



Diocese of Norwich

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Home, Belonging,  
and Identity

**Norwich Diocesan Lent Groups 2016**

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*For use in small groups  
or for personal reflection*

## Index

<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Using the Lent Course .....	4
Prayer .....	4
<b>Week 1 – Foundational Story.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 Moses in a Foreign Land .....	5
1.2 Jesus’ Time in the Wilderness.....	7
1.3 Refugees Today .....	9
1.4 Lent as a Preparation for Baptism .....	12
Concluding Prayer .....	13
<b>Week 2 – The Stranger .....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Abraham, Hagar and ‘The Stranger’ .....	14
2.2 Jesus’ Ministry to the Marginalised .....	17
2.3 European Response to Immigration .....	18
2.4 Coming to the Eucharist.....	22
Concluding Prayer .....	24
<b>Week 3 – Learning and Formation .....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Elijah and Elisha .....	25
3.2 Jesus Teaches .....	26
3.3 Growing Community Life through Education .....	28
3.4 Lent and Discipleship .....	30
Concluding Prayer .....	32
<b>Week 4 – Power and Vulnerability.....</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1 David’s 5 Stones .....	33
4.2 Jesus’ 5 Wounds.....	36
4.3 Economic Imperialism.....	38
4.4 Holy Week: Palm Sunday to Jesus’ Trial .....	40
Concluding Prayer .....	43
<b>Week 5 – Exile and Home .....</b>	<b>44</b>
5.1 Living in Exile .....	44
5.2 Jesus’ Death .....	45
5.3 Disorientation and Loss.....	47
5.4 Easter Saturday .....	50
Concluding Prayer .....	51

## Overview

This Lent course is comprised of five weeks of material. It is suggested that you do this course during the five main weeks of Lent, but you could begin just before (after Ash Wednesday) or run into Holy Week.

### February

10<sup>th</sup> Ash Wednesday  
 14<sup>th</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent  
 21<sup>st</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent  
 28<sup>th</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

### March

6<sup>th</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
 13<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
 20<sup>th</sup> Palm Sunday / Holy Week begins  
 27<sup>th</sup> Easter Day

The material for each week is divided into four parts, which considers:

1. The Hebrew Bible – a story or an episode
2. Jesus’ way – his life and example
3. Our contemporary situation – issues in our world
4. Our liturgical life - looking at how Lent forms the church to be a certain sort of people.

The themes of each week are designed to shed light on each other. They are mapped below, for convenience.

Sections	1	2	3	4
Week	Hebrew Bible	Jesus’ Way	Contemporary Social Situation	Liturgical Reflection
1: Foundational story	Moses and Gershom	Jesus in the Wilderness	Refugees Today	Lent and Baptismal Preparation
2: Hospitality	Abraham and Hagar: ‘The Stranger’	Ministry to the Marginalised	The European Response to Immigration	Eucharistic Hospitality
3: Learning and formation	Elijah and Elisha: Apprenticeship and Formation	Jesus’ Teaching Ministry	A School in PNG: Our Lent Appeal	Confirmation and Discipleship
4: Power and Vulnerability	David and Goliath: the 5 Stones	Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem: the 5 Wounds	Economic Imperialism	Holy Week: Palm Sunday to Good Friday
5: Death	Exile and Rebirth	Jesus’ Death	Disorientation and Loss of Identity	Easter Saturday

Each week the session will be about 90 minutes, comprising 45 minutes of Bible study (parts 1&2) and 45 minutes reflecting on social context and our own life (parts 3&4). Should you wish for refreshments, it would be a good idea to have these as you gather, share news, and settle down. In the first week, if you don't know each other very well, do make time before the session begins properly to introduce yourselves to each other.

## Using the Lent Course

The Lent Course is designed for small discussion groups, the materials providing pointers for the group members to share their reflections over the weeks. It is ideal if these groups are stable groups, able to get to know one another and to develop a degree of trust.

It would be helpful for each member to have a copy of the materials, whether these are given as a pack at the beginning, or given week by week.

It is anticipated that you will read the readings and comments together, even if members have read them alone beforehand, and then share your reflections on the questions that follow. The questions are starters for reflection – please don't feel bound to them. In small groups, the Spirit may well lead us where we need to go.

As the materials invite personal reflection, it is a good idea for your group to consider the boundaries you would be happy with before they begin. Are you happy for what is said in the room to stay in the room? Or are you happy for members to share with their nearest and dearest, if suitable anonymity is preserved? It may be that if something is said which a member wishes to be confidential, they should simply ask.

## Prayer

Each week there are suggestions for prayer. You may like to end each session with a time of open shared prayer using these suggestions, if groups feel comfortable with such free prayer, or you might like to use these suggestions afterwards in your own personal prayer, as you review the materials at home.

Thanks to Bishop Jonathan Meyrick, who prepared section 3.3. Bishop Jonathan has diocesan wide responsibility for Social and Voluntary Concerns, including world engagement, and so assists with the link with Papua New Guinea. Thanks also to Sue Overend, who proofread this course. The materials have otherwise been prepared by Paul Overend, the Lay Development Officer.

## Week 1 – Foundational Story

*“I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.”*

### 1.1 Moses in a Foreign Land

#### **Moses Flees to Midian (Exodus 2:11-25)**

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, “Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?” He answered, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “Surely the thing is known.” When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defence and watered their flock. When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come back so soon today?” They said, “An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.” He said to his daughters, “Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.” Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, “I have been an alien residing in a foreign land.”

After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

This episode comes between the story of Moses being rescued from death in a basket (Exodus 2:1-11) and the story of Moses being called at the burning bush (Exodus 3), which is then followed by his return to Egypt and the Israelites’ eventual liberation from Egypt and their journeying in the wilderness.

Moses is a political fugitive who flees for his life, having killed an Egyptian. The situation is initially provoked by the violence of an Egyptian against the Hebrew slaves, but Moses’

response is to kill the Egyptian, as Moses identifies with his people. He takes asylum in Midian – which is believed to have been in the northwest Arabian Peninsular, east of the Red Sea, south and east of Canaanite territories. This place was to be the Israelites' home, the 'promised land'.

A Kenite farmer and priest, here called Reuel (later called "Jethro" in Exodus 3:1), gives his daughter Zipporah in marriage. But Moses recognises that his home is with his people, the Ancient Israelites. They are people dwelling in a foreign land, but as slaves in bondage under Egypt. The passage later gives the name of Moses' firstborn son, Gershom. Gershom's name appears to mean 'a sojourner there' (גֵר שָׁמַיִם *ger sh'm*), hence the explanation, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land."

The story of Exodus becomes a foundational myth for the Ancient Israelites. It is the story of this people's liberation from the powers of Egypt. After a number of miraculous signs and terrible plagues, Egypt's Pharaoh finally lets them leave after the Passover, a passing over of death that takes the first born of Egypt, but spares the Hebrew first-born children. Pharaoh then changes his mind and his military forces pursue them, as they passed over the Sea.

After this escape, Moses leads his people in the wilderness. The Israelites become restless and complain that life was better even under slavery than wandering in the wilderness. God provides manna from heaven for them and water from the rock. Here is an economic lesson that they are to be provided with enough, but not enough to store, save for a day of rest. God provides the *Torah*—guidance for his people.

This time is a lifetime of living in the hope of a better future – a land of freedom, a land flowing with 'milk and honey'. (In the Hebrew Scriptures, which didn't farm cows or collect bees' honey, this is generally understood to be the milk colour of ripened wheat and barley on the meadows and a reference to heavy fruit blossom and fruit nectar, or more specifically date honey). Moses was never to reach this land of promise and plenty.

### Questions

- Have you experienced living in another country as a foreigner – either on holiday or living or working abroad? How were you welcomed?

Consider the characters:

- **The priest Reuel (Jethro):** How do you respond to his giving his daughter in marriage to an unknown immigrant who has sought asylum in that country, as he was fleeing a charge relating either to murder or political intervention? Do you think it is a generous sign of trust and a lesson in hospitality, or foolishness?
- **Zipporah:** How do you think you might feel if you were not only given by your father in an arranged marriage, but given to a foreigner who has killed for protect his own people?
- **Moses' God:** Moses becomes the vehicle for God's purposes, to lead the Hebrews, directing them towards the 'Promised Land'. What does the story about Gershom reveal about God?

Consider your own reaction:

- How do you imagine you would feel if your daughter not only met a foreigner, but then wished to take your daughter and grandchild back into that place of conflict?

## 1.2 Jesus' Time in the Wilderness



Briton Rivière, *Christ in the Wilderness* (1898)<sup>1</sup>

### **The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus and the Start of his Ministry (Mark 1:9-15)**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good

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<sup>1</sup> The author, Briton Rivière, died in 1920. This work is in the public domain in the UK,. (c) City of London Corporation; Supplied by The Public Catalogue Foundation, via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Briton\\_Rivière\\_-\\_The\\_Temptation\\_in\\_the\\_Wilderness.jpg#filelinks](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Briton_Rivière_-_The_Temptation_in_the_Wilderness.jpg#filelinks)

news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

In various passages from the Gospel accounts, Jesus’ own story has associations with the Ancient Israelites’ foundational story of Exodus in a number of ways. Here are a few examples:

- In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ parents go to Egypt to escape the killing of firstborn children by Herod, and so Jesus is identified both with rescue from childhood death and also escape from Egypt, like Moses. (Matthew 2:13-23)
- John’s Gospel tells us Jesus dwelt among us (John 1:14). The Greek word which is often translated into English as ‘dwelt’ (*eskēnōsen*) has also been translated as “pitched a tent.” That translation recalls the nomadic homes of Israel, and views Jesus’ dwelling among his people in terms of the divine presence dwelling in the tabernacle and leading the Israelites in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
- Jesus also takes time in the wilderness, following his baptism (Mark 1:12-13) and before he begins his ministry. His forty days recall the forty years the Hebrews spent in the wilderness.

Whether the episode of Jesus’ temptation is a literal account or a literary device, whether it describes events or serves to evoke biblical associations and religious resonances, the story of his time in the wilderness serves for us as the ancestral story of identity – the story of slavery and liberation. It is not a time of quiet and prayer, but a time of struggle, identity and purpose.

The biblical scholar Ched Myres likens this episode to the discovery of purpose in various native religious traditions, which he describes as a ‘vision quest’ tradition:

*(T)he “vision quest” tradition survives still among most land-based tribal peoples. Among Aboriginal people it is referred to as the “renewal of the Dreaming”; for the California Yuki it is dancing and the sweat lodge; the Pueblo people of New Mexico follow the ancient traditions of the kiva; and the Sioux call it hanblechia.*





This reading of Jesus' time in the wilderness views it as a transitional time, a time of entering into learning from the religious tradition, before he begins his ministry.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke develop this episode of testing, in which Jesus recalls what it is for Israel to be God's child. The temptations accounts name the archetypal characteristics of imperial domination: the economics of exploitation, the politics of empire, and the symbolism of power and omnipotence. Jesus refuses false worship, though it would make him powerful and earn him glory. Jesus refuses to test God, a reminder that the Israelites of the Exodus story did put God to the test. And Jesus hungers (Luke 4:3/Matthew 4:3, cf. Exodus 16:2-3), which reminds us that God provides food (manna), but only enough for need, not enough for greed: God-given manna cannot be stored, kept and accumulated, as money can.

#### Questions

- Have you undertaken a time to retracing family origins – visiting locations or researching family history as a way of understanding who you are? If so, share the experience with the group. What insights did you gain?
- Have you had a wilderness experience seeking God, or a time of testing in which your faith has been reformed and new sense of purpose gained? If so, was it a time of quiet reflection or of struggle? Share this with others, if you feel comfortable in doing so.
- If you haven't had such an experience, how do you think Jesus felt? How do you imagine yourself feeling? Are there differences, and if so what are they?

### 1.3 Refugees Today

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

An estimated 13.9 million individuals were newly displaced due to conflict or persecution in 2014. This includes 11.0 million persons newly displaced within the borders of their own country, the highest figure on record. The other 2.9 million individuals were new refugees.

UNHCR report, *The World at War: Global Trends 2015* <sup>2</sup>

This report shows a rising rate of increase of refugees, year on year.

There have now been five years of armed conflict in Syria, building up from anti-government protests to civil war, between Syrian forces, opposition forces (some of which are supported

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<sup>2</sup> [http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html#\\_ga=1.57333546.1233224016.1449145654](http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html#_ga=1.57333546.1233224016.1449145654)

by the Syrian National Coalition, which has been supported by member states of the UN), the Islamic State (IS, or Daesh<sup>3</sup>) and Kurdish forces.

Over **4 million Syrian people have been displaced**, fleeing from these conflicts. The 2003 US invasion displaced approximately 1 in 25 Iraqis from their homes, with fighting connected with the Islamic State contributing to additional displacement.<sup>4</sup> According to Unicef, this number includes about 2 million Syrian children who have been forced to flee their homes in Syria. Turkey and Lebanon have each taken in more than one million Syrians, while Jordan, Iraq and Egypt have become home to hundreds of thousands more. But Syria is not the only place of conflict.

From Afghanistan, the UN Refugee Agency estimates that there are **3.5 million displaced people**, mainly in Pakistan (1.5 million) and Iran (1 million), and with 700,000 internally displaced persons.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2003, and continuing beyond the separation of North and South Sudan, the Darfur region of Sudan remains a place of conflict, with the allied forces of the National Redemption Front opposing the government of Sudan. 300,000 people have been killed, and **2.3 million people displaced**. Some 300,000 refugees are in the east of neighbouring Chad.

The immense numbers of people involved shows a mobilisation that recalls the movement of displaced people after the Second World War, as a result of which The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 guaranteed a '... right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution'.

The Refugee situation and Asylum application process in Britain is changing week by week. As this time of writing, Britain had just made a commitment to support air strikes, with an aim to end IS (*Daesh*), and its part in the conflict in Syria. The strategy supports allies, but risks of making the situation more difficult for those living there, at least in the short term.

The move from 'homeland' to a new land is disorienting, even if it's chosen. For those for whom it's not a choice, it can be a cause of acute loss, like bereavement. Many skilled people find they can't find skilled employment and lose their role and career. Many have left family members behind.

### **'What would it feel like to leave everything behind?'**

That was the question teacher Stewart Cook asked his class of eight and nine year olds.

Stewart's school, Frances Olive Anderson, was a year into a Connecting Classrooms partnership with Mohammed Shamel school in Lebanon, notable

<sup>3</sup> Also known as 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant', ISIL, *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah fī 'l-'Irāq wa-sh-Shām*, leading to the acronym *Da'ish* or *Daesh*.

<sup>4</sup> <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/refugees/iraqi>

<sup>5</sup> <http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/refugees/afghan>

because 40% of its student body is made up of refugees. Stewart wanted to develop his pupils' understanding of what life is like for the Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian children at Mohammed Shamel. So in a classroom exercise based on theme of conflict and peace, he started a discussion about the possessions pupils couldn't live without if they had to flee their homes.

Halfway through the discussion the school sounded an air raid siren. Stewart gave everyone 30 seconds to assemble in the playground, taking whatever they could with them. The exercise made the discussion about possessions real, giving the children a taste of the panic many of their new friends had experienced during their young lives.

When complete, the exercise was followed up with a Skype call to Mohammed Shamel. In an eerie twist, a security alert had been given in Lebanon just minutes earlier. The children talked together about personal safety, with British pupils asking questions about the fear of going out and what they took with them when they were forced to evacuate.<sup>6</sup>

### Questions

- What would you most miss, if you were forced to leave England in a hurry? (What would you pack in a single case, if given the opportunity, and what would you leave behind)?
- Do you have a family member who moved to the UK, and settled here in living memory (or who has emigrated)? If so, what was the move like for them?
- Do you think it's important to hold on to your faith and cultural identity to support you (by connecting with other English people abroad, for example), or to assimilate into a new culture and faith, so as to be accepted?
- Do you agree that it should be a "right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948)

During this next week, consider how the media are presenting the issue of refugees. You might consider reading a different newspaper or watching a different TV channel's news report from the one that you usually choose.

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<sup>6</sup> This episode is taken from 'Schools Online' - <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/case-studies/global%20themes/identity-and-belonging>

## 1.4 Lent as a preparation for Baptism

Lent is a time of preparation and the discovery of purpose, a returning to the love we first had for God and to the work of mission and ministry that we engaged in, when inspired by the first enthusiasm of faith.

### Revelation 2:1-5

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent (return), and do the works you did at first.”

At one time, preparation for baptismal candidates may have lasted as long as a number of years. Yet it was at Easter that many were admitted to the church in baptism, or readmitted into fellowship with the church after penitence, following a serious estrangement or excommunication.

Over time, this time or preparation for baptism and penitence for readmission became the basis for our Lent. We now share this season of 40 days in the wilderness, recalling Jesus' 40 days in the desert. We too take these 40 days to re-engage with our foundational story – our baptism into Jesus' way of living, our baptism into the way of his death.

Our foundational narrative is baptism, by which we turned to Christ, and in the waters of baptism died to sin and rose to a new life in Christ.

Baptism is best understood as one part, albeit a key part, of an on-going process in our initiation into faith in Christ and into the life of the church.

1. Pre-baptismal instruction (*catechesis*) and preparation (e.g. fasting)
2. The rite of baptism
3. Post-baptismal learning and formation (either before admission to the Eucharist for children or before confirmation (traditionally called *mystagogia*)
4. Admission to the Eucharist
5. Confirmation

Not all churches follow the same pattern, for historical and theological reasons. In the early church, when a leading/presiding presbyter (only later called 'bishop') baptised adults, the chrismation of confirmation was part of the baptismal service. When baptism took place without a bishop present, the last part of the rite became separated, until such time as the

bishop could be there. Baptist churches practise adult baptism, for example, and have no separate rite of confirmation. The Church of England used to admit people to the Eucharist only after confirmation, but this is no longer the case in most dioceses.

It is a process of initiation, as it involves equipping a person to walk with Christ, helping them understand the faith of the church and learn to pray, and not just a rite of entry. Many infants and children who are baptised are not nurtured further into commitment, for whatever reason.

#### Questions

- Do you recall a time earlier on in your faith journey when you felt an all-consuming love or God or longing for God? If so, how do you feel about that now? Did it lead to commitment?
- Has that longing continued to grow, or did it change?
- What could you do this Lent to renew your walk with Christ and your trust in God?

#### Concluding Prayer

In your own words, as a group or alone, you might like to pray for

- those who are homeless
- those who are fleeing their homes, displaced by civil or international conflict
- those who are seeking to understand themselves
- those who are journeying through this Lent to baptism at Easter, or to a renewal of their baptismal vows at the Easter vigil service

## Week 2 – The Stranger

*'You shall love the stranger'*

### 2.1 Abraham, Hagar and 'The Stranger'



Pieter Lastman, *Abschied Hagers* (1610) <sup>7</sup>

#### **Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away (Genesis 21:8-28b)**

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is

<sup>7</sup> Pieter Lastman 001 The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH.. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter\\_Pietersz.\\_Lastman\\_001.jpg#/media/File:Pieter\\_Pietersz.\\_Lastman\\_001.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pieter_Pietersz._Lastman_001.jpg#/media/File:Pieter_Pietersz._Lastman_001.jpg)



through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer- sheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness.

Last week we began with the foundational story of Exodus, and the flight from oppression. But the 12 tribes of Israel recounted a more ancient story of a common ancestor Abraham, who left Ur courageously and out of obedience, and set out for a land and future he did not know. This is generally considered to be a story of courage and hope. It is the story of one ancestor Abraham and one father God, which held the federation of the 12 tribes of Israel together, before the rise of the monarchy of David and his son Solomon. It is a paternal myth for a paternalistic culture, but we turn here to the maternal figure of Hagar.

In Hebrew, the name *hagar* appears to refer to a migrant. (הַגָּר *hā·gār* may be derived from the verb ‘to sojourn’, cf. הָגַר *hager*, the ‘stranger’ or ‘settled migrant’).

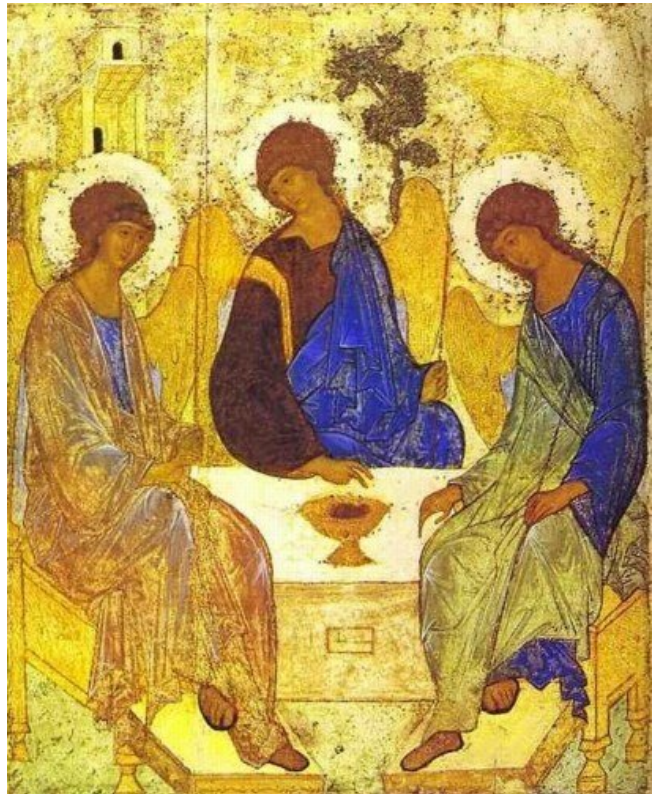
In *Genesis*, Hagar is Sarah’s servant or slave. Sarah gave her to Abraham ‘to wife’. The child of Hagar and Abraham is Ishmael (*Yishma’el*), whose name means ‘God has heard’. In the Islamic tradition, Hagar is understood to become a second wife, but there is an implied inferior status in the text, which gives cause for some translations to imply that Hagar was a concubine. What is clear is that being a wife gives her no legal security when Sarah falls pregnant and wants her dismissed. Hagar is made homeless, and fears the death of her child. But God intervenes in this tale, and promises protection, so she dwells with her son in the wilderness of Paran.

In spite of this tale, the role of hospitality to the stranger in Ancient Israel was important, as it was for other nomadic countries. In the Hebrew Scriptures and in Jewish theology today, care for the ‘stranger’ (along with the widow and the orphan) is a God-given command and responsibility.

*When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 19:33-34)*

The commandment 'You shall love the stranger', (*Va'ahavtem et ha-ger*) is found twice in scripture (Deuteronomy 10:19; Leviticus 19: 34), along with similar commands: 'You shall not oppress the stranger' (Exodus 22:20;23:9); 'You shall have one law only – the same for native born and stranger' (Numbers 9:14;15:16). The reason given each time is 'for you were slaves in the land of Egypt' (Leviticus 19:33 Deuteronomy 24:18).

There is an account in Genesis 18 of Abraham offering hospitality under the oak of Mamre. Suitably enough, it takes place at a table. The text at first glance appears to be corrupted as the text moves between speaking of a singular guest (he) and three guests (they). This led Christians to see Abraham's hospitality as entertaining the triune God. The story therefore became the basis for an icon by the icon writer Rubilev, in which the worshipper before the ikon is invited to join in the company.



#### Questions

- How do you respond to the commandment: 'You shall love the stranger' (the migrant)? How do you show this love?
- In your church, are all welcome or is anyone excluded? How would you respond to an immigrant coming to your church
- How would your church community show hospitality to 'stranger' or migrant, outside of the worship, to make them welcome?



## 2.2 Jesus' Ministry to the Marginalised

### **The Syrophenician Woman's Faith (Mark 7:24-30)**

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone

Jesus' ministry is often to the marginalised – such as the poor, lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes, and people of other religious identities and traditions, such as the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-26). In his teaching he tells of the compassionate deeds of a Samaritan in more favourable terms than that of a priest and Levite (Luke 10:25-37).

On this occasion, Jesus is in a coastal area, the region of Tyre and Sidon, well outside Palestinian Jewish society. He is approached by a local woman, born in the Phoenician part of the Roman province of Syria. This Syrophenician woman steps before him and bows down at his feet. We today miss how confrontational this would have seemed, in the honour culture of Jesus' society. It is the same approach that we see offered by the rich man of Mark 10, for whom such social propriety would not have been offensive, but still a direct demand for help. But she is a Gentile woman, approaching a Jewish man. The bold gesture is rather like a beggar confronting us in the street today, with the direct challenge of plea 'help me', rather than sitting by the side with a begging bowl for charitable coins.

Jesus' reply to this needy woman seems harsh and insensitive, even offensive, both to the Syrophenician woman and also to listeners in our own congregations today. A variety of Bible commentaries are uneasy enough to want to explain this text in various ways. For example, perhaps Jesus is mindful of Exodus 22:31, which reads, 'He who eats with an idolater is like one who eats with a dog'.

Jesus' use of language is likely to have reflected his own culture, but nevertheless it is a moment of tension created by cultural difference. This tension is only highlighted by the woman's retort, 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

The references to food might also refer us to the political economics of food and inequality in Jesus's day. While the disciples of Jesus are sometimes hungry (Matthew 11:1) and at one time are sent out with no bread (Mark 6.8), Herod is able to hold a banquet (Mark 6:21): It is against this background that Jesus shares meals with 'tax collectors and sinners' (Mark 2.16) and feeds the multitude (Mark 6:37-44), for God fills 'the hungry with good things' (Luke

1:53, cf. 1 Sam 2:5). The Syrophonecian woman's response may share that it is not only Jews who suffer the oppressive policies of taxation of the Romans, administered by Herod Antipas.

But the real surprise lies in the closing line 'For saying this you may go – the demon has left your daughter.' Although the woman has confronted Jesus and has challenged him, he does not take a position of being insulted or affronted, he suffers no indignity according to the honour code of his culture, but he ministers to her need.

#### Questions

- Jesus' response initially seems racist, reflecting the usual racist characterisation of foreigners. What is your reaction, how do you feel about Jesus response?
- How does the woman's words challenge Jesus? Is it possible she taught him something, or reminded him of something?
- When have you had to catch yourself or challenge other people's or a newspapers' language?
- Have you felt affronted by others'? What was your reaction – to feel insulted or to seek healing?
- How can we learn from Jesus' example of not being insulted by the woman's challenge, and his willingness to change?

### 2.3 European Response to Immigration

Last week we considered the numbers of people on the move, displaced as a consequence of conflict. Only a small proportion of those displaced people are approaching the European Union, as the majority of displaced people are either with a neighbouring country or are internally displaced.

The Rt Revd David Hamid, the Church of England's suffragan Bishop of Europe, has described the situation as the "largest crisis that Europe has had to face since World War II" and warned that churches, governments and agencies need to prepare for a "medium- to long-term situation" that is "not going to go away quickly."

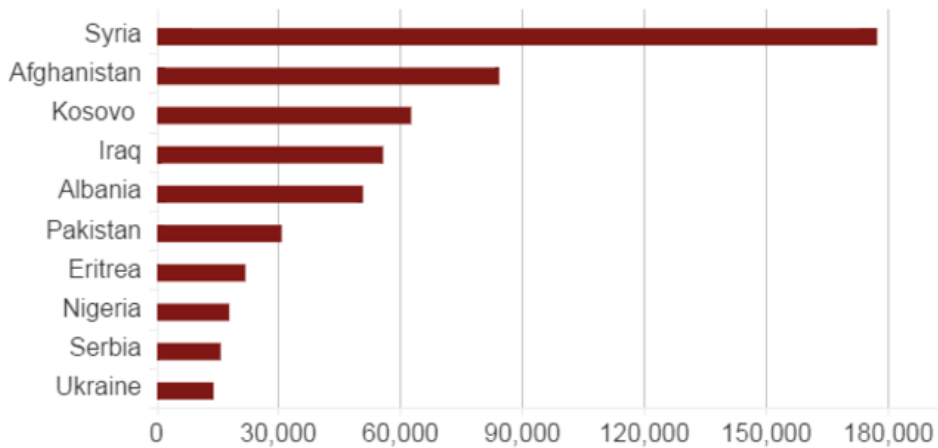
Small though the proportion of displaced people coming to the EU is, there have been over three quarters of a million people who have crossed the Mediterranean and Aegean, fleeing war, persecution and homelessness in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Eritrea, and other countries. Figures from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) show that over 762,000 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe by boat in 2015. Most of them, around 620,000, have arrived in Greece; while Italy has received over 140,000 people.

The UNHCR estimates that almost 3,500 people have died or gone missing trying to make the journey. Over half the migrants trying to reach Europe come from the Syrian Arab Republic, while 20 per cent come from Afghanistan.

Of those who approach the EU, the BBC graphic below gives an indication of their origin.

### Top 10 origins of people applying for asylum in the EU

January - October 2015, first-time applications



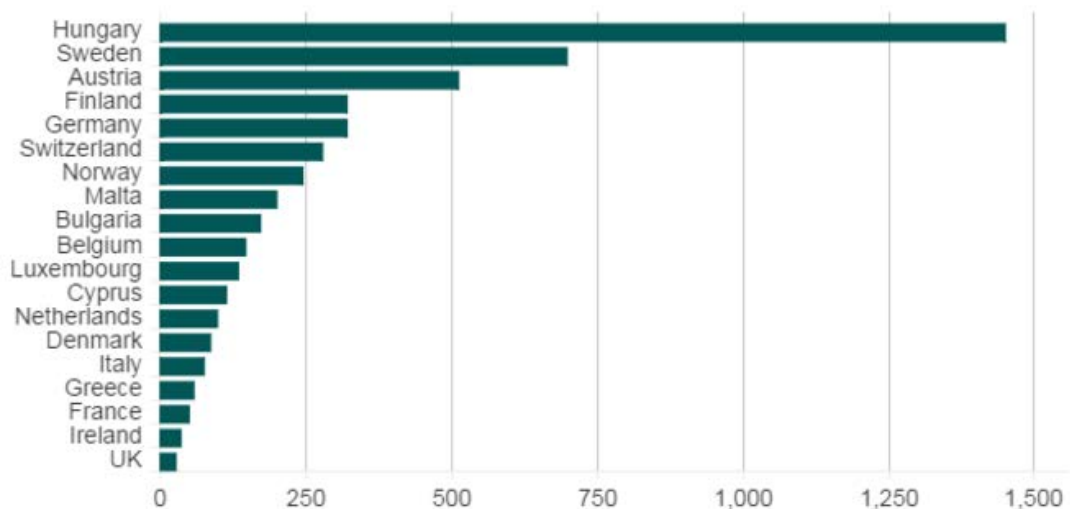
Source: Eurostat



The next BBC graphic below shows the number of applicants in different countries, relative to the population of those countries (being an indication of the ability to offer financial and other support).

### Asylum applications per 100,000 local population

January - October 2015



Source: Eurostat



However, behind such statistics are individual stories, of divided families and personal tragedies. Many refugees attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea were drowned, like the little boy discovered near the holiday resort town of Bodrum, in Turkey. The picture of which appeared in national papers temporarily changed the tone of the debate in Britain, last year.

In a second Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Norwich on the Refugee Crisis, written before Christmas, Bishop Graham wrote the following [extracted section]:

...As many of you may know Norwich City Council has pledged to receive Syrian refugees under the Government scheme and we hope that Norfolk County Council, as the lead authority, will be in a position soon to ensure Norfolk's participation in that scheme. The numbers likely to come are relatively modest but given that they are likely to come direct from refugee camps their needs may be considerable. Those needs are likely to be met if they are living in relatively close proximity to each other so offers of individual accommodation may not be needed. But those of you who have made such generous offers may be able to assist in other ways.

What will certainly be needed is some financial support to settle refugees in their new homes and provide them with some of the amenities they will need for life in Britain.<sup>8</sup> Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the Appeal. That money will be retained to be spent in its entirety in supporting such families since I am confident the need will be there. As I mentioned in my last letter there are other agencies who are assisting refugees in transit, including Christian Aid and Save the Children.

... let us continue to pray and work for the many refugees in our world who find themselves bewildered by their circumstances but who long for a new life. Among them are our brothers and sisters in Christ and many who have not given up hope despite their adverse circumstances.

Thank you again for your support but even more for your prayers for refugees in our world and all who are in need.

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<sup>8</sup> ***Ways to Give***

1. Online - Follow the link [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/refugees](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/refugees)
2. By Text - Text ACTS45 £10 to 70070 to donate £10; or text ACTS45 £5 to 70070 to donate £5;
3. By Cheque - Cheques should be made payable to 'Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd' or 'NDBF Ltd', marked clearly on the back of the cheque 'Refugee Appeal'. Please send the cheque together with a completed Gift Aid declaration (if applicable), which can be downloaded at [www.dioceseofnorwich.org/refugees](http://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/refugees) to Refugee Appeal, Miss S Bunting, Diocesan House, 109 Dereham Road, Easton NR9 5ES
4. To give to Christian Aid to help refugees still overseas, go to their website <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/emergencies/>

## Questions

- How have the newspaper articles you've been reading presented the situation in the UK?
- What light can the biblical passages you have considered bring to the situation?
- How has your church been involved, or how might your church be involved, in the support of refugees?
- As in the photo of the young boy who drowned, can you think of other images that have spoken louder than words and changed people's hearts? Why have pictures such power to move us?

## 2.4 Coming to the Eucharist

As candidates prepare for baptism and some for confirmation, there will be members of our churches who may be sharing in the Eucharist for the first time and many more who will come to a Eucharist for the first time in a long time.

Lent is a reminder to us about what it means to be church, preparing to come to the table, not because we have much to bring, but because we too come with needs: the need for fellowship; the need for God; the need for meaning and purpose in our lives; the need to express faith, share faith and grow in faith. In the church, whatever we bring to the table we each share in the same. God builds us into his body.

The Eucharist shapes who we are, personally and collectively.

- **We gather**
  - **in praise and gratitude.** We are uplifted by this celebration of God and joined in our common desire for God
  - **in penitence.** By our shared public penitence, we are formed to be a people who approach God in humility, knowing that ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom 3:23). We seek God’s grace and learn to accept one another’s failings, forgiving others as God forgives us.
  
- **We attend to God**
  - **in the reading of scripture.** We explore the relationship between God’s revelation in history, the church’s witness, and our lives today, in sermons and by others ways of reflecting on the scriptures.
  - **in intercessory prayer.** We become ever more mindful of the needs of other people, of other beings, and of the environment, as we hold these in prayer.
  
- **We offer to God**
  - **Our gifts of ‘alms and oblations’.** We give for charity and the support of ministry, and are so formed as giving people, who respond to our own prayer for the needs of others.
  - **Our thanks and praise, for all God did in Jesus.** Sharing in communion together, we are formed as a community in Christ.
  - **Ourselves as ‘living sacrifice’.** We offer to become all that Christ exemplified for us.
  
- **We are sent**
  - **To ‘love and serve’ God**
  - **To continue God’s work and Jesus’ mission. We are sent, renewed by forgiveness and strengthened by the power of God’s Spirit** in the Eucharist, to continue God’s work of reconciling all creation, and Jesus’ ministry of building the kingdom of God, through his vulnerable loving service.

**From Augustine: *Sermon 272*,**

... As the prophet says, "Unless you believe, you will not understand." [Is. 7.9; *Septuagint*] So you can say to me, "You urged us to believe; now explain, so we can understand." Inside each of you, thoughts like these are rising: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, we know the source of his flesh; he took it from the virgin Mary. Like any infant, he was nursed and nourished; he grew; became a youngster; suffered persecution from his own people. To the wood he was nailed; on the wood he died; from the wood, his body was taken down and buried. On the third day (as he willed) he rose; he ascended bodily into heaven whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. There he dwells even now, seated at God's right. So how can bread be his body? And what about the cup? How can it (or what it contains) be his blood?"

My friends, these realities are called sacraments because in them one thing is seen, while another is grasped. What is seen is a mere physical likeness; what is grasped bears spiritual fruit. So now, if you want to understand the body of Christ, listen to the Apostle Paul speaking to the faithful: "You are the body of Christ, member for member." [1 Cor. 12.27] If you, therefore, are Christ's body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's table! It is your own mystery that you are receiving! You are saying "Amen" to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith. When you hear "The body of Christ", you reply "Amen." Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your "Amen" may ring true!

But what role does the bread play? We have no theory of our own to propose here; listen, instead, to what Paul says about this sacrament: "The bread is one, and we, though many, are one body." [1 Cor. 10.17] Understand and rejoice: unity, truth, faithfulness, love. "One bread," he says. What is this one bread? Is it not the "one body," formed from many?

Remember: bread doesn't come from a single grain, but from many. When you received exorcism [before baptism], you were "ground." When you were baptized, you were "leavened." When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit, you were "baked." Be what you see; receive what you are. This is what Paul is saying about the bread. So too, what we are to understand about the cup is similar and requires little explanation. In the visible object of bread, many grains are gathered into one just as the faithful (so Scripture says) form "a single heart and mind in God" [Acts 4.32]. And thus it is with the wine. Remember, friends, how wine is made. Individual grapes hang together in a bunch, but the juice from them all is mingled to become a single brew. This is the image chosen by Christ our Lord to show how, at his own table, the mystery of our unity and peace is solemnly consecrated. All who fail to keep the bond of peace after entering this mystery receive not a sacrament that benefits them, but an indictment that condemns them.

So let us give God our sincere and deepest gratitude, and, as far as human weakness will permit, let us turn to the Lord with pure hearts. With all our

strength, let us seek God's singular mercy, for then the Divine Goodness will surely hear our prayers. God's power will drive the Evil One from our acts and thoughts; it will deepen our faith, govern our minds, grant us holy thoughts, and lead us, finally, to share the divine happiness through God's own son Jesus Christ. Amen!

### Questions

- Augustine refers to the church when he says, “Be what you see; receive what you are.” How do we better become the body of Christ?
- How does your way you celebrate the Eucharist as a church form the life of your church?
- Do you have people in your church sharing in extended communion at home? How might they be enabled to participate in the life of the church be better met?
- How might you prepare better for sharing in the Eucharist?

### Concluding Prayer

In your own words, as a group or alone, you might like to pray for

- Those who are marginalised in our society, and those who suffer terms of racist or other forms of abuse, that there may be hospitality generous enough to welcome and accept and include them all.
- Pray for those preparing for confirmation or preparing to share in the Eucharist either for their very first time, or for the first time after a long time apart from the church.
- Pray for one another as you share your reflections in these weeks of Lent.



## Week 3 – Learning and Formation

### 3.1 Elijah and Elisha

#### **Elijah Ascends to Heaven (2 Kings 2)**

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 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. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”

Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

We sometimes think of learning in terms of academic study. Such study is what we did at school, when the bell rang and it was time to stop playing and start learning. But learning is a far greater idea than study, and study is but a small though valuable part of learning.

This passage takes place in the context of an apprenticeship, for Elisha has been an attendant and disciple of Elijah the Tishbite before this episode. This apprenticeship begins after Elijah hears God's call to him in the still small voice in a cave on Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19). Elijah leaves there and throws his mantle over Elisha's shoulders, investing him with a prophetic ministry, inviting him to leave his family and follow. By doing this, Elijah effectively adopts Elisha as a son, and mentors him. Elisha learns the art or craft of public ministry as he ministers to Elijah (1 Kings 19:21), and watches the way Elijah confronts king Ahab (who had seized Naboth's vineyard, in 1 Kings 21) and later king Ahaziah (2 Kings 1). This preparation ends with a new birth, as Elijah 'took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground'. This reference alludes to the liberation of Exodus, and to Moses' leadership.

We see in this a model of learning as apprenticeship, which involves the formation of people through their personal and spiritual growth, and through learning the art and craft of ministry. Learning is not divorced from, but belongs with and relates to, identity and purpose. Formation for Christian ministry involves following the example and practice of Jesus.

#### Questions

- How would you describe the learning of an apprentice, and the teaching role of a mentor?
- The government are currently encouraging apprenticeships,<sup>9</sup> what are the benefits of this way of learning employable skills, and what are the drawbacks?
- Church leaders (Clergy and Lay Licenced Ministers / Readers) often mentor people developing ministry skills such as curates, Authorised Worship Assistants, Small Group Leaders, etc.. How might such patterns of mentoring be extended in your church for foster new members as Christian disciples?

### 3.2 Jesus Teaches

#### Luke 4:13-22

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

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<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/topic/further-education-skills/apprenticeships>

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’

Jesus has a teaching ministry, though its focus is on changing lives and on the Reign/Kingdom of God, rather than just on learning. It is to grow in wisdom and holiness, rather than just knowledge. It is learning about God’s creating, liberating and life-giving activity, that we may become a part of it.

In this episode, Jesus goes to visit the place of his own childhood, to Nazareth, "where he had been brought up" (Luke 4.16). He reads in the synagogue there, in the town where we might presume that he first learned to read, in the gathering place where he worshipped and grew in faith. Where other gospels don’t tell us what he first taught, but limit themselves to saying that Jesus "began to teach in the synagogue" (Mark 6.2; cf. Matthew 13.54), Luke offers a summary of Jesus’ message. Jesus chooses his text: He "found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me ...!" (Luke 4.16-18; Isaiah 61.1). Isaiah 61.1-2 speaks of proclaiming "liberty to captives", and Jesus takes up this theme. He speaks of letting the oppressed or the downtrodden go free, an expression that is also found in another passage of Isaiah, where it says that the fasting which pleases God does not consist in observing ritual ("hanging your head like a reed, lying down on sackcloth and ashes". Isaiah 58.5), but is "to break unjust fetters and undo the throngs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke" (Isaiah 58.6). It is also significant that the last line of Isaiah read by Jesus says: "to proclaim the Lord's year of favour" (Lk 4.19). This expression of Isaiah 61:2, "year of the Lord's favour", refers to the prescriptions in the Book of Leviticus on the 'jubilee year' (Leviticus 25.10-13), to the time after seven cycles of seven years, when all debts were released and land returned. Jesus’ teaching ministry inaugurates such a time of release and liberation, for as soon as he ends his reading, it is declared that "this text" was being fulfilled on that day.

Education at its best is more than rote learning. Teaching at its best is liberation to new life. It is also creative or ‘formative’ for the learner. Central to Jewish learning is responsibility to

the poor, and Jesus teaches this. But throughout his ministry, Jesus teaches in parables and signs – which give people choices while helping them to be aware. Jesus teaches by ‘gracious words’, words that are gift and freedom. Those with ears to hear will hear the challenge he gives, and those who have been blind or indifferent to the suffering around will see situations in new light. We are not forced to see things differently, but are transformed until we want to see things with Jesus’ perspective. We are not forced to do anything, but we are released from exploitative patterns by the choice to give to those in need.

### Questions

- Was your experience of education at school a liberating experience, where you developed the confidence to reach into responsible adulthood, or did it fall short of this?
- Does your benefice have a school within its parish(es). If so, what is the church’s current role there?
- Are you open to new ways of looking at things and to challenges? If so, how do you choose to continue to feed your learning today? Does your church help with this learning?
- Who do you think the oppressed are today? Do you think learning may set them free, and if so whose learning is needed for this liberation?

### 3.3 Growing Community Life through Education



Nine miles out from the centre of Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea, on a patch of unusually (for PNG) dry and dusty ground is a community of some 7,000 Anglicans. They are miles away from their traditional homes and communities, across a large range of mountains. This relatively new community is made up of people from the Orokaiva people – traditionally the largest group of Anglican

Christians across the country and their settlement is known as the Orobada Settlement. Like many other groups of people from around PNG, they come to find new opportunities in the Capital – economic migrants in our terms. The language is different here in the Capital (some 800 local languages across the country). As always, the reality is different and so they gathered amongst the people they knew on this arid hillside to establish homes and a new community.

The land is not their own, though the landowners will be earning money from them, and the Government does not acknowledge them. Access to water is difficult and facilities are scarce, but for their children, this is the only home they know and they are determined to create a vibrant and sustainable community.

The Diocese of Port Moresby helped them to establish a school, Christ the King, which grows year group by year group as their children grow up. Their pupils currently number around 350. The school is not recognised by the Government and technically, Orobada is a squatter settlement, but the Pilgrimage from Norwich last year found it in good heart, even if living hand to mouth. One of the classrooms was made out of an old container the previous bishop's wife had acquired for them. Mostly the teachers are enthusiastic volunteers, or are paid a significantly lower salary than teachers in government-recognised schools.



Some of the Prep students with their teacher. © ACPNG 2013

They know education is critical for the development of their children and from very slender resources (most of them have not found paid employment); parents find money for an annual fee of 150kina and a school uniform. Books and teaching resources are very few and far between. By our standards, the sums are not large – there are currently 4kina to the pound – but in relative terms they are. 150kina is the annual parish share in Popondotta diocese.

### **This year's PNG Lent Appeal**

Bishop Graham encourages us to focus on this particular school in conjunction with our colleagues in the Australian Diocese of Rockhampton as the main element in this year's appeal for the church in Papua New Guinea and to seek to raise enough money to:

- Build and equip a block of two classrooms. The building of that block will cost around £7,000.
- Establish a bursary scheme whereby we will match-fund a reduced annual fee of 100kina, which increases both the number of parents who will then be able to access the school and the money which the school can use for more teachers and teaching materials. Every £1,000 we raise will enable us to continue the Bursary for another year.
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## Why Papua New Guinea?

Our diocesan link with the Anglican Province there and its five dioceses goes back to the time when David Hand became the first Anglican Archbishop in the early 70s. He and our Bishop Lancelot Fleming set it up so that we could be partners together in the church's mission. These intervening decades have seen clergy and laity from both places travel to each other for mutual encouragement and shared companionship in the Gospel. Involvement has waxed and waned at different times, but currently and particularly following our recent Pilgrimage, has introduced new people to supplement the faithful few who have been so dedicated to this link; it feels an important part of our connection to the Anglican Communion.

The Link receives no financial input from the Diocese centrally, and so the only money that goes into it comes from the Lent Appeal every other year. Part of what we raise each time therefore, goes into keeping the link alive and sustaining personal contacts in both directions, and additionally makes a gift to the running of the church there.

Please help us: £20,000 will build the classroom block, run the bursary scheme for 5 years and maintains our mutual encouragement of one another.

### Questions

- How might your church help with this appeal?
- With so many causes that we can give to, why is important that we work together as a diocese, sharing in a common effort, to support the school in this community and access for poorer families?
- What insights and wisdom do we gain as a church from our overseas links?

## 3.4 Lent and Discipleship

Lent is often a time of Bible study for churches, or more widely a time for re-engagement with learning and values, and for gaining new insights. It offers a time of reflection, by which we can evaluate our practice, and turn again to God. We re-engage with our own foundational story and seek to be formed in community.

In the passage above, which begins the second book of Kings, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

The passage of Elijah's ascent and Elisha's receiving a double share of Elijah's spirit, which we began with today, is a passage which the church reads at Pentecost, when Jesus ascends to heaven (at the end of Luke's Gospel). In the Acts of the Apostles, which is the sequel to the gospel of Luke, we find an analogous passage, with the church being anointed with a



bountiful measure of the Spirit of Jesus, as it takes up his 'mantle'. The disciples, who have similarly learned by living alongside Jesus, having been apprenticed to him, receive Jesus' Spirit (in the opening of the Acts of the Apostles). This reminds us that we too are disciples being apprenticed and yet are also invested into Jesus' work and commissioned by the Spirit at Baptism/Confirmation for sharing in Jesus' ministry.

Confirmation is a pastoral rite in the Church of England which marks the completion of initiation. At its heart is an invocation of the Holy Spirit on the person being confirmed, which reflects an invocation we find in the baptismal service and indeed at the Eucharist. Here the Holy Spirit is asked to conform the believer more perfectly to Christ and to strengthen them so that they may bear witness to Christ for the building up of his body in faith and love. The Holy Spirit equips each member of the church for God's service as a part of his body, the Church.

### **Confirmation**

*The bishop extends his hands towards those to be confirmed and says*

Almighty and ever-living God,  
you have given these your servants new birth  
in baptism by water and the Spirit,  
and have forgiven them all their sins.  
Let your Holy Spirit rest upon them:  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding;  
the Spirit of counsel and inward strength;  
the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness;  
and let their delight be in the fear of the Lord.

**All     Amen.**

*The bishop addresses each candidate by name*

*N*, God has called you by name and made you his own.

*He then lays his hand on the head of each, saying*

Confirm, O Lord, your servant with your Holy Spirit.

**All     Amen.**

*The bishop invites the congregation to pray for all those on whom hands have been laid*

**All     Defend, O Lord, these your servants with your heavenly grace, that they may continue yours for ever, and daily increase in your Holy Spirit more and more until they come to your everlasting kingdom. Amen.**

The bishop's prayer within the confirmation refers to 'fear of the Lord'. It is an idea we find elsewhere too. It is said of the church in Acts that, "Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, [the church] increased in numbers." (Acts 9:31)

This 'fear of the Lord' is not fearfulness or timidity. The passage being used here comes from Isaiah, where the prophet speaks of a royal ruler coming from the stock of Jesse (the father of King David). It ends by explaining what 'the Spirit of the Lord' enables this king to do:

His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

It is not what his eyes will see or his ears will hear that leads him to God's wise understanding and judgement, and to the righteous action this leads, but a delighting in awe, in reverence, in love and respect of God. So as we seek to follow Christ, we don't delight in rumour, opinions or appearances, but delight in God and so seek the wise rule of Christ.

#### Questions

- What did your confirmation mean to you? Was it merely a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood or did it mark a stage of personal commitment?
- What do these phrases mean to you,
  - the Spirit of wisdom and understanding;
  - the Spirit of counsel and inward strength;
  - the Spirit of knowledge and true godlinessAnd how are these fostered within the life of your church?
- When your church (Benefice/Parish) last held confirmations, how were the candidates prepared? Were members of the church involved (in teaching them, or in praying for them, or in celebrating with them, for example?)

#### Concluding Prayer

In your own words, as a group or alone, you might like to pray for

- The schools in our diocese, their governors, their heads, and teachers
- Young people and new Christians, learning to live the Christian faith
- This year's Lent Appeal and those who live in Orobada Settlement
- Our diocesan link with Papua New Guinea
- Those who are preparing for confirmation



## Week 4 – Power and Vulnerability

### 4.1 David's 5 Stones

#### **David and Goliath 1 Sam 17:1-11, 32-51**

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle; they were gathered at Socoh, which belongs to Judah, and encamped between Socoh and Azekah, in Ephes- dammim. Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. The Philistines stood on the mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on the mountain on the other side, with a valley between them. And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield- bearer went before him. He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us." And the Philistine said, "Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together." When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

*[verses 12-31 omitted]*

David said to Saul, "Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth." But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God." David said, "The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine." So Saul said to David, "Go, and may the Lord be with you!"

Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head

and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field." But David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

The story of David and Goliath is about a simple outdoor shepherd boy confronting the full might of a military threat. Goliath is wearing the latest and best weaponry, the bronze javelin and iron spear, and the best of armoury, the most secure technology of 'defence'. Saul would have been better suited to combat, but we read that God had rejected him from being King over Israel (1 Sam 16:1 & 16:14). David doesn't choose to engage this military power with the same sort of power; he refuses to wear Saul's armour. David confronts and wins with skill, using five smooth stones.

The story is not considered by scholars to be an historical account about David. It may illustrate the Ancient Israelites' relationship to other nations, as a less powerful nation needing wit rather than power. It may be that we like the story of the underling, who confronts faceless power, and triumphs over evil. That might go to explain the popularity of

a film like *Erin Brockovich* (2000), in which Julia Roberts plays a paralegal in a criminal case that revealed the illegal dumping of highly toxic waste (hexavalent chromium) and one of the largest class action suits in U.S. history. But for Ancient Israel the story is a game-changer about the winning of support for the institution of the monarchy.

Before the election of King David, the judge Samuel was very much against a king (see 1 Samuel 8:6-22), because kings assume a role in relationship to the people in which the subjects serve the king.

‘These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.’ (1 Samuel 8:11-18)

The choice appears to be between the way of power and the way of God, for as the psalm writer of Psalm 20 notes: ‘Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God’. Or elsewhere, as Isaiah says, ‘Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD.’ (Isaiah 31:1)

Samuel’s fear is that kings become Goliaths.

This is what happens with David. David becomes Goliath: He develops armies and extends territory to unify Judah and Israel by deviousness and by force. He is God’s chosen, but a flawed human being, driven by ambition. He also murders Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba, to cover his taking of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11).

His son Solomon also becomes Goliath, building a temple for God and a house for himself—all from conscripted labour (1 Kings 5:13, 1 Kings 9:15). He builds a fleet of ships for trade, accruing wealth and power, and the admiration of the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10: 1-5). He also took to himself seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:1-3).

In a speech to the UK House of Lords in 1770, Prime Minister William Pitt the Elder said, "Unlimited power is apt to corrupt the minds of those who possess it".<sup>10</sup> The same idea is more often ascribed to the historian and moralist, Lord Acton, who in a letter in 1887

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<sup>10</sup> *William Pitt the Elder, Earl of Chatham*, was British Prime Minister from 1766 to 1778

memorably stated: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men." <sup>11</sup>

#### Questions

- Do you agree that power corrupts and that a person in sole power is more likely to abuse that power?
- Are good and honourable people who come to power corrupted when they get there, or by the way of getting there?
- Do you think this is necessarily true of all power, or can you think of anyone who has come to power and not abused it?

#### 4.2 Jesus' 5 Wounds



Meister der Palastkapelle in Palermo <sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Lord Acton is John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, who was first Baron Acton, 1834–1902

<sup>12</sup> "Meister der Palastkapelle in Palermo 002" - The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei. DVD-ROM, 2002. ISBN 3936122202. Distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH.. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister\\_der\\_Palastkapelle\\_in\\_Palermo\\_002.jpg#/media/File:Meister\\_der\\_Palastkapelle\\_in\\_Palermo\\_002.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_der_Palastkapelle_in_Palermo_002.jpg#/media/File:Meister_der_Palastkapelle_in_Palermo_002.jpg)



### Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-12)

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

"Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

Jesus is acclaimed Son of David, which is a royal title, before his journey to Jerusalem.

Where Pilate enters Jerusalem with processions of banners and the accompaniment of soldiers, as a demonstration of imperial power, Jesus is depicted entering Jerusalem by another way—on a donkey, in humility (although in Zechariah 9:9 this is how a king will come in peace). Jesus enters the city to the cry 'Hosanna!'. This is a transliteration of the Hebrew term (*hōsî-âh-nā*), an intense expression of 'save us' (save us urgently, please rescue us). It is not a triumphal acclamation, but a cry of social and political desperation!

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However, Jesus doesn't confront power with power. Though he is said to be of the line of David, he does not throw deadly blows with five smooth stones from a slingshot, but receives those blows as wounds inflicted by soldiers acting on the orders of Pilate, the wounds of nails of crucifixion and a sword. He endures these wounds as a consequence of confronting military violence with truth – the truth of the misuse of the temple by the High Priest and other religious leaders for profit and position; the truth of the Roman military's use of violence. He wears those wounds upon his body, exposing the violent brutality of power.

John's Gospel portrays Jesus as the Lamb of God, slaughtered on the Thursday, not on the Friday, identifying Jesus as the Lamb for the Passover meal. Yet he goes to slaughter in a seamless robe, like the robe of the high priest entering the temple. And not a bone of his body is broken, as with the Passover lamb. John's use of temple imagery subverts the role of power, even of the religious authorities, and shows God at work in the victim, the innocent and vulnerable lamb. The book *Revelation* develops this idea with its reversal of the Lion of Judah, which is the Lamb of God.

#### Questions

- Confronting the military might of a Goliath, do you think Jesus behaves more like the servant shepherd of his people, an ideal of the young David (like Matthew's Gospel), or more like the Passover Lamb that is slaughtered as a sacrifice (as in John's)? Do the images complement one another or contradict one another?
- If power functions through the imposition of authority, does this understanding of God working in vulnerability appeal to compassion? If so, how do we foster compassion, seeing God in the vulnerable and the victim, the Lamb rather than the Lion?
- Can you think of examples of non-violence forms of resistance used since Jesus? How do these confront power non-violently?

### 4.3 Economic Imperialism

David's Kingdom was short-lived, and the context thereafter is almost constantly one of imperial domination:

- by Assyria; which wiped the northern Kingdom of Israel out of history (722/721 BCE).
- by Babylon – with the siege and destruction of the first temple under Nebuchadnezzar (587/586 BCE).
- by Cyrus and the Achaemenid Empire incorporating the Medes and Persians.
- by Alexander the Great, whose Macedonian empire later divided, leaving Judah under the Seleucid empire. A Jewish Maccabean revolt led to a semi-autonomous Hasmonean dynasty, and later established a new Hasmonean Kingdom.

- by the Roman Empire, which initially ruled over former Hasmonean territory through Herod the Great, but later divided that territory into four parts. In 70 CE the Second Temple was destroyed.

Since the Norman conquest, England hasn't had such a history of imperial occupation on its homeland. But, like other European nations, it has in the past been an imperial force, and used its institutions in finance, trade and investment, as well as its military power, to extend its influence across the world. The British Empire was at its height in the time of Queen Victoria's reign.

Today, the political and economic institutions known as the 'Bretton Woods' institutions<sup>13</sup> (The *International Monetary Fund* [IMF, from 1944], *World Trade Organisation* [WTO, from 1995] and the *World Bank* [WB]), aim at providing stability of markets, the reduction of trade barriers and conditions for development. But these institutions serve to support wealthy countries in exercising their influence in global affairs, by such means as requiring trade liberalisation of sovereign states as conditions of loans and the restructuring of debt repayment plans. This influence is experienced as international pressure by poorer sovereign states.

The term 'Economic Imperialism' is a contested term, but is generally used to refer to the process whereby the dominant political and economic interests of one nation expropriate for their own enrichment the land, labour, raw materials, and markets of another people from poorer dependent nations. North American and European corporations have acquired control of more than three-quarters of the known mineral resources of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. These internationally-operating corporations also shift production from the west to nations with lower economic costs, such as cheaper labour with minimal or no union organisation and no minimum wage, or less regulation or less powerful resistance and reaction to economic destruction.

Liberation theology in Latin America developed through the 1970s and 1980s in response to a critique of alleged models of 'development' that were being imposed on the county from the 1960s. The giving of loans for development created dependency on the richer nations for income, while enabling those richer nations to economically exploit the resources of Latin America. According to Leonardo and Clodovis Boff:

Development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin. All the nations of the Western world were engaged in a vast process of development; however, it was interdependent and unequal, organized in such a way that the benefits flowed to the already developed countries of the "centre" and the disadvantages were meted out to the historically backward and underdeveloped countries of the "periphery." The poverty of Third World countries was the price to be paid for the First World to be able to enjoy the fruits of overabundance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> So called following a meeting (in this area of New Hampshire) in 1944, which led to the setting up of institutions [initially, the *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (IBRD) and *The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade* (GATT)] which later developed into these three institutions.

<sup>14</sup> Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Orbis Books, [Tr.] 1987 p.68).

More recently, according to a Christian Aid briefing paper, *The economics of failure: The real cost of 'free' trade for poor countries* (June 2005): 'Trade liberalisation has cost sub-Saharan Africa US\$272 billion over the past 20 years... Two decades of liberalisation has cost sub-Saharan Africa roughly what it has received in aid.'<sup>15</sup> Christian Aid, with other Christian and charitable organisations, have worked to challenge sinful structures where the economic institutions of dominant nations extend political influence.

## Questions

The day before he was murdered, Archbishop Romero said:

*How easy it is to denounce structural injustice, institutionalised violence, social sin! And it is true, this sin is everywhere, but where are the roots of this social sin? In the heart of every human being. Present-day society is a sort of anonymous world in which no one is willing to admit guilt, and everyone is responsible. We are all sinners, and we have all contributed to this massive crime and violence in our country. Salvation begins with the human person, with human dignity, with saving every person from sin. And in this Lent this is God's call: Be converted!*

- Can you think of any financial or other activities you are engaged in, at work or home, which might bring suffering to others? For example, those who have pensions invest in companies in this international context: To what extent are you aware of the nature of the funds your pension is invested in?
- To be converted is to change. How might we change?
- In Jesus, God was understood to be incarnate in a subjected country and he assumed the role of a sacrificial victim. Where do we see God operating today to oppose unjust structures?

## 4.4 Holy Week: Palm Sunday to Jesus' Trial

As we approach the cross we come acutely aware of the dynamics of power and poverty. We begin with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but recall his trial and execution.

There can be a tendency for these services to be devotional and emotional, and so one of the tasks of a church is to relate Jesus' death to the suffering of others today. In Holy Week, we do well to remember those who suffer as a consequence of power and control today. Hence, many devotions of this week, such as the Stations of the Cross, identify with Jesus' suffering, and many meditations relate Jesus' life and death to suffering people today, helping us to enter into Jesus' witness and mission.

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<sup>15</sup> [https://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/economics\\_of\\_failure.pdf](https://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/economics_of_failure.pdf)



As churches observe the reading of the Gospel on Palm Sunday, congregations are sometimes invited to share in the reading of the 'passion narrative'. If the Gospel is read in this way, different people read the parts of the Gospel narrator, or of Jesus, or of Pontius Pilate, and the congregation is invited to share in the part of the crowd.

Pilate offered the gathered crowds their choice of the prisoner to be freed: Jesus or Barabbas. The crowd cried out for Barabbas to be freed and for Jesus to be crucified, even though Pilate declared that Jesus was guilty of no crime deserving death (Matthew 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-14; Luke 23:17-23; John 18:39-40). This can be a disturbing experience, which is caught in the following poem by a contemporary American writer, Andrew Hudgins. The poem invites us to consider if there is a Pilate, or a crowd of tormenters, or a Jesus within us all.

*Ecce Homo*<sup>16</sup>

Christ bends, protects his groin. Thorns gouge  
his forehead, and his legs  
are stippled with dried blood. The part of us  
that's Pilate says, *Behold the man*.  
We glare at that bound, lashed,  
and bloody part of us that's Christ. We laugh, we howl,  
we shout. *Give us Barabbas*,  
not knowing who Barabbas is, not caring.  
A thief? We'll take him anyway. A drunk?  
A murderer? Who cares? It's better him  
Than this pale ravaged thing, this god. Bosch<sup>17</sup> knows.  
His humans waver, laugh, then change to demons  
as if they're seized by epilepsy. It spreads  
from eye to eye, from laugh to laugh until,  
incited by the ease of going mad,  
they go. How easy evil is! Dark voices sing,  
*You can be evil or you can be good,*  
*but good is dull, my darling, good is dull.*  
And we're convinced: How lovely evil is!  
How lovely hell must be! *Give us Barabbas!*

Lord Pilate clears his throat and tries again:  
*I find no fault in this just man.*  
It's more than we can bear. In gothic script  
our answer floats above our upturned eyes.  
*O crucify, we sing. O crucify him!*

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Hudgins, "Ecce Homo" is from *The Never-Ending*, (Houghton-Mifflin, 1991). "Ecce Homo" is Latin for "Behold the man". This is Pilate's statement to the crowd upon the presentation of Jesus in the crown of thorns and purple robe (John 19:5).

<sup>17</sup> Hieronymus Bosch, the 15th- and 16th-century Dutch painter. In his painting, *Ecce Homo* (1490) Jesus is jeered at by the crowd whose faces, as Hudgins notes, seem to lose their humanity in their savagery.

What makes this a disturbing experience is that Pilate has power over life and death, and the crowd is given the decision, as was custom, to release one of the prisoners. The crowd therefore shares in that power. The discomfort comes from the congregation's sharing that moment of power over life and death. Yet it is a moment we cannot avoid in real life, given the way the world works. We may not make decisions in anger, but we are a powerful nation, and decisions we make mean life or death to others. Or like Pilate, we delegate those decisions—to our banks and pension funds, our supermarket owners and retail chains, whose choices mean life or death to others.

The decision of the crowd leads to Jesus' death. The disciples are not there to stand up for him: they have fled, afraid for themselves.

The real choice is not to choose power or to avoid it; whether to pass it over to others, as Pilate did, or to flee, as the disciples did. It is to choose power or to confront it—as Jesus did: at one time turning over tables; at another, riding on a donkey.

It is thought that the letter of Paul to the Philippians may well have incorporated an early Christological hymn, a poem to the Christ. These words give us an idea of how we might follow Christ on the way of the cross:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ,  
Who though he was in the form of God,  
Did not count equality with God  
As something to be exploited,  
But emptied himself,  
Taking the form of a slave,  
Being born in human likeness....  
Obedient to the point of death –  
Even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:5-11)

Jesus' death was a consequence of power. Jesus challenged Rome, and the temple authorities that helped administer power for Rome. Rome simply had him destroyed, with a threat to any who would follow Jesus's way, the 'way of the cross'.

#### Questions

- Imagine reading the parts of the crowd at the trial of Jesus in the passion narrative. How would you feel being cast in the role?
- What can we learn from Jesus' choice to confront power with powerlessness; from his exposing of power and collusion in its brutality?
- How can we keep Holy Week in ways that help members of our churches and others who come to our services at this time to walk in

the way of Christ and to confront the 'principalities and powers' of our day?

### Concluding Prayer

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world- rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Wherefore take up the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.

Ephesians 6:10-13

In your own words, as a group or alone, you might like to pray for the following, which are suggested by Christian Aid:

- institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank to remove the economic conditions attached to loans and debt-cancellation
- reforms at the IMF, where the world's 50 poorest countries have less than 3% of the vote
- industries to develop in the developing world, creating jobs and opportunities

## Week 5 – Exile and Home

### 5.1 Living in Exile

#### **Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:1-14)**

These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. This was after King Jeconiah, and the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the artisans, and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem. The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah son of Shaphan and Gemariah son of Hilkiah, whom King Zedekiah of Judah sent to Babylon to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It said: Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord.

For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

We began this Lent course with Abraham in a strange country before the Exodus, but another formative theme for Judaism is the Babylonian exile.

The empire of Egypt and the waning empire of Assyria were defeated by the empire of Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar II at the Battle of Carchemish (605 BCE). Following this defeat, Jerusalem was besieged for three months, which resulted in the death of Jehoiakim, King of Judah. He was briefly succeeded by his son Jeconiah, but after the siege and defeat of Jerusalem, Jeconiah was deposed. With his court, including the political and religious leaders of Judah, Jeconiah was sent into exile (597 BCE), leaving those who remained

subject to Babylonian rule. Zedekiah was set up as a puppet king, to pay tribute to Babylon, but he and his court were also exiled in a second wave of deportations (587/586 BCE, a third wave followed in 582/581 BCE).

The political and religious experience was traumatic. The Psalmist laments ‘how can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land’ (Psalm 137), and the verses that end that psalm reflect the experience that the exiles had endured.

However, Jeremiah’s prophecy was not one of revenge: Jeremiah tells the exiles to make homes, marry, and seek the welfare of the city. Where there had previously been suspicion of marrying people of other nations (Joshua 23:8; Judges 3:6-7; Elijah in 1 Kings 18) in that it would lead to religious syncretism and the worshipping foreign gods would water down religious identity, Jeremiah advises not only to inter-marry, but to flourish in doing so. He also asks that they seek the welfare of the cities, the cities of Babylon, the empire that had conquered them.

Through this traumatic period, so much of what was believed in falls apart, and a new faith is born. Jewish theology comes to see God not as the God of a place, the temple in Judah, but the God of all the world. It led to a change of understanding, moving tribal religion into a universal context. Ezekiel and Daniel depict this as God’s throne having ‘flaming wheels’ to move over the earth (Ezekiel 10, Daniel 7). It is after this period in Judah’s history that much of the Hebrew Bible was edited into something like its present form.

### Questions

- Have you had a disorientating experience that has shaken all that you believed to be true, or have you learned of such an experience from someone else, from reading a book for example? If so, try to describe this to the group.
- ‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile’? How might your church, your deanery, or the diocese, work with people who are refugees or immigrants, to seek the welfare of the city and contribute to the Common Good?
- How do you think and feel religious diversity questions which challenge your own religious faith or religious identity?

## 5.2 Jesus’ Death

### The Death of Jesus (Mark 15:33-39)

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen,

he is calling for Elijah.” And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

When Jesus is dying on the cross, Mark’s Gospel ascribes the words from opening of Psalm 22:1 - 2 to him. The writer may be following a tradition he knows, or he may be ascribing to Jesus the most desperate cry he knows, for this is a cry of grief and loss. The psalm reads:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?  
O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, and am not silent.

(Psalm 22:1 - 2 NIV)

‘Why have you forsaken me?’ Asked Jesus.

‘Where is God?’ We ask, innumerable times.

‘Where are you?’

As we struggle with the heaviness of memories of a painful past, as we wrestle with self-doubt and wonder if we walk the path alone, as we face life-threatening illness or chronic pain, as we ponder our own mortality, our own betrayal of our highest values, we ask ‘Where is God? Where is our Saviour and Deliverer?’

In a book, *The Night* (published 1956), Jewish author and theologian Elie Wiesel, who had been a captive at Auschwitz, writes of the protagonist Eliezer, being forced to watch a young man being hanged. He is too light to hang quickly, and struggles in agony.

“Where is God now?”  
And I heard a voice within me answer him:  
“Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows. . . .”

It is an ambiguous line. Eliezer appears to think that, as far as he is concerned, God has been murdered on the gallows together with the child. But where faith in God seems to be absent, and a certain understanding of an intervening God has died, it is in this place that Christians understand Jesus to have been before, the ‘Emmanuel’—God with us. It is a soldier, one of those charged to kill Jesus, who recognises this. He ascribes to Jesus the imperial title of Caesar, saying, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

This is where we find God to be present, amidst the pain, the ‘All Powerful’ found in this powerlessness. This is a model for us, an example of what it means to follow Christ. We find God by going to the place where God would be, and loving with the same love that God loves.

Following Jesus' death, the disciples experienced a similar disorientation. They only began to understand his death with the passage of time, as on the 'Road to Emmaus', and after Pentecost. This understanding is of course later written back into the gospels and other Christian scriptures, which are written by disciples who live this risen life, equipped by the Holy Spirit.

#### Questions

- Can you recall times of pain or loss, in which God appeared to be absent, or powerless? How did you feel?
- Have you been with someone in such a time of grief or pain. How did it feel to be powerless, watching their suffering?
- Such an experience of loss and God's absence has been a way of discovering God in the longing, in a 'dark night of the soul'. Have you had such an experience?

### 5.3 Disorientation and Loss

*"It is not a human who made that decision."*

The following is an account of a Syrian Refugee, who was the son of a Palestinian refugee. He sought Asylum in the UK, which was only granted after living for many years of uncertainty about his own and his family's future. The account is taken from the London charity, Refugee Action.<sup>18</sup>



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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/refugee\\_voices/1487\\_hassan](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk/refugee_voices/1487_hassan)



## Hassan

A son to Palestinian refugees, Hassan grew up in a refugee camp in Syria. As an adult, he joined the Palestinian political party FIDA - a decision that put him in danger.

As time went on, Hassan's writing and activism saw him increasingly harassed by the Syrian authorities. By now he had sons of his own. He worried desperately for their safety. Leaving Syria seemed like their only choice. "I took my sons and ran away," he says.

Hassan brought his sons to the UK, where they quickly settled into school. But there was no news on the family's asylum claim. "I had an interview appointment in December 2007," Hassan remembers. "When I got there, they said: 'I'm sorry we don't have an interpreter. We will call you.'" That was the last Hassan heard about his case for seven years.

While waiting, the family lived on asylum support – just enough to cover their basic needs. "We could not make any plans," remembers Hassan. "If we had to buy a shirt or trousers, we had to make a plan for that". Almost all the family's support was spent on basic food.

Seven years later, Hassan and his sons suddenly received a letter rejecting their asylum claim. Without an interview, court appearance, or any communication from the Home Office, they were to be made homeless and left without any support almost immediately.

The news couldn't have come at a worse time. Hassan's son Bassem was undergoing cancer treatment; his brother Mahir was suffering from depression; and eviction day was the first day of the boys' A Level exams. "I had two sick children, and [the Home Office] stopped all our support," Hassan says. "It is not a human who made that decision."

Hassan went to Refugee Action. Advice worker Alma helped him appeal the decision to make his family homeless. She found storage for the family's possessions should they be evicted. And when it became clear Hassan had received poor legal advice, she found him a new, more reputable solicitor. Bassem and Mahir left their first A Level exam not knowing if they were homeless or not. Thankfully, it was good news - they'd been given a last minute reprieve and were allowed to stay in their home. With their belongings in storage, they ate their dinner that night off newspaper and slept on bare beds. But at least they were at home.

The family's problems weren't over. The Home Office decided to house them separately, each in a different city. With Bassem still gravely ill, the family chose to fight this. While they did, their support was stopped, leaving them reliant on food parcels and our Destitution Fund to survive.

Finally, the Home Office agreed the family could stay together. Then there was more good news – the boys had passed their exams! But as asylum seekers, they can't go to university. It's frustrating, says Mahir. "I'm one of the most successful in my school. I'm doing my best. It's not like I'm just here living on benefits."

The situation back in Syria still affects them. "When you see wars on TV, it doesn't really affect you," said Bassem. "Only when it's your family do you actually feel it. I never thought I'd understand how people suffer, until a lot of my family were killed".

Mahir agrees: "What happens in Syria does affect me. My family there faces a worse situation than I have. A village full of my relatives was completely wiped out. It was 6th June 2012 when all of them were killed. It just kind of breaks us." But as head of the family Hassan is determined to stay strong. "After eight years seeking asylum we still smile, we still read and we still breathe. We have a Palestinian poem that says, 'This life deserves to be lived'."

Those who have left home behind live through estrangement, disorientation, grief. They are unable to settle until their future is decided. For Hassan's children, they knew little of any other country.

#### Questions

- How do you imagine living with uncertainty, born as a refugee and seeking asylum as a refugee?
- What would the sentence of the Home Office seem like?
- What would the support of Refugee Action seem like, as it helped carry your burdens, as you needed support of food parcels and legal aid?
- What would the time of waiting for your appeal seem like?
- What would the good news of your salvation seem like, when those in authority changed their decision?

The shape of these questions has the shape of Jesus' story: his life, sentence, Joseph of Arimethea's carrying the cross, and of Jesus' death and resurrection.

- How does your Christian faith shed light onto Hassan's story?

## 5.4 Easter Saturday

### **'East Corker' from *Four Quartets***

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,  
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,  
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,  
The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers,  
Distinguished civil servants, chairmen of many committees,  
Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark,  
And dark the Sun and Moon, and the Almanach de Gotha  
And the Stock Exchange Gazette, the Directory of Directors,  
And cold the sense and lost the motive of action.  
And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,  
Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.  
I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,  
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed  
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on darkness,  
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama  
And the bold imposing facade are all being rolled away—  
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between stations  
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence  
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen  
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;  
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing—  
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

We can miss the Holy Saturday experience of devastation if we are so busy setting up for Easter. But it is a time to sit with the experience of death. 'O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark..' Death levels us all, the supposed 'great and good'. Ordinary and poor people too.

Holy Saturday is a time to ponder all that was. It is a time of waiting and confusion, the struggle of not having words, waiting with 'only the growing terror of nothing to think about.' It is 'the darkness of God.'

We remember those whose journey we have been thinking about: those displaced by war and civil conflict, environmental destruction or punitive conditions; those who are seeking refuge and waiting for news; all who are captive and oppressed. We remain with the pain,

where God's hope is born. We wait, praying that love may overcome the powers of violence.

While it is 'still dark' (John 20:1), Mary Magdalene makes preparation. She goes to the tomb. Her first experience is darkness. The tomb is empty—a theft perhaps. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb'. Yet this is a new start. It is the 'first day' of the week, and out of this emptiness, this apparent loss, comes a new creation.

### Questions

- What takes place in your church on Holy Saturday (before the celebrations of the Resurrection begin)?
- How do you react to these lines from T.S. Eliot's poem?
- Can waiting be purposeful, or is it just a waste of time?
- Are you comfortable with silence? Does it have something to teach us? If we are attentive, can we hear the 'still small voice'?

### Concluding Prayer

An Alternative Common Worship Collect for Easter Eve

In the depths of our isolation  
we cry to you, Lord God:  
give light in our darkness  
and bring us out of the prison of our despair;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pray for

- Those who feel trapped, hopeless, or alone
- Those who are asking to die to an old way of life and seeking to be reborn in Christ, as they are baptised and we prepare to share with them in the renewal of our baptism.
- Pray that this Easter may mark a renewal of hope and a new life in following Jesus' way.