

LENT 2025

HEAR OUR PRAYER



THE
DIOCESE
OF
BLACKBURN

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE



PREFACE

Dear Friends,

There was a supply teacher (whose name I can't remember) who inspired me to take up music. There was Colin who helped me to enjoy sport. There was Mark and Michael who together inspired me to be a priest. There was Lindsay who taught me how to share my faith. We all need role models, people whose example inspires and encourages us.

And the same is true with prayer. In the Diocese of Blackburn, 2025 is a Year of Prayer for Growth and Renewal, a year when we are committing ourselves to praying regularly and expectantly for the growth of our churches. And fortunately, help is at hand! When you open up your Bible, there are countless role models to help us grow in the life of prayer.

This Lent devotional differs from its predecessors because, rather than working our way through one Book, we are going to explore a range of powerful prayer role models in the scriptures. By using the Diocesan Lent Course, available on the Fruitful app or online, you can go even deeper in helping these wonderful individuals to help you to pray.

Over the next few weeks, we will pray with Hannah whose intense life of personal prayer plays a massive role in God's plan of salvation. We will pray with Elijah who prayed big and prayed bold and bore courageous witness in his faithfulness to God.

We will pray with Ezekiel whose prayer bore witness to God's redemptive plan to bring life out of death, and we will pray with Esther who joined her prayer with so many others to save her people from tyranny.

We will pray with Daniel who models for us constancy and persistence in prayer even in times of danger, and we will pray each Sunday with the psalmist whose vivid and honest relationship with God manages to incorporate every aspect of prayer.

Finally we will pray with Jesus as, constantly strengthened by His Father's presence, He takes up the Cup of Suffering and goes to the cross to set us free.

I hope you find challenge, inspiration, and joy in the journey this year's Lent Devotional will lead you on. Above I hope that, inspired by so great a cloud of witnesses, your life of prayer grows, and with it, your joy in bearing witness to the God who sets us free in the cross of Jesus Christ.

Yours,

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.

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WEDNESDAY 5TH MARCH

ASH WEDNESDAY



READ
Matthew 6:5-8

'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.' **Matthew 6:5**

In our modern world, the desire to be noticed often overshadows genuine actions. How often do we find ourselves doing things for the sake of being seen rather than for the act itself? This phenomenon is particularly evident in our current political landscape, where figures like Donald Trump make outlandish statements, such as claims about eating dogs, simply to garner attention. This tactic, regardless of truth, serves to build public profiles and keep individuals in the spotlight. Jesus, however, instructs us to approach prayer in a radically different manner. In Matthew 6:5-8, He emphasises the importance of private, sincere prayer over public displays of piety. This teaching challenges us to examine our motives: are we praying to connect with God or to impress others?

While public figures often seek attention, there are those who quietly make significant impacts. Taylor Swift, known for her music, also engages in charitable works without fanfare. In the Diocese of Multan, as witnessed on my visit last year, Christians discreetly educate women from brick kilns, using the Bible to teach literacy. These actions, done in secret, embody the spirit of Matthew 6:6, where Jesus encourages us to *"go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father"*.

This approach to prayer and good deeds aligns with Jesus' broader teachings on humility and sincerity. In Matthew 6:1, He warns against performing righteous acts to be seen by others. Similarly, in Matthew 23:5, Jesus criticises the Pharisees for their ostentatious displays of piety.

By focusing our prayers and actions on what truly matters rather than on public perception, we can find greater fulfilment and authenticity in our spiritual lives. As we navigate a world that often values appearance over substance, let us remember that our relationship with God is personal and profound, not a performance for others.

**LET US
PRAY**

Let us pray: Lord, teach us to pray not for show but for connection. Guide our hearts to seek You in quiet moments of genuine conversation. Help us find depth in our prayer life, beyond the noise of public recognition. Amen

Iain Parks, Diocesan Director of Education.

THURSDAY 6TH MARCH



READ

1 John 5:14-15

'And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.' **1 John 5:14**

I wonder what gets in the way of you having a daily habit of prayer. Is it because you have no confidence in your prayers. Do you say things like: 'I don't know what to say' or even 'My prayers are not important: God wouldn't listen to me.'

In the '60s and '70s the ads for Colgate toothpaste had a strap line – Colgate's ring of confidence: the confidence that you would be free of bad breath by using Colgate toothpaste. Putting bad breath aside where do you put your confidence. Is it in your job, your friends, your family, your health? Is it in your own ability to get things done? What confidence do you have in God?

The verses today tell us that we can have confidence in a God who hears us, that we can be bold in our prayers. We can boldly come into God's presence to pray. He is already there waiting for us to turn up and talk to Him. I have a boldness in praying because I know that my Heavenly Father is delighted to hear my prayers, to listen to the concerns I carry with me. The most delightful image I have of God is that of the loving father who runs out to meet His lost son.

I came across a story told by Brennan Manning, about a dying man who asked him how to pray. He suggested that the man picture Jesus sitting on the chair by his bed and just talk to him as a friend. When the man died his daughter mentioned to the Brennan Manning that when her father died his head was lying on the seat.

So can I encourage to be bold this Lent and build up a regular rhythm of prayer. If you have little confidence in coming to God with your requests, maybe you will find it helpful to spend some time picturing Jesus sitting near you with a cup of coffee eagerly waiting to hear what you have to say to Him.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father, thank you that you eagerly wait for my prayer: Jesus, help me to boldly pray: Holy Spirit guide me as I pray. Amen

The Revd Mary Ashton, Warden of Spiritual Directors.

FRIDAY 7TH MARCH



READ

Ephesians 6:17-18

“Take up the sword of the Spirit. Pray in the Spirit at all times.” Ephesians 6:17, 18

*‘We wanna see *clap clap clap* We wanna see *clap clap clap* We wanna see Jesus lifted high!’* You’re welcome for the earworm. Many of us will remember this 1993 song – perhaps you still sing it at your church? If not, as was proven by the band Oasis, we’re surely due for a 90s comeback. The verse in that catchy ditty includes the line, *‘Every prayer a powerful weapon, / Strongholds come tumbling down’.*

Talking of the 1990s, that was when my team (Man Utd) was riding high season after season. Alas, no longer. One of the things the new manager Ruben Amorim has said he will work on is the team’s transition – the skill of turning defence into attack with speed, agility, and menace. These two verses in Ephesians 6 are likewise training us, Christ’s team, for our transition in the spiritual match against sin, the world, and the devil, from defence to attack. In verses 11-16, Paul has been instructing us on our defensive game – how to put on the *‘whole armour of God’* so that we might stand in the struggle against the *‘powers of this present darkness.’* We’ve clothed ourselves with defensive, protective garments. But in the second half of verse 17, we pick up a weapon: something that can do some real damage: *‘the sword of the Spirit.’*

How can the Spirit be wielded as a sword? Well, the sword of the Spirit is *‘the word of God.’* Scripture read and preached, the gospel of Jesus proclaimed: these are the arms with which we can claim more territory for Christ’s Kingdom and drive back the enemy. But Paul puts more into our arsenal in the next verse: *‘Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication.’* The sword of the Spirit is yielded also in our prayer life: every prayer a powerful weapon.

I’m going to resolve to make my prayers more aggressive; more spiritually martial. In Jesus’ powerful name, our prayers can drive out demons, disarm the devil, dispel the darkness, defeat depravity. Let us pray boldly for evil to be exposed, expunged, and exiled – from our own hearts first of all and from our churches second (for judgment begins at the house of God – 1 Peter 4:17); and then from our unjust and broken world. Let’s see strongholds come tumbling down.

**LET US
PRAY**

Let us pray: Lord, give me the unction and courage to wield prayer as a Spiritual weapon against sin, the world, and the devil. Amen.

The Revd Tom Woolford, Vicar of New Longton.

SATURDAY 8TH MARCH



READ

Philippians 4:6-7

'Do not worry about anything...'

Philippians 4:6

To those who know me I may not come across as such, but I'm a terrible worrier. As I am writing this in January, the road outside is thick sheet of ice, and I'm worried about going out in case I fall or have an accident in the car. I'm worrying about downsizing to a three-bedroom house in April when I've lived in big clergy houses for over 20 years. Over Christmas I've been worrying about what I could say in this reflection and while I was Mothers' Union President I was always worrying that I might let the members down in some way. When the surgeon rang me from the hospital to tell me that my husband Mark's operation was over and had been successful, I was beside myself with worry as I thought there was going to be a BUT...

Why do I do it? I know this beautiful, reassuring passage well. I think I'm quite good at making my requests known to God in prayer, but I'm not so good at leaving them with him. However, I resolve to try harder to do this during Lent and I hope to receive more of his peace.

I'm sure that many of you reading this reflection will have many more serious problems to worry about than I do. Please be assured that you can have *"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"* (v.7). This is not just an absence of hostility, but wholeness, well-being, and every kind of blessing. The peace of God helps us to know that the Lord is near (v.5).

When I was a home group leader, we kept a record of the things we had prayed for during the prayer time each week. Every few weeks we would encourage each other by looking back over previous weeks and seeing just how many of our prayers had been answered and how many of our worries had been unfounded. This would lead us to thanksgiving. Maybe this is something that you could do.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, help me to make my requests known to you and to leave my worries with you. Please give me your peace, which surpasses understanding and help me know that you are near. Amen.

Gill Ireland, Lay-member of Blackburn Cathedral.

SUNDAY 9TH MARCH

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT



READ
Psalm 91

'When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.' **Psalm 91:15**

One glance at the news headlines is often all that's needed to understand why levels of worry and anxiety are presently so high in the UK. Whilst we may not have to contend with the lions, snakes, and arrows referred to in today's psalm, the cost of living, crime, international conflict, and other news stories coupled with the relentless pressures from social media can gnaw away at our peace of mind. Indeed, in their most recent study the Mental Health Association found that 73% of adults in the UK had felt anxious in the previous two weeks and 20% felt anxious most or all of the time. Yet it doesn't have to be that way.

Psalm 91 is a wonderful reminder of what happens when we pray to God about the things that are troubling us. As we bring our fears to Him we can enjoy: rest as we trust in Him; comfort as He covers us with His feathers; protection behind His shield and deliverance from whatever is afflicting us. The imagery here is beautiful and we can lean into different verses depending on our circumstances. When we're at the end of ourselves, worn out and hurting, we can take refuge under His wings. When we're fearful or afraid, we can stand behind His shield. Through prayer, we're talking to 'the most High'; 'the Almighty'. We can trust that there is nothing that is more powerful than our God.

Digging deeper, all of the above is available to us if we make the Most High our '*dwelling-place*'. 'Dwell' means to take up permanent residence but how do we take up permanent residence in the shelter of God? I think this is as simple as spending time with Him in prayer and worship, learning more about the bible and listening to and putting our trust in Him. Through drawing close to Him, we find ourselves living in His shadow where we can find rest.

Nothing in this Psalm suggests that storms and trials won't still come our way but when they do it promises us there is an alternative to being consumed by worry, a way that brings peace and comfort – the antidote to our anxious world.

**LET US
PRAY**

Heavenly Father, we lift up to you our worries and concerns. Protect, comfort and deliver us, may we find rest in the shadow of your mighty wings. Amen

Carolyn Barton, Director of Vision Delivery & Deputy Diocesan Secretary.

MONDAY 10TH MARCH



READ

1 Samuel 1:1-8

'So it went on year after year; as often as [Hannah] went up to the house of the Lord, [her rival] used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.' **1 Samuel 1: 7**

Strange things can happen to us when we're under pressure. Intensely stressful situations, chronic pain, unresolved issues, or grief can push us toward unhealthy habits, destructive behaviours, or struggles with our physical or mental health. As believers, we are not immune to hard circumstances, nor poor responses to those circumstances, nor the unchosen effects. However, in prayer, we have unrestricted access to the throne of grace for our time of need. Not an escape from our problems but Jesus' presence and help during them.

As we begin to consider Hannah's prayer, we reflect on the circumstances that drove her to prayer. Hannah lived in a chaotic time of Israel's history, when few people followed the Lord. She was married to a good man, Elkanah, who faithfully worshipped the Lord and led his family in making regular sacrifices. He also loved Hannah dearly, even though others may have treated her poorly for being unable to bear children.

The family's prosperity is hinted at by the fact that Elkanah had two wives, as polygamy was rare for all but the wealthy. Yet this wealth did not bring peace. Hannah and Peninnah were rivals, and home life was filled with tension. Peninnah cruelly taunted Hannah, exacerbating the deep pain of her childlessness. This mockery often occurred when the family went up to worship. At the very point when Hannah should have been enjoying intimacy with God, she was filled with sorrow and would not eat the fellowship meal. Elkanah does what he can to help but his words are clearly inadequate.

This was not a one off. It was a chronic situation. Every time they go to worship. Imagine yourself in Hannah's position, how might you have responded? Hannah is driven to prayer. Her pain did not turn her away from God but toward Him. As we learn from her this week, let our circumstances prompt us to turn to the throne of grace for help in our time of need.

**LET US
PRAY**

Heavenly Father, help me in all circumstances to turn to you in Jesus and not away from you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

(If reflecting on this story raises any emotional challenges, we encourage you to seek support. Talk to a church leader, a trusted Christian friend, or a counsellor.)

The Revd Jonny Lee, Rector of All Hallows, Bispham.

TUESDAY 11TH MARCH



READ

1 Samuel 1:9-18

'She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord.' **1 Samuel 1:10**

Today we read of how Hannah cried to the Lord in desperation. It is often at times of despair that we give more time to God. Trouble can lead us to pray with fervency, energy, determination, and persistency. Hannah was praying so fervently that Eli thought she was drunk.

I remember a story of a girl whose life had spiralled out of control. She had lost contact with her family and had ended up imprisoned in a life of drugs, violence and prostitution. As she sat in a motel room, waiting for her next client, she turned on the radio to hear words of an old hymn her father sang to her at bedtime when she was a child.

*'Jesus loves me, this I know, For the Bible tells me so
Little ones to Him belong, they are weak, but He is strong'*

As she listened, she wept, as she was reminded of the Jesus' deep love for her. In despair, she prayed to the Lord. The girl returned home to her father, who joyfully welcomed her with open arms. Inspired by this story of a father's faith and his teaching of deep truths with simple songs, I have often sung these words to my daughters at bedtime. May they know that when they are weak, He is strong!

I previously served as an Army Officer, which included two tours of Afghanistan. As a young leader in my twenties I became acutely aware of my inadequacies, as I attempted to deal with the grief and trauma of those under my command. In my desire to lead my soldiers well, I discovered that the most powerful weapon I possessed was not a rifle, but prayer, and the grace of God.

So be reminded, that in the Lord Jesus we find a tender loving Saviour who can bring peace in times of despair. Just as He heard the cry of Hannah's heart, He will hear your prayer. So go to Him and pray fervently, with an open heart.

**LET US
PRAY**

*O Lord, remember me, and meet me in my deepest need.
Amen.*

The Revd Alex Oehring, Rector of Colne, St Bartholomew and Holy Trinity.

WEDNESDAY 12TH MARCH



READ

1 Samuel 1:19-20

'In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked him of the LORD.' **1 Samuel 1:20**

As a child who loved fairy tales and Disney films, I was always delighted by the meaning of my name. "Sarah" means "laughing princess" and as I've grown older, I've tried to embody the joyful aspect of my name (though I'll always secretly love being called a princess!). When my husband Ben and I were expecting our own children, we took great care in choosing their names—thinking deeply about the meaning and what we'd be speaking over their lives.

In today's reading we hear of a joyful answer to prayer. The bible says that 'The LORD remembered her', and in time, Hannah gave birth to Samuel. His name, meaning 'God had heard' is an expression of Hannah's gratitude for God's response to her painful plea. Have you ever thought about how you recognise and respond when God answers your prayers? Hannah marked her answer to prayer in such a way that every time she said Samuel's name, she would have been reminded to praise God for his faithfulness.

Not everyone receives the same answer to prayer that Hannah did, and this verse can be difficult, especially for those facing infertility or other unanswered prayers. As we reflect on this passage, we can rejoice that through Jesus, who is named the Great High Priest, we can boldly approach a God who not only hears us but also fully understands our pain. Jesus embraced every aspect of human experience, including suffering (Hebrews 4:14-16) and as our great High Priest we can be assured that even in difficult times, the Lord remembers us.

Wherever we find ourselves –whether praising God for answered prayers or waiting in pain—we can call upon Him, confident that He hears us, understands us, and is able to deliver us.

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You that we can boldly approach Your throne through Jesus, our Great High Priest. Lord, we especially want to thank you for the ways that you have answered our prayers (spend some time calling them to mind). I lift to You my greatest hurts and fears. I ask that you hear my plea, look on me with compassion, and answer me. Amen

Sarah Marston, Making Disciples Coordinator.

THURSDAY 13TH MARCH



READ

1 Samuel 1:21-28

'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there for ever; I will offer him as a Nazirite for all time.' **1 Samuel 1:22**

Hannah's happiness seems complete as she has the baby boy in her life and stays back to look after him. To me as a mother, sending Samuel a few years later to live in the temple because of the vow she made to God seems cruel. But in the temple, where it was thought that God's presence dwells, Samuel would be as near to the Lord as possible. As in Psalms 27 and 91, he would make the Lord his dwelling-place. In the law of Moses, a Nazirite was someone set apart and consecrated to the Lord to fulfil His will. In a sense this was the whole people of God, but much more was demanded of Nazirites.

Later on, as the child Samuel grew up in the temple, he was called by God at night and responded: *'Speak, for your servant is listening.'* He kept on listening to God, and was able to direct the people of Israel in His ways because nothing mattered to him but the fulfilment of God's word. In the stories of these people, it is clear that they want to give their very best to the Lord. That is the purpose of their lives. Hannah speaks of lending the child to God as long as he lives, but really it is us who have things on loan from God in this world.

Could we, in a similar way, focus our best efforts on the building of the Kingdom of God? In our baptism we are all anointed and set apart for a special role in God's plan of salvation for the world as followers and imitators of Christ. How would you give the best of your attention and your gifts to God? Are the things that you value also the things that God values most, or is there an opportunity to align your values more closely with God's? Prayer is how we practise deep listening to God, and the way in which He changes our hearts. And as we attend to what we hear, God's presence and His kingdom are made more visible.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, we pray for the courage to hold nothing back from you so that we may see your kingdom come in our midst. Amen

The Revd Anna Walker, Director of Whalley Abbey.

FRIDAY 14TH MARCH



READ

1 Samuel 2:1-11

'Hannah prayed and said.'

1 Samuel 2:1a

At Heskin Pemberton, our local primary, there is never a shortage of volunteers to step forward and pray at the end of whole school worship. From every class. They do not know what words they are going to say, but we listen with anticipation, and say 'Amen' with joy. What a powerful tradition that school has developed.

Hannah was a pray-er. Sadness, distress, misery – all prayed from. All shared, as she habitually, expectantly, sought God's attention. This time, as she has seen God move, she finds herself speaking these words of praise we have just read. She lets them come out of her mouth, knowing and feeling their truth, weight and their wonder at coming from her heart!

As a teenager, beginning to grasp the practical reality of following a Jesus who lives, I distinctly remember one occasion, having stopped to pray, thinking 'where did those words come from' that I had just heard myself saying! No, it wasn't words to match Hannah's, but a huge little step. If you use the gift of tongues in prayer, then you will practise the discipline of being still and letting your spirit praise God in prayer.

I imagine Hannah's posture in the previous chapter was probably head bowed. Here, I see her, like Moses, with her hands aloft, eyes open, maybe again with tears. It's not a pose of triumph, but of reaching out, acknowledging a God who listens. This is the way the people of Israel prayed.

Isn't it wonderful to hear toddlers start to string words together that they speak from their heart? Jesus noted the same then he quoted Psalm 8 in Matthew 21 '*Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself.*' I learned so much in prayer by praying with others – the practise of letting prayer grow in your heart and mind, then releasing it in words. Welcoming the discipline of God as eager children. We all need a prayer crèche!

**LET US
PRAY**

O Lord, open our lips, and our mouth shall show forth your praise. From the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

The Revd Stef Dnistrianskyj, St James the Great, Wrightington with Heskin.

SATURDAY 15TH MARCH



READ

1 Samuel 2:18-21

'The Lord took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord' **1 Samuel 2:21**

'Das Leben is grausam, und Klaus ist ein Schwein' was a line from an annoyingly catchy song when I lived in Germany. From a song by Die Prinzen, it roughly means 'Life is awful and Klaus is a pig!' I would wander about Hamburg singing those words, when in reality, life was generally OK, and the only Claus I knew was great!

We all experience tough times in life, when things really are awful, and I suspect many of us will worry, try to find a solution ourselves, phone friends and family, panic and get stressed, before we even think about God or prayer!

Hannah would have had good reason to sing the first part of that line with feeling, but in contrast, she gives us an extraordinary example of faith, trusting God in tough times and putting Him first in everything. Her love for God is clear in the way she brings her pain to God. She trusts God with the future, and her devotion is even clearer as she gives God her only son to live in God's house, for God's purposes, all his life.

Hannah's faithfulness is also clear in the way she and Elkanah went each year to the Temple for the annual sacrifice. It must have been hard, each year seeing how much her son had changed, what she was missing, but she remained faithful. Samuel wasn't forgotten either, as she remained his loving, faithful mother, making him a new robe each year. And verse 21 shows that Hannah's faith is 'noted by God' and rewarded as she and Elkanah are blessed with five more children, with Samuel growing up *'in the presence of the Lord'*, trusting in and serving God.

Trusting in Jesus, we too have rich blessings now and an amazing future hope to look forward to. So, whether life is awful, just okay, or fantastic let's be encouraged and challenged to pray by Hannah's example:

Do we truly love God and put him first, before everything?

Do we trust God with our lives, the future, with our children?

Do we remain faithful no matter how life is?

**LET US
PRAY**

Father God, Help us to trust in you wholeheartedly and pray with confidence and faith just as Hannah did. Amen.

Simon Corner, Youth Worker, St Michael's CE High School, Chorley.

SUNDAY 16TH MARCH

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT



READ
Psalm 27

*'One thing I ask of the LORD, that will I seek after;
To live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.'*
Psalm 27:4

As we are now a week and a half into Lent and almost a quarter of the way through the Diocesan Year of Prayer. I have a question for you; how is your prayer life? As I muse on the wealth of resources provided for the Year of Prayer, I am reminded of the old saying, 'you can take a horse to water, but can't make it drink!'

In Psalm 27 King David is focused on two parallel themes, that of God's protection and of abiding in the LORD. David sees them as two sides of the same coin, He puts his trust in God for protection and in response he desires to spend his days in worship and prayer (verse 4).

Today in our country we have the ultimate freedom to worship, pray, and read our bibles. Being a Christian is not illegal, or punishable by imprisonment, and Christians are not persecuted for their faith. The Church of England is part of the establishment, therefore when our Diocese designates 2025 as a year of prayer, we are free to read and receive the resources to help us pray. Sadly, this is not the case in other countries.

So, back to my initial question; 'how is your prayer life?' Bearing in mind the freedoms we enjoy, do we take it for granted, or are we aware of how precious our religious freedom is? David understood the need to spend time in the LORD's presence, he was desperate to meet with the LORD in prayer, and as a result, he had no doubt that LORD would uphold him in times of difficulty.

This unwavering conviction of the LORD's desire to protect David was born out of a life devoted to God in prayer. And David's desire to spend time in the LORD's presence came from periods in his life when he was not able to worship the LORD freely, he knew and understood personally the pain of not having the freedom we have today.

So, how is your prayer life?

**LET US
PRAY**

Father God, thank you for the religious freedoms I enjoy, help me never to take it for granted, but give me the desire to worship you all the days of my life. Amen

The Revd Canon Anne Beverley, Director of Ministry.

MONDAY 17TH MARCH



READ

1 Kings 17:1-7

'He went and did according to the word of the Lord; he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.' **1 Kings 17:5**

Last year I moved from a house with a relatively small garden to a house with a much larger garden where there's an area for feeding the birds. I have discovered the joys of watching all the birds flitting to the feeders and the sorrows of watching the squirrels poach the food! I don't have ravens in my garden, just a few cheeky magpies and the occasional crow having a go at knocking the bird feeders down so they can get to the contents. In today's reading we have a role reversal; instead of Elijah feeding the birds, the ravens feed Elijah.

This is first appearance of Elijah, in the Bible. He is considered one of the great prophets of the Jewish faith and appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. In the reading today, he is sent by God to proclaim a harsh judgement on King Ahab, whose marriage to Jezebel led to an acceptance of the worship of Baal in the land of Israel. The land is to be devastated by a severe drought. Once Elijah has faithfully passed on God's message, he is sent to the wilderness where God protects him from the wrath of King Ahab and the effects of the drought.

There are many points in the Bible where God sends His people into the wilderness, or quiet places; often after a stressful situation or before they embark on something new. Sometimes, we are so caught up and busy with the day-to-day that prayer gets pushed to the edges, or even doesn't happen at all. When this happens we miss the opportunity to hear what God might want to say to us in prayer so cannot respond faithfully, like Elijah did, to the prompting of the Spirit. Taking time to go 'into the wilderness', either walking in the country or even attending a quiet day at Whalley Abbey, provides the space and the quiet to reconnect with God in prayer, to be refreshed and to listen to where God might want to take us next in our walk with Him.

**LET US
PRAY**

Help me, Lord, to find quiet in the chaotic so I can hear your wisdom and guidance. Amen.

Jen Read, Senior Church Buildings Officer and Licensed Lay Minister.

TUESDAY 18TH MARCH



READ

1 Kings 17:8-16

'The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.' **1 Kings 17:16**

As part of a small Diocesan team, I recently visited the Diocese of Multan in central Pakistan. This area is famous for its deserts. We visited one of these deserts called 'Cholistan' (Land of sands) where there is drought, poverty, and lack of provisions. There is also a spiritual drought. Many people worship other gods. God works in unexpected places and people. He has been sending His servants to Cholistan for proclaiming the gospel and many people welcome them and trust Jesus even amidst harsh circumstances.

Today's reading depicts a similar picture where God sent Elijah for refuge in Zarephath amidst drought and famine (v.9). The region is the homeland of Jezebel (King Ahab's pagan wife) who served and worshipped other gods (Baal and Asherah). There is spiritual drought and scarcity. Elijah confronted King Ahab and he may have been thinking 'why is God sending me into a lion's den?'. But he obeys God's word and trusts in His promises. Because his relationship with God is deep and his trust in the Lord is rock-solid. God works in unexpected places and people for His glorious purposes.

Elijah is given sustenance through a destitute and vulnerable widow. This widow had lost all her hopes of life and waits to die along with her son. But although a non-believer she welcomes God's servant and honours His word. She gives a tiny amount of bread and oil (v.12), for this is all she had. Her resources are meagre and temporary (v.12) but when she trusts God's word, she reaps in abundance (vv.15-16) and eventually everlasting life.

Our county and country may not experience any drought or famine like Elijah's time or the deserts of central Pakistan, but there are people who live under poverty and lack of provisions. In addition, there is spiritual drought and scarcity. God works in unexpected places and people for His glorious purposes. He sends us to these places and people with the life-giving glorious gospel of Jesus. Like the widow we must receive God's word, trust in Him, and give ourselves fully to Jesus so that we may receive abundant and everlasting life.

**LET US
PRAY**

Heavenly Father continue to work in unexpected places and people to give abundant and everlasting life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Revd Munawar Din, Vicar of St Luke's, Brierfield & St Cuthbert's, Burnley.

WEDNESDAY 19TH MARCH



READ
1 Kings
17:17-24

'Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again.'
1 Kings 17:21

In the heart of the Old Testament we find Elijah living at a time when faith was challenged in a land often far from the presence of God. But Elijah stood firm, and his story draws us into the transformative power of prayer as he faced the heart-wrenching plight of a grieving mother.

Imagine the devastation following the wildfires that swept through Los Angeles (United States) in January. Thousands found themselves in despair, their lives in ashes. What could be more distressing than losing home, livelihood, and hope? Similarly, Elijah encountered a widow gripped by the desolation of her child's death. Yet, amidst this turmoil, his response was not of despair but of fervent prayer, believing in God's power to restore life.

Elijah's profound relationship with God was marked by exceptional trust. He approached God with boldness, reflecting a heart steadfast in prayer. His passionate plea for the widow's son teaches us that prayer is not just a ritual but a lifeline connecting us to God's immeasurable grace and power. Witnessing the child's revival, we see a miracle born out of deep faith, emphasising God's faithfulness and sovereignty.

To walk in Elijah's footsteps means adopting a faithful and expectant prayer life. Each day, one may pause to converse with God, laying burdens and hopes before Him with honest surrender and trust. In those moments, the seeds of faith grow, enabling us to see beyond our struggles.

A prayer is more than words; it is the heart's posture before a mighty God. As we learn from Elijah's example, let our prayers be simple yet bold, trusting in the One who listens and holds all power.

**LET US
PRAY**

Gracious God, inspire us with Elijah's faith, teaching us to pray boldly and trust fully in Your power. Amen.

**The Revd Cornelius Ashgar, Assistant Curate,
St Laurence's & St Peter's, Chorley.**

THURSDAY 20TH MARCH



READ

1 Kings 18:20-46

'Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.' **1 Kings 18:37**

I don't have enough of the stuff on my head to ever have a "bad hair day", but I know what it is to have a "bad prayer day". It's those days when prayer is noisy, rushed, perfunctory, or selfish. When prayer is basically a reflection of how much I am ticked off with life rather than how much I am switched on to God. In 1 Kings 18, we are witnessing a bad prayer day for those who oppose Elijah.

At Mount Carmel, the tension was palpable and the rivalry intense. On one side there was Ahab, the King of Israel, who had actively encouraged the worship of Baal. By Ahab's side were the prophets of Baal. Opposing them is Elijah, the prophet of the God of Israel. This was a public contest – a showdown for the ages.

First up were the prophets of Baal. They had done as agreed: prepare the sacrifice but put no fire to it, then call upon the name of your god. It was established that the one who answers by fire, he is God. So, the prophets prepared their altar and called upon the name of Baal. They shouted and screamed and wailed and moaned. They raved and ranted but no one answered.

Elijah, on the other hand, is having a good prayer day. He is stood by the altar he had built, prepared, and had drenched with water. Elijah's prays: *'Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.'* *Then the fire of the Lord fell'.*

A good prayer day comes down to purpose and motivation. Here, Elijah is seeking God's vindication, not to "win" or be proved right, but rather that people might recognise, on a heart level, who God is and what God had done. Elijah shows how our prayers rely on God's initiative and how they need to be in tune with God's action. If prayer is seeking God for my own purposes, then my split ends will lead to more bad prayer days.

**LET US
PRAY**

Loving God, thank you for all that you are and all that you have done. Hear my prayer this day and answer so that I may know more fully that you are turning my heart towards you, in Jesus's name. Amen.

**The Revd Matt Allen, Blackburn Centre Lead Tutor,
Emmanuel Theological College.**

FRIDAY 21ST MARCH



READ

1 Kings 19:1-19

'He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' **1 Kings 19:11**

In the school where I work I have a bright yellow banner emblazoned across the wall of my office that states "I am never down, I am either up... or getting back up." This is a timely reminder for me that whatever comes my way, with God I have His constant love, support and guidance in the joyous times and in the challenges life brings. When the difficult times come, being in His presence, leaning on Him to provide means I will get up again.

In this passage from Kings, Elijah felt really down and was reliant on God to 'get back up.' He had been working hard to show the Israelites God's way, but most were not listening even after God performed wonders where there could be no doubt of His power. He had got to a point where he was afraid, weary and in despair. Elijah felt he was the only one '*zealous for the Lord.*' Elijah is running for his life feeling alone... and his prayer? He prays to die, he is 'done'; his prayer is simple and has such honesty. God's response was to provide rest, an angel to wake him, and food and drink to renew his strength and motivation.

But God wasn't finished, He sent wind, an earthquake, and fire yet it was recognising and listening to God's quiet voice that was important. In verses 12 and 13 it says *"...after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave."* God spoke and gave him specific instructions to anoint Jehu king over Israel and Elisha to succeed Elijah as a prophet. Elijah obeyed what God told him to do. His prayers show that he was honest, reliant and recognising God's voice listened and obeyed.

At the end of this passage we see the call of Elisha who carried the mantle of Elijah and worked to keep Israel focused on God. Elijah passes to Elisha prophetic authority. During this time of Lent whatever our circumstances God invites us to be in His presence, to be in relationship with Him and to listen to His gentle whisper.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father God whether I am up or getting back up strengthen me with a renewed passion to do your will; like Elijah help me to recognise your gentle whisper, listen and obey. Amen.

Jen Palfrey, Subject Lead for RE, St Michael's Chorley & ALM Hesketh with Becconsall.

SATURDAY 22ND MARCH



READ
2 Kings
2:1-12

'Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.' **2 Kings 2:2**

When we start a Lent devotional, like this, there can be a temptation to fall out of the habit of praying and listening to the Lord, daily. So, well done for staying with it so far.

In this last chapter of Elijah's story, we see how he trusts the LORD and goes where the LORD leads, right until the very end, and beyond.

This relentless commitment to follow is something Elisha learnt from being with Elijah. Elijah gently suggests to Elisha that he can choose to stop following, but Elisha reaffirms his commitment to keep going with Elijah.

Elijah had learnt to trust the LORD. Though he didn't always follow with courage or enthusiasm, he kept going, even when he got tired and grumpy about it. Elijah knew he wasn't following a way of life or a set of ideas. He was following a person. The LORD is his name (LORD is a translation of God's name 'Yahweh' or 'Jehovah', meaning 'I am') and Elijah talked with Him, often.

Prayer is how we grow in our relationship with the LORD. In prayer, we don't just learn about God, we learn to be with Him, talking with Him and listening to Him. It is how we learn to recognise His voice, which leads us as we follow Him.

Elijah trusted God because he knew Him. Elijah was very honest with God at times too. He had learnt that God is faithful through all the highs and lows and the mundane things in life and so he kept following Him.

So let us keep going in prayer too, learning to trust God, speaking honestly with Him and to keep following Him through the rest of Lent, and beyond.

LET US PRAY

Lord, I commit to keep coming to you in prayer and to keep following you. Thank you that I can be honest with you when I pray. Help me to listen well to you. Help me to keep going, even when it is difficult and I want to give up, or when I get distracted. Amen.

The Revd Claire Cooke, Lead Tutor for Formation at Emmanuel Theological College.

SUNDAY 23RD MARCH

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT



READ
Psalm 63

'I seek you, my soul thirsts for you.'
Psalm 63:1

Elijah is vital in understanding the covenant between God and His people. There is a vacant seat for Elijah at major ceremonies reminding Jews that he's a silent observer of the ongoing covenant. His prophetic ministry drawn out in the words of today's psalm are an indication that he gazes upon and knows the presence of God.

Elijah, in the Christian tradition, is present on two key occasions. He is there on the Mount of Transfiguration heralding Jesus' messianic credentials. He is also seen in the ministry of John the Baptist. John is the new Elijah representing the ongoing link with the prophets of the earlier tradition.

Elijah's prayer is that the fullness and beauty of God is revealed to His people. Today, in our psalm, we see the significance for those called to be prophetic of knowing the presence of God so intimately. Elijah needed to know that God was so close and present to him. He needed to know that he could reflect upon the glory of God before him to carry him through times of challenge.

This is an exemplar for us. We should be inspired by Elijah's zeal for God and be recalled to the desire to thirst for God. The inspiration for Christians is to have that physical longing to know God present in and through us. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit and we are Temples of the Spirit. We need to recognise the responsibility that gives and the gift of intimacy with God.

Furthermore, we can recognise that our longing for God, our desire for God, will be occasionally fulfilled with the kind of mystical vision suggested in today's text but also seen in the beautiful miracle of the Eucharist that has been left for us as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet until we see Him face to face in Glory. Literally, in the Eucharist physical and spiritual needs are met so that we may come face to face with the presence and the glory of God as Elijah did.

**LET US
PRAY**

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. Amen. (From St Augustine of Hippo).

The Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster.

MONDAY 24TH MARCH



READ
Ezekiel
2:1-3:3

'And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house.' **Ezekiel 2:6**

Have you ever lived among scorpions? I have, and I can tell you there is a reason Alabama is called the Beautiful State and not the Scorpion State. If it was no one would ever move there. The pain of a scorpion sting can be quite blinding, but I would still sooner be stung by a scorpion than face some of the pain that other people's words and looks have caused.

In this passage we read about Ezekiel's call to be a prophet, which if you read the rest of your bible, you will see, wasn't a glamorous or even comfortable job. The prophets were often ostracised and even hated, because they held a mirror up to society and showed them where they had strayed from the Lord. No one likes to be told that what they are doing is wrong.

So, Ezekiel, while obedient, probably was not jumping at the chance to do as the Lord commanded of him. Sometimes we can avoid listening to what the Lord has to say because we fear ending up like Ezekiel—living with scorpions (literal or metaphorical). Being too busy is a common excuse we use for avoiding making time to pray, but how many of us, do you think, sometimes avoid prayer because we are scared of what the Lord has to say? When we pray the Lord's prayer, we pray one particularly powerful and brave line *'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.'* This is the point when we shed all of our own plans and expectations, and lay them aside to boldly follow God down whichever road He leads us. But let's remember that just like Ezekiel, if the Lord has called you, He will equip you and most importantly, He will protect you from the scorpions. So, fill up your stomach with the Word of the Lord, stand up on your feet and let the Lord speak to you today.

LET US PRAY

Our Father, in heaven, glorious is Your name, we ask today that Your kingdom come, and Your will be done. Help us to listen to the calling You have placed on our lives, and give us the courage to look up past the briars and thorns, and fix our eyes on you instead. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The Venerable David Picken, Archdeacon of Lancaster.

TUESDAY 25TH MARCH



READ
Ezekiel
33:10-19

'Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?' **Ezekiel 33:11**

Lent is a time when we are reminded of the importance of turning back to God. Our passage from Ezekiel demonstrates that God deeply desires that the hearts of the Israelites are changed and turn back to Him. In our key verse above, God says 'turn back' three times. He wants Israel to live and not die. What was true for the Israelites is true for us as well. God wants us to turn back to Him. Sometimes life can be overwhelming: work, finances, relationships, family life, health issues and many other things can contribute to the stresses and strains of everyday existence. The Israelites must have felt like this too. After years of struggle: war, famine, and exile, they started to believe that God was not on their side.

Too often, the temptation is to try and live life on our own terms and in our own strength. When we do this we often get into a mess. It can seem like nothing is going our way. God can seem very distant. Like the exiles in our passage from Ezekiel, we may at times feel like God is punishing us, but that is not true. Do we ever ask ourselves, have I given my problem or my situation to God in prayer?

This passage actually reassures us of God's love for all His children. God could easily have said "I have no pleasure in the death of the righteous." He actually says, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked"! That is wonderful and reassuring. It reminds us of the forgiving father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The father welcomed back his errant son with open arms. Harsh judgment is not what God prefers, but we still need to repent. This passage shows us that even in the Old Testament, God can be seen as a merciful Father who hates to see His children suffer. In all of life's challenges and joys, may we return to our Heavenly Father, and give our lives to God in prayer.

**LET US
PRAY**

Heavenly Father, help us to turn away from those things and those behaviours which separate us from Your love. May we return to You, and know the abundant life that Jesus promises. Amen.

The Revd Marc Wolverson, Vicar, St James', Leyland.

WEDNESDAY 26TH MARCH



READ

Ezekiel 34:11-31

'I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.' **Ezekiel 34:22**

Anyone who has been around church for a while may be quite familiar with being described as a sheep with God as our Shepherd (e.g. Psalm 23). However, in today's reading we find one of the essential characteristics that makes the sheep/ Shepherd metaphor so appropriate – the vulnerability of God's people. In Ezekiel's day, Judah's negligent and self-interested leaders (shepherds) had inflicted great harm upon God's flock, eventually leaving them scattered abroad in the horrors of exile (vv. 1-6). Ezekiel tells us that God's passionate concern for His people compelled Him to take on the role of Shepherd by searching out His sheep and bringing them to a place of safety and wholeness (v.11,16,25-31; cf. Luke 15:1-7).

There is, I suppose, a certain incoherence in God's insistence that He Himself will shepherd His flock (vv. 11-16) while at the same time sending his servant David to do the job (v. 23-24). This puzzle is, of course, resolved when Jesus, the Davidic Messiah and divine Son of God, came as Shepherd (Heb 13:20). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has brought his flock to a place of safety, flourishing, and abundance by shedding His blood for them (John 10:10-11). As we prepare for Holy Week, let us rejoice once again in our salvation and security found in the Good Shepherd.

However, in this Lenten season of repentance, let us also note that God's rescue entails judgement. To keep His flock safe, God removes negligent and oppressive 'shepherds' (v.10) and ravenous wild animals (vv.25,28) – even those in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). But God's sheep are also in danger from one another it seems. In their haste to satisfy their own needs, the sleek and strong of the flock ignorantly crowd out the weak and trample over their needs (vv.16-22). Where have we carelessly put our wants before others' needs and in doing so caused harm? Let us re-commit to take much greater care of one another – especially our most vulnerable members – recognising the Flock of God are those bought with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

**LET US
PRAY**

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, forgive us for the ways we have harmed other sheep. Please lead us in justice to be a more caring, considerate, and safe flock under your care, Amen.

The Revd Andy Meeson, Vicar, St John's, Leyland.

THURSDAY 27TH MARCH



READ Ezekiel 36:16-38

'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.' Ezekiel 36:26

If you type the phrase “famous songs about the heart” into Google, the results return an endless list of hits. From singers who tell of a heart that has been totally eclipsed, made of glass, a heart that is hungry, achy, breaky, burnt, broken, haunted... the list goes on. Songwriters tell a familiar story of people like you and me attempting to be in relationship with one another, repeatedly messing up, causing untold and unseen damage to one another right before things fall apart. You might say the story is a familiar but bleak one.

The book of Ezekiel tells an equally bleak story at first. The story of a priest and prophet, wrenched from his home at a critical moment in his career and ministry, taken into exile and yet still selected by God to help bring about seismic change to the hardened hearts of the Israelites. Just as chart-topping songs often go; the Israelites were also messing up repeatedly, causing untold and unseen damage to each other and things were falling apart spectacularly – their hearts needed to be rescued by, and reconciled with, God.

After landing in today’s reading, we finally start to witness the most abundant hope and light breaking through into the very darkest of times. All of this brought about through a young man who was faithfully committed not just to walking and praying with God regularly, but who listened to and engaged with God to bring about a life-changing transformation in others.

As you read this reflection today, do you find yourself with a completely worry-free, joyful and light-filled heart? Or does your heart feel heavy? Are there areas of hurt and pain, shaded spots and unresolved situations that you’d rather not share? One of the greatest and simplest ways we can respond when our hearts are heavy – is simply to speak to Jesus Christ. He is waiting to hear from you and me right now. Why not respond by opening your heart and saying these simple words:

LET US PRAY

Dear Lord, as you promised in the book of Ezekiel, I pray that you heal me from the inside out, starting right now with my heart. Create a new heart inside me and take over the heavy load that I have been carrying for such a long time on my own, so I can share your light and hope with those around me. Amen.

Abi Saunders, PA to The Bishop of Burnley.

FRIDAY 28TH MARCH



READ

Ezekiel 37:1-21

'Mortal, can these bones live?'

Ezekiel 37:3

The alarm goes, you make a cup of tea, then reach for your phone to check the BBC News, known as doom-scrolling: wars, famine, floods, rising prices, and the church news is as bad. Is there any hope? It seems not. Can these dry bones live?

The vision of the valley of dry bones is familiar to many, but the key to understanding this chapter is its context. Ezekiel has been promising new leadership, a restored land, rebuilt cities. They looked at the shattered remains of their people in exile and could only say: *"Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost. Can these bones live?"* The answer appears to be no, but Ezekiel believed it could happen. Ezekiel speaks first to the bones, telling them to hear, exhorting lifeless people to listen to the word of God. Secondly he speaks to the spirit, tantamount to praying. The effect was devastating; prayer made the vision a reality. The bones represent Israel in exile. They have been there for more than ten years, glimmering of hope extinguished. Hope was gone, their bones were very dry. In the vision of dry bones, God reassures His people of hope amidst despair. The imagery speaks powerfully of their current state – spiritually dead and exiled. Ezekiel's message is one of both national and spiritual restoration.

In the middle of the 19th Century, many godly Welsh Christians felt the need for a powerful awakening. Many people prayed privately at times of worship and in congregational services. At 5am in the morning the chapel at Tre'r-ddol was crowded. Children and youth held prayer meetings, revival continued to spread. In place after place drunkenness decreased, pubs were empty, the cursing and swearing in the mines nearly disappeared. Prayer meetings became the principle means of awakening churches. As soon as people were saved, they became prayer warriors. It was a prayer revival from first to last.

Can these dry bones live?

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, restore our bones to life, beginning with me. Amen.

The Rt Revd Tony Porter, Honorary Assistant Bishop.

SATURDAY 29TH MARCH



READ

Ezekiel 39:25-40:4

'I will never again hide my face from them.'
Ezekiel 39:29

At the grand unveilings of statues or plaques it's often the reactions of those present that captures our attentions. Sometimes we see delight, but there are also times when there is disappointment or even shock etched into their faces. Depending on how dramatically the unveiling is stage-managed there may be a moment of anticipation before we see the end result, and then we seem obliged to assess the impression it makes on us quickly.

The unveiling of Christ's Passion, Cross and Resurrection is the work of the Holy Spirit and the *raison d'être* of the Church's liturgy. Our participation in this begins in hearts which set out in search of the face of God.

Today's extract from Ezekiel reveals God's intention to "restore" by His "mercy" so that His "holiness" can be displayed through the lives of His people. The adversity of separation from God is converted by His grace as the people are "gathered" from "exile." This restoration is both a deeply personal and corporate experience where the hidden "face" of God is unveiled.

As we journey through the exile of Lent and reach out for a clearer sight of God we are helped by numerous traditions. For me the Lenten use of the Stations of the Cross have always proved revealing about my needs as God sees them. The Sixth Station, where Veronica wipes the face of Jesus speaks into this very theme with its use of the Psalmist's words, "*seek my face...do not hide your face from me.*"

Our needs are unveiled as God wipes away that which blinds us to His presence, so by the time we reach the wonderful Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday the sense of unveiling reaches its climax as the words of the *Exultet* ring out, "the night will be as clear as day; it will become my light, my joy."

Ezekiel's guidance to "look and listen attentively" is fulfilled in the Church's school of looking and listening attentively, the Daily Office. Founded on St Benedict's words, "listen...and incline the ear of your heart" this school of attentiveness is how we are prepared the whole year round for what he will "show" us, and how we are to "declare" it.

The Revd Guy Jamieson, St Paul's & St Mary's, Nelson.

SUNDAY 30TH MARCH

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT



READ
Psalm 32

'While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long...Then I acknowledged by sin to you...' **Psalm 32:3-4**

I don't know if you can remember having 'three magic words' drilled into you as a child? The three magic words my parents often reminded me of were: thank you, sorry, and please. (Actually that's four words, but I didn't spot that then!). Mothering Sunday is an appropriate day to reflect on this particular psalm, or prayer, of David. For it is in the context of home and family that we first learn to say sorry, and to forgive.

Sometimes in the family there can be an awkward silence, because someone cannot bring themselves to admit they are in the wrong and say sorry even though they know they should. Likewise, there can be a silence in our relationship with God, when the relationship is strained because we have not said sorry.

That is the experience David describes in verse 3, *'While I kept silence, my body wasted away...'* Then everything changes in verse 5 when David continues, *'Then I acknowledged by sin to you,and you forgave the guilt of my sin.'*

The rest of the psalm is a beautiful thanksgiving for the experience of being forgiven by God. Because Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15.3) we can, like David, find that a weight is lifted from us when we humbly confess our sins to God and seek His mercy.

'Thank you, sorry and please' can also form a good framework for saying our prayers each day. It is so easy when we pause to pray to go straight to 'please', yet if we look at the psalms we find that David spends as much time in thanksgiving and confession as he does asking for things.

As we turn to prayer now, why not make 'thank you, sorry and please' our framework? Start by naming before God things you are thankful for. Then ask the Holy Spirit to show you things you need to say sorry for. Having confessed them it is good to read a Bible verse like 1 John 1.9 to reassure ourselves of God's forgiveness. Then finally, we can go on to say 'please' and bring our requests to God.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Lord, thank you for... Lord, I am sorry for... Lord, please...
Amen.*

The Venerable Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn.

MONDAY 31ST MARCH



READ

Esther 2:5-10

'Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his cousin; for she had neither father nor mother.' **Esther 2:7**

Esther's life, while filled with challenges and uncertainties, offers profound insights into the nature and power of prayer. Although the Book of Esther doesn't explicitly mention prayer, the line of Esther's life suggests a faith steeped in quiet communion with God. Her circumstances could have overwhelmed Esther, raised by her cousin Mordecai in a foreign land after losing her parents. Instead, her story unfolds with grace and courage, qualities nourished by a life attuned to God's presence.

Esther lived in a world where voicing one's inner turmoil openly was often not possible. How many of us experience moments when words seem insufficient in our conversations with God? Her silent courage can inspire us to appreciate the quiet strength found in contemplative prayer, where we listen and dwell without speaking.

Prayer isn't merely a recitation of requests or thanksgiving; it's an opportunity to align ourselves with God's will, even when it means waiting in silence for guidance. Esther's quiet determination to do what's right—seeking wisdom, acting with discernment, and trusting beyond understanding—mirrors a life of prayerful introspection that prepares us for the challenges life presents.

During Lent, a time of reflection and renewal, Esther's journey urges us to embrace a deeper connection with God. Whether our prayers are long-established or just budding, Esther reminds us to find strength in silent moments with God, preparing our hearts for the work appointed for us.

May this season encourage us all to seek God with earnest hearts, leaning into the quiet and finding courage in the silence.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Lord, guide my heart to seek You with trust and courage today.
Amen.*

Dr Shumaila Safdar, Lay-member of St Laurence's, Chorley.

TUESDAY 1ST APRIL



READ

Esther
3:13-4:3

'There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes' **Esther 4:3**

The Jews were threatened with annihilation, their despair is evident. We are not told that they prayed, but they must surely have done so in words like those of Psalm 83. Reading on in the story of Esther, we learn that God answered that prayer, and the Jews were saved from destruction. But we know that that has not always been the case.

I was reminded of this quite recently by the film *White Bird* which tells the story of Sara, a Jewish girl in Vichy France, who is saved from the Nazis by Julien, a crippled French boy treated as an outsider by his classmates. Sara survived where her mother and millions of other Jews did not. But the film reminds us that it was not only Jews who were caught up in the Holocaust, for Julien is captured to be taken to a camp. The Nazis targeted many groups: Roma, black and mixed-race people, gay men, and others who did not fit their idea of Aryan perfection. The Holocaust was an extreme and horrific example of human behaviour. But we are all tribal creatures who tend to exclude, and even demonise, people who don't belong to our 'tribe'.

Sadly, the Church is not free from this behaviour. Though we claim to believe in one Lord Jesus Christ we are fragmented into warring sects and factions by which people are hurt and diminished. But Our Lord Jesus commands us to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us, for God loves them too. His teaching is illustrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in an act of kindness to someone from a different, hostile, 'tribe'. Imagine the incident updated as kindness shown by a Palestinian to an Israeli. How would the Israeli feel? How would other Palestinians react?

Think of someone who seems alien because they do not belong to your 'tribe'. What words or actions of yours they would regard as kindness? Pray that they may know themselves to be loved by God. Pray for grace to love them as God loves them.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Heavenly Father, may they know that you love them.
Teach me to love them as you do. Amen.*

Richard Carter, Licensed Lay Minister, Lancaster Priory.

WEDNESDAY 2ND APRIL



READ **Esther** **4:9-17**

'Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish. Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.' **Esther 4:16-17**

As we journey through this part of Lent, we're looking at the book of Esther. It's a story that highlights bold faith in the face of adversity and a pivotal moment in the life of the Jewish people; where one woman's bravery changed the course of history.

In today's reading we find Queen Esther faced with a difficult decision. Mordecai sends her a message urging her to go before the king and plead for the lives of her people, the Jews. Esther knows that approaching the king without being summoned could cost her life. But Mordecai's words challenge her to consider that perhaps *'she was placed in the palace for such a time as this.'*

She calls for a three day fast, seeking God's guidance and strength. Esther's response is a powerful example of prayer-fuelled, boldness, courage, and faith. Afterwards, despite her fear, Esther goes before the king, declaring, *'If I perish, I perish.'* This is profound – she embraces the possibility of sacrifice for a greater good. Are there moments where God may be urging us to do the same, to step into uncomfortable situations to act for justice? You see each of us has a purpose and a calling. As we reflect on the story of Esther we are encouraged to consider how we can use our voice, influence, and actions to advocate for the marginalised.

During the season of Lent, we are reminded of the importance of self-reflection and prayer. Just as Esther prayed, fasted, and sought God's guidance, we too are called to take time to examine our own hearts and seek His will for our lives. Lent is a time to draw closer to God, to humble ourselves before Him, and to seek His mercy and grace. May we, like Esther, remember the power of prayer and fasting and be willing to take risks for the sake of others. You see our beautiful God is with us every step of the way.

LET US PRAY

Gracious God, help us to recognise our 'Esther moments – times when you call us to act, even in fear. Give us boldness in the face of adversity and the courage to stand firm, speak up, and love boldly, reflecting your light in dark places. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Delves, Associate Mission Priest, Holy Trinity & St Bartholomew's, Colne.

THURSDAY 3RD APRIL



READ

Esther 6:1-13

'That night the king could not sleep, and he gave orders to bring the book of records, the annals, and they were read to the king.' **Esther 6:1**

Like many of you reading this reflection, I own a lot of books. Probably too many if I am honest. I have among my books a collection of old prayer books, bibles and religious writings bought over the years. One is a re-production of a Medieval Book of Hours. These were personal prayer books dating back in origin to the 12th Century. They were often beautifully illuminated and contained prayers, psalms, hymns and lessons based on the devotions made at set hours through the day and night, hence the title. I imagine the owners of these books rising in the night, perhaps when they couldn't sleep and using the book for inspiration and comfort in the familiar words read and spoken.

King Ahasuerus could not sleep and so he gave orders for a book to be read to him. He listens to the story of Mordecai and how he saved him from assassination. The reader could have bought any part of the records, and read any story from it, but they were guided to read this one. As a result of listening to these words, we almost find a parallel story running through the passage. We have Haman, come to court to ask the king to execute Mordecai at the very moment the king has chosen to honour him for his actions. Haman falls into the trap of thinking the king is speaking of him and so chooses honours which would bring him pride but are not really things which mattered – the kings robe, horse and crown and a parade in the town. What a picture Hamans face must have been when he learns this is all for his arch-enemy.

In the context of the book of Esther we are reminded how God works through prayer and how these are answers according to his will not ours. Esther becomes Queen by God's favour and Haman is perhaps taught a lesson about pride. When we pray, either with familiar words or new, let us be attentive to how God directs our thoughts, words and deeds.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord God, help us when we pray to hear your words, that your way for us may be illuminated this Lent. Amen.

**The Revd Fleur Green, Vicar of Broughton St John Baptist,
St Peter & St Martin's Chapels Fulwood.**

FRIDAY 4TH APRIL



READ **Esther** **8:3-17**

'Then Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet, weeping and pleading with him to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews.' **Esther 8:3**

Since the screening of Mr Bates vs The Post Office in 2024 things have certainly improved for the hundreds of sub-postmasters and mistresses who were wrongly accused and convicted because of the Post Office's faulty IT system. True, many of these cases still await a satisfactory conclusion—and sadly there are those who died without being exonerated—but thankfully the story is now rightly celebrated for the great reversal that the victims have come through.

In Esther Chapter 8 we have another great reversal story, but this time involving God's people. The evil Haman is now dead, but there's still the terrifying matter of that awful decree signed and sealed by king Ahasuerus as a result of Haman's false accusation in chapter 3. Unless something is done the Jews living throughout the Persian Empire will face genocide.

But there is someone who might be able to do something – Queen Esther. Esther was a Jewess but when she married Ahasuerus she had kept her ethnicity a secret (2:10); but now was the time to break cover and put her life on the line (4:16) and plead with the king. This would mean breaking the law, but she had to risk everything with her people in such danger.

A repeated theme in Scripture is that God's people are saved through the courageous faithful intervention of one person. Usually it's a man—think of Joseph, Moses and David. But here God surprises us by sending a woman, *"for just such a time as this."* (4:14) And so Esther makes her plea to king Ahasuerus in chapter 8. And wonderfully he listens and issues a new decree that allows the Jews to defend themselves (8:11). The chapter ends with great rejoicing because everything has been reversed for God's people. And we too should rejoice that Jesus reverses everything for us.

LET US PRAY

God we rejoice that You have delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of Your beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

**The Revd Canon Mark Jones, Retired Vicar of St Leonard's,
Padiham and St Margaret's, Hapton.**

SATURDAY 5TH APRIL



READ

Esther 9:18-23

'...from sorrow into gladness...'

Esther 9:22

They feasted! A holiday of feasting and gladness no less is what we note in our reading today. Indeed a final special celebration for the Jews as their sorrow turns to joy. A feast for peace.

In this peace, the Jewish people have a resting from their enemies, a promise fulfilled (Dt.25:19). Through divine intervention, the battle is over and His people have received God's deliverance from persecution. To prevent this day being forgotten, Purim, a day of joy and celebration was established when presents of food were given, and the poor received gifts. It was to remember not just the deliverance from physical harm and human need for survival but the recognition of God's hand in this deliverance. How can our prayer this Lent support those with human needs and recognise God's action in our world where peace is yet to be found?

On our journey in Lent towards the cross, we might reflect on battles against the enemies we hold in our bodies, minds, and souls. Perhaps a deliverance through prayer that we can walk with God and realise His purpose in our lives. Following prayer and fasting, Esther, a powerful queen, and the Jewish people were delivered by God's intervention. We too anticipate a deliverance; His peace. How can our prayer this Lent bring peace in body, mind, and spirit as we realise God's purpose in our lives?

Our reading today reminds us that when we turn to God in prayer, He is faithful to deliver and transform our lives in ways beyond our understanding. As a feasting celebrated God's transformation of the lives of those in our reading, so we celebrate His transformation in our lives; our work, our schools, our relationships. How can our prayer this Lent enable us to listen and be transformed?

A feast is being prepared. Let us pray this Lent that we may come into his presence and know his peace.

**LET US
PRAY**

Dear Lord, may today our prayer joyfully celebrate the battle won by Christ. Amen.

**Chris Metcalfe, Ordinand and Chair of Governors,
St Michael's CE High School, Chorley.**

SUNDAY 6TH APRIL

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT



READ
Psalm 126

'Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.' **Psalm 126:7**

Today's Bible reading is Psalm 126. According to the tradition of the time, Jesus and his disciples would have sung this psalm as they travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover. We sing with them today.

The psalm begins by looking back to a time when God spectacularly restored the fortunes of his People:

*'When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
then we were like those who dream'. (v.1)*

God blessed them so much, they were pinching themselves to make sure it was real. The air was full of laughter and song, the psalmist continues. Even people in other countries heard of it and joined the Hebrew people in speaking about the great things that God was doing. All this we read in verses 1-4: looking back to God's great mercies in the past.

But then the psalm suddenly changes, in verse 5. Suddenly we are in the present, and the psalmist is praying for God to be merciful again.

'Restore again our fortunes, O Lord'. (v.5)

At first, we think that perhaps some new calamity has befallen God's People, so that the psalmist is asking God for a new spectacular rescue. But as we read on, we see that this is not quite what is happening.

The psalmist prays for God's mercy to be like the winter rains which water the Negev, the arid region in southern Israel, or like the harvest time when the food supply is secured and joy is complete. So the psalmist is recalling some spectacular blessings in the past, but he's praying in the present for blessings which are more everyday – but real and needed nonetheless.

In the coming fortnight, as we travel in heart and mind with Jesus, we too recall the great blessings of the past, the redemption of humanity at the Cross. And so we look forward with sure hope. As St Paul writes, *'He who spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not also, with him, give us all things?'* (Rom 8:32).

The Rt Revd Joe Kennedy, Bishop of Burnley.

MONDAY 7TH APRIL



READ

Daniel 1:1-17

'[Daniel] asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself.' **Daniel 1:8**

That part of the Book of Daniel which deals with the story of Daniel and his companions has a simple message to convey: that just as God delivered Daniel, so he would deliver his people now. This message has always resonated with God's people, and Christians in this modern age are no different. We need to know that God saves and that our faith in that salvation is not in vain. The parallels with our modern age are striking in this passage; the beginning of the Book of Daniel.

The omens here are not good. The Jews are in a tough spot, caught between two more powerful nations, and God does not seem very powerful. The exile that Nebuchadnezzar imposes, is both physical and spiritual. The temple is defiled and the nation ransacked and even the best of the people of Judah are confiscated to serve a powerful king who worships other gods.

Daniel and his friends are taken into the service of this king, and by change of name and diet, amongst other things, would serve, not God, but that king. Even the food, certainly not kosher, was an affront to Daniel's faith. His response was twofold: to make polite request to the right person – the chief eunuch, and to hold fast to his faith in God. The contrast between humility and power, faith and worldly might, is striking. Daniel's approach is to say "watch and see". And God, noticing the faithfulness of the young men, rewards them with knowledge (heavenly knowledge?) and learning of every kind. Time and again in the history of God's people, the gifts of God are not earthly or material.

And Daniel and his companions provide a lesson to us here and now. Our constant, as Christians, is ultimately God, not any earthly power or construct. We are to deal with this world according to the commands of God and thereby imitate Christ, who is our deliverance from the powers of darkness and the looked for salvation promised by God. We are especially fortunate to know God's salvation has arrived and so we rejoice.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, help us to serve you faithfully regardless of what the world would have us do, and to choose You above everything else. Amen.

The Revd Graham Buttery, Vicar, St Paul's, Adlington.

TUESDAY 8TH APRIL



READ

Daniel 3:13-28

'But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.' **Daniel 3:18**

Have you ever been tempted to use your prayers to try to bargain with God? "Please let me find a parking space now and I'll read an extra Bible passage later." Or the more serious, "Please Lord, heal me of this and I'll give more of my time to serving in church."

In today's passage, we hear about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – Jewish exiles and friends of Daniel taken into Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. It would have been easy for them to decide that as captives in a foreign land, they should be obedient to the king's commands, but instead they were prepared to suffer and die for their faith in the one true God. If there was ever a time when you might fall foul of offering God a deal, this would be it! "Lord, save us from this and we'll spend even more time in prayer each day!"

From reading the account, one thing is clear: the three friends were wholly confident that God could save them. They had complete faith in His power. But they also had enough trust in God to stand firm in their beliefs, saying that even if God does not save them, they were still willing to accept the king's fatal punishment. Could you face the fiery furnace like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and accept that God might not save you, even though you know he can?

This story demonstrates a level of faith and obedience that we should all be striving for. When we are faced with a 'fiery furnace' moment – when things are heating up in our lives, whether that is to do with financial pressures, ill health, separation, or other things – do we approach our prayers with a 'fully persuaded' attitude like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? An attitude which says, "God can save this relationship... but even if he doesn't, my faith will not falter." There are times when God will answer our prayers and times when he won't, but we mustn't turn our back on God when the temperature ramps up because even when our prayers go seemingly unanswered, that doesn't change His goodness, His power, or His love.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord God, help us to remain faithful during the fires that threaten us in life, knowing that you are with us. Amen.

Sarah Earnshaw, Diocesan Children's Work Adviser.

WEDNESDAY 9TH APRIL



READ Daniel 6:6-23

'Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the interdict you have signed, but he is saying his prayers three times a day.' **Daniel 6:13**

As a primary school headteacher I am all too familiar with having to make leadership decisions. Some decisions are easy to make; whilst others are tough and could impact on our staff, children and families.

In King Darius' situation, his advisors and closest allies (the people who should have had the kingdom's best interests at heart) were instead self-interested, spreading fake news, and manipulating the King's decision making for their own ends. Instead of listening to his own better judgement (led by God's guiding voice), Darius followed the noise of others.

In Lent we journey through the 'noise of others' to approach the cross of Jesus. This passage tells us that Daniel was well aware that the King had signed the document forbidding him from prayer – yet he silenced the doubts and the noise and continued in his routine prayer life. Daniel knew the impact that a committed prayer routine was having in his life, and no noise was going to come between him praising, glorifying and seeking mercy from God. It reminds me of the lyrics from the rousing worship song, 'In Christ Alone' which explains that, *"no power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand."*

Daniel was resolute – no matter what the consequences, the one thing he wasn't going to sacrifice was prayer! In the noise of our own lives, and in our own decision making are we as resolute as Daniel to prioritise prayer over everything else? Are we consistently loud and proud about prayer – letting those around us know that we pray regularly and are not afraid to use the power of prayer in our decisions?

The king spent a sleepless night worrying about the consequences of listening to the wrong advice. Daniel, however, relied upon the power of prayer, rather than listening to the noise surrounding him (possibly a few muffled growls, snarls and roars) and found the peace, protection and courage to stand up to the fiercest of foes!

**LET US
PRAY**

May this Lent be one where the distracting noise of others is silenced, so we may hear God's mighty roar, through the power of prayer at work in our daily lives. Amen.

**Victoria Gow, Headteacher, Balderstone St Leonard's
CE Primary & Pre-school.**

THURSDAY 10TH APRIL



READ

Daniel 7:9-14

'In the vision...was one like the son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the ancient of days and was led into his presence.' **Daniel 7:13**

The news reports today are saturated with depressing news like natural disasters, wars, shootings, terrorist attacks, tragedies that make our world a fearful and out of control place overflowing with evil. And causing us to think that God is absent and to shout: "Where is God?" Around 2500 years ago Daniel and his compatriots had it worse; having been defeated and deported to a foreign land they are forced to worship foreign gods but they did not give in to the pressures from this ungodly society and remained faithful to God, and so should we.

This part of the book of Daniel (7:9-14) is a vision of the divine throne from which judgment will come. God gave Daniel the ability to prophesy which empires would rise and which would fall because world powers are under God's control. Through this vision, God told Daniel about the coming of the Messiah and the Final Judgment. This vision of "*the one like a son of man*" offered hope to Jews who had been subject to foreign rule for over four centuries and now were victims of state terror and persecution. It has allowed them to see the end of empires, God's sovereignty, and the future kingdom where Christ (Messiah) is King.

The same passage is selected for the Feast of Christ the King to reflect the fact that for nearly two thousand years the "*one like a son of man*" is identified as Jesus. Moreover, Jesus used this phrase to refer to Himself (Matt.26:64, Luke21:27, John1:51). God gave sovereignty to this Human One: Jesus Christ, in response to the evil perpetrated by empires and the suffering of God's people.

Though many still suffer political domination, state terror, and persecution (the Beastly kingdoms), we can trust God to replace them by the just and righteous kingdom ruled by a human-like figure, the son of Man, Jesus Christ who is our redemption and salvation. He will come again to defeat His enemies and set up His eternal kingdom on earth, in so doing, Christ sought to free and empower the oppressed and establish a just rule on earth as in heaven. So let us pray for His kingdom to come.

**LET US
PRAY**

Our Father...

The Revd Jean Kouacou, Assistant Curate, St Paul's Adlington.

FRIDAY 11TH APRIL



READ

Daniel 9:3-23

'I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession.' **Daniel 9:4**

That sinking feeling, when you realise that you've done something wrong, and that you'll have to admit it and apologise. I still remember a time this happened at work years ago, I had messed up and I had to talk to the person it had impacted, to admit it and to apologise. But what would they say? Would they be forgiving? Would they make me 'pay for it'? Whatever the outcome, I have learnt that it is always better to talk to the person straight-away, to get it over and done with, admit what's happened, make a sincere apology and clear the air. Waiting doesn't make it any easier, and can even make it worse!

In our passage today, we listen in to Daniel praying to, or simply talking to, God. Daniel has realised what a dire situation he, and the whole of Israel, were in, and what did he do? Daniel *'prayed to the Lord my God and made confession'* (v.4). He knew that the best thing to do once he'd realised that Israel had not been doing as God wanted was to turn to God himself. To admit what they had done (and not done) and to ask for God's forgiveness. And the list of the wrong they have done is pretty comprehensive, and Daniel's confession and repentance is evidently sincere.

But how often, if we think about how we've messed up, done what God wouldn't want, or not done what God would want, do we say a quick "I'm sorry God" or "please forgive me!"? Daniel recognised that the judgement they were experiencing was what they deserved, and declares *'we do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies'* (v.18). Daniel could only throw himself on God's mercy, hoping that they could be forgiven.

We are blessed, because we know even more than Daniel about God and how He has wonderfully dealt with all our sin already in Jesus so that we know He can forgive us. But let this not allow us to take forgiveness for granted or accept God's grace and forgiveness lightly. Let us take time to be more aware of where we can live as God would want and where we have fallen short; and when we become aware of this, let us turn back to God straight-away, with heart-felt confession and heart-felt thanksgiving.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord, we have sinned and done wrong. Please forgive us, and make us quicker to turn back to You when we recognise that we have not lived as you would want. Amen.

Natalie Print, Lay-member of St George's, Chorley.

SATURDAY 12TH APRIL



READ

Daniel 12:1-13

'But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.' **Daniel 12:13**

Today we come to the last chapter of the Book of Daniel. If we are looking for an ending which provides all the answers we will be disappointed. Daniel himself asks 'what shall be the outcome of these things?' (v.8). Daniel searches for clarity and meaning.

Often, we don't know what God is up to in our lives or the wider world. We know, and believe, deep in our hearts, that God has a plan. Yet we need to wait for God to reveal it to us in God's time – which isn't necessarily our timing!

Prayer provides us with the opportunity to spend time alone with God and to discern what God is doing amongst us. Prayer is about talking to God and ask the honest questions. Which questions are on your heart and mind today? And how or where do we find the answers to our prayers? The answers come through us listening. Daniel hears words of comfort: that in the time of suffering which is to come 'your people shall be delivered' (v.1) and '*you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days*' (v.13). Listen for the voice of God today.

All through Scripture, we are reminded that in the times of greatest suffering God brings deliverance and transformation. Challenge and adversity are part of this life, but our God brings comfort to His people. Daniel is encouraged to '*Go on your way*' (v.9) and to trust in God. We are called to do the same; to make this earthly pilgrimage through faithfulness and obedience to our God.

We go on our way held in God's love. God who loves us so much, that He sent His only Son to dwell with us, and to die and rise again for us. As we now move into Holy Week, we do so in the sure and certain hope that Christ's victory over death has won for us the reward of everlasting life.

**LET US
PRAY**

Loving God, enable me to come ever closer to you in prayer; that I may hear your words of comfort and compassion, and trust in you more fully day by day. Amen.

The Revd Canon Tracy Charnock, Vicar, Holy Trinity & St Peter, South Shore.

SUNDAY 13TH APRIL

PALM SUNDAY – HOLY WEEK



READ
Psalm 31

'Into your hand I commit my spirit' **Psalm 31:5**

Today we remember Jesus's prophetic entry into Jerusalem on donkey. Immediately before and after this, Jesus stays at Bethany on the Mount of Olives. A place of prayer and retreat before for all that lies ahead.

I like to think he reached for the Psalms in that secret place of prayer.

Psalm 31 is a prayer of abandonment. David is in distress, grief, scorned by enemies, dreaded by acquaintances (vv.9-11). He hears the whisper of terror and plots.

It can be hard to pray when you're in fear, or grief, or pain. When you feel abandoned. It's much easier to numb the pain with displacement activities; to protect your heart from that innate fear that God is too distant to hear: *'I had said in my alarm, 'I am driven far from your sight''* (v.22).

Jesus experienced abandonment for real. He was driven far from God's sight. Literally by the weight of the world's sin. But Jesus, like David, incredibly abandons Himself to God. In the few words he gasped from the cross less than a week later, Jesus reaches for this Psalm (v.5): *'Into your hand I commit my spirit.'* (cf Luke 23.46)

Charles de Foucauld, French explorer, priest, and hermit who lived in the Sahara (before his martyrdom in 1916) wrote a lot about abandonment: "The more you suffer, the more you are tempted, the more you need to pray: prayer now alone can strengthen you with help and consolation. Let not pain and fierce temptation paralyse your prayer. The devil does all he can to prevent you praying at these times. But rather than give in to weak human nature which absorbs the soul in its pain so that it sees nothing else for the time, turn your eyes to the Lord and speak to Him standing so near. He is with you, looking on you lovingly listening for your words".

This Holy Week, let Jesus teach you to pray, to abandon yourself, to surrender your pain and grief to him. He is lovingly listening for your words.

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, I surrender all of myself in joy and pain to You today. Amen.

The Rt Revd Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster.

MONDAY 14TH APRIL

HOLY MONDAY



READ
Luke 19:41-44

'Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side.' **Luke 19:43**

At the end of the Mass on last year's Easter Sunday, my church choir sang the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah. At the conclusion of the service I was in my usual position at the south door saying goodbye to members of the congregation. As she left the church, a visitor told me that she wasn't a regular churchgoer, but that the performance of the Messiah had quite literally moved her to tears.

To be moved to tears is a very common human emotion. Tears can signify both joy and sorrow, and it is the latter emotion which is the catalyst for the tears of our Lord as he looks out over the city of peace, Jerusalem. Sorrow, because Jesus knew that the place and people that He loved would ultimately reject Him, and that rejection would lead to the eventual destruction of the Temple at the hands of the Romans. During his journey to Jerusalem, he had regularly warned of God's impending judgement on the city and Temple because like the towns of Galilee they had resisted his call for peace. This rejection of the way of peace, would ultimately be the cause of her own ruin.

So, this Lent, let us take the opportunity to pray for courage to live out the things that make for peace, to recognise God's presence, with openness to what might be hidden from our eyes, and to acknowledge those "ramparts" which are a barrier to our relationship with the risen Lord.

**LET US
PRAY**

*Dear Lord, help us to always be instruments of your peace.
Amen.*

The Revd Glen Brooks, Vicar of St Annes, St Annes-on-the-Sea.

TUESDAY 15TH APRIL

HOLY TUESDAY



READ
John 17

'The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.' **John 17:22-23**

Have you ever received a call from someone you haven't spoken to in a while, and while going through the pleasantries at the beginning of the conversation, wondered what this person wants from you? I know I have. Almost always, the moment comes when the request is made, revealing the reason for the phone call. This means I really remember the rarer phone calls when someone has called just to find out how I'm doing and share their life with me. What a gift this kind of conversation is!

In meditating on the prayer of Jesus in John 17, I am struck by the fact that instead of being a list of requests, this glorious prayer gives us a window into the relationship between Jesus and His Father. It is marked more by relational truths than requests for action. These truths uttered by Jesus reveal that the foundation of Jesus' prayer life is relationship with His Father, marked by love. It is this relationship which then prompts the few petitions that Jesus does make of His Father.

There is much in this wonderful prayer to meditate on, but one petition seems to be particularly resonant in this present moment: the unity Jesus longs and prays for. This unity is not just for the disciples who were surrounding Jesus during His earthly ministry but includes all who believe in Jesus since that time. As we look around the Church today, it is not difficult to see a lack of this unity that Jesus prayed for. And as we look at the world around us, it is not difficult to see the great need for us to reflect the unity of the Father and the Son so that the world may know the love of God.

In this Lenten season, let us examine our own heart, speech, and conduct, and ask God to reveal where we are contributing toward fracture and division rather than unity grounded in the love of the Father and the Son. May our prayers be founded in relationship with the Father, as those in whom Jesus dwells by His Spirit.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father, reveal to us by your Spirit how we can worship and work together in unity, reflecting your love to the world around us, as Jesus has prayed for us. Amen.

Amy White, Lay Training Officer.

WEDNESDAY 16TH APRIL

HOLY WEDNESDAY



READ
Matthew
26:36-46

'Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' **Matthew 26:41**

For the Church, Holy Week is the sharp end of the sword for our faith, we often resolve to pray more, fast better, and give generously. Yet, let's be honest: how often do our good intentions falter? Jesus' words in this passage in the Gospel of Matthew hit close to home: *"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* Oh, how true that is!

Think about the disciples in the garden. Jesus asks them to stay awake and pray. What do they do? They nod off – again and again! It's almost comical. We're quick to judge them, but how many times have we dozed off in prayer, or let our minds wander while trying to focus on God?

The good news is Jesus understands. He doesn't berate the disciples harshly; instead, He reminds them, and us, that prayer is our strength in times of trial. Lent is not about striving to pray perfectly, or fast perfectly, or even give perfectly; it's about showing up in the first place. Prayer doesn't need to be complicated. It's not about saying the right words or folding your hands in just the right way. Prayer is simply turning our hearts to Jesus, even in our weakest moments. God's not looking for perfection – He's looking for you, the one He created in His own image.

I am sure each of us has sat through a shockingly boring sermon and threatened to doze off... I know I have! Sometimes the most holy of people can delve so deeply into prayer that the snoring can start! We are in good company with the disciples! Instead of beating yourself up, laugh, get up, and try again.

This Holy Week, let's keep it simple. Set aside a few minutes each day to pray. Ask Jesus to help you "stay awake" to His presence, even when life is busy or your flesh is weak. Remember, Jesus doesn't expect you to be perfect. He just wants you to be present with him. So, take a deep breath, say a little prayer, and trust that even in your weakest moments, He's right there with you.

**LET US
PRAY**

Heavenly Father, when we are weak, give us courage to walk with you the joyful path of everlasting life. Amen.

The Revd Jordan McDermott, Rector of Eccleston and Charnock Richard.

THURSDAY 17TH APRIL

MAUNDY THURSDAY



READ
Psalm 88

'You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep.' **Psalm 88:6**

Darkness is part of everyone's story. As a boy I was an Air Cadet and we were once taken to an old RAF bunker deep underground, and then the lights were all turned off... that was dark. At other times in my life I've also had periods of real hardship, and in a way that time was also dark.

Darkness is part of everyone's story. On this night Jesus underwent the 'darkness' of Gethsemane and the 'darkness' of His arrest and incarceration. When you visit the Holy Land you can visit the underground prison beneath Caiaphas', the High Priest's, home where Jesus is believed to have been held the night of His arrest. It is a deep, dark pit (v.6) and this psalm is one Jesus very likely meditated on whilst he was imprisoned there.

Darkness is part of life for the Christian, for the Christian follows the way of the cross. As we go with Jesus through the darkness of the next few days, remember that darkness does not win. As with all of Scripture, Jesus fulfils Psalm 88. Verse 3 points us to Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest as he stepped into the darkness on our behalf. The night He spent in the pit was only the beginning of all that He would endure for us. He felt the full weight of God's wrath at the cross in our place (v.7). He too was abandoned by His closest friends (v.8). Christ took on the curse of death, the darkest of all pits. He went through all of this for us.

So whomever you are, whether someone doing 'well' or someone who is struggling just to get through the week... know that God is with you. He has been through it, in the Person of Jesus, as Psalm 88 reminds us. There is darkness in this world, but it is not the end of the story. Hold on, the light is coming!

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, thank you that You know what it is to go through times of darkness. Please hold on to me and bring me out into Your marvellous light. Amen.

The Revd Michael Print, Vicar of St George's & All Saints', Chorley.

FRIDAY 18TH APRIL

GOOD FRIDAY



READ
Luke 23:26-34

'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' **Luke 23:34**

If you don't know who Mr Beast is, have you even got electricity? He's the most subscribed YouTuber with 340,000,000 followers. Recently he premièred Beast Games on Amazon Prime. 1,000 players competed for \$5,000,000. In one round players were divided into four groups, had to decide on a captain, who were then offered \$1,000,000 to eliminate their entire team.

How would you feel if your captain had eliminated you? Ruining your chance to win life-changing amounts of money for their selfish gain. I cannot imagine any of us would be quick to pray as Jesus does, *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*

There appears something odd when Jesus prays that prayer. He prays for forgiveness because they do not know what they are doing. However, these soldiers did know what they were doing. They were carrying out orders to execute Jesus. So, why does Jesus qualify their forgiveness because they do not know?

Perhaps the mystery is solved by what happens next. *"And they cast lots to divide his clothing."* This quote is from Psalm 22, a Psalm attributed to the words of Jesus as far back as the First Century. In this psalm Jesus cries, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Words he repeats on the Cross. These soldiers were oblivious that they sacrificed Jesus so that through His forsakenness, forgiveness was possible.

We too are oblivious, committing sins, sending Jesus to the Cross. As Stuart Townend penned, *"It was my sin that held Him there."* This sentiment, while true, is not entirely accurate – sin cannot overcome Jesus. Love held Him there. Love for sinners like us, who crucified Jesus.

Wonderfully, that's why we can pray, *"Father, forgive them,"* when we are sinned against. Forgiveness comes from the deep awareness of our sin which held Jesus there, and the loving forgiveness he offers us. It is his love which drives our yearning to pray prayers of forgiveness, knowing they like us are a sinner in need of Christ's love.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father, forgive them...

The Revd Lloyd Etheridge, Assistant Curate, St Andrew's, Leyland.

SATURDAY 19TH APRIL

HOLY SATURDAY



READ

Luke 23:35-46

'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Luke 23:46

On this day between Christ's Death and Resurrection my eyes are directed to Our Lord's last words on the Cross: *"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."*

It speaks powerfully to me of the union of the Trinity that both Christ's first words in His public ministry and His last were a conversation between Him, God the Son, and God the Father. Following His Baptism we read, *"You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt 3:17 & Mark 1:11).

A person's last words have a great weight behind them, more so for someone who has followers.

God the Son's last words to His Father, the final prayer of Jesus to God the Father, is a prayer of obedience. How often in our prayers do we lobby God for the outcome we want to the situation we are facing. If we were to follow Jesus we would offer up the situation to God and let Him come up with the right answer to our prayer.

The onlookers at the foot of the cross would have thought this was the end no good solution could come of this painful death. Yet God knew better. This was God's plan to wipe away suffering and break down the gates of death for ever. It was for this that God became Incarnate. This was always the plan—we need to trust that God has a plan for us and not try to suggest a better solution to Him through our prayers but allow Him to do His work in and through us.

I end where I began. The Letter to the Hebrews (9.14) says *"how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God"*. This makes it clear that although Jesus is speaking these words the whole Trinity is acting in Union in this final and greatest of acts.

**LET US
PRAY**

Father may I always trust in you with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding. Amen. (Based on Proverbs 3.5)

The Revd Canon Mark Soady, Rector of Rufford & Tareyton.

SUNDAY 20TH APRIL

EASTER SUNDAY



READ
Psalm 118

'I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.' **Psalm 118:17**

Lancashire is unthinkable without its football teams, and I love going to football matches. My shameful secret is that I support an over-resourced, southern team, so I attend as a neutral. But what I love is the raw and untrammelled emotion.

Most Lancashire sides have experienced turmoil, deep disappointment and the threat of extinction to their clubs. So when they score and if they win, the joy is uncontainable. The fans scream and sing and jump and chant, unable to control their utter delight. That should be our mood on Easter morning. We have faced the threat of extinction. We were in danger of death because of our failure to live in God's way. But today the most incredible victory has been won. Jesus has stepped in and died our death in our place.

So as on Easter morning He rises to life, we rise to life with Him. Today we are set free to delight in the gift of our humanity, to live a new life, to be in right relationship with God for ever. What words can possibly express a joy like that? Like the fans, we should be leaping and dancing and singing this morning, screaming out our joy at the very tops of our voices!

And Psalm 118 is a great way to do just that. What a wonderful explosion of praise this psalm is. The psalmist has known danger and jeopardy, has been hemmed in by enemies, and pushed hard, even to the point of falling altogether. But the Lord has come to the rescue. His right hand has done valiantly and now the gates of righteousness have been thrown open. Every word of this fabulous hymn prophesies the Resurrection. And the psalm doesn't just express joy in this great victory. Verse 17 also tells us our response to it. *'Recount the deeds of the Lord.'*

This Easter Day, rejoice in what Jesus has done to set you free. Then, like the women at the tomb, rush out to recount his deeds. Tell the world the good news. For Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

**LET US
PRAY**

Lord Jesus, thank you for the joy of your Easter triumph. As today we celebrate your victory, send us to recount your deeds, that all the world might know your gift of Resurrection life. Amen.

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn.



WHAT'S NEXT

We really hope you've enjoyed walking through Lent with this booklet. If you're wondering how you can continue with this pattern of daily reading there are a whole host of resources available to you. For ease of access, many resources are now available either online or as apps. A few suggestions are:

DAILY PRAYER

churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer

Daily Prayer is available free as an app or on the Church of England Website and gives complete services for Morning, Evening and Night Prayer in both contemporary (Common Worship) and traditional (Book of Common Prayer) forms.

BIOY

bibleinoneyear.org

With BIOY each day you receive a Psalm or Proverbs reading, a New Testament and an Old Testament reading. It also provides daily audio and written commentary to walk you through each day's reading, to provide fresh understanding of the texts.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

blackburn.anglican.org/bible-study

BIBLE PODLETS

bdeducation.org.uk/podcasts/bible-podlets

Bible Podlets is a Bible study and discussion podcast for primary aged children to do with adults. Each episode has fun games/activities, an engaging Bible reading in the form of a news story, and discussion, with places to pause and talk together about the topic. You can download discussion notes from the resources area of the site.

If you prefer a hard copy resource, Christian bookshops carry a large range of Bible reading material, from daily reading notes to study books on particular themes or books of the Bible.

BISHOP'S BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Access Bible studies created by Bishop Philip, Bishop Jill, and Bishop Joe, designed for small groups or individual use, directly in the Fruitful App, accessible anytime, anywhere.

In addition to these resources there will be regular Quiet Days and Retreats offered by Whalley Abbey: whalleyabbey.org

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Parish Quiet Days 2025

Whalley Abbey, The Sands, Whalley, BB7 9SS



PRAYER FOR GROWTH AND RENEWAL

Dates

- Saturday 22nd March with Steve Haskett
- Wednesday 2nd April with Anna Walker
- Thursday 5th June with Steve Haskett
- Saturday 23rd August with Joy Rushton
- Tuesday 21st October with Anna Walker

Outline of the Day

- Opening worship
- Structured and facilitated programme of prayer and reflection
- Lunch
- Prayer walk around the ruins
- Closing Eucharist

Cost £30 per person





PRAYER FOR GROWTH AND RENEWAL

THE
DIOCESE
OF
BLACKBURN
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN LANCASHIRE

*All texts in this booklet are taken from the
New Revised Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated*

Designed by Morse-Brown Design

We'd love your feedback on this resource!

