



LENTEN STUDY 2026

Vision and Strategy for our diocese “Hopeful Culture Change - Fostering joy, imagination, trust, and Spirit-led confidence in God’s future.”

For Lent we have included weekly reflective questions on Joy.



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Prepared by Monika and Rev'd Cathie

Lent is a period of spiritual preparation for Easter among many Christians worldwide. It lasts for **forty-six days** (six weeks plus Sundays) and is typically observed with solemnity and self-reflection to ready Christians to commemorate Jesus's death and resurrection. Lent begins on Ash-Wednesday and ends with Passion Saturday.

The 4 pillars of Lent are: Prayer, Abstinence, Fasting and Almsgiving.

The 4 R's of Lent are: Reflection, Repentance, Reconciliation, Renewal

The season of Lent invites us to realise the areas of our lives where we are vulnerable to temptation, to repent of times we have succumbed. We are encouraged to turn around and lean on God. **Psalm. 32:8**

This study is prepared to help us to repent of our failings but also to help us to turn around from our foolish ways, to **Repent, Re-evaluate, Refocus and Renew** and in the end feel the joy of being forgiven and saved.

WEEK ONE - Sunday 22nd February – 1st Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ² The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the

garden; ³ but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Reflection: Temptation. God gave us guidelines for a good life. Giving in to temptation has consequences. Is it easy to realise in a situation that we are tempted? True joy is portrayed as stemming from gratitude for God's generous provision and obedience to His boundaries, while sin introduces a shift from innocent delight to guilt and self-centred desire.

Psalm. 32

¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

² Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’, and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

⁶ Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

7 You are a hiding-place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.

11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Reflection: Repentance is the keyword for the Psalmist. How does David describe the state of the person whose sin is forgiven? He acknowledges God's instructions and knows that he has failed God. How did that affect you physically and emotionally, akin to David's description in verses 3-4? What is the price for the unrepentant sinner?

Romans 5:12-21

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— 13 sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14 Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. 15 But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16 And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgement following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.

17 If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19 For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20 But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflection: The sin of one man brought separation from God. Repentance and Jesus' sacrifice restores us to God. The "joy" in this passage is not a fleeting emotion but a deep, secure confidence in salvation, even in the midst of trials. Where have you found Joy in Security

Matthew. 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' 4 But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."'

7 Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; 9 and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' 10 Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him."' 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Reflection: Jesus was not protected from Satan's temptation. Joy in Obedience, Joy in Trusting God's Provision, and Finding Joy in the Wilderness. How did he respond? What weapons did he use?

WEEK TWO - Sunday 01st March -2nd Sunday in Lent

Genesis 12:1-4a

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' 4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Reflection: A new chapter for God's people. God through Abraham starts a new community, a new nation. At the centre of this is obedience and trust in God. How does this obedience to God's call fit in your life?

Psalm. 121

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?
2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
4 He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

8 The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.

Reflection: The promise of God, as in **Gen. 12:1-4a**. God watches over his people. How difficult is it for you to trust in God's promises? Jesus has promised to be with us as his father did. Joy is restored when we stop trying to find help in our own strength and instead look to the Creator, who is stronger than the problems we face.

Romans 4:1-5,13-17

4 What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' 4 Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. 5 But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. God's Promise Realised through Faith

13 For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. 16 For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17 as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many

nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Reflection: Saved by faith not by law. We obey God's law to live a righteous life, have faith that God gave us the law out of love for us, for us to have a good life not to be saved by the law. Is it a struggle to accept that only faith will save us and not our obedience and our good works. Ps. 32:1-2

Do you see a connection between Christian living and making disciples?

John 3:1-17

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2** He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' **3** Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' **4** Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' **5** Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. **6** What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." **8** The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

9 Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' **10** Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? **11** 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things

and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Reflection: To be born again, to become a new person when we accept Jesus as our saviour. Joy in the Freedom of the Spirit: Jesus explains that being born of the Spirit is like the wind that "blows where it chooses" (v. 8). Considering that God loved a world that was opposed to Him, how can this unconditional love empower us to love others, particularly our enemies or those difficult to love, this Lent?

WEEK THREE - Sunday 08th March – 3rd Sunday in Lent

Exodus 17:1-7;

17 From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' ³ But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' ⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' ⁵ The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in

front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.’ Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’

Reflection: The Israelites didn’t see the goodness of God, they only thought of what they were missing and not what they received. Can you associate with this statement? Proclaiming the goodness of God brings joy in our life. Agree?

Psalm 95

1 O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise.

3 For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

6 O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.

7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

8 Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, ⁹ when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways.’

¹¹ Therefore in my anger I swore, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’

Reflection: The psalmist is rejoicing in the goodness of God. He warns us to not follow the example of the Israelites. In what ways

does "singing for joy" and "shouting to the rock of our salvation" (v.1) set a different tone for your Lenten journey compared to a mindset of gloom?

Romans 5:1-11

5 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.

8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. 9 Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. 11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Reflection: Paul looks at unselfishness and generosity. One would gladly sacrifice something for a person we approve of but not to someone we deem a bad person. Paul calls for humbleness and an open heart for the lost. What does it mean to have "peace with God" (v. 1) rather than just a feeling of peace? How does the realisation of being loved while a sinner change your perception of God's love during Lent?

John 4:5-42

⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

¹¹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷ The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' ¹⁹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.'

²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in

Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.’ ²⁵ The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming’ (who is called Christ). ‘When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.’ ²⁶ Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking to you.’ ²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, ‘What do you want?’ or, ‘Why are you speaking with her?’ ²⁸ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ ‘Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. He cannot be the Messiah, can he?’

³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him. ³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, ‘Rabbi, eat something.’ ³² But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat that you do not know about.’ ³³ So the disciples said to one another, ‘Surely no one has brought him something to eat?’ ³⁴ Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, “Four months more, then comes the harvest”? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.” ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.’ ³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done.’ ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer

because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

Reflection: The people believed because they have heard Jesus for themselves. We believe that the bible is the word of God. The people were so excited what they heard that they went and told their friends. Prayer is needed to be bold to proclaim Jesus. How does acknowledging our own spiritual "dryness" or "thirst" help us, approach Jesus during this season of Lent? The woman initially seeks water from a physical well, representing temporary solutions to life's thirst. Jesus offers "living water" (His love, truth, and grace), which completely satisfies the soul, bringing joy that never runs out. Do you agree?

WEEK FOUR - Sunday 15th March – 4th Sunday in Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13

16 The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.' 2 Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you, and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord."' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.' 4 Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, 'Do you come peaceably?' 5 He said, 'Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord.' 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have

rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’
8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The Lord has not chosen any of these.’ 11 Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.’ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’ 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’
13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Reflection: The prophet Samuel was fearful of Saul. He was sent by God to select the next King. His obedience to God was greater than his fear. Against his reasoning he waited for God’s call. Why might God prefer to work through the unexpected or disregarded? The Spirit came upon David immediately after his anointing (v. 13). How does this transformation reflect the Lenten journey of allowing God to reshape your inner life?

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.
4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

Reflection: This psalm reflects deep faith and we love to pray it. Does it reflect your faith? Please think about it. If the Lord is my Shepherd, why do I often feel I am in "want" or need? How can I practically allow Him to make me lie down and rest during the busy Lenten season?

Ephesians 5:8-14

8 For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— 9 for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

Reflection: I was brought up with the phrase: Lies have short legs. = eventual we are caught out. Paul advises us to be as good as we possibly can, because the light brings eventual out the darkness. The joy here is rooted in the salvation experience—being delivered from the "deadness" of sin and being made alive by Christ. For Lent, this passage challenges Christians to expose hidden sins through godly living, rather than participating in them. The voice of the Holy Spirit is a must listen to voice.

John 9:1-41

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,

that he was born blind?’³ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes,⁷ saying to him, ‘Go, wash in the pool of Siloam’ (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.⁸ The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, ‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’⁹ Some were saying, ‘It is he.’ Others were saying, ‘No, but it is someone like him.’ He kept saying, ‘I am the man.’¹⁰ But they kept asking him, ‘Then how were your eyes opened?’¹¹ He answered, ‘The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, “Go to Siloam and wash.” Then I went and washed and received my sight.’¹² They said to him, ‘Where is he?’ He said, ‘I do not know.’

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, ‘He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.’¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.’ But others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?’ And they were divided.¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, ‘What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’ He said, ‘He is a prophet.’¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight¹⁹ and asked them, ‘Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?’²⁰ His parents answered, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind;²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is

of age. He will speak for himself.’²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, ‘Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.’²⁵ He answered, ‘I do not know whether did he open your eyes?’²⁶ They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.

²⁷ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?’²⁸ Then he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’³⁰ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing. You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes.³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’³⁴ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’³⁶ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’³⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’³⁸ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him.³⁹ Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’⁴¹ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind,

you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains

Reflection: Jesus said if one has never heard of him, one has no sin. (because one doesn't know about sin?) So if one has heard of Jesus and his salvation and don't seek him or accept him, one's sins are not forgiven. Something to think about! The people have seen the deeds of Jesus and heard him teaching and they still didn't want to know him, because they wanted to stay as they were. The joy in this passage can be found in a deep, spiritual, and resilient joy in encountering Jesus and experiencing his transformative grace. If so is God "sending" you this Lenten season to bring his light?

WEEK FIVE - Sunday 22nd March – 5th Sunday in Lent

Ezekiel 37:1-14

37 The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ² He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³ He said to me, ‘Mortal, can these bones live?’ I answered, ‘O Lord God, you know.’ ⁴ Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.’

⁷ So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and

breathe upon these slain, that they may live.’¹⁰ I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹ Then he said to me, ‘Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.”¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel.¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people.¹⁴ I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.’

Reflection: Dead bones coming alive again. This is a promise of resurrection. If we want everlasting life we have to listen to the prophets and more importantly to Jesus. Do you believe in it and do you desire eternal life? How does this vision encourage you to turn away from "idols" (anything that takes God's place) and toward a deeper, renewed relationship with God during this Lenten season?

Psalm 130

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

² Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Reflection: This psalm is a yearning for life in the presence of God. A follow on from the Prophet Ezekiel. Is everyone yearning for everlasting life? Verse 4 - "But with you there is forgiveness". This realisation transforms the psalm from despair to hope, have you experienced this joy? Joy in Forgiveness, Joy in Waiting, Joy in Redemption - a profound, deep-seated joy that is not based on temporary happiness or comfortable circumstances.

Romans 8:6-11

⁶ To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Reflection: Lent is a time to reflect where we are and where we want to go. To evaluate our goals and maybe reset them. Lasting joy is not a fleeting emotion but a by-product of having one's mind set on the Spirit. How does the knowledge that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you provide hope for the future?

John 11:1-45

¹¹ Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' ⁵ Accordingly, though

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' ⁸ The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' ⁹ Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.'

¹¹ After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' ¹² The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' ²³ Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' ²⁴ Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' ²⁵ Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' ²⁷ She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him.' 37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' 40 Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

Reflection: Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' For some it takes multiple miracles to believe and some still don't want to see them.

True joy comes from seeing God's purpose fulfilled, even when it requires walking through a period of, "What if? Why didn't you?" "Jesus wept." what does this tell us about God's relationship with our pain and grief? You want to share?

Sunday 29th March – 6th Sunday in Lent/Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴ The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens— awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵ The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards. ⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷ The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸ he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹ It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Reflection: We are reaching the end of our study and like Isaiah we have come to strengthen and reaffirm our belief in Jesus, in his death and resurrection. Ready to stand up for what we believe. The passage presents a profound, unconventional kind of joy that exists in the midst of suffering. (v. 4). How does the assurance of God's presence help us face fear, shame, or opposition? How might this passage challenge our understanding of strength and victory during Holy Week?

Psalm 31:9-18

⁹ Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away for grief, my throat also and my inward parts.

10 For my life wears out in sorrow, and my years with sighing: my strength fails me in my affliction, and my bones are consumed.

11 I am become the scorn of all my enemies: and my neighbours wag their heads in derision.

12 I am a thing of horrors to my friends: and those that see me in the street shrink from me.

13 I am forgotten like one dead and out of mind: I have become like a broken vessel.

14 For I hear the whispering of many: and fear is on every side;

15 While they plot together against me: and scheme to take away my life. 16 But in you, Lord, have I put my trust: I have said 'You are my God.'

17 All my days are in your hand: O deliver me from the power of my enemies and from my persecutors.

18 Make your face to shine upon your servant: and save me for your mercy's sake.

Reflection: In times of persecution the psalmist clings to God for help. The Shift to Joyful Trust (14-16) This pivot is where the foundation for joy begins—not in the absence of trouble, but in the presence of God. Have you experienced this Joy? The psalmist appeals to God's "unfailing love" and "favour," not their own righteousness. He is the only one who can help him. Can you associate with this thought?

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in

heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Reflection: Jesus the perfect example for living a life pleasing to God his father. He has proven that it is possible. It is time to reflect on the messages of the last weeks, did we repent? Did we seek forgiveness? Are we willing to turn our lives around? Are we ready to live our faith and be a person that others see as a follower of Jesus Christ? True, lasting joy is found in adopting the humble mindset of Jesus, who sacrificially served others rather than seeking self-advancement. Maybe you want to choose one task of service this week that is uncomfortable or "beneath" you, as a way to mirror Christ's descent into humanity.

Matthew 27:11-54

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. ¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' ¹⁸ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.'

20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21 The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' 22 Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' 23 Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' 25 Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' 26 So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. 27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son.'" 44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' 47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' 48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Reflection: This gospel is well known to Christians. Apart from being the gospel of the passion of our Lord we see a lot of human behaviour that Christians all over the world have to face: mocking, unbelief, denial, hatred to the point of killing, preferring a criminal before Jesus. But we also see the love Jesus has for us

and the humility that is needed to reach out. At the moment of death, the Roman centurion, a witness to the carnage, declares, "Truly, this was the Son of God!". This sudden, unexpected confession of faith amidst darkness represents a moment of divine joy and triumph. (Joy in Revelation)
How do these events signify that the way to God is now open to all?