



From
Christmas
Manger
To
Easter Glory

Lenten Devotional Booklet





Jesus coming to save the world was foretold hundreds of years before He was born in Bethlehem. The fact that God sent His Son to earth to be fully human as a baby born in Bethlehem to human parents is very significant. Jesus was also fully God (Son of God) as we can see in His death and resurrection 33 years after His birth. Through these Lenten devotions we are going to walk the path and significance of Jesus' birth and how it relates throughout His life and teachings as He walks to the cross.

The Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday and goes right through to Easter Sunday – there are 40 days and 7 Sundays (culminating on Easter Sunday). This is a booklet of 47 short devotionals, Bible readings and prayers for each day during the Lenten Season (including Sundays). Some of the Bible Readings that go with each day may seem to be the wrong season (Christmas), but they are related to leading us through Jesus' life and ultimately to the cross where we can then celebrate His resurrection.

**May these devotions bring
you to a greater understanding
of God's plan for the salvation
of the world.**





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Our Lenten Journey

Ash Wednesday

Read: Romans 5:6-11

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Luke 9:51 (NIV)

Ever notice that the older we seem to get the closer the birthdays and the faster the years seem to go by? Since turning 50 I feel that God has made the years shorter and that he has taken a couple hours off each day! So, why is this? When I was younger and at school, I couldn't wait to finish school and get to what I really wanted to do with my life. Then at University, I couldn't wait to finally get to work and use all that I learnt. Then, I couldn't wait to get married, to have children, to have the children leave school, to see them married. Oh, and now retirement is looming!

Why should we want to hurry through our lives? Let us relish every moment, cherish every memory! Our journeys may be longer than Jesus' journey – He was only 33 when he died a cruel death. Jesus' journey started like ours – at our birth. But Jesus knew from the beginning (being God) what His purpose of life was to be. His life on earth from the crude manger at Christmas to the cross at Easter was lived to save us from the sin gripping our lives – from our cradles to our graves. But we don't stop there in the grave. We are set free from our sin to live in the glory of heaven with Him.

Through these devotions we travel with Jesus on His Lenten Journey. It starts for us on Ash Wednesday (today). He began His journey when talking to His disciples: ***"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."*** (Luke 18:31b-33 NIV) He knew what would happen and He knows our journey too. We can be thankful that Jesus made His entire life a journey of love for us!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you for all you did for me and for being the world's Saviour. Show me how to live my life as you would have me live it – a journey travelled with you. Amen.*





Securing our Peace

2nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

"Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord... wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:11, 12b (NIV)

Before my first child was born, I enjoyed preparing for our son; getting a crib, soft blankets, clean sheets, soft towels, lotion, little clothes, and nappies galore! This baby was going to be so loved! You may also relate to this. Another baby was born over two thousand years ago who would be loved and adored by His earthly parents, dirty shepherds, travelling wise men and His Father in Heaven. He was born to love all of humanity. Yet when born He was placed not in a clean crib and soft blankets as one would think He deserved, He was born and placed in an animal feeding place with straw and a wrap to cover Him.

Jesus' whole life was one of poverty and self-denial. He didn't come for himself to receive accolades or live in a palace. His birth became the epitome of what His life would hold for Him – it couldn't be otherwise. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:9 – ***"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*** (NIV)

For our sins and wrongdoings, we deserve all the misery and poverty that we could expect. But here comes our Saviour, 'Christ the Lord', God's own Son who then endures the cross and carries the penalties for all our sins. From this crude manger He goes to the cruel cross to stand-in as our substitute. Now we can feel rich with the peace and forgiveness of our sins secured. We can rest comfortably in our beds because He once endured the hardships of a stable. This is not to make us feel guilty but blessed! For peace is what Jesus secured for us, not only for our souls when we sit in church but also for our bodies when we lie down to rest in our beds. Jesus has secured our peace through His amazing love!

Prayer: *My Lord Jesus, thank you for being willing to endure the crude manger and then the cruel cross for my sake and my peace. Amen.*





Taking our Place

3rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:6-21

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

I was watching one of those police movies on TV the other night. It showed a person entering a home and robbing it while the owners slept. The husband woke up and attempted to overpower the robber. Just at that time the police arrived, and the husband was now a hostage. In good TV fashion, the policeman offered himself as a hostage if the robber would let the husband go! I'm sure you have seen similar and most of the time all works out in the end and the police officer is the hero.

Jesus is our hero. We have been taken hostage by all the wrong things we have thought, said, and done; for every day of our entire life. If Jesus hadn't come to take our place as the hostage, our future wouldn't look very good! But, as it is, Jesus offered His life in our place on the cross and died for the sins of the whole world.

Reading again through the 2 Corinthians passage above, in verse 10 it says that in our human state we must all appear before the judgement seat of God and account for all our wrongs in our thoughts and our actions. This is a very condemning verse, for as it is I don't think any of us would fare very well before God's judgement on our own. There is no way I can atone for all the wrong things I have done throughout my life. I am held hostage by all these sins. But the passage continues to say that it is then through Jesus' reconciliation with God that we have been set free and have an eternal future. I sure like the sound of that a lot better. Jesus is our conquering hero; He has taken our place to give us a future in heaven. What an amazing gift of grace He has given us!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord, for taking my place and becoming not just the hostage for my sin, but for dying for me. May my life be one of service to you. Amen.*





Running Away

4th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Matthew 2:13-23

"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'" Matthew 2:13 (NIV)

When a cyclone hits the coast of Australia there is usually some warning. According to the cyclone warning website, we are to secure our home, remove loose things from outside, turn off any utilities, and then evacuate to a safe place. We are not told to stand and fight the storm, for this would be futile. The most important thing is to keep everyone safe. Running away is sometimes the best course of action when lives and safety are at risk.

Cyclone Herod was coming. He had been tricked by the wise men who had been warned to do so by an angel, and Herod was out to find this usurper who was threatening his Kingship, even if the threat came from an infant. God knew that this Cyclone Herod was out to kill His Son, so He sent an angel to pre-warn Joseph to get his family out and to run away to Egypt. It would have done no good for Joseph to stay and fight, Jesus' time for fighting was not here yet. So, they ran to keep them all safe. Cyclone Herod did hit the town of Bethlehem and many infants were killed due to Herod's paranoia. There was much weeping in Bethlehem, and I am sure that Joseph and Mary also wept for all those boys who had been killed. God knew the heart of Herod and needed to keep His Son safe until He was old enough to fight the devil on His own. This was the fight to end all fights – Jesus' death and rising again – our future was in His hands.

Terrible things happen and will continue to happen, but that doesn't mean that God doesn't care; it means that God has all things in His hands and knows what is the best and the best timing. God continues to direct and guide our lives, so listen, and heed His voice.

Prayer: *Thank you God for securing my future by warning Joseph so long ago. You hold my life in your hands, and I thank you for this gift of love. Amen.*





Fully Human

1st Sunday during Lent

Read: Hebrews 4:11-16

"But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman..."
Galatians 4:4a (NIV)

The short story by Bret Harte, *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, set in the California Goldrush days of 1850's, shows very clearly the impact a small baby can have on the lives of hardened men. This small orphan boy, named Thomas Luck, was raised by the rough men of Roaring Camp. There were no women to help, but Stumpy took it upon himself to be the baby's mother, father, and Godfather, with the rest of the camp helping. The camp changed over time. This tiny baby changed the hearts of tough men.

God sent His Son as a baby, born of a human woman into a harsh situation. A census forcing travel and then no room for a child to be born, a jealous King Herod threatened by a baby, a couple with no home. But this little baby changed the hearts of lowly, rough shepherds, great wise men and everyone in between... us included! This baby was born fully human by a human mother and a loving surrogate human father to grow and mature as one of us.

It can really make us think and wonder why God brought Jesus up as a human baby. How else could Jesus be considered a human if he wasn't first conceived in a human woman, be born and develop as a human baby? Jesus was fully human, who suffered and died as a human. Had He been an angel with more power than human beings, or even a little god exercising a measure of divine power, He could not qualify as the Messiah who was to save all people from their sins. He had to be capable of giving up His life for us. ***"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."*** (Hebrews 4:15 NIV) Our Saviour and King who died for our sins fully understands what it is to be human!

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, you grew up just as I did and developed as a human being, just so that you could die a human death for the saving of my life. Thank you. Amen.*





Our Holy Temple

5th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Luke 2:41-52

"After three days they found him [Jesus] in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." Luke 2:46 (NIV)

As we have travelled around Australia, and in previous years around other countries, my husband and I enjoyed viewing and visiting other churches. It is peaceful walking around, looking at the stained-glass windows, candles, altars, and features made to make the building a worship place to our Lord and God. The main function of a place of worship is to give thanks and praise to God. I enjoy this act of worship, but there are many who would never step foot into a church and instead find them repulsive. It makes one wonder if they are angry at God or themselves, and whether there is guilt or hurt. God's house is one place where we should be able to find rest and peace.

During Jesus' time, the only temple was the Temple in Jerusalem. So, to be a good Jew it was necessary to go to the Temple to offer sacrifices for sins and praise to God for His goodness. It was important to go there once a year during the Passover. The Temple in Jerusalem was also where a young boy could go to study and learn more about God and His will for their life. Jesus and his parents went there every year (Luke 2:41).

When He was 12 years old, Jesus became separated from his human parents, and it is recorded that He went to the Temple to talk with the scholars and be about His Heavenly Father's business. Jesus loved the Temple. During His ministry years He spent much time worshipping, teaching, and even cleansing the Temple. He wanted the Temple to be God's house of prayer. In His heart and mind God's Word and God's house were closely associated. When Jesus died on the cross, the Temple curtain was torn in two signifying that the separation that had once been between God and humans was now removed. The final sacrifice was made by Jesus for the forgiveness of all our sin. We now have free access to God and His throne of grace.

Prayer: *Thank you, Father, that I can go to your house to find rest, peace, and the forgiveness of all my sins. Help me to bring others to your house. Amen.*





An Obedient Life

6th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Hebrews 5:1-10

"Then he [Jesus] went down to Nazareth with them [Mary & Joseph] and was obedient to them." Luke 2:51a (NIV)

The great church father, St. Augustine (354-430AD), a Christian Bishop and Theologian, was not always saintly and obedient. As a boy he ran with a sketchy crowd. One night, after the gang had finished playing sports in the streets of their neighbourhood, their attention turned to a pear tree that was heavy with ripe fruit. The tree did not belong to any of their families, but it grew on a plot adjacent to that of Augustine's family. *'We carried off a huge load of pears, not to eat ourselves, but to dump out to the hogs, after barely tasting some of them ourselves. Doing this pleased us all the more because it was forbidden.'*

Writing about it in his mid-40s, St. Augustine looked back on this theft and was struck by the fact that he did not even want the pears. He took a pear merely to throw it to the pigs, not for the pigs' sake, but for the sake of his own desire to disobey. This desire can be attributed to 'original sin' stemming back to Adam and Eve.

Jesus as a boy did not have these natural desires. ***"And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." (Luke 2:52 NIV)*** Martin Luther describes His obedience like this: *'He fulfilled the Fourth Commandment by willingly serving father and mother, fetching water, bread, meat, watching the house, and the like.'* From Joseph He learned the carpenter's trade. By Jesus' childhood obedience in Nazareth, He fulfilled God's commandments for our sake, making us the beneficiaries of His perfect and sinless life. But then God gave us more through Jesus. This obedient Son of the Heavenly Father was willing to be offered up as the sacrificial Lamb of God to save us from all our sins and the penalty of death. By being the obedient Son in the smaller duties in Nazareth, He could go on to become obedient in the great mission to bring salvation to the world. When we find it hard to obey God, or some tasks of love are hard to do... remember Jesus!

Prayer: *Loving Saviour, thank you for your sinless and obedient life, so that you as the 'spotless lamb' could fulfill God's mission of saving me and the world. Amen.*





Double Jeopardy

7th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Matthew 3:1-17

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John." Matthew 3:13 (NIV)

"**Double jeopardy** is a procedural defence (primarily in US common law jurisdictions) that prevents an accused person from being tried again on the same (or similar) charges following an acquittal in the same jurisdiction." This law fascinates me – basically it states that you can't be put on trial twice for the same crime.

God pronounced us guilty of sin and wrongdoing since our birth through just who we are - sinners! We have been condemned to death. Wow, with this verdict there is not much hope. That's when God sent Jesus to bring hope and a solution to this verdict. Jesus fought for the victims of sin, for us. His whole life from the cradle to the cross was devoted to bringing us salvation and pronouncing us not guilty.

In the above text we see Jesus coming to John to be baptised. Why would our sinless Saviour come to be baptised for forgiveness? So, Jesus replies: ***"Do it. God's work, putting things right all these centuries, is coming together right now in this baptism."*** (Matthew 3:15 *The Message*) Jesus was in essence keeping the commandment of God to be baptised and present Himself as a sinner in order to be the Saviour of all sinners. This was already foreshadowing Jesus' death on the cross when He would really battle death and the power of darkness.

When we are baptised into the precious name of Jesus, we are made heirs of all that Christ did for us on the cross – where He saved us, washed us clean from sin, and made us presentable to His Heavenly Father. All that Jesus earned for us by His obedience to God's law and enduring the consequences of our disobedience is credited to our account by faith. Double jeopardy applies. Since Jesus willingly gave Himself for us, we are set free, and we cannot ever be found guilty again.

Prayer: *Lord God, you sent your Son Jesus to be the Saviour of the world through Him being pronounced guilty for all my sin. I claim all the promises you gave me at my baptism. Amen.*





Correct Labelling

8th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 4:1-11

"The tempter came to him [Jesus] and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'" Matthew 4:3 (NIV)

A man met the pastor in the chemist and asked him not to preach so much on sin. The man claimed that sin isn't really all that bad. Besides, it might give ideas to young people on how to sin. The pastor took a bottle from the shelf clearly marked POISON. He then said, "So you are asking me to change the label on this bottle and put 'vanilla essence'?"

To change the labels is one of the devil's favourite tricks. He said to Eve in the Garden of Eden: "No, this is not the tree of death to those who eat its forbidden fruit. This is a tree of life and wisdom. It will open your eyes." Satan changed the label that God had given and made it acceptable. In Eve listening to Satan, sin entered the world, and it would never be the same again.

In the above Bible story, the devil again tried to change the labels for Jesus and trick Him into sinning. He wanted Jesus to use His divine power to turn stones into bread - to treat poison as though it were food. The stones-turned-to-bread might not have harmed Jesus' body, but it would have poisoned His soul. The sin of disobedience is always spiritual poison: it kills unless it is removed. Jesus overcame this temptation by adhering to the Word of God.

Putting errors or sin on the same level as truth and trying to mix them to suit our situation or convenience is another of Satan's tactics. Sin is sin and God's Word is life. Jesus would stand for no compromise to the truth, and neither should we. In every instance Jesus spoke the truth, even if it brought Him condemnation and death – His death brought us life and salvation. Remember: truth and error do not mix; the poisonous, corrupting yeast of sin can never be an ingredient in the bread of life.

Prayer: *Jesus, you only spoke the truth for me to hear. Help me to only listen to your voice to lead me on the right path. Amen.*





Revealing His Glory

9th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: John 1:1-14

"This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him." John 2:11 (NIV)

A total solar eclipse occurs somewhere on earth about every eighteen months, and can be viewed from different places on earth. Before research developed into the causes of a solar eclipse many civilisations treated them as a sign of evil or that the god they believed in was somehow angry by removing their source of light and means to work. There were many stories and ideas about eclipses that developed in ancient times as the sun was the source of all life. Even animals can be confused during a solar eclipse; changing their day habits to a night habit; and then when the eclipse is over their day habits return.

Jesus is our source of light – the Son of God who came into the world revealing His glory and sharing His might and love for all. Even when Jesus was ridiculed, hurt, and humiliated; the Son of God still showed His divine majesty, power, wisdom, and glory. Jesus' glory was revealed partially through all He did through His ministry. We clearly saw it on the Mount of Transfiguration when God pronounced His Son to the world, but we also see it at His first miracle of turning water into wine in Cana. This miracle showed not only His divine power, but that He cared for those at a wedding feast and their embarrassment in the lack of wine. (Read John 2:1-11)

While Jesus was on the cross, a physical darkness came over the whole earth. The Son of God's glory had been dimmed. It has been said to signify the agonizing hours that Jesus' Heavenly Father had forsaken Him. It could also signify the spiritual darkness, the total eclipse of the soul, that could have overtaken us had Jesus not fulfilled His work of redemption. Jesus won the battle against death and so rose from the dead. On Easter morning Jesus fully revealed His glory!

Prayer: *Jesus you are the Son of God. You revealed your glory through rising from the dead and beating death for me. I praise you for your Glory. Amen.*





Come as you are!

10th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

"Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" Mark 1:14b-15 (NIV)

One day an artist returned to paint a scene from the part of town where he had lived. In the picture, which he intended to begin the next morning, he wanted to include the ragged, unkempt street sweeper. The following day the sweeper showed up washed, his hair combed, and all decked out in a respectable suit of clothes. The artist had to send him away, for he had wanted to paint him as an authentic character – just as he was.

Through Jesus' actions on the cross at Easter, we have been made righteous and acceptable to God. It is not because of anything we have done or because we are good, it is because God is good! As a sinner we do not need to 'spruce up' before God will accept us, rather we are to come as we are, believing that Jesus is our Saviour.

Even before Jesus was crucified, throughout His ministry He was calling people to repentance and to believe the Good News that He had come to save all of humankind. Jesus announced the presence of God's kingdom; to believe and come just as you are to receive God's mercy and His throne of grace. In the 1 Corinthians text, Paul tries to explain to the Corinthians that there is nothing they can do to obtain God's mercy and love, just to believe in Jesus and His saving actions on the cross. ***"Think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."*** [1 Corinthians 1:26-27 NIV]

Come, just as you are and receive God's mercy and love. Receive His salvation!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for accepting me and choosing me to be a part of your kingdom. Your grace and love covers and forgives me every day. Amen.





A Personal Teacher

2nd Sunday during Lent

Read: John 3:1-17

"He [Nicodemus] came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God.'" John 3:2a (NIV)

Helen Keller (1880-1968), who was blind and deaf and yet led an amazingly full life (an American author, disability rights advocate, political activist, and lecturer), owed much to her teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy. Anne Macy was able to open the world to Helen by opening her mind to the possibilities and spending time one-on-one with her. This relationship was very close, prompting Mark Twain to say, "It took the pair of you to make a complete and perfect whole."

As a teacher, Jesus was never too busy to have a one-on-one conversation and build a relationship with someone who had questions: the Samaritan woman at the well, Mary and Martha, and in the above Bible verse we find Jesus having a conversation with Nicodemus at night. Jesus was never too busy! This conversation contains the beautiful verses of John 3:16 & 17, often referred to as 'the Gospel in a nutshell'.

Other times found Jesus teaching people in groups (disciples) and even in multitudes (sermon on the mount). But the ability to make His teaching personal was never lost. He was able to have a close rapport with all those He wanted to teach. Jesus used parables and then explained them; His teaching involved the lives of the listeners to help them understand the truths and concepts of God.

In the last week of Jesus' life on earth He was found teaching in the temple. Nicodemus spoke truth when he described Jesus as being 'a teacher who has come from God.' Jesus even reminded the Pharisees, ***"Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."*** [Matthew 26:55b-56a NIV] Jesus taught and still teaches us that 'He is the Way and the Truth and the Life and no one can come to the Father except through Him.' Learn from the Teacher!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to find time to sit still and be quiet to listen and learn from you through the Bible and my Christian community. Still my mind and heart and open me up to your leading and guiding. Amen.*





The Great Healer

11th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Isaiah 61:1-4

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Matthew 4:23 (NIV)

'Doctor John Dolittle is a kind-hearted country physician who keeps goldfish in his pond, rabbits in the pantry, white mice in a piano, and a hedgehog in the cellar. He also has an unusual gift: he can talk to animals — a talent that comes in handy, since he prefers treating animals, rather than humans, as his patients.' [Children's book written by Hugh Lofting] The story of Doctor Dolittle is a fictitious story of a kindly doctor having time for the less important – animals. The story takes you through adventures where he is called upon by the great kings and princes in the world to heal the least of the animals and the most peculiar.

God as our Heavenly Father has called upon His Son Jesus Christ to be our great physician. When Jesus had His earthly ministry, He went throughout the land "...healing every disease and sickness among the people." These diseases and disabilities included fever, leprosy, blindness, deafness, lameness, paralysis, a withered hand, bleeding; and were not just for the leaders of the land but the common people. His miracles even included raising people from the dead.

But the greatest of all sicknesses that Jesus came to heal us all from was the sickness of sin – the leprosy of the soul, the sores of the spirit, the paralysis of the mind and heart. Sin is more than a crippling disease; it is fatal. Our sin not only leads us to a temporal and eternal death it is also a spiritual death. Total separation from God. When Jesus gave His life to die on the cross and heal us from our spiritual death, He took upon himself the sins of the whole world, not just the leaders and kings, everyone! Jesus truly heals us from death of sin and has brought us a new life with Him in eternity. Praise be the God for this Great Healer!

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, you came to heal me from my sickness of sin. Thank you for your mercy and goodness to me and help me to live a life worthy of your love. Amen.*





Defeater of Evil

12th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Ephesians 6:10-18

"When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.'" Matthew 8:16-17 (NIV)

In Martin Luther's well-known hymn 'A Mighty Fortress', verse 3 speaks of the power that one word from Jesus to the devil, can undo all his evil work and all his plans:

*Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill, They shall not overpower us.
The world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none; He's judged, for e'er undone;
One little word can fell him.*

[LH 195, Martin Luther (1483-1546)]

No doubt about it: there is a devil, and demons have possessed people, as shown in the Biblical accounts. There is no doubt that they are *unclean spirits*. Much uncleanness lies in the human heart, for Jesus said: ***"For from the inside, from your heart, come the evil ideas which lead you to do immoral things, to rob, kill, commit adultery, be greedy, and do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, jealousy, slander, pride, and folly — all these evil things come from inside you and make you unclean."*** [Mark 7:21-23 GNB]

The healing work of Jesus in His ministry on earth involved liberating those who had demons (were unclean) and He did it with just a word. This in itself shows Jesus' supreme power over the devil and his powers, even before Jesus won the final victory over Satan at the cross. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He claimed authority over the dark things on this earth. We do not need to be afraid or fear Satan, for God is on our side and has freed us from the sin that binds us. With Christ's won forgiveness on the cross, we have victory of life eternal with our Heavenly Father! Being on Jesus' team is being on the winning team!

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you for cleaning us from the inside out through your death and the final defeat of Satan in your resurrection. Grow faith and love in my heart every day. Amen.*





Doing Without

13th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Philippians 2:5-11

"Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'" Matthew 8:20 (NIV)

There have been many stories of persecution from Europe and other countries during the wars of the last century. A couple stories were told to me by the elder members of one of our congregations. Russia was invading Poland. The Russians pushed the Polish residents out of their homes forcing them to flee to Germany. One such family had one hour to get out of their house before the invading forces came. What would you take? What could you carry? This family had a beautiful Family Bible too heavy to carry, but too precious to leave – so they buried it in the garden to hopefully retrieve one day. Another family couldn't take anything but two suitcases. One to hold clothes for the children and nappies for the baby and the other to hold food and the Bible. Their Bible was their source of comfort and reassurance during hard times and persecution.

Jesus and his disciples were also always on the move and what they had, they had to carry. Their homes were where they were welcomed and given food and shelter for the night. Jesus had to ask for food, take sleep when He could, and often was overworked and needed to be alone. Jesus knew what it was to be without... born in a stable, a refugee in Egypt, entered Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, celebrated the Last Supper in a borrowed room and buried in another's grave.

Being in want and being human, Jesus, God's Son can also understand our needs and wants, and knows how deeply we need His love and security in our lives. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has atoned for our sins and has instead presented us as holy before God. We no longer need to be in want or be concerned over our lives; God has them safe and secure in His loving hands. We share the hope and promise of eternal life – what more do we need!

Prayer: *Thank you, Father for providing me with everything I need each day. You fulfill all my wants and needs, help me always to be thankful. Amen.*





Thirst No More

14th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: John 4:7-15; 19:28-30

"When the Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?'" John 4:7 (NIV)

To keep healthy and prevent dehydration, people need to drink 8-10 cups of water or other fluids every day. Fluids are vital for most of our bodily functions—protecting our joints, maintaining organ function, transporting oxygen to cells, and sustaining body temperature. On the contrary, dehydration occurs when you use or lose more fluid than you take in, and your body doesn't have enough water and other fluids to carry out its normal functions. If you don't replace lost fluids, you will get dehydrated.

Jesus was thirsty coming to the well at Sychar in Samaria. He had expended energy and was weary from walking. It was hot and He had to bear the burdens of the day: hateful words from His enemies and the pain of having His outreaching love answered with expressions of unbelief. He was thirsty. His thirst also extended to bringing God's saving love to the lost. So, meeting this woman at the well was planned. Jesus asked a Samaritan outcast for water, and then He told her about her life. She was thirsty to hear. Then when told that there was a 'living water' that would quench her spiritual thirst, she was very eager to know and have this water. Jesus expressed His thirst at the beginning to quench the thirst of others.

Sometimes it is in expressing our needs that others are drawn to the same. God uses our stories to change lives and bring others to know the love and saving action of Jesus. On the cross again Jesus expressed his need: 'I thirst'. Through Jesus suffering and going through the pains He did, scripture was fulfilled, and we were brought closer to God's presence. Jesus has presented us with the 'Living Water' – the Word of God, the Bible to quench our every need and thirst. Go to it every day for sustenance and life and bring others this 'Living Water'!

Prayer: *My thirsty Saviour, I need to have this water every day to quench the needs of my soul. Help me to share this life-giving water. Amen.*





Mountain Views

15th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Luke 9:28-36

“Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which was about to bring fulfillment at Jerusalem.” Luke 9:30-31 (NIV)

From the top of Mount Washington observatory in New Hampshire, on a clear day it's often possible to see into five states - New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York - even into Canada and to the Atlantic Ocean. When the atmosphere is relatively dry and free of haze, it really feels like you are on top of the world as you can see as far as 210km at times.

Before His death, Jesus also ascended a mountain thought to be Mount Hermon (approximately 2700m high). He was 'transfigured' in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Transfigured means to change in form or appearance. ***“As [Jesus] was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning.” (Verse 29)*** From this height the disciples saw a heavenly sight: a bright light, the Old Testament figures of Moses and Elijah, and they heard the voice of God saying: ***“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to Him.” (Verse 35)***

What an incredible sight to see! But this event of glory came before what Jesus had also seen and knew was coming in Jerusalem. Down in the world below this mountaintop experience, was a world of sinners living in the valley of the shadow of death. He foresaw that in Jerusalem, cruel hands would soon lay hands on Him, abuse Him, and nail Him to a cross. The darkness of all our sins would be laid upon Him.

So then, before this darkness there was the shining light of the Transfiguration, which convinced Peter, James and John that Jesus truly was the Son of God. These eyewitnesses gave their testament to God's glory in the love for His Son and the world. From the top of the mountain God shone through His Son to bring the light into our world and save us from the darkness of sin. Look to God's Glory!

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you that your light now shines into my heart. You went through so much darkness for me and I praise you for your love and forgiveness. Amen.*





Through the Blood

16th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Hebrews 9:15-22

***"...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin... He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."
1 John 1:7b, 2:2 (NIV)***

The National War Memorial in Canberra is an interesting but also sobering place to visit. There is a huge section to the WW1 soldiers exploring the different campaigns, how they were fought and then won or lost. The numbers of lives lost are at each campaign display. This last time I went, I noticed that the numbers were not only given, but some short stories and histories of individuals who fought and ultimately lost their lives all in the cause of saving their country. Lives were lost and much blood was shed to protect and form our nation of Australia.

Throughout His time on earth, Jesus also fought – the Pharisees, the unbelievers, those who didn't understand, and the leaders in the land. He wanted to save everyone and bring all people to believe that He was truly God's Son who had come to claim all for eternal life. It was hard work and Jesus even wept over their unbelief. ***"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it" (Luke 19:41 NIV)***. This city was hardhearted, they had killed their prophets, stoned God's messengers - what would it take to save them? It took the life of Jesus to save them and all of us from drowning in the blood of our sin.

During His trial, those who hated Jesus and didn't believe in Him had Him whipped and flogged and His blood flowed freely from all the scourging. A crown was placed on His head and more blood flowed, then nails were pierced through His hands and feet when He was hung on the cross to die. Jesus did not complain, but rather asked God to forgive His tormentors and accusers. This was the only way that we could be made acceptable to God and experience the freedom from sin. Through the blood of Jesus, we have been made new and we can now live in the assurance of God's forgiveness.

Prayer: *It is through your blood dear Jesus that I have been washed clean from all my sins. Show me your love and forgiveness that I can also give it to others. Amen.*





Disappointments

3rd Sunday during Lent

Read: Luke 22:1-6

“Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve.” Luke 22:3 (NIV)

I have heard from my own children that to express ‘disappointment’ in them or their behaviour is worse than any other form of punishment. To be disappointed is to express a ‘sadness or displeasure caused by the non-fulfilment of one’s hopes or expectations.’ To be disappointed is to lose hope, and much then needs to be done to gain that trust again.

It seems that the whole of Jesus’ life from the manger to the cross was marked by disappointment after disappointment: the lack of understanding of His disciples, unbelief from the people and priests, and the constant roadblocks from Satan. All these preliminary challenges had to be overcome before Jesus could enter the main events of His passion in Gethsemane (garden of prayer), Gabbatha (place of the trial) and Golgotha (place of death). The pains and disappointments leading to Jesus’ death are also our story – for He was our Substitute in life and death. All that He overcame was for us!

Jesus had been very careful in choosing His twelve disciples, He spent the previous night in prayer. He had to then be disappointed with their slowness to learn and with their individual misbehaviours: the rashness of Peter, the readiness of John and James to call down fire from heaven to burn an inhospitable Samaritan village, and the greed of Judas Iscariot. Judas then went from bad to worse to worst. He secretly stole from the treasury of the group. He objected to the costly ointment being ‘wasted’ on anointing Jesus, and then he went to the Pharisees to make a bargain for betraying his Master.

Satan had entered Judas’ heart. Satan only had one thing in mind: to keep Jesus from carrying out His work of redemption for the world. God and His Son Jesus knew all these things would occur; it was all foretold in the Old Testament. All the disappointments Jesus endured showed His human nature and this we can relate to. The story of our salvation came from the fickleness of human nature. God can turn all things to good!

Prayer: *Lord, I know that I disappoint you again and again. Thank you for overlooking these things and instead showing me your constant love and forgiveness. Amen.*





Steadfast Hope

17th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: 1 Peter 1:1-9

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." Hebrews 10:23 (NIV)

"You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have," wrote Corrie Ten Boom, author of the book, 'The Hiding Place'. Many of us may have heard of Corrie Ten Boom, born in the Netherlands in 1892, a Dutch-reformed Christian. Her faith was lived throughout her life even when captured by the Nazis in 1944 and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp for helping and sheltering Jews. She shared her faith through the darkest times, losing both her father and sister, and brought many to faith. After years she was released and even able to forgive the Germans who harmed her and the German soldier who killed her sister. She brought hope where there seemed to be no hope through her faith in Jesus. *"Sometimes all we can offer is a whisper of hope. But sometimes that is the very thing that is needed."*

During His agony in Gethsemane, Jesus would have been thankful for little things too: more steadfastness in Peter, the support of his disciples instead of their sleep, a word of encouragement or intercession from God. None of this came and there was only darkness and sorrow. For us as humans, this would have brought us to dire despair. Jesus' human nature did feel this, but also being the Son of God, He called upon the hope given by His Heavenly Father, an angel to support Him. Knowing that this was the only way, He submitted Himself to God's will. The betrayal of His disciple Judas had to be the crowning insult.

Jesus did not collapse under this great load of suffering and sorrow. He gathered His strength and courageously went out to meet the enemy. In all that followed, the trial, being condemned to death and His crucifixion, Jesus was steadfast in His duty and became our Saviour. His steadfastness to His task at hand brings us hope. Without our Saviour Jesus Christ we have no hope – hold steadfastly onto Him.

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for giving me hope for my future. You went all the way through suffering to the cross for my salvation. Amen.*





Anguished Prayer

18th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Matthew 26:36-46

"And being in anguish, he [Jesus] prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." Luke 22:44 (NIV)

The Bible describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as being in anguish. Other translations use agony, being in conflict, full of pain, and His heart was troubled; all pointing to Jesus being intense in His Spirit and needing not just to pray but to pray so deeply to his Heavenly Father that the beads of sweat formed were like blood. Jesus needed His Father to hear Him, to listen to His pleading, and to take what He knew was coming His way which He didn't want to go through. ***"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.*** (Luke 22:42-43 NIV)

Have you ever prayed an 'anguished prayer'? When a child, soon after getting their driver's license, does not come home when they should. When a lump is found, and you await diagnosis. When a tragedy occurs – fire, flood, car accident and the outcomes are not known. During these times it is hard to pray, to know what to pray, and to also pray in God's will. Is it God's will that these things happen or is it because of our sin that things go wrong? God is always there to comfort, to guide and to lead us through these 'anguished' times. He sent Jesus an angel to offer support and strengthen Him when He felt so weak and powerless.

Jesus is more than an incredible example of praying when in life's difficulties. He is the perfect and divine enabler of prayer. As our mediator, Jesus opened the way through defeating death on the cross and rising three days later. We can come directly to God's throne, into His presence and plead our prayer directly. When we pray to our Heavenly Father we are not alone, our Saviour and the Holy Spirit are there also pleading with us. When you are touched and have those times of 'anguished prayer' you are heard by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and they will give you strength to handle all.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord Jesus for going through such times. Knowing that you prayed so earnestly, allows me to do this also. Your strength is there when I am weak. Amen.*





Betrayal

19th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Luke 22:47-53

"Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him." Matthew 26:48-49 (NIV)

Looking for an example of betrayal I googled: 'What was the biggest betrayal of all time?' Thinking that I would get Benedict Arnold who changed sides and abandoned America in the middle of the American Revolutionary war to fight for the British Army or Brutus and Cassius who killed Julius Caesar after pretending to be his closest friends. But to my surprise, the most famous traitor was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus with a kiss for 30 pieces of silver in the Garden of Gethsemane. His act led to Jesus' death by crucifixion which made him the most notorious traitor in history.

What makes an act of betrayal so inexcusable is the hypocrisy involved. Hostility poses as friendship, hatred as love, falsehood as truth. Judas posed as being a friend and disciple of Jesus and instead gave him the 'kiss of death' which ultimately led to betrayal for Jesus – sorrow of His soul – for this demonstrated how completely Judas had turned against Him. The unfaithfulness of this disciple had been foretold: ***"Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."* (Psalm 41:9 NIV)**

The kiss of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane was not a sign of friendship but an act of deadly betrayal. It said that Judas would rather have 30 pieces of silver than the Saviour. There are so many times that we also betray Jesus – not sharing Christ with others, following the crowd in disobedience, putting other worldly gods ahead of our loving God and Heavenly Father. For this we deserve death, but Jesus did the dying and submitted to the intense betrayal so that we can be blessed and are no longer enemies of God. ***"All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also."* (2 Corinthians 5:18 GNB)**

Prayer: Lord, thank you that I can come to you as my friend. Forgive the times I betray you and lead me to be a closer disciple in my walk with you. Amen.





My Worth

20th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-10

“Then one of the Twelve – the one called Judas Iscariot – went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ ‘So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.’” Matthew 26:14-15 (NIV)

What is a human being worth? As far as the body is concerned, the value of the chemicals constituting it was at one time estimated at 98 cents. Then came inflation, and today DataGenetics have valued it as \$160. But what is a human being really worth as a person? Jesus once said that we could give nothing in exchange for our life, not even the worth of the whole world. A price tag cannot be put on our lives, we are invaluable to Him.

But for Jesus, His life came down to a mere thirty pieces of silver (about \$500 in today’s market). In Jesus time, thirty pieces of silver were about five weeks wages. Even a slave in that time cost about thirty pieces of silver. This became the contract price of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Imagine what Jesus would have thought and suffered internally when He realised that His life was worth the price of a slave. Perhaps Judas had hoped that Jesus would be found innocent and then set free, and so Jesus would have His freedom again and Judas would keep his money. But things didn’t work out that way. Jesus was sentenced to death and the thirty pieces of silver became ‘blood money’. When a bad deal is made, the dealer is the loser – Judas lost His Saviour, lost the money, and lost his life.

This ‘bad deal’ for Judas and Jesus actually turned out as a good deal for us. These thirty pieces of silver bought us our life and salvation with our Heavenly Father forever. Then as a result of Jesus’ death we are redeemed through the precious blood of Jesus that He shed on the cross for us. ***“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ.” (1 Peter 1:18-19a NIV)*** Jesus has paid the ransom price for our lives and our freedom – God’s gift to us!

Prayer: *My dear loving Saviour, thank you for paying the price for my life on the cross with your innocent suffering and death. Make my life a life of service to you. Amen.*





Need of Healing

21st Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: John 18:1-11

"Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear." John 18:10a (NIV)

There were two men, one blind and the other lame, who made their living as professional beggars. One day they were caught up in a procession supposedly carrying the relics of St. Martin that were thought to have healing power. On learning this, the lame man jumped on the back of the blind man – and they ran away from this procession. They didn't want to be healed, for then they would lose their profession of being beggars.

It seemed at times that Peter didn't want to be cured and saved by Jesus. When Jesus announced to His disciples that He would suffer, die, and rise again in Jerusalem, Peter tried to prevent this, even berating Jesus with His outburst: ***"Never, Lord!" he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'" (Matthew 16:22b NIV)*** Peter then also acted his words out in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Pharisees came to arrest Jesus. He impulsively took his sword and cut off the High Priest servant's ear. He didn't realise that unless these things took place the whole world's salvation would be in jeopardy... he just didn't understand.

Jesus calmly pointed out to His beloved disciple that a sword was not necessary. For if Jesus commanded it there could be 12 legions of angels to protect Him. But, if the enemies of Jesus were repulsed and Jesus was free to go, how could the Scripture be fulfilled? How could Jesus then carry out His mission of saving sinners by suffering and dying for them? How could the world be healed of its sin? We all need healing whether we think we do or not. It cannot be gained through force, fire, sword, or power, but only through the suffering and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Come to Christ this Lenten season for healing of body, mind, and spirit. ***"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6b NIV)***

Prayer: *Jesus, you came to earth to heal me of all my sin. Through your actions on the cross and submitting to terrible suffering, my life has been saved. I am healed in your love. Amen.*





Totally Deserted

22nd Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Mark 14:43-52

"A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." Mark 14:51-52 (NIV)

Protesting is a way for the public to get across their grievances and demands to those in greater power, usually the government. Within a protest group you have those who are the leaders, the most vocal, then those who are convinced and then those who just are interested and want to see what will happen – the 'sightseers'.

Imagine the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane that late evening. Jesus is having some quiet prayer time with His disciples, not really bothering anyone, and then there comes a mob. First come the Pharisees, the guards, and the traitorous disciple Judas, and following them would be all the people hearing the commotion as the group made their way to the Garden. There would be many who just wanted to see what was happening and going on. Due to the late hour, some may have just gotten out of bed to follow in whatever they were wearing. Whatever the case, we have a lone young man wearing just a linen cloth coming to see, and it is interesting to note that only Mark's Gospel tells of this event.

It would have been terrifying for all there – shouts from Peter and the disciples, the guards with swords and torches of fire, and the Pharisees intent on capturing all involved with Jesus. John Piper, a well-known theologian, pastor and teacher writes: "...as seemingly surprising as the appearance of this young man was in Mark, his presence is not meaningless and it is not insignificant.. He is a concrete, vivid example of the terror they all felt and the completeness with which the Scriptures were fulfilled, that they would all flee." In verse 50, we read that ***"... everyone deserted Him and fled."*** During this time Jesus I'm sure felt totally deserted. But His love for us was so great that He went through the whole ordeal for our salvation. Stick by Jesus; and His love will get you through all situations.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, forgive me when I desert you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I want to be your disciple, please help me to be brave. Amen.*





Innocent

4th Sunday during Lent

Read: Mark 15:1-5

***"They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor."
Matthew 27:2 (NIV)***

Recently I discovered a new series on Netflix – 'For Life'. The series is loosely based on the true story of Isaac Wright Jr, who was imprisoned for a crime that he did not commit. While incarcerated, he became an attorney and helped overturn the wrongful convictions of twenty of his fellow inmates, before finally proving his own innocence. There are many shows like this, about those who are arrested, imprisoned wrongfully and finally being found innocent. This does occur in real life too! It also happened about 2000 years ago.

Jesus was arrested, sentenced, and executed for doing nothing wrong. He didn't commit any crime but was actually accused of doing good. When you see someone in handcuffs you naturally assume some wrong deed has occurred. Standing before the governor Pilate was an innocent man. So then why was Jesus on trial? Why was He led away like a common criminal? It is all because He had fulfilled His mission according to the will of His Heavenly Father. Jesus preached repentance; the religious leaders resented this, for they didn't regard their unbelief as sin. Jesus accepted repentant sinners, even if they had once been the dregs of society; the Jewish leaders didn't think them worthy of saving. Jesus proclaimed Himself as the Christ, the Promised One, come to seek and save the lost; the blind leaders rejected such a humble man from Nazareth. Really it is then no wonder that Jesus was arrested.

Thanks be to God that this was all in His plan to bring God's grace and salvation to the whole of the world. By His stripes we are healed and by Him being in bondage we are set free. Seems like a contradiction, but Jesus suffered and died to bear our sins and their consequences. By faith in Him we are liberated from the bondage of the Law and its curse of sin and death. We have been freed by an innocent man who took on Himself the sins of all.

Prayer: *Lord God, you sent your beloved Son to suffer horribly for me. He was an innocent man yet was found guilty of my sins. Thank you and help me to share this love. Amen.*





Slap in the Face

23rd Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: John 18:19-24

"...one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. 'Is this the way you answer the high priest?'" John 18:22 (NIV)

Only a few months ago we celebrated that beautiful time of the year when 'all is calm, all is bright.' When Israel as a nation seemed to be all at peace and the shepherds, wise men and angels told of God's love for the world in sending His beloved Son as a human baby. I do love Christmas! It is really at Easter though that God's love is truly demonstrated. That beloved Son born in such a beautiful way, dying a horrible and cruel death was to save humanity from their sins.

In the whole history of Israel was peace really present? Read through the Old Testament and you read of many wars, battles, and treachery. Even today, there isn't peace in Israel. The Holy Land was said to flow with milk and honey but also flowed with blood. People were killed and neighbours were harmed. The whole passion history is a true mirror of hostile human behaviour, including assault and battery.

When Jesus stood before Annas, the ex-high priest, He was asked about His disciples and His teaching. Jesus responded that He had always taught openly, in the presence of many witnesses. An officer of the arresting temple guard standing by considered this an impertinent, disrespectful reply. So, he administered to Jesus, as the Greek says, *a rapisma*, which translates as 'slap in the face'. This act is physically painful, but even more it is an insult and deprives of human dignity. Paul, the apostle was also slapped before the council (Acts 23:2-3).

Hardly anyone goes through life without being 'slapped in the face' in some way, either physically or figuratively. The natural response is to get angry and fight back with words or actions, but as a Christian our example is our innocent Saviour who questioned their intentions without anger or malice. Jesus endured all insults, every indignity, all punishments, all for us. From Jesus we can find the strength to do the same and to follow in His footsteps of restraint, patience, and endurance.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, you endured all indignities with love and restraint. Help me to follow your example and to show love and acceptance to all my neighbours. Amen.*





In a Dream

24th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Matthew 27:15-23

"While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'" Matthew 27:19 (NIV)

Arshile Gorky, an Armenian-American abstract expressionist painter said: "The stuff of thought is the seed of the artist. Dreams form the bristles of the artist's brush. As the eye functions as the brain's sentry, I communicate my innermost perceptions through the art, my worldview." Dreams can be exciting, terrifying, and disconcerting or as Gorky said, a basis for his work. Dreams are basically stories and images that our mind creates while we sleep, but we do hear of God talking through dreams – Joseph to marry Mary (Matthew 1:20), Joseph (Jacob's favourite son) dreams about what will happen in Egypt (Genesis 37). What about Pilate's wife's dream? We don't know any more than what was recorded in Matthew, but it was a dream with meaning.

Difficulties had really piled up for Pontius Pilate on account of Jesus. His every scheme backfired: Herod sent Jesus back to him; the crowd chose Barabbas to be set free rather than Jesus; his conscience told him that Jesus was innocent and should be set free, but the crowd demanded Jesus' death; and now, his wife tells him to have nothing to do with Jesus death. Her dream pointed to Jesus' innocence. [Tradition has it that her name was Procula and that she became a Christian convert.]

What difference did this dream make? Another time in Jesus' life a dream played a vital part – the dream of Joseph, His foster father. In a dream God warned Joseph of King Herod's attempt to murder Jesus. In response he took Jesus and Mary and fled to Egypt, to protect the little Son of God. But the dream of Pilate's wife did not save Jesus' life. Pilate had allowed himself to become too deeply involved with the Pharisees because of political considerations. Despite his wife's appeal, he authorised the death of Jesus. It was God's will to allow this to take place. Jesus was to suffer death for the sins of all the people. This is what had been prophesied and fulfilled – all for our eternal life.

Prayer: *My Saviour, so many contributed to your death and suffering, but it was for me that you suffered and died and allowed this evil against you to happen. Through your resurrection you beat death and have given me life. Amen.*





Mocked and Insulted

25th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Luke 18:31-34

"The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace... and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him." (Mark 15:16-17 NIV)

Julian the Apostate (Roman emperor, AD 361-363), although brought up in the Christian faith, did what he could to uproot and dissipate Christianity and to restore paganism. In a battle with the Persians, he was mortally wounded, and he claims to have said: *Vicisti, Galilaeae* ("You have won, Galilean") referring to Jesus of Galilee. Jesus ultimately wins where death is concerned!

However, after Pilate had pronounced his sentence of death by crucifixion against Jesus, our Lord looked anything but a victor. To add to this insult, the soldiers staged a mock scene to satirise the divine kingship that Jesus had affirmed before Pilate. One of the soldiers draped a purple robe over His shoulders to symbolise that He claimed to be king. A crown of thorns completed the mockery.

In Luke 18:32, Jesus had predicted this type of insult and mockery He was to receive, but the disciples did not understand. Again, in Isaiah it had been prophesied that the Son of God was to suffer so many terrible things, yet He was to be a silent sufferer. ***"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."* (Isaiah 53:7 NIV)**

Although mocked and ridiculed, Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. His kingdom which was founded on the Good News of God's forgiveness, lives on long after the Roman Empire has passed away. It lives on through us and the generations to follow. The Galilean has indeed won, but not with weapons and wars but with the Gospel of the love of God in Christ, the Redeemer. Jesus is our Lord and King!

Prayer: *Thank you for conquering sin and death for me. You were mocked and ridiculed and shamed yet you knew that you would be the final victor. Thanks be to God! Amen.*





Simon of Cyrene

26th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Mark 15:21-32

"A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross." Mark 15:21 (NIV)

When I was younger, I remember reading one of my brother's books that he had received for his confirmation about the story of Simon of Cyrene. I remember being fascinated by this story and for me, the man Simon became very real. Not only did he carry the cross of Jesus to its resting place on Golgotha, but he was impacted by Jesus' love for his captors. Simon has a permanent place in the passion story, for he was compelled to be the cross-carrier for Christ.

The city of Cyrene was in what is now Libya, North Africa, which was founded as a Greek colony and later taken over by the Romans. Many Jews lived there and came to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. Whatever the reason Simon was in Jerusalem, he never realised that he would be forced to carry the cross of the Saviour of the world. Simon had two sons, Alexander and Rufus, who were well-known members of the early church at the time Mark wrote his gospel. It is believed that after Simon carried the cross of Christ, he later became a believer in Jesus as the promised Messiah. He could be included with the men from Cyrene in Acts 11:20 who told the Good News about Jesus.

Simon literally bearing the cross of Christ was a one-time event, but we are called upon every day to figuratively carry Christ's cross. We may be called to bear burdens because of Christ. ***"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'" (Matthew 16:24 NIV)*** The cross that we bear comes from being a disciple of Jesus and following His teachings. We may have to suffer personal loss, hatred from others, persecution and even death because we are Christians. Daily take up the cross of Jesus and hold it high as a light for the world.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, help me be a witness to others of your saving love and actions through dying on the cross. May my life be a light for others to see you. Amen.*





'Don't weep for me!'

27th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Luke 23:26-31

"Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children.'" Luke 23:28 (NIV)

In June 1978 the musical *Evita* was first performed on the London stage. The storyline follows the early life, rise to power, charity work, and death of Eva Perón, the second wife of Argentine president Juan Perón. *Evita* was the endearing name of Eva. She used her position as first lady to fight for women's suffrage and improving the lives of the poor and became a legendary figure in Argentine politics. One of the memorable songs written by Tim Rice and put to music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, is 'Don't cry for me Argentina', where she speaks of not worrying about her, but to concentrate on their own lives.

Jesus says a similar thing to the women of Jerusalem as they are standing there weeping over the suffering Christ. He means that they should concentrate not about Himself but about themselves and where their lives and their children's lives were headed. In Luke 23:27, it says that "a large number of people" followed Jesus as he walked to Golgotha, and that the women "mourned and wailed". They were probably crying out of natural sympathy for Mary and Jesus, but Jesus referred to them as "Daughters of Jerusalem", who needed to examine their own lives in the light of God's Word, to repent and to believe in Him as their Saviour. Jesus went on to tell them to not weep for Him, but to ready themselves for Judgement Day. He quoted from Hosea who foretold the fall of Jerusalem which occurred in 70 AD when the people from the city suffered death by starvation and slaughter at the hands of the Roman Army.

This message is also for us. Over Easter we not only remember the suffering and death of Jesus who died for us, but we need to prepare ourselves for the second coming where Jesus will come back in all His glory and take all those faithful to Him to His Heavenly home.

Prayer: *My Lord and Saviour, you died for me. Help me to examine my life according to your love that I may be blessed at the end times. Amen.*





Love for His Mother

28th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: John 19:23-27

"When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,'" John 19:26 (NIV)

When Prince Charles, the future king of England, reached his fourth birthday, it was reported that his parents were trying to bring him up as a normal boy. Charles grew up thinking that all children were like him; and that not only his mother but everyone's mother was a queen.

Jesus was put into a loving family. We don't hear much about Joseph, but it is thought that he taught Jesus carpentry. Mary, his mother, treasured all the situations and circumstances that surrounded Jesus' growing up and His ministry. But what did Jesus think about His parents, about His mother? We are told that growing up He was obedient to His parents. At the wedding feast He listened and obeyed His mother (John 2), and throughout His life, even in the hour of death He honoured her.

Besides the pain He endured on the cross, it was there that He said goodbye to His grieving mother. It is painful when close human bonds are severed. It can be a time of sadness and grief, whether expected or unexpected, parting and leaving forever is hard. Jesus knew He was leaving His widowed mother without someone to care for her, so He commissioned his disciple John to care and provide for His mother's needs throughout the rest of her life. Widows and unmarried women had a hard life in the culture at that time without a male to provide. Jesus cared for and loved His mother, Mary.

As Christians, being parted from our loved ones is a time of grief and sadness, but we do not grieve without hope knowing that Jesus paved the way for our eternal glory. His care not only for His mother, but for us, in His death and resurrection, gives us the joy and hope of life eternal with our Heavenly Father. Jesus unites us in His death and the celebration of His resurrection!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank you that you are my Saviour and that you care for me as you cared for your mother. I can be assured of my place in heaven one day with you and all believers. Amen.*





Refusal

5th Sunday during Lent

Read: Matthew 27:32-50

"There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it." Matthew 27:34 (NIV)

Unfortunately, one of the realities of holidays are the fatalities on our roads due to inattention, drinking or drugs. Drink-driving is the number one contributing factor in approximately 30% of fatal crashes in Australia. Over 1 in 4 drivers and riders killed on Australian roads have a BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration) exceeding the legal limit. Drinking alcohol can be an enjoyable experience when sharing with friends, but when overindulgence occurs, inhibitions are released, and a sense of euphoria and numbness ensues.

When the crucifixion procession arrived at Golgotha, and Jesus was to be nailed to the cross, He was offered a sour wine laced with gall. Gall was a bitter herb which had the effect of deadening pain. Jesus refused to drink this mixture, for He had come to earth to endure the full pain as punishment for the sins all people had committed. He didn't want to invalidate His suffering by escaping or retreating into a drugged drink.

Another 'drink' incident occurred later on Good Friday. Toward the end of His six-hour suffering, Jesus uttered two statements: ***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46b NIV)*** and ***"I am thirsty" (John 19:28b NIV)***. Then, we are told: ***"A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on the stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips." (John 19:29 NIV)*** Jesus, knowing that his work was now complete, accepted this drink, which was vinegar. This fulfilled the prophesy from ***Psalm 69:21: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."*** What Jesus endured – and what He refused because of His responsibility – is truly an example for us. We can have the strength to do this only with the help of God and the Holy Spirit who keeps us close to Christ. Walk in the way and example of our Saviour!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, give me your 'living water' to quench my thirst and let me live in your grace and promises. May my life be an example for others to then see you. Amen.*





Cancelled Debt

29th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Colossians 1:9-20

“God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.” Colossians 2:13b-14 (NIV)

In 2020, when COVID19 was causing stress and concern for people with their finances, I remember reading a good news story about some grandparents who went into a Toyworld store in Bendigo and paid off the layby debts of 82 people. These people had put toys on layby early and had been trying to pay the toys off in readiness for Christmas, but many struggling with lack of work found this difficult. These grandparents said that they wanted to help those in need and in their selfless act brought joy and love to others over Christmas.

This Good News is also found in the story of Jesus Christ who gave everything He had to pay the debt of our sin. There is nothing we could give or do to make restitution for the sins of all humanity, but God knew just what to do; He sent His sinless beloved Son and gave His life for ours. The penalty for sin is death and Jesus paid for this sin with His death. Jesus Christ, from His manger to the cross came as our substitute, and the cross became the instrument by which Christ cancelled our debts.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes it very clear that we are now made right with God through the death and suffering of Jesus. Through Christ, God reconciled ***“to himself all things, whether on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Colossians 1:20 NIV)*** Some people feel that they still need to do ‘good works’ to make restitution to God for their sins, for what Jesus did for us is too easy a solution. Everyone who feels this way needs to remember that grace is never cheap; it cannot be if it cost God the life of His Son to save us. Our debt was cancelled at a huge cost to Jesus. Let us give our thanks for His love!

Prayer: *Thank you Jesus for cancelling my debt by dying on the cross for me. Give me a heart of thankfulness and praise, telling others of your grace. Amen.*





Simple Iron Nails

30th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: John 20:24-29

"...they have pierced my hands and my feet." Psalm 22:16b (NIV)

The story goes that Richard III took his horse into the blacksmith to shoe quickly. The blacksmith secured two of the horseshoes but didn't have enough nails to put four in each of the other two horseshoes. So, rather than waiting for the blacksmith to make more iron nails – the blacksmith was told three would be enough in each of the other shoes. During the battle one shoe fell off, then another causing the horse to go lame and throw King Richard III off his horse and then with no one to lead the battle, England was defeated at the battle of Bosworth in 1485. In 1758, Benjamin Franklin wrote the following poem.

"For the want of a nail the shoe was lost;
For the want of a shoe the horse was lost;
For the want of a horse the battle was lost;
For the failure of battle the kingdom was lost;
All for the want of a horseshoe nail."

Simple iron nails were used to hold Jesus, the Son of God, firmly on the cross, as had been foretold in Psalm 22:16. The nails driven through the hands and feet of the victim caused excruciating pain, and did so for hours, sometimes for days. So it is that Jesus was held to the cross, pain from the flogging on his back, pain from the crown of thorns, pain for the beatings and pain from the nails, all brought us salvation through His death and suffering.

Later, when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the locked room after rising from the dead, he used those nail marks as His credentials. Thomas even asked to see and feel them as proof that Jesus was who He said He was. Jesus, knowing his scepticism, even said to him: **"Put your finger here; see my hands... Stop doubting and believe."** (John 20:27 NIV) Those wounds verified that Jesus is the Son of God. Now, with our hands and feet we can serve Jesus, whose hands and feet were nailed for us!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know that you suffered and endured so much for me. With my hands and feet may I go out and serve others. Amen.





Thorn Crowned

31st Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Mark 15:16-20

"...Then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him." Mark 15:17b (NIV)

Ziziphus spina-christi, known as the Christ's thorn jujube, is an evergreen tree or plant native to northern and tropical Africa, Southern and Western Asia. The oldest known *Ziziphus spina-christi* is located south of Jerusalem, in Ein Hatzeva, Israel. It is estimated to be between 1500 and 2000 years old and is believed locally to be the very tree from which Jesus' crown of thorns was made.

We read in the story from Mark 15:16-20, that Jesus was mocked and ridiculed before being beaten and crucified. The crowning with thorns was part of the act of ridicule because Jesus had said He was a king. The mock coronation included wearing a purple robe, with the soldiers, bowing down and saying, "**Hail, king of the Jews!**" Injury was then added to insult when the soldiers beat the sharp thorns into Jesus' scalp.

When cutting and pruning roses, inevitably a thorn goes into a finger, and we act quickly to disinfect and bandage the wound so an infection does not occur. No one did that for Jesus. Instead, as we see in the pictures of Jesus on the cross, He wore this crown of thorns to His death. The thorns can be a metaphor of all the prickly sins that Jesus took with Him to the cross on our behalf. Those sins that could have festered and become infected, Jesus disinfecting them with His blood and ultimate death. Then He took all these sins away and we have been allowed to come directly before God, perfect and spotless with no infections.

Thorns and thistles continue to grow in our hearts and lives, but these spiritual thorns can no longer plague us. Jesus has healed us through forgiving and washing away all these sins. We now have peace with God and know that when thorns do appear, they can be removed through the grace and love which Jesus bore on the cross for us.

Prayer: *My dear Saviour, you have removed the infecting thorns of sin from my life. Help me to live my life washed clean through your sacrifice. Amen.*





Rolling the Dice

32nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 22:1-18

“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 which said, ‘They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.’ So this is what the soldiers did.” John 19:24 (NIV)

Dice – the spotted little cubes used in games of chance and for rolling when playing games: Monopoly, Yahtzee, Backgammon, Ludo and many more. Dice are not a modern invention, as dice were discovered by archaeologists from at least 2000 BC. Dice are also mentioned in Psalm 22, at the time of King David. Playing dice were a pastime for the ancients. Even by soldiers in the Roman army as a game of chance and to make decisions.

A crucified person was no longer in need of their clothing, so the spoils usually went to the soldiers. In Jesus case, it is written that His clothes were divided amongst the soldiers involved in His crucifixion. The tunic, however, was woven throughout and would have unravelled had it been torn into parts. So the soldiers decided to roll the dice and gamble for it.

The stripping of Jesus for His crucifixion and the dividing of His clothes were components in His shocking suffering. We don’t hear of Jesus owning anything through His life. He didn’t have a suitcase with a change of clothes, nor a wallet or jewellery or watch – all He owned He wore! Psalm 22 mentions the disposal of His clothes as part of the total passion: the exposure to the elements, the mockery, the piercing of His hands and feet. Through enduring all these indignities Jesus redeemed us from all our sins.

Even though Jesus had nothing in this world, He gave us everything through His death and resurrection. This is His legacy of love and God’s grace to us. We come into the world with no possessions, and we leave with none, but we do have the certainty of God’s promise that we will on the last day live with Him together in Paradise.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, your love and grace to me is invaluable. Nothing can be worth more. I pray that my life may bless others around me showing this same love. Amen.*





Pierced

33rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: John 19:31-37

"Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." John 19:34 (NIV)

"In 1956, five American missionaries to Ecuador were brutally speared to death by a savage Stone Age tribe of Indians. Nate Saint flew a Piper Cruiser plane with four other missionaries into the jungles of Ecuador and dared to make contact with the most dangerous tribe known to man, the Waodani also known as "Auca," or naked savage. This story was made into a movie: 'End of the Spear: The True Story'.

After several months of exchanging gifts with the natives, the five men were speared multiple times and hacked to death with machetes. One of the men in the tribe that fateful day was Mincaye. Two years later, the wife and sister of two of the murdered missionaries walked into the jungle to live with the same people who had murdered the men they loved. Years later Steve Saint found out that Mincaye delivered the final spear that ultimately killed his father. Knowing that the son Steve would want to avenge his father's death, Mincaye held a spear to his chest waiting for Steve to kill him. Instead, Steve forgave and said "What the Waodani meant for evil, God used for good. Given the chance to rewrite the story, I would not be willing to change it." To end this story, Mincaye prays for people to know how to walk 'God's trail'. "Your Son dripped His blood to mark the trail for us to walk on," he prays." [Craig von Buseck, D.Min for CBN]

These missionaries were pierced for their faith in Jesus who Himself was pierced on the cross also by a spear. The piercing of His hands and feet and side were to save us. The battle against the evil in the world was turned into victory as the soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear, for just a short time earlier Jesus had 'finished' and submitted His life to His Father's care. With our sins too, we pierced His body, but through faith in the redeeming work of our Saviour we are healed. What was meant for evil, God turned it into our salvation!

Prayer: My dear Saviour, you were pierced and tortured for my salvation. May I always be reminded that I need to keep sharing this news for others who haven't heard. Amen.





Words that Hurt

34th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Matthew 27:32-44

"In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself!'"
Mark 15:31 (NIV)

'Sticks and Stones may hurt my bones, but names will never hurt me!' This is a little ditty I remember hearing and saying to someone in the schoolyard who was termed a 'bully'. It basically stated that it is the physical hurts that last longer and are more painful. But I would like to suggest that words are actually more hurtful. Words used without thought can tear at the mind and soul.

Many of the people responsible for Jesus' death were pleased to see Him suffer. Not only their physical acts: the scourging, the beating, the crucifixion; but also their words caused Jesus much pain. These included the lies and false charges, the crowd crying out for His crucifixion, and especially the words of ridicule and derision.

The soldiers in Pilate's praetorium mocked Jesus when they dressed Him up as a king and bowed before Him, using the words of ridicule: 'Hail, King of the Jews' (Matthew 27:29). The scorn became even more intense on Calvary. Many of the people who passed by and the spectators looking on expressed their scorn for Him. They said with contempt that if Jesus were the Son of God, why didn't He come down from the cross? Even one of the dying, crucified thieves mocked Him. The worst sarcasm came from the Pharisees and spiritual leaders. It hurts the most when people who should know better stoop to mockery. ***"Let this Christ, this King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."*** (Mark 15:32a NIV)

This torturing scorn was an integral part of the passion which Jesus endured for us. He atoned for our sins of our tongues, the words which we say that hurt others. Being redeemed and saved children of God we need to attend also to our tongues and the words they speak. Do they build up or tear others down? Remembering Christ's love for us, let us show this love for others. Build-up, encourage, nurture, help and inspire others for God's glory this Lenten season and always.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord for showing me how words hurt you on the cross. Help me to choose my words carefully that I may never hurt others, but rather encourage them. Amen.*





Healing Wounds

Palm / Passion Sunday

Read: 1 Peter 2:18-25

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

In the Guinness Book of records, Evel Knievel (Robert Craig Knievel), who was the pioneer of motorcycle long jumping exhibitions, held the record for the most broken bones and still surviving. By the end of 1975, he had suffered 433 bone fractures. Wearing his trademark star-spangled red, white, and blue jumpsuits, Knievel made more than 300 jumps during his career and claimed to have broken nearly every bone in his body. Of his 81 ramp to ramp jumps, he succeeded 63 times.

How many times have we tried different things and failed? Evel Knievel wanted to jump the Grand Canyon but never achieved this, instead trying Snake River Canyon, Idaho and failing. There are many things we want to do or attempt to do, but we often find ourselves failing in one way or another... sometimes it's our sin and imperfections that hold us back. Jesus was perfect in every way, and on the cross He suffered five wounds which were integral to His death. With these wounds He suffered and endured intense pain until finally God took Him to His Heavenly home. He then rose from the dead, winning all the failures people assumed when He died, and made all things perfect. In this perfection Jesus has given us a perfect life in Heaven forever when we pass away in this life.

No matter how many times we fail. No matter how many bones are broken and attempts not completed, we have been healed and made perfect through the wounds of our loving Saviour. His wounds given on the cross which were seen as failures in the Pharisees and people's eyes, have healed the world of their sin. Isaiah and 1 Peter speak the same truth and give us the promise: *"By his wounds we are healed."* Today is Palm Sunday and we celebrate the triumphal entry, but we know what is to come on Friday – those wounds and death. Know that Easter Sunday contains the rest of the story where Jesus succeeds in healing us from our sin. Praise be to our Lord and Saviour!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord Jesus, that you love me so much that you endured such pain to free me from my sin and forgive me all my sins. I can no longer fail – you have succeeded in beating death. Amen.*





Time of Darkness

35th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Isaiah 60:1-7

"It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining." Luke 23:44-45a (NIV)

At the south pole in Antarctica from the middle of May to the end of June, there is complete darkness where the sun neither rises nor sets. There are several stations that Australia has for research in Antarctica. These are placed closer to the coast (nearer Australia) and so don't experience this total darkness but rather a longer twilight. In the northern hemisphere, countries like Greenland and Norway experience long dark winters and bright summers.

When God first created the world, it was perfect, but then through Adam and Eve sin entered and a spiritual darkness covered the world. This darkness came in the form of idolatry (worshipping other gods), unbelief, and immoral living. John 3:19 says: ***"...people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil."*** (NRSV) Then Jesus came to earth to turn all the spiritual darkness into light. That is why He is referred to as: The Sun of Righteousness, the Dayspring from on high, the bright Morning star, the Light of the World. His task was not easy, for Jesus had to fight the forces of darkness – the devil and his demonic and human cohorts.

Jesus had to endure this darkness on the cross for three hours. The sun's failure to shine, along with the earthquake that shook the earth and opened the graves when He gave up His Spirit, was an unusual event. It accompanies the most unusual event of all: the death of Christ for the sins of the world. Here was the Son of God forsaken by friends and the Heavenly Father. It couldn't get any lower. The veil of darkness covered this whole dreadful scene.

Because of the darkness that Jesus endured along with all the other components of His passion, we have the light – the Light of the Gospel, the Good News – Christ Himself – who illuminates the way to heaven! Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ!

Prayer: *Dear Saviour and Lord, you experienced the darkness of death itself to bring me into the light of your Kingdom forever. You are the Light of the World. Amen.*





Sacrificed

36th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Hebrews 10:11-18

"...because of one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Hebrews 10:14 (NIV)

There are times that we all make sacrifices. Maybe you give the last piece of meat to the guests or the last bit of pudding saying you were full! You may have even sacrificed not going to an event because there were not enough tickets or enough room. These are very small sacrifices, but sacrifices nonetheless. In the Bible we find many instances of sacrifices – many of them animal sacrifices to thank God for all His goodness to His people. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac because God had told him to and he was obedient, but God's grace prevented this tragedy.

These all pale in comparison to the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for our redemption. Sin is awful, and with sin comes God's judgement and punishment. If we regard sin lightly, just look to the cross where the Son of God writhed in pain as He atoned for all our sins. Sin is in no way trivial. God's grace and His forgiveness are not cheap if His beloved Son was given to die in such a horrible manner to make amends for our wrongdoings (sin). ***"God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood."*** (Romans 3:25a NIV)

We thank God that through Jesus' blood on the cross we have been forgiven and declared to be God's children and the heirs of eternal life. We also thank God that Christ's life-giving sacrifice paid the price for sin and brought us salvation. This sacrifice is a once and for all sacrifice – read Hebrews 10:14 again! Now we are fully and forever redeemed, sanctified and at peace with God. Our sins are all covered over with Jesus' blood and death on the cross. Jesus did so much for us; let us now serve Him in every way we can – sharing the Gospel, serving our neighbour, and praying for the world.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you sacrificed your life for me to atone for all my sins. Thank you for this amazing love and help me to serve you wherever and whenever I can. Amen.*





Sealed and Secure

37th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Isaiah 53:1-12

“So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.” Matthew 27:66 (NIV)

When my daughter’s beloved rabbit, Poppy passed away, the whole family was upset. We thought about where to bury her and how to do it. She was laid in a cardboard shoebox with her favourite fluffy toys and a big hole was dug out in the backyard garden. We laid the box in there, but then my daughter suggested that we lay a large stone on the place where Poppy lay. When asking her why, she said so that no other animals could dig her up and hurt her.

After Jesus had died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus, was granted permission by Pilate to take Jesus’ body off the cross, where it was wrapped and laid in a new tomb that had been cut out of the rock. The chief priests and Pharisees were paranoid that someone would take the body and then say that Jesus had risen. So Pilate, to keep them happy ordered a huge stone to be rolled in front of the tomb with Pilate’s seal placed on it. Then he ordered at least one guard to stand watch to make sure no one disturbed the tomb: either from inside or from outside!

We can be glad that that stone was there. It kept out the friends as well as the foes – friends who by their well-meant actions might then cast doubt on the reality of Christ’s resurrection, and the foes who might want to continue their celebration by breaking into the tomb and desecrating the body of Jesus. Jesus truly was ‘crucified, dead and buried’. But then on the third day Jesus had atoned for the sins of the world and demonstrated that He had overcome death. Which also means that even though we may die, we also are raised to be with our Heavenly Father in heaven forever. Jesus’ death and resurrection takes the fear out of life. We no longer need to fear death and dying – our risen Saviour lives with us now and we are safe – inside and outside!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, your death and burial had been planned from the beginning, so that none could dispute your resurrection. Thank you for this assurance. Amen.*





Sacramental Sustenance

38th Day in Lent (Maundy Thursday)

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them." Mark 14:22-24 (NIV)

Hunger has always been a critical problem for the world. Countries face hunger from many reasons: war, flood, famine, government, and other natural disasters. The United Nations estimate that 25,000 people die from hunger, thirst, or related causes every day. 3.1 million children die from hunger every year; a child dies every ten seconds. These are staggering figures, and it has been estimated that more people have died of starvation and thirst than the victims of all wars and revolutions in the past 150 years.

The Bible speaks of the hunger and thirst of the soul. God's Word is the bread and water of life by which a person is inwardly nourished and refreshed. God has also given us the Sacrament of Holy Communion for the strengthening of our faith in Him. This Sacrament was instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ himself on Maundy Thursday (today), the evening before His death. Jesus told us to eat and drink the bread and wine, knowing that we are eating and drinking His body and blood which was poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins. The bread and wine are received in a natural way, the body and blood in a supernatural way. This is called sacramental eating and drinking – this only takes place during the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In a manner that far exceeds our understanding, we receive infinitely more than bread and wine; we receive Christ's true body and blood.

Jesus comes to us to satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls. This also satisfies our longing for peace with God for in Holy Communion our sins are forgiven, and we are reconciled with God. We come to Holy Communion often for in it we obtain the renewal of our faith, hope and love and we can give thanks to God for the grace and forgiveness He gives us every day. Come to the Lord's table regularly for your Sacramental Sustenance.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord Jesus for the gift of your body and blood to strengthen and preserve me in my daily life. Help me to always be thankful. Amen.*





Last Words

39th Day in Lent (Good Friday)

Read: Hebrews 5:5-10

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

It is interesting to note the last things people have said on their deathbeds – they are usually brief remarks which show their faith, or lack of it. Here are some well-known people and their last words: George Washington, "It is well"; Ned Kelly, "Such is Life"; Daniel Webster, "I still live"; Winston Churchill, "Life is a journey well worth making"; Pope John Paul II, "Let me go to the house of the Father"; Goethe, "More light!"; Tasso (Italian poet), "Into Thy hands, O Lord!"

The last words of Jesus were based on Psalm 31:5, ***"Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth."*** (NIV) Many Christians have repeated Jesus' dying words, not only as they are dying but throughout their lives. Martin Luther even uses this phrase in his morning and evening prayers: "Into your hands I commend my body, my soul and all that is mine." Jesus spoke His dying prayer with a loud voice showing that He still had strength. He still had the power to lay down His life, but also the power to take it up again. He could now die in peace because the plan of God's redemption for the world was finished. Then Jesus ***"breathed his last"***.

This breath ended the terrible grief and pain He had borne, knowing that He would soon be with His Heavenly Father. I remember with grief my own dear father's last words on earth as his service for his Heavenly Father and the Saviour he loved was now finished, "Ah, good." It is good that we can rest in the arms of our Saviour and Lord when our time on earth has ended. But what joy to be able to come into the presence of our Heavenly Father with Jesus and all the angels to welcome us home. We can then finally commend ourselves into our Father's hands!

Prayer: *Thank you, my Jesus for all you suffered for my sake. May my life be one of service to you until you take me to my Heavenly home. Amen.*





Our Hope in Death

40th Day in Lent (Holy Saturday)

Read: John 19:38-42

"So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb." Mark 15:46 (NIV)

Life asked death: "Why does everyone love me, but hate you?" Death replied: "Because you are a beautiful lie, and I am a painful truth."

Abraham Lincoln said: "In the end it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

There are so many quotes like the above on death and our impression of it in our lives. But in the end, death is a part of life and something that we must all someday face. I am not trying to be morbid, but rather it is a reality, and it need not be a sad or morbid thought, rather one of relief and expectation of one day meeting our Saviour face to face.

We have journeyed through this Lenten season from the manger at Christmas to now Jesus being in the tomb fighting death for all of us. We all know the rest of the story as we wait for His glorious resurrection tomorrow morning. But for now, we remember all that Jesus did and suffered for us. Jesus began His life in a dark stable lit by a star, and He is buried in a dark tomb. Things could look dark for us too, had Jesus not died as He did innocent and blameless. This perfect Son of God carried all the world's sin both past, present and in the future so that all God's people could receive the greatest promise and inheritance that there ever was or has been - life everlasting in heaven.

Death and the burial tomb can no longer be a fear for us because Jesus has been there before us and has purified it. Even though it may be dark and gloomy to our eyes, Jesus has illuminated it with His presence and His promise. Our hope lies in the words of Jesus, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 NRSV)***

Prayer: *Our Lord of Life, even a dark tomb could not hold you. You have promised to take me to be with you when I die, I hold onto this hope of eternal life with you. Amen.*





An Open Tomb

Easter Sunday

Read: Mark 16:1-8

"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." Acts 2:24 (NIV)

In 520 BC, King Darius the Great (522-486 BC) built a royal highway from Susa to Nineveh, to help with the trade and communication within his vast empire. Three thousand slaves were used to create this highway and they were used to build a huge memorial to this king of the Medes and Persians. On a 49-metre cliff his figure was inscribed along with his achievements. He also inscribed, "I, Darius, king of kings, king of the whole world"; and it was written in three languages.

Darius did a lot of idle boasting, for as we know there is only one 'King of Kings' and this was also inscribed on the plaque above His cross – 'King of the Jews'. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and His resurrection proves this. When the women came to Jesus' tomb early on Sunday morning to anoint His body, they found the tomb open. Instead of a decaying corpse, they found their risen Saviour. Peter also was with the women and testified to the people that He had seen the risen Lord (Acts 2:14-41). This was God's plan from the beginning and here we see the fulfillment of God's incredible love for all His people.

This open and empty tomb of Christ is the guarantee that forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and eternal life have been won. Christ's open tomb is the promise that our graves will also be opened, and that our physical death is now the door to eternal life. Heaven is open to all believers, for Jesus promised, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am."*** (John 14:2-3 NIV) Jesus has demonstrated His power over sin and death, so if He can do that, He can surely do what He has promised to raise us up on the Last Day. Eternal Life in heaven forever!

Prayer: *My risen Saviour, thank you for beating death and hell so that I can rest in your promises of eternal life with you in heaven forever. Your promise is sure. Amen.*





The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Luther's Morning Prayer:

I thank you heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have protected me through the night from all harm and danger. I ask you to keep me this day too, from all sin and evil, so that in all my thoughts, words and deeds I may please you. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen

Luther's Evening Prayer:

I thank you, heavenly Father, through your dear Son Jesus Christ, that you have graciously protected me today. I ask you to forgive all my sin and the wrong which I have done, and graciously keep me this night. In your hands I place my body and soul and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the evil one may have no power over me. Amen.





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