

lent

Meditations 2021

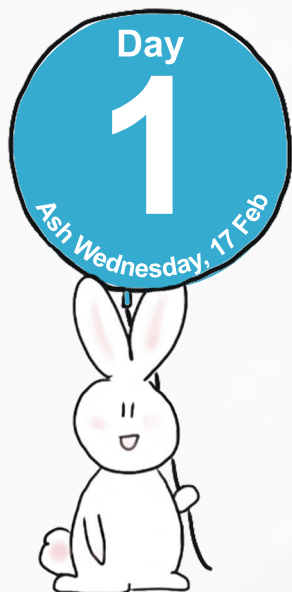


*We enter into this season of Lent after a year of uncertainty and upheaval.
The winds of change and turmoil may continue to rage around us.
We may be swamped with responsibilities and concerns. But in all things,
let us put our faith in Jesus, who commands even the winds and the water.
Let us keep our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith.
Let us abide in His presence and tune in to His gentle whisper, so that
we may reflect His light in the darkness around us. And may we always be
thankful for the hope we have in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.*

TRAC Board of Worship and Music

Lent 2021





Why Am I Doing This? What Is My Motive?

Bible Reading: Isaiah 58:1-12

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6)

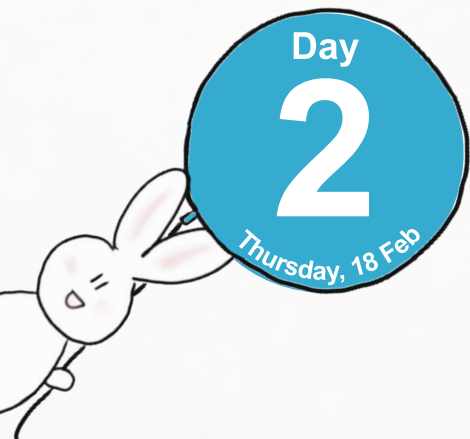
We find God strongly rebuking Israel's supposed acts of piousness. He challenges the disconnect between their claimed faith in worshipping Him and their actions. As James 2:17 says, "... *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*"

Faith in God is not a Sunday activity, but a whole new way of thinking—a paradigm shift. We are not forgiven sinners, but new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), set aside by God for His holy purpose—saints. Through Jesus' resurrection, God restored to us the LIFE (John 10:10b) that Adam and Eve lost. This life of abiding in Christ reflects Christ's character and actions in and through our lives. Others will see and experience His love through our actions. This new life has impact on our entire being, not just the spiritual aspect, but our social, mental and physical aspects as well.



Why am I doing what I am doing? Do I fast and pray out of obligation or selfish gain? Am I doing it to arm-twist God to answer my prayers? Can it withstand God's scrutiny?

Lord, I repent of my selfish motives; reveal all my false pretences. Help me live out my faith with real actions of love, that others may see Jesus and glorify Him. Amen.



The Call To Corporate Confession And Repentance

Bible Reading: Daniel 9:1-14

*"We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws."
(Daniel 9:5b)*

Just as there is a need for personal confession and repentance, the passage today reveals the importance of corporate confession and repentance. Even though Daniel himself was not guilty of the sins before God, he identified with the sins of Israel that had caused the situation he and the rest of the exiles were in.

The sins of the leaders and the nation or institution weigh heavily upon the "body of people" they lead or represent. We have seen other examples in 2 Samuel 24 (David's census of the army) and Joshua 7 (Achan's disobedience of God's command) where it had great impact on the nation. Paul's comparison of the Church to the human body also suggests that the body as a whole is affected when one part is not well.

The present day Church has sinned against God in many ways. Pray and ask God to open our eyes to see how we, as His Church (locally, nationally and globally), have sinned against Him, so that we can confess and repent corporately.



How have we, in my local Church (the gathering of God's people), sinned against God and His commands? Similarly, how have we sinned as the wider Body of Christ?

Lord, open my spiritual eyes to see how we—Your Church, locally and globally—have sinned against You, that we may confess and repent of our evil ways. Amen.

Praying For His Sake

Bible Reading: Daniel 9:15-25a

“Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.” (Daniel 9:19)

Daniel offers an interesting insight on our prayers to God. Do we pray for our own sake, someone else’s or God’s sake? The word “sake” means cause, purpose, interest, account, or “the benefit or regard of someone or something”. It also reveals the motives of our prayer and intercession.

When Israel sinned against God by building the golden calf, He was determined to destroy them in His anger. Moses interceded, calling on God’s character and promises, that it was not in His interests to destroy Israel—essentially for God’s own sake (reputation). Similarly, Daniel’s prayer of corporate confession and repentance pleads with God to “protect His reputation” (not that God needs to protect His reputation) based on who God is and what He has promised, i.e. for His sake.

When we pray and intercede, we call upon God to act for His name’s sake because we do not deserve anything from Him. We call on Him to act and intervene because of who He is—compassionate, full of grace and mercy—and His unbreakable commitment to His promises. God and His Word are ONE! The ultimate aim of our prayers should be to glorify Jesus.



*For whose sake do we pray and intercede?
Our own, the person being prayed for, or for
God’s sake? We need to examine the motive
for our prayers and intercessions.*

Teach me, O Lord, to know how to pray
effectively, that You and Your Name will be
glorified. Amen.



Calling On God's Character

Bible Reading: Psalms 25:1-10

... according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! (Psalm 25:7b; ESV)

Following on yesterday's reflection, David calls on God's character in this psalm (and in Psalm 143) to plead his case for the sake of God's goodness. David's intimate knowledge and relationship with God grew from his days as a shepherd out in the fields, where he experienced God's love and protection. This enabled him to confront Goliath without fear, as well as the many more trials he had to go through before he became king. He grew to know God as trustworthy, merciful, steadfastly loving, good, upright, faithful and true, and that God ...

- *will not allow us to be put to shame*
- *makes known His ways*
- *teaches us His paths*
- *leads us into His truth*
- *forgives our transgressions (sins).*

God desires that we know Him intimately. It forms the foundation of our relationship with Him and enables us to grow to be the persons He has created us to be—fully secure, significant and accepted in Him. Knowing God intimately enables us to see life from God's perspective, having the calm assurance that He is here with us on this earthly journey.



God knows us intimately; how well do we know Him? You can know much about God, but yet hardly know Him. Knowing Him, like all relationships, requires time and commitment. Are you willing?

Lord, teach me to know You intimately that I may put on Your character in loving others. Amen.

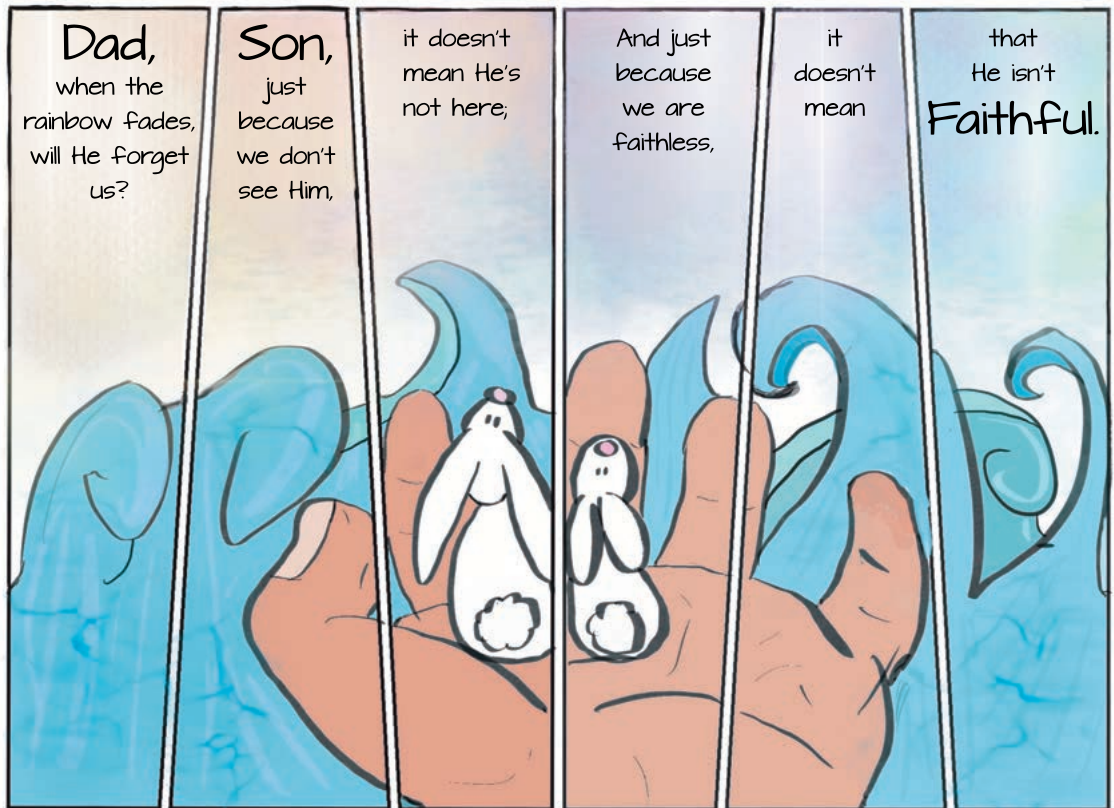


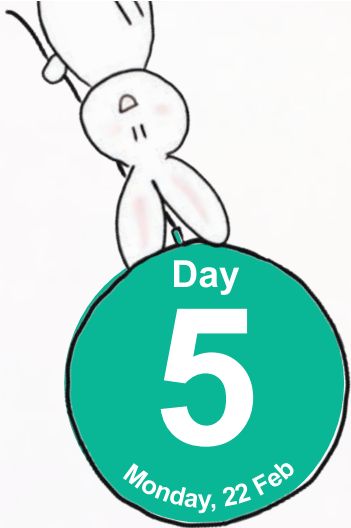
1st Sunday in Lent, 21 Feb

I Will Remember You

Bible Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

"This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come ..." (Genesis 9:12)





Righteous Suffering

Bible Reading: Job 4:1-21

"But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed." (Job 4:5; ESV)

Trials and difficulties are a fact of life. No one is immune. How, then, do we react when things do not seem to go right or when troubles appear? Many have a distorted worldview that God will **always** bless the righteous, and that no harm will befall those who are faithful and obedient to Him; bad things only happen to bad people.

Indeed, in troubling situations, we need to search our hearts to see if we have committed any known or unknown sins that may have resulted in our situation(s). If so, we need to confess and repent as the Holy Spirit reveals them to us. If, however, like Job, there are no known sins, bear in mind the behind-the-scenes meeting between God and Satan, unknown to Job (Job 1-2).

Why God allowed it is His prerogative alone, but He had confidence that Job would remain faithful. God states that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). The Bible tells us to expect persecution, suffering, and discomfort as Jesus' followers. God uses difficult circumstances to sharpen and mould us to be the persons He has called us to be.

When we face difficulties, persecution, suffering, and pain, do not ask why, but ask God what He is trying to teach us.



Lord, I acknowledge Your all-encompassing sovereignty. Help me look beyond my circumstances to see what You are teaching me, to mould me into who You have called me to be. Amen.

Suffering May Be Discipline —But Not Always!

Bible Reading: Job 5:8-27

“Blessed is the one whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.” (Job 5:17)

Here Job, whom God declared *“blameless and upright”* (Job 1:8; 2:3), continues receiving “comfort” from Eliphaz. Eliphaz encourages Job to appeal to God, listing down His wonders and miracles, and describing how He thwarts the plans of the crafty. Eliphaz makes the point that God may allow suffering in order to discipline us, and promises Job that God will restore him if he accepts God’s correction.

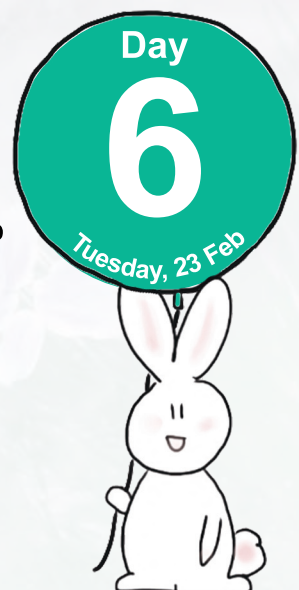
Eliphaz’s point is a good one, and it is generally true. When we go through suffering, it may be a clarion call for us to examine ourselves and see if we have done wrong. But for Job, this advice missed the mark. Job had done nothing to deserve the calamities that had befallen him. Now, on top of his already terrible suffering, he had to deal with this false accusation!

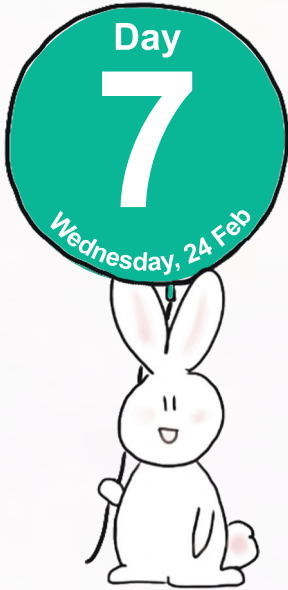
As we look to Jesus in this Lent season, we remember that He is the righteous sufferer *par excellence*. He surpassed Job, for He was sinless. Yet He, too, suffered greatly, not under discipline, but to pay the penalty for our sins. What a Saviour! If ever we endure undeserved suffering, let us take heart, for Jesus goes before us and suffers with us.



Reflect on some suffering you have endured. Was it God’s discipline? If so, how did you respond? And if not, how did it affect you and your relationship with God?

Father, when I face Your discipline, help me to accept it and repent. And if I must go through undeserved suffering, give me strength and perseverance to stay faithful. Amen.





Three Facets Of Wisdom

Bible Reading: Proverbs 30:1-9

"I have not learned wisdom, nor have I attained to the knowledge of the Holy One." (Proverbs 30:3)

In these nine verses, we find three facets of wisdom. Not just head-knowledge or intelligence, but the ability to live a good life; the kind of wisdom that begins with the fear of God (Proverbs 9:10).

Firstly, it is wise to humbly admit that we lack wisdom (30:2-3). This is foundational because if we proudly think ourselves already wise, then we will never seek to know God and gain true wisdom.

Agur underscores this with a series of rhetorical questions concerning things that only God could do and know (30:4), ending sarcastically with, *"Surely you know!"*

Secondly, it is wise to revere God's Word. Having realised that we need to know God and learn from Him, we must turn to the Scriptures, where His person and character are revealed. We should consider His Word flawless and not add to it (30:5-6).

Thirdly, it is wise to desire to have just enough. Once we have come to know God, we should guard our relationship with Him by seeking only our *"daily bread"* (30:8c). We have to avoid the twin traps of idolising wealth and getting caught in poverty, both of which can lead us to disown and dishonour God.



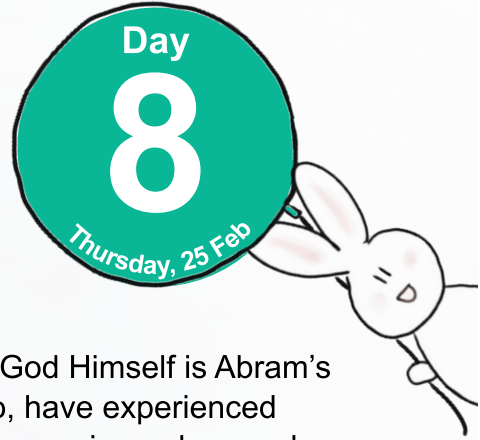
How can you cultivate an attitude of humbly seeking to know God? Have you given His Word its deserved priority? Can you honestly ask God for only your "daily bread"?

Father, forgive me for proudly considering myself wise. Help me to humbly seek You and Your wisdom, to revere Your Word, and not to desire more than I need. Amen.

God's Promises And Our Response

Bible Reading: Genesis 15:1-6, 12-18

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)



Here, God appears to Abram, simply to assure him: God Himself is Abram's protection and ultimate reward (15:1). Surely we, too, have experienced God's presence and the reassurance of His precious promises when we have most needed Him.

Abram's response, however, is full of questions and doubts (15:2-3). Abram is old, yet still childless. His legacy, it seems, will be left to his servant. Surely we, too, have sometimes questioned God and doubted His Word.

God, however, speaks: Abram will have a son and uncountable offspring (15:4-5). Thus, God renews His promise to make Abram "a great nation" (12:2). This time, Abram responds in faith—faith that justified him before God. Surely we, too, are learning to respond to God with similar faith as we journey with Him.

Finally, God cuts a covenant with Abram (15:12-18). Usually, both parties walked between the animal halves, meaning, "May I be thus bisected if I break this promise." Abram, however, was fast asleep (15:12). Instead, God did it twice: once as a firepot, and again as a torch. Thus, He alone would bear the consequences of a broken covenant. This was fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross for all of us covenant-breakers.



Remember the last time God gave you reassurance; thank Him. What doubts assail you now? Will you bring them before God, respond in faith and renew your covenant with Him?

Father, thank You for the times You have graciously encouraged and assured me. Help me to trust in You and Your Word in spite of my doubts and questions. Amen.

Neither Run Ahead Nor Lag Behind

Bible Reading: Genesis 16:1-6

So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. (Genesis 16:3)



Christian life, as the beloved Sunday School song says, means “Walking with Jesus”. Sometimes, however, instead of keeping pace with Him, we lag behind. Reluctant to follow, we drag our feet and make excuses. Conversely, at other times, we run ahead of Him. Instead of acting according to His leading and timing, we try to manipulate events, plotting and planning to make things happen.

Today’s passage is an example of the latter. In yesterday’s reading, Abram received anew God’s promise of offspring as numerous as the stars (15:5). Yet, he and Sarai had been childless for so long; hope dwindled. So Sarai had the “brilliant” idea of bearing an heir through her slave-girl, Hagar.

Whenever things are misused in ways outside their intended design, trouble ensues. Think of a knife, designed to chop vegetables, being used instead to stab someone. God’s design for marriage is one man and one woman, united in a lifelong commitment to one another (2:23-24). Adding Hagar into Abram and Sarai’s marriage distorted that design. Unsurprisingly, negative consequences ensued. Relationships broke, pregnant Hagar despised barren Sarai, Sarai blamed Abram for what was originally her idea, he allowed her to abuse Hagar, and Hagar ran away.



Have you run ahead of Jesus or lagged behind Him? What happened? Will you now resolve to deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Him (Luke 9:23)?

Father, forgive me when I have refused to obey You. Forgive me also when I have acted presumptuously and independently. Help me to follow You more closely as I journey on. Amen.

The One Who Hears And Sees

Bible Reading: Genesis 16:7-15

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” (Genesis 16:13)

In the patriarchal context of the day, Hagar was not in a favourable position as a woman, a foreigner and a slave. She was also imperfect, and in “despising” Sarai (probably disrespecting her in some way), Sarai reacts by “mistreating” Hagar (by harsh labour or abuse?) and Hagar flees. With absolutely nothing to fall back on and nowhere to go, she encounters God.

God promises her in verse 10 to *“increase [her] descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count,”* even though she was only pregnant at that time. This was not merely a distant promise of generational blessing; it was also an immediate assurance to her current well-being. This caused Hagar to respond by naming both her unborn child and the place she encountered God as “God hears” and “God sees” respectively.

This was Hagar’s experience—though she was the least and lost, God heard and saw her. Her encounter with God caused her to even obey Him in faith by going back to her mistress and submitting to her, although that was the situation she was fleeing from in the first place. She trusted God over her immediate foreseeable circumstances.



*Are there circumstances you desperately want to flee from?
How can your trust in the One who hears and sees help you to
persevere or overcome?*

God of all knowledge, You are always greater than what we face.
Help us to know You better, that we may trust You better. In Jesus’
name. Amen.



2nd Sunday in Lent, 28 Feb

Journeying With God Through The Seasons

Bible Reading: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

“... walk before me faithfully and be blameless ... I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come ...” (Genesis 17:1b, 7a)



Laughing For The Right Reasons

Bible Reading: Genesis 21:1-7

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." (Genesis 21:6)

In a twist of irony, Sarah, whose laugh was sparked by the ludicrous thought of bearing a child in her old age in Genesis 18:12-15, ends up laughing in an entirely different sort of way, and Isaac is even named "he laughs" to remind her of this.

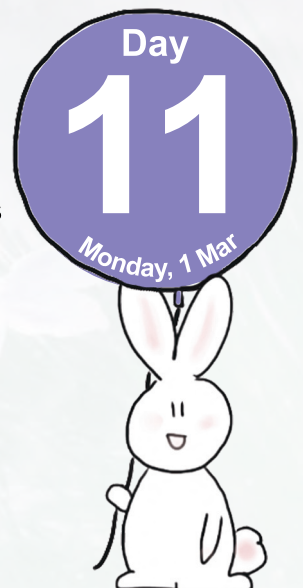
The journey of discipleship is fraught with incredulity. Miracles and the supernatural are not the only things our rational minds need to contend with. Looking at any of Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount makes us want to laugh at the thought of turning the other cheek, or loving our enemies in a world that is almost certain to abuse or take advantage of such sentiments.

Yet, this same God opened the womb of a 90-year-old woman and turned her incredulous laughter into one of delight as He fulfilled His promise to the letter. This same God preserved a nation from annihilation after its cities were destroyed and its people were scattered. This same God dealt with the sins of humankind by sacrificing His only Son on the cross and raising Him to life three days later. This is the same God we follow.



The bridge between God's promises and our reality is built on faith. How are God's promises (e.g. always providing an escape from temptations) being tested against the challenges we face?

Lord, though we have eyes, we are often blind. Increase our faith as we watch for Your promises being fulfilled around us day by day. Thank You, Lord. Amen.



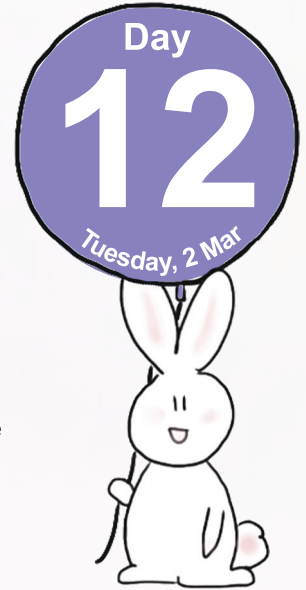
Incomprehensible Faith

Bible Reading: Genesis 22:1-19

He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.” (Genesis 22:5)

What is recorded in this passage is simply fascinating, and equally fascinating is what is not recorded. There is no mention of Abraham’s reaction to God’s command. We do not know what his posture was like during the journey. We lack insight into Isaac’s facial expression as he was bound and laid upon the wood on the altar. But just as we lack the details, so did Abraham as he obeyed the Lord.

Setting out before knowing the destination was not new to Abraham; he had gone through a similar experience when God first called him. This time, however, God was telling him to sacrifice Isaac, the one through whom he would have many descendants and nations would be blessed (Genesis 17:21). This was a test—not designed to make Abraham fail, but to prove the truth of God’s promise. Abraham’s instructions to his servants to wait until he and Isaac **both** return to them was a statement of faith that the writer of Hebrews unpacks as such: *“Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.”* (Hebrews 11:19)



God’s command to obey is not always preceded by understanding, nor agreement. How ready are you to obey God based on faith in simply who He is and nothing else?

Lord, Your good, righteous and loving character remains steadfast. Free our faith from the shackles of our own desires and expectations of You. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

True Hope

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 30:12-22

“So you will be my people, and I will be your God.” (Jeremiah 30:22)

The people of God witnessed the truth of God's promises, especially the negative ones that culminated in their defeat and subsequent exile. Now another kind of promise was being made to restore them, not only as a nation, but also as His people. As witnesses to the truth of God's promises, hope is kindled.

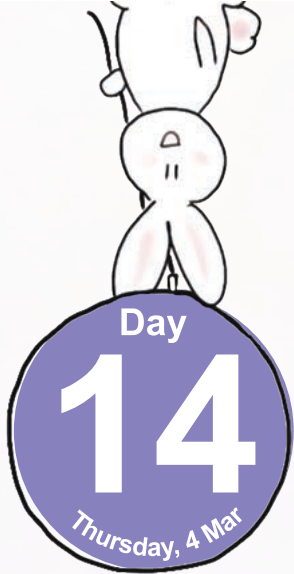
Hope is an essential ingredient for us all as we live in this broken world. It begs us to look beyond present trouble to future rest. It contextualises pain and suffering as purposeful rather than meaningless. It strengthens the soul for the temporary as it yearns for the eternal. Yet, hope can be found nowhere except in the unfailing promises of God because God alone is able to transform trouble into rest; God alone is able to bring purpose into suffering; God alone is able to shape the eternal. True hope is born and fulfilled in God alone.

How amazing it is, then, that our hope is placed in a good God who heals our wounds and restores us from brokenness and despair. How wonderful that Jesus gives us hope—not only as His people for this earthly life, but for eternity.



If personal or world events have caused you to despair, how can the sovereign hand of God bring hope into those areas?

Almighty, good and loving Father, teach us to move beyond wishful thinking, that our hearts would be set on You alone in sure and certain hope. Amen.



Call To Obedience

Bible Reading: Exodus 19:1-9a

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” (Exodus 19:5a)

After the Exodus from Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. The journey had been long and arduous, filled with the powerful display of God’s hand at work, and striking awe in the hearts of the

Israelites. They had seen for themselves how He had delivered them from Egyptian slavery. God now wanted to meet with the Israelites to share His heart’s desire for this nation that He had created.

An invitation was given to the Israelites to be God’s treasured possession. They were given the privilege of entering into a covenant with God and to walk in obedience to Him. In return for obedience, God would bestow upon Israel “honorifics”, as it were—a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.

The call to obedience is especially meaningful to us in the light of Christ’s finished work on the cross. The realisation of the extent of what Jesus went through should evoke gratitude and worship in our hearts for the One who was obedient, even unto death! No wonder the Father was pleased with His Son (Mark 1:11)! Obedience pleases God and will always trump sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22).



What does the level of your obedience look like in the barometer of your life? Do you think the “readings” are pleasing to God?

Father, I have often disobeyed You because of my fleshly desires. Help me to follow Christ’s obedience and please You, that I may be Your treasured possession. Amen.

Call To Holiness

Bible Reading: Exodus 19:9b-15

And the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes.” (Exodus 19:10)

Entering God’s presence is a grave matter, not to be taken glibly. After calling the Israelites to obedience, God gave them instructions on preparing to meet Him. Here was the test of obedience for the Israelites to follow the rules and boundaries God set. Sin would not be tolerated in God’s holy presence.

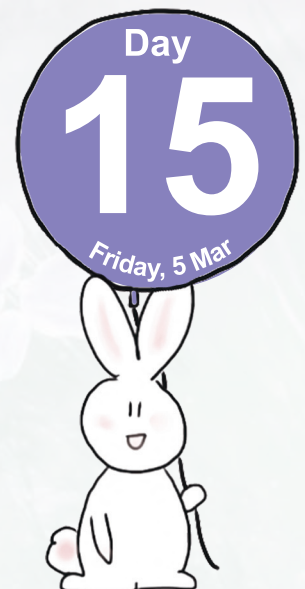
God was about to manifest Himself to give Israel the Ten Commandments and other laws. Before witnessing this theophany, the Israelites had to cleanse themselves and stay within God’s boundaries, so that **they may live!** The world considers boundaries and rules as damaging, yet when God sets boundaries and laws for us, they are for our own protection.

Psalm 24:3-4 declares only those with clean hands and pure hearts may ascend the mountain of the LORD and stand in His holy place. Paul instructs believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). Peter reminds Christians to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). We do this by having awe and respect for God’s majesty and holiness whilst wholeheartedly pursuing obedience. This is the fitting attitude toward a theophany, whether in a visual display of terrifying proportions, or in a manger as a baby.



What are some things you need to discard in order to pursue holiness?

Father, help me to live my whole life
coram Deo (in the presence of God).
Amen.





The Witness of God

Bible Reading: Exodus 19:16-25

As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (Exodus 19:19)

God's appearance on Mount Sinai made Israel tremble. They had seen God's signs and wonders in the ten plagues, the pillars of cloud and fire on their journey, and the incredible parting of the Red Sea. Nothing, however, prepared them for what they were about to experience: the very Presence of God.

This experience may have possibly served as God's testimony concerning Moses. Exodus 19:9 records: *The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you."* God gave His people this experience so that they may believe in His servant Moses to relay God's Word.

Similarly, we see the Presence of God descending on Peter, John and James on the Mount of Jesus' transfiguration. God's purpose was to bear witness to His Son. In Luke 9:34-35 we read: *While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him."* We have no greater witness than the witness of God concerning His Son.



Are you willing to put your full trust in Christ and His Word alone?

Father, teach us to listen to You and obey You wholeheartedly.
Amen.

3rd Sunday in Lent, 7 Mar

Protection Under The Law

Bible Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

"I am the LORD your God ... You shall have no other gods before me ... You shall not ... You shall not ... Remember ... Honour ... You shall not ..." (Exodus 20:2a, 3ff)





Waiting For Fulfilment

Bible Reading: 1 Kings 6:1-4, 21-22

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign ... he began to build the temple of the LORD. (1 Kings 6:1)

We live in a fast-paced and action-orientated world. The use of electronic devices changes the way we think and do things; decisions are expected to be made rapidly. The modern person has problems with waiting.

The Israelites waited 480 years for the building of the Temple. The Exodus and the building of the Temple were two key events in Jewish history. Many of the laws given through Moses were regarding community life in relation to the Temple. Why, then, the long wait to build the Temple of the Lord, especially when the Temple had already been promised much earlier by God? (Deuteronomy 12:5)

Reflecting on this reminds us that God has His own time and way of carrying out His purposes. If we are going to do God's work, then it must be done in His way and time. The time of waiting is a time of preparation of heart and mind—a reorientation of one's attitude and will to God's agenda. Inactivity does not mean God is not doing anything. When the time comes, we must be ready to spring into action and carry out the work.



Are you feeling restless waiting for God to act? What can you do to move forward?

Father, help me to wait, to know that You are seated on the throne. Prepare me to be ready and willing to work when the time arrives. Amen.

An Awesome Responsibility

Bible Reading: 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them. (2 Chronicles 29:3)



Leaders are significant people. In chapters 28 and 29, we see two leaders with opposite inclinations. Ahaz “*shut the doors of the LORD’s temple*”; he desecrated the articles of the house of God and set up foreign altars in “*every street corner in Jerusalem*” (28:24). As a result of his many sins and actions, God’s judgement came upon the people of Judah.

In contrast, Hezekiah opened the doors of the house of the Lord and commanded the priests to cleanse the Temple, i.e. to “*remove all defilement from the sanctuary*.” Both Israel and Judah benefitted from the determination of his heart “*to make a covenant with the LORD ...*”. As a result of his many reforms, God restored the land.

Today, we are God’s temple (1 Corinthians 3:16). We can either open or shut the doors of our hearts to His voice. Will we do His bidding? This is an awesome responsibility! Our wrong decisions and actions can have an impact on our loved ones and others around us; they can also, ultimately, bring devastating consequences to our nation as a whole.



Are the doors of your heart open to the Holy Spirit? Will you be His instrument of righteousness for the sake of our beloved nation?

Father, I pray that we will open the doors of our hearts to You. Let Your light shine through us, so that Your good will and purposes may be established in our land. Amen.

The Joy Of The Lord

Bible Reading: Ezra 6:1-16

Then the people of Israel ... celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. (Ezra 6:16)

At last the Temple was finished—completed at great cost and with painful sacrifice, toil and weeping, self-denial and hardship. The people of Israel came together to celebrate the dedication of the house of God with gladness, thanksgiving and joy. They rejoiced, for the Lord had filled them with joy; He *“had caused them to rejoice ...”* (Ezra 6:22; NASB).

Like the Israelites, we can know the joy of God's providential care, of serving Him wherever He has placed us, and of worshipping Him together in corporate worship. We can experience the joy of sitting in His presence, and in living holy lives in obedience to His will.

God Himself is the source of our joy. He fills us with joy in His presence (Psalm 16:11) and we shall enter into the joy of our Lord one day (Matthew 25:21; NKJV). Nehemiah 8:10 tells us, *“the joy of the LORD is your strength.”* God's joy gives us strength to run the race without wavering, to keep going when we would give up, to reach for His love even when we feel He is not there. Let us rejoice in Him, our Lord and Saviour!



Do you wish to pursue joy in God with all your heart? Then, should you not love and obey Him so that His joy may be in you?

Lord, cause us to rejoice! May You always be our source of joy, and may Your joy in us light up the hearts and lives of those around us. Amen.



God's Rainbow In The Clouds

Bible Reading: Genesis 9:8-17

"Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." (Genesis 9:16)

Note what God said to Noah and his family: *"Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember."* God did not say, "When the rainbow appears, **you** will remember ..." Again, with Israel in Egypt, God said, *"When I see the blood, I will pass over you"* (Exodus 12:13), and not, "When **you** see the blood, I will pass over you."

God is the One who remembers us! Thank God that the remembrance of the covenant is not left to me, for my memory is weak; thank God that my security and salvation is not dependent on me, for I will fail. It is all on God. All we have to do is to look up at the sign of the rainbow in the clouds, remembering that God remembers, and that He cannot forget us for we are engraved on the palm of His hand.

God's rainbow is in every cloud of trouble and sorrow and death. Let us be encouraged, for it tells us that He remembers us and He holds us in His loving hand.



Are you discouraged? Depressed? Lift up your eyes and look for the rainbow in the clouds, and remember that God remembers.

God, help me look for the rainbow in the clouds daily, and to remember that You remember. May I so live each day, trusting in Your Word and faithfulness. Amen.





Our Blessed Hope

Bible Reading: Daniel 12:5-13

“As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.” (Daniel 12:13)

“Go your way till the end.” Daniel was not to worry or be discouraged over the present or future. As far as he was concerned, he was to go and keep to the path God laid out for him. His way was to be marked out with a constant eye toward the end. So it is for us. Do not give up, or be side-tracked, or discouraged, but run the race set before us. Then we will be able to say that we have fought the good fight; we have finished the race.

“Go your way till the end.” This command is followed by a promise: “You will rest, and then ... you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.” We can look forward to our rest, and if our Lord does not return during our life-time, we look forward to receiving our portion when we rise from the dead. This is the hope that is our basis for godly living—the hope that inspires us to not give up, but to finish the race set before us. This is the blessed hope of resurrection, heavenly glory, and the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.



“I am coming soon,” Jesus says. Are you ready to reply: Amen, come, Lord Jesus!

Lord, let me live my life each day looking to Your coming in the clouds. Let this hope purify my life, that I will not be ashamed when You come. Amen.



A Gathering To One's People

Bible Reading: Numbers 20:22-29

*At Mount Hor ... the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,
"Aaron will be gathered to his people."
(Numbers 20:23-24a)*

The phrase "*gathered to his people*" assures us that, although Aaron died in the wilderness as a consequence of his sin at Meribah, he was not excluded from the true and eternal Promised Land. Aaron was gathered to his people "as one that dies in the arms of divine grace" (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*). Moses, Aaron and Eleazar went up the mountain with solemn grandeur in the sight of the whole camp to meet with God. Aaron went from Mount Hor to the eternal Mount Zion, a pilgrimage of faith leading to eternal life.

So it will be for all of us who believe. There will be times when we will stumble and fall, and there will be occasions when we will feel like giving up. The trials in the wilderness are great and manifold, but the end is promised and assured when we remain with the Lord. When we reach the end of our days, we will be gathered to our people, God's people. What a glorious day it will be!

Let us therefore persevere with the assurance of the presence of God with us to guide, comfort and provide until we reach our allotted inheritance.



Are we daily looking for the coming of the blessed day of our Lord when we shall depart and be with Christ forever?

O Lord, empower us to live our lives in anticipation of Your coming, that we might glorify Your holy name. Amen.

4th Sunday in Lent, 14 Mar

Turn Your Eyes Upon Him!

Bible Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

"... anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." (Numbers 21:8b)



You mean ...
There was a
connection all along?!

Uh-huh.



The Way Of The Wilderness

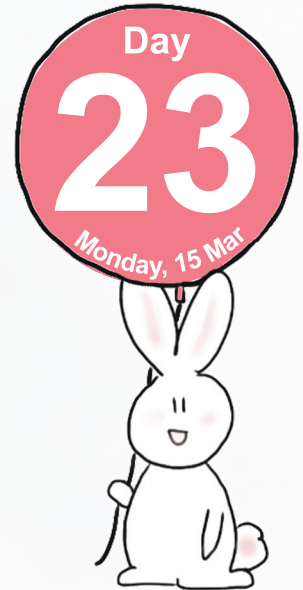
Bible Reading: Exodus 15:22-27

There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. (Exodus 15:25c)

The wilderness is God's chosen place of testing. He leads His people there to teach them to depend on Him alone and to learn to trust the Word of God completely.

What happened at Marah is an object lesson on trust and obedience. After three days of thirst, the Israelites finally found water, but the water was so bitter that it was undrinkable. God then showed Moses a piece of wood and told him to throw it into the water. God's word to Moses defied logic. How could a piece of wood remedy the bitterness of the water? Similarly with Naaman, how could dipping seven times into the Jordan River heal his leprosy? Moses, however, obeyed and the water was made sweet, fit to drink.

Moses took God at His word; he listened and obeyed. The result was healing and sweetness. This is the test of obedience and simple faith. We need to listen carefully to the Lord and do what is right in His eyes; we need to pay attention to His commands and obey them. Let us hear His word and obey His word; let us learn to trust and obey.



Have you learned to trust and obey? Will you listen and obey?

Lord, help me to walk by faith and not by sight that, by doing so, I will learn to trust and obey You. Amen.

In Your Anger Do Not Sin

Bible Reading: Numbers 20:1-13

*... and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff.
(Numbers 20:10b-11a)*

In Ephesians 4:26, Paul tells us, *"In your anger do not sin."* In this passage we see, unfortunately, how Moses sinned in his anger towards the Israelites. Furious with them for rebelling yet again, Moses struck the rock twice with his staff instead of speaking to it as instructed by God. His action was not honouring God as holy and, thus, God did not allow Moses into the Promised Land. Moses' anger caused him to lose sight of what God wanted him to do and to sin against God.

Paul did not say we must not get angry, but that our actions in response will determine whether or not we sin against God. We cannot justify our wrong actions by rationalising that the other person deserves what is coming to them. We are responsible for how we respond to people and the situation around us, regardless of their effect on us.

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love (Psalm 103:8). When we are angry, we need to come before Him first and ask for His grace to help us deal with our anger. Then only can we, like Him, respond out of grace and compassion.



How do you normally respond when faced with situations that make you really angry? Think of one recent incident and reflect on how God might want you to respond differently.

Father, when faced with aggravating situations or people, prompt me to approach You first with my emotions. Grant me grace to be like You—slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. Amen.



Never Give Up Hope

Bible Reading: Isaiah 60:15-22

*"I am the LORD; in its time I will do this swiftly."
(Isaiah 60:22b)*

Despite His people's constant sin and apostasy, God always remembered His covenant with them. Time and time again, He would reach out to them. His promise was always to redeem them from their troubled situations, and to give them

hope and life. God's constant reminder to His people was that He was their Saviour, the Mighty One who was able, in His time, to bring all things to pass, even the seemingly impossible.

Oftentimes, when things are not going our way, we only see what is before us—problems, hopelessness, despair—and we wallow in self-pity. Sometimes we are crippled by guilt at what we have done. During such times, we need to remind ourselves of God's unfailing love and faithfulness.

Regardless of how we may have landed ourselves in our situation, His promise is that He will always lift us up and bring renewed life and hope to us. What we need to do is to look, not within or around ourselves, but to look up at Him in trust. As we wait for Him, He will restore us in His time; that is His unfailing promise to us always.



Recall incidents when God has come through for you and brought new life and hope. Take some time to reflect upon His goodness and thank Him for His loving faithfulness.

Father, thank You for Your unfailing love and faithfulness. Thank You for all the times You have lifted me up and brought me renewed hope and life. Amen.



Find Rest In God

Bible Reading: Isaiah 30:15-18

*"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it."
(Isaiah 30:15b)*

When we read the book of Isaiah, we will see that God's people were always a rebellious lot, stretching God's patience and only turning to Him when they had run out of options. When they were threatened by the powerful Assyrian empire, the people of Judah chose Egypt rather than God to help them against their enemy (30:1-3).

God rebuked them for not turning to trust Him to deliver them from their enemy. Yet, despite their callous rejection of Him, God still reached out to them. He desired to show them His grace and compassion because He knew the disastrous consequences that would befall them if they continued their own way.

God's plans for us are always for our good, not to harm us, but to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). Instead of trusting in our own abilities or resources to run our lives or to manage our problems, God's invitation to us is to turn to Him and rest in Him. When we are able to trust God to guide us through the storms of life, we can have that calm inner peace that God is in charge and all will be well.



Who is in charge of your life—you or God? How do you decide how you live your life? Take some time to reflect and talk to God about it.

Heavenly Father, help me recognise I can only find true rest and strength when I turn to You to lead and guide me in how I live my life. Amen.

A Fragrant Aroma

Bible Reading: Exodus 30:1-10

“Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar ... so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come.” (Exodus 30:7-8)

In Scripture, incense is often associated with prayer. In Psalm 141:2, David prayed, *“May my prayer be set before you like incense”*. John wrote that the 24 elders around the heavenly throne *“were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people”* (Revelation 5:8). Just as the altar was made holy by the blood of the sin offering so that incense could be burned on it, so also have we been made holy by the blood of Christ that our prayers may be offered to God. Jesus’ sacrifice ensures that the outpouring of our hearts, whether in worship or supplication, can enter God’s presence, rising as a fragrant offering, holy and pleasing to Him.

Each time we think God is silent when we call out to Him, each time we entertain those moments of fleeting doubt that God has distanced Himself from hearing us, or each time we wonder if it is of any use to pray over and over again because our prayers go unanswered, let us then recall the words of John in Revelation 5:8—that glorious picture of our prayers all gathered up in golden bowls, holy and precious, before God’s very presence!



How do you think God feels each time you pray to Him? How would knowing that He regards your prayers as a fragrant offering affect how you pray?

Father, thank You that You hear all our prayers and see them as our fragrant offering to You. I praise and worship You for Your amazing love for us. Amen.





Hope And Faith In Difficult Times

Bible Reading: Habakkuk 3:2-13

LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known ... (Habakkuk 3:2)

How do you respond when you see widespread injustice, corruption or violence happening around you? Do you struggle to make sense of why God seems to allow evil to exist and go unpunished? Or maybe you have become numbed, indifferent or apathetic toward the situation. It is easy to get discouraged or disillusioned thinking that God does not care about our situation since He seems not to have done anything about it.

Habakkuk models for us how we can respond in difficult times like these. Instead of despairing, he brought his doubts, complaints and questions to God in honest conversations, and waited patiently for God's answer. As he wrestled with God on these issues, he looked back to the past and remembered all the mighty deeds God had done in their midst. He also looked at the wonders of creation that pointed to God's unwavering presence and awesome power. Likewise for us, these reminders not only become a source of hope and faith to face current challenges, they also invite us to turn to God, trusting Him to carry us through these difficult times. We can ask for His intervention, and for Him to be made known in our circumstances.



How have you experienced God's presence and power in your life in the past? What issues or challenges are you currently wrestling with that need God's intervention?

Lord, I stand in awe and thankfulness for all You have done in the past. In this time of need, help me again as You did in years gone by. Amen.

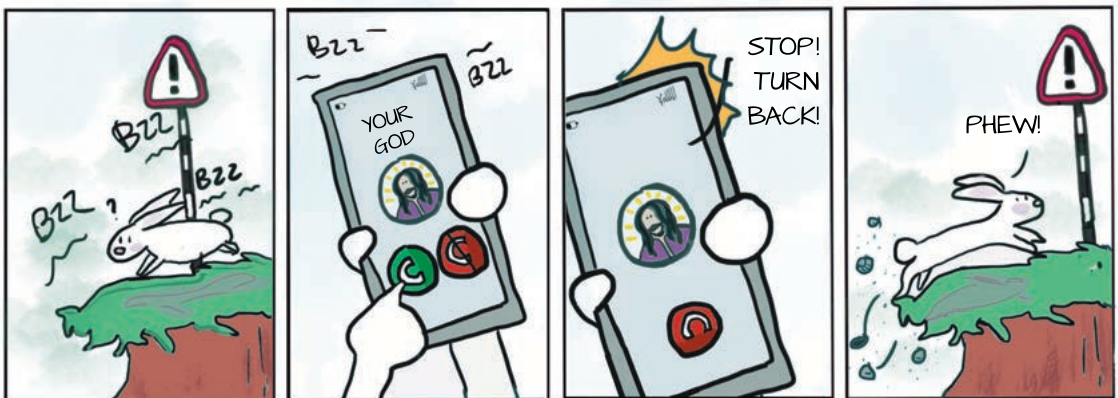


5th Sunday in Lent, 21 Mar

They Will All Know Me

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 31:31-34

"I will be their God, and they will be my people ... they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest ..." (Jeremiah 31:33c, 34b)





Being God's Witnesses

Bible Reading: Isaiah 43:8-13

"You are my witnesses ... that I am God." (Isaiah 43:12c)

Imagine you are in a courtroom calling up witnesses to defend your client. What would be the criteria for a good witness—trustworthiness, reliability, honesty, truthfulness, and having a first-hand experience of the event? God called Israel to be His witnesses against foreign gods to prove that He alone was God through what He had done in their lives. The Israelites were chosen to know, believe and understand who God was as He revealed, saved and proclaimed truth to them.

In Acts 1:8, Luke reports that Jesus quoted Isaiah 43:10, *"You will my witnesses,"* when commissioning His disciples to bear witness—through their lives, words and actions—to who He claimed to be. Similarly, we who have genuinely encountered God in our lives, and experienced first-hand the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, are called to give evidence of who God is from our personal experience of Him. We testify by sharing the story of our experiences and knowledge of God—the one and only God who has the ability to save. Our lives become signposts that point people to God.



You have been given the privilege and entrusted with the responsibility to be God's witness. How have others seen or experienced who God is through your life?

Lord, what love and dignity You have bestowed on us to count us worthy to be Your witnesses. Help us to be faithful witnesses through our lives, words and deeds. Amen.

Wholehearted Devotion To God

Bible Reading: Isaiah 44:1-8

Some will say, 'I belong to the LORD'. (Isaiah 44:5a)

Towards the end of Isaiah 43, the Israelites were rebuked for substituting ritualism for genuine personal surrender. They thought they could manipulate God to be on their side by relying on rituals and traditions while still retaining ownership and control of their own lives.

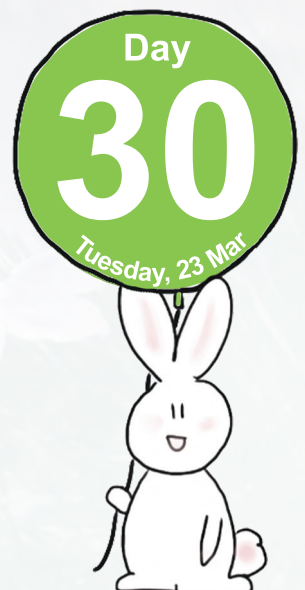
God invites His people to enter into committed relationships with Him, marked by lives that are completely surrendered to Him. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our lives not only provides spiritual refreshment and blessings, but also identifies us as a people belonging to God and enables us to live lives of total submission to our Master and Lord.

Sometimes we are tempted to hold some areas of our lives back from God—areas that we still want to control, e.g. work options, financial decisions or relationship choices. James refers to those whose loyalty is divided between God and the world as “*double-minded*” (James 1:8; 4:8). Being loyal to God means that we cannot live our lives partly for God and partly for ourselves, or expect God’s blessings while pursuing what the world offers. God wants our wholehearted devotion and commitment.



Are you living a life of complete surrender to God? What distracts or tempts you from living a life of total commitment and wholehearted devotion to God?

Holy Spirit, please do the work of transformation in my life to enable me to live in wholehearted commitment to God. Amen.



It Just Isn't Like The Old Days

Bible Reading: Haggai 2:1-9

*"But now be strong ... Be strong ... Be strong ... and work.
For I am with you ..." (Haggai 2:4)*

The post-exilic remnant were discouraged when they compared the current condition of the temple they were rebuilding to its former glory prior to its destruction. They were reminiscing on the past and longing to relive the experiences of the past. God, however, spoke through Haggai, challenging them to rise above their disappointment and to be open to what He was doing in their midst in the present, which was different from the past. They were asked to draw upon the resources of God's presence (which gave strength to continue with the work assigned to them) and God's action (which removed fear of threats), as they held on to God's promise of a greater glory in the future.

Some of us long to experience "the good old days" when we evaluate our current spiritual experiences in relation to past experience and thus become dissatisfied and disillusioned. Just as Haggai exhorted the remnant to move beyond past experiences, we may need to leave our past behind and be open to experience God in new ways that are timely and relevant to our present situation. God invites us to experience Him in a greater measure as we continue to grow in maturity.



What are some past experiences that are hindering you from being present to new ways of experiencing all that God has for you in this season?

Lord, help me not to hang on to the past, but be open to discover the new ways that You are working in and through me. Amen.

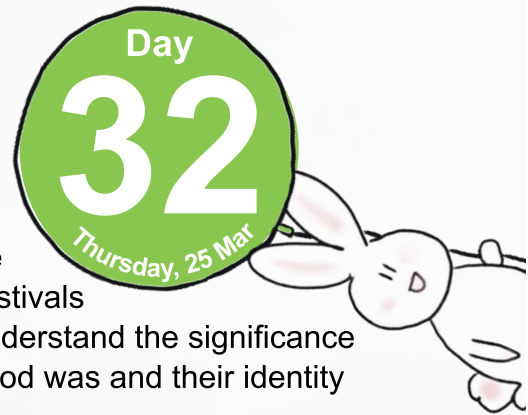
Remembering What Christ Has Done For You

Bible Reading: Deuteronomy 16:1-8

... so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt. (Deuteronomy 16:3b)

Deuteronomy 16:1-8 focuses on the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:1-28; 13:1-16). Among the many religious festivals, the Passover was considered the most important as it commemorated God's protection from the angel of death, and the subsequent deliverance from Egypt. Moses gave careful and detailed instructions on how these festivals were to be observed so that the people would understand the significance of each symbol and action, and not forget who God was and their identity as His people.

"Although the book of Hebrews declares that the ceremonial and festival calendar of ancient Israel is rendered obsolete through the sacrifice of Christ" (Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*), Christ did not abolish the Passover, but radically transformed it. Christ offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins (Hebrews 9:13-15) and through His sacrifice, death is averted and we are redeemed. Jesus' work on the cross gives life and freedom to all who look to Him for salvation. As we celebrate communion, baptism, and seasons like Lent, may we be reminded of the reality of God's work on our behalf and respond to God in gratitude for what He has done for us.



How can you observe this Lenten season in a meaningful way to commemorate what Christ has done for you?

Lord, help me remember how You delivered me from darkness into Your marvellous light. Thank You for the perfect Passover sacrifice found in Jesus that has set me free. Amen.



The Hope Of Glory

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 33:1-9

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

It is 588 B.C. and Judah is under siege. Babylonians are forcing their way into the city, wreaking death and destruction. Amid the chaos, Jeremiah sits in the palace courtyard, imprisoned by King Zedekiah for prophesying Judah’s doom. The situation is bleak; hope seems lost.

Then God speaks. The author reminds us this Word comes from the One *“who made the earth ... who formed it and established it.”* This God is sovereign over the bleakest situations; He promises to hear and answer. The promise is given to an undeserving people. Yet, God promises not only to hear their cry, but to bring healing and peace. The phrase *“I will”* is repeated four times in verses 6-9, emphasising the certainty of God’s will and initiative in fulfilling His promise.

Why would God show mercy? Verse 9 states that God’s purpose is His own glory. In view of God’s mercy, all nations will *“be in awe and will tremble”*. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him,” says John Piper (*Desiring God*). What an amazing God who delights in our abundance and whose glory is manifested through His eternal love to His people!



How does the certainty of our glorious future with God help us face current challenges? Think about practical ways of living daily in view of God’s mercy.

Father, thank You that in Your mercy, You save us by grace through faith. Help us look to You for hope in bleak times and to seek Your kingdom daily. Amen.

Everlasting Love Through A Righteous Branch

Bible Reading: Jeremiah 33:10-16

“In those days and at that time, I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line ...” (Jeremiah 33:15a)

A desolate waste, deserted, uninhabited; a place of joy, gladness, and rest—seems unthinkable that both descriptions refer to Judah. Yet, such is God’s promise: as far as Judah had fallen, equally would she be restored.

The destruction of Judah seemed a sign that *“The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose”* (verse 24). It is easy to imagine the exiled people of Judah beginning to believe this to be true. God’s word, however, turns this belief on its head, declaring that *“the LORD is good; his love endures forever”*—through sin, rebellion, and even judgement.

Judah’s promised restoration is a foreshadowing of God’s promise of salvation through Jesus, the righteous Branch from David’s line. He would be the ultimate manifestation of God’s everlasting love, breaking the cycle of sin and judgement by Israel and Judah. As God’s people, we can look forward to the day when we will live in safety in the New Jerusalem, the coming of which is as sure as night and day (verse 20).



Spend some time confessing to God the ways in which you have sinned. Rejoice in the knowledge that He is good and His love endures forever.

Lord, our Righteous Saviour, thank You for Your blood that washes away my sin. May the knowledge of Your amazing and divine love shape the way I live today. Amen.



Palm Sunday, 28 Mar

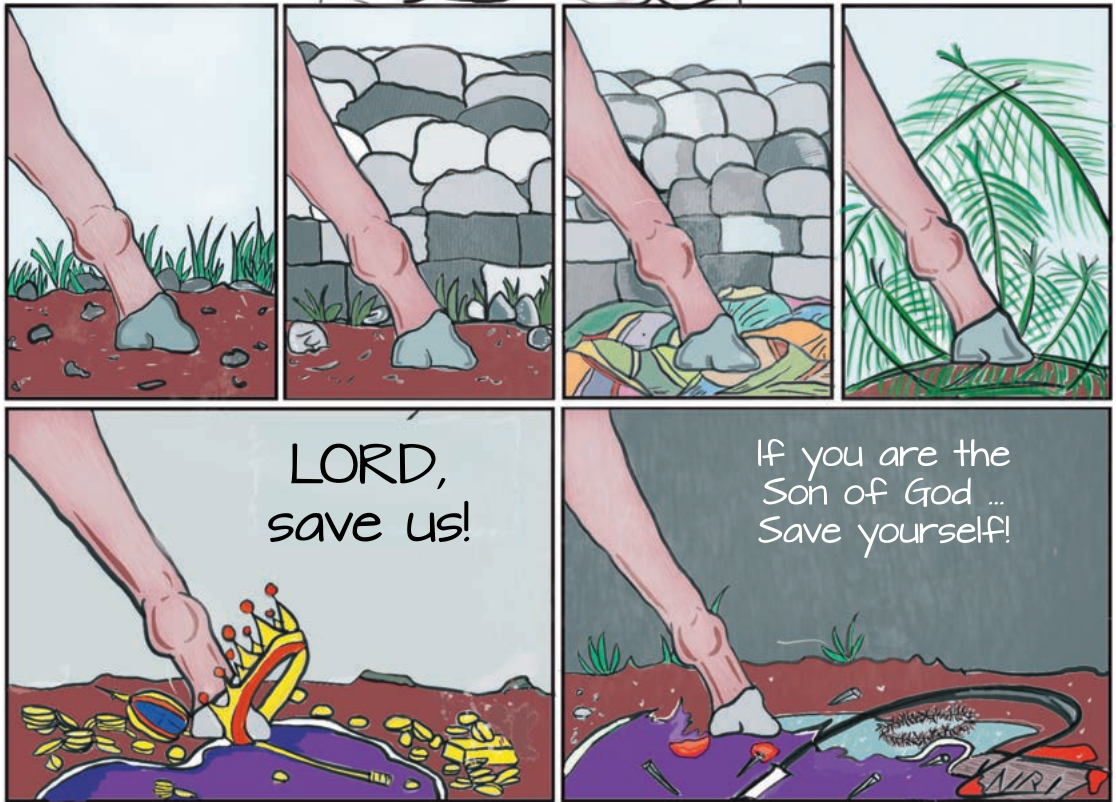
Lord, Save Us!

Bible Reading: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

LORD, save us! (Psalm 118:25a)

Whoa - That was ...
unexpected

Just because God doesn't
meet our expectations
(the way we want), doesn't
mean He hasn't exceeded
them (the way He wants!)



New Things

Bible Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

“See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.” (Isaiah 42:9)

Isaiah’s centuries-old prophecy now addressed conquered, broken Israel—words of judgement, then comfort. Chapter 41 ends with the futility of listening to false prophets; chapter 42 then begins: *“Behold my servant ...”* (ESV).

Behold, the world will be renewed through one man. This man would not cry out or raise his voice in the streets. Unlike prophets seeking attention, Jesus did not seek His own glory (John 7:18). This man would *“bring forth justice”* by his Spirit-given power, yet he was gentle and compassionate. Instead of empty talk, Jesus would effect real change—justice on earth. We, like broken Israel, need not fear; Matthew 12 introduces Jesus in Isaiah’s words: *“A bruised reed he will not break ...”*. Though our candle of hope may flicker weakly, Jesus our Good Shepherd holds us lovingly as He renews this world.

In this new world, the blind see, captives are free and those in darkness emerge into light. We long for creation to cease groaning—an end to poverty, natural disasters, and injustice. These **will** come (Revelation 21), but behold, renewal has begun its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, who was made a covenant, bringing light into our sin-darkened lives that we may worship the true Creator. “All glory to God!” as we anticipate the new things, both now and to come.



In what ways are we tempted towards hopelessness and where do we seek restoration? Reflect on how different our lives would be without Jesus as our new hope-bringing covenant.

Good Shepherd, we praise You for Your mercy and compassion. Help us hope in You alone, that we might not falter as we run this race until the end. Amen.





Perfect Redemption For All

Bible Reading: Isaiah 49:1-7

"Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD ... who has chosen you." (Isaiah 49:7b)

Chapter 48 ends with God urging the Israelites to leave Babylon, both physically and spiritually. They are called to leave their sinful disobedient ways, rejoicing instead in their redemption from exile. However, though Israel's geographical position changed, their hearts spiritually remained in sin. Chapter 49, however, reminds us that God's plan transcends time and space—it will not be thwarted.

Jesus, hidden by God until the predetermined time, is the solution to Israel's perennial problem. Isaiah does not reveal **how** this Servant will save, but the outcome is clear. God's plan is always to gather Israel back to Himself. God's splendour **will** be displayed even in discouraging circumstances. Crucified, mocked, despised, His followers scattered, Jesus' ministry seemed a fruitless endeavour. Yet, God remained in control, able to turn the darkest of circumstances into utmost victory.

God's redemption plan is not limited to bringing the Israelites back to Jerusalem, or even turning the Israelites' hearts back to Himself—it is a salvation that will *"reach to the ends of the earth"* through Jesus, a light for the Gentiles. So we rejoice at the vastness of God's love, awaiting the day when every knee will bow to Jesus Christ our Servant King.



As Christ's disciples, we are light-bearers to the world (Acts 13:44-48). As we seek to follow Him, how does this passage help us take heart when we are discouraged, helpless or fearful?

Lord, we praise You for Your sovereign plan, transcending time, space, human wisdom and effort. Help us trust You as we seek to further Your Kingdom here on earth. Amen.



The Meaning Of Righteous Suffering

Bible Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. (Isaiah 50:6b)

We discern Isaiah's anxiety, seeking to make sense of his exiled people's pain. Inspired, he speaks of God sharing their plight as a "suffering servant". This provides spiritual insight when remembering Jesus' passion and ultimate victorious resurrection. Jesus is the Suffering Servant prophesied by Isaiah. God's Servant does not receive suffering passively, but actively chooses "righteous" suffering when faced with conflict. God's help is the source of confidence and hope in suffering. Verse 7 is akin to Jesus' prayer in the Garden, "*not my will, but yours be done.*" (Luke 22:42)

We cannot see the future, but we know that all face hardships in life. We can either fret over them, or like Jesus, place them in the Father's hands. In surrendering our hardships to God, we can go beyond mere endurance; we will find strength, knowing that "*in all things God works for the good of those who love him ...*" (Romans 8:28).

We do not carry our crosses alone. Jesus bore the cross of the sins of all humanity. He walked the road to Calvary so that He could walk with us today, sharing in our sufferings and leading us towards the promise of redemption and release.



*Are you able to trust that the Lord will always watch over you?
Only then you will find peace.*

Lord, I trust that You will keep me in perfect peace as I cast all my burdens on You, who bore my sins that I might be saved. Amen.

To Remember Is To Keep Faith Alive

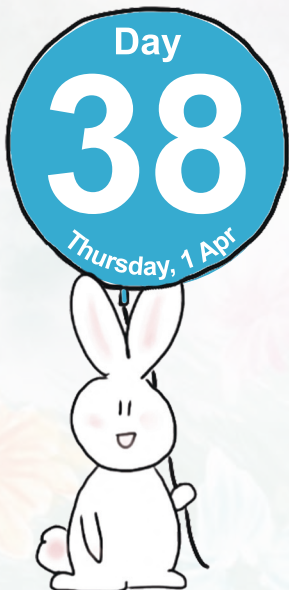
Bible Reading: Exodus 12:1-14

"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance." (Exodus 12:14)

Ever wondered why the Israelites had to *"eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast"*? They had painted lamb's blood on their doorsteps and lintels; the angel of death passed over them. The blood saved them. Why, then, the need to eat the lamb? Passover night was only the beginning for the Israelites. They were embarking on a long journey and needed to remember the sustenance this meal symbolised—God would provide for them.

We, too, need spiritual sustenance for our journey with the Lord from Jesus our Paschal Lamb. Through Jesus' death, our sins were pardoned and cleansed, delivering us from death to eternal life. The Lord provides for the journey ahead of us—Jesus' gift of the Holy Communion supplies needed strength and renewal to reach His heavenly Kingdom.

On Holy Thursday, Jesus gave His disciples the ultimate sign of His love—the breaking of bread symbolising His body, and drinking the wine symbolising His blood—a new covenant, fulfilling the final Passover. Jesus' shed blood and broken body are means of grace to experience new life in Him. On the journey towards holiness, we go to Christ, hungry and thirsty, sharing in communion with Christ by taking up our cross to follow Him.



*Do you want to have communion with Christ?
Then you have to love Him till the end.*

Jesus, Lamb of God, I do not want to stop at being cleansed by Your blood, but to be nourished deeply and transformed as I receive Your presence within me. Amen.



Near The Cross, I'll Watch And Wait, Hoping, Trusting Ever

Bible Reading: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows ... as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3; ESV)

Isaiah describes the Suffering Servant as “a sheep before its shearers,” who “did not open his mouth.” Tormented, Jesus maintained prayerful silence throughout His passion. Everything He said or did led to this act of pure selfless love. Today, we are invited to gaze upon the ugliest sight of all: Jesus Christ crucified—in Isaiah’s words, marred, stricken, crushed and oppressed. “He was pierced for our offences, crushed for our sins ... But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all.” (NAB)

Looking beyond the pain and suffering upon the Son of God’s blood-streaked face, we encounter unconditional love. We see eyes of compassion turned toward us. We hear His voice pleading for His Father to forgive us (Luke 23:34). On the cross, Jesus said all He needed to say; all that was left were the long-cherished “seven last words”.

We hear His confident promise, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 12:32; NAB), and we are drawn into the greatest love, which conquers even death. Gazing at the cross of Christ, we sense our hearts melting as we behold the greatest compassion of God, offering His life unconditionally for our sins.



*Are you able to discern God’s will unfolding in your life?
Take note of the crosses you carry in your life.*

Jesus, I lift my eyes to You, weeping for causing Your suffering. Yet, I embrace Your cross with unspeakable joy. Your love led You here, and Your love is stronger than death. Amen.



The Mercies Of The Lord ... Are New Every Morning

Bible Reading: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lamentations 3:24; ESV)

This lament is stunning and suffocating in describing Jeremiah's sense of affliction and imprisonment: *"He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape ..."* Our portion, share and hope, we are told, are in the LORD—His steadfast love, unceasing mercies and great faithfulness. Where is God's steadfast love on Holy Saturday? Holy Saturday is when Christ descends into the hell of our lives, breaking Death's bonds, and setting Hades' captives free.

Mary sets an example, mourning quietly at the tomb, but not despairing. We, too, wait patiently for the moment fear is conquered and we receive the light of hope. The tomb of Holy Saturday will become the womb of Easter Sunday. This is the promise hidden deep within every heart. At the presence of Christ, Hades' trembling and quaking will become the contractions that birth new life. Whilst faced with anxieties and uncertainties, we sit, and watch, and pray, certain that the Promise-Giver will keep His promise and set us free to new life with Him in eternity.



Do you love the LORD as much as Christ did? Christ gave His life for you.

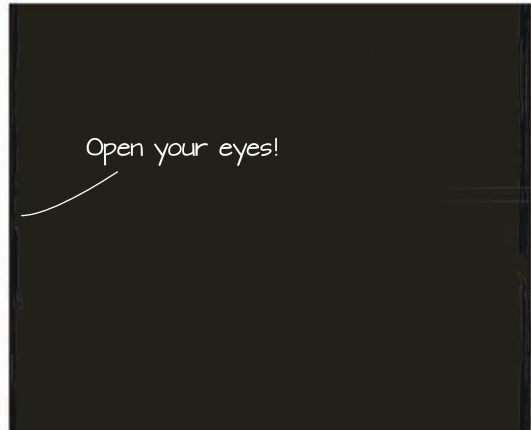
Father, Your dear Son rested entombed on this Holy Sabbath; may we so wait and rise to newness of life with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Easter Sunday, 4 Apr

Rejoice!

Bible Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

*“Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”
(Isaiah 25:9)*



Contributors

The Board of Worship and Music would like to thank all our contributors (two of whom wish to remain anonymous) for their prayerful contributions and thought-provoking insights.

Kiew Sieh Jin is a member of Taman Ujong Methodist Church Seremban, where he serves as a lay preacher, worship leader, and Captain of the 2nd Seremban Boys' Brigade Company. He is happily married to Chen May and has two often endearing, sometimes naughty, but always beloved children.

Rev. Shearn Sya has been in the pastoral ministry for nine years. He is currently the pastor of Trinity Methodist Church Penang and has a burden for the substance of following Jesus that cuts through the many forms that surround it. His hobbies include console gaming and cuddling with his wife and pets.

Rhema Karasu-Rao worships and serves at Wesley Methodist Church Kuantan. She is passionate about worship and music, and strongly believes that all of life should be of worship to God. A homeschooling mom, she gets by daily with a little bit of coffee and a whole lot of Jesus.

Tay Hui Cheng worships at Taiping Wesley Methodist Church. She is a retired teacher with a heart for young people, having been involved with youth work for over four decades. She has a passion for teaching and has been led by God through the years to teach young and old in Sunday School, IMYF/MYF, Care Groups, and seminars. Through her ministry of teaching, she hopes and prays that others will be led to grow in love and knowledge of the Lord, and to be passionate about Him.

Goh Kim Guat worships in Taman Ujong Methodist Church Seremban. She has always found much joy in helping people to grow in their journey of faith, even as she herself continues to learn how to live a life that pleases God. In this season of her life, she is trying to slow down and appreciate some of the simple blessings of life more—family, friendships and good health.

Tang Swee Kit worships at Trinity Methodist Church Petaling Jaya and serves as the assistant director of the Institute for Christian Ministry (TRAC ICM). She is passionate about her calling to help people grow and deepen their relationship with God, and enjoys creating space for others to encounter God at retreats. Besides journeying alongside others as a spiritual director, she enjoys taking walks, nature and photography.

Allyna Ng, a recent law graduate, is from Melaka. She is currently studying for the Bar in London and looks forward to serving Malaysia in the future.

Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri is a religious practitioner, social justice advocate and interfaith peace builder. He holds a PhD in Sacred Theology from the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He is currently the General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, and also serves on national, regional and international bodies that promote ecumenism, interfaith initiatives for justice and peace, and on climate change. He was the Deputy Chair of the special committee of interfaith relations and harmony of the Ministry of Unity for over ten years.

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Christabel Wong (Editor) is currently Worship Chairperson at Taman Ujong Methodist Church Seremban, and serves on the TRAC Board of Worship and Music. She works as a librarian at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and her favourite pastimes are just chilling and doing nothing.

Juwita Suwito (Co-Editor) is a singer-songwriter with a heart for worship. She weaves words into music, but also has a shy penchant for the written word. Juwita currently chairs the TRAC Board of Worship and Music, and worships with Damansara Utama Methodist Church. She is on a mission to unite worshippers to light up Malaysia with heart songs of the land (#MYWorshipCollective).





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