

REIMAGINE

SEEKING GOD'S WILL
A Prayer Resource

Lent 2023

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday 2nd April

9 churches together for PALM SUNDAY

10am at Holy Trinity, Embleton

Thursday 13th April

9 churches together for a SHARED CONVERSATION

6-9pm at St Mary, Lesbury

INTRODUCTION

A Note from The Clergy

Welcome to our Lent Prayer Resource for 2023

In the cycle of the Church's year Lent may originally have followed Epiphany, just as Jesus' time in the wilderness followed immediately on his baptism, but it soon became firmly attached to Easter, as the principal occasion for baptism and for the reconciliation of those who had been excluded from the Church's fellowship for a variety of serious faults. This history explains the characteristic notes of Lent – self-examination, penitence, self-denial, study, and preparation for Easter, to which almsgiving has traditionally been added.

As the candidates for baptism were instructed in Christian faith, and as penitents prepared themselves, through fasting and penance, to be readmitted to communion, the whole Christian community was invited to join them in the process of study and repentance, the extension of which over forty days would remind them of the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness, being tested by Satan.

Lent provides all of us with an opportunity to take more time with God, deepening our relationship, questioning what it is that God wants of us, to what he may be calling us. Allowing ourselves to be assured of his unending love for all that he has made, being strengthened by the knowledge that his forgiveness is generously offered to all who turn to him in penitence and faith, and knowing that in his strength we can go into the world to share his life and love with others.

Lent is also a time for taking more time with God as the Church. In our case, nine churches, seeking his will for our life together and for our future in our particular communities. There is much to do and many ways of doing it. Questions of how, why, when and where will arise, but in praying together and journeying together, we ask God to be our guide and reveal his plans for us in this season of our common life.

This Lent, let's take time to ask God to guide us, to a clear vision of how God wants us to be and to grow and to worship and to serve – together, not apart. Each week we invite you to return your thinking and praying to one central question:

**Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God's future,
trusting him to be our guide?**

We offer these resources as a focus for our prayer and reflection this Lent. We hope that you find them helpful and inspiring. If you have any ideas and insights to share, please get in touch, we'd love to hear from you.

Prayer is about spending time in the presence of God. Seeking out time to give your full attention to dwelling with God is often quite difficult in the busyness of life. Prayer comes in so many forms and there is a wealth of traditions and resources to draw upon as you work out how best you approach prayer. This might include silence, reading scripture, a conversation with God, music, art, or walking – the list goes on. Whatever your style of prayer, wherever and whenever you might set time aside, this resource seeks to provide some helpful prompts to guide your prayer during this season of Lent. Be assured, too, that others are praying alongside you and using this booklet to focus their prayers also.

The structure of this resource is very similar to how we use our time together at our 'Come and See' study group each week - a loose framework with plenty of time for thinking, discussion, reflection, and prayer. Each week we explore a word or theme, let ourselves ponder and wonder together, and read scripture - asking God to speak through what we are reading. Together we are attentive to how God is stirring us and prompting us. No answer or reflection is wrong or silly!

Maybe this is a new venture for you in your life of prayer. You might like to journey through this Lenten prayer booklet alone, or in the company of others. You might consider journaling or drawing as a way of articulating how God is speaking through your time of prayer. This is an invitation to have a go at something new. As we pray together as a wider church family, we do so assured that God will journey with us and expectant that God will answer our prayers – even if it might be in unexpected ways!

If you'd like to journey with others this Lent, through these themes and reflections, there are a couple of opportunities each week:

1. Zoom prayers on Wednesday at 9:30am
Zoom code: 897 887 8657
2. *Come and See* discussion group at Howick Village Hall on Thursdays, 2-4pm
3. Sunday services
4. Connect with others in your own time over the 6 weeks of Lent

At the end of this booklet there are two invitations as we look ahead to what comes next – if you can, get these in the diary. If at any point you wish to discuss something with a member of clergy, maybe a way that God has prompted you in prayer, we'd love to hear from you. You can find contact details on page 10.

INVITATION

Week 1

REFLECTION



SCRIPTURE
John 1:35-end

Something that excites us, makes us smile, or think, or change our opinion is well worth telling other people about. We desire that others see, feel, taste it too; we want to share our experience so others can join in. In this passage we hear of one disciple after another encountering Jesus and having a transformative experience. In turn, that leads them to tell others, so they too will “come and see.” Right at the start of Jesus’ ministry, when people were beginning to realise that Jesus was a man well worth following, invitation by word-of-mouth was the way Jesus gathered his disciples. This example of invitation, first offered by Jesus himself, provides us a pattern to be inspired by in our own discipleship and church community. Jesus’ new disciple, Philip, in his acceptance of Jesus’ invitation to “follow” is moved to respond. For Philip, this was finding another potential disciple of Jesus, Nathanael. Nathanael’s encounter with Jesus transforms him from sceptic to believer.

We start this prayerful journey through Lent with the concept of ‘invitation’ because, for many, invitation is the start of their journey with Christ. Not just a one-time-only invitation, but one made and accepted daily as we choose the way of Christ. We do this in the context of fellowship and friendship with one another – church together. ‘Invitation’ in our pondering and prayers this Lent is about joining together as the gathered people of God in this place, to seek God’s will and ask for inspiration of how we can extend that Christ-like invitation to “come and see” in new and exciting ways. The first disciple who received this most awesome invitation is never named (v39). He represents us, John’s readers, who like those disciples in this passage, are invited to see for ourselves how God may surprise us, transform us, and inspire us to extend to others that invitation to “come and see.”

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God’s future, trusting him to be our guide?

Gracious and Holy Father, give us the wisdom to discover You, the intelligence to understand You, the diligence to seek after You, the patience to wait for You, eyes to behold You, a heart to meditate upon You, and a life to proclaim You, through the power of the Spirit of Jesus, our Lord. Amen

PRAYER



VISION

Week 2

REFLECTION



SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 12:12-end

Vision is a huge word. It's complexity and diversity sits deep with the Christian tradition. Throughout scripture we read how the people of God have articulated God's wisdom in many and various ways. Our passage from holy scripture is Paul's attempt to speak of God's vision for the early church, with particular reference to the state of the Christian church in Corinth. The Corinthians had many factions in their church, they some really talented speakers and wise leaders, yet they were not living up to their true potential as a local church. Instead of being built up in love and growing in sanctification, they were dealing with issues of pride, division and chaotic worship – people were being exalted over God. St Paul desires for us, readers of this letter, to know that we are one body made up of many members and each person brings something essential to the life, ministry and culture of the church.

This vision of a fruitful, healthy and diverse church would have been difficult reading to those first readers, and maybe too for us today. As we prayerfully discern God's vision for our churches, we are encouraged to recognise, nurture and use the gifts in our pews at present, but also to identify the gaps and the places where we must ask for help – recognising others might help us grow and flourish further. One gift that Paul often names is prophecy. Whether you think of yourself as a prophet or not, we can all speak prophetically - naming how God is at work and articulating how God's vision for us might be worked out in this place. This might include taking a risk, feeling silly or getting it wrong; but prayerfully and actively seeking God's will and testing our boundaries as a church, all in the name of fulfilling God's vision for this place, will always be a good thing.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be our guide?

Will you dare to embrace each other and grow together in love?
Will you dare to share your riches in common and minister to each other in need?
Will you dare to pray for each other until your hearts beat with longings of God?
Will you dare to carry the light of Christ into the world's dark places?

PRAYER



WORSHIP

Week 3

REFLECTION



SCRIPTURE
Romans 12:1-13

Worship is a fundamental aspect of our life together. Our common call to worship goes far beyond our time together on a Sunday. Instead, it forms the pattern of our life as Christian disciples and permeates our daily lives and encounters.

St Paul speaks of a transformative worship that is living and sacrificial. Not only does worship sustain us in our personal lives, and in corporate life as a church community, but it also seeks to look outwards by 'extending hospitality'.

To pursue this, St Paul encourages us to preserve in prayer (v12) – being ready to ask for God's guidance and, importantly, being willing to listen to how God might respond.

This passage of scripture speaks of a prayerful desire for reorientation. Reorientation of our worship is about a considered and intentional movement from being a self-serving community to a community of service. This reorientation of worship is urging us to think about how and what we are offering. That is something we must first consider in our own heart with God, but also in conversation as church together. Our worshipping life can only thrive if we are praying and seeking to make God the very centre of our being – the beating heart of our churches. In our prayer and worship we are urged, 'do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord' (v11).

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be our guide?

Come, now is the time to worship.
Come, now is the time to give your heart.
Come, just as you are to worship.
Come, just as you are before your God.

Willingly we choose to surrender ourselves.
Willingly our knees will bow.
With our whole heart, soul, mind and strength,
We gladly choose you now.

PRAYER



Week 4

REFLECTION



SCRIPTURE
Psalm 63:1-8

Why do we pray? Why do we ask for God to speak into our lives?

We pray because we *hope* and trust God has something better in store for us.

We pursue God in *hope*. These words from Psalm 63 are the praises of David in the wilderness of Judah. David is looking beyond his current circumstances and longs for God by reaching out his hands in prayer and worship. God never changes.

About 1,000 years after David, Jesus said this best – Matthew 7:7-9. David did not know these words, but he certainly knew the One who said them.

It is in the steadfastness of God that we can hold fast to hope.

Throughout this Psalm David uses his whole self in worship and prayer. As human beings, made in the image and likeness of God, we have so much just by our nature that can be used to worship God as seen in this Psalm: our lips, our tongue, our hands, our will, our soul, our mouth, our memory, our minds, just to name a few. When we approach God, however and wherever, if we do it with a hopeful heart, we will always be satisfied – even if that is in ways we did not expect. Because David was satisfied by God's love, he praised God even in the most difficult of times. In David's words, 'the loving kindness of God is better than life' (v3). We live in hope, we are a living hope and we hope in the life God has in store for us.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be our guide?

Let nothing disturb me. Let nothing affright me.
All things are passing; God never changeth.
Patient and hopeful endurance attaineth all things.
Those who God possesseth lack nothing. God alone sufficeth.

The eternal God is thy refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting arms

St Teresa of Avila, adapted

PRAYER



TRANSFORMATION

PAGE 7

Week 5

REFLECTION



SCRIPTURE
Ezekiel 37:1-14

We've already encountered the word transformation through this Lenten prayer journey. Often this passage from Ezekiel is the Old Testament reading on the celebration of Pentecost – the descending of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. Yet, we meet Ezekiel as he is describing a vision – a picture of a dry, barren and lifeless valley. It might be a metaphor for how life can sometimes feel – moments of spiritual aridity, doubt and question, loss and bereavement... the list goes on. In the midst of this vision, a question: "Can these bones live?" God asks Ezekiel. "Lord, you alone know", he replies. What a wonderful answer from Ezekiel. God, I don't know, I'm lost. In your mercy help me understand. Transform my ignorance with your wisdom.

Can these dry bones live. Yes! Yes they can. For God says "I will make breath enter you and you will live" (v5). That word 'breath' might also be translated as wind or spirit. Suddenly we're back in Genesis, the wind over the formless void before creation and the breath of life given to humankind. The breath of God transforms even the driest of bones into a living and thriving being. The wind of the spirit that set-off the story of creation, just like a toppling row of dominoes, transformed the world to have life and continues to work in transforming us daily. What happened at Pentecost was the same thing that happened in Genesis, and the same as in Ezekiel's vision. The transforming breath of God gives life, even in places where we cannot predict or in the moments when we least expect it.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be our guide?

Cover me with your Holy Spirit, O God. Draw me to greater faith in Him who is able to do all things. According to your eternal mercy, establish, strengthen and reconcile me in Christ. Transform me according to the revelation of your Word and Spirit. Move me through prayer and study of your word to live out your will. Fulfil in me the fruit of your good works and grant me wisdom that I might bear your light in this world. Amen

PRAYER



COMMISSION

Week 6

REFLECTION



SCRIPTURE
Matthew 28:16-end

As we come to the end of this season of intentional guided prayer, we are met with powerful words of encouragement and assurance. Commonly known as 'The Great Commission', these were Jesus' parting words for the church just prior to his ascension. Jesus gathers, sends and blesses. Jesus gathers his disciples for worship and instruction. He calls his disciples to 'go' - to go out, share the good news they have witnessed and make disciples. And finally, Jesus offers words of blessing. Simple but profound words. "I am with you always" (v20). What better blessing can there be? This pattern of gathering, sending and blessing does not end as we turn the final page of Matthew's gospel. It continues to live on, offering us a pattern for our life as a church.

As churches with individual identities, we are called to serve our communities in different ways - this is absolutely essential to authentic and incarnational ministry. That does not lessen or draw us away from that common calling to gather in prayer and worship, encourage and support one another in mission, and to receive God's great blessing. This short passage, truth and assurance passed down through generations of faithful Christians, brings together all our threads of these last weeks and moves us toward action. As we continue on, seeking God's will for us in this place, there is no doubt that God is with us and journeying alongside us. As our page turns in this new season of our common life, Jesus' last earthly words become the first line of our story: "I am with you always."

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, will we dare to walk into God's future, trusting him to be our guide?

Eternal God, I am no longer my own but yours.
Your will, not mine, be done in all things.
I willingly offer all that I have and am to serve you,
as and where you choose.
In obedience your church hears and accepts your commands.
In love we seek to do your perfect will,
And with joy we offer ourselves anew today.

PRAYER



LOOKING AHEAD

Reimagining Church

As the season of Lent ends, and we enter Passiontide and anticipate Easter, we hope you have been able to engage with these prayer resources. Whether you have found it helpful, inspiring, or challenging (or a mixture of all three!), we hope you have met with God in prayer and been guided in your thinking and wondering.

This has been a journey we have undertaken together as 9 churches. Whether you have explored these themes in your own time, or have found discussion helpful, we'd love to hear how God has been stirring you. What has this season of intentional prayer prompted you to think, say, or do? How is God's will for this place exciting you, or challenging you? What might you be able to share about your time of prayer and reflection?

We'd love to gather and share with one another how God has answered prayer and begin to articulate, in the company of one another, how God's might be calling us as individual churches and as churches together – the people of God in this place.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

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9 churches together for PALM SUNDAY
10am at Holy Trinity, Embleton

Thursday 13th April

9 churches together for a SHARED CONVERSATION
6-9pm at St Mary, Lesbury

If you're unable to make these occasions and would like to share something of your journey of prayer through Lent, please don't hesitate to speak to a member of clergy or your church warden – contact details on the next page.

Lent Books

Dust and Glory: A Lent journey of faith, failure forgiveness.

40 Daily Reflections by Emma Ineson

Women of Holy Week: An Easter journey in nine stories

Reflections with illustrations by Paula Gooder

Structured Daily Prayer

Daily Prayer or Time to Pray – Church of England Apps or website

Updated daily with set prayers, readings, and liturgy for the season.

Lunchtime Examen (Loyola Press Soundcloud) – an invitation to pause during the day to review your day in the presence of God. This six-session series is led by Jim Manney, author of *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer: Discovering the Power of St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen*

Worship Songs and Hymns

Oceans (Where Feet May Fail) by Hillsong UNITED

Take My Life, and Let It Be – This hymn is a beautiful prayer that God would both draw us closer to Himself and use us to bring others to Him.

Art

A traditional Lenten and Passiontide discipline is to meditate upon Stations of the Cross. There are many different series to choose from – traditional and modern.

Why not have a look to pictures by the Benedictine Sisters of Turvey Abbey.

Connect

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