

Lent Meditations 2011



THE JOURNEY OF LENT THROUGH THE GOSPELS

**TRINITY ANNUAL CONFERENCE (TRAC)
The Methodist Church in Malaysia**

"JOURNEY THROUGH LENT WITH THE GOSPELS"

(An Introduction)

Lent is a pause in our everyday life; a pause to let go of the frenzy we have been engulfed with; a pause to come forth from the mire of deadness into new life - as Lazarus was called forth from death to life. He came forth hearing the voice of the Lord. May we too, as we pause, as we ponder, as we pray.....hear the voice of the Lord and come forth into new life.

As you read and meditate, you will realize that the meditations are very simply put. Why? For the basic reason that "simplicity" is key to spirituality. Therefore, each meditation has its own appeal - a potential pearl in every oyster - if we care to sit long enough with it.

As editor, I try to honour much of what has originally been written, so as to preserve the essence of the writers' thoughts and feelings about a subject, theme, insight. Each thought and each feeling is precious. Each, an inspiration from God. A longer meditation doesn't mean it's better. A shorter meditation doesn't mean it's less good. It's the essence of the meditation that is more important. As we read and meditate, constantly ask ourselves, "What is the core of the inspiration found in this meditation for me?"

And our question to you? "Did it find its way to your heart?"

May God bless you richly in every way as you pause to "ponder" ... to "wonder" ...

SHALOM!

Rev Peggy Seow
Editor

FOREWORD

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face ..."

So goes the first line of an old, familiar chorus. This year we are invited to keep our eyes on Jesus as we make our journey through Lent. Watch as He reaches out to heal and deliver those who are afflicted. Listen to Him as He teaches and challenges us with hard sayings. Walk with Him as He travels and encounters people from different sections of society. And then, during Holy Week, accompany Him through His passion and finally to the cross.

With our watching and listening and accompanying also comes the call to move from "Contemplation to Action", to live out what we have learnt from the Master. In the process may we find ourselves drawn closer to our Lord, who gave His life for our sakes, and come to a deeper experience of His love.

The Board of Worship and Music expresses much gratitude to Rev Peggy Seow (editor and writer), Ms Betty Yap, Mr David Tan and Mr Soo Ewe Jin for sharing their time, talent, and themselves with us in the Meditations.

Grace and peace,
Rev Yong Wai Yin
Chairperson
Board of Worship and Music, TRAC

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

*"... your Father ... sees what is done in secret ... "
(Matthew 6:4, 6, 18)*

TODAY is the beginning of **Lent**, the holiest season in the Christian calendar.

It is a season to learn how to die to self once again ... and return to God. The more we die to self, the more we will be able to return to God - the centre of our being. The more we return to the centre of our being, the more we will live from this centre. The more we live from this centre, the more we will be able to live lives that are true, loving, and compassionate.

So, how do we die to ourselves? How do we return to God? How do we return to the centre of our being? How do we live from this centre of our being? How do we live lives that are true, loving, and compassionate?

Jesus' words today offer us some wisdom on "How To ... " .

Primary to the "How To ..." is the basic need to be freed from the shackles of our ego. That is why Jesus asks us today,

"Why are you giving to the needy? Why are you praying? Why are you fasting?"

Yes, why do we give, why do we pray, why do we fast?

Today, Jesus asks us, "Are you giving to the needy to be honoured by human beings?" (v 2)

"Are you praying to be seen praying by human beings?" (v 5)

"Are you fasting to show human beings that you are fasting?" (v 16)

If we are giving to the needy to be honoured by human beings

... if we are praying to be seen praying by human beings,

and if we are fasting to show human beings that we are fasting ... what happens?

"No reward from your Father in heaven." (v 1)

The "unseen" God (v 6, 18) "sees" (vv 4, 6, 18) all that is done "in secret" (vv 4, 6, 18).

And what happens when the "unseen" God "sees" all that is done "in secret"?

Jesus says, "your Father (in heaven - v 1) will reward you" (vv 4, 6, 18).

What "reward" will that be? "Out of the world" kind of reward obviously!

Today, on Ash Wednesday, as we return to God, aware of our fragility as human beings that we can be reduced to "ashes"; we are also aware that God has called us to eternity with God. Today, God calls us to return to God with our "acts of righteousness" (v 1) of giving to the needy, of praying, and of fasting. These acts of righteousness, in as much as they are good in themselves, are in fact good in helping us get out of ourselves, and die to our ego, especially when done "in secret." May we find the strength and the courage to practice these acts of righteousness for the glory of God and for the moulding of our inner self in our ongoing pilgrimage towards God.

Prayer

Lord, help me to give, to pray, and to fast - "in secret".

From Contemplation to Action

On this first day of Lent, decide to whom you want to give, when you will pray, and how you will fast.

Luke 9:22-25

*"What good is it for us
to gain the whole world, and yet
lose or forfeit our very soul?"
(Luke 9:25)*

Many years back, a prominent businessman declared, at a conference in Pulau Langkawi, "There is no one that cannot be bought. It's just the price." As a fairly young journalist and an even younger Christian then, the remark sent shivers down my spine. Surely this person cannot be serious. Surely there must be many good and honourable people who will not sell their soul, no matter how high the price.

Having now been part of the real world for many years, I have seen how people of high ideals eventually compromise their principles to become practical idealists or realists. Politicians who join a party for its struggle defect to "the other side" because they can be "persuaded" to embrace a totally different ideology.

Harold Myra, the CEO of *Christianity Today*, once said: "People of honour, people of their word, people who try to live in purity of mind and heart - such individuals stand out, if only because of their relative scarcity." Christians, and even non-Christians, are familiar with Luke 9:25. We are all aware that we come into the world with nothing, and we will leave with nothing (Job 1:21a).

Power, prestige and material wealth are temporal but they have an immense hold on all of us. We may declare that all we want is to have an honest day's wage for an honest day's work but our flesh can be weak in the face of all the temptations that surround us.

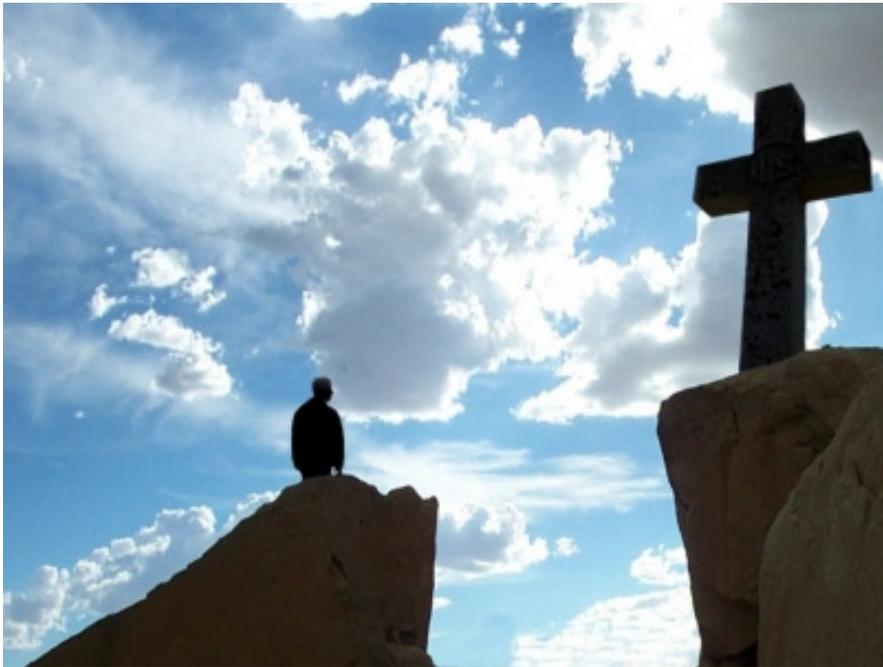
At what point do we decide that even our soul is saleable? That we are prepared to compromise on our Christian principles - on all that God has commanded us to do, and not to do - because we want to gain the whole world? Tragic would be the day when we achieve all that we set out to do - only to lose our soul.

Prayer

Lord, help me to remember what it cost You to save me from my sins.
Help me not sell my soul at any price!

From Contemplation to Action

Wherever you are placed, set godly standards to determine your own conduct, standards that are higher than even your company's/ institution's code of ethics.



Matthew 9:14-15

*Then John's disciples came and asked Jesus,
"How is it that we and the Pharisees fast,
but your disciples do not fast?"
(Matthew 9:14)*

This is the season of Lent, a time when Christians prepare for Easter through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting and the study of Scripture.

The purpose of fasting can be seen in the context of abstaining from an activity for a specific amount of time to focus on spiritual matters. Or, to put it another way, we are to take our eyes off the things of this world to focus completely on God. Fasting is a way to say to God, and to ourselves, that we are serious about our relationship with God.

As Richard Foster wrote in *Celebration of Discipline*, "More than any other discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us. This is a wonderful benefit to the true disciple who longs to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. We cover up what is inside us with food and other "good" things, but in fasting these things surface. If pride controls us, it will be revealed almost immediately."

Lent is a time when we let the busyness of the world fade into the background. Fast to slow down. Slow down enough to focus on what the Lord has done for us.

Prayer

Oh Lord, as I fast, please cleanse me from within, and reveal to me the things of the world that I cling to.
Help me surrender all of them to you.

From Contemplation to Action

During these days of Lent we can try (for the different days), fasting from food, from idle-lustful thoughts, from toxic-meaningless words, from showy-prideful actions, and whatever else God brings to our awareness to fast from.

Luke 5:27-32

*Jesus answered them,
"It is not the healthy who need a doctor,
but the sick.
I have not come to call the righteous,
but sinners to repentance."
(Luke 5:31-32)*

For many people, visiting the sick and the dying in a hospital is not the most natural thing to do, even if it involves close friends and relatives. Hospitals are for the sick, and the doctors are there to try to make the sick better. Whenever a patient is able to check out after he or she is cured, there is always a sense of relief and great joy for all.

I remember my last session of chemotherapy during my second journey with cancer on April 6, 2007. We celebrated with a party - muffins, nuts and raisins - and souvenir pictures taken with a home-made 'Last Chemo' banner. Fellow patients rejoiced with me, as did the doctor and nurses. The chemo journey may have ended but my life journey continues. For whatever is ahead, I know with absolute certainty that through faith in Jesus, I will be in God's presence once I go past death's doorway.

At the hospitals, I can see the huge difference it makes for someone going through an intense medical journey to have faith in a living God Who never leave them nor forsake them.

To those of us who are not physically sick, but are still "sick" because of our sins, Jesus like the doctors in the hospitals who heal the physically sick, can heal our spiritual sickness.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You have come to call sinners to repentance. I reach out in faith to You. Heal me, O Lord.

From Contemplation to Action

Let us reach out to the spiritually "sick" and "dying" that they will be healed in Jesus' Name.

Matthew 4:1-11

*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan!
For it is written:
'Worship the Lord your God, and serve God only.' "
(Matthew 4:10)*

I have heard many interesting comments from the pulpit on the subject of temptation over the years, but the two that stand out remind me how real temptation is, and how vulnerable we can be.

During a sermon on the Ten Commandments, the speaker jolted us with his opening statement: "I am capable of committing murder. I am also capable of committing adultery."

On another Sunday, the speaker declared: "I am polygamous by nature but monogamous by God's grace." When spiritually strong Christians openly declare themselves vulnerable, it reminds the rest of us that the risk and ease of falling into temptation is an inherent part of our fallen nature in a broken world.

Or, as LT Jeyachandran puts it, "Even after walking with the Lord for many years, it is frightening to realise how the values of the fallen world system can find a lodging place in one's subconscious in the most horrific and insidious manner."

While we may not actually act upon these temptations, there is no denying that many times it is a real struggle to stop such thoughts from lingering in our minds and wounding our souls.

All of us go through many struggles in our journey to remain a person of integrity for the Lord. Let us remember to honour God in all that we do. One way is through spending daily time daily with the Lord. This will help provide safeguards for us in our constant battle with diverse temptations.

A pastor once said, "All of us have to deal with temptations. We must draw the line, and then step back as far as possible from that line." Good advice indeed!

Prayer

Dear Lord, I pray that when tempting thoughts fly by,
You will help me.... not let them roost in my mind ... not act upon them.

From Contemplation to Action

Learn to identify where the temptations are in the home, in the workplace, in the community, in society, in the world.
Flee as early and as far away as possible from them.



Matthew 25:31-46

*"For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited Me in,
I needed clothes and you clothed Me,
I was sick and you looked after Me,
I was in prison and you came to visit Me."
(Matthew 25:35-36)*

One of the most dramatic sermons I heard was when the guest speaker spoke on this topic of 'The Sheep and the Goats'. Throughout his sermon, he kept on asking the congregation, "Are you sheep, or are you goats?"

I could feel the discomfort in the congregation as he challenged us to reflect on what we did, or did not do, and how we will be held to account one day when we face the Son of Man Who sits on His throne in heavenly glory. In fact, there was a fair bit of discussion via the email loop following that sermon.

I think it is important that we feel shaken. After all, these are the words of Jesus Himself. To me, it is a challenge to abandon the dualistic approach to life that many of us Christians take, where all we want is salvation and a guaranteed place in Heaven. We are reminded that faith without works is dead. There is absolutely no excuse for us to sit idly by and not feed the hungry, offer a drink to the thirsty, welcome a stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit the prisoners.

Conversely, in my pre-Christian life, I also did good deeds, but they were all done in the hope that by doing good to others, I would be richly blessed in return.

Now as a Christian, and having experienced God's amazing love, I know that our good deeds follow from our faith and that we cannot be blind to the needs and sufferings of the people we come across in our daily lives. It is clear enough that while we are saved by grace, we will still be judged based on what we do or do not do to the least among us. An old chorus goes: "Have I done my best? Have I stood the test?"

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for reminding me what it is to be a "sheep" and what it is to be a "goat". Let my deeds proceed from my faith in You.

From Contemplation to Action

At all times be alert to the opportunities in our lives to meet the hunger, the thirst, the loneliness, the sickness, the abandonment, the rejection of another in our midst.



Matthew 6:7-15

*"And when you pray,
do not keep on babbling like pagans,
for they think they will be heard because of their many words.
Do not be like them,
for your Father knows
what you need before you ask Him."
(Matthew 6:7-8)*

At the Thursday Care Group that I attend, we all have our favourite songs. There is one song that I like - "When I Pray". As I sing this song, the meaningful words gently remind me not only to pray for myself but also for other people because we are all in need God's love and care.

When I take my morning walks, I pray by talking to God. In my neighbourhood, my walk will take me by a primary school field. Although most of the birds here are sparrows and crows, I get the occasional surprise when a pair of kingfishers, green pigeons, and a plover or two, greet me along the way.

I walk rather early so there is no danger of meeting someone who thinks I may be crazy talking to myself. I talk to God quietly as I walk and sometimes I pause for a reply.

What I find comforting is the knowledge that God not only already knows what I want to pray for, but God is ever so gentle in not granting my prayers when God knows that is not what I need. When we say, "Not my will, but Yours", we surrender ourselves to a God who knows us deeper than we can ever imagine, and Who views everything from a perspective that goes beyond what we will ever fully comprehend.

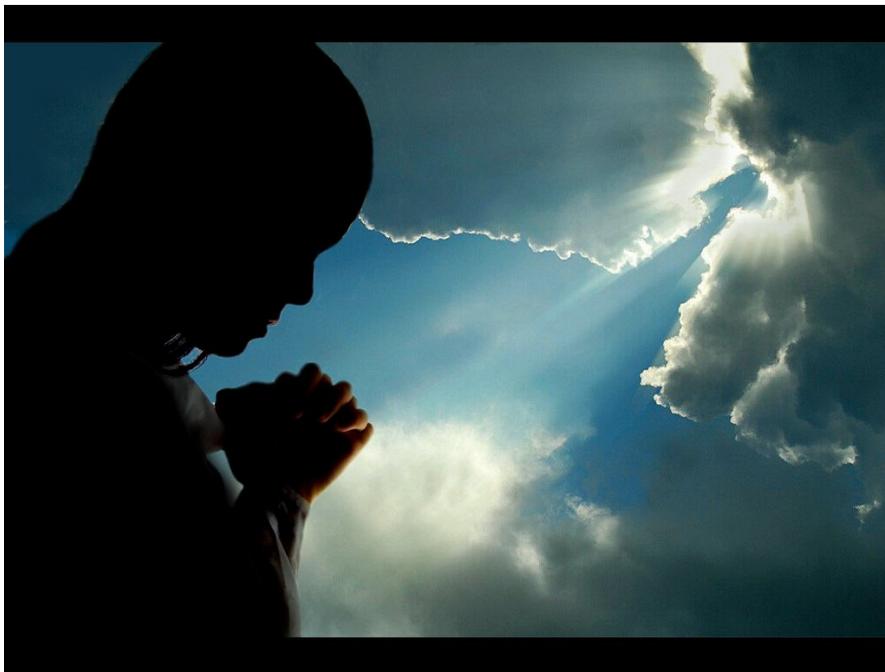
It is comforting to know that we pray to such a God.

Prayer

Lord, teach me to be in constant conversation with You through regular prayer for I know that You delight in my hearing the voice of my heart and soul.

From Contemplation to Action

This Lent re-immense into a life of prayer. Pray to God for a regular prayer partner, so as to mutually support and encourage one another in the Prayer Life.



Luke 11:29-32

*As the crowds increased,
Jesus said,
"This is a wicked generation.
It asks for a miraculous sign,
but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.
For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites,
so also will the Son of Man be to this generation."
(Luke 11:29-30)*

In our very modern, tech-savvy generation, we are constantly looking out for the latest sensation.

We get easily impressed by people who are able to dazzle and mesmerise us. Form is often preferred over substance.

We often hear of people who move from one church to another in search of "signs" of special anointing.

Are you confused by the signs on our roads and highways? I have a poor sense of navigation and the signs often make matters worse. Travelling to Kajang for its famous satay has led me to Port Dickson instead. And heading to Port Dickson for a family holiday once landed us in Malacca! Signs are meant to guide us on every journey but when they are vague or poorly designed, we end up heading in the opposite direction.

When we go through a crisis, be it health, family or financial, we also want signs from God. Questions keep popping up - "What is God trying to tell us? Why does God not send us a sign to lead us out of this mess?"

At times like these, there will also be those who come by with their "signs and wonders" professing to offer relief. However, we need to ask God for wisdom to discern God's purpose and direction.

The Son of Man is **THE** sign for our times. Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God. God has given us also - the Holy Spirit and God's inspired Word.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for being my most reliable and dependable sign.
Help me trust the signposts You place in my life to guide me.

From Contemplation to Action

The world is full of the sensational and the spectacular.

May we be discerning enough to separate form from substance and cling on to what is real and eternal.



Matthew 7:7-12

*"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!"
(Matthew 7:11)*

Imagine if we are able to get all we ask for, simply by asking. If you bring your children to Toys R' Us and you are committed to respond to their every need, there won't be enough shopping baskets to fill up all their desires.

If, at the workplace, you are disgruntled with your boss or your colleagues, and you can wish them away, don't be surprised if you are the one who disappears from the office because others may have similar wishes against you.

Christians believe in the power of prayer. Some, however, treat God like a vending machine, able to grant anything at the push of a button.

In my prayer life, I am glad on hindsight that many of my prayers go unanswered. There is power in unanswered prayer because it is God's will and wisdom, not ours, that prevail.

Look at verse 11 again. The Key Word here is "good". God does not simply give us anything we ask for because what we ask for may not be good, even if we may not see it as "not good" at the point in time.

I remember an occasion when I had been called to encourage another cancer patient. It had been a very rough day at the office and I was all drained out when my oncologist called.

As I drove to the hospital, I sought the Lord. Then I found that instead of getting more tired, I started to feel refreshed, as the words of Isaiah 40:29-31* come to mind.

At the hospital, I spoke to the patient and his girlfriend, and they were much encouraged.

So was I. I thought I had gone to bless them, but I ended up being blessed.

Prayer

Lord, let me always pray to You. Help me not be discouraged when my prayers go unanswered for I know that You always know what is good for me.

From Contemplation to Action

When we are asked to pray for others, let us follow through with offering practical help as well.

*Isaiah 40:29-31:

He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.



Matthew 5:20-26

*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother or sister
has something against you,
leave your gift there in front of the altar.
First go and be reconciled to your brother or sister;
then come and offer your gift."
(Matthew 5:23-24)*

As a cancer survivor, I have learnt that one of the recurring themes in the lives of people struggling to cope with this terminal disease is not only about the physical healing that they pine for, but the healing of the heart that we all need to truly set ourselves free.

Medical doctors will say there is no such thing as "heart cancer", but in the spiritual dimension, there is. When we let unforgiveness linger in our hearts, it is akin to allowing cancer cells to fester and grow and make us into bitter, broken people.

I once met a man at a medical centre as he was dying. He told me how he would pursue wealth and success at any cost. If a family member or close friend went against him, he would not spare them any mercy.

"But look at me now. I do not have long to live. But if I recover, I will surely be a different person. I will seek the forgiveness of those I have hurt. I will forgive others. I will give back to society. I will try not to be so nasty to people," he said.

I was there to bring him a message from a work associate who was somehow not able to bring himself to see him personally. He told me to tell him that he did not hold anything against him and to wish him well.

Tears came to his eyes. "I wish he would come and tell me this personally. I have done so much harm to him and his business. But he still thinks of me and is concerned for me." I told him, "I hope and pray that you will both meet up and forgive each other." They never did. He died one week later.

God knows that you and I will never really be healed; we will never move toward wholeness; we will never get on with our lives ... until we are able to let go. . . and be reconciled with the other.

Prayer

Lord, bring to my mind and my heart, the brother, the sister, who has something against me.

From Contemplation to Action

Let us be courageous and go to the brother, the sister, who has something against us and be reconciled to him...to her.



Matthew 5:43-48

*"If you love those who love you,
what reward will you get?
Are not even the tax collectors doing that?
And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,
what are you doing more than others?
Do not even pagans do that?"
(Matthew 5:47-48)*

Today, let us look at a fundamental aspect of our Christian faith - Love. A little story about a woman and a man named Krishnan might help.

The woman passed him by each time she dropped her husband off at the Scripture Union office. He was dirty, smelly, and drunk. One day the Lord spoke to her, "You are not being very kind to him are you?" "Oh Lord!" she cried, "surely You don't want me to do anything about him, do You? I don't like him! He's dirty, smelly, and he drinks - I can smell it!"

God had spoken to her. Try as she would, she could not get the old man's face out of her mind.

In fact for the next few days she was unable to pray for anyone else until she had prayed for him.

After months of allowing her to ignore Krishnan, God challenged this woman to embark on a most amazing friendship. It began with her offering him a bun to eat. It went on for two weeks and then he disappeared. She searched for him and found him. He was sick. So she brought him to the doctor. And then she took him into their home.

For six months, the family cared for this man, and nursed him back to good health. They gave him a Tamil Bible. They learnt about his family in India and how he had been separated from them for 35 years. One thing led to another and through a miracle, they found his family, who wanted him back.

After 35 years the miracle had happened! Gifts of money began to pour in from sympathetic friends who'd heard his story. They paid for his passage home, and more than that, gave him new clothes and presents to take home for his family.

She said: "I learnt so much about God's love and care for one lonely, poor old man; and my own need for repentance before I myself could be blessed." Who's the woman? The late Betty Young. The full account of this event can be found in Chapter 30 of her autobiography, *Before I Fall Asleep*.

Prayer

Lord, constantly remind me that I love because You first loved me.

From Contemplation to Action

Challenge yourself to serve in a ministry that will take you to the people you are most likely to avoid under normal circumstances.



Matthew 17:1-9

*While Peter was still speaking,
a bright cloud enveloped them,
and a Voice from the cloud said,
"This is My Son, Whom I love;
with Him I am well pleased.*

Listen to Him!"

*When the disciples heard this,
they fell face down to the ground, terrified.*

(Matthew 17:5-6)

How do we see Jesus today? More as a friend than as our Lord and King?

So familiar with Him, so familiar with the rules and practices of our religion that we have lost our reverence of Jesus? Have we also lost our place, as a people who are called to **listen**? "**LISTEN** to Him!" (Matthew 17:5)

We live in a country that has a constitutional monarchy and for some of us, there will be occasions when we have to come before the different monarchs who reign over the nation and states.

We know that at such moments we have to be mindful of the customs and traditions, for an event where royalty is present. How we dress and how we approach the throne is also worked out to the finest detail. Not forgetting to be especially early for the event.

Compare that to how we approach coming to church on a Sunday. We claim Jesus to be our Lord and King, but how do we accord Him the due reverence? The disciples fell prostrate at His Glory, terrified. Why? They understood who they were and Who Jesus was - the Son of God.

During the Transfiguration, the Voice from Heaven declared, "This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!"

As the disciples worshipped Jesus in awe, God's command to them was to "listen to Him!" How is our listening? Half-hearted? Do we choose to listen only to those commands that are convenient to us and ignore those that challenge our comfort zone?

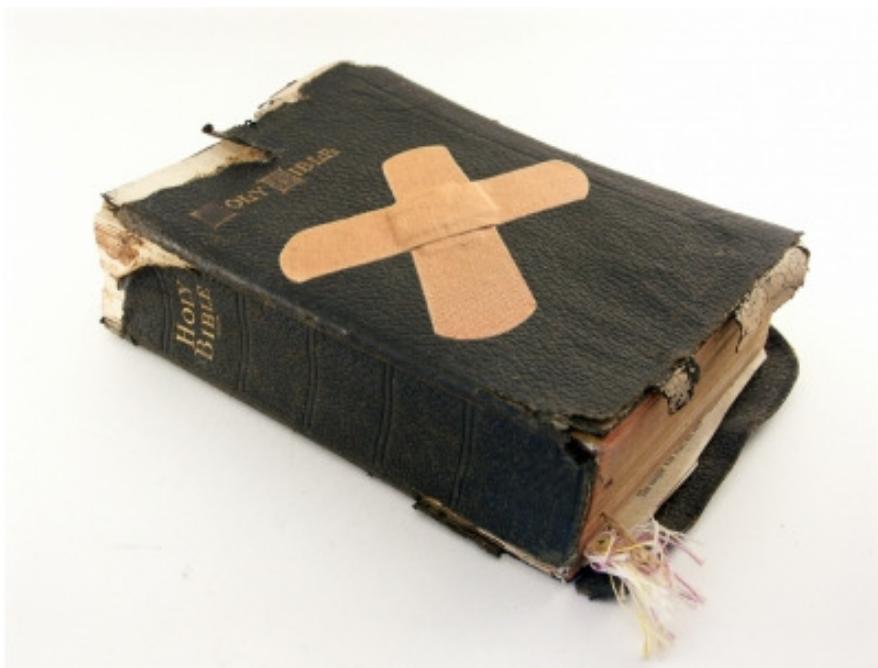
Our Christian life is premised on us following Jesus. **Listening** to Him is not an option. It is our Christian way of life.

Prayer

Lord, remind me to bow down and worship You, in awe and with full reverence, with the ears of my heart **listening** to You, my Sovereign King.

From Contemplation to Action

In your daily quiet time with God, come before God with a waiting heart - open and **listening**.



Luke 6:36-38

*"Give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over,
will be poured into your lap.
For with the measure you use,
it will be measured to you."
(Luke 6:38)*

At a construction site near my church, I watched a steady stream of lorries going in empty and coming out with a full load of sand.

I didn't find out where the sand was heading to but it sure was a lot of sand as the excavators worked relentlessly to fill up each lorry. And here's the interesting part. Every now and then, the lorry driver would signal to the excavator driver to flatten the pile of sand so that more could be placed into the lorry. The mission was to pack as much as possible.

I was reminded about my growing-up years when we had to buy provisions from the sundry shop across the street. In those days, things did not come prepacked. You could buy 20 sen of biscuits, 10 sen of salt, 1 gantang of rice, and just enough cooking oil for your needs.

When you buy rice or sugar, the shopkeeper will watch you with eagle's eyes. A gantang of rice means you pick up the tin container marked 1 gantang and put the rice in. And here's the trick. When the shopkeeper is not watching, you can shake the rice around and press it down to make sure you get your gantang's worth. You could do the same for sugar.

But to the shopkeeper, his measure of a gantang is one that is filled with air in between. He would not shake the container or press the rice down. I guess that is business.

But when we study the words of Jesus in Luke 6:38, you get the idea on how much God gives to us - PRESSED DOWN, SHAKEN TOGETHER and RUNNING OVER. In the same way, giving should be part of our natural Christian self. Think of how pleased God is when we give in the spirit of godliness.

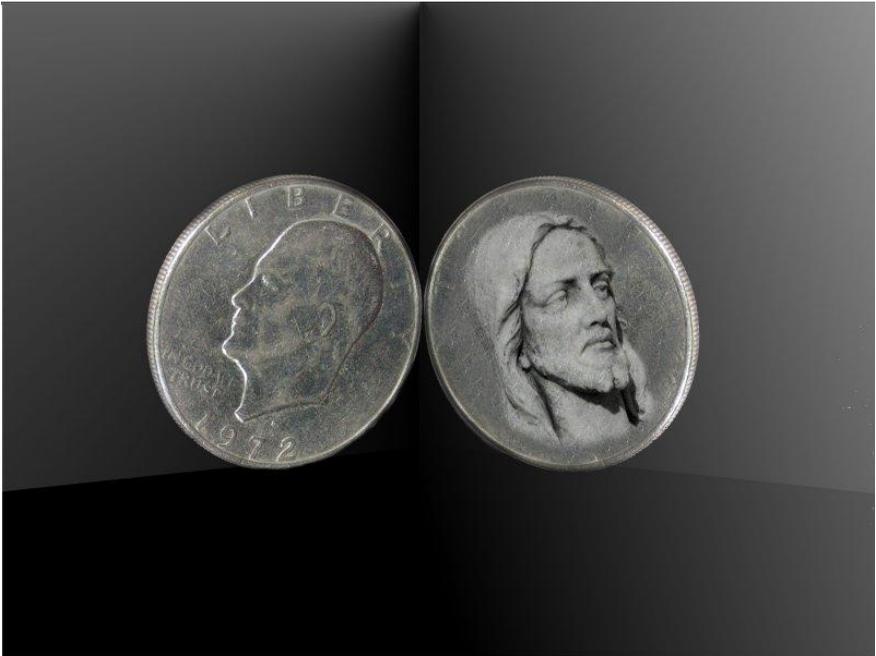
And when we do it in the generosity of godly spirit, we can almost hear God up in Heaven declaring, "Well done, good and faithful servants, a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap."

Prayer

Lord, I pray that I will truly know the spirit of giving, and also of receiving, that others will then be able to experience the joy of giving.

From Contemplation to Action

Identify the many needs around us that could do with a regular contribution from us, not only in terms of money or resources, but also our time and talent.



Matthew 16:13-19

*Simon Peter answered,
"You are the Christ,
the Son of the living God."
(Matthew 16:16)*

Acknowledging someone in public is not always a done thing. When we work for a tough boss, for example, and we happen to meet him in a public place, we will try our best to avoid him. And if our friends ask who the person is, we may not even want to give the correct information.

In the rough and tumble world of politics, when situations change, friends become enemies and enemies become friends. When a particular leader is cast aside, many of his ardent followers will abandon him and only the true friends will remain by his side.

Peter, in this chapter of Scripture, boldly proclaims Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Yet, in a subsequent chapter (Matthew 26:31-35) Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times, a situation which came to pass in Matthew 26:69-75. However, despite his human failings, Peter's destiny in the faith had been ordained by Jesus and he went on to become the Rock of Christianity.

When we live in a country where our faith is in the minority, will there be a situation when you are challenged on your faith and are asked to publicly declare who Jesus is? Will you, under extenuating circumstances, water down your confession of Jesus as the Son of God, and refer to Him only as a good prophet or a wise man?

The early Christians had to go about in secretive ways to connect with one another.

In some countries, freedom to worship as a congregation is not an accorded right to every person. History is replete with many examples of those who lost their lives because they confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

What then is your stand? Will you, at all times, even if there is a gun pointing to your head, stand firm and declare, like Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"?

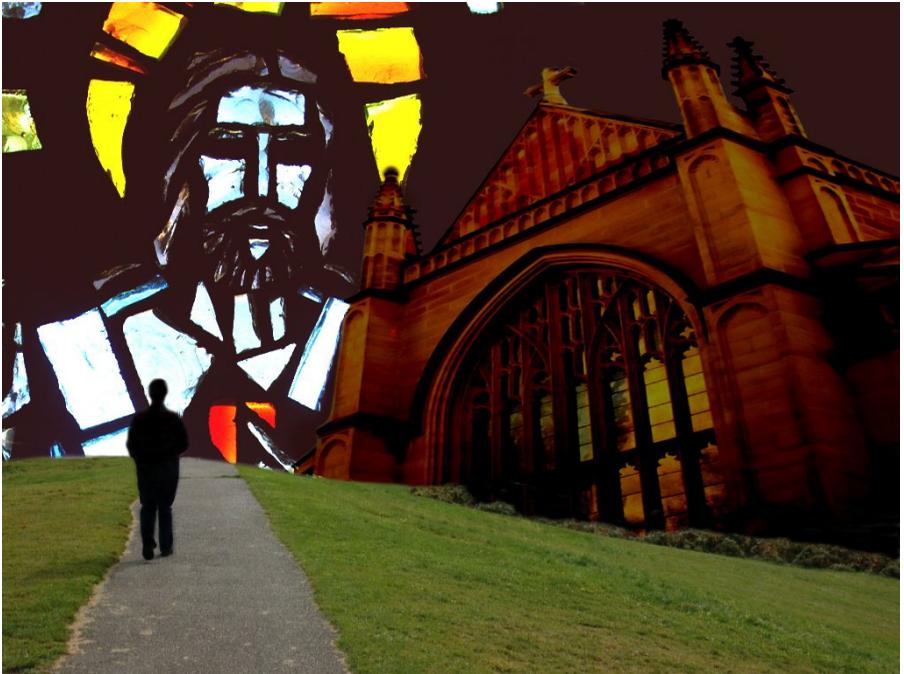
Prayer

Lord, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. You are sovereign whatever the circumstances. Teach me to embrace this fully.

Let me not falter in my faith when my time comes to confess You as Lord.

From Contemplation to Action

Let us be prepared for all eventualities of being challenged on our faith by constantly abiding in God's love and staying connected through God's Word.



Matthew 20:17-28

*Are You serious Lord?
"Not so with you. Instead,
whoever wants to become great among you
must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first
must be your slave
just as the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve,
and to give His life as a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20:26-28)*

In the Garden of Eden, when the serpent was tempting Adam and Eve, he dangled the ultimate carrot in front of them, "when you eat of [the tree of good and evil], your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

Throughout human history, human beings have always strived to move upwards. In the workplace, and even in churches, the battle for upward mobility is fairly common.

Henri Nouwen, the well known Dutch spiritual mentor, gave up a successful teaching career at several renowned institutions - Menninger Foundation Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, University of Notre Dame, Yale University and Harvard University, to share his life with mentally handicapped people at the L'Arche community of Daybreak in Toronto, Canada.

In writing about downward mobility, which he himself practised, he said, "The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which the world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross. . . . It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest."

The concept of servant-leadership is finding pockets of acceptance in the corporate world but in a world where power, prestige and money rank first, it is difficult to find someone willing to move down so as to move up, to serve rather than be served.

In the course of our work, we will always have our challenges and desires of moving up. Let us incarnate what Jesus said that to become great, we must be a "servant"; and to want to be first, is first of all to be a "slave."

Prayer

Lord, teach me to thank You for the opportunity to serve humbly at work and in the church. Help me not lord it over others.

From Contemplation to Action

Daily remind yourself not to follow the "drumbeat" of the world or seek the "applause" of human beings.



Luke 16:19-31

Do you know of professing Christians whose bibles merely occupy space on their book shelves?

At our church family camp, the children presented a skit on the theme of a resurrected Jesus coming to visit. In the skit, the visit of Jesus triggered a frenzied preparation: bibles that had collected dust were taken out, unread Christian literature was laid out replacing junky magazines. The skit seemed like a description of the rich man's reply regarding his brother's spiritual condition.

We know of countries where the import of Bibles are prohibited or restricted. As a result, Christians in those countries are deprived of reading the Word of God in their own language. I remember how delighted a student from that particular country, in one of our colleges, when presented with a bi-lingual New Testament.

You and I have free access to such an array of bibles. How have we pursued the Word of God and made it the centre of our lives?

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, that bibles and Christian literature are so readily available to us.

Help me read, meditate, and study Your word, regularly and consistently. I lift up in prayer before You, O Lord, missionaries and others in the work of recording and translating Your Word so that many more will come to know You and come into Your saving grace.

Bless their ministry and grant them Your joy as they serve You around the world.

From Contemplation to Action

Consider joining a Bible Study Class so as to be "rooted in the Word of God" and to let God's Word govern your daily life.

Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

The Parable of the Tenants was one which Jesus' listeners had no difficulty identifying. God was the "landowner." The "vineyard" referred to the Jewish nation. The "tenants" were the religious rulers of Israel. The "son" was Jesus, Himself, and the "other tenants" were the Gentiles and others who welcomed Jesus as the Messiah.

To lease out a vineyard to tenant farmers in those times was a little like the way our durian and rambutan orchard owners get paid a goodly sum of money for letting people harvest the fruit in due season. The tenants in the story however, paid in kind.

The absentee owner kept sending his servants to collect fruit but the tenants beat and stoned and killed them all. Finally he sent his son - he was also killed.

At the end of the story Jesus asked His listeners what they thought the vineyard owner would do to the wicked tenants. They said, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at the harvest time," (v 41). By answering thus, the Jews, for whom Jesus told this story, unwittingly pronounced the sentence of guilt upon themselves.

"Yes," said Jesus, "the vineyard, likened to the Kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to others," (v 43). Jesus then quoted from Psalm 118:22-23, reminding them of the stone rejected by the builders which became the capstone or cornerstone - a stone that bound the corners of a building together (v 42). This emphasis on rejection was a stern rebuke to the Jewish leaders then.

Prayer

Lord, show me the areas in my life in which I have rejected You and replaced You with other gods.

From Contemplation to Action

Ponder on the spiritual gift/s God has endowed you with.

Ask God how you may use this/these spiritual gift/s to further the Kingdom of God.



Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

"My son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours."
(Luke 15:31)

If you were directing the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a play, would your opening act be that of the son leaving home, and of the father's feelings after the son's departure? Would subsequent acts include the son's return, the celebration and the older son's resentment and anger?

Over the years, I have made a little collection of pictures depicting this parable. There is an unusual one with curious neighbours peeping out of the windows. Yet another shows villagers coming out and crowding round the embracing father and returning son.

A Mexican painting has the father waving in the distance and the son shamefully hiding in the shadows of a wall. In this picture, father and son have not come together. There is still some distance between them. A few more steps and the son would be in the arms of the forgiving father. These are steps we too would need to take. Have we not so often, deliberately or unknowingly, sinned against our heavenly Father? We have distanced ourselves from God and have been disobedient to God. Yet in God's love and compassion, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses, to repent and to return to God.

The Parable does not end with the son's return and the celebration that follows. The older son, on being told of the celebrative feasting, music and dancing resentfully refused to be a part of it. But his father came out and begged him to join in. And what did the father say, "My son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours." To rejoice and to feel the gratitude of having all that belongs to the father - is an attitude we can learn to adopt.

Prayer

Gracious God, I bring before You the sins I have committed.

I name them before You now ...

Forgive me, O Lord.

Thank You for Your forgiving love.

Thank You for Your gifts of ... (name them).

From Contemplation to Action

Find ways to respond to God for all that we have received from God.



John 4:5-42

Whenever Jesus spoke it often was to a wide audience. But He also had one to one dialogue as He did with Nicodemus. Now by Jacob's well He had a conversation with a Samaritan woman who had come to draw water.

It was a historical fact that Jews do not associate with Samaritans. Here was Jesus, thirsty for a drink breaking the rule, speaking to a Samaritan, and a woman!

With water and a well close by, Jesus took the opportunity of telling her about eternal life, using the imagery of living water. Like Nicodemus the woman misunderstood.

The conversation turned to where and how one worships.

For Jesus it was the attitude and spirit of worship and not the location that was important.

For us today, we can enter into true and meaningful worship when we do so in spirit and in truth.

We can know God through God's Son. True worship is made possible when we offer our worship to God in and through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord, create within me a worshipful heart.

From Contemplation to Action

Whenever we worship, consciously worship God with our whole being - body, mind, spirit.

Luke 4:24-30

We have come across headlines that read: "Hero's welcome for hometown boy," or "Thousands turn up to greet native son."

The sentiments are obvious - a warm welcome is accorded to a returning celebrity.

The people of Nazareth where Jesus had grown up were initially impressed by His opening words to them in the synagogue. But they soon reacted angrily when Jesus went to speak of how the prophets Elijah and Elisha respectively went to the aid of a non-Jewish widow, and to Naaman a Syrian, stricken with leprosy.

The leading Jews at the synagogue prided themselves as the chosen people of God. They were so sure of themselves and their perceived special position that they looked down scornfully upon others. They began to scoff at this seemingly young upstart of a preacher whom they knew to be the son of a local carpenter. And now He had the gall to speak of God's apparent favour upon the *Gentiles*!

Jesus' words enraged them. They dragged Him out to the edge of the hill to throw Him down but Jesus gave them the slip.

Could Jesus be in our midst and yet be unwelcomed and unrecognized?

Prayer

God of all nations and people, let me embrace in my circle of friends, people of different races, financial and social status, and educational levels.

From Contemplation to Action

Be consciously aware of Jesus in the people that I come in contact with today and every day.

Matthew 18:21-35

How many times should I forgive another person? Peter asked, then answered his own question with the suggestion "seven times?" Jesus' response was, "seven times seven" - meaning limitless!

In the parable we see a contrast between the attitudes of the two debtors, both servants to a king. The first one owed the king an enormous debt. He could not pay, and so he pleaded for mercy, and got it.

But when it came to his turn to exercise compassion, he harshly turned down his fellow debtor's plea for mercy - his fellow debtor who only owed him a paltry sum. At the end, the king pronounced his judgment on the merciless servant. He was severely punished.

Magnanimous and compassionate indeed was the king in the story. Similarly, God's forgiveness of us is limitless. God's love and mercy towards us is immeasurable. We are undeserving of God's forgiveness and yet God forgives us. There is a co-relation between divine and human forgiveness. When we have experienced God's forgiving love, let us "pass it on" - share it!

Prayer

Lord, I thank you for Your merciful, forgiving love. Bring before me in my prayer one person I need to be merciful and to forgive.

From Contemplation to Action

Go and imitate God's merciful, forgiving love today. Go to another today, and extend mercy, forgiveness and love to this person, today or at the earliest opportunity.

Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus declared He had come not to destroy or abolish that which is in Holy Scriptures, rather, He had come to fulfil or accomplish it. For Jesus, God's Word is so sacred that it was to be upheld. As it had been said, "Long after stars burn out and earth wears out, God's law will be alive and working." (Peterson, *The Message*)

Jesus pointed out that it was not the "letter" but the "spirit" of the law that mattered. Upholding the "spirit" of the law was to rise above all its trivialities and demands. Our deeds and actions should be guided by the principles of the law.

In our ongoing pilgrimage with God we will need to learn how to read, study, meditate, memorise and obey Holy Scriptures in word and deed. Then when we have "practiced" God's Word we will need to go on and teach it to others. Remember, to those of us who "practice" and "teach" God's Word, Jesus said, we will be called "great" in the Kingdom of Heaven; but to those who breaks God's Word and teach others to do the same, will be called "least" in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prayer

Lord, grant me the strength to incarnate Your Word with love.

From Contemplation to Action

Find opportunities to teach God's Word to others in word and in our lifestyle.

Luke 11:14-23

Driving out demons was very much a part of Jesus' healing ministry. Once, a crowd of onlookers was amazed at His healing of a mute. But some from among the crowd started to say He was doing it by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Driving out demons by the power of the prince of demons? How illogical! This is like turning your own gun on yourself. If it were so, Satan's world would crumble. Jesus said He drove out demons by the "finger of God" - meaning by the power of God.

There are many who simply cannot, or do not accept Jesus as the Son of God. It is difficult for men and women to bring themselves to follow Jesus Who promises no 'bed of roses', no material gains; but instead promised a life that would include suffering, persecution, and, even death.

Very often we witness ardent fans of sporting teams, openly and enthusiastically expressing their support through - what they wear: the colours, the emblem; their singing; their chanting. There is no mistaking on whose side they are on.

So, in your life, on whose side are you?

Prayer

Lord, show me how I have or have not, through my words and actions, shown that I am for You and the extension of Your Kingdom on earth.

From Contemplation to Action

Resolve intentionally to do something today to witness to your Christian faith.

Mark 12:28-34

In our fast paced lifestyle today, many do not wish to be bothered by details. We get impatient in a conversation if we have to listen to blow by blow accounts of a happening. "Just the essentials," we say, "better still, summarize the summary."

A teacher of the law who was listening to Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees posed a question. He seemed eager to have the commandments reduced to one when he asked, "Of all the commandments which is the most important?" (v 28)

Jesus gave him the answer quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5, and Leviticus 19:18b, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and "love your neighbour as yourself." The questioner agreed and added that this is "more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices," (v 33).

What was Jesus' reply to him? Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God," (v 34). It was Jesus' way of encouraging him to go on and lead a life of total devotion to God and to have love for his fellow human beings.

Did he do so? We will never know. But you and I must answer the question ourselves whenever we are confronted by an uncertain situation and have to decide what to do.

Prayer

Forgive me Lord, for going through the motions of the spiritual disciplines without really loving You or my fellow human beings.

From Contemplation to Action

Go through the last seven days and evaluate how you have loved God and your neighbour. Then decide to consciously love God and your neighbour everyday.

Luke 18:9-14

Two men went up to the temple to pray - one was a Pharisee, the other, a tax collector. Who are they? Pharisees were well-known for their seriousness in keeping the Law.

Tax collectors were hated by the Jews because of their dealings with the hated Roman government. They were even considered ceremonially unclean and could only be in the temple courtyard - meant for women and gentiles (non-Jews).

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable came into the holy place of the temple - usually the domain of leading Jews of standing - and proudly prayed "about himself". His prayer listed all his good and righteous deeds, including fasting twice a week and tithing all that he had.

The tax collector, not daring even to look up, with head bowed prayed simply said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner". The contrast in the prayer attitude of these two men is clearly evident.

One exalted himself, patting his own back, lauding his "achievements." The other humbled himself, deeply aware of his sins and his need for God's mercy.

So, who went home justified before God?

Prayer

Lord, help me recognize the "sinner" in me.

Help me confess to You, my sins of pride and self-righteousness.

Help me see the "Pharisee" in me.

Help me, Lord.

From Contemplation to Action

Find the time to list down our personal sins of pride and self-righteousness, and confess them to God.

John 9:1-41

What must it be like to be really blind? Do patches of light hover before our eyes whenever we are in the sun?

I once sat by a river on an early misty morning. The waters were like a sheet of glass. Where it was exposed to the sun the mist lifted and the waters clearly reflected the surrounding trees.

The light of God penetrates our lives to reveal God's truth to us. If we would lay our sins before God, confess and repent, our awareness of God's love and forgiveness heightens.

The man born blind can trace the stages of his journey into light. His first encounter was of "a Man called Jesus who made mud and put on my eyes," (v 11).

Then he saw Jesus to be a prophet (v 17). He concluded Jesus must be from God to be able to make him see (v 33). Testifying to the miracle he said, "I was blind, but now I see!" (v 25)

Having received such grace and healing mercy he even turned to ask if the Pharisees wanted to be Jesus' disciples. Finally when Jesus found him in the temple, he believed in Jesus and worshipped Him.

The man who had been blind and now able to see was a result of his belief and acceptance.

On the other hand the self acclaimed righteous and sighted Pharisees could not see Jesus for Who He is - the Messiah. Therefore they continued in their "blindness."

Prayer

Lord, continue to grant me Your light that I may continue to see You and follow You wherever You lead me.

From Contemplation to Action

How am I proclaiming what Jesus has done and is doing in my life that will let the world see that Jesus is a prophet (v 17), a healer (v 32), godly (v 31), from God (v 33), and is God (v 38)?



John 4:43-54

When Jesus visited Cana in Galilee a royal official asked a favour from Him. This royal official had come from Capernaum to Cana, to beg Jesus to heal his dying son.

At first Jesus remarked - sounding somewhat like a rebuke - that people would only believe when they saw signs and wonders. But on perceiving the official's desperate plea and sincerity

He said to him, "You may go. Your son will live." This father took Jesus at His word, and returned to Capernaum.

The royal official had come merely on the hearsay of Jesus as a miracle worker. He went home with the assurance of Jesus' Word of healing to find his son healed.

Looking beyond the miracle of healing, the royal official had begun to see Jesus now with a fresh new look of faith. That faith brought him and his whole household into the Kingdom of God.

It must have taken much courage for him to make his stand and profess his faith.

He could have been the butt of jokes and laughter, or deemed out of his mind by his associates at Herod's court. This was his test of faith in the market place.

In what ways is your faith being tested in the market place and how is it developing and growing?

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me mature and grow in my journey of faith with You.

From Contemplation to Action

What faith journey is God calling you to embark on at this point in your life?

How accepting are you to enter into it?

What resistance are you encountering within yourself?

How can you let go and let God?

John 5:1-16

"Do you want to get well?"

Confronted by such a question, our answer would surely be in the positive. But the man who had been lame for 38 years, hesitated. All he knew was that - he needed help to get into the pool of Siloam where he could be healed whenever the water was stirred.

Jesus knew of his condition and moved with compassion, told him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." The man did so and was healed.

All this happened on a Sabbath day. Result? The Jews immediately reprimanded the healed man for picking up his mat - an act construed as "work". In answer to their question he could not tell who had asked him to do so as Jesus had disappeared into the crowd.

Much later Jesus found him in the temple and encouragingly said to him, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Very likely Jesus had in mind the Day of Judgment when we would all have to stand before and be answerable to God.

On being told Jesus was the healer and therefore the One deemed to have broken the Sabbath law, the Jews were all set to go after Him for being a Sabbath breaker.

Many of us are blessed with good physical health but what about healing for our inner being?

"Do you want to get well?"

This is still ... a relevant question for us today.

Prayer

Lord, heal the parts of me that need healing.

Lord, I want to get well!

From Contemplation to Action

What are the “brokenness” in your life, in the life of your church, your community, our nation?

List them and ask God for healing for everyone of them.



John 5:17-30

After the man by the pool of Siloam had identified Jesus as his healer, the Jews were all out to persecute Jesus. All that they saw was Jesus the law breaker! They saw nothing of the miraculous healing.

Jesus spoke of God as His father. This claim of an exclusive relationship with God really upset them because within it was a claim of intimate relationship with God.

In the discourse that followed, Jesus persistently pointed out to them how close His relationship with the Father was, e.g. "Whatever the Father does, the Son also does," (v 19); "Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father Who sent Him," (v 23).

There is so much to digest and understand from the statements made by Jesus today.

So what are their reminders for us today?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your promise that whoever hears Your Word and believes in You will have eternal life. Bring before me now one person in my life who needs to hear Your Word today.

From Contemplation to Action

Go and share God's Word with that person that God has brought to your awareness, so that he/she too will have eternal life.

John 5:31-47

In the context, Jesus was speaking of and to the Pharisees. His analysis of their situation is penetrating: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life. I do not accept praise from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts," (vv 39-42).

The lifestyle of the Pharisees would be one that we would admire, because they diligently apply the Law to their life. Jesus outlined 3 mistakes they made:

1. Their obsession with the Law became a substitute for a real relationship with God.
It blinded them to the person of God that Jesus embodied.
2. They responded to the praise of human beings, and thus took care of what human beings could see and neglected what God could see.
3. They did not have the love of God (not love *for* God) in their hearts. It could well be that they loved God as they envisioned God (after all they diligently obeyed God's Law).
But their legalism robbed their heart of the love for God.

Prayer

Lord, are there traces of the mistakes of the Pharisees in me?

Please show me how these mistakes manifest themselves in me.

Lord, please help me remove them, so that they will not obstruct me from the life that You want to bring into my life, and rob my heart of the love for You.

From Contemplation to Action

Set your mind on one thing about you that you want to change.

Begin by praying about this matter regularly.

Pray that when God speaks you can hear what God says.

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

It would be a good idea to read John 7:1-39. The passage is basically about the anticipated appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem during the Passover, both because the Pharisees are known to be plotting to arrest Him, and also because there is the expectation that this is the time for Jesus to enter the public arena, and Jerusalem during the Passover is the perfect stage for this.

Jesus did appear in Jerusalem and the general conclusion was that He was an amazing teacher (v 15). Jesus however did not allow people the luxury of such a conclusion and went on to claim that He knows God; He comes from God, and is sent by God (v29).

It is easy to want to learn from Jesus; to accept Him as a wonderful teacher. But He does not allow us that option. As our teacher we think we can pick and choose what we want to learn from Him.

We think we can argue whether He is right, whether what He says is true, or whether His teaching is wisdom. But as One sent by God, all we can ever do, is to humbly and obediently listen to Him as we listen to God.

Prayer

Lord, show me what are the influences that have made me the person that I am now. Let me grasp how the words of Jesus have shaped my life.

From Contemplation to Action

Look over your meditations for the past week.

Or perhaps look over what you have set your heart upon yesterday.

Whichever it may be, set your heart on the one thing and say

"This is what Jesus is saying to me."

Determine how you can change your lifestyle,

in your mindset, in your daily choices,

armed with what God has said to you.

John 7:40-53

There was a lot of speculation as to the identity of Jesus. There was a lot of intellectualizing about Jesus. There were a lot of arguments about the identity of Jesus. But whichever position a person took it made a difference only in the person's mind, not the heart. They did not do much more than talk, discuss and argue. But in the hearts of some lowly temple guards, sent to arrest Jesus, it made a huge impact, so much so that they disobeyed the orders of the chief priests and Pharisees.

"Why didn't you bring Him in?" (v 45)

"No one ever spoke the way this Man does." (v 46)

The guards did not know theology, nor were they learned in the Scriptures. But they know that their hearts were stirred. And they were prepared to go against their orders because they knew that those orders were against what their hearts were saying about Jesus.

Prayer

Lord, I know that You are God.

Help my confession make a difference in the way I live every day.

Help my confession make a difference in my attitude to what You continue to say to me.

Let my confession of You as God encourage me to do things for You and the Kingdom joyfully.

From Contemplation to Action

Today, let your confession that "Jesus is Lord" come forth in your words and actions.

John 11:1-45

As you read this story, note the intent of both the writer and Jesus. From the beginning Jesus made it clear that there is a higher purpose guiding Him and He demonstrated it by staying back two more days, until Lazarus had passed away. The writer made it clear that everyone involved believed wholeheartedly that Jesus had the power to heal. But when death came, it seemed that even Jesus could not do anything about it.

Although Martha went further than the rest to express her belief that Jesus is indeed "the Christ, the Son of God, Who has come into the world" (v 27), we see that her faith went little beyond verbal, intellectual assent (John 11: 38-40). Her faith could not go beyond what she had seen and experienced.

For her and everyone there, while there is still life, there is hope. When death came, hope died.

Jesus went to great lengths to bring Martha and Mary beyond the limits of their faith ("Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died," vv 21, 32), to know Him as He truly is: "I AM the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me will live, even though they die; and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (vv 25-26)

Prayer

Lord, show me the limits of my faith.

Show me where You want me to go today in my life of faith with You.

Lord, I offer you the fruit of my contemplation.

Speak to me.

Let me hear what You have to say to me, now.

From Contemplation to Action

The beauty of Martha is that she went out to meet Jesus despite her disappointment. Ask yourself, what is it about Jesus that disappoints you? Continue to meditate on Jesus' words, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (11: 40) and ask Jesus for the strength to believe.



John 8:1-11

When we use the phrase "such women" (John 8: 5), or more generically, "such people", we draw a line between ourselves and "such people" - not only implying that we are not "such people" but that we are better than "such people". What Jesus did was to remove that line and forced the Pharisees to see that they are no different, and certainly no better. But let us not romanticize about the woman either.

She was caught in adultery. There was no question as to her guilt. She was either the third party with an adulterous man, or has betrayed her husband sexually with another man.

Even so, Jesus does not allow us to view ourselves different, or better, than her.

Prayer

Lord, show me what needs to change in my relationship with those I would normally view as "fringe members" or even "outcasts" in my church and community.

Grant me to have a compassionate and understanding heart in situations where I am likely to be judgmental and self-righteous.

From Contemplation to Action

In life, it is easier for us to identify ourselves with good, righteous people, than to be lumped together with those who are considered worthless or sinful. As a useful exercise - why not try and identify with specific persons that we would easily label "such people" - someone in our community whose marriage has been wrecked by his or her infidelity perhaps? Or some young "party type" who has no interest in spiritual things? Or a rich and haughty so-and-so couple who frowns on our relationship with their son or daughter? Or the good-for-nothing chap who smokes and drinks outside church and talks too loudly in church?

What would be useful is to remember Jesus' words in John 3:16, "For **God so loved the world** that God gave God's only Son ..."

John 8:21-30

"You will die in your sin." (v 21)

"I told you that you would die in your sins." (v 24)

"You will indeed die in your sins." (v 24)

There is no escaping or misunderstanding what Jesus wants to tell His listeners.

And He makes it clear that this message is not His own, but what the Father wants Him to communicate. "You will indeed die in your sins." (v 24)

This serious message of Jesus may at times be side-stepped by us as we concentrate more on His other messages, e.g. His love, friendship, blessing, healing power, guidance, protection, provision, etc. In that case, sin loses its sting; and freedom from sin and its penalty loses its value.

Our attention is focused on this temporal life rather than the eternal life in the hereafter.

Prayer

Lord, help me during this Lent to be courageous enough to look at the seriousness of my sins, and its consequences for my life.

From Contemplation to Action

Take some time to understand that Christ came not to make your life on earth better, but to secure your future in God for all eternity.

John 8:31-42

The meditation today is based on the sequence of Jesus' words as found in the scripture text today.

"If you hold to My teaching, you are My disciples" (v 31).

In its context, this was said to Jews who "put their faith in Him" (v 30). Jesus urged them to "hold to" His teaching; not wavering, not a one-time response, but a consistent lifetime commitment. This is the criterion for being His disciples.

"THEN you will know the truth" (v 32).

Before they accepted the truth because they put their faith in Jesus, now they will know the truth themselves, implying that as a result of holding on to Jesus' teaching, His disciples will come to know God personally.

"AND the truth will set you free" (v 32).

In the context of the whole chapter, clearly Jesus meant freedom from sin and its enslaving power.

So while yesterday's meditation warns us that we will "indeed die in (our) sins" (John 8:24), today's meditation teaches us that "the truth will set (us) free".

Prayer

Lord, help me hold on to Your teaching, be Your disciple, know the truth, and be set free from the enslaving power of sin.

From Contemplation to Action

Evaluate your own Christian life and growth with the above sequence.

What can you do to hold on to Jesus' teaching?

John 8:51-59

The focus of this long discussion in John 8 is sin, and death as a result of it. John has cleverly told the story of how Jesus rescued a woman from "death" because of her sin.

Jesus life-giving words to her were, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin," (8:11). Now Jesus says "Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps My Word will never see death," (v 51).

Obviously we must understand death to mean "spiritual death" or death as a result of sin.

This is the "second death", the death after death. But I believe the choice of the word "death" here, with no qualification, is deliberate. As we have seen in Sunday's meditation on John 11, death is something that our faith finds hard to conquer. But Jesus wants us to know that we, through our being

His disciples, are conquerors of the "second death", and therefore need not fear the first death.

So let us read and meditate with thanksgiving on what Jesus says to us today:

"Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps My Word will never see death,"
(v 51).

Do you have a fear of death?

Does the shadow of death over a loved one, a close friend, a member of your church weigh you down?

Only the presence of God can help you and others who touch death or are in touch with death, can overcome the sting of death.

Prayer

Lord, free me from my fear of death.

I now bring before you my concerns about death

Lord, indeed You are my shepherd, and I lack nothing.

It is in grassy meadows that You let me lie.

It is by tranquil streams that You lead me to restore my spirit.

You are ever guiding me in paths of saving justice as befits Your Name.
I know that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil, for You are ever at my side.

Your staff and Your crook are there to soothe me.
And in the presence of my enemies You prepare a table for me;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely Your kindness and faithful love will pursue me every day of my life.
And I shall dwell in Your house my whole life long.
Thank You, Lord, Thank You!

From Contemplation to Action

Over the past few days we have been meditating on physical death (Lazarus), sin and death, Resurrection and Life, holding fast to Jesus' teaching, truth, freedom, and physical death.

As we move closer to Good Friday, Jesus moves closer to His own physical death.

Take time to allow these truths to sink deeply into your heart.



John 10:31-42

The Jews knew very well what Jesus was teaching about Himself. Even though He regularly used the phrase "Son of Man" for Himself, the claims He makes about Himself leaves them in no doubt as to Who He claims to be, the "Son of God". For us all, we do not have the privilege the Jews had of observing His miracles. But we can make our minds up in the way Jesus is to be understood: How are we to understand it when Jesus said, "Do not believe Me unless I do what My Father does," (v 37).

It is as if Jesus is saying to us, "In other words, as long as what I do and what I teach are consistent with what you know of God, both from Scripture and from the depths of your heart, you know you can trust Me. Otherwise I would be pure evil, scheming to usurp the place of God in your heart."

The most powerful thing that our Lord did was to die on the cross. Other religious leaders might have taught well. Still others might have fought well. Jesus gave up His life. Do others say in their hearts, "No, the Son of God will never do this". Or do we say in our hearts, "Yes! Yes! Yes!" We would never have thought of it but now that Jesus, the Son of God has done it, we would never imagine God in any other way.

Prayer (*Jesus of the Scars* by Edward Shillito)

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know today what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

From Contemplation to Action

What can I, as a son of God, as a daughter of God, do in my everyday life,
to manifest that "I do what my Father does," (v 37)?



John 11:45-57

As you listen to the discussion among the members of the Sanhedrin, ask yourself, “What motivated them the most?”

Verse 48 gives us the answer:

“If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

It was the fear of losing what they had that informed their decision-making. Their mind was on the material, not the spiritual. That was why what Caiaphas proposed seemed most sensible to them.

In a material world the loss of one for the sake of many makes simple mathematical sense.

A cursory analysis might make you think that God subscribes to the same mathematics.

But spiritual mathematics is not the same. God, the Father, determined that it is better that Jesus, the Son of God, sacrifice Himself for the sake of many. In Jesus then, God the Father sacrificed everything when He sacrificed His one and only Son.

Prayer

Lord, on my own I can never do what You did in practicing spiritual mathematics.

Help me not rely on material mathematics for my decision-making.

Help me learn to love the way You love.

Help me in small but significant ways spread the practice of spiritual mathematics.

From Contemplation to Action

Think of one thing you can do that demonstrates spiritual mathematics.

Then go and do that one thing as a homage to God, the great spiritual mathematician.

Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

Jesus has warned us, "You will indeed die in your sins," (John 8:24). Now in today's scripture reading, Jesus desires for us to know that with His own life, "I will die for your sins."

Today is Passion Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week - the holiest week in the Christian calendar.

Passion Sunday leads us to Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Today's scripture reading takes us through the key events of the Passion of our Lord, the sufferings of Jesus Christ. As you read through it, try to imagine Jesus' state of mind as He spent his last night with His disciples, as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane in the face of His impending crucifixion, as He went through the sham trial, and finally, as He hung on the cross. Take time to get in touch with the deep love that Jesus has demonstrated, for the heavenly Father (in submitting to His will), and for you and me.

Prayer

(adapted from the Hymn: *There Is a Green Hill Far Away*)

Lord, there is a green hill far away, outside a city wall,
where You my dear Lord was crucified Who died to save us all.

I may not know, I cannot tell, what pains You had to bear,
but I believe it was for me You hung and suffered there.

You died that I might be forgiven, You died to make me good,
that I might go at last to heaven, saved by Your precious blood.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin,
You only could unlock the gate of heaven and let me in.

O dearly, dearly have You loved! And I must love You too,
and trust in Your redeeming blood, and try Your works to do.

So help me, God. Amen.

From Contemplation to Action

Re-read *Matthew 26:14 - 27:66* twice.

Note verses, phrases or words that tug at your heart and treasure them as *God's personal words* to you for this Holy Week.

Meditate on them to draw more fruit from them.

As you draw fruit from your meditations, ask *God* what *God* would have you do.



John 12:1-11

Today's beautiful act of love took place after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead.

In this expression of profound love - Mary enters, pours expensive perfume over Jesus' feet, and wipe his feet with her hair. The topic of intense debate was about the expensive perfume, but let us ponder for a moment the way we may understand how this expensive perfume connects with Jesus' feet, Mary's hair and what God may desire that we learn from this.

The expensive perfume:

We always say that God does not look at the cost of what we offer God. And that is right.

But is it a way of life for us to offer God that which costs us nothing? The issue is not the monetary value, but the personal value (cost) to us. What is the most costly offering we have offered to God? Which of our offerings to God do we think God treasures the most?

The feet:

John the Baptist said that he was not worthy to untie the thongs of Jesus' sandals (John 1:27).

The expensive perfume is not fit for the feet of Jesus. Our most costly offering may not be fit for our Lord. Yet Jesus accepts our offering graciously. Dare we ever take pride in what we offer God?

The hair:

The hair is the glory of a woman, and yet Mary used it to wipe Jesus' feet. There was no trace of pride, no trace of shame. And there was no thought of using anything else to wipe Jesus' feet. Would I turn to a cheaper substitute, a lesser alternative, ask someone else, if the Lord has need of my service?

What was most poignant of Mary's tender expression of love for Jesus?

It is this.

She was unashamedly telling everyone who she thinks Jesus was, and who she was in relation to Jesus. It was for Mary - an act of worship. And Jesus, not only accepted her act of worship, He defended her profession of love.

Prayer

Lord, help me worship and love You anew!

From Contemplation to Action

Do something unashamedly loving for God today.



John 13:21-33, 36-38

Today's reading focuses our attention on Peter. When Jesus announced that someone would betray Him, Peter wanted to know who it was. And when Jesus hinted of the dangerous journey He was about to undertake Peter declared that he was not afraid, not even of death. "Lord, why can't I follow You now? I will lay down my life for You," (v 37). Peter had supreme confidence - in himself.

Alas, it was Peter's confidence born out of ignorance. Ignorance of the spiritual forces that were at play that night; that night of betrayal ... denial ... trial. Ignorance of the limits of his own faith, even though he might ordinarily be a courageous man. And ignorance of what the Lord was really talking about.

We too are often caught in ignorance. Some of us may respond like Peter, boastful and confident. Some of us may rant and rail at God. Others of us may retreat in fear. Still others merely complain or criticize. What we need to do is to first understand that we do not know as much as we think we do. And we need to trust in the One who does. Or else, **before the rooster crows**, we will find out how wrong we have been.

Prayer

Lord, forgive my ignorance in the ways that You move in my life.

Grant me discernment and sensitivity to the workings of Your Holy Spirit in my life.

And Lord, help me respond with courage and love to all that You ask of me, today and everyday.

From Contemplation to Action

For most of us, life is what we see and experience - time, health, physical potentials and limits, money, beauty, ability, history, etc. What we see and experience informs the way we look at life, the way we look into the unknown, the way we look at the future. But we need to be mindful that we are but a grain of sand in the ocean of eternity, a small but significant part of the cosmic reality of God and God's purpose, called to respond courageously in the battle between the spiritual forces.

That God knows us by name should be a reason for us to rejoice continually. As we contemplate on all this, let us let go of our faith in ourselves and strengthen our faith in Jesus, even as we meet the challenges in our life, in our church, and in our nation.



Matthew 26:14-25

The story of Judas is so well known that we would describe someone who has betrayed us, who has stabbed us in the back, as "Judas." But in this telling of Jesus' prediction of Judas' betrayal, we are at His table, reclining with Jesus and eating with Him the Passover, just before Jesus instituted the Holy Communion. At this meeting point of a Feast that commemorates how death passed over Israel, protected by the blood from a slain lamb, and a new Feast that commemorates how God forgives us our sin because of the blood of Jesus, we have the disciples asking, "Surely not I, Lord" at Jesus' assertion that one of them will betray Him. Each one at the table had to examine himself before the Lord.

Prayer

Surely it is I, Lord, who has betrayed You again and again.

Help me to see and to know the weaknesses in me that make me betray You again and again.

Heal me, Lord, and help me resolve to stand by You at all times.

From Contemplation to Action

On this day, the day before Maundy Thursday where we will celebrate the Holy Communion, let us take time to examine ourselves before our Lord - How have we failed Him? How have we betrayed His love?

How have we sinned? But we do so not as Judas who ultimately took his own life. We do so in anticipation of the Holy Communion, knowing that the blood of our Lord cleanses and frees us from all sin.

We do so in gratitude. Let us confess our sins before the Lord as we prepare for Maundy Thursday.

John 13:1-15

*"Jesus knew
that the Father had put all things under His power,
and that He had come from God and was returning to God."
(John 13:3)*

Today is Maundy Thursday. Today, Jesus eats the Last Supper with His disciples.

What is He feeling? Is His heart heavy with what is about to take place? Or is His heart heavier that one of His disciples is going to betray Him?

For Jesus however, the present was more important (more important than what is to come). For Jesus, He was more concerned with the "now". For "now", Jesus will be with His disciples. For "now", He will celebrate the Passover with them. For "now", He will humble Himself before them by washing their feet. For "now", Jesus will love them by serving them. For "now", He will make it known that one of them is not clean (v 10). For "now", He will continue to teach them that they should do to one another as He has done for them (vv 14-15).

What is the confidence behind Jesus that He could be in the "now"? It is this, "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God." (v 3) He "knew".

Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, help me to know who I am in You. Grant me the confidence to live every moment in the "now" - knowing who I am, knowing Who You are, and who I am in You.

From Contemplation to Action

In the confidence of knowing who you are in the Lord, go and serve others unreservedly - with joy, compassion, humility.

John 18-19

“Through the Cross both happiness
And life are given,
For there is no other road
That leads to Heaven.

On the Cross there hangs the Lord
Of Heaven and earth
And amid the stress of war
Peace comes to birth.
All the evils of our life
Far off are driven;
For there is no other road
That leads to Heaven.

A precious palm-tree is the Cross,
So says the Bride,
Which her Beloved One has scal'd,
His arms stretch'd wide;
And its fruit a savour sweet
To God has given;
And there is no other road
That leads to Heaven.

The Cross is like an olive-tree,
Fair to the sight,
Whereof the holy oil provides
Healing and light.
Wherefore, my soul, embrace
the Cross,
happy and shriven,
For there is no other road
That leads to Heaven.

'Tis a tree all wondrous green,
Tree of desire;
In its shade the Bride sits down
With love afire,
Rejoicing in her Lover dear,
The King of Heaven,
For there is no other road
That leads to Heaven.

When a soul unto its God
Submits indeed
And from every worldly thing
Is wholly freed,
To it as a tree of life
The Cross is given,
And a path delectable
That leads to Heaven.

Since the Lord embrac'd the
Cross,
And for us died,
Honour has surrounded it:
'Tis glorified.
Life and happiness it brings
When we have striven:
'Tis the surest road to take
That leads to Heaven.

(A meditation on the Cross by St Teresa of Avila
- 16th Century Spanish mystic)

Prayer

Lord, help me courageously take the surest road that leads to Heaven.

From Contemplation to Action

What is the Cross that is before me now, that I shrink from?

How can I take up this Cross?

What are my fears?

How can I overcome them?

What are the risks?

How can I embrace all the risks that are involved - when I take up this Cross?



Matthew 27:57-61

Mark 15:42-47

Luke 23:50-56

John 19:38-42

Today, Jesus lays silent in His tomb. All of creation waits in silence.

The day before, Good Friday, had been a most traumatic day - full of sorrow, anguish, pain, tears. Two of the followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, had lovingly taken the body of Jesus from the Cross and wrapped it in strips of clean linen, with 34 kilograms of spices (myrrh and aloes). They had placed Jesus' body in a tomb cut out of rock.

How did Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus feel as they were engaged in this last act of love for the dead Jesus? They must have been very, very horrified with the numerous and deep wounds on His head, His body, His hands, His feet, His pierced side.

After this, when they went home, what did they do? Did they just sit for hours staring into space - reliving the horror of it all - the injustice, the sham trial, the brutality, the crucifixion, the lifeless body of their beloved rabbi? Did they let their tears flow or did they try to numb their anguish in some mindless activity?

What about the women? It was said, they "were sitting ... opposite the tomb" (Mt 27:61).

They "saw where ... and how ... His body was laid." (Mk 15:47; Lk 23:55) And then, after the Sabbath, they came with spices to anoint Jesus' body. (Mk 16:1) It was an act of love.

How about you? How do you want to spend today? How do you want to be with Jesus, today?

Prayer

Lord, teach me to be silent before You today. Teach me to love You, in the silence.

From Contemplation to Action

For the future - do some act of kindness / love for the deceased.

Matthew 28:1-10

Mark 16:1-8

Luke 24:1-12

John 20:1-18

“Is it true He will rise on the third day? Is it true? Didn't He say that? He did!”

But will it happen? Will it?” Perhaps these were some of the thoughts of the women and the disciples on Holy Saturday. The women could not believe it because on Easter morning, they brought their spices along to anoint Jesus' body.

But what happened?

It is Easter morning. All is quiet, silent. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, new life enters the cold, dead body of Jesus. Cell by cell, Jesus awakes. As He awakes, the silence of creation is pierced. The waiting is over. The birds begin to chirp. The darkness of the night gives way to the dawning light. The flowers open their petals. The rush of fresh air is felt everywhere.

There is a violent earthquake, and the stone over the tomb is rolled back by an angel from heaven. Indeed, it is a New Day. A New Day has dawned! The women meet the angel, who tells them, “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, Who was crucified. He has risen! **You will see Him**” (Mk 16:6-7) And then they meet Jesus. He tells them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers ... **they will see Me.**” (Mt 28:10). And then Mary Magdalene has a personal encounter with the risen Lord. She rushes back to the disciples and tells them, “**I have seen the Lord!**” (John 20:18)

Prayer

Lord, let me “see” You today and everyday with the eyes of faith, hope, and love.

From Contemplation to Action

Go and tell someone of the Risen Christ today!

YOUR LENT WRITERS

MS BETTY YAP grew up in KL Wesley and was involved in the youth fellowship. Of the missionaries and teachers that have walked through her life, she says, that their "guidance and mentoring have impacted me." She was one of the pioneer batches of diploma students at the Trinity College, Singapore. Upon graduation she had a short posting in Bentong as a church worker, after which she went on to Baldwin-Wallace College, Ohio, on a Crusade Scholarship, majoring in English and Christian Education. When she returned, she was posted to Taiping Wesley as a Christian Education worker. She also taught Religious Knowledge at the Taiping Methodist Girls' School. From Taiping, she went to KL and taught in the Methodist Afternoon School and the Methodist College. She worships now at Emmanuel Methodist Church, PJ. On the personal side, she enjoys walking and word games. Her hope and prayer is that each of us will discover his/her gifting and serve in the various church ministries.

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A FELLOW PILGRIM is a Methodist who believes that daily "pondering" upon God's Word deepens and transforms one's life; and thus is passionate to help others connect with God through the living Word of God.