



BEYOND LOVE

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET

Jesus died willingly for the forgiveness of our sins so that we can have eternal life with God forever. What do you understand about the last sentence? What strikes you as you read it again? For me the word "*willingly*" stands out. How could anyone *willingly* suffer pain, agony, and humiliation for another person? Lucky for me I wasn't put into that situation, but the Son of God, our Saviour Jesus Christ was put into that exact situation by His Father. There was no other way that the curse of sin in our lives could be paid unless it was done by someone who was sinless. Imagine the extreme love of Jesus for His Father to *willingly* die on the cross and to *willingly* go through it all for you and me – it is so **Beyond Love!**

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). The Bible Readings take you through different Psalms which deal with the journey of Jesus to the cross. We are led through Jesus' life and ultimately to the cross where we can then celebrate His resurrection.

Jesus' love for you is beyond anything you could ever imagine.

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Beyond Love

Ash Wednesday

Read: Psalm 51

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8 (NIV)

Love is all embracing and all-encompassing. Love is a feeling of warmth and security. What could be ‘beyond love?’ The feeling of love within family or to another person. What could be more than the feeling of being loved beyond any measure? I can remember my wedding day. Arriving at the church, walking down the aisle, and seeing the one you love standing there. I don’t know that I remember a whole lot except the immense love for my husband-to-be.

How can Jesus’ love be even more? Humanly speaking it is hard to love more, but Jesus was able to love you and me even more. He loved us ‘beyond’ the human type of love. In the verse above we read that Christ willingly died for us as sinners. Jesus loved us with all our sordid sins, evil thoughts, wicked words and cruel emotions in order to save us for an eternity with our Heavenly Father.

Dr Walter A Maier (founder of the Lutheran Hour) wrote about the seven mercies that drove Jesus to die for each one of us. #1. Jesus suffered and died as an **innocent**. As the Son of God there wasn’t anything that He had committed deserving of His death. #2. He suffered and died in our place as a **substitute** to stand in the place of all our sins. #3. Jesus suffered and died **knowingly**. Jesus knew what God had in mind for our salvation from the very beginning of time and He still went through with it. #4. Jesus suffered and died **willingly**, and He even thanked His Father for the privilege of taking away humanity’s sins. #5. Jesus suffered and died **comprehensively** for all sinners throughout the world and throughout the world’s history, present times and future. Any class, race, colour or condition cannot keep you from His grace. #6. Jesus suffered and died for our **complete atonement**. Jesus fulfilled all the conditions and paid the full price for our pardon. #7. Jesus suffered and died **in complete mercy and love** for each of us. Jesus sealed our salvation freely without price or payment.

This type of love is beyond love and understanding!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for your amazing, incredible, beyond understanding type of love. I do not deserve your grace but help me to live in gratitude for all you have done. Amen.

Such Mercy

2nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 130

"But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Hebrews 9:26b (NIV)

There are just some things that seem too unfathomable to be able to understand. I have often wondered how homing pigeons find their way home after being released in unfamiliar areas. How does a turtle after being away for a year, find the exact spot to lay their eggs as they did the previous year? How do birds know to fly in an echelon (V-shaped) to get the greatest speed and wind resistance? How does a little tiny joey kangaroo, just born and blind, know how or where to crawl to get into the pocket of its mother to find shelter and food? Nature is incredible and it is mind-blowing how things in nature help each other in order to survive.

Jesus' mercy is another unfathomable action. It is far beyond understanding to know the great mercy Jesus showed to humankind. We are helplessly and hopelessly lost in our sinful natures, but here came Christ to give us a clear, incontestable title to our place in heaven! Our place in heaven is not deserved; it is given through the grace and mercy of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Jesus has had more books written about Him than any other in history; His Word and work have been debated for centuries in every country. Yet no one can totally understand such incredible love. During Lent we remember that He was born, crucified and resurrected to bring us to heaven.

Jesus permitted Himself to be tried by godless people: Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod; He was sentenced in the most screaming injustice of which one could ever hear, so that He could be nailed to a cross, in full punishment for all our sins. He suffered on the cross for our cleansing, and then died on this cross a death which by faith will make us free from all our sin and Satan. This freed us from a total separation from God. This is the incredible mercy that we can receive from our loving Saviour.

Prayer: Heavenly Saviour, it is incomprehensible the depth of your love for me and the mercy you show me every day. Help me to share this gift of mercy with others. Amen.

Cleansed Inside and Out

3rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 119:41-56

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

After a long day of work, a busy day around the house cleaning, tidying, shopping, nothing beats running a hot bath, adding a bath bomb and some bubbles and just soaking in a candle lit bathroom. It feels like all the pressures, deadlines and necessities are just washed away. Getting out of the bath then, red and wrinkly, one feels totally cleansed and relaxed. But this is just the outside being cleaned. How can we clean ourselves inside? Washing away all those unkind words, jealousy, bad thoughts, grumbling and heart-aches – how do these get cleansed and washed away?

This is not a job that a hot bath or scrubbing soap can remove. Jesus is the only one who can remove all of this through His cleansing blood on the cross. Many of our lives are filled with unhappiness, doubt, restlessness, fear, worry, uncertainty, and we are not sure if Jesus really can take all this away and make us new. But as we look to the cross and the love of our Saviour, we can be totally assured of this forgiveness and freedom from our sin. As it is written in the above text – 1 John 1:7, the blood of Jesus has purified us. Purifying is the act of taking out any impurities, anything bad to make it clean and pure. Gold is purified by fire, and we are purified through Jesus' cleansing blood, His sacrificial death on the cross just for you and me.

When Jesus was nailed to the cross and died for our sins, He rose again in glory, taking away all the things inside and outside of us that make us unholy to God. Jesus has washed us clean, inside and out, so that we have a clean heart and a new spirit to be able to come before God on the last day and be resurrected to live with Him in heaven forever. That sort of cleaning makes my bubble bath insignificant. We can only thank our Heavenly Father for all He did for us in Jesus!

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for cleaning me inside and out through your selfless death and suffering on the cross. Your love for me is unfathomable. Amen.

A Forgiving Love

4th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Psalm 25:1-7

“Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.’ And he broke down and wept.” Mark 14:72 (NIV)

The little boy crept quietly under his bed, scrambling into the furthest corner to wait for the storm which was about to hit. Earlier he had been playing inside with the new ball he had been given by his grandma. She had said, “Make sure you play with it outside, we wouldn’t want it to break anything!” It was too hard to wait. He kicked the ball to the door on his way out. Unfortunately, dad’s special trophy was on the table next to the door – then... CRASH the glass went everywhere! The little boy scurried under his bed.

If you haven’t experienced something like this, you would have seen it happen. When we do something wrong, our first impulse is to run away and hide. That is exactly what Peter did. The disciple Peter was called ‘a rock’ by Jesus. He was strong-willed and ready to defend Jesus against all odds. He had said: *“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” [Mark 14:31b NIV]*. Yet, when he was put into a situation of owning up to being a disciple of Jesus, he ran away and hid. Peter had such courage and had great intentions to help Jesus – but he fell asleep in the Garden. When Peter tried to defend Jesus, he cut off a high priest’s servant’s ear, then ran away with the rest of the disciples.

We try to defend Jesus, but have we also denied knowing Him? This can lead us to feeling guilty and unworthy. But the Good News is that just as Jesus forgave and reinstated Peter as His disciple [John 21:15-19], so too Jesus forgives us every day for all that we do. It is not just a flippant ‘I forgive you’, but it is a complete forgiveness in love. Jesus suffered and died knowing our weaknesses, just as He knew Peter’s sin in foretelling the denial. Don’t go hiding from Him as the little boy did – rather run into His arms knowing that in Jesus you have His complete and utter loving forgiveness!

Prayer: Thank you God for sending your Son to forgive me for all that I do wrong. Your love for me is so immense and I praise you for this forgiving love. Amen.

Intense Anguish

1st Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 62:1-8

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

If we research the time that Jesus was praying to His Heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, a professional psychologist would classify Jesus as being under intense emotional stress. The symptoms for this are: chest pain; shoulder, neck or back pain; headaches; shortness of breath; dizziness; feeling tired, anxious and depressed and there are quite a few other symptoms. In the verses where Jesus' anguish is described, it is easy to feel this agony of body, mind and spirit. The drops of blood mentioned in the passage above is a condition called 'hematidrosis' which occurs under extreme stress. He needs to have friends with Him to help bear the burden of the world's forgiveness placed on Him by His Father.

His disciples though, could not offer any help or support as they were also weary from all the intense situations that Jesus had been in and could no longer stay awake. Jesus was completely alone to suffer and ask God: *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* [Luke 22:42 NIV] In Luke it mentions that God sent an angel to strengthen Him. So Jesus was not alone; God knew and understood and felt everything that Jesus, His Son, felt.

In Mark 14:37-38, Jesus admonishes Peter for not watching with Him and says that he must keep his eyes open when temptation comes and to rely on God for safekeeping. Even in this intense situation, Jesus was thinking of His disciples and how to teach them to rely on God and His protection and guidance. Jesus is an example of faithfulness and strength in the face of incredible difficulties. We will never be faced with all Jesus had to and for that we thank Him. But there are times when pressure will be put on our lives. Knowing that Jesus has shown us how to cope, we can rely on the grace and love of God in knowing what is best for our lives!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Jesus never doubted your love even in such an intense situation. Help me to also rely on you in situations beyond my control. Amen.

The Combined Penalty

5th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 64

"[Jesus] began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' Mark 14:33b-34a (NIV)

In my younger days I played netball. I loved the game and was a defensive player – Goalkeeper or Goal Defence. To play these positions you need to try to keep the ball from the goalies and stop them at all costs. But many times in trying to stop them, I got too close in defence and ended up giving away a penalty shot for goal. Not a good thing. Even though it was me getting the penalty, it cost the whole team through the other team getting a goal. My mistake cost the whole team.

We see that in humanity. God created the whole world and made Adam and Eve, and all was perfect until this one person committed a sin (his penalty) and it cost the whole human race. So now, try to imagine the awful aggregate of sins committed by the trillions of people who have lived on this Earth. They are more numerous than the tiny grains of sand on all the shores of the world ...you can imagine the combined penalties that we would suffer. Let us go back to Jesus in Gethsemane. God had placed on this one man, the Son of God, all these combined penalties. He suffered for the sins of the world from the creation of the world till then, and all the sins that could be committed in the future. No wonder His soul was so troubled.

In Gethsemane God laid on His innocent Son the immense load of all the evil committed by the entire human race. It was there that Jesus started to give Himself as the sin-offering for all the ages. He was to be the one complete sacrifice, suffer the penalty alone, and pay for all our wrongdoings. Through Jesus suffering for us, our penalties have been paid in full and the whole human race no longer needs to suffer under the weight of our own sins. It is totally God's grace that has brought us peace and enables us to have a future with God in heaven!

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for sending your Son to carry the entire combined penalties of mine and everyone's sins to the cross. Amen.

A Tiring Day

6th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Psalm 90

“When [Jesus] came back, He found them again sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.” Mark 14:40a (NIV)

Teaching is tiring. Firstly, there is all the preparation for the lessons, getting the resources together, teaching the lesson and then all the follow up and marking to make sure that everything taught had been learnt by the students. This is a simplistic overview of teaching because there are real people and children involved and no amount of planning can prepare you for things that can be said or events that occur. When I decided to be a teacher, I had a bit of an idea what I would do, but until you are there you do not know all that it involves.

I think of the poor disciples. They did not plan to be a disciple; Jesus called them, and they accepted. From the accounts in the Bible, there didn't seem to be too much questioning on their behalf, they just did it. Were they prepared to see the Son of God at work in people's lives? In their lives? Did they fully understand all that Jesus was teaching? Remember some could not read - they were fishermen. Their minds must have been in overload trying to follow and understand all the stories and parables that Jesus was teaching them and the people.

Why was this night any different? It had been a busy day with Jesus, teaching and healing. During a special supper (The Last Supper), Jesus shared more about what was happening to Him, and that one of them would betray Jesus. Soon after, they took a night-time stroll in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus wanted company while He prayed. As soon as they sat down, the disciples fell asleep. Jesus knew that soon He would suffer and be put to death. He wanted company in His anguish. They tried but failed. We try to also do all that Jesus wants us to do - He wants us there to be with Him and helping Him in His work for the Kingdom. Continually we pray for strength to understand and be a witness for our loving Saviour!

Prayer: Loving Saviour, thank you for understanding that sometimes things can get too hard. I try to do my best for you, help me to continue to do your work. Amen.

Unflinching Courage

7th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Psalm 56

*"Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want?' 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I am he,' Jesus said."
John 18:4-5a (NIV)*

Courage is not about insane bravery; it is simply daring to let go of what is important to you because someone else is in dire need. When the Titanic was sinking, there were 3 ships within distance to save people. The Sampson was 7 miles away, but because they were illegally fishing and didn't want to be caught, they turned away. The Californian was 14 miles away, but it was night, and they were surrounded by ice, and thought they would wait until morning. Then there was the Carpathia, 58 miles away. They were going in the opposite direction but decided to be a lifeboat for the Titanic. Captain Arthur Rostron turned his boat around and prayed that God would get them there safely through the ice to save whom they could. That night they saved 705 people. Captain Rostron had the courage to look beyond his comfort to help those in need.

Jesus had been in agony in Gethsemane praying that His Father take away all that lay before Him. But this was not to be so. Jesus knew He had to die for the sins of the world and as He stood from prayer and went back to His disciples, He could see a mob coming. The silence in the garden of prayer was suddenly broken. From all sides, it seemed an armed mob swarmed into Gethsemane. In this crisis it is a different Christ to whom we just saw in agonising prayer with His Heavenly Father. This Christ, strengthened by the angel [Luke 22:43], steps before the murderous mob and asks whom they are looking for?

Jesus knew full well what was to happen, but He didn't hide. He went forward with unflinching courage to His arrest, trial, beating and death on a cross. Jesus gave Himself not just for His disciples, but also for His enemies and for us. Jesus wanted to suffer for you! He was eager to lay down His life for your redemption. With this magnificent mercy and limitless love for you, may He grant you an inner peace!

Prayer: My courageous Saviour, thank you that you didn't falter in the time of your agony but went with strength and courage to the cross to die that I might live. Amen.

Christian Charity

8th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 59

"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)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, a traitor appeared before Jesus. He pretended to be a friend and disciple, but Judas was out for himself – to make a profit from being a friend of Jesus. He was warned by Jesus repeatedly, but still carried out his treacherous plan. This sinister figure advanced towards Jesus without charity or good will and became an informer who sold his Saviour for thirty pieces of murderous silver. Judas is still known as being the worst betrayer in history. It is no wonder that the hand of one of Jesus' disciples went for a sword hidden beneath his garment.

Neither the Gospels Matthew, Mark or Luke mention that it was Simon Peter who cut off the servant's ear. Only John identifies him as Peter. At first, we can wonder why the first three remained silent as to the disciple's name; but when their Gospels were written, Peter was still alive, and with loving consideration avoided mentioning his name. This would spare him and the early Christian church much sorrow. John wrote his Gospel towards the end of the first century, long after Peter had died, and both for our warning and information, he could then record the name of this impetuous disciple.

The first three acted in Christian charity to protect the name of someone who had failed and hurt others. It seems that in these days anyone can slander anyone through print, on-line or through gossiping. There are many who enjoy in publicising any private sin and I am sure that each of us are then quick to judge others and put the worst construct on an action. It is hard to know in the news; which is real, and which is gossip and opinions. What we know to be fact is what God has shown us in the Bible in His Holy Word. The story of Jesus is found recorded by four different eyewitnesses: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When faced with other opinions of faith, go straight to the source - God's Word!

Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for your protecting hand over me. Let your Word live in my heart and help me from hurting others. Amen.

Innocent Blood

9th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 55

“When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” Matthew 27:3-5 (NIV)

I remember seeing ‘The Green Mile’ movie for the first time. It was so impacting and so sad that an innocent man was convicted to death row for offenses he didn’t commit. It was set in the 1930’s at the Cold Mountain penitentiary’s death row facility known as ‘The Green Mile’. John Coffey was a giant of an African American man, but unnaturally gentle. He was condemned to death for the rape and murder of twin nine-year-old girls. One of the guards, Paul, retold this incredible story of an innocent man willing to die because the world was so evil.

In the Biblical story we have innocent blood being shed. Jesus was innocent and Judas was the first in the story of Easter to proclaim Him ‘Not Guilty.’ Judas was in mental and spiritual pain when he realised what he had done, and he tried to make good of it. He was hoping the Pharisees would pronounce him forgiven from the sin he had committed against the blameless Jesus. The Pharisees had achieved their goal and that was to secure Jesus and have Him tried for insurrection and blasphemy. They really didn’t care about Judas and the turmoil of his soul.

Despite the priestly indifference of the Pharisees, Judas still tried to make restitution by not accepting the thirty pieces of silver. He threw the coins into the temple at least to try to rid himself of the blood money. Again, this didn’t help the despair that set upon Judas; he could not see the forgiveness that Jesus would give him and so went and hanged himself. No matter the despair and how great we think our sins may be, no matter how much we feel we have betrayed Jesus, there is forgiveness for us. Through the innocent blood of Jesus on the cross, He has pronounced us free from our sins and we have redemption through His grace. The innocent lamb that takes away the sins of the world!

Prayer: Jesus you are the innocent Son of God. Thank you for pronouncing me free from all my sins and I can find peace at the cross. Amen.

A Fair Chance!

10th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Psalm 52

“Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled.” Matthew 26:57 (NIV)

It was a late night on Thursday after the measureless agony of Gethsemane where Jesus had experienced the betrayal of Judas, the illegal arrest, the abandonment from His followers, the beatings from the soldiers and being led before the court of the Sanhedrin. Everything about Jesus' arrest had been done illegally, being condemned by the code of laws regulating procedure in criminal cases. Few courts could find authority for convening at night and yet, there was the unmistakable pressure to hurry through the trial of Jesus and speed up the schedule for the slaughter.

In 1945-1946, the Nuremberg trial of 21 of the most important surviving leaders of Nazi Germany took place. These Nazi leaders were charged for plotting aggressive war crimes against humanity and promoting atrocities. It took a total of nine months to reach a verdict. The courts sat a total of 1,000 hours on 216 days to come to a conclusion. Yet, at Jesus' trial, the high priest took hardly an hour for the trial – it seems that they couldn't kill Christ quickly enough. Within our society people also seem to deal with Jesus and Christianity in an offhand manner. Not giving God's Word time to sink into the heart and soul.

The saving story of Jesus and his love for humankind is life changing. He went through injustices and indescribable pain and torture to bring us salvation. As we tell and hear of God's love for the world this Easter season, give it a fair chance to open your heart, soul and mind. Make a commitment for your eternal salvation and study His Word and His teachings to see how your life can be filled with the love of God. As at Jesus' trial, the loudest enemies were the ones who didn't take time to understand. So, take time for Jesus, He has His whole lifetime for you!

Prayer: Our suffering Saviour, you were unjustly treated. Help me to spend time with you and your Word to allow your grace and peace to enter my life. Amen.

Running Away

2nd Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 139:1-10

"Then everyone deserted him and fled." Mark 14:50 (NIV)

As a child I loved playing chasey. I see children still playing it today. One person is chosen to be 'it' and the rest of the group scatters and hides so that they won't be caught and then be the 'chaser'. No one really wants to be the 'chaser'; it is much easier to be the ones running away as they can hide and allow others to be caught while they remain free! Another type of game like this is 'hide and seek' – all hide, and it is up to the one to find them and catch them out. But is it really easier to be the 'chaser'?

Jesus didn't hide, nor did he run away when the soldiers and Pharisees came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. He stood His ground, even asking them who they were looking for, when He knew they were after Himself. It was even foretold by the prophet Zechariah 500 years before Christ was born: *"Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered," Zechariah 13:7a (NIV)*. We can wonder who the disciples were all running from. It was all so unknown, and I suppose they even thought that Jesus being the Son of God would soon be set free by the authorities, because who would dare condemn the Son of God?

It can be easy to be a Christian and stand up for Jesus when things are easy and there are no threats. But, what about when we are threatened with intolerance, with being a hypocrite, for not turning the other cheek, for not being Christian enough and giving more to those in need? These are all realities in this world of post-Christendom. People have a view of Christians and if not meek and humble enough one could be persecuted. Are we willing to stand up and be counted with Jesus or will we hide and run away? Not an easy question to answer or do. We pray that when faced with issues that try our faith, Jesus will give us the strength to stand with Him!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be strong and stand up for you when it would be easier to run away. Keep me steadfast to you. Amen.

A Silent Saviour

11th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 119:1-11

"Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent." Matthew 26:62-63a (NIV)

Every 10 years, the monks in a monastery are allowed to break their vow of silence to speak two words. After his first decade at the monastery, one monk finally gets his chance to speak. He thinks for a second before saying, "Food bad." Ten years later, he says, "Bed hard." It's the big day, a decade later. He gives the head monk a long stare and says, "I quit." "I'm not surprised," the head monk says. "You've been complaining ever since you got here."

A vow of silence is something many of us would find hard – even to remain silent for 10 minutes. To remain silent when being falsely accused, slandered and perjured would be impossible. We wonder why Jesus didn't speak up for himself, send angels to carry Him away or fight for Him; but no! Jesus remained silent. It seemed that the high priest was frustrated that Jesus wouldn't say a word to defend Himself. *"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 her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth."* Isaiah 53:7 (NIV) Does Jesus refuse to answer because He thinks words are useless and nothing can deter His bloodthirsty enemies? Or does He refuse to speak on His own defence because something that He says may actually set Him free?

The fact that Jesus says nothing proves His innocence. Jesus had the divine conviction that the truth of His cause and the fulfillment of His mission must eventually triumph over the worst that earth and hell together can devise against Him. God's ways are not our ways, for our Heavenly Father is much more merciful and longsuffering than we are. When God sent His Son to earth as a baby, He knew what was to follow 33 years later. Jesus fulfilled the mission of salvation for the world.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you put up with so much at your trial. There was so much untruth and slander, yet you remained silent to save me. May my words always be a blessing. Amen.

"Yes, it is as you say"

12th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Psalm 39

"But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'" Matthew 26:63 (NIV)

You can imagine the high priest getting utterly frustrated with Jesus. He asks Jesus to explain what He had said and what He had done; but now He was being asked who He was. Jesus could have remained silent again, but this was not the time for silence, He needed to speak up and explain His position as the Son of God who is seated at the right hand of the Father. There can be no mistake whatsoever that Jesus claims His place in God's Kingdom. We thank God for this testimony – for then there can be no doubt in anyone's minds and hearts to His Sovereignty.

In Australia, each state has a supreme (or high) court which hears the most serious of cases - murder, manslaughter, serious drug offences. Anyone brought before the supreme court and judge is expected to plead their case through their lawyer and state specifically who they are so there can be no doubt. There are some cases which have gone on for months, and others like the Mabo vs Queensland case in 1992 which went for 10 years. In all these cases arguments for and against were heard and then decided upon with each person clearly stating their views.

Jesus' trial was very different. There were a lot of arguments against Jesus, but no one spoke up for Him, nor were any witnesses called. But when it came to Jesus stating who He was there could be no doubt. Jesus' trial went about an hour and in that time, He was tried and sentenced and soon after put to death. Jesus, standing before Pilate, loved each of us so much, despite our sins, our rebellion against God, our ingratitude; that He suffered all the punishment that we should have endured. Jesus gave His everything in that moment and stated His birthright as the Son of God. He gave us complete redemption and forgiveness and the promise of eternity with our Heavenly Father. Are you also willing to stand up and state your case for Jesus?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for being my Saviour and stating so clearly that you are God's Son. I have no doubt that you died for me, help me to also stand up for you. Amen.

Despised and Rejected

13th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Psalm 139:11-24

"He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held Him of no account." Isaiah 53:3 (NRSV)

As a schoolteacher, one is often subjected to all sorts of reactions and behaviours from children not agreeing with your rules or actions. One that particularly disturbs me is when a child (or adult) rolls their eyes. To me it shows disrespect, disdain and contempt for the person talking. There are many rude gestures and idioms that plague our world and society. I sometimes feel that to confront these and explain how their actions and words hurt may be one way to educate respect.

Jesus was faced at His trial with more than disdain, contempt and disrespect. He was, as it was foretold by Isaiah, 'despised and rejected' and was 'acquainted with infirmity.' After the High Priest had asked Jesus to say who He was and Jesus had replied to being the Son of God, the High Priest tore his clothes in a gesture of mock disgust. He declared that Jesus had spoken blasphemy and on that note the crowd turned on Jesus and ordered Him to be put to death. Everyone it seemed had condemned Him, they rolled their eyes at Him, despised Him and rejected Him. These people all needed to be taught respect for human life and decency.

This was not to be the case, and even greater brutality and injustice followed. People in their depravity can stoop to depths of hideous brutality as in Jesus' trial and conviction. They humiliated Jesus in ways of cowardly injustice. The spitting, mocking, beating, whipping all came to fruition as was foretold in Isaiah. He was beaten beyond recognition and I'm sure many hid their faces as they couldn't bear to look at Him. Again, through all that rejection Jesus never complained or turned against the people or God. Rather He looks upon us all with love in His eyes. Jesus went through all this for you – He loves you so much!

Prayer: Thank you, my Saviour and Christ, for being willing to suffer all the atrocities for my salvation. Help me to show love and respect to all as you did. Amen.

Blood-bought Grace

14th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 141

"Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, 'Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?'" Matthew 26:67-68 (NIV)

There are so many traps to capture, ensnare and even kill wild animals. I saw on a movie once that to kill wild wolves the hunter froze a sharp knife covered with frozen blood and put it in the snow. The wolf smelled the blood and started to lick the frozen knife. As it was all frozen the wolf did not feel its own tongue being cut. The wolf continued licking, cutting its tongue more and more until the wolf dies from bleeding out. Sounds like a horrible way to kill a wolf, but this was in a movie.

The Pharisees were out to entrap and ensnare Jesus. They wanted to get rid of Him and so planned out ways to trap Him. It all started with the betrayer Judas, who wanted easy money. Then to hurt Him through a mockery of a trial and condemn Him to death. Jesus was subjected to the agony of indescribable torture. During the hours following the trial, the enmity and jealousy pent up during the three years of Jesus' ministry was let loose against Him. He was spit upon and hit with blow after blow on His defenceless body. While His hands were tied Jesus was blindfolded and they played games and toyed with Him as to have Him prophecy as to who hit him. I am sure the blood of Jesus flowed out. He was pronounced guilty, and His death sentence was carried out.

This is so horrid to think of, that people could be so cruel to each other. To be so cruel to the Son of God though is unthinkable. But look past the blood soaked cross to the empty grave. Heaven was opened and proclaimed Jesus Christ Lord of All! He was no longer bound by the cruelty of others, but now sits at the right hand of His Heavenly Father. Through Jesus death and suffering and the blood He shed for our sake, He bought us freedom and grace. We have access to heaven and all the glory - now that is a blood-bought grace!

Prayer: My living Saviour, thank you for shedding your blood for me. Your grace is all I need and may my words and actions always be pleasing to you. Amen.

To Live Loyal

15th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 145

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’” John 18:37 (NIV)

This last year, our world lost a lady of great faith and witness to her God. HM Queen Elizabeth II (1926-2022), was a leader in her own right and guided Britain and the Commonwealth through good times and bad. She was the world’s most prominent Christian leader and perhaps the most faithful person to lead a nation. In it all she never lost sight of her faith and of her love for her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *“To many of us our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ’s words and example.” (HM Queen Elizabeth II, 2000)*

Jesus witnessed to the truth that He was the king in the presence of the whole court and assembly. He testified to the truth. Many did not like Him saying this and then they sought to silence Him. But God had other plans. In the silence of the cross, God was planning the world’s salvation for us. Jesus is our king in glory. HM Queen Elizabeth II testified to her faith; what about us? It is not easy to share your faith with someone who won’t listen, but God softens hearts and over time and with prayer lives can be changed.

We must remain loyal to our Heavenly Father and Saviour Jesus Christ. Through our loyalty and with God’s help and grace we can change one heart at a time for God. When Jesus is Lord of our hearts and lives, we have been born into the kingdom of heaven and on earth. We have also been spiritually reborn so that one day we can live with Him in His heavenly kingdom of glory. Live loyally to your king – Jesus Christ!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to be loyal to you and be able to be bold in sharing your grace, love and forgiveness with others. Amen.

A Heavenly Kingdom

16th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Psalm 2

"Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'"
John 18:36 (NIV)

'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...' begins the opening lines of every Star Wars film. It sets the scene of where the movie is to take place, not on Earth, but another fictitious place. Marvel comic stories tell stories of people from other places (not on Earth) who come to Earth and wreak havoc by imposing their ideas and sanctions on a world unfamiliar to them. In such they come to take over Earth for their interplanetary realm. That is where the heroes arise to defend Earth. I enjoy watching these stories as the good seems to always win over the bad.

Back in Jesus' time there was no Star Wars or stories about other inhabitants on unknown planets. So, you can well imagine that Jesus in the words spoken above must have really confused them all. How could Jesus be from another world and have a Kingdom somewhere else? This is totally radical from Jesus. No one could understand what He was saying. They did think that He must be crazy or out-of-his-mind! But Jesus' kingdom is where our Heavenly Father lives and a place for our eternity. Following Jesus does not reap financial or social rewards. The disciples expected Jesus to establish a mighty kingdom here on Earth, and they repeatedly debated who was to have the positions of highest importance in this new realm.

We pray for God's Kingdom to come, where all will be made perfect in glory. But in the meantime, we remain in the earthly kingdom to follow Jesus and His teachings. Through this Lenten season we remember that Christ suffered for the whole world - so that all may enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Although His is not an earthly realm, Jesus will rule as King in our hearts and lives. May we also be dedicated to serve Him all our days.

Prayer: King Jesus, rule in my heart and life that I may follow you all the days of my life. Help me to share this love and forgiveness with others. Amen.

Herod Antipas

3rd Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 75

“When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle.” Luke 23:8 (NIV)

Herod Antipas (born before 20BC and died after AD39) was the son of Herod the Great. As the younger son he was given the title of tetrarch over a minor principality in the Roman Empire in Galilee, northern Palestine and Peraea. He was somewhat like his ruthless father, who was King when Jesus was born and issued the order to kill all the 2-year-old boys in Bethlehem; as Herod Antipas was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded. He needed to prove his position and so made it his ambition to keep the peace in his part of the realm. Peace may make the people of the realm crown him king above any of his older brothers Herod Philip I and Archelaus who were also tetrarchs of different regions.

It is then not surprising that Herod Antipas wanted to make sure that no one disturbed the peace he wanted to create. When John the Baptist started preaching and causing issues with the local Jewish authorities, he wanted to rid himself of him. And, when Jesus from Nazareth (from his region of rule) started causing issues he wanted to be rid of this disturbance. Herod, in the verse above was also rather curious about Jesus and wanted to see him do one of his miracles, but when Jesus refused to answer him at all he got angry and had Jesus beaten and humiliated and sent back to Pilate to deal with.

Jesus, our Saviour, was sent from one ruler to another and none knew what to do with Him. In some ways they were frightened as He did things no one else could and claimed to be God's Son. I can see how neither wanted to be the murderer of the Son of God. In the end it wasn't only them, but the whole crowd who condemned Jesus to death. We can say it was us who did it. Jesus was found innocent by Pilate and Herod wanted nothing to do with Him. An innocent Jesus was led to the cross willingly, and for us he died.

Prayer: Our Saviour and Lord, you were innocent, yet the people wanted you dead. Forgive me for all my wrongdoings and help me know your love through your sacrifice. Amen.

Crucify Him?

17th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 3

“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify him!’” Matthew 27:22 (NIV)

In 1991, I took time off and went backpacking through Europe by myself for 3 months. I had my backpack, a Eurail pass and an excitement for adventure. I didn't really have a plan or itinerary, but decided to go to the train station, see what destinations were on the list and then choose two – flip a coin and decide that way. I ended up going to places which I would never have put on my list – Trier, Germany; Luxembourg; Verona, Italy; and many others. During my travels I came across the unexpected and met amazing people with whom to travel.

Pilate had a decision to make! He could have set Jesus free upsetting the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, or he could allow the people to decide Jesus' fate. Makes me wonder that if he had flipped a coin which way it would have gone. To be honest, this all was part of God's plan so I don't think anything would have been different. So, in a sense we could say that Pilate never really had a decision to make – God had always put it in the hands of the people to decide what to do with this man called Jesus.

We are also faced with this decision today. What are you to do with Jesus? Is He your Saviour and King to pray to and worship? Or is He a man who could do incredible things for others but just not for me. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords for others, but maybe He doesn't really have a place in my life – or maybe only on a Sunday morning. Does it matter that He suffered and died and was put to death by the people of the day? The answer we know is that it does matter as Jesus did it all out of love for you and me. He died and was crucified that you and I could be forgiven and saved from our sins to be able to spend eternity with our heavenly Father. So, what are you going to do with this man called Jesus?

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help me to see you as my Lord and Saviour to worship and pray to. You died that I could have eternal life – Thank you. Amen.

Wanting to free Him

18th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Psalm 13

“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.” Mark 15:9-11 (NIV)

We have a court scene set before us with one difference... the judge here, Pilate, is also Jesus' defender against the Pharisees who are trying to prosecute Jesus without a shred of evidence. Instead, the Pharisees incited a fever pitch within the crowd to have Jesus crucified. Pilate seems to be clued to the intentions of the Pharisees as he saw it was all out of envy that Jesus was being tried at all. To his credit Pilate took Jesus to a private place to hear what He had to say. Jesus was cross examined, and Pilate went to the crowd telling them, *“I find no basis for a charge against this man.” [Luke 23:4b NIV]*

So, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, hoping that Herod could then pardon Jesus and deal with the backlash from the Pharisees. But Herod wanted nothing to do with this man claiming to be the Son of God. Pilate then put forward a murdering rebel Barabbas as a choice against Jesus. I am sure Pilate was hoping that the crowd would see when they were both standing side by side, a sympathy for the bruised and beaten Christ. But no, the crowd wanted him dead. So again, Pilate had Jesus beaten severely... so excruciatingly that many die, and again had Him brought to the crowd, hoping for their sympathy and compassion, but there was none that day.

The crowd wanted Barabbas set free and Jesus crucified and there was nothing to stop that blood bath. Pilate took Jesus aside again privately wanting to have Him freed, but we know the story. In all, Pilate tried to have Him found innocent three times [Luke 23:22]. Finally, Pilate physically washed his hands of the death of the innocent man of Jesus and laid the blame for Jesus' death on the crowd and the generations to come [Matthew 27:24]. Even though innocent Jesus wasn't freed, it was the guilty us who were set free. With the scourging and the crucifixion of Jesus, we have been pronounced innocent before the throne of Heaven and have been set free!

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus for your strength against the angry crowd. Give me strength daily to be able to stand up against any opposition for my faith. Amen.

Two Kingdoms

19th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Psalm 26

"From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.'" John 19:12 (NIV)

The fire of Rome, AD64, destroyed 10 of the 14 districts. It was during the reign of Emperor Nero, and many say that the emperor himself started the fire so that he could rebuild his own, new Rome and make room for a vast luxurious palace and further his political agenda. But Nero blamed the Christians and the Jews for starting the fire. During that time, he blamed the Christians for being anti-government. So, he beheaded them, set them afire, had them fed to wild animals and other unspeakable tortures and deaths. Paul was beheaded that same year as the burning of Rome and Peter three years later by Emperor Nero. Were the Christians and Jews actually anti-government? If following Jesus, the answer is no, as He often spoke about giving to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.

Christians are to live in the two kingdoms – earthly and Godly at the same time. Just as we follow the government's laws to keep a functioning society, so we also follow God's laws to love and respect each other and love God above all else. At the time of Jesus' arrest and trial, the accusations that He was against Caesar were totally unfounded. Jesus knew that we are to live according to the government of the day, but also follow God's commandments. They do not oppose each other. It is not one or the other as Jesus taught his disciples. One of His disciples was even a tax collector.

Throughout the ages Christians have been blamed for many acts against the state and government. In AD150, Marcus Aurelius and Valerian brutalized Christians, because many held high positions of state and were presented as a threat. We can only wonder what the rulers were frightened of. Throughout the centuries this persecution has continued. Through it all, to the honour of their faith, many of them, innocent of the crimes against their government, accepted the pains of martyrdom rather than deny their Lord. What would you do if faced with having to confess Jesus?

Prayer: Lord, thank you that I live in a world where Christians can live and worship in safety. Bless the government and all in authority that they may lead with integrity. Amen.

Roadway of the Cross

20th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 22:1-11

"But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads" Psalm 22:6-7 (NIV)

In year 12 I went on a camping tour to the Blue Mountains, NSW as a school excursion with Immanuel College. It was to be 10 days of hiking in the Blue Mountains carrying a pack filled with tent, water, food, sleeping mat, sleeping bag and anything else needed. The journey began with much excitement, but we slowly slipped into routine as the days went by with the pack not becoming any lighter. Our last day was the hardest as we had to walk the track out of the Blue Mountains up the Giant Stairway of 998 steps to the Three Sisters in Katoomba. The pack hadn't gotten any lighter and the blisters and sore feet were not healed. We encouraged each other as step by step we made the climb.

A few blisters were nothing compared to the journey and roadway that Jesus had to go on through the city of Jerusalem. This was the death parade that was chosen to be the longest possible route to the place of execution. Jesus was to be made a public spectacle, a warning for the curious masses and to bring the greatest humiliation. Jesus was not even strong enough after all the beatings, whippings and scourging he suffered to carry his own cross. The soldiers enlisted a bystander, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the weight of the cross with Jesus trailing behind. This cross that Jesus carried was not just His, but He carried the sins of the whole world on his shoulders. Jesus was the victim of the worst injustice, the most criminal falsehood, the most dastardly deceit degenerate and depraved people have ever witnessed.

Jesus never called out or swore accusing the rulers of treachery, but instead carried His cross quietly. This He suffered for us and for our eternal salvation. He took your sins upon Himself on this roadway leading to the cross. The Son of God truly is *"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!"* [John 1:29 NIV] as foretold by John the Baptist.

Prayer: My dear loving Saviour, thank you walking the way to the cross, carrying my sins upon your shoulders. You gave everything for me; help me to do the same for you and others. Amen.

Comforting the Mourning

21st Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 122

“A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.’” Luke 23:27-28 (NIV)

What can you say to someone who has just lost a loved one? Nothing is usually the best and rather we should share the sorrow through tears, care and love. So many times, people can be callous in their responses to those who are grieving, but here in the above text Jesus can see grief and He acknowledged it and by doing so showed love and care for these sorrowing women. Jesus knew He was going to a better place to be with His Heavenly Father where there would be no more hurt, pain or grief, but He also recognised that these women needed Him and needed His presence in their lives as we also do when we have lost a loved one. We miss their presence and their love, even though we know they are going to be with their Heavenly Father.

Comforting the mourning is something Jesus did throughout His ministry. He didn't say "don't cry, they are going to a better place." He cried with them and shared their grief and sorrow just as He did here. Jesus was never too self-engrossed to speak to others about their salvation and to warn them of the dangers that surrounded them. Even here on the roadway to the cross Jesus stopped to share with the women about the fall of Jerusalem and the temple which was to take place in forty years. This indeed was going to be a time of suffering not just for individuals but for the whole Jewish community. It would have been better not to have been born or to die in the collapse rather than go through such pain and suffering. This was to be a time where their faith would be tested.

But what of us when we mourn? We can be comforted that our Lord and Saviour knows what it is to suffer through extreme pain and still He holds out His arms to us in love to welcome us home. Jesus mourns with those who mourn and comforts those in need of comfort – let us follow this example of true love.

Prayer: Jesus, through your love and comfort to others I know that you have the same love and comfort to me. Help me to show the same love to others in need. Amen.

My Substitute

22nd Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Psalm 103

“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)

Those with food allergies and dietary needs know how important substitute foods can be. To replace the gluten in flour for baking with almond meal or rice flour. To replace sugar with another sweetener – honey or saccharin. One that I remember was the substitute for chocolate – carob in the 1970's which was said to be much healthier. I remember shops selling all sorts of carob Easter eggs, bilbies and bunnies at Easter, bars made from carob and carob cake. The substitutes for the natural foods have become so tasty and widely spread that many without allergies choose to eat the substitutes as they are considered healthier.

Sin, since Adam and Eve has reigned in the life of all humans. Reading through both the Old and New Testaments, people are always doing the wrong thing. Then God comes along to bring His people to repentance and then forgives them. Yet, God's people do it all over again, and again, and again. It is the theme played out constantly through the history of the world. We sin, repent of our sin, turn back to God and He forgives us. The Old Testament replays this over and over. When will God's people ever be totally forgiven and healed from all that we do wrong? How can we ever be good enough to get into heaven?

That is why God sent Jesus. Sin was something that we could not get rid of on our own. The only way to make us healthy again was to send Jesus to be the sinless sacrifice for all our sins. Jesus never did anything wrong, but He became our substitute and died on the cross so that we could be declared forgiven forever and be acceptable to God again and spend our eternal life with Him in heaven forever. Jesus as our substitute has made us healthy before God. Turn to Jesus and know that through Him we are blameless and acceptable to God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for being the sinless substitute for me on the cross. Help me to do my best always to live as you want me to. Amen.

Who to Choose?

4th Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 4

“Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.” Mark 15:15 (NIV)

“Inky pinky ponky, Daddy bought a donkey,
Donkey died, daddy cried, Inky pinky ponky”

As a child I remember using the above verse to choose who would be on my team or side for whatever we happened to be playing at the time. It was always hard to choose teams, so instead left it somewhat to chance with the little rhymes so that no one was hurt in the process of picking. “Eeny, meeny, miney moe...” was another such rhyme. In class for games, sometimes the teacher helped in the picking of teams to make it somewhat fair. I do remember the leaders of each team picking people for their team and me being left to one of the last picked. It was always rather embarrassing and hurtful.

Pilate placed Jesus in such a situation. Pilate could have chosen between Barabbas and Jesus himself and made the decision clear cut. He could have just pardoned Jesus and not brought Barabbas into the situation. He could have even flipped a coin or done the children’s verse to choose who to set free. But instead, he left it to a crowd who was stirred up by the jealous Pharisees and teachers of the law. How could the crowd choose independently and make an informed decision with all the facts, when the Pharisees planted usurpers in the crowd and crowd-mentality took over? Under normal circumstances, anyone with an ounce of decency would set the innocent Jesus free, rather than the murdering bandit Barabbas.

A question put to me at one youth event, really made me sit back and ponder my response: ‘Are you Barabbas-minded or Christ-minded?’ In other words, do we choose sin or Jesus? Would we follow the crowd to free the sinner and convict the innocent? In our world of no absolutes, people don’t like to talk about sin – there is no black and white, only grey. Jesus has helped us by making us clean and white through His blood on the cross. Jesus needs to be our absolute, clear-cut choice!

Prayer: Lord God, you sent your beloved innocent Son to the cross and be pronounced guilty of my sin. I choose Jesus to live in my heart and life, help me to always follow you. Amen.

Crown of Thorns

26th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 6

"They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him." Mark 15:17 (NIV)

A plant with thorns was woven into a crown-like shape and placed on the head of Jesus in mockery when He stated that He was indeed a King. When I was a child, I used to like to find little daisies. I would split the stem and weave them into a daisy chain and put on my head and pretend I was a princess. In Mainly Music (a Christian musical playgroup) we sing songs about different jobs and in them we put on different hats to show that we are different characters. The children also enjoy putting on workers helmets, top hats, sun hats, fireman hats and many others. It helps them create a pretend time where they can be anything and then have fun doing the different jobs.

The soldiers put the crown of thorns on Jesus' head in mockery, pretending He was a king. They even put a purple robe on Jesus and bowed down to Him. But, unlike the times of pretend that were spoken of above, Jesus truly was a King – He was God's Son, the King of the world who sits at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. I often wonder why the guards did that to Jesus. In a cruel way they did it to hurt Him more than ever. Jesus could have stood up to them. He could have commanded legions of angels to help Him and hurt those who were hurting Him. Instead, Jesus silently bore the ridicule and mockery.

Had these guards really known what they were doing to a true King, they would have fallen on their knees in worship. But we know who the true King of Kings and Saviour of the world is. How often do we treat Him with mockery and contempt and fail to recognise Jesus for who He really is – God's Son? May God's blessing and love rest on us this Lenten season as we open our hearts to recognise and acknowledge our true Saviour and King.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you are my King and Saviour. Help me to always acknowledge you before others who seek to ridicule and taunt you for you died to save me. Amen.

Hebrew, Latin & Greek

23rd Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 96

“And Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, ‘JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS’. The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, so that many people could read it.”

John 19:19-20 (NLT)

In 1522, Martin Luther translated the New Testament into the common language of the people in Germany. This translation was invaluable to the reformation of the church. No longer were the common lay people dependent upon the scholarly interpretation of scripture by the Roman Catholic clergy, but now every literate person in Germany could read the Bible in their native tongue and know for themselves the saving message of the Gospel. Luther completed this work of translation in only 11 weeks while he was hidden in the Wartburg Castle. It took Luther another 11 years to then complete the Old Testament, but what an amazing thing he did for the spreading of God’s Word around the world.

In a similar way, Pilate unknowingly was writing for the future. He indicates in writing in a triple inscription that the Gospel will not just be for the Jews, but for all throughout the Roman Empire (Greek, Latin and Hebrew). The message of Jesus Christ as the King would be proclaimed to all masses and classes in their own language. According to Wycliffe Global Alliance, as of 2022 all the Bible has been translated into 724 languages. The New Testament has been translated into an additional 1,617 languages and smaller parts of the Bible have been translated into 1,248 other languages. What Pilate began in his superscription on the cross of Christ has brought the Gospel to millions around the world.

This Lenten season we are reminded that Christ died for all people around the world. There are still so many who do not know about Jesus and His love; pray that God will send people into these places to share with the people that Jesus brings love and peace and forgiveness of sins. We can read about how just a few sent to other places can set the world on fire with God’s love, just read the book of Acts. Maybe God is placing this mission on your heart. What began with Pilate so long ago can continue with us!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, place this mission of spreading your love on my heart to share with my neighbours what you have done for me. Help me be bold for you. Amen.

Jesus Understands

25th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Psalm 42

“Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).” John 19:17 NIV

When we look at the life of Jesus and especially the last week of His life on Earth, we can learn many life lessons. When we are faced with heavy burdens and afflictions which can really weigh on our hearts and lives; we can know that Jesus carried the cross to the hill of Golgotha. On that cross He carried the sins of the whole world – so He understands, hears your cries, supports you when the load becomes too great and guides you through this time to a time of peace. Are you struggling to support your family? Finding ends hard to meet? Jesus knows what it is to have nothing; He died destitute and poor. Come to Jesus with your cares and concerns and give them to Him in prayer.

Are you feeling lonely or without anyone to care for you? Jesus has promised that He will never leave you or forsake you. He was abandoned and left to hang on the cross alone – Jesus will never let you feel this way. Come to Him in prayer and find God’s presence. Do people hurt you with their words, ridicule your actions and make you feel worthless? Never feel that way with Jesus as your ally to support, encourage and be your closest friend. As Jesus was taken to the cross, He was beaten, scorned, and ridiculed with the harshest words from His enemies. Jesus can help, come to Him, read His words of love and forgiveness in the Bible, and forgive those who hurt you, just as Jesus did for His enemies on the cross.

We are all burdened by the sins we have done and even the thoughts that we have against others. Jesus knows them all. He understands what it is to lead a human life. Jesus went to the cross sinless so that He could carry all these sins that plague us and cover them all with His forgiveness and love. As you go through this Lenten season, lean on Jesus. He understands and forgives and offers eternal life.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus, for knowing me and for being there during all my hard times. Help me to lean on you, knowing that in you is someone who understands. Amen.

Funeral Procession

24th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Psalm 102

“Then they led him away to crucify him.” Matthew 27:31b (NIV)

On the 8th September 2022, HM Queen Elizabeth II passed away. She died at the age of 96 and was the longest-reigning British monarch, ruling for 70 years. She was the queen regnant of 32 sovereign states during her lifetime and was the head of state of 15 realms at the time of her death. What an incredible resumé, so needless to say it wasn't surprising when at her funeral there were representatives from 168 countries, including 18 monarchs, 55 presidents and 25 prime ministers. Her coffin procession through the streets of London was watched by millions around the world until it finally rested in King George VI Memorial Chapel on the grounds of Windsor Castle.

What a contrast to the march Jesus took on the way to the cross as the Son of God. How many dignitaries were there to see the King of Kings and Lord of lords innocently crucified? Instead, Jesus was surrounded by those who spoke ill of Him and taunted Him with vulgarities. Even the worst criminals are not treated with the same viciousness that marked Jesus' persecution on the road to Golgotha. He was not held in high esteem like the Queen was through His life. Jesus did not get the same respect and courtesies as shown the Queen in her lifetime, yet Jesus is the ruling King over the whole heaven and earth. Wouldn't it have been different if He had been respected by all?

After Jesus had died, he wasn't paraded around Jerusalem with 2 minutes of silence marking His death. Jesus was buried in the borrowed tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and only a couple disciples and a few women were there to see Him buried. But God mourned with the loss of His one and only Son by tearing the temple curtain in two and causing a blackout and an earthquake. One can see the pain that God went through. We were not there to see Jesus die, but we know He went willingly to die for the sins of the whole world. He is now crowned our King in heaven.

Prayer: My Saviour, you died the most horrible death so that my salvation could be secured for eternity in heaven. Thank you for your love to me. Amen.

Seamless Garment

27th Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 22:12-31

"When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.'" John 19:23-24a (NIV)

Seamless garments are made obviously without a seam. In 2022, they are made by a circular and continuous knitting process using a circular knitting machine which will then make the whole garment according to preset computer instructions allowing different sewing modes. It does away with having to cut and sew pieces together causing side seams and thus making the garment much more comfortable to wear. These days a lot activewear is seamless and using such a machine is much easier to make than the former cut and sew garments.

Jesus had an under garment without seam that the soldiers did not want to cut or tear to divide it between them, so they threw dice to see who got it. The garment was woven from top to bottom without a seam. A very expensive and special item of clothing, and it would have taken an expert seamstress to make it. Some say Mary gave it to Jesus just before His last week. According to tradition, when a person was executed in whatever way, the soldiers guarding the body were able to share the clothing and garments of the convicted criminal. It was not unusual that the soldiers did this also under the cross of Jesus. What is remarkable is that 1000 years earlier in the Book of Psalms 22:18, it was specified, *"They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."*

It is not known why these facts were included with the recount of Jesus at His trial and crucifixion. Maybe it was mentioned so that the Scriptures could be fulfilled, and we would know that God is supreme and in control of the entire situation. Those of Jesus' time who knew the Old Testament scriptures would know that this then was the coming Messiah who came to save all of humankind. May you also know of God's incredible plan of salvation for you this Easter.

Prayer: My Lord and Saviour, you died for me. You went through horrific experiences for my salvation. It is foretold in the Scriptures that you are the Messiah the Son of God – I believe! Amen.

Elijah?

28th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Psalm 20

"Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.' And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit." Matthew 27:48-50 (NIV)

Elijah was a prophet in the Old Testament. He had been sent by God to show Israel the evil of their ways and turn them back to the Lord. The Israelites had turned from God and were worshipping Baal. In a mighty show of God's power to King Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah proved that God was Lord of all (1 Kings 18). In 2 Kings 2:1-12, we are told that Elijah never died but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. He was one of two people in the Bible that were taken by God – Enoch being the other one.

In Jesus time, some people thought that Jesus was Elijah who had come back to Earth to deliver God's people again from the evil of the government. In the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1-13), the disciples asked about the return of Elijah as he appeared transfigured on the mountain with Jesus and Moses. Even the disciples had heard rumours about Jesus being one of the prophets come back to Earth (Matthew 16:13-14). So, when you put all that in context it is not unusual that at the cross of Jesus, the people were waiting to see if Elijah was coming back to save Him. They still did not understand who Jesus really was.

It was not until He had died, been resurrected, and was seen by the disciples and by many others as being raised from the dead that they truly believed Jesus was who He said he was. He was not a risen Old Testament prophet. Elijah never came to help Jesus, nor did any angel as in the garden of Gethsemane. Rather he commended Himself into His Heavenly Father's keeping with the words, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30). Jesus died for us and stayed on the cross until all was finished and His work on Earth had ended. Now we wait for His coming again to take us to be with Him forever in heaven and for all eternity.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, the Old Testament prophets pointed to your coming as the Lord's Messiah. I know that you came to be my Saviour and free me from my sins. Amen.

Our Peace

5th Sunday during Lent

Read: Psalm 91

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” John 1:29 (NIV)

The Nobel Peace Prize is one of the five Nobel prizes awarded every year since 1901. It was first established by the will of Swedish industrialist, inventor, and armaments manufacturer Alfred Nobel. The other Nobel prizes are for Chemistry, Physics, Physiology or Medicine and Literature, and each year a prize is awarded to those who have “done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congress”. (Wikipedia) The peace prize is awarded to those with outstanding contributions to peace: with arms reduction, international cooperation and to organisations contributing to peace and human rights.

Jesus would have won this award, for by dying on the cross He gave peace and assurance to the whole of humankind. To see the immensity of what Jesus has done for us, take yourself for example. Think of all the wrongs you have done, all the sins committed and those just thought about. Think about words said to others to hurt deliberately or by mistake. My goodness, thinking of all my sins makes me so ashamed. Now, think about all the above sins for each person in the world today, throughout history and then for all the people yet to be born. That is just immense and beyond my thought capabilities. That is what Jesus has done for you, me and the entire world – past and in the future – He has forgiven and taken away the sins that would have otherwise condemned us. Instead, through this forgiveness we have peace in our lives for a future eternity in heaven with God.

Such peace could be unattainable without Jesus Christ’s action on the cross and then in His defeating the devil and rising to life on the third day. Jesus’ actions make living life to the full attainable knowing that in Jesus we are loved and forgiven. We live in this assurance and peace each day and try to live as Jesus would want us to. Such peace is our prize!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, through you I am given peace to be able to live not condemned but forgiven with a future secured in heaven. Help me to share this peace with all. Amen.

Jesus Pleads

29th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 142

“And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ – which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Mark 15:34 (NIV)

During Covid-19 I had to have my gallbladder removed. For any others who have suffered with the pain of a blocked or infected gallbladder, you know the pain; not being able to lie down or sleep and having this gnawing pain that can only be reduced with pain killers. I have friends who have been through chemotherapy and radiotherapy, or in need of knee and hip replacements and I can only imagine the pain that causes. I was in pain with the gallbladder, and these other ailments would also be excruciating and need relief from the pain. I am sure that we have all cried out in pain to God to just take it away.

Jesus was in pain on the cross. In fact, He had been in pain for hours, through the beatings, the whipping, flesh being removed from His back, pain through the crown of thorns pushed through the skin on His head. Then He had to carry a heavy cross for kilometres to Golgotha, then the pain of the nails and the pressure on His lungs with hanging there not being able to catch His breath. It is no wonder that Jesus cried out to His Heavenly Father. Jesus felt forgotten and forsaken by His Father; He was pleading with God to remember Him in His pain. His disciples and followers had left Jesus to fight the final battle against death all by Himself.

This was Jesus pleading not just for Himself, but for God to also remember us. Jesus knew God had not abandoned Him but wanted us to know that we can also cry out to God in our direst needs and pain. When times in your life are unbearable, call out to your Father in Heaven who loves and cares for you and in Him you will find assurance of His love and His mercy. God may not take away the pain, but He will be near you with all that you go through. God will never leave you!

Prayer: Thank you Heavenly Father that you never abandon me. Help me and others who are in pain and in need of relief from suffering. Be merciful to me. Amen.

Forgiveness

30th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Psalm 27

"When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'" Luke 23:33-34a (NIV)

On Feb 1, 2020, the Abdullah family in Sydney was changed forever when three of their six children were run over and killed by a drunk driver. Along with the three children from this family, another 11-year-old cousin was also killed. The children went out innocently to walk to buy ice cream when they were hit and killed. This was a family who chose not to hate the driver who caused them so much pain and loss, but they chose to forgive him. This family was a family of faith, and their children grew up knowing Jesus as their Saviour and the mother said that she knows her children are in heaven with their Heavenly Father.

This was a God-moment for the community and our country. Most of the time people want retribution and pain caused to others who cause pain to them, but here is a family who had lost three precious children and they choose to forgive because of what God has done for them. On the cross when Jesus was dying, He saw all those around Him who had caused Him so much grief and pain, and instead of shouting and swearing vengeance, Jesus chose to forgive all those who had hurt Him. This was a love for others beyond what we can do by ourselves. As in the Abdullah family, their love for God and Jesus influenced them to also forgive where hate would have been so much easier.

During this Lenten season, we have been led through the pain and suffering of Jesus, but it ends in Jesus forgiving others as an example for us also to follow. He not only forgave His tormentors, but in that sentence, He forgave us all the wrong we have done towards God and others. No matter how black our sins, in Jesus we have been washed clean and forgiven everything. Recognising this tremendous gift to us on Jesus' behalf can bring strength and spiritual growth to our lives. It can only bring blessing!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know that you suffered and endured so much for me. Help me to forgive as you have forgiven me. Amen.

Parched

31st Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Psalm 69:1-4, 16-21, 29

"Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips." John 19:28-29 (NIV)

Dehydration occurs when you do not have enough fluids in your body. Then the body does not have enough fluids to keep it working properly. If severe dehydration occurs it can affect the kidneys, heart, brain and the blood vessels and if long term it can lead to death. All living things, from the tiny cyanobacteria to the giant blue whales, need water to survive. Life exists where there is water, which is why Earth is the only planet known to contain life. There is no living thing on Earth that does not need water to live – all animals, plants, protists, fungi and bacteria must have water in some form in order to survive.

Jesus had been without any form of liquid for six hours hanging on the cross and he had been bleeding prolifically and exerting himself beyond human capability – no wonder He said He was thirsty. But interestingly, Jesus' request for water was the first words He spoke to help His physical needs or situation. He pleaded for God to forgive others; provided a home for His destitute mother; promised eternal salvation for a criminal; pleaded for God to remember Him; then asked for provision of His physical need of thirst; and 'It is finished'. The words He spoke from the cross began with a prayer and finished with a prayer of commending His spirit to God.

Whenever we have a drink of water this Lenten season remember our Saviour who also pleaded for water. Jesus lived and died so that we might not only refresh our body, but also refresh our spirit. He ordained Baptism to provide living water for our bodies and souls. When He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus promised her and us a living water to quench our parched souls. Through water and the Word we have the promise of eternal life.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus that through the Living Water of your Word and the promise of eternal life, I know my salvation is secured in you. Amen.

Saved by Grace

32nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Read: Psalm 32

"Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'" Luke 23:42-43 (NIV)

We don't know a whole lot about the two criminals hanging on the crosses next to Jesus. What we are told is that they were criminals and had obviously done something terrible in order to be crucified. The word in Hebrew for them is interpreted as 'robber'. This indicates that they were rebels of some sort or perhaps they were members of a gang who ambushed unsuspecting people. The Romans commonly crucified such violent men. What we do see in the conversations of the two on their crosses is that one is sorry for what he did and the other is not. One has his heart softened and comes to Jesus' defence, where the other one remains hard-hearted.

Whatever circumstances led them to the cross at the same time as Jesus, they were both meant to meet the Messiah. One mocked Jesus because the others did, and the second asked for forgiveness. One thought his fate was sealed with no possible means of escape, where the other saw in Jesus hope for eternal life. Even though both of these men encountered Jesus, only one recognised Him as Lord. This man realized that he had no hope except through the divine grace of Jesus; through acknowledging Jesus and asking for forgiveness and opening his heart to God. His salvation was secured that day hanging on the cross.

We encounter Jesus every day through what we do, our thoughts, through other people and in our prayers and reading the Bible. Do we take Jesus at His Word that our salvation is secured through God's grace, or do we still think we are not good enough or haven't done enough? Jesus has grace abundant for everyone and God wants all people to come to Him for forgiveness and salvation. Wherever you are in your life – just beginning it or coming towards the end; be secure in your knowledge of eternity with Jesus. In Ephesians 2:8 we have this assurance: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God". (NIV)*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your love and grace to me is abundant. Nothing I can do or say can get me to heaven but through you. Remember me Lord Jesus! Amen.

Amazing Grace

33rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Read: Psalm 28

***"From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."
John 1:16-17 (NIV)***

John Newton was born in London July 24, 1725 and was the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean. He made six voyages with his father and several voyages on a man-of-war ship before coming into service on a slave ship going to Sierra Leone. Here he was brutally abused. Finally, he came to be captain of his own slave ship. He grew up getting some religious instruction from his mother before she died, but he had given up on God long ago. Until, on a homeward journey, while trying to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced his "great deliverance". When all seemed lost and the ship about to sink, he cried out: "Lord, have mercy on us." Reflecting on this later, he realized that God was talking to him through the storm and that *Grace* had begun to work in him.

Through the rest of his life, he observed his "conversion" day as the day he subjected his will to a higher power. He continued in the slave trade after his conversion but saw to it that all the slaves in his care were treated humanely. Later in life he became ordained into the Church of England where he influenced many with his preaching and hymn writing. He wrote the hymn 'Amazing Grace' and it is thought to have been composed between 1760 and 1770, possibly for a weekly service. John Newton continued to preach until the last year of his life, although he was blind by that time. He died in London December 21, 1807. He was secure in his faith that *Amazing Grace* would lead him home.

There are many stories we hear of God's mercy and grace reaching out to those who seem unworthy. But that's what is so amazing about God's grace... It is available for all and was secured when our Saviour died innocently to cover all our sins and wrongdoings. What matchless mercy! What amazing grace!

Prayer: My dear Saviour, your death covered all my sins to make me worthy of my eternal life with my Heavenly Father. Thank you for your mercy and grace to me. Amen.

Preparations

34th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Read: Psalm 24

*"As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me.'"
Matthew 21:1-2 (NIV)*

Getting ready for Easter is fun! I have some things I like to do – decorate an Easter egg tree with eggs that my children painted years ago, clean the house, start working out the menu for Good Friday and then Easter Sunday and work out with my husband how to decorate the church. Preparations help the stress and to get ourselves ready; heart and mind for Holy Week. I may even get adventurous and start baking biscuits and sweets early. There are so many traditions around getting ready for Easter. With the most important week for Jesus and for His journey to the cross, Jesus also did preparations so that all would be ready and the prophecies foretold centuries ago would be fulfilled.

He had the disciples go and prepare for Him to enter Jerusalem for the last time. He was not to enter Jerusalem on a great warhorse but rather on a humble donkey. He was entering Jerusalem as a King of peace which would prove to the people that He was the chosen Messiah as it had been foretold in Zechariah 9:9, that he would come into Jerusalem riding the unbroken colt of an ass. All the people were travelling to Jerusalem in preparation for the Passover Festival. According to the passage above, Jesus and his disciples stopped for a bit out of Jerusalem in Bethphage and told his disciples to prepare for Him.

Tomorrow is Palm Sunday. Have you stopped for a bit to think about what all this means? Have you prepared not just your house, but your heart for Jesus to enter in? Jesus enters our lives to bring peace and love. He is the lowly and meek King that comes humbly into our lives, not demanding attention, but seeking your love so that Scriptures will be fulfilled: Jesus says: *'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'* [John 14:6 NIV] Prepare your life and heart for the King and Messiah.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for preparing to enter your final week. It acknowledged you as King. Come into my life and prepare me for all that comes in the week ahead. Amen.

Noisy Stones

Palm / Passion Sunday

Read: Psalm 118

"Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' 'I tell you', he replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'" Luke 19:39-40 (NIV)

Jesus was entering Jerusalem in glory with the people acknowledging Him as their Saviour and the Messiah – *"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"* [Luke 19:38a] Their joy and praises could be heard all over Jerusalem and the Pharisees were upset. They didn't want the usurper Jesus being acknowledged as King... something needed to be done about this! But Jesus reply was quick and to the point... really, he was saying that if the people do not acknowledge me, the stones would. Jesus' promise of peace cannot be silenced, hidden or destroyed because He is the Son of God and soon it will be revealed just that on Easter morning at the resurrection.

Stones cried out to Henry Musgrave Reade. He had been an enthusiastic Communist, a popular speaker at atheist meetings. For a long time, he had concluded that belief in God was childish, and belief in the Bible totally misplaced, and the fact that Jesus died and rose from the dead was total superstition. He spent one vacation in the Rocky Mountains of America. He recalls, in his book **Christ or Socialism** and tells how the Word of God which he thought had been silenced forever in his life, spoke to him. Gazing at the towering ranges, he said: "Surely all this is not the result of fortuitous circumstances, blind chance, matter and force ... Might I, after all, have been mistaken? I felt I must face this question. I fell upon my knees and cried, 'O God, if you exist, reveal yourself!' I asked for light. It came like a flood."

The stones cried out to Henry Musgrave Reade that day and brought him peace. From that day forward Henry had the firm conviction that Jesus Christ was indeed his Saviour. Jesus is at work in this world, and we have been given the responsibility to make sure that all people know about the Good News of Jesus as their living and loving Saviour. Jesus' coming cannot be silenced – we as God's small stones must cry out!

Prayer: Thank you Lord Jesus, that you love me with an everlasting love. Help me to be a noisy stone for you and tell others of your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Predictions

35th Day in Lent (Monday)

Read: Psalm 34

"These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: 'Not one of his bones will be broken,' and as another scripture says, 'They will look on the one they have pierced.'" John 19:36-37 (NIV)

Engineers were preparing to build a highway in the middle of the Amazon Forest when a native rocked up and told them to seek shelter because there would be heavy rain in 2 hours. In exactly 2 hours it poured heavily. The following day the native showed up again and told them not to worry it would be sunny for 4 days. Sure enough it was sunny the entire 4 days. On the 5th day he showed up again in the morning and told them it would be too hot to work in the afternoon. It did get too hot in the afternoon. The following day the lead engineer dispatched a few of his juniors to seek the wise native, gift him some cash and ask for his prediction of the weather. This carried on for 3 months whilst the engineers worked to setup the highway. One morning, as had become their routine the junior engineers went to seek the wise native with their daily cash gift to enquire about the day's weather. After accepting the cash, the wise man had bad news. "My radio ran out of batteries last night so I didn't listen to the weather forecast, unfortunately I can't help you today."

There are those who believe they know the future, but so often they, like in the above joke, are just scamming others for their gullibility. We would like to know what the future holds for us, so many enquire into crystals, fortune tellers, and seers.

The Bible foretold so many events leading to Jesus' death and were recorded centuries before: Jesus lament on the cross being forsaken, His thirst, the holes in His hands and feet, being classed with criminals, the drink given to Him, the mocking words, desertion of the disciples, dividing His clothing, His unbroken limbs and His pierced side from a spear. There are so many others, but it is incredible that these are all recorded to the smallest detail. The people waited and longed for a Messiah – this Messiah has come and died for each of us to save us from death.

Prayer: Dear Saviour and Lord, you alone know my future and I leave it all in your hands. Guide my life and show me your ways. Amen.

An Example to Follow

36th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Read: Psalm 71

"When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God.'" Matthew 27:54 (NIV)

Joan of Arc (1412-1431AD) was a peasant girl who at the age of 13 received visions from God to rally the support of the French army to bring Charles VII to the throne. It was her bravery and tactics that changed the Hundred Years' War to a French victory. She stated to the English army: 'You Englishmen, who have no right in this Kingdom of France, the King of Heaven sends you word and warning, by me Jehanne the Maid, to abandon your forts and depart into your own country, or I will raise such a war cry against you as shall be remembered forever. And this I write to you for the third and last time, nor shall I write further.' It was at the age of 17 that so much of her bravery was evident in leading the French army and at 19 she was burned at the stake, a martyr. With her last breaths she confessed 'Jesus'.

She had such bravery and was a witness to God that she fought for Him. The centurion at the foot of Jesus' cross, was no less a witness. Tradition names him as Longinus, but we really do not know his name. He was a model officer in that he did not scoff or ridicule Jesus on the cross, he just regarded Christ without hatred or prejudice. When the earth shook and blackness took over the earth, this centurion openly confessed that Christ was the Son of God. The first convert! As with Joan of Arc, this centurion followed the steps of Jesus to the cross and confessed that Jesus was God's Son.

In the military, soldiers follow their leaders as an example to replicate in word and deed. In our faith, we follow Jesus in all He did on Earth and in His words and actions spoken to others. Jesus is our example to follow and in all situations we can ask ourselves: What Would Jesus Do? In all we do may our words and deeds be pleasing to God and be a witness for others to also follow.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to follow you in my living and speaking. May everything I do be pleasing to you and a witness for others. Amen.

Law and Life

37th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Read: Psalm 26

“With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” Mark 15:37-38 (NIV)

The purpose of the Law is to point us to Christ. The law shows us what we have done wrong and the punishment we deserve, and then in Jesus we find forgiveness and love (the Gospel). I have read that there are about 613 laws in the Old Testament in the first five Books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They are laws on how to honour God, listening to His prophets, living in community with others and what happens when you don't follow God. God set up this way to worship Him with Moses, and Moses then gave God's laws to the Israelites. Peace and reverence of worship could then be maintained.

The Temple in Jerusalem had been set up according to the laws of Moses, which were highly regimented with only the High Priest coming into the Holy-of-Holies once a year; only once to be in the presence of God on behalf of the people. There were curtains separating this holy place from the people and they could never come to God except through sacrifices and priests. So, when the curtain was torn in two with Jesus' death – suddenly everything was revealed, and nothing hidden. No longer was there any doubt as to what was behind the curtain and no need to offer sacrifices as Jesus offered himself as the once and for all sacrifice!

The 613 laws were rewritten to two - 'Love the Lord your God' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. This severed curtain allowed light to penetrate into the Holy-of-Holies and remove the mystery behind it. So it is with Jesus and the Gospel. He said: *“I have spoken openly to the world.... I said nothing in secret.” (John 18:20 NIV)* The same is with our Christian church and our faith. Everything can be seen and all are welcome to the throne of God. Through the abolishment of the Old Testament Laws by Jesus on the cross, the Gospel of forgiveness, love and eternal life were instituted.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you tore the temple curtain with your death and have made it possible for me to come to you personally. The Gospel has brought eternal life. Amen.

Upper Room

38th Day in Lent (Maundy Thursday)

Read: Psalm 116

Jesus said: "...say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." Luke 22:11-12 (NIV)

Growing up, our place of gathering with visitors and guests was over a meal in our dining room. There always seemed to be room for more at the small table and food galore. When we invite people over to our house it is usually for a meal of some sort with time spent sitting at the table talking even after the food has been consumed. The table and the dining room is a place of fellowship and gathering of friends and family. In the 2020's, I feel the time for gathering and talking is not necessarily over a meal – often it will be a coffee, with chatting taking place in coffee shops or restaurants rather than around the family table.

Jesus wanted to have an important meal with His disciples but had nowhere to go. But that had been planned and the disciples were to go to Jerusalem and tell a man carrying water that the master has need of his Upper Room. This was a family home with a large upstairs dining room. [If you google it, it is said to be a sacred site now called the Cenacle... this is not necessarily the actual place, but people like to go to visit sacred sites.] This was the place where Jesus unfolded the whole plan of salvation and ordained Holy Communion. Here He revealed to us the principles of faith and life on which we can build joy-filled homes today. If you still say grace before eating, we invite Jesus to be our guest at our meal. I remember my mother and father always having enough food for the family and for one more... the unseen guest – could be Jesus or someone who is in need!

Jesus offers us a home blessed with His presence, as that Upper Room was. Christ brings with Him real rejoicing, the fruits of Heaven and the highest happiness we can have this side of Heaven. Maybe this year open your house and home to be the Upper Room where Jesus, friends and family can live and dine every day.

Prayer: Come Lord Jesus, and be our guest, and let this food to us be blessed. Amen.

Crucifixion

39th Day in Lent (Good Friday)

Read: Psalm 17

“When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left.” Luke 23:33 (NIV)

What happens at a crucifixion? First, the upright timber, usually about 3 metres in length, is firmly planted in the ground. Second, the victim's hands are tied, one to each side of the cross beam, then nailed to the wood. Third, that beam is then raised, often with the help of a ladder and affixed to the upright timber. Fourthly, to complete the fierce, barbaric cruelty, the feet are placed on a rest and are likewise bored through by one or two nails, and so the whole body is rivetted to the cross. This was a common form of capital punishment for the Persians, Seleucids, Carthaginians and Romans from about 600BC to 400AD. Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor abolished it in the Roman Empire out of respect for Jesus Christ, the most famous victim of crucifixion.

Crucifixion was the most vicious of all capital punishments as it caused the greatest suffering and usually took the longest for the victim to die. Hearing and reading about all this makes Jesus' suffering all the crueller and more gruesome. He was an innocent, who was falsely convicted to this death on a cross to save you and me from our sins. On this cross Jesus, who hung in agony, only uttered seven sentences – many of them not for His sake but for those He loved. Not only was He in physical pain, but Jesus was separated from His Heavenly Father to defeat the devil on our behalf.

It only took Jesus six merciful hours to die on this cross of torture, probably due to the amount of scourging and whipping and dehydration. The soldiers at the end of the day as it neared the Sabbath broke the legs of both the criminals to speed the death, but Jesus they found already dead and so he was pierced with a spear. As it was written in Psalm 34:20 – ‘Not one of His bones will be broken.’ Jesus as the Lamb of God was sacrificed for your sins and mine – let us be ever grateful.

Prayer: Thank you, my Jesus for dying an innocent death so that my eternal life in Heaven is secured. I welcome seeing you and experiencing this joy one day with you. Amen.

Joseph of Arimathea

40th Day in Lent (Holy Saturday)

Read: Psalm 23

“As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.” Matthew 27:57-60 (NIV)

Not a lot is known about the man, Joseph of Arimathea, who on Good Friday asked for the body of Jesus from Pilate. We do know from the above text in Matthew that Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus. In each of the four Gospels, Joseph is mentioned and in each we can piece together a bit about this man who had the courage to speak up for Jesus, to ensure He had a proper burial and His body not be desecrated by those who hated Him.

In the gospel of Luke, we are told that Joseph was a “good and just man” who did not agree with the Jewish leader’s decision to put Jesus to death (Luke 23:50, 51). He was also a prominent member of the Jewish council (Mark 15:43), but he was “waiting for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:51). We do know that he was from Arimathea (Matthew 27:57), but we do not know the exact location of this town. It is thought that he was likely from Mt Ephraim, which was the same place Samuel was born. Interestingly, it states in John 19:38 that he was a ‘secret follower’ of Jesus, because he feared the Jews. But, like Nicodemus, after Jesus’ death Joseph no longer cared what others thought about him and so he personally took Jesus off the cross.

Joseph was also a rich man (Matthew 27:57) as he held a prominent position on the Jewish council, and had an unused tomb cut out of rock (probably for himself) and this tomb was in a garden. He was a man of means and influence. Joseph and Nicodemus were devoted to Jesus which was shown in the way they cared for his body by lovingly wrapping it in clean linen and Nicodemus brought 75 pounds of spices and aloes to anoint the body (John 19:39-40). Joseph of Arimathea was courageous and loved Jesus and went the extra step to show his love and devotion. He went beyond love – just as Jesus does for each of us!

Prayer: Our Lord of Life, you were laid in a borrowed tomb, but those who buried you showed their extreme devotion to you. Help me also to realise how you went beyond love for me. Amen.

Triumph

Easter Sunday

Read: Psalm 150

***"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."
1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (NIV)***

There may be some of us who remember VE (Victory in Europe) Day on the 8th of May 1945. Personally, I do not remember it, but from what I have seen and read of the celebrations in Britain, Europe, Australia and all the Allied countries, they went on for days. World War II had finally ended in triumph for the Allies and the last shots were officially fired at the Eastern Front on the 11th of May. Upon the signing of the defeat of Germany on VE Day, celebrations erupted throughout the western world with more than a million people dancing in the streets of London. Winston Churchill addressed the crowd: "God bless you all. This is your victory. In our long history, we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man or woman, has done their best."

Now, let us go back further to the triumph of Jesus over death and the devil by rising from the dead. Using the message from Winston Churchill, we can relate it to us: 'God truly has blessed us. By Jesus' victory over death, He has won the victory for us. In the long history of the world, we have never experienced a greater day than this. Jesus has died for everyone, every man, woman and child and given salvation to us all.'

We celebrate Jesus' victory over death day on Easter Sunday. We could call it JCVD Day! Today we celebrate, we sing, we rejoice the triumph Jesus has won for each of us. The tomb is now empty, Jesus lives, and He rules in eternity waiting for the final return when He will bring all who believe to live with Him forever in heaven. This truly is a day of triumph and a day to celebrate! Jesus has gone beyond love to bring us eternal life in heaven forever.

Prayer: My risen Saviour, thank you for your victory over death and securing my salvation. You have triumphed, Halleluiah! 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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