

PREPARATION FOR LENT – THREE SPIRITUAL ESSENTIALS FOR REAL LIFE.

Welcome to our Quiet Day at home. This has been set up as three videos, with the idea that each part of the Quiet Day will be for 1 hour 30 minutes. It has been designed so that you can spend the whole day (10.00 to 11.30, 11.30 to 1.00 and 2.00 to 3.30 or similar timings), or you can take 3 days, with one session each day. The choice is yours and you can do whatever suits you and your circumstances.

The material has been taken from a book by Paula Gooder entitled *LENTWISE Spiritual Essentials for real life*.

Each session has a Bible reading followed by a reflection. You will then have time to spend in Quiet. It is up to you what you do. You might have a book you want to read, or you might want to write or draw something to reflect something you have heard and has given you something to think about. I have added some possible activities for reflection, but it is entirely up to you if you wish to use them, or some of them.

As this is all being done by video, if you want to talk to me at any time, please feel that you can contact me by text or phone on 07721 437316.

We will start today with a short time of worship:

God of journey, we thank you for bringing us here today, for gathering us together, albeit in our own homes, at this point in our own individual lives, so that we may spend time with you in solitude.

Gracious God, we come from the busyness of our daily lives into your peace. Help us to leave our responsibilities and preoccupations behind for a few hours. May we come to know you more clearly this day.

FIRST CANDLE IS LIT

We thank you God of Love, that you are more ready to receive us, that you welcome us whether we come from a distance or from close by., whether we come to you doubtful or hurt or angry or guilty. You know what we have all been going through in this last year.

Loving God, some of us are carrying baggage that holds us back in our search for you. Help us to leave our fears and worries behind today as we spend time listening to your voice.

SECOND CANDLE IS LIT

Loving God be present with us we pray. Send your Spirit to open our minds to hear your word, our hearts to meet you afresh and our lives to follow your will. We ask all this through your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

THIRD CANDLE IS LIT.

SESSION 1 – JESUS AS OUR COMPASS

John 14:1-7

- 1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.
- 2 In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?
- 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.
- 4 And you know the way to the place where I am going."
- 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"
- 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- 7 If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

REFLECTION

This is a passage of scripture that many of us know well. I find it is a passage that I read a lot at funerals – principally because it is a message of hope and promise. Shortly after this moment the disciples are going to find that here world has been turned upside down. They are going to go through a terrible time and Jesus is trying to prepare them. He is trying to reassure them that there is a direction for them to follow. He is quite clear, that he is going to prepare a place for them and that at the right time he is going to return to take them to the place so that they can be all together. And he says to them 'Believe in God, believe also in me'. If we truly believe this, then it is at least possible to accept that even what we cannot understand, and even in the storms of life we can hold onto our faith and know that Jesus is there beside us.

I have a rather soft spot for Thomas. At this moment when the disciples were confused and not really understanding what was going on, we have Thomas, who would never say that he understood when he didn't. Thomas was the man who was far too honest and far too much in earnest to be satisfied with any vague and pious expressions. He had to be sure. So he expressed his doubts and his failure to understand and the wonderful thing is that it is the question of a doubting man which provoked one of the greatest things that Jesus ever said. We do not need to be ashamed of our doubts for it is very true that those who seek will find.

So Jesus says to Thomas "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". He is our direction and our compass in life.

Have you ever wished you could have a map of your life? Wouldn't it be useful to know that next week your life might get a little bit bumpy so you need to watch out? Or are there hairpin bends ahead and, if you do not negotiate them carefully, you might go over the edge. Or, again, in a few months time, your life will be downhill all the way and you can ease off a bit and enjoy the view? During this strange time of lockdown and Covid 19 I am sure we would all like to know what really lies ahead. Sadly there are no such 'life maps': we have little or no idea of what is just around the corner until it rears up in front of us.

So we return to Thomas who bursts out with 'We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way'. And Jesus' answer 'Actually you do know where you are going and you also know the way'.

When I was first teaching, I helped run a Youth Hostel group at the school as well as running a Guide Unit. Most holidays I would be away with the young people camping, hostelling and doing a lot of walking. I remember well, being in the Lake District and setting off in wonderful sunshine up one of the steepest areas with our youngsters doing the map reading. When we got to the top and had our lunch, suddenly we were in low cloud and couldn't see any of the landscape and the important features on our maps. Fortunately we not only had a compass, but we adults could use it and were able to walk back down.

When we are trying to follow the Way, we are often looking in the wrong places. We want to know what job we are going to do, where we are going to live, what is going to happen next, will our family all have good jobs and be happy – the list is endless, but Jesus shows us something else. We do have a destination in life – God the Father who loves us and longs for us to be close to Him. And Jesus is our compass, he shows us true north and leads us through the clouds that are obscuring our vision. He invites us to go along with him.

The Father is our ultimate destination, but what about our day-to-day, mini destinations. We all face a barrage of vital questions and everyday small decisions as we make our way through life.

- Should I go and visit this person or stay at home and watch *Eastenders*?
- Should I accept that job/role or not?
- Can I justify buying those shoes/ that gadget?
- How am I going to deal with Home Schooling for another month?
- Will the young in my family find the right life partners?
- Should I move house?
- How should I react to that person who has hurt me?

And so on.....

The answers to these questions shape the contours of our lives. How does coming to the Father help us to answer them? The answer must be that our ultimate destination shapes the direction our life takes and all the decisions we make along the way. Our priorities, our hopes and dreams, even our most mundane decisions will be shaped by our closeness to God, who loves us and the whole world so much.

I do wonder whether Thomas was satisfied with Jesus' answer to him. Thomas was asking a question about a concrete direction. Where are you going? Where are we going? How will we be able to get there if we don't know where we are going? Jesus' answer was about a spiritual destination (No one comes to the Father except through me). He declared the Father to be our destination and Jesus the way by which we get there. Jesus is our compass.

God's love for the world encompasses every hair on our heads, but also the events that affect the whole world. God's care stretches from the smallest issues to the largest events. We need to ensure that our prayers turn away from ourselves and turn towards the world, national and local events.

If God is our destination, our lives are being drawn constantly in his direction. If something else is our destination (money, status, promotion etc.) then our lives are drawn in that direction. The first

spiritual essential for real life is having a sense of direction based on relationship with God the Father and allowing Jesus the Son to be our compass.

ACTIVITIES FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

How do you relate to Thomas and his outburst?

Do you think Thomas was satisfied with Jesus' answer? Does it help you?

What do you think it means for Jesus to be 'the way'?

How much does it matter if we get a few small decisions wrong?

Reflect on a life question or issue that is important to you at the moment?

Some quotes to ponder:

Alice came to a fork in the road. 'Which road do I take?' she asked.

'Where do you want to go?' responded the Cheshire Cat

'I don't know' Alice answered

'Then' said the cat 'it doesn't matter'

Lewis Carroll. Alice in Wonderland

Was the cat right?

And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ear shall hear a word behind you saying 'This is the way, walk in it'

Isaiah 30: 21

I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.

Jimmy Dean

I seldom end up where I wanted to go, but always end up where I need to be.

Douglas Adams

Welcome to our second session.

SESSION 2 JESUS AS OUR SHELTER / SECURITY

JOHN 10: 7-18

- 7** So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.
8 All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.
9 I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.
10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.
13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.
14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,
15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.
16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.
18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

REFLECTION

The Jews did not understand the meaning of the story of the Good Shepherd, so Jesus took it and applied it to himself. He began by saying 'I am the gate' In this parable he spoke of two kinds of sheepfold. In the villages and towns there were communal sheep-folds, where all the village flocks were sheltered when they returned home at night. These folds were protected by a strong gate of which only the guardian of the gate had the key. But when the sheep were out on the hills in the warm season, when they did not return at night to the village at all, they were collected into sheep-folds out on the hillside. These were just open spaces enclosed by a wall with an opening through which the sheep came in and out but there was no gate. What happened was that at night the shepherd lay down across the opening and no sheep could get in or out except over his body. In the most literal sense the shepherd was the gate and there was no access except through him.

That is what Jesus was thinking when he said 'I am the gate'. Through Him and through Him alone we find access to God. Jesus opens the way to God. Until he came, people could only think of God, at best, a stranger and, at worst, an enemy. But Jesus came to tell us and show us what God was like and to open the way to God. He is the gate through whom entrance to God becomes possible.

There is a contrast between Jesus and those who came before. Jesus said that those who came before Him were thieves and robbers. He was not, of course talking about the great succession of prophets and the heroes. He was referring to those adventurers who were continually appearing in Palestine and promising that if people would follow them they would bring in the golden age. All these claimants were revolutionaries and insurrectionists. We only have to look at what is happening in our world to understand that these sort of people only believe that the golden age must be brought in with violence, class warfare, bitterness and destruction.

It is Jesus' claim that He came that we might have life and they we might have it more abundantly. When we walk with Jesus and know his presence in our lives there comes a new vitality, a superabundance of life.

Jesus then draws a comparison between the good and bad, the faithful and unfaithful shepherd. In Palestine the shepherd was totally responsible for the sheep. If anything happened to the sheep, he had to produce some kind of proof that it was not his fault. The good shepherd was born to his task and grew into the calling of being a shepherd. To the shepherd it was the most natural thing to risk his life for the sheep. On the other hand, there was the false and unfaithful shepherd. He was in it simply and solely for the pay he would get out of it. When the wolves arrived he would run away and save his own life rather than his flock. Jesus' point is that the man who works only for reward thinks more of money than anything else; the man who works for love thinks more of the people he is trying to serve more than anything else. Jesus is the good shepherd who so loved his flock that for their safety He would risk, and one day, give his life.

One of my favourite feelings is being inside on a rainy blustery day and knowing that inside my shelter I am safe, dry and warm. This kind of shelter is essential for any kind of journey. We need to know, at the end of the day, when we collapse weary from the day's activity, we have somewhere safe in which to rest. The sense of safety is vital for our wellbeing. If we know that we have a haven into which we can retreat while the rains beat down and the winds howl around us and the thunder crashes, we can not only survive but face the storms with more courage and determination.

Our Bible passage on one level is very like the passage we looked at in the first session. Jesus is the mean by which we can gain entrance. But it is not the only meaning here. When we add it to the Good Shepherd saying it, it becomes clear that Jesus, as the gate, provides safety for those inside. If you have ever watched a film that involves the siege of a great castle then you will know that the most crucial part of the safety of the castle is its doorway. A strong secure door will keep all those inside safe from their attackers outside. Jesus, the door, welcomes us in but also keeps us safe once we are in.

This is no imprisonment. The unfortunate connotations of doors is that they can serve to keep us in against our will, as well as others out and in fact one of the challenges for those seeking to keep others safe is where to draw the line between safety and infringement of liberty (a brief glance at the political complexities involved in counter-terrorism, identity cards and the like can tell you that). Jesus, however, is our place and means of perfect freedom, He is the door to guide us from danger but also encourage us to come in and out and to find nourishment.

Jesus models for us – and indeed offers us – safety balanced with freedom, security with independence, sanctuary with true liberty. We all need in our lives to find this balance that gives us a sense of home without locking us in, a place to rest without undermining our confidence to face the world 'out there'. The shelter that Jesus brings gives us refuge from life's storms but does not expect that we will stay in that haven for ever.

Safety functions on all sorts of levels. In many ways a sheepfold is a good image for the kind of safety that Jesus brings. It provides a sense of home, protection from the dangers around and a place in which to find rest. There are many other biblical images of safety that also speak powerfully of the kind of safety we find in God.

In the Old Testament there is an ancient tradition about cities of refuge. If people kill someone there are laws of limited revenge (an eye for an eye etc..) that allowed their punishment. So if they had killed someone, they too would die. If, however, the killing was accidental, then perpetrators could

flee to one of six cities of refuge, where they would be safe from revenge, so long as they stayed there. This idea influenced mediaeval ideas about refuge which allowed people to claim refuge in churches.

Our modern society places a high premium on being risk free in order to avoid legal action. Jesus, however, was prepared to risk his life in order to save ours. Does this mean that he lacked security or did he find his security elsewhere?

The contrast that Jesus makes between the employer and the owner is as relevant today as it was in the first century. It is only when something belongs to you that you are prepared to risk your life to save it. Even the most dedicated employee will find it hard to risk everything for something that belongs to someone else. Jesus' care for us means that he is prepared to go to extreme lengths to ensure that we can find sanctuary – the challenge to each one of us is whether we are prepared to accept the sanctuary he offers or whether we prefer safety of a different kind.

ACTIVITIES FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What did it mean for Jesus to 'put his soul on the line' for his sheep?

What kind of thing do you associate with the word security? Money? Relationships? Career?

If you looked to Jesus to provide you with security would this change how you relate to you money, career etc?

What would it mean to look to Jesus for safety? Is it just a nice idea or would it make a practical difference to our lives?

Spend some time looking at the range of images of shelter or safety that can be found in the Bible. Which are your favourite ones and why?

- **Psalm 17: 8** Keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings.
- **Psalm 18: 30-31** ... he is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock besides our God?
- **Psalm 18: 2** The Lord is my rock , my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation
- **Psalm 27: 5** For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble: he will conceal me under the cover of his tent: he will set me high on a rock.
- **Matthew 23: 37** How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.
- **Revelation 21: 3-4** See, the home of the God is among mortals. He will dwell with them: they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Safety is something that happens between your ears, not something you hold in your hands

Jeff Cooper

How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Psalm 36: 7

For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

Isaiah 25: 4

Cowardice asks the question 'Is it safe?'

Expediency asks the question 'Is it politic?'

But conscience asks the question 'Is it right?'

And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular because conscience tells one it is right

Martin Luther King Jr

Sanctuary, on a personal level is where we perform the job of taking care of our soul

Christopher Forrest McDowell

If you are doing this as a whole day, you may wish to do midday prayers during this section.

Having considered Jesus as our Compass and as our Shelter, we now consider Jesus our Refreshment.

SESSION 3 – JESUS OUR REFRESHMENT

John 4: 5-18

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!"

REFLECTION

To put this passage into context, Jesus and the disciples were travelling from Judea to Galilee. It was a journey that could either take them through Samaria, or they could take a longer walk to avoid Samaria. Traditionally, there was a lot of animosity between Jews and Samaritans so we could have expected them to take the longer route. However, as we know, Jesus spent a lot of his time being with people who were on the margins, and who were considered to be unacceptable. So not only had he walked through the area, but his disciples had gone to find a food shop while he rested by Jacob's well, very hot and thirsty.

So as Jesus is sitting there a Samaritan woman appears. There is something of a mystery here, as there was water in the village half a mile away, so it would be strange not only for her to appear, but also for a Rabbi to engage with a woman, particularly a Samaritan woman. We are made aware of this by the woman's response to Jesus when he asks her to give him a drink of water.

Jesus' conversation with the woman follows a very similar pattern that we only see in John's gospel. In the same way that Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was meaning when Jesus talked about being born again, so this woman first of takes Jesus literally when he says he can give her 'living water' which she initially understood to be running water. Even when he makes a further explanation she still doesn't understand and asks for the 'living water' so that she doesn't have to come and draw water from the well. Eventually, after the third statement by Jesus she understands what he is saying. Further on in this chapter she recognises Jesus as the Messiah and she becomes a messenger of the Good News to all in her village and further afield.

Throughout the Old Testament there are references to the 'living water'. The Psalmist speaks of his soul being thirsty for the living God; In Isaiah we have the promise made to the Chosen People that they would draw the water with joy from the well of salvation; there is the summons that everyone who is thirsty should come to the waters and drink freely (Isaiah 55). Jeremiah complained that the people had forsaken God, who was the fountain of living waters. There are many other references and at the heart of them is the fundamental truth that in the human heart there is a thirst for something that only Jesus Christ can satisfy.

If we think about ourselves, I wonder if you have been on a long walk on a hot summer's day and heard the babbling of a stream in the distance. I am fortunate that I live just below the ridgeway and wherever I walk I can come across several streams. There is something about the sound of bubbling water that suggests coolness, relaxation, but most of all, refreshment. It is hard to resist dangling our feet in the water and feeling the heat of the walk melt away. In some ways, food and water are very similar; both are essential for life and for keeping us going on our journey. The difference between water and food, however, is that water can be bathed in as well as drunk so it gives use refreshment and the energy (both physical and spiritual) to return once more to our journey.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman shows not only his own weariness and thirst, but also that of the woman. The image I have of her is of someone so numb and bruised by life that she has no energy left to conceal anything from this stranger she meets at the well. Jesus' exhaustion is temporary and physical, whereas this woman's exhaustion is life long and both emotional and spiritual. It is into this context that Jesus speaks a promise of deep eternal lasting refreshment. Jesus offers a spring of living water (that is constantly moving rather than stagnant), but this spring is internal, rather than external, and brings eternal rather than simply physical life. Most important of all, it provides eternal refreshment that we can carry with us so we do not have to toil carrying a heavy water jar all the time. As with the other two spiritual essentials we have explored, the challenge each one of us faces is to ask ourselves whether we have accepted and packed this essential for our journey, or whether, because of distraction, busy-ness or a range of other reasons, we have left this essential behind us somewhere along the way.

POINTS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

What do you think Jesus means by both living water and by water that bubbles up into eternal life?

Remember a time when you have felt deeply and truly refreshed. Is there a connection between physical and spiritual refreshment?

Do you notice any difference in the quality of your decisions and/or relationships before and after times of refreshment.

If you were to play or be at leisure more in your spiritual life, what kind of things might you do?

When you think about your spiritual life, is it 'hard work' or is there leisure associated with it?

When you engage in leisure pastimes (e.g. sport, crafting, gardening, baking, knitting, sewing) do you think of these enhancing you spiritually?

To sit in the shade on a fine day and look upon the verdure is the most perfect refreshment
Jane Austen Mansfield Park

When you put your hand in a flowing stream, you touch the last that has gone before and the first of what is to come.
Anon

Do not be wise in your own eyes: fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body *Proverbs 3: 7-8*

After your time of reflection you might wish to say the following prayer:

As I go on my way I take with me:

A compass for direction – you are the way, the truth and the life

Shelter to keep me from harm – you are the gate and the good shepherd

Water to refresh – You give us living water

AMEN