

Sefton North Deanery



Lent Reflections 2026

I am delighted to write an introduction for our Deanery Book of Reflections for Lent. The idea originated from our annual clergy overnight in Whalley Abbey and is a project that the Diocese of Blackburn did in 2024. We thought if a diocese can do it so can our deanery!

As a season of the church Lent goes back to the 4th century mirroring the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness following his baptism by John. Lent originated as the period of preparation that candidates underwent to be baptised on Easter Day. Soon the church saw the benefit to all Christian people to have a time of spiritual preparation.

The season typically became marked by penitence, fasting, prayer, Bible reading and charitable giving. For many today the emphasis in Lent is about taking up rather than giving up something, doing something for the good of others and making time for our own spiritual growth.

Lent is an opportunity for a concentrated time of spiritual refreshment and renewal. I hope this book of reflections will help us all make Lent a springtime for the soul as members of our Deanery and beyond share their reflections on the Bible readings for each day.

A special word of thanks to the Revd Nathan Thorpe who has made this project possible. He has contacted all those who have written reflections, then collated and edited the material. Nathan has given a lot of time to help us, as a deanery, be spiritual refreshed through Lent.

(NB – I apologise for any omissions or remaining errors - NT)

Thank you especially to everyone who has contributed; it is very much appreciated.



Our deanery of Sefton North has worked together on many projects over the years – each church has an Eco Award, we had a Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Trail around each church, we have devised a Diversity Statement and we enjoy our link with the deanery of Überlingen-Stockach in Germany.

So, let us journey together through Lent being inspired, refreshed and renewed as we serve God in all the varied opportunities given to us. This is an exciting time to be enthusiastic about the unique and wonderful message of God's love given to us in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Rev'd Canon Anne Taylor, Area Dean

Ash Wednesday (18th February)

Isaiah 58. 1-12; Psalm 52. 1-18 & John 8. 1-11

I have been asked to start the Deanery Reflections – on Ash Wednesday. So, here we go!

When I was a curate in 1992, our church adopted this strapline, *‘being disciples in order to make disciples’* & this has always stayed with me. At Pentecost 2018, Bishop Paul Bayes also introduced the ‘Rule of Life’ in our Diocese. This is a habit of personal growth: to inwardly pray, read and learn; outwardly tell, serve and give.

This balance of inward and outward practices helps us grow as disciples.

So, looking at the passage from John chapter 8; the religious teachers bring to Jesus a *‘woman caught in the act of adultery!’*. They want to trap Jesus, so they ask whether the Law of Moses is correct in saying she should be stoned.

Adultery is the betraying of a sacred relationship. Jesus turns and writes in the sand. When pressed, he continues his sandwriting and simply says *‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’* He then continues to write in the sand, and one by one the accusers disperse. I always wonder what he wrote in the sand.

I hope he confronted those teachers with how they betray their sacred relationship with God. One by one they silently leave. Then Jesus says to the woman *‘neither do I condemn you’*. These accusers knew the law but rather than see justice served, they wanted to trap Jesus.

I am hopeful that, as well as shaming them on their outward words and actions, he opened up some of their inward life too - lives that God sees.

Today, many of us will be marked with a cross, so perhaps we can ask Jesus to write on the sand of our lives and use it as an opportunity to draw closer to him; by praying, reading the scriptures and learning, and also telling of our hope, serving those around and offering our gifts, our talent, time and treasures.

I encourage each of you to be a disciple in order to make a disciple – for ideas, visit: www.ruleoflife.org.uk.

Have a blessed Lent & God bless you all!

Rev'd Paul Ellis, Retired Assistant Priest at Holy Trinity, Formby

Thursday 19th February

Deuteronomy 30. 15-20; Psalm 1 & Luke 9. 22-25

Out of small acorns, mighty oaks grow...

In St Giles', we're celebrating 70 years of our building being present in Aintree, this year. Seeing pictures from it's history, I see an evolving community full of people, memories, ups, downs, sadness, joy, prayer and praise.

However, there is something that roots all of them together.

Our readings today give us stark choices on weighty themes; many of which sound old-fashioned, but make for good self-reflection! These readings oscillate between life and death, righteousness and wickedness, contrasting blessings with consequences for disobedience, and encouraging a very Lenten self-denial to following Christ as the path to true life!

But notice a small line in Psalm 1:

"That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields it's fruit in due season and whose leaves do not wither..."

Nobody planted, rooted and grown with God, is ever cut off.

They are sustained by living water; even in the depths of winter, no matter how slowly they look like they are growing!

This line reminds me of the sometimes diffident sounding Ecclesiastes *"for everything there is a season..."* (Ecclesiastes 3. 1-15).

However you feel today, ask yourself what season are you in with your faith?

How and where, are you producing fruit? Who journeys with you?

No matter how much fruit, or whether you feel in season or not, each of us face the challenges that run through the choices in our scripture today as we live a life of faith in the midst of the world.

"...Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me... What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" (Luke 9. 23, 25)

Through 70 years, these roots, those questions, and that faith have sustained people in St Giles' church in Aintree.

Hopefully, they continue to sustain all those churches of our deanery!

Those who gather have chosen to be people of faith rooted together in Christ, the pains of His cross, and the hope of life beyond it.

Rev'd Nathan Thorpe, Vicar of St Giles', Aintree

Friday 20th February

Isaiah 58. 1-9a; Psalm 51. 1-5; 17-18 & Matthew 9. 14-15

On 3rd September last year, a 'hot mic' accidentally caught some snatches of a private discussion between Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping of China. Meeting in Tiananmen Square, their conversation was not about politics: surprisingly they were more concerned with organ replacement technology and the possibility of an endlessly healthy, active and comfortable life.

How very different from the message of Ash Wednesday!

The ash on our foreheads is both a symbol of our own mortality and a reminder of our fallibility and need for forgiveness in our relationships with God and neighbour.

Lent is the traditional time for self-examination and confession; and Psalm 51 praises, indeed celebrates, the fundamental longing of human beings for a fresh start.

The Psalmist imagines the whole process of repentance, not as the drawing up of a tick-list of sins to be forgiven, but as the work of the Holy Spirit, totally restoring us from within.

In this renewed relationship we must learn to navigate the darkness of our world by using the star-map of Heaven's values; and to see ourselves as shining, however dimly at times, with the reflection of God's love.

It may help if we look at repentance as more discipleship than discipline. It seems to me that meeting the Jesus of history was often a uniquely disturbing experience; an encounter with a love so profound that it burnt away all self-interest and pretence. As a Lenten exercise you might like to find yourself a quiet space to reflect on the many individuals in the New Testament whose relationship with Jesus was life-changing.

Among the most memorable is Zaccheus, the scheming and dishonest tax-collector. The transformation of his character began with his own curiosity about Jesus, and was completed when the Lord invited himself to his home – the rest, as they say, is history.

Jesus, the Light of the World, stands outside waiting for us.

We have only to open the door to meet Him.

Frederick Nye from St Peter's Formby

Saturday 21st February

Isaiah 58. 9b-end; Psalm 86. 1-7 & Luke 5. 27-32

'If,' such a short word, but one that carries with it a wealth of meaning as we see in the passage from Isaiah.

As we look back on our own lives we may think 'if only' or 'what if' because we can now see how much has depended on the decisions we have made over the years.

For Isaiah the '*If*' choices refer either to our response to God's commandments about how we treat other people, or our attitude to God himself, but Isaiah is clear that how we respond will have consequences. Which is what Levi, who is of course St. Matthew, will have realised when Jesus called him in our gospel reading.

He may have thought, '*if I answer His call, will I one day think 'if only' I had stayed at home, unpopular but prosperous?*'

Yet he does respond, and in his excitement, he wants to introduce his new friend, Jesus, to all his old friends. Jesus says "*Follow me*", Levi says, "*Come back to my place*" and Jesus accepts his invitation to eat with him and his friends at a banquet.

The sharing of food creates memories and sometimes just the taste of a certain food can help us to remember. The food writer Nigel Slater tells how as a little boy he once said his mother's kisses were like marshmallows. His mother died when he was only 9 years old and his father started leaving marshmallows beside his bed each night – in remembrance of her. And, of course, Jesus gave us bread and wine to share in remembrance of him.

We hear that the Pharisees criticised Jesus for eating with tax-collectors and sinners, but he was not condoning their sin, he was offering them the love and acceptance which would help them change their lives.

So, Jesus invites all to his table because he knows that it is in receiving him, and feeding on him, that we can become better people - if we will answer his call and welcome him into our lives.

Ruth Woodward, Lay Reader at Holy Trinity Formby

Sunday 22nd February – 1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2. 15-17; 3. 1-7; Psalm 32 & Matthew 4. 1-11

Many people find it hard to believe in the devil today and tend to reduce him to a figure of fun. CS Lewis said in the preface to *Screwtape Letters* that there were 2 dangers that we needed to avoid: one is to forget that he exists and the other is to be obsessed with him.

Here the devil is portrayed as a personal being active in the world opposed to the doing of God's will in the world. We can learn a little bit more of his tactics. Knowing our enemy can help us to come to Christ and experience his power in our lives.

In Genesis, Satan is portrayed as a serpent, slippery, sly and distasteful (apologies if you like snakes!) exaggerating/deliberately getting wrong what God had said and putting doubt into their minds: "*did God really say.....?*" (v. 3). Satan denies the consequences of eating the fruit that God had spelt out but tempts them into thinking they will become like God (Genesis v.5). So the man and woman eat of the fruit of the tree and the consequences are shame and embarrassment (v.7).

In Matthew, we see Jesus experiencing 3 specific temptations:

- a) to make bread from a stone (v.3) which was really a temptation to give in to his bodily desires;
- b) to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple (v5-6), forcing God to protect him, is really a temptation to misuse his power, and;
- c) to gain the kingdoms of the world by worshiping the devil (v.8-9) is analogous to Israel's temptation to worship other gods.

We ought not to be surprised if we experience similar temptations.

The good news is that Jesus also showed us how we can find a way out of it. He uses Scripture. He has studied it from his boyhood after all.

So he is able to say about the first temptation: "*Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*"(v 4), about the second "*Do not put your Lord God to the test*" (v.7) and about the third: "*worship the Lord your God and serve him only*" v.10).

The Bible is like a toolbox and we need to be able to remember it at such times and use it to help us live our lives.

Venerable Peter Spiers, Archdeacon of Sefton & Knowsley

Monday 23rd February

Leviticus 19. 1-2; 11-18; Psalm 19. 7-end & Matthew 25. 31-end

Jesus is sitting on the Mount of Olives. In His favourite quiet spot away from the crowds. Around Him are His friends, His disciples, asking questions, opening discussions, hanging out with their Master. What will happen in the future, is uppermost in their minds, they have some, but not fully formed, knowledge of what is going to happen to Jesus, but what is going to happen next? What are they going to face? And can they bear it?

To the question of what will happen in the end times, Jesus tells this parable. All through His ministry, there have been specific themes that occur over and over, and in this story, Jesus combines two of the most crucial themes. The coming of the Kingdom and the two great commandments. There will be a time, in the future, at a time of God's choosing, when the people of the world will be judged by their lives, that they have been given by God their Maker.

This isn't optional, this is inevitable. They will be asked how they have made the best of those lives, in accordance with the will of God.

Jesus has already spelt out, simply and succinctly, what the will of God is: you will love God and you will love your neighbour. Not one or the other, but both. But in fact, it is impossible to love God if you don't love your neighbour, because that would defy God's instructions.

In this parable, loving your neighbour involves stepping inside the difficult lives of those less fortunate, and helping them and walking with them.

As the native American saying goes, '*you can't know someone properly, until you have walked in their moccasins.*' So often we are confronted by the idea that God is invisible, unable to be touched, frequently inaudible, and that can stretch our faith, sometimes to breaking point, but when Jesus says, '*The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

Suddenly, it dawns on us that we are looking at Christ every day of our lives, speaking to Him through those around us, seeing Him as we step out to give of ourselves to others. What our service to Jesus through our love of others looks like is up to us, but if we wish to become one of the sheep instead of a goat, we will have to grasp the nettle and learn to serve, just as Jesus serves, instead of expecting service for ourselves.

Sylvia Beardsell, Lay Reader at Holy Trinity, Formby

Tuesday 24th February

Isaiah 55. 10-11; Psalm 34. 4-6; 21-22 & Matthew 6. 7-15.

'I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.'

How often do you seek the Lord?

Several times a day, daily; or perhaps when you need something, or feel afraid and need prayers answered?

Fear has a way of making us feel powerless. In times of uncertainty, we regularly turn to our own strength or the promises of the world.

Yet, Psalm 34:4 reminds us of a more important truth—God is our deliverer. When we seek him with a sincere and true heart, he not only hears us but also responds. His answer to us is not always immediate or in the way we expect or hope for, but he is there to guide us through each and every fear and struggle.

Trusting in God's love and care means giving up our worries to him and handing them over.

I've done this by holding a pebble in my hand, thinking of the worry or concern and then laying it down at the foot of my cross.

I have also done so closing my eyes and visioning this action.

It requires faith to believe that He is working in us and with us, even more so when we do not see instant results.

Fear distorts our viewpoint, sometimes making problems seem bigger than they really are.

But when we fix our eyes on our Lord, we begin to see through his lens—one of hope, peace, and assurance.

He calls us to seek him first, knowing that his presence alone in our lives can calm our fears and give us true deliverance. Seek the Lord.

Rev'd Keith Thornborough

Vicar of St Stephen's, Hightown



Wednesday 25th February

Jonah ch.3; Psalm 51. 1-15; 17-18 & Luke 11. 29-32

It will come as no surprise to know that we all sin. We may even tell ourselves they are not big sins, or that God doesn't mind. That may be true. God says come as you are and knows we aren't perfect.

Psalm 51, attributed to King David, recounts his repentance having committed adultery and murder. He asks for forgiveness and wants to be restored to a right relationship with God.

It contains useful verses that can help each of us during our own journeys through Lent. Lent is often seen as a time of repentance, saying sorry, giving up something we like, or doing something that we find difficult. Lent is also a time of reflection. Think about your own personal relationship with God.

Is it faithful and healthy?

Is God at the centre of everything you do or do you feel distant from God?

Psalm 51 helps us reflect on that personal relationship enabling us to re-connect with God. We begin with the first verses:

"Have mercy on me, O God... cleanse me from my sin."

Imagine David saying these words, words that help us recognise where we go wrong, acknowledging God loves us and he washes away all our sin.

Having recognised our sin / wrongdoing and asked to be made clean our plea, with David, is: *"Create in me a pure heart, O God... grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."* We ask God to help us examine what is on our hearts and minds make our hearts healthy and by His grace, cleansing us from the inside. As our hearts are cleansed, we pray for a willing spirit to enable us to stand firm, sustain us from temptation to do anything that distracts us from restoring our relationship with God.

Asking God to restore us to the joy of His salvation is committing to taking time to looking at our faith journeys; seeing where God was, where He is now and how we have been called into a personal relationship with Him. We are reminded of the joy that our relationship with God can bring. It can sustain us in the toughest of times.

"Then I will teach transgressors your ways so that sinners will turn back to you... My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise." As we journey through Lent and recognise the joy of being reconciled into a right relationship with God, we can praise God for His righteousness, and use this time of Lent to listen to how God wants us to encourage others to know God for themselves.

Pat Dunbar from St James' Maghull

Thursday 26th February

Isaiah 55. 1-7; Psalm 138 & Matthew 7. 7-12

These bible words come as quite a shock-amid all the ‘weightiness’ and thundering of God’s great prophet Isaiah.

Suddenly, there is an invitation, a party invitation, a simple ‘Charlie-in-the-chocolate factory’ golden ticket to God’s eternal (and hangover free) parties in heaven.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.”

What are we to make of this?

Too good to be true? Make-believe? Wishful thinking?

Perhaps, if the golden promise had remained, lost and forlorn, stuck in Old Testament days, a defiant ‘fingers-crossed’ in the storms of life.

Thankfully, it did not. Thankfully, we live in a Christmas world, we know God’s Messiah has come to his world as Isaiah promised here (in verses 3-5), and Jesus confirms the open invitation:

“I say to you that many will come from the east and west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

The great parties on earth, the Oscars, the Baftas-they are exclusive, for the privileged few, or we are charged a fortune to listen to the great entertainers of our day on ticket re- sale sites.

Not so with God: the gospel ticket is priceless, and it is free. By the end of today, thousands more people across the world will have joyfully accepted the invitation.

Lent is a time to clear away the clutter, to re-focus.

Clutch God’s golden ticket close to your heart. It is too valuable to lose.

Rev’d Ian Hopkins

Team Rector at Maghull & Melling Team

Friday 27th February

Ezekiel 18. 21-28; Psalm 130 & Matthew 5. 20-26

“Lord, out of the depths I have called you; hear my cry.”

When the psalmist calls to God out of the depths, you can see it as a cry of despair.

But, when you read the whole psalm, it is clear that the writer has unshakable faith in God and in his providence, and so his cry is made in full confidence that it will be heard and responded to.

He doesn't have an answer to whatever is hurting him and so he reaches out in trust to his Creator and Father.

Mother Teresa said,

“Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at his disposition, and listening to his voice in the depth of our hearts.”

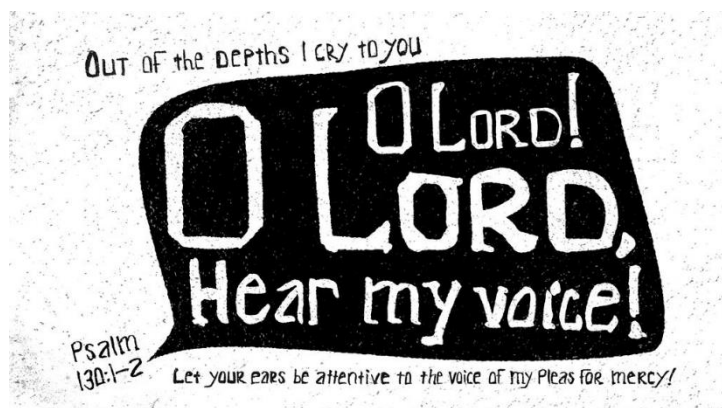
The psalmist has a strong relationship with his heavenly Father and so he prays in full assurance of God's love for him. Therefore, he can say that he waits for the Lord with longing; he puts his hope in God's word; his soul waits for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen for the morning. He knows deep in his belly that the Lord hears and will respond in love.

May this psalm be an encouragement to us when we are at our lowest; may it be a light to us when nobody else can help; may it be an inspiration to us when our faith in God is exhausted and all we have to rely on is his faith in us.

At these times, may God give us the spirit to say with the psalmist,

“I wait for the Lord with longing; I put my hope in his word.”

Dave Sherman, Lay Reader at St Andrews's, Maghull



Saturday 28th February

Deuteronomy 26. 16-end; Psalm 119. 1-8 & Matthew 5. 43-end

“The judges scores are in... Craig Revel Horwood” “10”, “Motsi Mabuse” “10”, “Shirley Ballas” “10”, “Anton Du Beke” “10”...

Cue much excited shouting and cheering from my wife and daughter!

As you might have guessed, they were watching Strictly, and their favourite contestant had just been awarded the perfect 40 score by the judges.

Perfect / perfection is a complex word / concept isn't it? One person's idea of the perfect cup of tea or piece of toast can be very different to someone else's!

One dictionary definition states 'perfect' means 'to make something completely free from faults or defects, make as good as possible'.

Basically, however it's viewed, perfection is a tall order / big ask isn't it?!

And certainly when you then relate it to people in this messed up, fallen world, it's an impossibility isn't it? Impossible for people to be free from fault or defect!

'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' Matthew 5:48.

Just a small ask from Jesus during his Sermon on the Mount!

But what is a heavenly perspective on perfection? Is God's idea of what is perfect, somewhat different than a worldly and human perspective?

When the world says about striving for perfection, it's often talking about personal achievement, being the best, the strongest, the fittest, the most beautiful. I'm not convinced Jesus has that in mind here! Just a few verse earlier, he says *'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...'*

Another big ask!! But if you read his command about being perfect in the light of those words and the rest of what these few verses at the end of Matthew 5 say, then the heavenly perspective on perfection is about hearts, minds, attitudes. About how we relate to and treat other people and why. I would argue, striving to be perfect as the world so often promotes perfection has led to competitiveness, selfishness, greed, injustice, corruption, differences being emphasised, I could go on...

Striving to be perfect as God is perfect is about loving as God loves and viewing people as God views people. All people!

The language of being perfect sets a high, indeed impossible, standard.

Yet we need to aim high, to aim for the impossible, if we are to live with and show the grace of Christ, and meet hate with love in his name.

Rev'd Simon Elliott, Team Vicar in the Maghull & Melling Team.

Sunday 1st March - 2nd Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12. 1-4a; Psalm 121 & John 3. 1-17

There are some days when I think ‘Heaven help me – am I ever going to get there!’

Because the journey towards trying to achieve something can feel so difficult, with the destination so far away.

But I am reminded from two of today’s readings to have faith that God is with us as we travel - we do not have to journey alone.

Psalm 121 reminds me that, if we lift up our eyes to the mountain, and ask ‘*Where does my help come from?*’; I will see that help comes from the Lord – He is with us, watching over us and keeping us from harm.

I don’t always find it easy to commit to doing something new or difficult. I try and rationalise why now is not the right time to do it, or why it’s far better to delay and put something off. When really, I know it’s because I lack the courage to step into the unknown, fearing that I won’t be able to cope with all that may lie ahead.

But Abraham had courage and faith when he answered God’s call to leave his country and his people – trusting that he would be blessed.

So maybe in my small way I too should have more courage as I journey through life, faithful in the knowledge of God’s blessing – now and forevermore.

Sharon Parr

Liverpool Diocesan Secretary

& Liverpool Cathedral Chief Operating Officer

*Loving Father,
by your grace,
we long to see more people knowing Jesus,
and more justice in your world.
Help us to live as your disciples
in the power of the Spirit
and to work to your praise and glory.
Amen.*

Liverpool Diocesan Prayer

Monday 2nd March

Daniel 9. 4-10; Psalm 79. 8-9; 12-14 & Luke 6. 36-8

Have you heard of Pick a Brick? For those of you not in the know, think Pick'n'Mix but with Lego bricks. My sons love to go to the Lego Shop and fill the container with as many bricks as they can squeeze in. Once they've finished, I then get them to pour everything out.

Before you complain, I'm not being a mean father. We then join the bricks together and carefully put them back in: biggest first, and smaller ones in the gaps.

Now they can fit in almost double the number—far better value for money!

It reminds me of Jesus' words in Luke 6:38: "*A good measure, pressed down, shaken together.*" It's delightful when people (or shops) are generous towards us, but it's costly to be generous towards others.

We find it hard, don't we?

It's why our Gospel reading for today is tremendously challenging:

"For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Whether it's mercy, judgement, condemnation or forgiveness, we struggle to treat people as well as we expect them to treat us. The bad news is that our behaviour will be judged according to our higher expectations.

The worse news is that judgement will include how we behave towards God.

In our Old Testament reading, we read how the prophet Daniel knew that the exile was because he, along with the rest of God's people, had been unfaithful to God (Daniel 9:7).

They had ignored God, rebelled and done wicked and sinful things.

What do you make of the end of verse four? God's covenant of love is "*with those who love him and keep his commandments.*"

That condition is difficult, isn't it? If we don't keep God's commandments, God doesn't have to keep his covenant of love.

During this season of Lent, we need to feel this tension, we need to reflect on it and repent accordingly.

But we also need to remember verse 9: God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.

Praise God for his undeserved grace when we repent.

Rev'd Dr Matt Davis – Vicar of St Luke, Formby

Tuesday 3rd March

Isaiah 1. 10, 16-20; Psalm 50. 8, 16-end & Matthew 23. 1-12

*“The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
and his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold...”*

These lines, evocatively penned by controversial Lord Byron in *Destruction of Sennacherib* from a collection of poems that: *“reflects the poet’s general sympathy with the downtrodden.”*

Difficult times result in a lot of finger-pointing; time which would be best utilised in self-reflection *before* any finger pointing. Isaiah speaks of events (charted throughout chapters 1-39) in 734 and 701 BC as the Assyrian empire stretched it’s muscles from Tiglath-Pileser III’s reign. Isaiah gives a spiritual barometer at the end of the reign of king Uzziah, and through Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Sennacherib & Manasseh.

Isaiah challenges some social, spiritual and ethical failings that are very modern-sounding. In Mathew’s gospel, Jesus finds the same things.

New-found wealth was not distributed evenly; a small economic elite cared little for the rest of the populace. Justice was brought and sold; or disregarded in favour of exploitation or repression. Religious observance continued; but the words were hollow and could no longer baptise the status quo. It became increasingly difficult to say *“The Lord is King”* as it ran so contrary to the every-day experience of people’s lives and eyes.

Back to Byron, then!

*“And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!”*

Psalm 50 articulates God’s answer concerning the covenant sidelined by his people. The psalmist echoes Jesus and Isaiah, that lip service and observation of the key days is not enough. Brueggemann comments in his *Message of the Psalms* that *“God does not rely on these things for nourishment or our efforts for appeasement....”*. To flourish, our engagement with God needs to be one of *“free will and passion; not of dutiful necessity.”*

The majestic visions of God at the beginning of Isaiah and Psalm 50 remind us of God’s majesty; to whom all are accountable. As Byron concludes:

*“And the might of the Gentile, unsmeared by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!”*

Rev’d Nathan Thorpe – Vicar of St Giles’ Aintree

Wednesday 4th March

Jeremiah 18. 18-20; Psalm 31. 4-5; 14-18 & Matthew 20. 17-28

When did you last think or say the words –“That’s not fair!” or maybe “Well, life’s not fair!”? What was the situation that caused those words?

Jeremiah (God’s prophet who was tasked with taking God’s messages to his people) would understand how you might feel.

In this passage he is feeling it too. He has passed on God’s messages and the people know that these messages won’t stop. They ignore them and plot to bring false charges against him. Remind you of anyone? (*Mark 14:56*)

Jeremiah’s image of being entrapped by others is echoed by King David in Psalm 31. The pit dug for Jeremiah is a net laid for David. Following God is never portrayed as a carefree, snare-free path. But check out v 3.

Even in these difficult times David sees God as his rock, fortress and refuge. In the face of opposition he asks for God’s blessing and entrusts himself into God’s hand. Remind you of anyone? (*Luke 23:46*)

In our encounter in Matthew 20, James and John (and their mum) are hoping to swing the scales of fairness firmly in their own favour. They get their bid in first with Jesus requesting heavenly privilege, status and power. When the other disciples find out they are furious, they have missed a trick.

This isn’t fair!

Jesus has a slightly different view on fairness. He doesn’t offer James and John the power they crave.

He does offer them the chance to share in the way He uses power, to drink from the same cup as him. Remember this is the cup he begs to be rescued from (*Matthew 26:39*) but still takes.

Fairness and justice for Jesus are not about seizing your chance and gaining the advantage.

Instead, He explains, it is about choosing to serve, to put others first, to follow the ultimate lead of Jesus.

**Wednesday Morning Communion
& Bible Study Group
St Nicholas’, Blundellsands**



Thursday 5th March

Jeremiah 17. 5-10; Psalm 1 & Luke 16. 19-end

This is a familiar story to many - Dives and Lazarus: the rich man and the poor man at his gate. There are many themes in this passage suitable to Lent - greed, indifference, wealth hoarding, repentance - but one line stood out this time - *'a great gulf has been fixed..'*

Who fixed this gulf? Can this gulf have been fixed by God - a gulf to prevent relationships? Could God, who calls us to loving relationships, have fixed a gulf impossible to cross?

If God doesn't create the gulf - who does? It can only be ourselves. When we refuse to see the humanity in someone else, we create the gulf. When we refuse to hear someone else, respect their opinion, care for them, that person over there is 'Other' - and the gulf is created.

Here is a poem by Karle Wilson Baker:

*The Lord said "say 'We.'"
But I shook my head,
hid my hands tight behind my back and said stubbornly "I."
The Lord said "say 'We.'"
But I looked on them, grimy and all awry,
myself in those twisted shapes? Ah No.
Distastefully I turned my head away persisting "They."
The Lord said "say 'We.'"
And I, at last, richer by a hoard of year and tears,
looked in their eyes and formed the heavy word that bent my neck
and lowed my head, and with shame at my pride,
then I mumbled "'We, Lord."*

And the gulf dissolves. And the Way into love is made visible. The Way into love can be tough, can bend our pride, can be joyful: but unless we say *"We, Lord"* the great gulf has been fixed.

How did you react to the poem? Do you hear God saying "say 'we'?"
What does that call mean to you?

Do you acknowledge your first inner thoughts when meeting people who challenge your ideas of correct behaviours, ways of living, religious beliefs?

Do you find it hard to put them aside and let God's love shine from you, filling in any gulf between you?

Rosemary Turner from St Luke's, Crosby

Friday 6th March

Genesis 37. 3-4, 12-13, 17-28; Psalm 105. 16-22 & Matthew 21. 33-43; 45-6

We know the tale of Joseph and his “Amazing Multi-coloured Dream Coat”, if not from our bibles or a Sunday school story then from Andrew Lloyd Webbers’ musical. But how often do we see the parallels between Joseph’s life and Jesus’ as exemplified in this parable of the Tenants?

Jesus is, of course, God’s only son and heir, and although neither of these, Joseph is the firstborn of Jacob’s favourite wife Rachel, so they both hold a special place in their Father’s heart. They are both obedient to their Father’s will.

Joseph, as a shepherd like his brothers, is sent to seek them out and see that all is well with the flock. Jesus, as the parable suggests, is sent to sort out a problem in his Father’s vineyard.

For the Pharisees listening, they would immediately recognise this as the land and people of Israel.

Both Jesus and Joseph face rejection: Joseph, by his jealous brothers, Jesus by those who should have recognised him as the Messiah. Rejection brings them suffering, torture, and death, having been sold into slavery for silver. By their obedience, they become the teacher, master and shepherd of their people, who provide nourishment, real and spiritual, and bring salvation to their people.

What do we think about Joseph: A brave teenager who set out for a long journey alone, a spoilt brat who got his comeuppance? A flawed young man who suffers for his folly but eventually makes good through God’s grace?

At the end of the parable of the Tenants Jesus asks the listeners what the owner of the Vineyard should do to the rebellious servants. The response is damning:

“Take the land away and give it to people who will produce good fruit.”

Such is our challenge for Lent. Are we spoilt brats, who fail to care for the vineyard? Can we face rejection and suffering for the sake of the Kingdom? Can we be shepherds, nourishers, and teachers of those around us? Are we obedient sons and daughters, fulfilling our task wherever we are sent?

Helen Hunter – Lay Reader at St Michael, Blundellsands.

Saturday 7th March

Micah 7. 14-15; 18-20; Psalm 103. 1-4, 9-12 & Luke 15. 1-3, 11-end

I was once given a postcard sized copy of a painting by Rembrandt called *"The Return of the Prodigal Son."* I loved it (see page 51 of reflections). Years later, on a cruise to the Baltic I decided to visit the actual painting in St Petersburg, knowing it hung in the art gallery of the magnificent Winter Palace.

The picture was situated in a dimly lit corner, but I had brought the postcard with me and was able to discern the most important aspects. I saw that the father and the prodigal do not take centre stage, they are to the left of the painting. The rigidly stern figure of the older son stands on the right.

My eyes were drawn to the father and his young son because they are both bathed in light. The son kneels in front of his father, his face buried in his father's chest, while the father bends over him, looking down with compassion at this son who was lost, and now is found.

Rembrandt shows that Jesus in this parable is talking about our heavenly Father, showing how God is delighted to welcome home the sinner who has repented, who has returned to the fold, just like the lost sheep.

Remember, Jesus was telling this story to the self-righteous Pharisees. I wonder if they recognised themselves in the attitude of the older son, when they declared, *"this man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* They saw God as being strict and demanding obedience.

Jesus compares them with the unforgiving older son who is angry with his father's extravagance.

Do we ever feel angry when someone else seems to garner all the praise despite all that we've done? Where would you stand in this story?

Look closely at the Father's hands. One seems to be a man's hand, and one a woman's. In Genesis 1:27, God created humans in his image, *"male and female he created them."*

Our Father God is also our Mother God, always there, just waiting to welcome us back whenever we go astray, whenever we think we are beyond forgiveness, he longs for our return.

Joyce Green

Retired Reader at All Saints with St Frideswyde's, Thornton & Crosby

3rd Sunday in Lent

Exodus 17. 1-7; Psalm 95 & John 4. 5-42

*“The water that I will give will become in them
a spring of water gushing up to eternal life”*

The story of the Samaritan woman has far-reaching implications for us in our ministries. In Lent, we can reflect on how we measure up to the template Jesus presents to us in his dealings with people.

The Jews dismissed the Samaritans; they hated one another, and had done so for a thousand years. This feud involved claims of defection, intermarriage, and disloyalty to the temple.

The life that this woman was leading would additionally have made her a social outcast. She collected water in the intense heat of midday, when no one was around to make hurtful comments about her.

Jesus broke all the rules. He asked her for a favour; for water. He asked to drink from her cup, another thing unacceptable to the Jews. Jesus talked to her with a respect that was completely different to how other men had treated her.

Jesus could see the thirst of her soul. He knew that a spring of living water he could give would quench the thirsts of her body and soul. As we read this account, we see the love and power of Jesus enabling him to cross barriers that are observable in our society today. Barriers of gender, ethnicity, religious differences and the hurt that they can produce.

All Christians have a great privilege of directing people to the living water of God's Holy Spirit.

How compelling are we when we talk to others about what God has done in our lives? Do others see Jesus at work in us?

Have we built up any walls of prejudice that hurt others and that can prevent God's love from shining through? Is there a person we disregard?

An immigrant with a hard-to-understand accent or someone who stands on the opposite side of our political fence?

Or, maybe a beggar who sits in the street or who comes knocking at our door? Lent is a good time to reflect on these things.

Rev'd Chris Parsons – Assistant Curate at St Luke's Crosby.

Monday 9th March

2 Kings 5. 1-15; Psalm 42. 1-2; 43. 1-4 & Luke 4. 24-30.

It is some small comfort that Jesus didn't refrain from subjecting his home town, as well as us, to uncomfortable remarks too!

Naaman was a Syrian commander in the army. He also has something that was considered a death sentence for many years – the now curable, but devastating tropical disease, leprosy.

Naaman's helpers? The prophet Elisha and his wife's slave girl.

Naaman is far too grand to listen to such little people; especially because he receives such simple instructions.

Based on the argument that I have used to encourage people to try church, or even prayer, Naaman's servant says "*What have you got to lose?*".

Naaman swallows his pride, and steps into a different unknown from the midst of battle that has given him his status and arrogance.

Naaman is cured, as well as curbing his pride.

We who read the story are reminded that God's grace is not limited to our definitions of where it should, or ought, to be!

Many, many years later, Jesus thinks the people of his home-town need to be reminded of that lesson. Although Jesus has begun his public ministry of teaching, healing, and travelling; there are those, even those who knew him from childhood and in a position to respond and encourage him best, who dismiss Jesus as getting too big for his boots.

The people of Nazareth and Naaman had the same problem from different angles. Naaman can't believe God would speak to him through lowly folk. The Nazarenes can't believe God would exult one of their own to speak for Him. We, too, can limit God to our own groups or preferences, missing His broader work.

Jesus' experience shows that highlighting ingrained, deeply held, or unacknowledged beliefs and ways of operating is not always comfortable.

Lent is a good time to reflect, to seek to shed prejudice and pride so that we can see God's blessing and healing in our midst; despite our own shortcomings. A step back to see the broader picture does us good too!

Rev'd Nathan Thorpe, Vicar of St Giles, Aintree

Tuesday 10th March

Daniel 2. 20-23; Psalm 25. 3-10 & Matthew 18. 21-end.

Mark Twain is reputed to have remarked, *"It isn't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bothers me. It's the parts that I do understand!"*

Today's Gospel reading about forgiveness is one of those challenging passages that is easy to understand but difficult to live out.

Forgiveness is not easy and it can take a long time before we are able to forgive. As C.S. Lewis said with regard to today's Gospel passage:

"It may take 77 attempts to forgive one offence!". In his book, *Healing*,

Frances McNutt wrote, *"The devil of unforgiveness, and I choose my words carefully, the devil of unforgiveness is that it is so often justified."*

Most of us have memories of negative experiences that still fester and hurt, and about which we may have every reason to feel aggrieved. Jesus is not asking us to deny the reality of what we have suffered, but he is asking us to forgive those who inflicted the hurts. Something he did himself as he forgave those who nailed him to the cross.

There are two other areas where forgiveness is needed.

The first is to be prepared to forgive ourselves. We all make mistakes and wrong decisions and say things we bitterly regret. God forgives us when we do wrong. We need to accept his forgiveness and forgive ourselves.

In Colossians 2:14 Paul tells us that our sins are nailed to the cross where they are erased. Secondly, we sometimes need to forgive God for what we imagine God has done or allowed to happen to us. It's so easy to blame God for all the negative things that happen to us. *"What did I do to deserve this?"* The problem of innocent suffering is a vast one, but of one thing we can be sure - God only desires our good.

And then there is the fact of free will. Indeed, an element of free will pervades the universe itself. God is not a puppet master pulling the strings of our lives. God can take our anger and out of it bring healing and peace.

"Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we confess that we have sinned in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be; that we may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen."

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Rev'd Canon Anne Taylor, Area Dean & Vicar of St Peter's, Formby

Wednesday 11th March

Deuteronomy 4. 1, 5-9; Psalm 147. 13-end & Matthew 5. 17-19.

‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’

Today’s reading is a section from the Sermon on the Mount. If you read the text carefully it is an interesting question as to whether Jesus is just talking to his disciples, or whether he’s talking to a larger number of people. The Sermon on the Mount, you will remember, starts with the Beatitudes.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted...” and so on, ending up with *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Jesus was treading a fine line. On one side we have the fact that Jesus was proclaiming that the world was going to change, and the Kingdom of God would be established on earth. On the other side of the line we have a population who were listening to him, who were discontented, who wanted to seize power back from the Romans, who wanted to become a free and independent nation.

So in this piece of scripture we see Jesus emphasising that he is not coming to overthrow the Law or the Prophets but to demonstrate their value and fulfil them. Challenging the existing order is not about breaking the rules. We know that Jesus has said, and will say time and time again, that love is the fulfilling of the law. In this reading he’s telling his listeners, which includes us, that there is no substitute for following the laws laid down by his heavenly Father.

Follow the Law, act righteously, and love each other as much as we love ourselves.

Rev’d Dr David Taylor, Retired NSM at St Michael with All Angels, Altcar

Thursday 12th March

Jeremiah 7. 23-28; Psalm 95. 1-2, 6-end & Luke 11. 14-23.

Lent is a journey we walk together.

Each day brings us closer to Easter. In this gaze towards Easter, we look upon Jesus Christ – the Risen One. Lent is a time when we turn to Him again and again. We often give something up in order to focus our hearts on God. For what we look upon shapes our thinking. Some things irritate me & captures my attention. That is where my gaze rests. Certain news stories worry me – perhaps even today.

Let me encourage you: turn your eyes towards Christ! Not because everything else is unimportant; but because, from Jesus Christ's perspective, everything else finds its proper order anew. And thus, through fasting, our everyday lives are transformed.

God lamented over His people when they turned their backs on Him. His face was turned towards them in blessing, yet they wanted nothing to do with it (*Jeremiah 7:24b*). Even today, God still seeks our attention. Jesus said of Himself: "*I am the light of the world.*"

Light in the darkness draws attention; it almost calls out, "Hey, here I am!"

The psalmist responds and urges us: "*Come! Let us come before His presence!*" (*Psalm 95:1-2*). To come before God's face means to look upon Him.

In gazing upon God, we recognise His incredible greatness and His immeasurable love. No wonder the psalmist can only exclaim: "*Let us rejoice before the Lord, let us praise and thank Him!*" (*Psalm 95:1-2*).

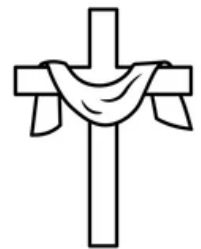
The angels before the throne praise God. The psalmist calls us to join in this worship as we, too, come before God. But the tongue is a double-edged sword. With it we bless and praise, yet with it we also curse and insult.

And sometimes it simply remains silent. No wonder Jesus once cast out a demon that made a man mute (*Luke 11:14-23*).

The mouth that had been bound was set free – free to praise God.

Do not let your praise fall silent.

Look with me towards Easter – towards Jesus Christ;
and let us receive His grace and mercy.



Pr. Johannes Karker, Student Minister.

*Sefton North Deanery has an ecumenical link with the
Deanery of Überlingen-Stockach (Evangelical Church in Baden, Germany).*

Friday 13th March

Hosea ch. 14; Psalm 81. 6-10, 13, 16 & Mark 12. 28-34.

Lent can sometimes feel overwhelming. We're told it's a season of repentance, reflection, and renewal — and it can start to sound like one more thing we're supposed to do well.

But today's readings bring us back to something much simpler and kinder. In Hosea, God does not ask the people to arrive perfectly put together. The invitation is simply: "Return." Come back as you are. Which can be a challenge.

Bring the mess, the tiredness, the things that maybe didn't work out.

It could be said that this season is not about sorting ourselves out before God, but about letting God meet us where we are. The Psalm reminds us that God is the one who lifts heavy loads from our shoulders.

So a practical question for reflection might be:

What is weighing me down right now — and what would it look like to place that burden in God's hands?

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus' words are wonderfully clear. Loving God and loving our neighbour are not two separate tasks; they belong together. We are told to love our neighbour as ourselves—and that last part is something we often forget. We are called to love ourselves too, in the way God loves us.

This can be a real challenge in a society that often feels competitive, and which can even benefit from us being tired, harsh with ourselves, and not well cared for. Jesus' words are clear. So what does that mean for today?

This season can be less about giving things up, and more about making space — space to listen to God, and space to notice the people around us, a space for practical self care. A kind word, an act of patience, choosing not to rush — these are small, holy acts of love.

A prayer for today:

*Loving God, you call us not to perfection, but to return.
Lift the burdens we carry, softly draw our hearts back to you,
and teach us to listen again.
Help us to love you with all that we are,
and to love our neighbours with grace.
Grow in us what is dry, heal what is weary,
and lead us closer to your kingdom. Amen.*

Rev'd Lilly Nelson, Assistant Curate at St Peter's Formby

Saturday 14th March

Hosea 5. 15-6.6; Psalm 51. 1-2, 17-end & Mark 12. 28-34.

Everyday rules to live by! The Scribe asked Jesus “*What is the first commandment?*” A glance through the first few books of the Old Testament will tell you there were lots for Jesus to choose from.

Jesus replied with: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength.*”

And then he gave a second; “*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*”

These words are familiar to worshippers in the Church of England in both the Prayer Book and Common Worship Eucharists. The compilers of the Prayer Book made sure these words of Jesus were there for generations of worshippers to regularly read, recite and hopefully learn by heart.

Love is key to both commandments. To quote a favourite Rock group; “*Love is bigger than anything in its way!*”. It is the cement that takes an individual from being alone in the universe, to being in relationship with the Creator of the universe and the many other people that inhabit the world we are part of. When we love we are never alone.

Love is a two-way thing; we not only give love, we receive it. Growing up in a village with limited street lighting you could see the stars on a cloudless night. I often felt tiny in comparison to the splendour of the Heavens, but I knew the very Creator of the heavens knew me, loved me and cared for me. I was not insignificant in God’s eyes.

As a Christian, I should strive to spend time in prayer, worship and study, learning what it means to love the very source and fount of love. When my love feels exhausted God’s generous supply is extravagantly given away.

There’s an old saying; you can’t love God if you don’t love your neighbour.

The neighbours we would like and the neighbours we have may be two different things.

That is an everyday challenge... and in loving our neighbour we love God too!

Rev’d John Reed, Retired Assistant Priest at St Stephen’s, Hightown

Sunday 15th March – Mothering Sunday

Exodus 2. 1-10; Psalm 34. 1-5. 11-20 & Luke 2. 33-35

If the Bible passages chosen for Mothering Sunday are the outcome of a lectionary designer's work, it seems largely to have been an exercise in missing the point.

These aren't really the stories of Moses' mother, or of Mary.

Imagine a filmmaker recording these scenes. The cameras would focus on the babies, while the women stood in the background, slightly out of focus.

The narratives focus on Moses and Jesus, future heroes, the heroes of the moment, the women, lost in anticipation of a better future through their sons. Yet these women are essential to the stories.

It is not simply that from them future leaders are born, or avoided threat and survived. It is also from these women that Moses and Jesus learn and grow up.

For three months, Moses' mother hides her son at a time of extreme racial prejudice, when the rulers want baby boys killed; in a hut adjacent to the neighbours, separated by the kind of bamboo screen we can buy in garden centres. She and her daughter place him where Pharaoh's daughter will find him. Then, she gives up her home and goes, as Moses' wet nurse, to live in the palace of the king who wants to wipe out her people.

All this, and she is not named in the Bible until Moses has seen the burning bush and returned to Egypt.

Brave, strong, pioneering women are hidden by fascination with future possibilities and sentimental interpretations of love and motherhood.

Would Moses be a suitable leader out of oppression and into liberation had he not had a mother like Jochebed?

Let's resist the temptation this Mothering Sunday to sentimentalise motherhood and instead accept the challenge of celebrating brave, strong, courageous women.

Rev'd Canon Dr Liz Shercliff

Tutor in Biblical Studies and Practical Theology (Luther King House)

Monday 16th March

Isaiah 65. 17-21; Psalm 30. 1-5; 8; 11-end & John 4. 43-end.

“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe!”

It is easy to believe something if you can see it!

Easy, but not necessarily wise. Think of magicians sawing people in half!

Of card cheats, and in our tech-savvy world, adapted photos and AI.

What is seen isn't necessarily real, although it seems to be.

All of this is both interesting and troubling; and Jesus, in our Gospel reading, is dealing with the knock-on effects of this particular problem.

Jesus does not want people to believe in him just because they see him perform a miracle. It bothers him.

Apparent miracles and magical tricks were not difficult in former days, and Jesus wanted it to be clear that that was not what he was about.

Jesus wanted them, as he wants us, to develop a deep and sustaining faith; which isn't about, and certainly doesn't depend on, seeing miracles, but is simply based on hearing his word and believing, trusting, having true faith.

Think about Jesus' short but important interaction with Thomas, in John 20.29: *“Have you believed because you have seen? Blessed are those who haven't seen yet believe”*.

We are among those people and we are blessed: and the results of that blessing when we believe in him, his life, death, resurrection, and our redemption through his love and saving grace, are that things change!

Little miracles of grace occur all the time minute by minute, year by year.

Things change in that we begin to find love and forgiveness in ourselves instead of hatred and grudge-bearing. Things begin to change as we start to become people with thankful hearts; peaceful and content in our lives and no longer striving to keep up or compete with others.

This is what lies in Jesus' challenge, and perhaps in his dismay, in v48 of our Gospel reading today: *“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe”*. But the royal official was different, wasn't he? He didn't need to see, he simply believed! Well, we haven't yet seen the glorious creation promised in Isaiah 65.17: the new heaven and new earth, but as Paul teaches us in Corinthians 5.7: *“We walk by faith not by sight!”*.

So, we continue in faith knowing that there are glories to come which we can't even imagine. That's Jesus for you!

Rev'd Sue Smith, Retired Assistant Priest at St Giles, Aintree

Tuesday 17th March

St Patrick's Day; Ezekiel 47. 1-9, 12; Psalm 46. 1-8 & John 5. 1-3, 5-16.

Shamrocks and snakes, green beer and green hair, banquets and baloney are all part of the modern celebrations of St. Patrick's Day which rely more on fiction than on facts!

Most historians say Patrick hailed from the North West of England. He is one of our own!

His father was a deacon and his grandfather a priest, though in his early years Patrick was not especially religious. A proto-type, maybe, for many teenagers in clerical families!

At the age of sixteen he was captured in an Irish pirate raid and sold as a slave to mind sheep on the inhospitable slopes of Mount Slemish in Co. Antrim. In a hopeless situation, he turned to God.

After six years he escaped to Dublin and joined a ship to France where he was later ordained. In a dream one night he heard the Irish people appeal to him "to come and walk among us once again." He was sent to Ireland by the Pope as a missionary bishop. Landing in Strangford Lough in 432 AD, he built his first church in nearby Saul, and travelled the length and breadth of the country preaching the Gospel, ordaining priests and organising the new church along diocesan lines. He made Armagh his principal base.

It wasn't all plain sailing as he met opposition from kings, chieftains and druids, but he persevered, ministering in Ireland for 29 years.

He died on 17th March, 461 AD.

Three characteristics stand out.

1. He was a person of prayer. Prayer enabled him to persevere. His wonderful prayer – the Breastplate (hymn 277 in Hymns Ancient&Modern) is still a prayer for today.
2. He was a person of forgiveness. On receiving the call of the Irish people, he records that he was "pierced with great emotion" and in an act of forgiveness for all he suffered in captivity, he returned with the Gospel of God's love.
3. He was a person of loving service, caring for all whom he met and seeking for them a better life.

Rev'd Ted Woods, Retired Assistant Priest at St Peter's, Formby

Wednesday 18th March

Isaiah 49. 8-15; Psalm 145. 8-18 & John 5. 17-30.

Shopping lists, to-do lists, lists on the fridge, lists in our heads, lists of lists. It is hard to prioritise until something is declared a "matter of life or death." A phrase that cuts through the noise, signalling that nothing else matters. Yet, it rarely means what it says; a human life is rarely hanging in the balance.

However, as Jesus defines his purpose during a debate with religious authorities, he shockingly claims to be the life or death matter. Almost too calmly, he inserts his significance:

"Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Not even 'a' matter of life or death but 'the' matter of life or death. And not even death in the basic physical sense but the two great powers that battle over human existence. A battle that death has seemingly been winning since about page 2 of the Bible; the end of a life that is as sure as taxes, the inevitable slide to decay and the corruption of all things. Jesus is indicating a seismic shift in human existence, a way out of the inevitability of death, decay and corruption.

Of course this would have sounded like hyperbole to even his keenest supporters. That is until the day they stood before him resurrected and started to realise the depths he meant. He really did overthrow the great enemy and offers a way out for all who believe in him.

How many people missed his words that day because they were preoccupied with their own urgent business? In dealing with pressing priorities, they hurried past the one who mattered most. Do we do the same?

Into our distraction comes this genuine "life or death" priority. It is not shouted, but spoken calmly as an invitation into our messy lives. He asks to be the priority around which everything else falls. This single most important question for every human being, whether it is answered for the first or thousandth time:

Will you believe in Jesus?

Rev'd Dave Lowrie, Lead of Storyhouse Fresh Expression, Crosby

Thursday 19th March

Ezekiel 47. 1-9, 12; Psalm 89. 26-36 & Matthew 1. 18-end.

The Feast of St Joseph

I always wonder how Joseph felt about all that happened.

There he was living a life of moral and legal rightness according to the Law of Moses as taught in the Synagogue, laws he'd been taught to live by all his life. He was happily betrothed to Mary, who as far as anyone knew was also living a good life in accordance with the Law. And then suddenly there she is pregnant, and not by him.

Thankfully his worldview contained a God bigger than human doings and beings, a God who was beyond his understanding, a God he worshipped. So he was prepared to accept an angelic dream as the word of God, as a call from God for his and Mary's life together. This enabled him to raise Jesus as his own child, as one adopted and one who was more special than most.

For us today, medical sciences would mean that claims of a virgin birth would have been wrapped up by suspicion of either psychological disturbance or barefaced lying. Even for Mary and Joseph, it suddenly meant that they could both have been seen to be engaging in immoral and illegal actions, and they would have been to some extent outcast from their own community.

And for Jesus, what stain did he carry with him from birth onwards? Would other parents not have wanted their own boys playing with 'that child', would they have avoided 'that family' as ones who were not righteous? Or did they accept a supernatural, God-is bigger-than-us claim?

Today, some of us will be happy to accept the claim of virgin birth and others of us won't be. We have to think through what this claim means for our faith and worship.

Do you accept that Jesus is the son of God, as in biologically conceived by the Holy Spirit, and not just the Son of God which as a title declares him to be the eldest son representing the family business (of Godhead) in foreign lands (amongst humankind). Who is Jesus to you?

Rev'd Amanda Bruce – Vicar of St Luke's, Crosby

Friday 20th March

Jeremiah 26. 8-11; Psalm 34. 15-end & John 7. 1-2, 10, 25-30

As children grow and develop they learn about consequences – some actions like not holding on or touching something hot can have unpleasant or dangerous outcomes. Nice or tasty consequences might be used to encourage certain behaviours. Ice cream when the broccoli is all gone, maybe!

Jeremiah is facing some tough consequences of his faithfulness in passing on God's message to the people of Judah. It's not going down well because God is bringing about the disastrous consequences of the people's "evil way". His message is one of warning to change their behaviours or their city will be destroyed as Shiloh was before it (*1 Sam 4*). Do the people take note?

In Psalm 34 we are assured that God knows exactly what is going on in his world. He sees, hears and rescues his people. He is particularly close to those suffering broken hearts and crushed spirits – maybe the consequences of actions of the haters, the wicked and the evildoers. God's face is turned away from them.

We can choose which of God's consequences to take – refuge and rescue or having his face turn away from us: redemption or condemnation. It's presented here as a stark contrast.

Do we act on God's consequences? Are we bold enough (like Jeremiah) to address the evil we see in God's world – modern slavery practices, abuse, poverty, racism - the things that break hearts and crush spirits?
Can we speak out?

In John 7 Jesus is boldly passing on God's message despite the threats against him. In v 7 he points out "*the world...hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil.*" All that Jesus says here points to God. It will get him killed. Not this time because it was not yet God's timing but 12 chapters later we read of the cruelty and horror of Jesus' execution when, in God's plan, he takes on the consequences for all the evil, hate and wrong in all the world.

Knowing this, can we have the courage to speak out against evil, to point to the victorious sacrificial love of our God – whatever the consequences?

Rev'd Beth Anderson, Vicar of St Nicholas', Blundellsands

Saturday 21st March

Jeremiah 11. 18-20; Psalm 7. 1-2, 8-10 & John 7. 40-52

Everyone's confused by Jesus.

They see his healings, listen to his teachings, his willingness to adapt centuries old laws to meet the needs of the suffering and wonder if he really can be the long-awaited Messiah. Added to their uncertainty is their belief he is a Galilean whereas the expected Messiah will come from Bethlehem. Jesus doesn't mention his birthplace. He only talks about God who sent him to bring the true gospel of peace and justice for all. It's possible his parents never told their children about Jesus's birthplace.

They were all born in Nazareth in Galilee.

The synagogue leaders sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus. They were plotting to kill him, but the guards returned, having heard Jesus. They had been impressed by his words and actions. The chief priests were angry, expressing their belief that nothing good could come from Galilee.

Nicodemus then said, "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" He was, immediately, silenced.

The high priests said again no prophet will come from Galilee.

Earlier in the gospel Nicodemus went to see Jesus and listened to him.

He chose to go to Jesus in at night. This might have been because he didn't want to be recognised and run the risk of being reported to the high priests. Nicodemus was still uncertain about Jesus.

What did Nicodemus do after being rebuffed by the chief priests? We aren't told but, move on to Jesus's execution. We note Joseph of Arimathea was helped by Nicodemus to bury Jesus.

In the time between the dismissal of his question by the high priests Nicodemus has obviously taken time to consider their arrogance and compared it to the love, peace and justice for all of Jesus's gospel message and had become a disciple.

Nicodemus was prepared to set aside life-long beliefs.

Have you and I strong opinions?

Are we prepared, along with fellow Christians, to talk and to pray and allow Jesus to help us to show where we might be misguided and then to modify our beliefs?

Richie Brown from St Luke's, Crosby

Sunday 22nd March – Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37. 1-14; Psalm 130 & John 11. 1-45

‘I wait for the Lord – more than watchmen wait for the morning’,
says the psalmist. Waiting is hard.

Real pain, disappointment and uncertainty now is not invalidated or cancelled out by knowing that dawn is coming, though that gives focus to our yearning.

Ezekiel sees in his vision a valley full of bones. He’s not surveying the scene from a distance; he feels himself led right among the bones, seeing their texture, seeing how many there are. This is a horrific scene of mass slaughter.

You might imagine picking up a bone, perhaps a bird’s skull, on a walk through the hills. Run your fingers over that slightly porous texture that dry bone has; see the warm, bleached ivory colour of it. These aren’t fresh bones – they are old, skeletal, residual.

The word dry in the Bible almost always emphasises death. Roots, shoots, trees, or river beds that are dried up, dead. By contrast, water gushing forth – in springs, in rivers, from rocks – is a symbol of life, closely connected with the imagery of giving birth. Note that at the end of Ezekiel there’s a powerful image of a river flowing from the temple, giving new birth to the land, an image that is more famous in the way it is later picked up in the book of Revelation.

Most of Ezekiel hammers home the prophet’s anger, despair and disappointment at how things have turned out for his people, his religion, and his country. Things really are as bad as they seem.

This vision doesn’t dismiss the reality of pain, hurt and brokenness – but like the cross and resurrection, which the story of Lazarus anticipates in John’s gospel, it invites us to set present trauma in the context of the much wider story of God’s life-giving love for creation.

Against the background of a belief that God has entered human history and calls people to follow the path to freedom even though it might lead through the wilderness, the prophets speak of what God has done, is now doing, and will do.

Venerable Dr Miranda Threlfall-Holmes, Archdeacon of Liverpool

Monday 23rd March

Joshua 2. 1-14; Psalm 23 & John 8. 1-11

Did Rahab know shame the day those men came to her? She's plainly named a harlot, a woman of ill repute: pushed to the edges of society, deep into the city walls, where others could pretend she didn't exist.

Did Rahab know fear as tales of Israel's conquest flooded Jericho?
Was her precarious existence going to be washed away too?

The woman in the temple surely knew shame and fear. Whatever the decisions that had led her to that day, it was she who was bundled up and pushed before Jesus and the crowds to be jeered at by the very men who had caught her in the act whilst her lover escaped the public disgrace and threat of bloody death.

When things looked darkest, each would encounter the grace of God.

Rahab used her outsider status and clever, elegant words to bring her and her household into a covenant with a new people and with God. This faith-filled foreign prostitute will be lauded down the generations for revealing that who is "in" with God is much more expansive than we ever expect.

The woman in the temple had no words at first, perhaps exhausted from pleading. Perhaps she knew they would be pointless. Her accusers didn't even really see her at all: just a pawn in their power play as they sought to disrupt and entrap the upstart Jesus.

Would he condemn himself by failing to uphold the Law or reverse his teachings on mercy?

Jesus had no words at first either, drawing on the ground as the crowd got more agitated until finally "*Let he who is without sin cast the first stone*".

Shouts dropped to murmurs, to silence, as those men recognised themselves in the one facing condemnation.

Finally, Jesus addresses the woman. The only one who could justly have cast that stone offers forgiveness and a fresh start.

For spies, prostitutes, Pharisees, adulterers, and us, Jesus takes this invitation of mercy and reconciliation to and through the cross into the vast openness of God's eternal love.

Rev'd Kate Greaves - L23 Curate (*St Luke's, Crosby; St Nicholas, Blundellsands, St Michael's, Blundellsands, ASSF, Thornton & Crosby*)

Tuesday 24th March

Numbers 21. 4-9, Psalm 102. 1-3, 16-23 & John 8. 11-20

Unusually for me, I am choosing to focus on the reading from John for today. Unlike most people, John is not my favourite Gospel.

I think my thirteen-year-old self captured my feelings well, as I once said *"I just don't like Jesus' tone!"* with true teenage indignance!

But in this reading, I do like Jesus' tone. I picture the scene with the Pharisees. To me, their venom seeps out of the page. I can hear jeering and mocking. Their hatred for Jesus and their disdain for the woman caught in adultery apparent.

But from Jesus, I hear a gentle, but firm tone. Cutting through the fire is a still, small voice of calm. *'Let you without sin cast the first stone'*.

Eventually, there is nobody left to condemn her because there is nobody without sin.

Softly, perhaps with her chin cupped in his hand, he says:

'I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more'.

In the next few verses, the Pharisees again try and corner Jesus with their logic and rules. They're trying to catch him out, but he can't be caught – yet.

Today, we are just a few short days from Holy Week. We have been observing the season of Lent. Perhaps you have been fasting, or perhaps you have picked something up. Maybe you decided that you just needed to go a bit easier on yourself for a while.

However you have spent the last 30 or so days, I wonder if today you could lean into those words of Jesus. I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more.

For all of us, I am sure these words are both freeing and challenging.

The first half bringing a sense of relief; the second are more problematic.

So what do you need to receive God's – or your own – forgiveness for?

And what do you need to stop doing, thinking or saying?

Hear these words, spoken in a soft and yet firm tone:

I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more.

Rev'd Poppy Thorpe

Vicar of All Saints with St Frideswyde's, Thornton & Crosby.

Wednesday 25th March

Feast of the Annunciation; Isaiah 7. 10-14; Psalm 40. 5-11 & Luke 1. 26-38

As the Diocesan lead on Legacies, my thoughts are drawn to the profound legacy of Mary, the mother of Jesus; a reflection inspired by today's Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord.

I imagine that young woman, perhaps only fifteen, thrust into a divine drama. Called to be the mother of the Saviour, she balances human fear with profound favour.

Her question—“*How can this be?*” (Luke 1:34)—is relatable, a moment of rational pause before the miraculous. Encouraged by the confirmation of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy—a sign that “*nothing will be impossible with God*” (Luke 1:37)—Mary's response is simple and revolutionary: “Yes”.

This act of trust is the foundation of her legacy.

Mary's “Yes” was a surrendering of her own comfortable plans for God's extraordinary will. She shows remarkable faithfulness and obedience. Though she felt blessed, she was entirely unaware of the full cost—the joy of motherhood would eventually lead to the sword of sorrow Simeon foretold, concluding in the agony of the crucifixion.

Her bravery was in her willingness to embrace the unknown.

Jesus himself highlighted the true nature of her greatness. He understood that her acceptance of God's plan in her heart preceded the physical reality of His conception. When others focused on her biological role, Jesus refocused their attention: “*blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*” (Luke 11: 28)

Mary did exactly that, modelling what it means to be a true disciple. Her life reminds us that when God asks, we must say “Yes”.

This Lent, I urge us to consider our own faith legacies.

What will we be remembered for?

Do we need to listen anew to the word of God in our lives?

What is the specific “Yes” that God is calling each of us to say today?

Vicky Sime

Lay Reader at Holy Trinity, Formby

& Legacy Officer at the Diocese of Liverpool

Thursday 26th March

Genesis 17. 3-9; Psalm 105. 4-9 & John 8. 51-end

At St Gabriel's, we observe a Methodist tradition of reaffirmation of our baptismal vows using the Covenant Service; sections of which were written by John Wesley. The Covenant prayer begins:

"I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things".

This relies entirely on the grace of Christ which brings healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and possibility to our relationship with God the Father.

But being rooted in Jesus it also reminds us of the challenge of discipleship which Christians face as they try to live hopefully and faithfully.

Christians are not immune from fear, pain, grief or despair; so this annual reminder of God's sovereignty and love has, in my experience, always brought encouragement to those who gather. New Year with its looking back, looking around and thinking about the future seems to be the perfect time to do this. The theme in these readings are God's covenant and the challenge of trusting in God's promises. There is tension between divine assurance and promise, and human doubt and experience.

In Genesis 17.3–9, God establishes a covenant with Abram, renaming him Abraham and promising that he will be the ancestor of many nations.

This covenant is not temporary or conditional but "everlasting," extending beyond Abraham himself to future generations. Abraham's response is humility and trust, even though the promised fulfilment lies far beyond what he can see.

Psalm 105.4–9 echoes this covenantal faith by urging the people to "*remember the wonders*" God has done and recalls the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. By remembering God's past faithfulness, the present community is strengthened to trust God into tomorrow. In John 8.51–end, Jesus' conversation with religious leaders reveal the challenges of recognising God's work; especially when it does not align with our expectations or experience.

Jesus speaks of eternal life and claims a unity with God that precedes Abraham. The crowd struggles to understand, just like we struggle to understand, when our faith appears paradoxical. Together, these readings call us to be people of faith who trust God, remember that God's wisdom is not ours, and Christ's incarnation is not about removing obstacles to our humanity but by filling it with His presence.

Rev'd Canon Malcom Rogers MBE

Vicar of Huyton Quarry & Bishop's Canon for Reconciliation

Friday 27th March

Jeremiah 20. 10-13; Psalm 18. 1-6 & John 10. 31-end

Jeremiah knows the cost of truth-telling. He is not writing from a place of safety, but from inside fear and threat. “*Terror on every side,*” he says. His faith has led him into conflict, isolation and danger.

Jeremiah shows that resistance often follows when faith confronts systems that depend on silence. His suffering is not random; it is the price of naming what others want hidden, and refusing to collude with the stories that protect power. People watch for him to fail, not because he is weak, but because his words disturb the status quo.

Lent invites us to sit with that discomfort. We can treat faith as a private comfort, but Jeremiah reveals a faith that exposes what is broken.

Truth-telling brings things into the light — and that light can feel costly.

What is striking is his honesty; Jeremiah does not pretend to be fearless. Justice work rooted in faith is not sustained by big statements, but by trust that God is present when what happens next is unclear.

This matters for the church today. When we speak about poverty, racism, exploitation or exclusion, we may be misunderstood or opposed. There is pressure to soften language, to stay “respectable”, to avoid controversy.

Jeremiah suggests that faithfulness is not the absence of fear, but the refusal to let fear dictate our obedience.

And still the passage ends in praise: “*Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord!*”

Not because everything is resolved, but because God has not abandoned the vulnerable. There is no trite soundbite of comfort or a pithy phrase but rather a quiet, defiant trust.

Take this time today to ask where we have chosen silence for the sake of comfort, and where we might be called to speak.

Like Jeremiah, we may feel exposed. But justice rooted in God’s presence does not rely on our strength alone; it rests on the conviction that God stands with those who refuse to turn away again.

Rev’d James Green, Executive Director at Together Liverpool

Saturday 28th March

Ezekiel 37. 21-end; Psalm 121 & John 11. 45-end

Today's psalm opens with a question. Asking questions is good. Indeed, the best questions are those which keep us learning and growing. Albert Einstein is credited with saying, "*Don't listen to the person with all the right answers, but to the person with all the right questions!*" In asking questions we do not lose faith but rather find it.

The first recorded words of Jesus in John's Gospel are a question, "*What are you looking for?*" (John 1: 38)

We often think of hills as places of beauty, refreshment and peace, but they can also be places of danger and hazards, places where we can get lost.

It is this latter understanding that is in the psalmist's mind as he asks where can help be found in tough and rocky times.

And which of us doesn't ask a similar question when misfortune falls or we face difficult decisions?

Questions are OK. In asking them we can, like the psalmist, find answers which bring us strength and hope to cope with whatever threatens to overcome us.

Jesus' question to the two followers of John the Baptist led them to an encounter with Jesus which changed and transformed their lives. It didn't do away with future questions nor guarantee them trouble-free lives, but they did find the One on whom they could rely and who gave meaning and purpose to their lives.

The psalmist's question led him to God and the assurance of his presence and help in his "*going out and coming in from this forth and for evermore.*"

So may it be for us and our questions.

Rev'd Ted Woods, Retired Assistant Priest at St Peter's, Formby



Sunday 29th March - Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50. 4-9a; Psalm 31. 9-16 & Matthew 27. 11-54

I once led a parish holiday that each evening tackled "Difficult Questions." My brief was to answer "Why did Jesus say, *'My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?'*"

The holiday was a nightmare. A refurbished stately hall had not been finished in time and yet they had allowed groups to still come on holiday. There was no floor in the kitchen, beds were missing, toilets not fastened to the floor etc. My pockets were soon stuffed full with bits of paper listing the shortfalls in the accommodation. I remember finding some blessed respite and pouring my heart out to the Lord. *"Where are you? What's happening? Father God you are usually closer than ever on these holidays but not this week. Help I'm really struggling!"*

Mercifully the weather was good and we could get outside to enjoy the Welsh coast. At the end of the week the owner apologized and gave us our money back for the trauma that we had been through.

Amazingly we had experienced, by the grace of God, a wonderful holiday. So much so that we agreed to donate the money for the ongoing refurbishment. And I was able to answer my question. God had been there even in the difficult first part of the week but we had not emotionally felt his loving presence.

That was the insight into Jesus' cry on the cross. His Heavenly Father had not abandoned him but at that particular moment the Son could not feel His presence.

I see it in the woman whose dying husband meant it was hard for her to keep trusting. Through refusing the temptation to despair she was caught up in Christ's victory for this life and for the life to come. Even, at what at times seemed the most hopeless of circumstances, she felt her eyes opened to glimpses of God's glory and dominion.

I actually think that Jesus may not just have quoted this first verse from Psalm 22 but possibly the whole Psalm. It includes verse 28 *"The Lord is King."*

Soon we will witness His authority underlined once again.
Ours is an Easter faith, a Resurrection faith.

Rt Rev'd Geoff Pearson

Retired Bishop of Lancaster & Assistant Bishop in Liverpool Diocese.

Monday 30th March

Isaiah 42. 1-9; Psalm 36. 5-11 & John 12. 1-11

It's the night before the storm. Tomorrow Jesus will march into Jerusalem; but tonight... tonight Jesus is in a 'safe house'.

It is the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

We say life happens – it happens to Lazarus; here presented to us by John, as someone to whom things happen. None of which are of his own volition: he falls ill, dies, is mourned, called stone dead from the tomb, and then is a tourist attraction to be gawked at, next the object of an assignation plot, yet we never hear him speak.

His silence is unsettling; yet Lazarus represents a foretaste of Jesus' claim, provoked by Martha's lament, to be "the resurrection and the life" (11.25).

Mary is no mere cipher in John's telling of the story of Jesus; firstly, falling and weeping at Jesus feet, now, here breaking the alabaster jar to fill the home with the aroma of spikenard.

Her prophetic act; firmly in line with the Old Testament seers is motivated by devotion, but here has the weight of visionary insight, for she has intuited Jesus' destiny.

In Matthew and Mark's telling it's Jesus' head that is anointed, the prophetic Old Testament sign of kingship, that preceded coronation: Jesus will take his throne, with a crown of thorns. But John tells us that Mary anoints Jesus feet for burial. Both true.

As Mary unlooses her hair to wipe Jesus' feet "*she too becomes an anointed one exuding and spreading pistakē fragrance symbolizing faith.*":

(M. Daley-Denton; cit. D.F. Ford, *Gospel of John: Theological Commentary*)

It's a sign that is done to Jesus rather than by him; and so:

The whole room richly fills to feast the senses

With all the yearning such a fragrance brings,

The heart is mourning but the spirit dances,

Here at the very centre of all things,

Here at the meeting place of love and loss

We all foresee and see beyond the cross.

(Malcolm Guite: *Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year*, p. 35)

Rev'd Mark Stanford

House For Duty Priest at Liverpool Cathedral & Warden of Readers.

Tuesday 31st March

Isaiah 49. 1-7; Psalm 71. 1-14 & John 12. 20-36

“Cast me not away in the time of my age . . . forsake me not when my strength faileth me.” (Psalm 71 vv. 8/9)

Like many people of an older generation, my father spoke little about his earlier years – it was only after his death, that I discovered that he had been orphaned at the aged of four and brought up, with his siblings, by an older brother.

What he did tell me was that one of his class at Primary School, the grandson of the Headmaster, had gone on to be Bishop of London! He always called him ‘Bob’ (Rt Revd Robert Stopford – 1961-72) and ‘Bob’ opened the new School in Garston in 1964.

This story highlights the fact that it isn’t where we start, but where we finish.

Over just ten days recently, I found myself at three funerals. They were people that I thought I knew, yet the eulogy at each one revealed things that I never knew. Each of them highlighted, from humble beginnings, most wonderful achievements.

“Leaving what lies behind, I press towards the goal” (Phil. 3.14).

Some memories are painful, others are part of a rich treasury which we do well to share. There are one or two stories I tell my grand-children, and they ask me to repeat them over and over again. We recognise, nevertheless, that memory can fade and we see people, sometimes those nearest to us, who do not remember any more.

The words above, from today’s psalm, suggest that ‘age’ presents its own challenges, when things that we have always done are harder, even no longer possible.

That said, many of our Churches are offering activities, designed to keep our minds and bodies active; above all, to help and encourage each other, so avoiding any thought of ‘being forsaken’ or no longer of any use.

What I do know is that my father, throughout his life, knew and recited the weekly collect and trusted in Him who would never ‘forsake’ him.

Venerable Arthur Siddall

**Bishop’s Retirement Officer, Sefton North Deanery
& retired Archdeacon of Italy, Malta & Switzerland.**

Wednesday 1st April

Hebrews 12. 1-3; Psalm 70 & John 13. 21-32

At the heart of this moment in John's Gospel is a simple and unsettling gesture; Jesus gives bread to Judas.

In the world of Jesus, sharing bread was never just practical. To eat together was to signal trust, belonging and protection. You did not offer bread lightly, and you certainly did not offer it to someone you intended to expose or exclude.

So when Jesus hands bread to Judas, knowing what is coming, he is not withdrawing love. He is extending it.

This is what makes the scene so difficult to sit with. Jesus does not confront Judas publicly. He does not shame him or force a decision.

Instead, he offers him a sign of fellowship. Love and betrayal occupy the same space. Grace is given without condition, even when it will be refused.

John is careful with this detail. Judas is not driven out. He leaves. The bread does not compel betrayal, nor does it prevent it. It simply reveals what is already forming in the heart.

Grace does not override freedom. It honours it, even when that freedom is used to walk away.

There is something deeply uncomfortable here for us in Lent. We often imagine that God's love will make decisions easier, clearer and safer.

Yet in this scene, love does not simplify anything. It sharpens responsibility. Judas cannot claim exclusion or rejection as justification. He receives the bread fully and still chooses to betray Jesus.

John tells us that immediately after Judas leaves, Jesus speaks of glory. Not success or triumph, but a love that refuses to harden when it is wounded. Glory is revealed not by control, but by faithfulness.

Lent asks us to consider what we do when grace is offered to us freely.

Do we receive it, even when it costs us something?

Or do we step away quietly into the night?

The bread remains offered, not as a test, but as an invitation.

Rev'd James Green, Executive Director at Together Liverpool

Thursday 2nd April - Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12. 1-14; Psalm 116. 1, 10-end & John 13. 1-17, 31-35

“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.”

That ‘so’ at the beginning of verse 4 introduces what appears to be the most astonishing non sequitur!

What possible connection could there be between these two verses?

After verse 3, setting out Jesus’ origin in God, his power over all things and his imminent return to God, we might expect verse 4 to record some deed of power or a second transfiguration into robes of glory.

The last thing we would expect is Jesus shedding all hints of status to carry out the work of the lowliest of servants.

And the last thing that his disciples would have expected, or welcomed, was Jesus setting them this example to follow.

There are hierarchies of service aren’t there? Some attract more attention. Some bring status and power. Some are even glamorous. But washing feet is the lowest of the low. It is nothing less than the death of ego and self-importance.

“Lord, show me what it means for me to follow your example.

*Show me where my service of others bolsters my ego
and gives me status.*

Guard me and keep me from these dangers.

Fill me with your Spirit,

*for only in the power of your Spirit can I begin to serve others
without regard for status or prestige.*

*And where my service is unseen by others,
or is taken for granted and attracts no thanks or praise,
give me grace to carry on and to look only to You.*

*May your church, and we in our churches,
so model this selfless service
that everyone will indeed know that we are Your disciples.*

Amen.”

**Andrew Thompson-Smith, Lay Reader at All Saints with St Frideswyde’s,
Thornton & Crosby & Chair of Sefton North Readers Chapter.**

Friday 3rd April – Good Friday

Isaiah 52. 13-53. End; Psalm 22 & John 18. 1-19

Some may ask what's so good about Good Friday, the day when humanity murdered the God that created it?

When we read of the passion of Christ in the gospel of John, it tells a story that is full of details of the events leading to Jesus crucifixion, namely his trial, death and resurrection. It is a shocking time. It tells of the betrayals by Jesus's close friends and by the religious and government institutions, the disloyalty of the Jews as they denounce Jesus as their King in favour of the Emperor, the humiliation of being publicly flogged and made to wear a crown of thorns and the ultimate punishment, a public crucifixion.

Jesus, the innocent victim, dying on the cross. How can any of this be good? But if we look closer we read of the goodness of Good Friday.

Jesus, in his self- sacrifice, takes upon himself the whole of human sorrow, his whole body stretched to the limits of human being, he leads us to a place of love, forgiveness and transformation, to a new way of living.

In all his anguish and pain, as he trusts in his Father's unfailing love, Jesus forms family, a new community. At the very heart of this story are relationships, relationships steeped in love. As Jesus's mother, and his mother's sister Mary, and Mary Magdalene stand near the cross, Jesus entrusts his mother to his dear friend John, to be as mother and son forming a new family, God's family. God is revealed to us in such a way that within the limits of our lives, we are offered the opportunity to be fully human. We are called to love one another as God loves us.

As we reflect on the events of Good Friday, the division between those who were for, and those who were against Jesus, we reflect on the divisions today in our society. Our diversity is often what causes these divisions and whereas diversity is a gift from God which enriches God's family, the divisions it can cause amongst some generate exclusivity in our churches and hatred in society. We are called to work for peace and unity in ourselves, in our churches and communities.

If we refuse to love our sisters and brothers we deepen the mark of the cross in God's world that becomes more fractured than it already is.

May we strive to work to heal our divisions and to show God's love to all in our work for unity and peace (*Matthew 22: 37-39*).

Rev'd Jane Morgan MBE, Retired Assistant Priest at St Peter's, Formby

Saturday 4th April

Lamentations 3. 1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31. 1-4; & John 19. 38-end.

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting. A day when the Church resets itself after the ceremonies of Maundy Thursday, with the stripping of the altar and the stripping of adornments in church.

Holy Saturday follows Good Friday with the starkness, the emptiness, the silence in the church as it remembers Christ's death on a cross.

As Christians we talk easily and openly about Jesus' death and resurrection. We speak openly of Christ risen and crucified, of Good Friday and Easter Sunday but we don't often speak of a third moment in Jesus' journey through death, his burial.

We are told in John's Gospel that after the death of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus receive permission to remove Jesus' body for burial.

But they do not just bury his body we are told that his body is wrapped in linen cloths with myrrh and aloes weighing about 100 pounds.

A hundred pound is a lot of spices!

Then Jesus's body is placed in a new tomb.

By including this information the writer of John's Gospel is pointing us to a burial of a King.

Only a king would receive such treatment, and this is of course entirely in keeping with John's narrative of the arrest, trial and execution of Jesus.

The Jesus portrayed here is the sovereign Lord who lays down his life of his own free will. This is the Jesus whose cross is his throne.

So as we wait in the silence and in the emptiness of the crucifixion on this holiest of Saturdays we do so alongside those first disciples and other Christians, acknowledging that waiting is part of the mystery of God, who will soon make God's self present in our midst.

Very Rev'd Dr Sue Jones
Dean of Liverpool Cathedral

BE STRONG
AND TAKE HEART,
ALL WHO HOPE
IN THE
LORD.

5th April - Easter Day

Acts 10. 34-43; Psalm 118. 1-2, 14-24 & John 20. 1-18.

Easter morning does not begin with certainty or triumph, but with women walking to a tomb, carrying grief, love, and unanswered questions.

The resurrection breaks into a world that is still wounded, still fearful, still unsure—and that is precisely the point.

The risen Christ does not erase suffering or tidy the story. Instead, God meets us within it and opens a future we could not imagine. Resurrection is not an escape from the world as it is, but God's commitment to it. Life is stronger than death, love more persistent than despair, and hope more durable than we dare believe.

Easter invites us to notice where resurrection is already stirring: in acts of courage that feel small, in forgiveness that costs us something, in communities choosing compassion over fear. The stone is rolled away not so Jesus can get out, but so we can see in—and discover that God has already gone ahead of us.

This is the work we are drawn into as Easter people: to live as witnesses to hope, not because everything is resolved, but because God is faithful. The risen Christ calls us by name and sends us back into the world, not unchanged, but transformed.

Alleluia. Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Rt Rev'd Ruth Worsley KHC

Bishop of Wigan & Interim Bishop of Liverpool

EASTER

He is Risen



Space for your own notes, prayers, reflections:

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More notes or doodles:



Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal Son" – Saturday 7th March



Einfach Ja zu Dir!
Überlingen, 25.5.2025

Thursday 12th March

Clergy of Überlingen-Stockach – our link Deanery in Baden, Germany.

Sefton North Deanery Churches
in the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool

Formby & Hightown

St Lukes, Formby
St Peter's, Formby
Holy Trinity Formby
St Michael & All Angels, Altcar
St Stephen's, Hightown

Maghull & Melling

St James, Maghull
St Thomas, Melling
St Andrew's, Maghull
St Peter's Maghull

Aintree

St Giles, Aintree

Crosby & Blundellsands

St Michael's Blundellsands
St Nicholas', Blundellsands
St Luke's, Crosby
All Saints with St Frideswyde's, Thornton & Crosby
Storyhouse, Crosby

A prayer for all Christians during Lent

***Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.***