularly withdraw to the mountainside to pray (Luke 5:15-16; 6:12). As you walk pray out loud. Whilst this can seem strange at first it helps to stay focused on speaking / listening to God rather than allowing our mind to wander.

Day 5 – Monday 22nd February

Reading: John 13:31-38

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ 'My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.' ³⁶ Simon Peter asked him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.'

³⁷ Peter asked, 'Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.'

³⁸ Then Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times!'

Comment

As Judas leaves Jesus starts to talk more explicitly about what is to come and, looking ahead to his crucifixion and exaltation, describes it as his moment of glorification. Jesus is glorified in the shame of the cross, because we see the extent of his love in this act of self-sacrifice. Jesus is also glorified in his resurrection and ascension, as he returns to the Father. We are called to love one another as Jesus has loved us, but Jesus' interaction with Peter here reminds us that we are unable to do that in our own strength.

Reflection

By this (loving one another) everyone will know that you are my disciples. Think about the city of Bradford looking in on Sunbridge Road Mission:

How, by God's grace, are we doing this well?

How, with the Spirit's help, could we grow in loving one another as Jesus has loved us?

Prayer

Father God, thank you that through the cross, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus you have been glorified. By your Spirit, help us this week to love one another so that people may see that we are his disciples. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 6 – Tuesday 23rd February

Reading: John 14:1-8

14 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.'

⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

⁶ Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

Comment

Jesus has returned to his Father in heaven, and he makes it clear here that he has prepared a place for his disciples. This is a wonderful image of heaven as a house with rooms ready and prepared for us. How do we get there? Jesus is very clear. The only way to the Father is through Jesus. Jesus will prepare a place for his disciples, for those who believe in him. There is no other way to know God the Father or live with him forever.

Reflection

How are these verses a comfort to us as we live in the world today?

How are these verses uncomfortable in the world we live in today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that we don't need to fear death. Thank you that you have gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us as your disciples. Thank you that today, through you, we can know God as our Father. Please give us opportunities today to speak of you – the way, the truth, the life – so that people around us might come to know the Father and share in the solid hope we enjoy. Amen

Day 7 – Wednesday 24th February

Reading: John 14:8-14

⁸ Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

⁹ Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'

Comment

Philip should have realized by now that in seeing Jesus he has seen the Father. Jesus reveals God to us – both in his words and his works. As Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure, he assures them that his work will not stop. In fact, it will grow, and they will play a part in it. Jesus is at work today through our works and prayers as his disciples. As we serve him, as we pray in his name, the Son continue to bring glory to the Father. Think of the great multitude who have come to living faith since Jesus' ascension. Think of the fruit that has been borne by the Spirit in their lives over the centuries. Think of all God has done in answer to his people's prayers. Surely it exceeds what Jesus' saw during his time on earth. The mustard seed has grown into a great tree (c.f. Matthew 13:31-32).

Reflection

How do you feel about the idea that though Jesus has returned to his Father, he continues his work through us as his disciples?

How does that change the way we see our works, and our prayers?

Prayer

Spend some time asking your heavenly Father to work in specific ways, that he may continue to be glorified in the Son.

Day 8 – Thursday 25th February

Reading: John 14:15-21

¹⁵ 'If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.'

Comment

Jesus speaks about the coming of the Holy Spirit, which is a significant theme in the second half of John's gospel. The Spirit is called an advocate – which is someone who pleads your case in court. The word has the sense of coming alongside to strengthen and encourage. Counsellor is another common translation. Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry he had been constantly alongside his disciples, strengthening and encouraging them. His departure doesn't mean we are left alone. He promises to send another advocate, the Holy Spirit who will come alongside his disciples as he lives within them.

Reflection

The disciples relied on Jesus' help whilst he was with them. Where in your life at the moment do you need to rely upon the Spirit's help as your advocate?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you haven't left us alone as your disciples but have given us the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, thank you that you are with me this week, to strengthen and encourage me. Please help me to walk in truth and obedience. Amen

[You might want to bring particular situations before God where you need the Spirit's help to walk in truth and obedience]

Day 9 – Friday 26th February

Reading: John 14:22-27

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, ‘But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?’

²³ Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ ‘All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Comment

Jesus makes it very clear that love and obedience come together. Our love for Jesus will show itself in our obedience of him. He has no time for the person who says ‘I love Jesus’ but then blatantly ignores his teaching. The world around us doesn’t love Jesus, and so we can’t expect it to obey his teaching.

The Holy Spirit will teach Jesus’ disciples all things, and remind them of all Jesus has said to them. Primarily this refers to the way in which he equipped the Apostles to write the New Testament – filling out Jesus’ teaching, and helping them to understand his words. Of course, the Holy Spirit continues to teach us as his disciples and lead us in understanding and obeying Jesus’ words.

Reflection

How is your love for Jesus showing itself in obedience at the moment?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, in whom both you and the Father make your home with us, and through whom the Apostles were inspired as they wrote down your words in the New Testament. I love you, and want to walk in your ways today. Please help me to do so by your Spirit. Amen

Day 10 – Saturday 27th February

Reading: John 14:28-31

²⁸ ‘You heard me say, “I am going away and I am coming back to you.” If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. ‘Come now; let us leave.

Comment

The Father is greater than I doesn't mean that Jesus is somehow less than God. The Father sits enthroned in the glory of heaven, whilst Jesus at this point has humbled himself to walk alongside his disciples on Jerusalem's streets. If his disciples really loved him, they should long for him to ascend again to his Father to enjoy the glory he deserves. The prince of this world refers to the devil. Again, John shows us that the cross is a cosmic battle between God and Satan, but despite appearances Jesus is in full control. He leaves in obedience to his Father, knowing what awaits him.

Reflection

Is it possible for us to be more concerned by how Jesus can help us, than that he be glorified?

What is the problem with that?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am sorry when I love myself more than I love you. Thank you that today you sit exalted and enthroned in heaven, having willingly faced the devil at the cross, in obedience to the Father. I pray today that my main concern would be you, and your glory, and that you would receive the praise you deserve. Amen

Week 3: Silence

At the start and end of each devotion this week spend 2 minutes in silence with God. Like Martha, so often we are worried and upset by all sorts of things and struggle to make space to be with God or listen to what he might be saying to us. As you sit in silence, try to clear the distractions from your mind, and focus on being with Jesus, open to what he might be laying on your heart by his Spirit.

Day 11 – Monday 1st March

Silence (2 minutes)

Reading: John 15:1-4

15 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Comment

We have already seen that Jesus' disciples are marked by love and obedience. It is clear here that God's intention for us, as his people, is to be fruitful. To be fruitful is to live a life that pleases God: Galatians 5:22-23 speaks about the fruit of the Spirit; sharing the gospel with others is described in Matthew 9:38 as working in the harvest field; and the focus here in John 15 is on loving others (15:12; 17). Jesus is very clear here, however, that we can only be fruitful by remaining in him. We can't live lives that are pleasing to God on our own.

Reflection

Pruning is where a plant is cut right back so that it grows back even more fruitful. How have you experienced God's pruning in your life (hard times that lead to you living a life that is more pleasing to him)?

Prayer

Father God, thank you that you want me to be fruitful, and are willing to prune me to help me live a life that is pleasing to you. I know I can't do this in my own strength, so please help me this week to remain in Jesus, and in him to grow in godliness, share the gospel with those around me, and love my brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen

Silence (2 minutes)

Day 12 – Tuesday 2nd March

Silence (2 minutes)

Reading: John 15:5-8

⁵ 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Comment

The contrast here is stark. There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian: either we are in Christ and will bear fruit, or we have no real connection to Jesus and will ultimately face God's judgement. We also get a fuller idea here of what it means to remain in Jesus. It involves his words remaining in us, and us coming before him in prayer to ask him to work out his purposes in us and through us.

Reflection

These verses say fruitfulness comes out of our relationship with Jesus. Think about what it might look like to prioritise your relationship with Jesus throughout the day ahead of you.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that in you we can be fruitful. I pray that today your word would remain in me, shaping the way I think, speak, and act. Throughout today help me to come before you in prayer, according to your word, in the confidence that you will gladly answer. I pray that today you would give me the opportunity to be fruitful, so that people may see I am your disciple, and God the Father might be glorified. Amen

Silence (2 minutes)

Day 13 – Wednesday 3rd March

Silence (2 minutes)

Reading: John 15:9-17

⁹ 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: love each other.

Comment

Incredibly Jesus tells us that he loves us as his Father loves him! We remain in his love by keeping his commands. This doesn't mean that one act of disobedience means Jesus no longer loves us, but that we experience and enjoy his love as we walk in obedience. You see his commands are not burdensome. His ways are good, and so as we trust him in obedience we find joy. The main command he gives us here is *love one another*. The way we treat one another in the church matters a lot to God – it reveals our spiritual maturity. We are called to love each other as God has loved us.

Reflection

Jesus calls us his friends. How do you feel about Jesus sharing his business with you, and involving you in what he is doing?

Prayer

As you come to this time of silence, ask God to show you how you can love his people at Sunbridge Road Mission. You may want to write something down, and ask God to help you walk in obedience to his command.

Silence (2 minutes)

Day 14 – Thursday 4th March

Silence (2 minutes)

Reading: John 15:18-25

18 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember what I told you: "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. 24 If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25 But this is to fulfil what is written in their Law: "They hated me without reason."

Comment

In John's gospel the world is society organised against God and his purposes. Here Jesus tells us there is a fundamental hostility between the world and the new society he is forming (the church). We shouldn't be surprised when we face hatred, persecution, or opposition. This is how the world treated Jesus, and if we are truly following him we should expect some hostility. In the end the only way to be loved by the world is to belong to it.

Reflection

Where do you feel the hatred of the world as a follower of Jesus?

How does it help you to know that in facing opposition you are following in Jesus' path?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I thank you for choosing me out of the world to be part of the new community you are forming in the church. Thank you that you were willing to bear people's hatred and hostility even though you had done nothing wrong. Forgive me where I care more about the world's love than your love, and help me to face hostility courageously because I belong to you. Amen

Silence (2 minutes)

Day 15 – Friday 5th March

Silence (2 minutes)

Reading: John 15:26-27

²⁶ 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father – the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

Comment

How will people know Jesus when he has returned to the Father? Jesus tells us that both the Spirit and the Apostles will bear witness to him. In this sense J.I. Packer describes the ministry of the spirit as a floodlight. Just as a floodlight's job is not to draw attention to itself, but shine light on something else, so the Spirit testifies about Jesus and points people to him. The Apostles too, have a unique role in telling people about Jesus, which they did in both their preaching and their writing. One of the qualifications for all the New Testament authors was that they were eye-witnesses who were with Jesus from the beginning.

Reflection

How do the Spirit and the Apostles continue to testify to Jesus today?

Prayer

Think of some people on your heart who do not yet know Jesus. Ask the Father to reveal his Son to them by the witness of his Spirit and the testimony of the Apostles in the New Testament.

Silence (2 minutes)

Day 16 – Saturday 6th March

Silence (2 minutes)

Reading: John 16:1-6

16 'All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ² They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³ They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴ I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. I did not tell you this from the beginning because I was with you, ⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, "Where are you going?" ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.

Comment

Jesus is realistic about persecution so that we aren't thrown off course when it comes. Facing persecution as Jesus' disciples doesn't mean something has gone wrong. Jesus says this is par for the course. For many Christians throughout history, and across the globe, persecution is all they have ever known.

Reflection

In the UK the laws and values of our society are changing, and it seems like it is becoming harder to participate as a follower of Jesus. Should this alarm us?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that you are realistic about what it might mean to follow you in a world that is fundamentally opposed to your rule. Please protect your church from falling away as it faces opposition from the surrounding culture. Help us at Sunbridge Road Mission to remain faithful to you, and to boldly stand up for you even when it is unpopular and costly. Amen

Silence (2 minutes)

Week 4: Journaling

This week, take a pen, and use the space after each devotion to write down one reflection and one prayer each day. This doesn't have to be in the same slot as your reading. You may want to do the reading first thing in the morning, and take time to journal as you go to bed at night. Write down one reflection about what God has been teaching you or showing you that day. Then write out a prayer in response to that, as you bring the day before the Lord.

Day 17 – Monday 8th March

Reading: John 16:7-11

⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Comment

Sometimes we think 'if only I could have been in Galilee when Jesus was there', as if it would have been fuller, or more real, or easier. Jesus tells us that it is good for them that he is going away, because then they will receive the Holy Spirit. His point is that being alive now, after the coming of the Spirit, is better than walking with Jesus whilst he was on earth. Jesus came as a light. He showed up people's sin, exposed their superficial righteousness, and brought true judgement. Jesus has now returned to the Father, but the Spirit continues this work: convicting people of sin (particularly unbelief in Jesus); showing up our attempts at righteousness; and bringing true judgement to bear.

Reflection

Have you grasped how precious a gift the Holy Spirit is?

Why do the people around us need the Holy Spirit?

Prayer

Father God, thank you for giving us your Spirit. Thank you that in the Holy Spirit we enjoy even greater privileges than those who walked with Jesus in Galilee. Thank you for showing me the reality of my sin, helping me to look to Christ's perfect righteousness, and opening my eyes to the truth. Please be at work in those around me who are blind to their need for Jesus. Amen

Journal reflection:

What has God been teaching you or showing you today?

Written prayer:

Day 18 – Tuesday 9th March

Reading: John 16:12-15

¹² 'I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.'

Comment

Jesus is speaking to his disciples the night before his death, and at this stage they haven't even got their heads around the idea of his resurrection. It is not surprising that Jesus has more he needs to tell them! Sometimes people accuse Jesus' disciples of making Christianity up, but Jesus makes it clear that he what the Apostles wrote and spoke came from him. The Spirit receives these words from Jesus and makes them known to the Apostles. Some Bibles have Jesus' speech in the gospels in red to highlight it. The problem with that is that it gives the impression the words in black are somehow less important, merely human words. These verses make it clear that the whole of the New Testament are Jesus' words. Some spoken during his earthly ministry. Others given later to his disciples by the Holy Spirit.

Reflection

How does this affect how you see the New Testament?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for all you have taught us as your disciples, both in your earthly ministry and through the Holy Spirit as your disciples wrote the New Testament. Thank you that I can read your words in a language I understand. Help me to treasure your words to me, and be careful to obey them. Amen

Journal reflection:

What has God been teaching you or showing you today?

Written prayer:

Day 19 – Wednesday 10th March

Reading: John 16:16-24

¹⁶ Jesus went on to say, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.'

¹⁷ At this, some of his disciples said to one another, 'What does he mean by saying, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me," and "Because I am going to the Father"?' ¹⁸ They kept asking, 'What does he mean by "a little while"? We don't understand what he is saying.'

¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, 'Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me"?' ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²² So with you: now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³ In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.'

Comment

In verses 16-22 Jesus is preparing his disciples for the grief they will experience at his crucifixion, and reassuring them that it will not be long before they know the joy of his resurrection. He then moves on to speak about prayer. Whilst Jesus was with them on earth they would frequently come to him with questions and requests. It might seem that when he has gone they will miss out, but Jesus says quite the opposite. Through his death, resurrection, and the coming of the Spirit, they will be able to approach the Father directly. As we pray in Jesus' name we can ask God the Father directly, at any time, wherever we are. We can know the joy of relating to God as *our* Father. Asking of him in prayer, and receiving from him as his children.

Reflection

How have you experienced joy in asking of your Father in Jesus' name and receiving from him as his child?

Prayer

In Philippians 4:6 we are encouraged in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, to present our requests to God. Spend some time asking your Heavenly Father now, in Jesus' name.

Journal reflection:

What has God been teaching you or showing you today?

Written prayer:

Day 20 – Thursday 11th March

Reading: John 16:25-33

²⁵ 'Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. ²⁷ No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.'

²⁹ Then Jesus' disciples said, 'Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. ³⁰ Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.'

³¹ 'Do you now believe?' Jesus replied. ³² 'A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.'

³³ 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

Comment

The disciples claim they understand, but Jesus makes it clear that before long their confidence and bravado will fade. It won't be long before Jesus finds himself alone in his time of need. Still he leaves them with a reassurance of peace. In Christ, we can know peace, whatever the world might throw at us, because we know ultimately that Jesus is stronger than the world. The world may oppose him, but he has overcome it.

Reflection

When do we need to remember that Jesus has overcome the world?

Prayer

As yesterday bring your petitions and requests to your Father who loves you, remembering the promise in the next part of Philippians (4:7), that the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Journal reflection:

What has God been teaching you or showing you today?

Written prayer:

Day 21 – Friday 12th March

Reading: John 17:1-5

17 After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed:

'Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Comment

This remarkable chapter contains Jesus' prayer shortly before his death as he prays for himself (1-5); his disciples (6-19); and the church (20-26). The hour that has come is the hour of his death, and Jesus makes it clear that this is not a moment of shame but glory. God the Father is glorified as Jesus finishes his work upon the cross, and God the Son will be glorified when he returns to the Father. The focus of Jesus' work here is to bring eternal life to those the Father has chosen. Notice how eternal life is defined in verse 3, not by lavish possessions, incredible experiences or beautiful surroundings, but by a relationship.

Reflection

What do you make of Jesus' definition of eternal life?

Is knowing God personally what you are most excited about?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you have answered Jesus' prayer. In the cross, resurrection, and ascension you glorified Jesus, and as we see your power, wisdom, love, and grace you are glorified. Forgive us when we want things from you, more than we want you. Thank you that in Jesus you give us yourself, to know now in part, and fully in the new creation. Help me to enjoy you today and give you the glory you deserve. In Jesus name, Amen

Journal reflection:

What has God been teaching you or showing you today?

Written prayer:

Day 22 – Saturday 13th March

Reading: John 17:6-12

⁶ 'I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹ I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. ¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

Comment

Jesus prays specifically for his disciples – those who have been with him during his earthly ministry. To this point he has been with them to keep them safe, and so before he leaves them he commits them to his Father's care. They have been called out of the world, and given to Jesus by the Father. When you think about the context this prayer is quite remarkable. Here is Jesus, facing his own crucifixion, and yet his concern is for his disciples. He prays for their protection, not his own.

Reflection

How are you reassured seeing Jesus' care for his disciples here?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that you look after all those the Father gives you. Thank you that even in your hour of need you were thinking of your disciples. Thank you that I can trust you to look after me. Amen

Journal reflection:

What has God been teaching you or showing you today?

Written prayer:

Week 5: Arrow prayers

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we are instructed to *pray continually...for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*. This doesn't mean we are to put our lives on hold to spend every waking hour in a prayer meeting. Instead this is talking about walking with God in every part of our lives, and bring whatever we are doing before him. Philippians 4:6 similarly instructs us *in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God*. This week, whenever you are about to start a new task, or meet the next person, take a second to bring it before God. Use the transitions in each day to come before God. If you are unsure what to pray try the following prayers from Scripture:

Your kingdom come, your will be done (Matthew 6:10)

Lord, help me to be wise in the way I act towards outsiders; making the most of every opportunity. Let my conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that I may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:5-6)

Day 23 – Monday 15th March

Reading: John 17:13-19

¹³ 'I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. ¹⁴ I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

Comment

You may have heard people saying that to be a Christian is to be 'in the world, but not of the world.' Jesus' intention is not that his disciples are taken out of the world, to live some hermit existence. Like him they are sent into the world with a purpose. His prayer is that within the world they would remain distinct (to be sanctified is to be set apart), and protected from the evil one.

Reflection

As you look at your life are you in the world but not of the world?

Is belonging to the world or retreating from the world more of a danger for you?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please help me to be in the world but not of the world. In all that I encounter today help me to be salt and light to those around me. Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one. In Jesus name, Amen

Day 24 – Tuesday 16th March

Reading: John 17:20-23

²⁰ 'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – ²³ I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Comment

Jesus' disciples are sent into the world to proclaim the good news about him, and now Jesus prays for those who respond to the message of the Apostles. This is a prayer for the church throughout the ages. So here, the night before his death, Jesus is praying for you. Jesus is praying for us at Sunbridge Road Mission. What is he praying for? Unity. This isn't a unity we manufacture, but one that is achieved in Christ. As we believe the message of the Apostles we are bought together in purpose and love. Jesus prays that our unity would be visible, and that by it the watching world would sit up and take notice. Isn't this an exciting vision – that we might live out our unity at Sunbridge Road Mission so that as Bradford looks on people would conclude that this must be of God.

Reflection

What do you think of the idea that our unity as gospel believers helps people to see the love of God, and the reality of who Jesus is?

How are we doing at displaying the unity we have in Christ at Sunbridge Road Mission?

Prayer

Father God, thank you for the unity we enjoy in Christ. We might be from all kinds of backgrounds, but in him we are brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father. Help us to live out our unity by loving one another and working together in our common gospel purpose. We pray that the way we relate to one another would help those living around us to see Jesus and the love you have for us as your people. In Jesus name, Amen

Day 25 – Wednesday 17th March

Reading: John 17:24-26

²⁴ 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.'

²⁵ 'Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.'

Comment

Jesus is looking forward to being restored to the glory he enjoyed before taking on flesh. His final prayer for those who belong to him is that we would share in this glory. As John tells us in his letter *when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* (1 John 3:2). Jesus makes God the Father known to us, and promises to continue doing so, that both the love of the Father and Jesus himself might dwell in us. In Romans 5:5 we are told that *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit*. Incredibly we can experience the same love the Father has for his Son.

Reflection

Do we see ourselves as those God loves with the same love he has for his Son?

Prayer

We often find it hard to enjoy God's love for us. Using Paul's words from Ephesians 3:14-19 to echo Jesus' own prayer for you:

Father, I pray that out of your glorious riches you would strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that being rooted and established in love, I may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. In Jesus name, Amen

Day 26 – Thursday 18th March

Reading: John 18:1-9

18 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want?'

5 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied.

'I am he,' Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, 'Who is it you want?'

'Jesus of Nazareth,' they said.

8 Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.' 9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.'

Comment

These verses describe Jesus being betrayed by his close friend, and ambushed by a detachment of Roman soldiers. Yet it is clear throughout that Jesus is in control. He chooses to leave the safety of the upper room. He goes to a place he knows Judas will expect to find him. Jesus speaks first. He knows everything that is going to happen. The guards fall to the ground at his voice.

Reflection

Jesus allowed himself to be betrayed, arrested, and ultimately crucified, knowing all the time what was coming, and able to stop it whenever he wanted. How do you feel about Jesus reading these verses?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I marvel at your selfless love. You knew what was coming. You could have stopped it at any moment. You had complete control. Yet you chose the pain of betrayal. You chose the shame of arrest. As we see so clearly in these verses, at the cross you chose not to think of yourself, but instead to offer yourself so that I might go free. All I can do is fall down in worship.

Day 27 – Friday 19th March

Reading: John 18:10-11

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'

Comment

On the surface Jesus' death looks like a disaster. What could be worse than God's chosen King being betrayed, arrested, accused, and killed. This is Peter's perspective and he tries everything in his power to prevent Jesus' arrest. As is often the case, however, Peter doesn't understand what is going on. Jesus' reply shows us what is really going on under the surface. The cup he talks about is a symbol of God's judgement – his terrible wrath poured out in judgement of sin (c.f. Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17; 22; Jeremiah 25:15-17; 28-29; 49:12; Revelation 14:10; 16:19). All of us deserve to drink that cup, but at the cross Jesus chooses to drink it to the dregs, so that we need not face God's judgement. The real trial of the cross was not the physical pain, but the wrath of God which was poured out on Jesus.

Reflection

Read Isaiah 51:17-22. How do you feel knowing that Jesus willingly drank this cup so that you don't have to?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that at the cross you faced the wrath of God that I deserve because of my sin. You could have fought off those Roman soldiers in an instant, and yet you chose to obey the Father. Thank you for drinking the cup of God's judgement right down, so that there is nothing left for me to drink. Amen

Day 28 – Saturday 20th March

Reading: John 18:12-18

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant-girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?' she asked Peter.

He replied, 'I am not.'

¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood round a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Comment

Jesus has been betrayed by Judas his close friend, arrested by the Roman soldiers, and now he faces the hostility of the Jewish religious leaders. Caiaphas speaks more truth than he knows when he says that *it would be good if one man died for all the people*. It is good, for all of us need a sacrifice. Someone to die in our place. Take Peter, Jesus' most vocal supporter. He wants to be right there fighting by Jesus' side, and yet in his moment of need Peter denies his Lord. At the cross Jesus is alone. No-one stands with him, because in reality all of us fall short. All of us fail Jesus. All of us, including Peter, need him to die for us.

Reflection

Where do you find it hardest to be known as a disciple of Jesus?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am sorry for the times I deny you. I am sorry for the times I choose to enjoy the comfort of the world rather than be known as yours. Just like Peter I need you to die for me. Thank you that as I come to the cross today I find forgiveness. Amen

Week 6: Singing

This week try and set aside a time to worship God in song. One of the most natural ways for us to spend time with Jesus is giving him the praise he deserves. As Colossians 3:16 reminds us singing helps the message of Christ to dwell within us:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

This could mean playing some worship songs in the car on your commute rather than listening to the radio. It could mean taking some time in the evening to sing using videos on YouTube. It could mean pausing after breakfast to sing together as a family. It might be on your own or it might be with others. It could be that you invite some others over, and print off some words, so that you can spend some time praising God together.

Day 29 – Monday 22nd March

Reading: John 18:19-24

¹⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

²⁰ 'I have spoken openly to the world,' Jesus replied. 'I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.'

²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials near by slapped him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the high priest?' he demanded.

²³ 'If I said something wrong,' Jesus replied, 'testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?' ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Comment

Jesus has nothing to hide. He has lived a life of integrity and transparency, and anything he says to them he has taught in public for people to hear. There is a great irony here. The high priest, whose role is to mediate between God and his people, is looking at the great mediator between God and man, but he can't see him. The official rebukes Jesus for what he perceives as disrespect, blind to the fact he has just slapped the great High Priest in the face. As Hebrews reminds us *we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin* (Hebrews 4:15).

Reflection

In his trial Jesus faced unjust accusations. How would we have been tempted to react in such circumstances?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for your self-control. You knew temptation. The temptation to strike back. The temptation to defend yourself. The temptation to fight your corner. Yet you chose to bear shame and injustice and condemnation so that you could serve as my high priest, making a way for me to come to God. Amen

Day 30 – Tuesday 23rd March

Reading: John 18:25-27

²⁵ *Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, 'You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?'*

He denied it, saying, 'I am not.'

²⁶ *One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, 'Didn't I see you with him in the garden?'* ²⁷ *Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a cock began to crow.*

Comment

Just as Jesus' foretold (13:38) Peter denies Jesus three times. In his own strength he is unable to stand with Jesus in his hour of need. We might expect that this would disqualify Peter from ministry, and I'm sure Peter grappled with shame and regret. At the end of his gospel John records Jesus reinstatement of Peter (21:15-19). Three times Jesus asks Peter *do you love me*, and as Peter replies *Yes*, Jesus responds to him *feed my lambs...take care of my sheep...feed my sheep*. Peter's fall doesn't invalidate him from future service. Wonderfully Jesus restores him, and gives him important work to do in caring for his people.

Reflection

Are there moments of regret in our past that we think disqualify us from being used by Jesus today?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am sorry for times in my life where I have been unfaithful to you. Thank you that through your grace there is a way back, not just to forgiveness, but useful work in your service. Please help me to accept your forgiveness for past failures, and not allow them to rob me of opportunities to serve you today. Thank you that we serve, not in our perfection, but in your grace. Amen

Day 31 – Wednesday 24th March

Reading: John 18:28-32

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?'

³⁰ 'If he were not a criminal,' they replied, 'we would not have handed him over to you.'

³¹ Pilate said, 'Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.'

'But we have no right to execute anyone,' they objected. ³² This took place to fulfil what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

Comment

The irony and blindness here is startling. The Jewish leaders refuse to enter the Roman governor's palace, because associating with Gentiles might leave them ceremonially unclean, and they want to be able to enjoy the Passover meal. Yet at the same time they self-righteously stay put by the front door they are hand Jesus over to the Romans to execute him. They want to be sure they can eat the Passover lamb commemorating God's deliverance of his people from Egypt, and at the very same time they are unknowingly sending the true lamb of God to his death. They want to be clean, and yet they have blood on their hands. Incredibly, however, through their actions God is making a way for us to be truly cleansed from sin.

Reflection

How is it possible today for people to be so focused on making themselves clean, they miss the true forgiveness Jesus has achieved for them at the cross?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I acknowledge that I cannot clean myself up. I cannot deal with my own sin. Please protect me from focusing so much on my good works that I miss what you have done for me at the cross. Thank you for coming as the true Passover lamb, to deliver me from judgement and cleanse me from sin. Amen

Day 32 – Thursday 25th March

Reading: John 18:33-40

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’

³⁴ ‘Is that your own idea,’ Jesus asked, ‘or did others talk to you about me?’

³⁵ ‘Am I a Jew?’ Pilate replied. ‘Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?’

³⁶ Jesus said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.’

³⁷ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate.

Jesus answered, ‘You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’

³⁸ ‘What is truth?’ retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, ‘I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release “the king of the Jews”?’

⁴⁰ They shouted back, ‘No, not him! Give us Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Comment

Time and time again in this account John makes it clear that Jesus is innocent. Pilate tells us three times that he can find no basis for a charge against him (18:38; 19:4,6), Jesus doesn't deserve to die. He dies as an innocent man. This is so important, because if Jesus died for his own sin, then he couldn't die for ours. At the cross a substitution takes place. The innocent one takes on sin, so that we the guilty may go free. We see a picture of this substitution with Barabbas. Jesus, the innocent one, is sent to be crucified, whilst Barabbas, a known criminal, goes free. In many ways, if we are to place ourselves in the crucifixion account, we are Barabbas. We deserve death because of our rebellion, and yet Jesus the innocent one dies in our place so that we can go free.

Reflection

How do you feel thinking about yourself as Barabbas?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you lived a perfect life. In all your thoughts, words, and actions you never did anything wrong. You didn't deserve to die as a rebel upon a Roman cross. It is I that deserve to die because of my rebellion. Thank you that because of your sacrifice, I the guilty, can go free. Amen

Day 33 – Friday 26th March

Reading: John 19:1-6

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³ and went up to him again and again, saying, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.’ ⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’

But Pilate answered, ‘You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.’

Comment

Jesus was treated terribly as he approached the cross. Flogged, mocked, slapped, and falsely accused. 1 Peter 2:23 reminds us that *when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats.* What enables him to do that? Peter gives us two reasons: *he entrusted himself to him who judges justly; and he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.* Sometimes we suffer unjustly, and it is hard. Everything within us wants to retaliate or vindicate ourselves. Peter suggests that in those situations we should look to Jesus as our example – we too can trust ourselves to him who judges justly.

Reflection

Where do you struggle not to retaliate or threaten when you suffer unjustly?

How is Jesus’ example here helpful?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for enduring such injustice without threat or retaliation. Please help me to follow your example in bearing up under the pain of unjust suffering because I am conscious of God. Help me to trust God who judges justly rather than seeking justice by my own hand. Thank you for taking the flogging, the mocking, the slapping, and the false accusation so that I might die to sin and live for righteousness. Amen

Day 34 – Saturday 27th March

Reading: John 19:7-11

⁷ *The Jewish leaders insisted, 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.'*

⁸ *When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. 'Where do you come from?' he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' Pilate said. 'Don't you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?'*

¹¹ *Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.'*

Comment

Once again we see clearly that Jesus is in control. It might not look like that. Jesus stands there as a condemned man, dressed up in mockery, and bleeding from the wounds to his back and head. Pilate looks like he is in control as he stands in his palace and pronounces judgement. In reality, however, Pilate's power is an illusion. He only has power because God has granted it. The events that are unfolding are the will of God, not Pilate. In the end, whether they realise it or not, those condemning the Son of God to the cross are carrying out God's will. This doesn't mean they aren't responsible for their actions. Jesus is very clear here that Judas is guilty for the sin of handing Jesus over.

Reflection

How do you feel about God being able to work out his purposes, even through his enemies?

Prayer

Father God, thank you that nothing takes place outside of your sovereign hand. At the cross Jesus' enemies didn't get the better of him, but you were working even through them to bring about your purposes of salvation. Thank you for the reassurance that whatever is going on in my life it isn't too big for you. Help me to trust you. In Jesus name, Amen

Week 7: Scripture meditation

Psalm 1:2 says blessed is the person *whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night*. When we hear the word meditation we often think of eastern meditation where you have to empty your mind of everything. In the Bible meditation is about filling our mind with God's word, a bit like the way a cow chews the cud. Chewing over God's word over and over again, so that we can digest it, and it becomes part of us.

Choose one or two verses that God has really put on your heart as you've read through John over the last 6 weeks. Write these verses out on a little card and carry it with you in your wallet / phone / purse. Aim to memorize the verse(s) by the end of the week. Whenever you find yourself at an idle moment in the day pull out the card and let these verses go around in your mind. As you memorize them you won't need the card, but can turn back to them throughout the day, reflecting on what God is saying to you through them, and how your life might change as a result.

Day 35 – Monday 29th March

Reading: John 19:12-16

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.'

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

'Here is your king,' Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!'

'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked.

'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

Comment

At the very beginning of his gospel John tells us that Jesus *came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*. No where do we see this more starkly than in the Jewish rejection of Jesus at the cross. Here is the Messiah. God's chosen King. Yet they do not recognize him. Instead of receiving God's chosen King they claim allegiance to Caesar, the Roman Emperor oppressing God's people. The Jewish leaders, the Jewish people, and the chief priests all reject God's Messiah. No one stood up for Jesus. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied him. The Jewish leaders condemned him. Pilate handed him over to be crucified.

Reflection

Hostility to Jesus continues today. Where do you see people resisting receiving Jesus as their king?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we grieve to see so many around us rejecting Jesus as their King. We think of family and friends that we love who condemn the one who has come to rescue them, who choose to submit to the powers of this world rather than the King you have chosen. Please open their eyes so that they might see who Jesus is, and submit to him. Amen

Day 36 – Tuesday 30th March

Reading: John 19:16-22

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, ‘Do not write “The King of the Jews”, but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.’

²² Pilate answered, ‘What I have written, I have written.’

Comment

Jesus is a king like no other. So often when we think of a king we think of palaces, robes, thrones, and extravagance. Sitting pretty at the top whilst everyone underneath serves them. With Jesus it couldn't be more different. He gives himself to serve us. He descends to the cross so that we might be lifted up. Pilate may have meant this sign in mockery – after all what kind of king hangs ashamed between criminals on a Roman cross. We realise, however, that the cross is his glory. We have a king who died for us. We worship the servant King.

Reflection

Why are you glad to serve and worship the servant King?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for giving yourself for me. You could have enjoyed the glories of heaven, but you chose to descend to the depths of a Roman cross. You, the King of Kings, hung there between two criminals in love for me. Lord, I wouldn't want to serve anyone else. Please help me to give you the praise and glory you deserve this week. Amen

Day 37 – Wednesday 31st March

Reading: John 19:23-24

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ 'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.'

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

*'They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.'*

So this is what the soldiers did.

Comment

Why does John include this little detail about what the soldiers do with Jesus clothes? It is to show us that all that is taking place at the cross is not random or accidental. All these events have God's hand over them. It is the fulfilment of his plan, revealed throughout Scripture. Psalm 22:18 which is quoted here was written around 1000 years before these events took place. On the face of it the cross may look like a tragic mistake. In reality it is the climax and epicentre of God's plans for the world.

Reflection

If you have time read Psalm 22.

How many references can you see that point us to the cross?

How do you feel knowing that God had all these details in his mind when David wrote Psalm 22 around 1000 years before Jesus died?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are working out your purposes in human history. We marvel at your wisdom and power. We thank you that human history is in your hands, and just as you have fulfilled your promises in the past, so we can trust you to fulfil your promises in the future. We realise today that like the soldiers many people are so preoccupied with the things of this life that they miss Jesus. We look forward to the day when Jesus returns and everyone acknowledges who he is. In his name we pray. Amen

Day 38 – Thursday 1st April

Reading: John 19:25-27

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,' ²⁷ and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Comment

These three verses reveal the remarkable care Jesus has for those he loves. Jesus is facing the excruciating pain of the cross. His death is at most hours away, and yet there is no self-pity. His thoughts are not for himself, but those he has come to serve. The very last act John records before he dies is this expression of kindness to his own mother, Mary. This incident would have been very precious to John, as *the disciple whom he loved* is his way of referring to himself.

Reflection

By faith we become the disciples Jesus loves, and we become Jesus' family; his brother and sisters. How do you feel, knowing that the care expressed for Mary on the cross here, is a picture of his care for you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that right to the end you took care of those the Father had given you to love. Truly we see that you came not to be served but to serve. Yes – you may call me to pick up my cross and follow you, but only after you have laid down your life for me. Thank you that as I follow you I can trust you to look after me. Amen

Day 39 – Friday 2nd April

Reading: John 19:28-30

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Comment

It is finished does not simply mean that Jesus has come to the end of his life. It is finished has the sense of completing a task. We could translate these words, 'it is accomplished.' Jesus has done what he came to do. He has fully obeyed his Father. He has drunk the cup the Father has given him to drink.

Reflection

The cross is Jesus' great victory. Spend some time writing down what you think Jesus achieved in his death. If you need some ideas try reading Isaiah 53:4-12, one of the Scriptures he was fulfilling at the cross.

Prayer

Write down your own prayer expressing your gratitude for what Jesus accomplished at the cross on your behalf, and your on-going dependence on his death.

Day 40 – Saturday 3rd April

Reading: John 19:31-42

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about thirty-five kilograms. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.

Comment

It is important to realise that Jesus really experienced death. He didn't escape at the last minute. He really died, and he was wrapped and placed in a tomb. It is so important that Jesus fully descended into death, because how else can we pronounce that death has been defeated. Our hope in the face of death, is that Jesus has gone through death and come out the other side and we can follow in his path. Hebrews 2 puts it this way:

[Jesus] suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone (9).

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death –

that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (14-15)

Reflection

Why are you grateful that Jesus really died, and lay wrapped in a tomb?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you that you humbled yourself by becoming obedient to death. You allowed yourself to lie in the grave. Thank you that you tasted death in all its horror so that my life need no longer need be ruled over by the fear of death. Amen

What now?

There are still two chapters of John's gospel left which you might want to read over the next two days:

Easter Sunday => Read John 20

Easter Monday => Read John 21

We began this lent devotional by looking at Mary and Martha. Mary chose what was best. To be with Jesus. To listen to him. To sit at his feet.

I hope you have enjoyed spending time with Jesus over the last seven weeks as we have walked through John's gospel together. My prayer is that for you, and for us as a church, this is the beginning of us choosing the best rather than being distracted by the good.

Remember Jesus' words to Martha:

'you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.'