

# Lent Meditation 2014



**THROUGH LENT WITH JESUS**

**TRINITY ANNUAL CONFERENCE (TRAC)**

**The Methodist Church in Malaysia**

## FOREWORD

Once again, Lent is upon us and the season of journeying with Jesus, preparing to go with him to the cross and then rejoicing at his resurrection, knowing that we too share in the life he has come to give.

Lent, a season of reflection, of drawing near to God, of looking more closely to see what God did for our sakes, because He would not have us to be lost forever.

May these meditations bring you nearer to the God who loves us so much that He gave His only Son, so that we may not be separated from Him eternally but will receive life and live forever with Him.

Blessings,

Chairperson,  
Board of Worship and Music

## EDITORIAL

"When we learn to read the story of Jesus and see it as the story of the love of God, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves—that insight produces, again and again, a sense of astonished gratitude which is very near the heart of authentic Christian experience."

— N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*.

Our hope is that these Lenten meditations on the life of Jesus will produce just that—a sense of overwhelming gratitude for God's saving and redeeming actions through Christ. And may that gratitude burst forth into Easter praise as we remember (*anamnesis*) God's immeasurable love for us.

Once again, we have inserted pictures for the Sundays in Lent to draw us away from words so that we learn to see God other ways. Take time to allow the pictures to connect with your life.

The editorial team would like to thank the writers and all who have helped produce this edition of the TRAC Lent Meditations. May our journey this Lent bring us to a deeper love for our Lord.

*The Editorial Team*

**Ash Wednesday****Text reference: Psalm 51**

*Key verse: Psalm 51:17 "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, O God, will not despise."*

In the Bible, ashes were used as a sign of mourning or a sign of repentance. Ashes also reminded the people of their substance, made from the dust of the earth. At the same time, ashes had healing properties and were used in the purification rituals in the Old Testament (Num 17).

The "ash" in Ash Wednesday refers to the ashes used to mark the foreheads of those who had repented and were restored to the Church in early Christianity. As time passed, the ashes were imposed on the foreheads of all worshippers as they acknowledged themselves to be sinners and in need of God's forgiveness and grace.

On this first day of the Lent season, we are called to humility and repentance. Repentance simply means to turn back to God from whichever direction we are heading away from Him. Where we have been intentional about going on our own and or doing our own thing, the call is to turn back to God and allow Him to lead us. Where we have inadvertently strayed off God's ways, we are called to turn back to Him and follow His ways.

On this first day of Lent, allow the psalm that David wrote when he repented of his sins to be our prayer also, acknowledging that any sin we commit is against God and only He can forgive us. Allow this psalm also to draw us into letting God create in us a clean heart and restore the joy of salvation in us. Repentance, while arising from sorrow for our sins, is also meant to lead us back into the joyful and grace-filled relationship that God always meant us to have with Him.

**Over to You:**

Take time to sit with the LORD and allow Him to show you where you have strayed away from His ways and His love. Turn back to Him and let Him to lead you back into His ways.

**Prayer:**

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit."* (King David in Psalm 51:10-12)

# *Notes*



## The Sower

### Text reference: Mark 4:1-9, 13-20 (The parable of the sower)

*Key verse: Mark 4:20 (NIV) - "Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the Word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."*

For many of us, Jesus' parable of the sower is a familiar one. In a nutshell, the kind of ground the seeds fall upon matters. Good soil wins hands down!

What is good soil like? First, we've got to rule out unprotected lands where crop-predators abound, impenetrable rocky grounds and deceitful thorns. Second, good soil is well-ploughed. We—modern, scientific people—may additionally imagine soil that has been adjusted to have the most conducive particle composition, aeration, porosity, drainage capacity, moisture, pH, symbiotic population and fertility. With so much preparatory work to do, a sower's job is certainly no child's play.

The seeds in this parable refer to the Word of the Kingdom (Matt 13:19), which God is portrayed to graciously invest in us. "Good soil" in the parable refers to the one who hears the Word and is able to accept it (4:20). He is not unprepared like the one from whom the Word was snatched away (4:15). He does not doubt the Word when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word (4:17). He does not allow his eyes to be blinded by the pursuits and vexations of the world so that he loses sight of the Word (4:19). The Word brings him life. Truly alive, he will play his role well in Kingdom-building.

God is calling Christians to be good soil. This requires self-denial and surrender on our part to the Holy Spirit's transformative work in us. Indeed, the Sower is able to make us good soil if we let Him.

The Sower sows good seeds. Together, good soil and good seeds will yield the best crop.

### Prayer:

Merciful Father and gracious Sower of the Word, as we have begun our Lenten journey, help us to give ourselves fully to Your Spirit's work in us during this season. Make us the good soil in which You delight—that we may yield the crop that honours and glorifies You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Rest in Kingdom-Building**

### **Text reference: Mark 4:26-29 (Parable of seed growing secretly)**

*Key verse: 1 Corinthians 3:7 (NIV) - "So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."*

The sower had sown the seed on good soil. His hands had done all the work they could do. But the life of the seed lay in a much greater pair of hands—those of the sovereign God. The germination, growth and maturing of the seed into grain could only happen in God's time. There was nothing that the sower could do to help God when it came to growth. The seed's growth was God's best-kept secret. And it was God, who enabled the harvest. The glory of the harvest belongs to God and God alone.

In this parable, Jesus reveals beforehand what he intends the simple story to illustrate—i.e. what the Kingdom of God is like. In essence, Jesus points his listeners to a simple fact: there is only so much we can do to build God's Kingdom. We share the Gospel with pre-believing friends and relatives, do missions, meet needs, build churches, make disciples and encourage one another. And then we must rest and wait prayerfully. We need to trust in God's timing—even when nothing seems to be budding, growing or moving; even when ears seem shut, eyes are yet blinded and hearts remain hardened; even when growth seems to plateau despite all we have done; even when our own dreams and ambitions have to be packed up and buried.

Lent is a good season to rest and wait on God for Kingdom-growth as we focus on soul-searching and repentance. We experience God's forgiveness, reflect on our own discipleship, ponder our mortality and, yet, anticipate the celebration of Christ's resurrection on Easter Day. May our renewed hope form the basis of our Kingdom service thereafter.

### **Prayer:**

Almighty God, the glory of Your Kingdom belongs to You. As we wait on You this Lent season, may Your Kingdom come; and may Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Wise and Foolish Builders**

### **Text reference: Matthew 7:24-27**

*Key verse: Matthew 7:24 (NIV) - "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."*

The Jordan River, in those days, was a terrifying river that flowed for a length of 200 miles with an average loss of altitude of about 9 feet per mile before it reached the Dead Sea. The Jordan River annually swelled to dangerous levels due to the yearly spring floods, which resulted from the melting of snow upon Mount Hermon. The swift flow and zig-zag current of the waters could easily sweep a man away if he happened to slip and fall into the river. Furthermore, the streams that coursed through the Palestinian hills could overflow to the plains below. Houses erected within the reach of the rising floods could not stand if they had been built on sand.

In concluding his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used the metaphor of house-building in order to impress upon the hearts of his hearers the importance of hearing and obeying his words. Hearers who were familiar with the annual floods would understand that it was a matter of life and death. Sand is soft; it is much easier to dig deep in order to lay the foundation; thus, you save on building costs. However, strong winds are able shake the house to its foundation and the flood waters can sink or erode away its base until it collapses. Even after hearing God's words, one may still choose not to found his/her life upon those words because they are "too inconvenient", "too counter-cultural" or "too old-fashioned". As impressive as such a life may seem in the eyes of the world, it may crumble and be reduced to utter ruin when hit by the unexpected storms of life. Sadly, many have resorted to taking their own lives in such circumstances. They cannot find hope to cling on to.

True hope springs from a heart in which Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, dwells. Are his words the motivation, vision and essence of our lives today?

### **Prayer:**

Gracious Father, grant me the tenacity to not look for the "easiest" way of life, but that which is built and centred upon Your words. My heart and flesh may fail, but I pray that You will be the strength of my heart and my portion forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# *Notes*



## First Sunday in Lent - Reflection



# *Notes*



## Father and Children's Requests

### Text reference: Matthew 7:9-11

*Key verse: Matthew 7:11 (NIV) - "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

**Manna.** The daily bread which the murmuring Israel received in its wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land still awakens a sense of wondering awe in our hearts today. Manna was God's initiative. It expressed God's Father-heart to care for His people. Through manna, God's grace was revealed. Grace did not only signify God's generosity, which stood in contrast to Pharaoh's predatory policies that had wounded the Israelites in Egypt and made them fear scarcity. Grace also characterised God's redemption of Israel from Egyptian captivity. "Redeem" in the context of the Exodus deliverance is *go'e/*, the Hebrew term which portrays rescue from captivity by the rightful redeemer. In the Old Testament social regime, the beneficiary of such an action became indebted to the redeemer and related to the redeemer in a special way. Israel would relate to God as His son. God's subsequent testing of Israel makes sense when we see it in the light of His loving, gracious intention to remould the life of the community so that it was rooted in His good gifts, rather than on unreliable and deceptive human enterprises devoid of God.

God is still the unchanging Father who hears His children's cries and, in His mercy, responds graciously. In Jesus' teachings, he often described the right disposition in asking for gifts—that of a child before his father. Prayer is a Father-child affair, based on intimacy and tenderness. In such a relationship, children should not be afraid to keep asking, seeking or knocking. Children can also trust their Father to give good gifts and, as such, approach Him with expectancy and joy.

In John 6, Christ portrayed himself as the Bread of Life that nourishes and gives eternal life, surpassing manna. The life of Christ—through the work, guidance, testimony and intercession of the Spirit in believers—gives us hope, even in our trials and tribulations. The Holy Spirit is, thus, the best gift that we can ask for today. If God willingly gives us the Bread of Life when we ask, what more the bread of our daily sustenance?

### Prayer:

Heavenly Father, help me to remember that You do hear me when I call on You, and trust that You will respond in Your good time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# *Notes*



## Two Gates, Two Ways

### Text reference: Matthew 7:13-14

*Key verse: Matthew 7:14 (NIV) - "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

The balance beam, a women-only event in artistic gymnastics, is an exciting event to watch. The raised beam measures only 10cm in width, which ascribes great difficulty to the acrobatic sequences, dance elements, turns and poses performed on it. Furthermore, competing gymnasts must demonstrate grace and coordination in every move, as well as stability in every landing. Experienced gymnasts may make it look easy—but we can only imagine the many hours (and years) they have put into their routines, to say nothing of the falls and injuries sustained during training. Such dedication is a reasonable price to pay for those determined to be in the running for the position of world champion. A slightest wobble during a competition may take the gymnast out of medal contention—to say nothing about a fall off the beam—and thus render many years of hard work wasted. If you have never watched a beam event in the Olympics, you should; you could always do so on YouTube!

Walking on the narrow road that leads to life isn't quite like somersaulting down the length of the beam, but our focus, sacrifices and perseverance in completing the journey should not be unlike that of a gymnast in a stiff competition for the gold medal. If we are not on the narrow road, we are on the broad road; one which is easily trodden, self-indulgent, popular and inviting, but one which also leads to destruction. This does not mean that we are to work for our salvation. However, to profess Christ as Saviour and yet conform to the ways of the world—which do not require self-denial or result in spiritual maturity—is to reject the life Christ came to give. Those who conform to the ways of the world cannot conform to Christ's way. If no one can serve two masters (Matt 6:24), neither can anyone walk two roads.

### Prayer:

Merciful Father, I tremble at my tendency to choose shortcuts, easier roads and popular formulas for a more enjoyable and painless life. I struggle to hear You and keep up with Your ways. I am slow to break out of the ways of the world, which seem so secure and good, but only lead me to destruction. Forgive me, I pray. By Your Holy Spirit, make plain to me that the only road that leads to life is the narrow one alongside Jesus and other devoted Christians, so that I may give myself totally to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Faithful and Unfaithful Stewardship**

### **Text reference: Matthew 24:45-51**

*Key verse: Matthew 24:42 (NIV) - "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."*

Faithfulness is an admirable virtue. A faithful servant or worker is reliable, responsible and committed. He is not only thorough in the performance of his duties on good days or when he feels inspired to work; but also on the days when he is bored, resentful and tempted to slack. A faithful servant is loyal to his master. His allegiance does not change even when his master is not around; he does not grow complacent; neither does he misuse his given power or gratify his sinful desires. He is mindful and expectant that his master will return and, thus, does his best at his assignments and keeps ready so that his master would be delighted.

The parable in Matthew 24:45-51 is clearly for the instruction of those who are awaiting the Lord's return. It was addressed to the disciples who would eventually undertake the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. It still addresses us today. Whether we are pastors, Sunday school teachers, marketplace ministers, artists, scientists, businessmen or homemakers, the poise and readiness of the faithful servant in the parable should inspire us. In contrast, the defiance and end of the wicked servant should not only warn us, but also remind us of a humbling fact: faithfulness is ultimately not human, but divine. Faithfulness is an attribute of God. We become His faithful servants when we truly believe and rest in His unchanging faithfulness. Otherwise, we would find it pointless to be faithful. Furthermore, without the Spirit's enabling to avail ourselves willingly and passionately for God to do His work through us, we would rather pursue our own dreams and ambitions.

To be a faithful servant, therefore, requires us to know and abide in God's faithfulness, so that we may reflect His faithfulness in our Kingdom service as we eagerly await our Lord's return. This Lent season, as we deny ourselves and prepare ourselves for Easter joy, may we have fresh encounters of God's faithfulness and, so, aspire to be more faithful ourselves.

### **Prayer:**

As the hymn goes: "Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with Thee," O Father, strengthen us, help us in our weaknesses and make us steadfast by Your Holy Spirit that we may also not turn from what we have set out to do from the beginning—to love You and serve You faithfully as we anticipate Christ's return as Master and King. We surrender our wandering hearts to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Good and Bad Trees**

### **Text reference: Matthew 7:15-20**

*Key verse: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them." (Matthew 7:15-16)*

Reading through the New Testament helps us to relate to the early Christians in many ways. The Book of Galatians, for example, presents us an ancient yet contemporary scenario: Christians doubting the Gospel that they had received because of false prophets/teachers. The troublemakers in those days were the Apostle Paul's opponents. Their teachings were dangerous because they misled both Jews and Gentiles to deem that keeping the Mosaic Law was required to please God and for salvation, even though God had already set them free from slavery to the Law. Obviously, such teachings bore terrible fruits. The Galatian Church became a boiling cauldron of disaster waiting to happen. And in it were Christians—those in fearful despair over their failure to stick to the Law, as well as those who were proud of their religious achievements and the approval they had gained from others.

Such chaos still exists. Today, the troublemakers are often the world's cultural forces that turn Jesus into a mere good man and Easter into an occasion for chocolate eggs and bunnies. Having sneaked into our midst, these are now seducing even the most earnest of Christians into idolising worldly standards and Christian leaders into becoming replicas of worldly leaders—leaders who pursue influence and prestige by self-promotion, worldly relevance and compromise. As we seek to live and minister for Christ, a temptation that Christians commonly face is to find our significance through conforming to the world's cultural and societal standards, instead of finding significance in God. Christ has delivered us from slavery to the world; if we do not resist falling into this trap, we will become slaves to it again. The dimensions of our world will then shrink from God's boundless life through faith, back to the cramped conditions of people-pleasing and of controlling our own lives. Good or bad fruit? Today's passage (Matt 7:15-20) urges us to be both reflective and discerning as we learn to walk in God's ways. May we hearken unto the voice of the Holy Spirit that we might not be misguided.

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus Christ, silence the voices that drown out that of the Holy Spirit. Like a Shepherd, lead us that we might not go astray while seeking to know you and your ways. Grant us the wisdom to differentiate between those teachings that comply with your word and those which do not. In your mighty name we pray, Amen.

# *Notes*



## The Parable of the Two Sons

### Text reference: Matthew 21:28-32

*Key verse: "... Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'"* (Matt 21:31-32)

In Matthew 21, Jesus' first act upon his triumphal entry into Jerusalem was to cleanse the temple, which had been rendered useless as a place of sacrifice and prayer even while religious activities obviously continued (Matt 21:12-17). This event seems related to Jesus' curse on the barren fig tree (Matt 21:18-22). The Gospel of Mark takes care to express in a parallel account that it was not the season for figs (Mk 11:13). Should it then have been a surprise to Jesus that there were no figs on the tree? The fact is this: fig tree leaves must appear together with *taqsh*, the edible forerunner fruits of figs, which drop off when mature, giving way to the figs in season. If the leaves appear without *taqsh*, it is a sign that the tree would bear no fruit when the right time comes. In the Old Testament, the fig tree often represented Israel (e.g. Hos 9:10; Joel 1:7). The barren fig tree in Matthew 21:18-22 symbolised Israel's religious activity—showy but lacking substance and futile with regards to entering God's Kingdom on earth. Israel may have had the leaves of religious activity, but not the fruits of repentance and obedience.

In Matthew 21:23-27, the stage was set for a showdown as Jewish religious leaders questioned Jesus' authority. It was within this setting that Jesus told three parables—the Two Sons, the Tenants, and the Wedding Feast. The parables alluded to the leaders' rejection of Jesus as well as pronounced judgment on Israel for their rejection of Jesus despite their religiosity. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the second son, who claimed obedience but did not do the will of the father, was a portrait of Israel and her leaders. Consequently, Jesus warned that the unreligious sinners—prostitutes and tax collectors—could enter God's Kingdom ahead of them (Matt 21:31).

Let us reflect on our religious activities today. Serving in church, attending Bible courses and tithing are good things—but what is the motivation behind them? Is it a repentant heart that seeks to obey and worship God? Or is it a mere show of outward religiosity?

### Prayer:

Holy Spirit, as we check our hearts and reflect on our lives today, search us, know us and reveal any destructive ways in us so that we may repent and truly do the will of the Father. Fill us with the desire to know, love, worship and obey Jesus Christ as Lord. In his name we pray, Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Sheep and Goats**

### **Text reference: Matt 25:31-46**

*Key verse: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' (v. 44)*

I do not know how you feel whenever you come across this portion of Scripture. Does it appear to be comforting? Or troubling? Why so? I used to have the impression that this message was for those who did not know Christ. But is that so? The answers from both those on the left and on the right suggest they 'knew' the Lord. But it is also in these answers that their inner character, attitude and quality of their relationship with the Lord were laid bare.

The sheep's hallmark was humility coupled with a lifestyle of loving others. Their Christian conduct was so naturally expressed in their day-to-day living that they did not realise they had blessed those in need. The sheep bore fruits that were consistent with a saving faith. On the other hand, the goats were arrogant and unrepentant by challenging the Judge over his accusation.

This parable certainly leaves us with some discomfort. It reveals to us that we may live our lives as we wish, but one day all of us will need to give an account before the judgment throne. Lots of people who were very confident with their salvation may be caught by surprise.

May we keep our lives checked, for true devotion cannot be separated from the everyday life!

### **Over to You:**

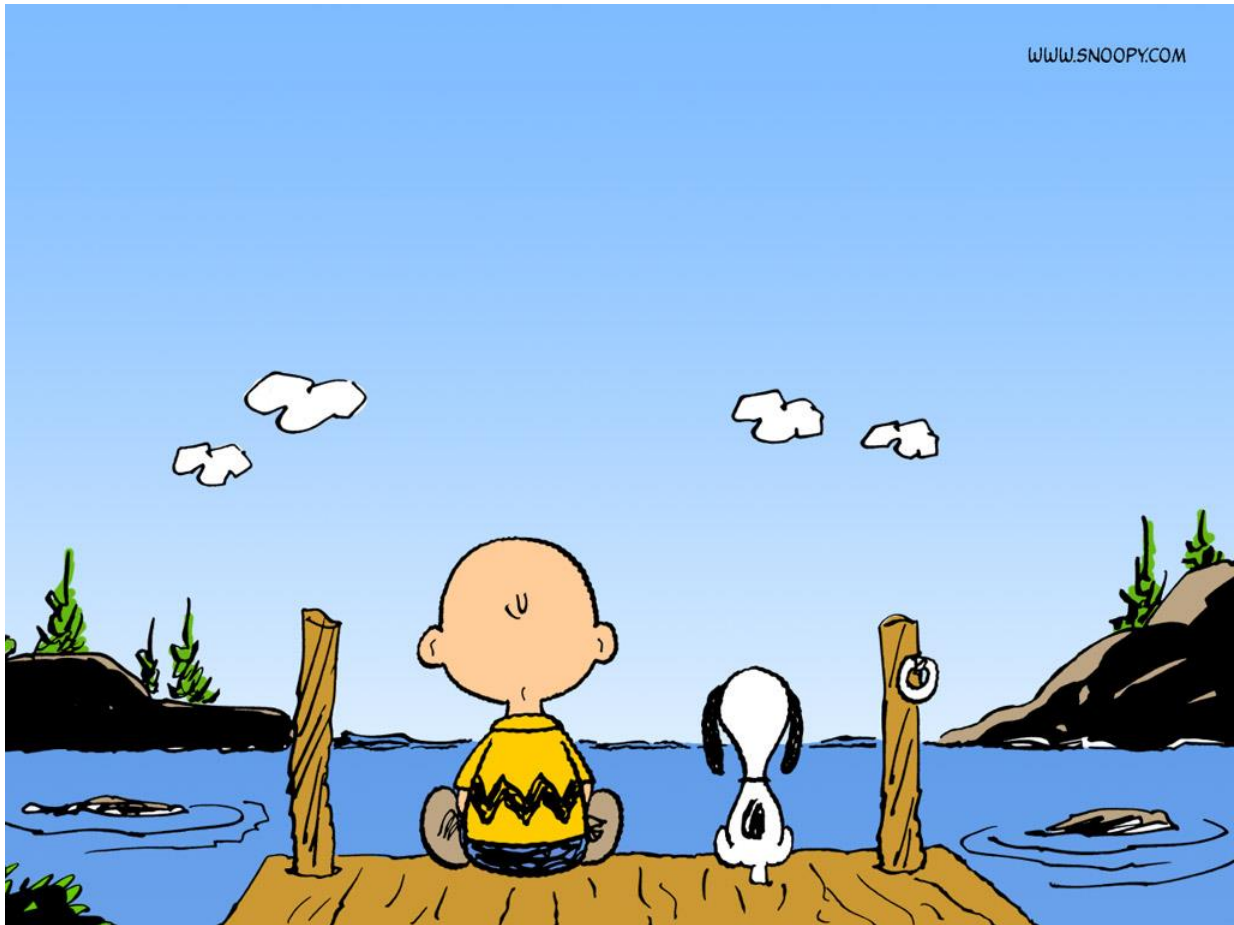
A self-seeking and self-serving lifestyle is not of the Kingdom. This Lent, let us seek to view the people around us (e.g. our aging parents, the lonely youth, and the not-so-popular in church or at the workplace) with a pair of inner eyes, so that we may see it is the Lord we are serving.

To him who will certainly return in glory one day!

# *Notes*



## Second Sunday in Lent - Reflection



# *Notes*



## Two Debtors

### Text Reference: Luke 7:41-50

*Key verses: How much do I love Jesus? What does it depend on?*

This story presents to us two opposite characters. On the one hand, we have Simon the Pharisee, someone who was highly-respected and enjoyed privileged social status. As a Pharisee, Simon not only kept the Law of Moses, but also saw to it that others followed it strictly. At the opposite end was a woman known as a sinner, one who had apparently violated the Law.

Seeing this situation, a mental condemnation naturally took place in Simon.

"Thinking to himself..."; "if only Jesus knows this woman is a sinner..."

However, the story describes that what Jesus knows about us is beside the point. Rather, what matters is our willingness to acknowledge the person we are deep within ourselves and the humility to come to Jesus just as we are.

Certainly Jesus knows us inside out. But how much are we willing to confront our true selves and seek his forgiveness? Simon, feeling truly righteous, failed to come to terms with himself. Thus, he did not experience the forgiveness of sin as the woman did and, in turn, showed little or no gratitude to Jesus. In contrast, this social outcast, the town's sinner, was pardoned by Jesus. As such, she just could not hide her gratitude and risked much by coming forward to show her appreciation to him. Can we then not say that the amount of God's love we experience is measured by how ready we are to acknowledge our unworthiness and to receive his forgiveness and acceptance?

### Over to you

Now put yourself in this woman's place and imagine Jesus looking at you and hear the words he is speaking concerning you:

*'... her sins, which are many, are forgiven - for she loved much...'* (v. 47)

Allow yourself to take as much time as you want to receive his loving and compassionate gaze. Speak to him about what comes to your mind. What would your act of gratitude be?

May we find ourselves loving Jesus more this Lent.

# *Notes*



## **Good Samaritan**

### **Text Reference: Luke 10:25-37**

*Key verses: "But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" (v. 29)*

All of us have the tendency to justify our actions in one way or the other in order to prove that we are right or in control. But it will be quite silly to do this before the most wise God; in comparison, our views, paradigms and thoughts often fall short, are too narrow or are possibly distorted.

The Good Samaritan's parable exposed the teacher's distorted view of his religion and of himself. Thinking so highly about himself and all that his religious acts had secured for him, he certainly failed miserably in his brilliantly composed test to catch Jesus. His question '...who is my neighbour?' (v. 29) implied that not everyone deserved his act of love. He may have thought that 'my neighbour' could not possibly include sinners or the Samaritans.

Truly, the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves has nothing to do with who deserves, or is worthy, of our love. *Rather*, what kind of neighbour do we want to be for others? When we see someone in need, are we moved to go beyond our obligations, prejudices or inconveniences to extend a helping hand? Modern living makes us hard-pressed for time. We are guilty of not seeing the needs around us. Or, when we *do* see, we may not stop and act. Or, in taking action, our act may not be out of love, but a calculated one with minimal demands. May God have mercy on us!

### **Over to You:**

Spend some time giving thanks to Jesus for his wisdom and piercing insight. In some way or other, we have tried to evade Christ's way of living, or rationalized our lack of neighbourliness. Let us admit our short-comings (excuses, head-knowledge, coloured-lenses, pride, self-righteousness, etc.) and pray for a life-giving experience in being a good neighbour to others.

This Lent, may we learn to simplify our lives and create space to welcome people with needs.

# *Notes*



## **Friend at Midnight**

### **Text Reference: Luke 11:5-8**

*Key verses: '...yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.' (v. 8)*

This parable illustrates the importance of persistence in prayer. However, this particular aspect of prayer may influence us to view God as One who is arrogant or delights in tarrying. He seems to require us to plead over and over again before granting us our request.

But when we take a closer look, this portion of the parable teaches us the practice of prayer. It illustrates our part instead of God's. In our prayers we may often babble and not mean much of what we pray. We may also forget about our request, or give up when answers to earnest repeated prayer are long-delayed, or seem to be not forthcoming—we often expect instant answers to our prayers.

Prayer is a relationship with the Living God. In the discipline of prayer, we learn to come before Him every moment of the day, which speaks of the close and intimate relationship between God and us. This also goes to show our dependence on Him, who is our constant sustenance.

We can be assured that our Heavenly Father will never give us bad gifts, e.g. a serpent or scorpion if we ask for a fish or an egg (vv. 11-12). He promised to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (v. 13). As we grow in our prayer life, our knowledge of God and His will also grow deeper.

May we learn to trust that God-with-us—Emmanuel—cares, loves and provides in His time.

### **Over to you:**

Perhaps we have given up praying over certain concerns of ours. This could be matters related to self, family, workplace or nation. Perhaps we have stopped expecting that God will act on our behalf. This Lent, may we recall some of these concerns and commit them again to Him with perseverance. And in the process, may we discover His will and deepen our relationship and trust in Him.

# *Notes*



## Rich Fool

### Text Reference: Luke 12:13-21

*Key verse: '...rich towards God' (v. 21). What does it mean to you?*

Money. Wealth. How much is enough? What level of bank balance is considered comfortable? What kind of living standard would make you feel blessed by God? Some say, "As long as I live within my means, my conscience will be clear."

But living within our means has taken a new meaning in an affluent society. With greater spending power, our standard of living has climbed higher and higher. The question is, when God blesses us, how are we a blessing to others (Gen 12:1-2)?

Having served in a Christian organization for years, I thank God for never allowing me to be short of cash. God took good care of me and provided for my needs. Even so, I felt insecure about one thing—the little means I had beyond retirement.

Due to the sudden demise of my dad, I felt an unusual insecurity and fear. I discovered that my financial security had been lost with him. God confronted and questioned me with a hard truth. Having seen His provision for the past 14 years, God asked if I would trust Him for the years ahead. Could I let Him lead me to even more unfamiliar ground than my previous experiences? I must say it was scary, but regarding money matters, it was also the most freeing encounter with my Lord.

### Over to you:

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise  
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
Thou and Thou only first in my heart  
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.*

Allow this beautiful hymn to sink into you. As you dwell in the presence of the All-sufficient God, speak to Him about your attachments, concerns or fears, and let Him minister to you.

# *Notes*



## **Barren Fig Tree**

### **Text Reference: Luke 13:6-9**

*Key verses: "...but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (vv. 3, 5)*

Luke 12:35 onwards contains a series of teachings concerning being prepared for the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus was urging the crowd to act justly and to do what was right, for the time of his coming was unknown to all. He then told the parable of the barren fig tree to further illustrate the need to repent. It was almost too late for the fig tree to avoid destruction, but *one final chance* was pleaded for and granted. The warning here to repent is strong; we need to seize the opportunity to repent while we can and bear the fruit of repentance.

What are your thoughts on how Malaysian Christians fare in general? Is our worship beyond lip service? Or are our hearts closer to other 'gods'? Have we strived hard to bring about change and hope to our land? Or are we guilty of abandoning the nation or joining the dirty game.

Goh Keat Peng in his book *A Time to Keep Silence, A Time to Speak* writes, '*It is very tough to play when the match officials cannot be questioned, the goal posts are movable, the playing field is never level.*'

Nonetheless, as Christians of this land, we cannot evade our responsibilities to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. We are not to profane our God's name by losing our integrity or walking with darkness. Rather, we are called to repent in areas where we have fallen short of His glory and once again hold His Kingdom values high up.

### **Over to You:**

What are the areas we need to repent as a Malaysian Christian? Could it be in selectively obeying the law of God? Or in being indifferent and inactive to the injustices around us? Or perhaps we have plundered our nation and exploited the workers? Or we may even be found guilty for turning to 'Baal' for hope and comfort? Repent now.

# *Notes*



## **Tower Builder**

### **Text Reference: Luke 14:28-30**

*Key verse: 'For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?' (v. 28)*

Herd mentality is not the way towards the Kingdom. Following Jesus comes with a price tag, the extent of which is not fully disclosed to us now. Anyone who desires to be his follower will need to sign a blank cheque and hand it over to him. The statement Jesus made to the crowd following him bore great weight: *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."* (v. 27)

Abandoned projects. Halted work. These are common in any township and certainly present an unpleasant scene when chanced upon. We may say, "What a waste! How could they have allowed this to happen? It should not have been started."

Am I into Kingdom-building? What will it cost me to be part of building this Kingdom? Time, talent or money? Inner resources, or matters pertaining to the heart, will, desire, and courage? Am I allowing God to shape me to be the vessel He wants me to be and take me to places He wants me to go?

### **Over to you:**

Am I prepared to pay the full cost? Our cost may take the form of living a life of integrity, honesty, purity and/or self-control. It could also be speaking up for the marginalized, or looking after the oppressed. Or it might be lifting up our tired hands and weary hearts to once again serve the people of God.

May we be found faithful in bearing our cross daily in our journey with Jesus.

# *Notes*



## Third Sunday in Lent - Reflection



# *Notes*



## Lost Sheep

### Text Reference: Luke 15:1-7

*Key verse: "This man receives sinners and eats with them." (v. 2)*

This parable was told following the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes over Jesus' apparent acceptance of tax collectors and sinners. The religious authorities found the non-religious and the immoral people in society a thorn in their flesh. They despised them and did not approve of others associating with them.

God loves sinners. He sent numerous prophets to woo Israel back to Himself, season after season, year after year. His heart poured out for them and He did not want them to perish. As long as they were repentant and returned, He forgave and welcomed them. Yes, the incarnate God came to save sinners. Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents and turns towards God. It is a wonderful occasion that is worth celebrating. Such joy cannot be contained within one's heart, but demands expression in celebration. Such is the joy and delight our God has over His people turning to him.

### Over to you:

We were all once sinners, but now are saved. Let us use this verse to thank and praise our Lord Jesus Christ for coming to seek and save us.

*'I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene,  
And wonder how He could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.  
How marvellous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be:  
How marvellous! How wonderful! Is my Saviour's love for me.'*

# *Notes*



## **Calming The Storm**

**Text Reference: Mark 4:35-41 (see also: Matthew 8:23-27, Luke 8:22-25)**

*Key verse: "they took him along, just as he was, in the boat." (Mark 4:36b)*

The disciples took Jesus along with them in the boat. He was present with them, just as he was, but the disciples were unaware of the power of his presence. So when the storm raged, they became fearful. But the storm and waves recognised and submitted to the authority of Jesus' presence and the fearful disciples became witnesses of the miraculous power of that presence.

The miracle that occurred 2000 years ago when Jesus was present, just as he was, can continue to take place in our lives today. When we take Jesus, just as he is, along with us in our 'boat', Jesus' power to do miracles is available to us.

### **Over to You:**

Have you encountered a terrifying experience where you felt very fearful? Did you take Jesus along with you? Were you aware of his presence and its power? Are you in need of a miracle today?

### **Prayer:**

Dear Lord, forgive me for the times when I was unaware of your presence and I attempted to confront the storm and rescue myself. Today, I acknowledge the power of your presence and that I need it to miraculously weather every storm of life. Help me daily to take you along, just as you are, and may I be aware that you are a very present help in times of need. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Humble Servant**

### **Text Reference: Luke 17:7-10**

*Key verse: "Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?" (Luke 17:9)*

According to the King James Version Dictionary, a servant is a person who waits and attends to the master. In the Jewish culture in the days of Jesus, the master was obliged to provide the Hebrew servant with the same food and drink that he himself consumed. But this did not make the servant equal to the master; rather the servant had voluntarily subjected himself to the master, to wait and attend to him.

Similarly, even as we submit ourselves voluntarily as servants of Jesus, he invites us to enjoy what he has but we are not equal to him. Therefore, when we do as Jesus instructs us, there is no expectation of thanks from him. Instead, we give him thanks for the privilege of being his servants and he commends us as we fulfil his will.

### **Over to You:**

As you serve Jesus, what are your expectations? Have you ever felt disappointed or discouraged because the 'thanks' did not commensurate with the work done? Today, will you surrender the disappointments and hurt to the Lord Jesus as you renew your voluntary submission to wait and attend to him?

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, please remove the disappointments and hurt that have arisen in my heart as I served you. I freely choose to submit myself to you as your servant. Enable me to serve you with a willing and thankful heart. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Lost Coin**

### **Text Reference: Luke 15:8-10**

*Key verse: "Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? (Luke 15:8b)"*

In Jesus' day, the coin was used by the Jews to pay their annual temple tax. A silver coin amounted to the average daily wage of a worker. Jesus frequently used coins in his stories. Sometimes the coins take on a meaning that goes beyond their function as money. For example, the expression "thirty pieces of silver" has evolved into a phrase that is used today for betrayal and greed. Silver is sometimes used figuratively in the Bible to represent God's words.

It is interesting to note that only one coin was lost, and that it was lost in the woman's own house and the steps that she took to recover it. What is the significance of that one coin? What about the steps she took before she recovered it? What did it cost her to take those steps?

### **Over to You:**

As you read and reflect, what is God drawing your attention to? Is there a silver coin that is lost in your life? What is it going to take to recover that "lost coin"? How far are you willing to go to recover it? Acknowledge to God your concerns and hesitations. Allow God to take you on the search of this lost coin.

### **Prayer:**

God, thank you for showing me what is lost in my life and that it can be recovered. Clear away the obstacles that hinder its recovery. Be the lamp that will light the path to recover it. Grant me courage, strength and perseverance till it is found so that I may rejoice with You. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Pharisee and The Tax Collector**

### **Text Reference: Luke 18:9-14**

*Key verse: "I tell you that this man [tax collector], rather than the other [Pharisee], went home justified before God." (Luke 18:14a)*

This is a story about two men who approached the presence of God with very different attitudes. The Pharisee focused on presenting his 'good works' while the tax collector spoke honestly from his heart. The Pharisee compared himself to the tax collector and claimed himself righteous whereas the tax collector, with self-awareness, acknowledged himself a sinner. Jesus declared that it was the sinner, and not the 'righteous Pharisee', who left the presence of God justified.

Perhaps the Pharisee in this parable had become so deceived by pride in his achievements that he could unashamedly boast of his deeds and declare himself righteous before the Almighty God. Yet, looking deeper, the striving to do 'good works' and competing for righteousness could stem from inner insecurity, anxiety and vulnerability.

### **Over to You:**

Who do you identify with—the sinner or the Pharisee? Feeling insecure or anxious or vulnerable can move us closer to God, like the sinner in this story. However, it can also lead us further away from God as we attempt to make ourselves righteous with more 'good works' and striving in competitiveness. As you reflect on this, what is God inviting you to do?

### **Prayer:**

God, I thank you that You understand my insecurity, anxiety and vulnerability. Your desire is to help me so that I do not drift away from You into competitiveness and self-righteousness. Today, I choose to submit to Your desire and trust that You will lead me closer to You whenever I feel insecure or anxious or vulnerable. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Rich Man and Lazarus**

### **Text Reference: Luke 16:19-31**

*Key verse: "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime, you received your good things while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.'" (Luke 16:29)*

As human beings, we tend to focus on and move towards tangible things. Although we know the Word of God teaches us to focus on laying up our treasures in heaven, we struggle to make this a reality in our lives. Perhaps it is because, in human terms, God does not seem tangible. So, hearing God and knowing His heart becomes an art that needs to be intentionally developed. Perhaps it is also because those treasures in heaven are usually intangible and we struggle to focus on what is not tangibly present with us.

In this parable, we see the final outcome of that choice between the intangible and tangible. The rich man chose the tangible joys of life and ended up in eternal agony; in contrast, Lazarus gained heavenly treasure and eternal comfort.

### **Over to You:**

Pause now and examine your life. Where have you been laying up your treasures? Where is God leading you to make adjustments in your life? Would you choose today to re-align your life back to His ways and purposes?

### **Prayer:**

Father God, I realize that I have been focusing on tangibles that will one day decay and die. But today, I am choosing to invest my life and time in Your Kingdom treasures. Show me an area of my life where I can re-align back to Your Kingdom ways and purposes. Grant me what I need to do it accordingly. Amen.

# *Notes*



## Fourth Sunday in Lent - Reflection

*Rejoice*

# *Notes*



## **The Unjust Judge**

### **Text Reference: Luke 18:1-8**

*Key verse: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8b)*

The widow was so persistent that the judge relented and granted her plea. Was it faith that enabled her to persevere till her plea was granted? If so, what or who was that faith anchored on?

I quote an insight a friend of mine received in prayer: "Faith is based on My (God's) words and promises, but trust is based on relationship." In the midst of turmoil and in times of desperation, it is trust that enables us to naturally take the path of faith. Trust is not automatic, but it is built, layer upon layer. Trust is relational; it is built on each encounter of God, where we grow in our awareness of His nature and of ourselves.

### **Over to You:**

As Jesus' disciple, you can choose faith and act on God's words and promises. But is your heart able to trust that God will grant you what you need and meet you where you are? The good news is that God desires to establish a trust relationship with you, so that you can enjoy that level of trust which enables you to respond spontaneously in faith to His call: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be open."

### **Prayer:**

Dear God, I confess that I lack the faith that responds naturally to Your call and promises. I ask that You will establish it in me, even as You build trust in me with each encounter of You. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Shrewd Steward**

### **Text Reference: Luke 16:1-8**

*Key verse: "I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses." (Luke 16:4)*

A steward is one who has been entrusted with something. It comes with responsibility and, perhaps, even power and status, depending on what has been entrusted. In this story, the steward was a manager; so, he must have enjoyed both power and status. But one day, he realized that it would be removed from him. What did he do? He set forth a plan to ensure that he continued to enjoy power and status even though he was no longer a steward.

What is the biblical perspective of stewardship? God has full ownership of everything and He chooses His stewards. As God's steward, we sometimes also enjoy power and status, but what is our response when stewardship is removed? Do we instinctively set forth a plan to ensure that we do not lose stewardship and its perks?

### **Over to You:**

Was there a time in your life when you found it difficult to let go of power and status when the season of stewardship had expired? What made it difficult to let go?

### **Prayer:**

Almighty God, today I acknowledge that You have full ownership of everything, including my life. Help me to be a good steward in all that You have entrusted to me without being attached to the power and status that come with it. When each season of stewardship is over, enable me to freely release it back to You and be contented in my true identity as Your beloved. Amen.

# *Notes*

## The Prodigal Son

### Text Reference: Luke 15:11-32

*Key verse: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:19a, 21b)*

This is a beautiful story of redemption and hope and a familiar story mentioned frequently in sermons. Seduced by the voices of the world and its promises, the prodigal son left home for a distant land. Finally, when confronted with the reality of a world incapable of fulfilling the promises of belonging, safety and unconditional love, the prodigal returns with these words to his father: "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." In these very words, we see the ambiguity of the prodigal's return; he finally realized his sonship, but at the same time, he was accepting the status of a servant. Perhaps it was because he was not yet able to receive the immense love of a forgiving father, even though he had already turned around and set himself on his homecoming path. As Henri Nouwen once said, "Home is where we hear and receive, at the very centre of our being, that unconditional voice of love that says to us: 'you are my beloved.'"

### Over to You:

"One of the greatest challenges of the spiritual life is to receive God's forgiveness. So we resist God's invitation of sonship and choose to cling on to being a servant" (Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*). Have you heard that voice of love but felt unworthy? Today, God invites you to come Home and be His beloved child.

### Prayer:

Father God, I confess that I have been unable to fully receive Your gift of sonship. But today, I choose to say "yes". I ask that You will take my hand as I step onto my homecoming path.

# *Notes*



## **The Gerasene (Gadarene) Demoniac**

**Text Reference: Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39**

*Key Verse: Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.*

There are occasionally times when things are beyond our control, especially when we don't understand them. Our anxiety and fear of these situations increase with the degree of helplessness we feel.

A man who could not be controlled, even after being bound with chains, would surely have been a frightful thing, yet the people feared what Jesus had done even more. Jesus had just demonstrated his authority over not just a spirit, but a "legion" of spirits (the Roman military unit of a legion consisted of 6000 men). Whether they feared someone they did not understand or the material repercussions of losing livestock, their response to Jesus' miracle was one of fear and rejection, whereas the one who had experienced him personally wanted to follow him.

### **Over to you:**

When you encounter God or witness Him at work, what is your response? Is it one of fear and rejection because of your concern for earthly things? Or is it a spontaneous desire to follow Him and to tell everyone of what He has done for you?

### **Prayer:**

Father, You are a God who changes lives. Help us to respond to Your every working in and around us with gratitude, awe, and devotion. May Your impact on our lives be such that all else fades into the background as You take centre stage in our lives, time and time again. In the name of the one who saves, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Raising Jairus' Daughter**

**Text Reference: Mark 5:21-43; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56**

*Key Verse: Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."*

Modern medicine has the capacity to heal so many ailments—diagnoses and treatments carry with them the hope of healing and restoration, provided one still lives. However, once death is pronounced, all hope is lost, medically speaking.

Regardless of whether Matthew's account of this miracle is more accurate than Mark's or Luke's ("my daughter has just died" as opposed to "my little daughter is dying"), one thing is clear: Jesus was claiming to do the impossible. In fact, in allowing the haemorrhaging woman to interrupt him, his lack of urgency proved his point—that his authority was over death, and that nothing was impossible for him. All Jairus had to do was believe. In dying upon the cross, Jesus did the impossible and made sinful humanity sinless in God's sight, drawing us close to the Holy One—all we have to do is believe.

### **Over to you:**

Are there times when God clearly says something, but you just can't believe it? His assurance of forgiveness and salvation? His unconditional love for you? His call to use you in His Kingdom?

### **Prayer:**

LORD, there are so many times when we know that we should believe that nothing is impossible for You, but our hearts betray our heads. At these times, LORD, our prayer is, "I believe; help my unbelief!" May we never attribute to You anything that is less than absolute omnipotence, especially in our lives. In the most powerful name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Haemorrhaging Woman**

**Text Reference: Mark 5:21-43; Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56**

*Key Verse: When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."*

Twelve years of suffering, spending all that she had on many doctors, only to get worse instead of better. One would think that the woman would have given up hope by then. Yet when she heard of Jesus, she knew that he could heal her. It wasn't a matter of how she would be healed, but she knew it was within his ability. How many of us find ourselves in situations that seem to be never ending—situations where everything points towards it just getting worse? The question about God's intervention in healing, restoration, and rescuing is never about His ability to do so; rather, it's about the how, the when, and the simple question of whether it is His will or not.

### **Over to you:**

Have you lost faith that God is able? Come back to the simple truth—God is always able. And as long as He is able, there is always hope for what is good and right and true.

### **Prayer:**

Father, nothing is too hard for You. Forgive us when we desire what is contrary to Your will and help us to give those things up. But when we desire for what is according to Your will—Your just and perfect will—give us the never ending hope to persevere in faith, knowing that Your will and timing are perfect. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Fifth Sunday in Lent - Reflection**



# Loved into Forgiveness

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# *Notes*



## **The Feeding of the Five Thousand**

**Text Reference: Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-15**

*Key Verse: Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.*

For many of us, life presents us with many wants and desires—often driven by greed for extravagance. Yet there are times when we find ourselves in genuine need, be it physically, emotionally, and so on. We long for those perfectly legitimate needs to be filled, yet often go about doing so the wrong way.

The crowds that followed Jesus needed nourishment—the disciples knew it, and Jesus knew it. The difference was how they expected to fill that need. The multiplication of food was not merely a sign pointing to Christ as Creator, but also met a practical need in the form of providence. The people had a need, and Jesus met that to their satisfaction.

### **Over to you:**

List down your needs, in as great detail as possible. Look at each item, and ask yourself if it is a genuine need, or a desire for more. If it is simply a desire, surrender that desire to God who, in His infinite wisdom, gives what is good for His children. If it is a genuine need, surrender it to Him, knowing that He is a God who lovingly watches over and provides for you, regardless how impossible it may seem.

### **Prayer:**

God of all Creation, You know us intimately. You know our needs before we do. Forgive us, LORD, when we lack faith in Your providence and take matters into our own hands. Grant us patience, trust, and the simple openness to Your methods of providence in Your time. In Jesus Christ's loving name we pray. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Jesus Walks on Water**

**Text Reference: Matthew 14:22-34; Mark 6:45-53; John 6:15-21**

*Key Verse: "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."*

One would find that many of Jesus' miracles are tied to faith in his ability to perform them. The "if Jesus says/does so, then it will happen" theme precedes many healings, exorcisms, and so on. This faith has a childlike quality, much akin to how children believe that because their parents say something, it must come to pass.

In a move that belies his impulsiveness, Peter's climbing out of the boat and walking on water towards Jesus displays this same kind of faith. He was distracted, however, by the wind, and his fear came hand-in-hand with doubt. The question is, who was he doubting? One would expect his doubt to be of himself. After all, "I can't do this," would have been a reasonable panicky sentiment of a man being buffeted by winds while walking on water. Yet it was not faith in his own ability that allowed him to be able to walk on water in the first place.

### **Over to you:**

Are there times when God has clearly said something and you doubted? You may tell yourself that you may be doubting many things that are "okay to doubt", such as other people, circumstances, or even yourself. But at the heart of all that, is it really God that you're doubting?

### **Prayer:**

Faithful God, there is no one and nothing on earth that we can trust more than You. Give us faith that is so well-rooted in You that nothing distracts us, or causes us to fear and to doubt in Your nature and Your promises. In the most faithful name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Canaanite Woman's Daughter**

**Text Reference: Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30**

*Key Verse: "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.*

The message from this miracle applies to most of us—a primarily Gentile audience. Jesus' mission at that particular time was to the Jews. Yet, the Gentile woman's faith in him overrode any distinctions there may have been, as in the story of the Roman centurion's faith (Matt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10). The grace of God spills over to all, regardless of their roots or background. Faith in Him is the only distinction that He recognizes.

### **Over to you:**

Thank the LORD for the opportunity of knowing Him—not as a foreign God of the Jews, as Gentiles did before Christ—but as our personal God, our universal Father.

### **Prayer:**

God of all nations, thank You for the saving act of Jesus Christ, who died upon the cross for the sins of the whole world. Thank You that the grace to know You is extended beyond all barriers, culminating only in the simple act of faith in Christ. We pray in the name of the one who made this possible, Jesus Christ. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Roman Centurion's Servant**

### **Text Reference: Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10**

*Key Verse: For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

There are few things as absolute as the chain of command in an army. The centurion's analogy of his authority over his soldiers displayed the extent of the faith he had in Jesus. His understanding of Jesus and his healings and miracles was not one of trickery, or the cajoling of the elements, or even magic or sorcery. The centurion understood Jesus as having absolute authority over the health of a person, at least in the case of his servant, and that was tantamount to attributing divinity to Jesus. In fact, the centurion's faith was such that he understood and believed these things without even meeting Jesus himself.

### **Over to you:**

Do you understand God as having absolute authority, not only over your life, but the events surrounding your life? Are there times when you compartmentalize God and recognize His authority only in certain areas?

### **Prayer:**

Sovereign God, forgive us when we limit You in our minds and hearts. Give us the faith of the centurion to recognize that You *do* have authority over all Creation, and in trusting Your good and perfect will, we can rest assured that our lives are never out of Your control. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **The Healing of Bartimaeus**

### **Text Reference: Mark 10:46-52**

*Key Verse: Mark 10:48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

The story of the healing of Bartimaeus is rife with themes that run throughout the Gospels—persistence, faith, healing, etc.—but the act of healing a blind man just before Jesus enters Jerusalem suggests a larger revelation, one not limited to a single man. Jesus opened the eyes of his disciples, the nation of Israel, and eventually, the entire world to his Messiahship.

The saving act of Christ always involves the giving of sight—there is a shifting of worldviews, a realignment of perspective, and for most of us, a yanking away of the covers to reveal the ugliness of our sin. Yet our eyes are also opened to a world bathed in beauty created by God, to the sustaining providence of a God who cares.

### **Over to you:**

Blink away those cobwebs and look carefully. Stare at the mirror, scrutinize the busyness of the world, examine your relationship with your Creator. Are there things about the world, yourself, and God that you've been shutting your eyes to? Shutting our eyes to the truth does not make it any less true. See things for what they are, and bring them before God in confession, surrender, and praise.

### **Prayer:**

We were once blind, but now we see, and only by Your grace. Help us to remember, God, that You called us out of darkness into Your marvellous light. Forbid us from returning to that darkness; pull us forward into freedom and sanctification, found only in Christ. In Jesus' most precious name we pray. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Saving the Lost**

### **Text Reference: Luke 19:1-10**

*Key Verse: Luke 19:5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."*

Being looked down upon, being discriminated against, being oppressed through social injustice, being bound in fear; these things kill the soul. God created us for *shalom*, His peace that also means well-being and flourishing.

Zacchaeus was looked down upon, not just because he was short, but also because he was seen to collaborate with the hated Roman government as a chief tax collector. His own people saw him as a traitor and a sinner. But Zacchaeus was also one of God's people and he had a heart for God. Just as God does not look at appearances, but at the heart, Jesus looked at Zacchaeus' heart and held out a hand of friendship to him.

When we know that God cares for us and loves us, it heals our souls and brings God's *shalom* into our hearts. And when this happens, we can only respond with generosity towards God. That generosity finds its way into how we treat our brothers and sisters in the faith, into how we extend a hand of friendship to those who are outside our circle of friends and acquaintances, and into how we care for those whom others have disregarded.

This is just what Jesus came to do—to extend the hand of God's grace and mercy to all of us. He had declared this as he began his public ministry (Lk 4:18-19) and now, as he moved towards Jerusalem and his final week, he again, reached out to one who was lost. Again, as he welcomed Zacchaeus into the Kingdom of God, Jesus reiterated the fact that he had come to seek out and to save the lost.

### **Over to You:**

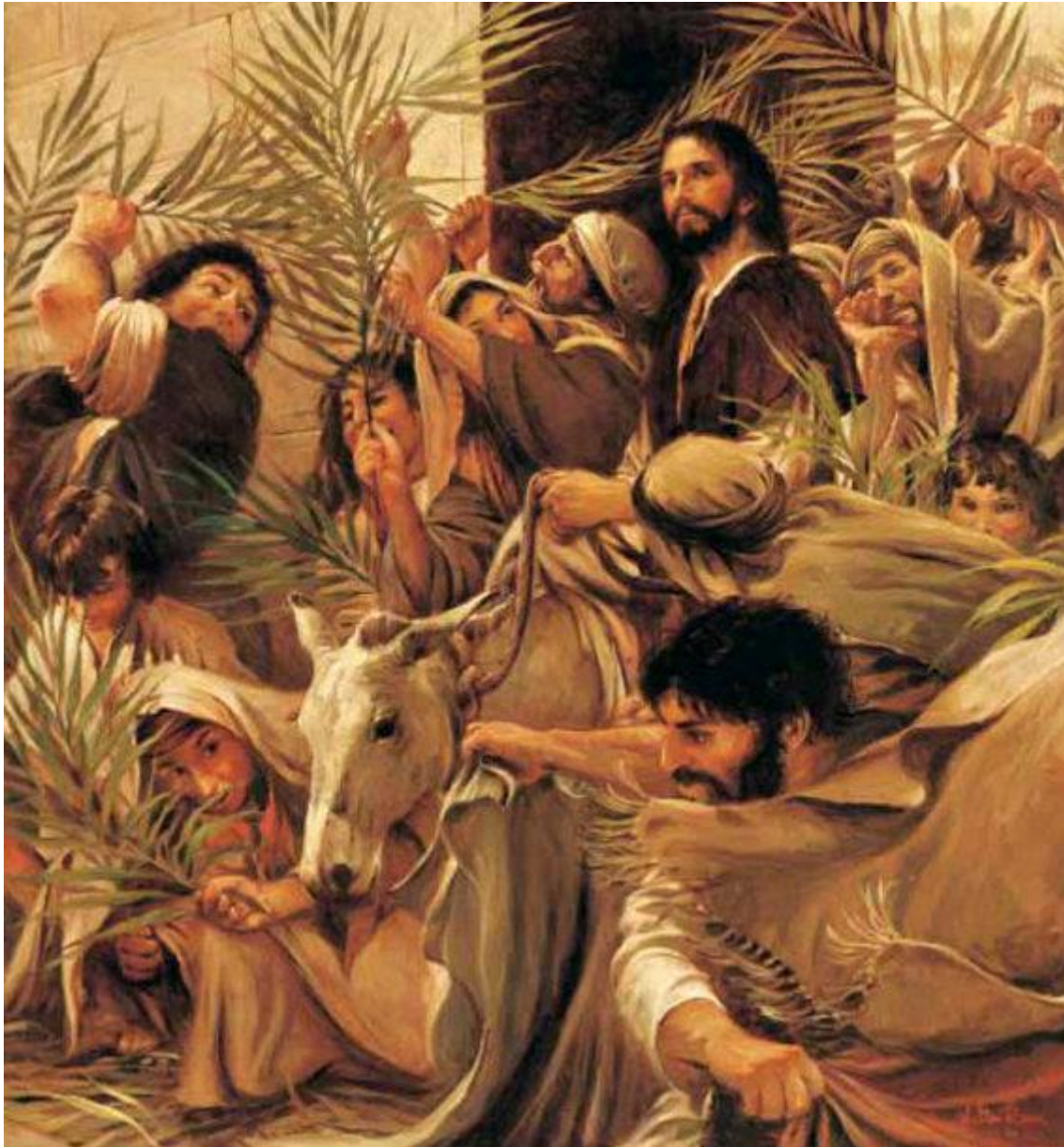
- Was there a time when you felt cut off, and your soul was dry and withered? Bring that time to Jesus and allow him to extend his hand of grace to you.
- Do you know of someone who has been looked down upon and disregarded? Bring that person in prayer to the Lord Jesus and ask him to show you how to extend his hand of grace to the person.

### **Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, thank You for extending Your hand of grace and mercy to me. Thank You for the peace that You give. Please help me to extend the same grace I have received to those who need it. Amen.

## Triumphal Entry - Reflection

**Text Reference: Matthew 21:1-9**



# *Notes*



## **Monday of Holy Week – Affirmed by God**

### **Text Reference: Matthew 21:1-9**

Jesus rode into Jerusalem cheered on by the crowd. It is always nice to receive affirmations, accolades and adulation from other people.

As little children, we felt grown up when Mum or Dad praised us for helping with the chores. As students, we feel affirmed when we hear the words, “Well done!” from our teacher. A good appraisal from the boss makes us feel valued. We can list so many other examples. Yet praises and affirmations from people are temporary. They are given today and gone tomorrow as further demands are made on us.

Jesus knew how transient the praises he heard that day were. He knew that the cheering crowd would turn into a blood-thirsty mob when they found out he did not fit their idea of a Messiah. While Jesus heard the cheers, he did not let them define his self-worth. Jesus’ self-worth was found in the loving affirmation of his Abba, “You are my Beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased,” said twice publicly (Mk 1:9; 9:7). This affirmation came not because Jesus had done anything, but because he was Abba’s Son and Abba loved him.

### **Over to you:**

- What are some affirmations you have received that gave you a sense of worth? From whom did they come and how long did you feel affirmed?
- Read Mark 1:9-11 and hear God’s affirmation of you as His beloved child with whom He is pleased because He created you and loves you.

### **Prayer:**

Dear Father, thank You for Your love and affirmation for me. Help me to live with courage and in the security of Your love. Amen.

# *Notes*



**Tuesday of Holy Week – Love God, Love Others****Text Reference: Matthew 22:34-40**

All of the Law in the Old Testament, which God gave to His people to help them live in His ways, are summed up in the two greatest commandments, “Love God with your whole being. Love neighbour as you would love yourself”. That is how God created us: to love and be loved. We give and receive love in different ways: between parent and child, between spouses, among siblings, among friends and other family members. But there are times when we find ourselves failing to love others. There are times when we fail to love God. And we feel guilty. More often than not we find it difficult to love because the “love tank” in our hearts is empty. We need it filled. The only way it can be filled adequately is by God Himself.

It is only as we open ourselves to being loved by God that we can love Him in return. It is only when we have experienced God’s unconditional love that we are able to offer the same love to others. John, the Apostle, understood this and therefore he wrote, “We love because he first loved us.” (1 Jn 4:19) Jesus was able to love God and others because he first received God’s love and affirmation. The disciples learnt to love others after they had received love from Jesus (Jn 13:1).

The ultimate expression of love is the cross. Jesus was willing to die on the cross to bring us back to God the Father, even when we did not know Him, when we were sinners and hostile to Him. This Holy Week, let us hear the invitation to come to the foot of the cross, the place of God’s unconditional, ultimate love for humanity.

**Over to you:**

Take time to sit with the Lord and take in his love. Make some space to be quiet at some point in the day. Become aware of God’s presence with you. As you do, bring to mind the cross and open yourself to God’s love that has no strings attached to it. Receive as much of it as you can.

Where do find it hard to love? Ask the Lord to teach you how to love. In the mean time, as you learn to love, also ask the Lord to love others through you.

**Prayer:**

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your unconditional love for me. Thank you for the gift of life and love that you made possible on the cross. As I receive that love, help me also to love you and love others in return. Amen.

# *Notes*



**Wednesday of Holy Week – A Beautiful Thing****Text Reference: Matthew 26:6-13**

When we have been shown or have received unconditional love, especially at a deep point of need, the natural response is one of gratitude and appreciation. The woman who came to Jesus must have been so deeply touched by the love Jesus showed her that she was willing to spend the equivalent of a labourer's annual wages to show that gratitude. The expression of a deeply grateful heart can be wildly extravagant.

At the same time, such extravagance can cause others around to be embarrassed or outraged, as the disciples were. They raised a valid concern for ministering to the poor with the money that was used for the ointment. Yet Jesus understood the woman's heart and accepted that gift of extravagant anointing from her. The poor are always close to God's heart and there will always be opportunities to minister to them. An expression of gratitude to the Lord that comes from our very deepest self will always be welcomed and received by the Lord.

**Over to you:**

Take time to sit with the Lord in quietness. Recall where and when you have received love from the Lord. What was your expression of gratitude in response to the love shown to you? Take time to express your gratitude to the Lord in whichever way you are comfortable.

**Prayer:**

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your extravagant love for me. Guide me that I may know you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Maundy Thursday**

### **Text Reference: Luke 22:14-20**

*"The body of Christ, given for you; the blood of Christ, shed for you."*

These are the words we hear each time the bread and the cup is given at Holy Communion. They echo Jesus' words spoken to his disciples at the final meal he had with them.

**"Do this, in remembrance of me."**

Each time we come to the Lord's Table for Holy Communion, we remember him, we remember his life, death and resurrection, and we remember that he will one day come again. More than that, when we come to the Table, we come with open hands, ready to receive God's grace anew in the celebration of this Sacrament. We come in wonder at the lengths to which God will go so that we are not lost forever. We come in humility acknowledging our sin and our helplessness to save ourselves. We come with gratitude that our Lord Jesus would love us so much as to give his life for our sakes.

We also come to the Table together with our brothers and sisters. Holy Communion is never celebrated alone. It is communal. We come with the awareness that together, we are the body of Christ; without each other, the church would not be true to what God has created her to be. As we come together, we are mindful of Jesus' commandment to his disciples and to us, "... love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34-35 ESV)

This love that we extend to one another, we first received from the Lord himself. Then as we rise from the Table, we go forth to further extend that love to the world that God loves and sent His Son to save.

### **Over to you:**

- What does Holy Communion mean to you?
- When you next attend a Holy Communion service, be aware of those who come to the Lord's Table with you. They are the brothers and sisters whom Jesus commanded us to love. How can you extend love to them?

### **Prayer:**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Good Friday**

### **Text Reference: Luke 23:44-49**

Death is the great leveller. Young or old, rich or poor, famous or unknown, whatever our condition, as long as we are human, our lives will come to an end one day. When Nelson Mandela died in December 2013, the world expressed sadness and condolences poured in from all over the world. He had left an impression on his country and had influence on others. When Jesus died, only a small number of people witnessed it—those who were gathered on the hill called Skull that Friday afternoon more than 2,000 years ago. But that death changed the world for all time.

Jesus died as he had lived, in complete trust and confidence in his Father. Only Jesus knew what lay beyond death for him (Mk 14:28, Heb 12:2). Jesus knew that his death was to bring reconciliation between God and the world, and he went to the cross in obedience to the will of the Father. And so it was, when he died, the curtain in the Temple that had protected the people from God's consuming, holy presence was ripped right down the middle. The intimate fellowship with God that God had intended for human beings, which Adam enjoyed at the beginning and which sin destroyed, was now once again available to all who would accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

### **Over to you:**

Take time to read the account of Jesus' death on the cross slowly, putting yourself at the foot of the cross. Take in the cross as the place where God showed His love most fully, where Jesus gave his life for us sinners. Then, take time to express your feelings to the Lord for what he has done.

### **Prayer:**

Dear Lord Jesus, your death has rescued me from the bondage of sin and brought me back to God. Thank you for your love and your sacrifice for me. Amen.

# *Notes*



## **Holy Saturday**

### **Text Reference: Luke 23:50-56**

Waiting evokes different feelings in each of us. For some, waiting can be a time of respite, a time to catch one's breath in the hustle and bustle of the day. For others, it may be a time of boredom, an enforced down time before the next thing can happen or be done. For yet others, waiting may be an excruciating time, especially when we are desperately wanting to do something but cannot.

The women who followed Jesus had to wait for the Sabbath to be over before they could dress Jesus' body properly for burial. They had witnessed his pain and death. They had watched while Joseph of Arimathea and others took Jesus' body, wrapped it in linen cloths and laid it in a tomb. But because Sabbath was almost upon them, they could not prepare the body properly. So it was that they went home, prepared the spices and ointments, and then rested in observance of Sabbath.

Sabbath was ordained by God for rest. A day set apart, different from the other six days of toiling and earning a living. God had set the example in creation, working for six days and resting on the seventh. Sabbath also recalled the days of slavery in Egypt when they had no rest from toil. Sabbath was a day in which to learn that the running of the world does not depend on our toil. A day to learn that God is the one who is in control. A day to learn to entrust our lives to God.

The women, ingrained with the practice of Sabbath, rested even if it may have been hard for them to do so. And in that one day of waiting, God was at work. When the Sabbath was over, they would be greeted with something they never imagined could or would happen when they resumed what they had in mind to do. They began Sabbath with death; they would begin the new week with a risen Messiah and new life!

### **Over to you:**

How do you take to waiting? Do you get impatient? Do you look for other things to do? Do you sit and relax, knowing that waiting is necessary?

Our bodies are created for rhythms of work and rest. Rest can mean doing something totally different from what you have been doing for six days of the week. What are some things that bring life to you? Are you able to do them regularly? Find time to do these things.

### **Prayer:**

God our Father, You gave us the Sabbath so that we may be renewed and refreshed. Forgive me when I work through the day of rest because of my compulsions. Teach me to rest in You, and trust that all will be well because I am in Your hands. Amen.

# *Notes*



## Easter Sunday - Reflection



# *Notes*



## *Contributors*



**Grace Moo** worships at Trinity Methodist Church Penang. Having just graduated with an MA in Divinity from the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, she serves in Christian music ministries and aspires to write for the edification of the Malaysian Church.

**Kong Lee Ang** is a firm believer of the contemplative life and the many treasures that we'll discover if we stop, look around, choose to engage and not rush through life. She shares with us her contemplation of Jesus' teachings and parables, hoping that these familiar passages will ring anew this Lent.

**Rev. Shearn Sya** has been in the pastoral ministry for two years, following his MDiv from Seminari Theoloji Malaysia. He currently pastors Christ Methodist Church, Ampang, and wishes for the Scriptures to be ever-present in study and application in the lives of all who profess to follow Christ.

**Chua Lay Har** stumbled upon the contemplative journey in 2011 when she completed "The Journey" under TRAC and since then, there has been no looking back. Blessed with a strong and logical mind, God needed to transform and renew her mind so that it becomes aligned to the purposes and destiny of God. As such, God has moved her from investing her life and time in engineering and financial services to children and the next generation. Contemplative spirituality is today an integral part of her being and the numerous beautiful encounters with God that it had offered, has placed her on an exciting and yet reflective journey with her Maker.