

Easter

*The Light at the End of
Calvary Street*

Lent Cycle B

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How to use this Lenten programme

For personal reflection

Begin with a slow meditative reading of the Gospel.

Pay attention to the insights, images that arise in you.

Use your journal to write anything you wish to remember.

Use the **Word Broken and Shared** section to help you expand your understanding of the Gospel.

In the **Food for the Journey** section make your own choice of something to take with you for the coming week.

Before beginning each subsequent week take time to evaluate the journey thus far.

For a group study

You will need someone to read the Gospel aloud.

The pattern is the same as above except that, after each section, the reader/leader will invite you to share with the other group members.

It is important to participate in the sharing as this is a way to gift others and to be gifted by them.

Share the action you hope to take if appropriate.

Conclude with the prayer provided or another of the group's choosing.

Overview of Six Meetings

Of Floods, Rainbows and New Beginnings

Light that Penetrates Dark Places

Creating Order and Harmony

Of Promises Renewed

Seeds in the ground

*There is light at the end of
Calvary Street*



WEEK ONE

Of Floods, Rainbows, and New Beginnings

Mark 1: 12-15

Pre-reading: Genesis 9:1-15; Psalm 25; 1 Peter 3: 18-22

Key words

Desert- scene of wandering for forty years; place of purification; place of evil spirits; place of special closeness to God; the Messiah will come from the desert.

Forty- a significant number; the time of the flood; a generation.

Wild beasts- hostile environment; associated with evil or danger.

Reign of God- sometimes called Kingdom of God; a new age; a sign of renewal under the leadership of Christ; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared

Today's Gospel contains two short stories each of three sentences. Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus as on a journey, on the road from one place to another.

In the first story the Spirit is shown to be the driving force of Jesus' life. With the help of the Spirit Jesus learns to face those temptations which were sometimes called "the powers of darkness". These temptations the writer personifies as Satan and the wild beasts. Such 'powers' are the persons, places or things that are antitheses of the reign of God. In other words those things, that would prevent us from following our Baptismal promises to make the world a better place. Jesus was victorious in his struggle because he kept the words of scripture and his father's example in his heart. Mark shows that he won by showing how the servants of God, the angels were happy to serve him.

In the second story Jesus begins his life's work. He starts by announcing that God is good news. Many had forgotten this because of bad experiences they had had with life and people who betrayed their faith through false teaching.

For Mark, Jesus is a powerful saviour; like God he hears the cry of the poor and responds. Jesus is also the suffering Messiah the anointed One. As disciples, anointed in Baptism we, too, will experience the cross in our lives.

Food for the Journey

The Gospel speaks of preparation for ministry or action for the Kingdom of God.

What role/s do you play in the building up of your family/community/parish?

How are you helped to prepare for this role?

Our Pope Frances reminds us that our family is all people everywhere we are not to exclude anyone. This means we need to accept differences without discrimination.

*God of the deserts of our lives
but also the rainbows.*

You send us your Spirit to lead us and strengthen us.

Reshape our hearts that we may better serve You.

Help us to look for ways of helping others

so that we will uphold their dignity

and be 'good news' to all.

Amen

WEEK TWO

Light that Penetrates Dark Places

Mark 9: 2-10

Pre-Reading: Genesis 22: 1-18; Psalm 116; Romans 8: 31-34

Key words

Mountain - meeting place of heaven and earth

Three – completeness

Moses – saviour, lawgiver

Elijah – prophet, messenger, champion of justice

Tents/booths – harvest festival, a joyous time, like a fair

Cloud – sign of the Presence of God (Shekinah)

Transfigured – indicates that Jesus appearance was changed

The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared

In this Gospel story Mark describes a vision experienced by three disciples. It begins with a climb to the mountain. Jesus is transfigured in a way that is not earthly. He is seen in conversation with two great figures of the Jewish story. There is both newness and continuity. Jesus' ministry will continue salvation history and offer a new path forward.

Peter's response is typical of our response to a peak moment, we want to hold on to it, to stay with the joy and peace that floods us.

The story tells us that there can be no staying around on the mountain while there is work to be done. We need the mountain experiences but they are to help us be faithful to the great work of renewing the earth.

Food for the Journey

Many people in our communities are often overwhelmed by sufferings of one kind or another. By small acts of compassion we can show our solidarity. From a smile to an offer of help. From support for projects to active participation in volunteer work. In your group explore what you could contribute.

*God of the mountain
and also the valleys of our lives
inspire us with the reminders of your presence
that surrounds us.*

*May my presence in this community
reflect the love you have for us
and my service be a blessing to all.*

Amen.

WEEK THREE

Creating Order and Harmony

John 2: 13-25

Pre-reading Exodus 20: 1-17; Psalm 19: 8-15; 1 Cor. 1, 22-25

Key words

Passover - The feast celebrating God's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt. It became the heart of the Jewish understanding of the saving acts of God.

Temple precincts - The outer courtyards where animals were brought for sacrifice. In Jesus' time the legitimate supply of animals had turned into a full-scale market.

Money changing - Rabbinic law decreed that special currency be used in the Temple. There was probably a certain amount of fraud operating in these transactions.

The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared

This dramatic story placed by John at the beginning of Jesus' ministry demonstrates both Jesus' understanding of the spirit of the Law and his attitude to the house of God. His actions will begin his journey that leads to the Cross.

Jesus gathers a bunch of the rushes that are strewn on the ground, then moving dramatically through the crowd he sweeps all before him. His justification for his actions comes from his words to the crowds, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my father's house into a marketplace."

Later the disciples word recall the words of

Psalm 69 - *Passion for your house has been my undoing.*

The story continues with a challenge by the Jews. They demand to know by what authority he dares do such things.

Jesus' reply seemed to be a riddle. What temple did he speak of? The Jews understood his words literally and so the pattern of misunderstanding was set.

The writer points to a mystical response in the light of the resurrection. Jesus as temple of the living God and in his abiding Spirit would replace temples, shrines, and holy places as the real dwelling place of the divine.

Food for the Journey

This story and the readings that precede it have at their heart a call to reflect on law. From the basic moral frame work, the Commandments to a movement to write the law of God in our hearts.

What is my attitude to Law? Am I able to discern the spirit of the law? As adult faithful Christians, is our community able to see what is of God and brings peace and harmony and what is tied to time and therefore to be re-evaluated. Law must serve God and the community. We need to examine our church laws in a spirit of openness. The pope has asked us to prepare for the second session of the Synod on family by full participation

*God of passion and compassion
Your law is reflected in the beauty of the universe.
Your Law is perfect, it refreshes, it brings joy.
Help us to have a right spirit
through our understanding of our failings
and a willingness to correct them.
May your law always be my treasure and delight.
Amen*

WEEK FOUR

Of Promises Renewed

John 3: 14- 21

Pre-reading: 2 Chronicles 36:14-23; Ps 137; Eph2: 4-10

Key words

The serpent raised - After an attack by seraph serpents Moses made a copper serpent and put it on a flag pole. To look at the sign would bring healing. Numbers 21: 4-10.

Eternal life - Life is a significant word in John. It can be called The Gospel of Life. Eternal life is the life that death cannot destroy. Eternal life is one of the gifts of Baptism, a gift that develops as we live a God-life.

Light - Often used symbolically. God is Light and Jesus is that Light made visible. Christians are called to walk in this Light.

The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared

Today's Gospel is part Two of the Nicodemus story so it would be useful to begin at 3: 1. Jesus is spending time with an enquirer.

This passage is a response to Nicodemus's third question, " How can I be born again?"

John uses dialogue to allow Jesus' teaching to unfold. A person asks questions and Jesus explains. Conan Doyle used this method with Dr Watson the questioner and Sherlock Holmes the enlightener.

Jesus compares himself to the copper serpent who when raised becomes not only a symbol of healing but also a healer. The snake was venerated in many parts of the world. The snake is a mysterious creature, beautiful but dangerous, having the ability to shed its skin which appears to be a way of dying and also living. We can feel that we are separated from God and alienated but the rising of Jesus shows that we are never separated

from the love and mercy of God. Through his death Jesus was raised. Through our little deaths through failures in our following of Christ and our repentance we experience renewal.

Food for the Journey

*Our saving sign is the Cross bearing the suffering but now glorified Christ. Some churches show this by having an empty Cross or a Cross showing Jesus raised. Paul reminds us that faith is a gift and salvation does not depend on our accomplishments. Is this the way we have understood faith? Do we base our judgements of others on our belief that we are **more worthy?***

Do I see myself as sharing God's love with those considered outcasts by my church or society.

God ever-faithful

*As your people, even as captives,
kept their faith alive through singing hymns
help us as a community to gather regularly
to remind ourselves of your constancy.*

*May the words of Jesus "Do this in memory of me"
be the challenge that spurs us on to
a more generous service of others.*

Amen.

WEEK FIVE

Seeds in the Ground

John 12:20-33

Pre-reading: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 51; Hebrews 5: 7-9

Key words

Greeks - Jesus' mission is to all peoples

Hour - John uses this word as a symbol of fulfilment. "My Hour" is the right time for this action.

The prince of this world - Sometimes called the Prince of Darkness. This is John's name for the personification of evil. We need to avoid any notion of a contest between God and darkness. The evil we experience is the result of the action of human beings.

The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared

This moving passage marks the end of Jesus public ministry. From now on Jesus will be in the company of his friends and followers. Interestingly, this last scene involves non-Jews and highlights the growth of inclusiveness. It also signifies the universal nature of Jesus mission.

Jesus response to a simple request from strangers that they might meet him, triggers a flow of images, with the theme of death.

The time is at hand. In the image of the grain of wheat, we are reminded that a new harvest requires the splitting of the husk to release the seed. Life to new life is through letting go. The journey from life to new life is through death. This is a kind of koan. It appears to be a contradiction but like the image of the seed we must now explore the meaning and grow into the meaning.

John now turns to the challenge of service. Contrary to public perception, service is an honour and is acknowledged by God. God dwells with the servant.

The next passage is a prayer;

I am disturbed to the depths of my being. How will I pray? Save me!

Father this is my final goal. This is my reason for being.

Father, glorify your name.

This is the only mention of agony. Luke says in his account that an angel came and strengthened him. John recalls the account of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. God's answer is the same.

Food for the Journey

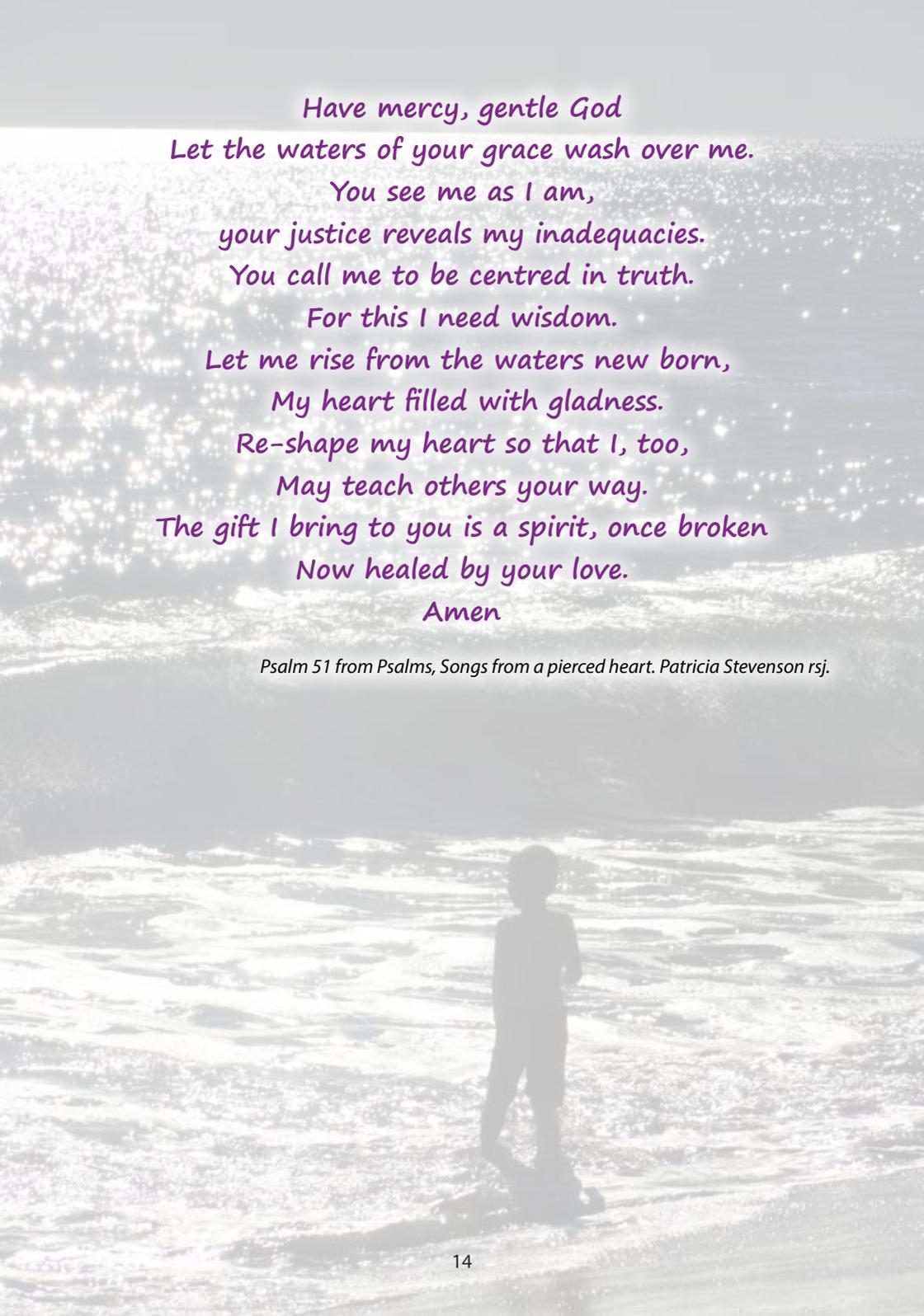
Suffering is a very personal and lonely aspect of our lives. We often reach out to others in the hope that by sharing the pain it will be relieved. In the news we hear of and see suffering in every possible form. We are often moved but it is usually a fleeting emotion. Maybe we are becoming desensitised to the suffering of others. Or even imagining that some deserve it.

Who is suffering in my family? my community?

What is my response?

The first step is awareness. Look around you. Sometimes a smile is enough.

Does anyone need your help? An offer alerts the other to your concern. Small actions can mean the difference to feeling alone and knowing that others really care.

A child's silhouette stands on a beach, looking out at the ocean. The sky is filled with a soft, golden glow from the setting or rising sun, with light rays and a shimmering effect. The waves are gentle and white with foam. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Have mercy, gentle God
Let the waters of your grace wash over me.
You see me as I am,
your justice reveals my inadequacies.
You call me to be centred in truth.
For this I need wisdom.
Let me rise from the waters new born,
My heart filled with gladness.
Re-shape my heart so that I, too,
May teach others your way.
The gift I bring to you is a spirit, once broken
Now healed by your love.
Amen

Psalm 51 from Psalms, Songs from a pierced heart. Patricia Stevenson rsj.

WEEK SIX

There is Light at the end of Calvary Street

Mark, Chapters 14 and 15

Pre-reading: Isaiah 50: 4-7; Psalm 22; Phillippians 2: 6-11.

The Gospel Story - The Word broken and shared

Mark's passion narrative is stark, bleak, and brooding. Darkness shrouds most of the story. There are occasional glimmers of light but they are fleeting.

Jesus is alone. The suffering servant stands in a pool of light while around him the powers of darkness become more threatening.

The Prelude

The priests and scribes plot to kill Jesus.

A woman anoints Jesus' head. This ritual is used in the anointing of priests, prophets and kings.

A disciple plots to betray Jesus.

The Meal

Jesus gives instruction for the preparation of the Passover supper.

The joy of the gathering is diminished by the threat of betrayal.

The sacrifices of the old covenant and the image of the messianic banquet come together in Jesus final leave-taking.

The Garden

Jesus warns his followers that the coming events will test their faith.

Peter promises undying fidelity.

Jesus experiences the isolation of suffering and seeks support.

The internal turmoil of the previous scene contrasts with the noisy violence of the arrest.

The show trial

Jesus' enemies try desperately to present a case against Jesus but the charges are hollow.

Jesus the suffering servant, stands silent before his accusers until he is asked about his relationship with God. On this subject he is eloquent.

Jesus' silence contrasts with Peter's noisy denials. After the third outburst, Peter breaks down and cries as the memory of his wild promise comes to haunt him.

Political Expediency in action

The Sanhedrin takes Jesus to Pilate confident that it can make a case for the death penalty.

A convicted criminal is chosen ahead of Jesus. His isolation and abandonment are signified by the call to the crowd,

“What will I do with this man?”

The soldiers participate in the on-going denigration of Jesus. They play a game which mocks the idea of a convict king.

The Great Way

Jesus is helped by a stranger.

The dying Jesus is trivialised and mocked by both soldiers and other convicts.

A cosmic event contrasts with the lone cry of the dying Jesus.

Witness is given by an anonymous soldier and a group of women who have ministered to him from the beginning.

The Aftermath

Jesus is dead. There is no question about it.

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, not involved in Jesus' death requests the body of Jesus.

The narrative ends on a note of expectation.

The women take note of the location of the tomb.

Food for the Journey

The following questions may be useful as you work through this narrative.

As you read the story look particularly at how each episode relates to Jesus.

Where is Jesus? How is he treated? Who is with him?

What support does he have? What is the overall mood of the story?

What surprises are there?

While the story of Jesus' passion and death is one of betrayal isolation and suffering it is not the end. Jesus was raised by God. What meaning does this have for us? In the midst of painful times look for the joy around us, whether it be in a flower, a neighbour, family or the antics of pets.

Gracious God

Giver of life, energy of the universe;

*We give thanks for all the constant reminders
you give us of your sustaining love.*

*As we rejoice in the small resurrections
we experience in daily living*

*comfort us in that moment when for each of us
life will be changed not taken away.*

May we move into the new with grateful hearts.

Amen