

New Start 2009

Journey to Easter

Praying as Jesus showed us

February 23rd, 2009

1. The Lord's prayer
 - Matthew 6.9-13; also in shorter form in Luke 11.2-4
 - Even in Greek translation this is very close to Jesus original words
 - This is fully consistent with Jewish practice, yet is not exclusive or nationalistic
 - This prayer holds together God's grace and action, with our hope and action
 - We do not know what all the words mean; nevertheless Jesus gave it to us intentionally open to many levels of meaning
2. Prayer of silence
 - Mark 6.31 and 6.46: finding ourselves in the presence of God....
 - not having to place ourselves there; nor having to still all our inner turmoil
3. Putting prayer into words
 - Philippians 4.6: first say it straight as an expression of trust;
 - in the listening you can begin to think and ask to see it afresh
4. Gethsemane
 - Matthew 26.36: even here Jesus was not alone
5. Transfiguration
 - Matthew 17.1: on a few occasions, we may be given an experience of Light

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil. Amen.*

A distinctive Christian quality: Being centred
neither over-extending oneself, nor self absorbed

For discussion:

- What have you found to be the heart of the Lord's Prayer?
- What part has the Lord's Prayer played in your life?

Next week: Forming a Christ-like character **March 2nd**
Read Matthew 5.1-16 (or if you are feeling strong, Matthew 5-7)

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Forming a Christ-like character

March 2nd, 2009

1. The Sermon on the Mount

5.1-2	Crowds, teaching, mountain	7.28-8.1
5.3-16	Introduction/conclusion	7.13-27
	Kingdom of heaven: 5.3,10 7.21	
	3 rd person 5.3-10, 7.21-27	
	2 nd person 5.11-16, 7.13-20	
	Law and the prophets 5.17, 7.12	
5.21.48	2 main sections	6.19-7.11
	Antitheses Possessions, judgement	
6.1-6	Righteousness before God	6.16-18
	6.7-15 Lord's prayer	

2. The Beatitudes: a primer in Christian character

1) Poor in Spirit	Mt 6.19, not storing up; Isaiah 66.2
2) Those who mourn	Isaiah 61.2 is the reverse/inverse of mourning
3) Meek	Psalms 37 and Mat 6.28 "do not panic"
4) Hunger and thirst for righteousness	Luke 6.21, restoring our passions
5) Merciful	Mt 7.1, staying connected
6) Pure in heart	Psalms 24, God's companions
7) Peacemakers	John 1.12 putting on the role of God's children
8) Persecuted for righteousness	

3. "The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton"

Christian morality is more focussed on forming character, discipleship and training, than on making difficult decisions in ambiguous situations.

*God, give me grace to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things which should be changed
and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

A distinctive Christian quality: Patient
neither forcing the pace, nor fatalistic

For discussion:

- Which beatitude do you find particularly nourishing/stimulating?
- What experience can you describe of Christian character growing over some years?

Next week: Entering into the story of the Kingdom

March 9th

Skim read through Luke Chapters 12 – 19, looking only at the parables.
What common themes and images emerge from the variety of stories?

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Entering into the story of the Kingdom

March 9th, 2009

1. Josephus, a Roman governor and historian, uses the phrase “Repent and believe”
 - Repent: to turn around, and enter into another story
 - Believe: to trust a person and the narrative that they present

2. The parables cannot be summarized into themes; yet 3 groups of stories in common:
 - a) “And who is my neighbour?”
 - The Good Samaritan (Luke 10.25-37)
 - Surprise at the goodness of outsiders
 - Challenge the imagined goodness of insiders
 - Becoming a neighbour: who is the active/passive partner?
 - The Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32)
 - Reincorporating the lost: whether at a distance or home

 - b) Stories of abundance
 - The Sower (Mark 4.1-9)
 - The wise and foolish bridesmaids (Matthew 25.1-13)
 - The heavenly banquet (Matthew 22.1-14)

 - c) While the King is absent....
 - The Pounds (Luke 19.11-27) faithfulness means more than results

3. A community of learning
 - You are already being shaped by the stories of Jesus. Part of the role is to god-parent others by your example, attitudes and words
 - Consider some examples of how we declare the nature of the story we are in:
 - The words used at the Lenten ashing:
‘Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return’
 - Jesus’ story “there were 2 men in the back of a taxi...”
 - After a WOW moment, what do you say?

A distinctive Christian quality: Being a god-parent

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us, so we and all you children shall be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord.

For discussion:

- Which parable has most shaped and guided you?
- Share an experience of ‘god-parenting’ someone (or bring god-parented by someone).

Next week: More than just a friend

March 16th, 2009

Read John 1.1-18, Mark 9.2-8 or Matthew 28.1-20 – all passages where Jesus is seen to be unusual, and more than merely human.

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More than just a friend

March 16th, 2009

1. How much is Jesus “just like us” and how much is his life fundamentally different?
 - Modern theology has stressed the companionship of Jesus, being “one of us”.
 - This can have implications for how we see God: irrelevant, totally distant.
 - Perhaps if Jesus is recognised as unfamiliar rather than merely human, then God too becomes both close and separate.
 - Matthew 16.13-20: the confession by Simon Peter at Caesarea Philippi is cast in familiar Jewish terms, whilst also trying to reach out to those who do not share that experience.
 - “Be thou my vision” and Hopkins’ poem Windhover both tread the same fine line.
2. The Transfiguration: Matthew 17.1-9
 - Asking the question “what actually happened?” may lead us to domesticate this particular experience?
 - Strangeness is something that was recognised in Jesus – a strangeness that was attractive and beckoning.
 - By allowing for this strangeness, we can find experiences that may be similar in our own day. But care needs to be taken to discern whether they are similar: not all religious experiences are the same; and they are not content-free.
 - Historically, the Transfiguration was not always seen as a high point in Peter’s life, nor something to be desired or emulated.

A distinctive Christian quality: Being respectful
Between being gullible and being cynical.

*Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
And such a Life, as killeth death.*

*Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.*

*Come, my joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.*

For discussion:

- In midst of change, anxiety and complexity, how do you want to address Jesus Christ?

Next week: Acting prophetically

March 23rd, 2009

Read Jeremiah 19, and 27.2 for examples of prophetic actions

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Acting prophetically

March 23rd, 2009

1. I need £100
2. Moments when a deeper truth is acted out visibly
 - Jeremiah 19: a visual aid
 - Jeremiah 27: making oneself the visual aid
 - Mark 12.41-44 (the Widow's mite) when the offering of a gift is a symbol of a complete offering; money frequently works in this way, revealing broad attitudes to so much more.
3. Moments when a new truth is freshly declared
 - Luke 4.16-21: turning promise into fulfilment
 - The healing stories indicate the beginning of a new age
 - Cleansing the Temple (Mark 11.15-19) was about more than merely a corrupt place of worship
4. Moments when our history and identity are evoked
 - The Last Supper redefines the past, and so makes us a new people, and offers us a new present and a different future.
 - The curtain of the temple being torn in 2 (Matthew 27.51) and Jesus' baptism are also such moments of redefinition.
 - Jesus as the prophet of God's Kingdom: embodying it, initiating it, defining it.
5. An ordinary and sensitive response to "do miracles happen?"
 - Be careful with the questions "what actually happened?" and "do miracles happen today?"
6. Today
 - Finding similar dense moments of meaning: when do they happen for us?
 - As followers of Jesus, our roles in shaping events can be as seer, pioneer or leader.

A distinctive Christian quality: Taking initiative: shaping the story,
neither colluding with limiting assumptions,
nor being reckless, haphazard or random

Blessed are you, Sovereign God of all, to you be glory and praise for ever. In your tender compassion, the dawn from on high is breaking upon us to dispel the lingering shadows of night. As we look for your coming among us this day, open our eyes to behold your presence and strengthen our hands to do your will, that the world may rejoice and give you praise, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Blessed be God for ever.

For discussion:

- Share an experience of a prophetic act, or a "dense moment", in the context of your personal, our parish or national life.
- What do the miracle stories now evoke for you: embarrassment, puzzlement, confidence, challenge, or hope?

Next week: Forgiving and being forgiven

March 30th, 2009

Refresh your memory of any of the key passages about forgiveness: for example, Psalm 51, Luke 19.1-10 and John 7.53-8.11

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Forgiving and being forgiven

March 30th, 2009

1. Forgiveness is a key theme in Jesus' prayer, teaching, parables, and prophetic acts, and at the end of his life. But describing what happens – what is demanded of us – when we forgive and are forgiven is not easy.
2. The image of the Persian Carpet: God being able to integrate into his overall plan whatever we do, however misguided it is. The books of Jonah and Job witness to this.
3. Forgiveness as a declaration that “nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 8.38). “No end there is!” from the hymn ‘An upper room did our Lord prepare’; or John Donne’s ‘Death be not proud’.
4. The problem of Original Sin: is this only a problem in the minds of theologians? Are we really sinners before we are born (Psalm 51.5)? Or what is that language trying to convey?
5. What is being forgiven? The act, the person or the situation? All the world, as well as all of us, need redeeming – but this is slightly different to being forgiven (Romans 8.18-23).
6. The courage that is needed to accept and adopt forgiveness: Simon Peter as an example (John 13.8-9). Forgiving oneself as allowing oneself to enter into a new role (Luke 15.11-32)
7. Does forgiveness lead to a lowering of standards of behaviour? Is it always a win/lose situation – either you can maintain high moral standards, or you can forgive? What allows this to become a win/win (as expressed in John 8.1-11)?
8. The general confession from Daily Prayer in the Book of common Prayer – take care with the language: ‘there is no health in us’, miserable sinners’....

A distinctive Christian quality: Being generous-hearted
rather than being closed to the future.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws, we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us: But thou, O lord, have mercy upon us miserable offenders; spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults, restore thou them that are penitent, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord: and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy name. Amen.

For discussion:

- Can you share within your group experiences of different aspects of forgiveness – what it feels like giving and receiving forgiveness; the timescale required for forgiveness; what is demanded of those being forgiven.
- What stories strengthen and resource you to be a person that is caught up in a pattern of forgiving?

Last week The Seder Meal

April 6th, 2009

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The Seder Meal

April 6th, 2009

A distinctive Christian quality: Being hospitable

And finally: