

Leeds North & East
Methodist Circuit



Lent
2021

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Introduction

This year we will be approaching Lent knowing that it will certainly begin during the lockdown, with restrictions limiting life in all sorts of ways. The period of Lent is a time to consider our own faith journey in the light of the Easter story. Lent is often a time when we think of ‘giving something up’, or ‘denying ourselves of something’. However, we may be thinking, ‘Haven’t these past 11 months been full of that- I’m not sure if I can give anything thing else up!’

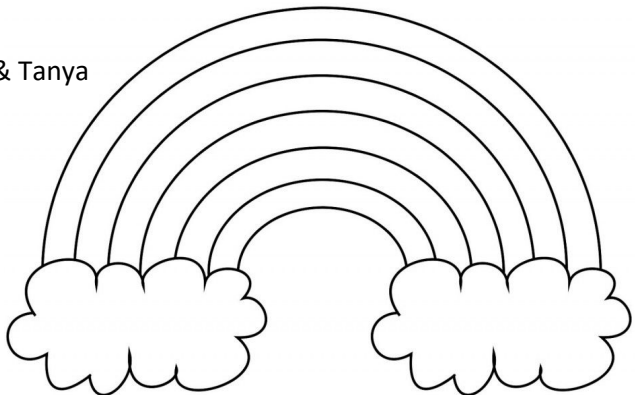
Our Lent booklet this year is a reminder of God’s good promises to us. The rainbow brings hope to our weary world, inviting us to wonder through the stunning hues of God’s assurance. Each week, you are invited to ponder a sacred promise from God. In our constantly changing and uncertain world, peace can only be found in God’s faithfulness that never changes.

“I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of My covenant with you and with all the earth.” (Genesis 9:13)

May God’s promises to us sustain us along the way of Lent, remembering that no matter what happens on our earthly journeys, we belong to the God of the Covenant – this is our destiny.

God bless,

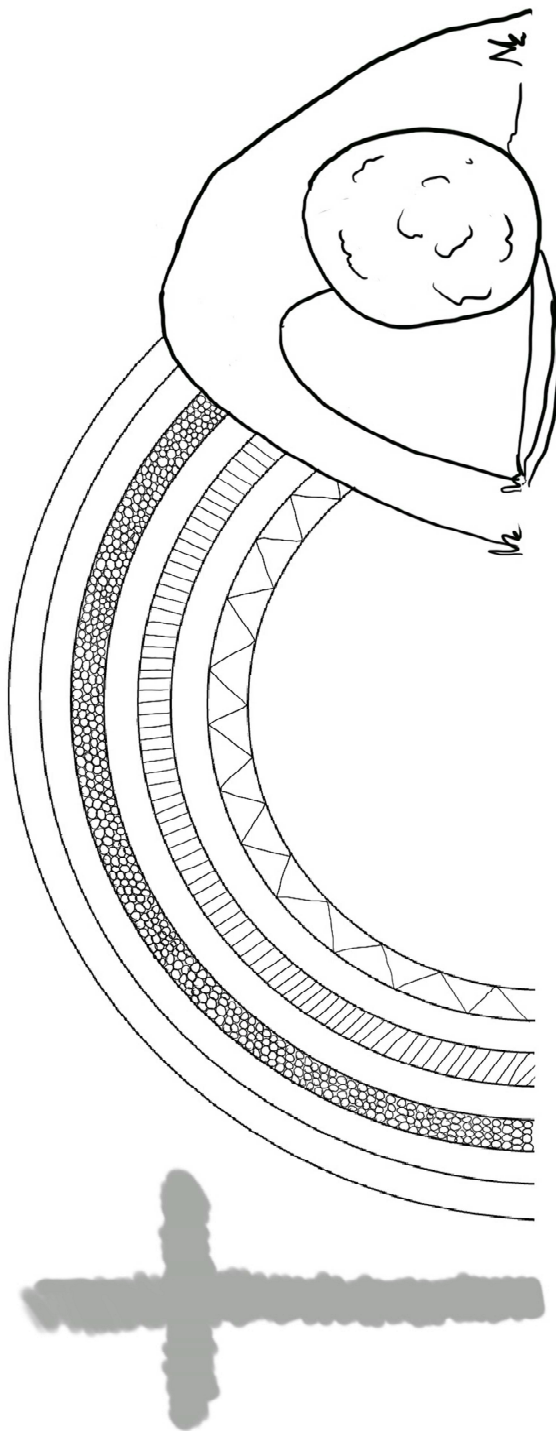
Robert, George & Tanya



Colour-in rainbow

As part of our Lent booklet we have included a colour in rainbow. Feel free to colour it colour it in at your own leisure or colour in a different colour each week. On Ash Wednesday an extra challenge would be to colour in or create an ash cross next to the rainbow.

If you would like to you can carefully remove the page from the book and put the picture up in a window to share with your neighbours.



Let's party

As we start this Lent journey together, the first call is to... Party! Let the Carnival begin!

Lent can sometimes be characterised as a sombre sort of Christian season all about sackcloth and ashes, fasting and ramping up the discipline components of our discipleship. To be honest, we have already been doing a fair bit of going without things we love in the last year. Perhaps what we need is not more challenges, but an honest assessment of what we have lost, what we have gained; what we already enjoy and what we need.

Shrove Tuesday is the day before Lent starts, when Christians find ways to work out what they might turn away from. Maybe you will follow the pancake tradition and get your frying pan out today... though I have never heard of anyone I know giving up eggs, milk and flour in Lent. In other countries in Europe the norm centuries ago was to give up eating meat, and Shrove Tuesday was the day to finish up the meat and leave it behind – literally, in Latin, *carne levarum* – to remove the meat. Eating up the meat was the occasion for a feast on a grander scale than pancakes can provide – hence the beginning of what evolved from the Latin to be known as carnival.

What do we already have and what do we need? Here's a thought for Shrove Tuesday which turns some of the usual thinking upside down: acknowledging what God has mercifully given to us does not leave us wanting less, but instead aware of our failure to receive more...

Today is a day to celebrate and give thanks for what we have – and, inspired by this goodness, to think about what more God wants to give us. As we journey with God's promises this Lent, take time to ask God for more mercy, more love, more wisdom, more peace, and make space in your life to receive God's gifts.

Rev'd Dr George Bailey

Shroving

Shrov'ing n. 1. The festivity of Shrovetide

What a strange definition The Free Dictionary provides for shroving! I'm not sure that 'festivity' is quite the right term for what is a time of preparing for the abstinence of Lent. Let's call it the *observance* of Shrovetide instead shall we?

Shrovetide is not only Shrove Tuesday, but rather a period of time which covers Shrove Tuesday and the two days before it. It's traditional in this time of course to take things out of the house which are luxury items, leaving only the basics for a simple diet, and, in the Catholic tradition, to attend Church for confession.

It is a time for clearing out, cleansing, and readying ourselves for the meditation, contemplation and perhaps deprivation of Lent.

Nowadays, I'm not sure many of us carefully sweep through our cupboards and pantries to eat and dispose of anything that might be a little too much of a treat during Lent. Probably not all of us choose to give something up for Lent. Perhaps some of us do give something up, but it's fine because there are 5 feast days in Easter so I don't need to go the whole time without...

Does this matter?

Well, I suppose that's up to you!

We observe Lent as a remembrance of Jesus' time in the Wilderness, and as a time leading to the sacrifice of Good Friday and, eventually, the celebration of Easter.

When we're held accountable for our lives at the end of our time on earth, I don't think questions will be asked about how well we 'shroved', or how many illicit Crème Eggs were eaten in stolen moments during a fast from chocolate during Lent.

But when we're offered a time of the year to experience what it is to deny ourselves in some small way or other, in preference for filling more of our lives with God, why not take the opportunity and see what renewal might be in store?

When the pantries are cleared of unhealthy treats, there's more room for nourishing basics.

Likewise, as we embark upon Lent, we enjoy Pancake Day as a reminder of the good things we are fortunate to enjoy, and in commitment to clearing out some of the unhealthy things in our lives, filling the gaps with holier habits and activities.

As we eat the Pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, let's rejoice in the abundant joy of the world God has given to us, and ready ourselves for a season of renewed spiritual discipline and focus on God.



Rev'd Becki Stennett

Pancakes

A Pancake Recipe

- 100g plain flour
- 2 large eggs
- 300ml milk
- Sunflower or vegetable oil for frying

Mix together the flour and eggs, carefully, using a whisk. Slowly add the milk, whisking constantly, until you have a smooth batter which doesn't feel thick.

Set the batter aside for half an hour if you can, perhaps while you prepare some toppings!

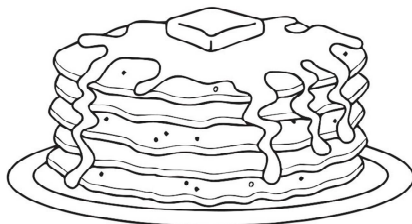
Heat a medium frying pan, pancake pan, or crepe pan over a medium heat. Use a piece of kitchen roll to carefully spread a small amount of oil over the surface of the pan. When the pan is hot, ladle on some batter, moving the pan to spread it evenly, and cook for a minute or so on each side until golden. Keep warm in a low oven if you're making lots...! (This recipe will also make pancakes that freeze well, separated by squares of baking parchment and wrapped or sealed well.)

Banana pancakes (Vegan friendly)

- 1 large ripe banana (around 150g)
- 2 tbsp (golden) caster sugar
- 1/4tsp fine salt
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil (and some for cooking)
- 120g self-raising flour
- 1/2tsp baking powder
- 150ml dairy free milk (oat or almond or soya for example)

Mash the banana well and stir in sugar, salt, and the oil. Add the flour and baking powder, mixing thoroughly. Make a well in the centre and whisk in the milk. You should have a thick batter with a dropping consistency.

Heat a little oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add about 2 tbsp batter at a time to make an American style pancake. You should be able to make several at the same time. Fry for 2-3 minutes on each side until golden brown. Serve with toppings of your choice! (More banana, syrup and berries is a good choice...!)



Some good ideas for toppings.

(note, the banana pancakes won't be suitable for the savoury ideas below)

Ham and Cheese (add these to the pancake when it's in the pan to get the cheese truly melty!)

Ham, Cheese and Egg (Crack the egg into the pancake as soon as you've got it cooking, and keep the heat not too high. As the egg cooks, add ham and cheese, and take it off the heat as soon as the whites are cooked for a dippy yolk!)

Creamy Leek and Bacon (cook some lardons in a pan and saute leeks with them, adding a little stock and a dash of cream towards the end. Delicious!)

Lemon and sugar (definitely best with fresh lemons, and let everyone squeeze their own for some fun sour-taste faces!)

Syrup (opinion is divided in the Stennett household- Golden or Maple)

Bananas and Nutella (spread some Nutella before the pancake is off the heat, and add bananas on. You can also fry the banana slices first in a little butter....yummy!)



Ash Wednesday

“The tempter came and said to him.....” Matthew 4:3

One of the strange reflections that can be made about Jesus’ “Temptations” is that there is a way in which he fulfilled each one of them, though not in the manner that the devilish voice in the wilderness was wanting.

Jesus did not turn stones to bread, but yet he gave food to the hungry crowd and is referred to in John’s Gospel as the Bread of Life. Secondly (in Matthew’s listing) he did not do “spectacular things” for their own sake to prove his trust in God; but the things that he did in his life and ministry naturally drew a sense of utter amazement from the crowds. Jesus demonstrated his trust and belief in God’s power working through him. Thirdly Jesus did not compromise or squander his divine calling and power to get people to fall down and worship him, yet across the globe 2,000 years on, Christians call him King and Lord of all.

These three classic temptations point to how we can get things disastrously wrong when it comes to meeting the human need for nourishment, or the living out of our faithful trust in God, or the exercising of the right use of personal power.

As we make this Lenten journey may we pray: *“Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,..”* so we don’t do the right thing in the wrong way, and end up working against God’s purposes for the world. All need to be nourished, all need to discover God’s providential care, and all need to live under the power that brings God’s just and equitable kingdom. *“... thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.”*

Revd Robert Creamer



Detail of a miniature in two registers of the Temptations of Christ, surrounded by six niches, with two kings, two seraphims and two angels. Image taken from f. 191 of Psalter ('The Queen Mary Psalter'). Written in Latin, with French image captions.

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I will protect you

We take time this week to remember that life can be tough and these last 12 months have been blue for most of us at some point, but we are reminded of God who says, "I will protect you..."

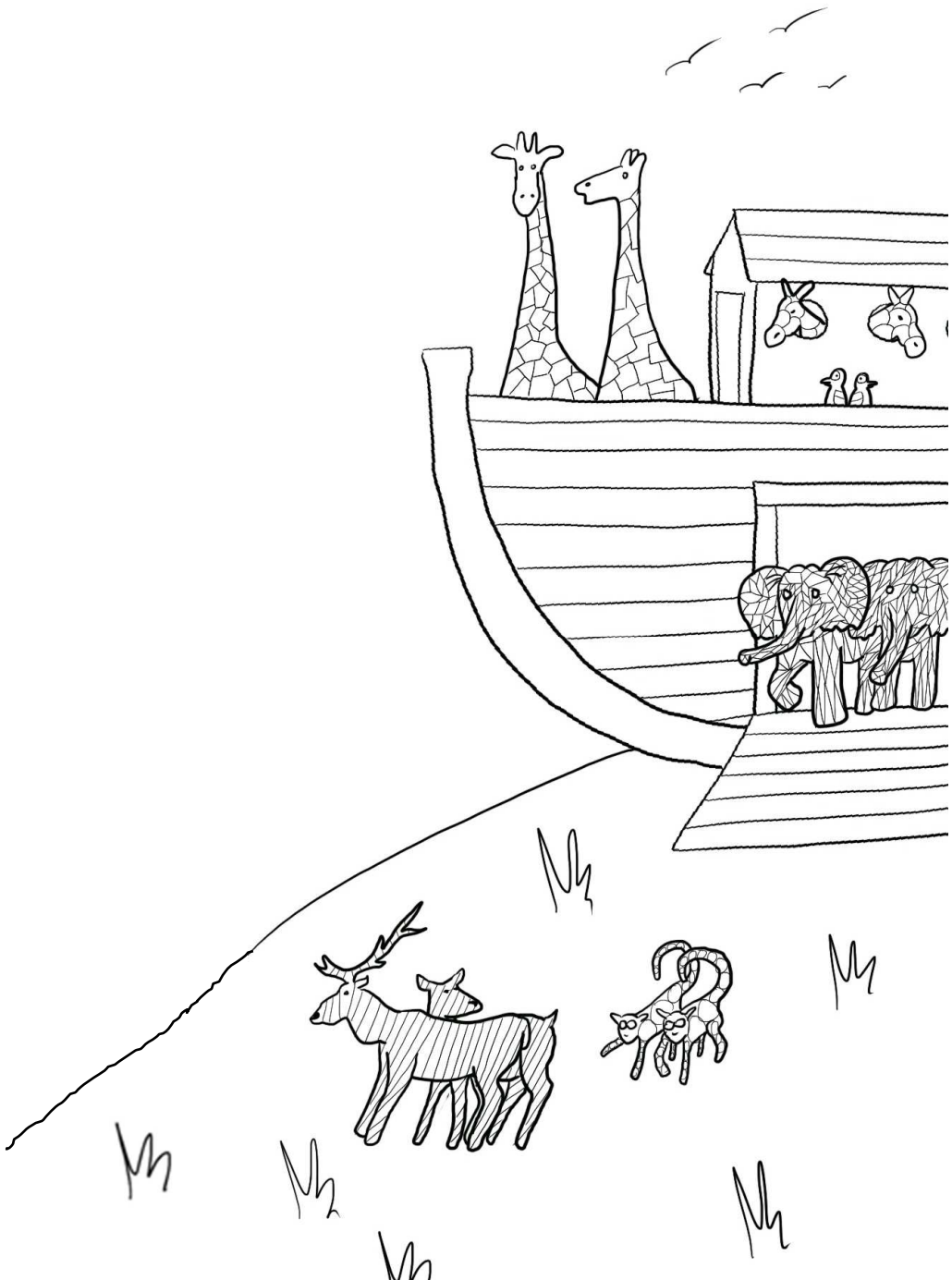
God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

(Genesis 9:12-13)

May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.
 May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.
 May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.
 May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen

God, may we see in every rainbow the promise of a new world.

May we live as your people of promise.



God's protective love

Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Your people have killed the prophets and have stoned the messengers who were sent to you. I have often wanted to gather your people, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you wouldn't let me. (Matthew 23.37)

Jesus describes himself by using the striking image of a mother hen with her chicks. A mother's deepest instinct is to protect her children – an echo of God's amazing love that goes to the very depths to rescue and protect us. These heartfelt words of Jesus immediately precede the events of Holy Week, when we witness the ultimate expression of the lengths to which this sacrificial love will go. As we look forward to the events of Easter this story may help to prepare us and link Easter to the sacrifice that Christ made for us.

The farmyard was a peaceful place – safe and warm for the animals that lived there. The pig in his sty, the young calves in the big shed, the lambs in the pen, the ducks on the pond and the hens – the hens were everywhere, clucking and pecking at the grain and food scraps all around the yard. The hens truly were everywhere – except for one mother hen, who was busy with her newly hatched brood of chicks. Little, fluffy, yellow bundles of new life looked after by a proud mum. It was a typical, peaceful farmyard scene – a safe place to live – at least it was, until one night three weeks before Easter.

All the animals had settled to sleep, when a strange new smell was caught on the wind – an unfamiliar, unpleasant smell, a dangerous smell. The mother hen awoke. She smelt it too. It was the smell of burning. Somehow, somewhere in the darkness of the night a fire had begun. It was spreading fast, licked into a fury by the wind. Stubble began to burn, the hay in the hayloft caught light and the dry wood of the pens was soon ablaze.

Panic set in among the animals. The lambs were bleating, the cattle lowing in distress, the pigs snorting with fear, the ducks were flapping and squawking, the hens scurrying about in confusion. The mother hen sensed the danger and drew her chicks closer to her for safety. Surely the farmer would be alerted by now? He would come and rescue them from the corner of the barn that had become their temporary home. The mother hen sat tight and waited – too frightened to leave, too protective of her young to move.

The farmer did come, but not to the barn. Bringing water and beaters, he and his friends did their best to douse the roaring flames and rescue the bigger animals. It was hard work. Exhausted they had to be content with containing the disaster and waiting for dawn to see the damage. They rescued all they could.

What about the mother hen? When the farmer began the morning search of the ashes in the barn, he spied something unusual – a sad lump of charred feathers in one corner. The poor hen, overcome by the fumes and the heat, had died. But – didn't the feathers move? Yes! Something was alive. He brushed back the mess and out stumbled six little chicks, safe and sound, protected from disaster by a mother's love. She had died so that they could be saved. She had given her life so that they would go on living.

It was only three weeks to Easter and this one event, more than anything else, helped the farmer to understand for the first-time what Easter was really all about.

God's love for us is so special that we are scarcely are able to accept it, believe it, let alone receive it. God's love that protects us, strengthens and inspires us, nurtures and feeds us, and also encouraging and willing us to be protective in our concern for others.

Revd Tanya Short



The promise of the rainbow

It's been a difficult and strange year for all of us, with so many challenges and new experiences, pain and losses, hope but also a lot of fear. However throughout the year, one image has been present wherever you looked. We've seen it in windows and on walls, in papers and on painted stones, and even on the introduction to daily local news bulletins. The image of the rainbow has come to symbolise so much of what we hope for and prayed for during this last year.

It's an image that has brought colour and joy, and a promise of better times following months of darkness and despair. It's an image that speaks of all people working together as one for the good of all; it speaks of overcoming challenging situations; it speaks of healing and restoration.

From the outset, and through it all, God is with us. God is before all things and the first gift the world is given is light. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness."

God gave us a purifying, energy enhancing, life-giving light. And it's this light that "contains" the rainbow that makes the rainbow possible. It's these colourful elements that are woven together to give us the light that that breaks through the darkest of days, that heals and restores, that protects and guides us, that gives us life.

The story of the Great Flood, an event described by many cultures and traditions, depicts a time of brutal trauma and devastation for the earth. It's unsettling and disturbing on so many levels. In different ways, throughout the ages, many peoples and nations have experienced times when they must have felt the end of the world was upon them; times when they must have felt that God had abandoned them.

But God has not abandoned us, and will not do so, for the Great Flood was also a time of washing away, a process of cleansing, of restoring and healing God's wonderful creation. God protects us and guides us through the trauma and in the diversity and richness of the rainbow gives us a sign of this constant restoring grace and a symbol of hope for a brighter future.

Richard Vautrey



Making rainbows

Rainbows are a sign of God's promise to protect us, and never again to destroy the world for the sinfulness of humans. It's a wonderful sign of hope, and a beautiful thing to try to make! Here are a couple of ways you can get outside and make a rainbow!

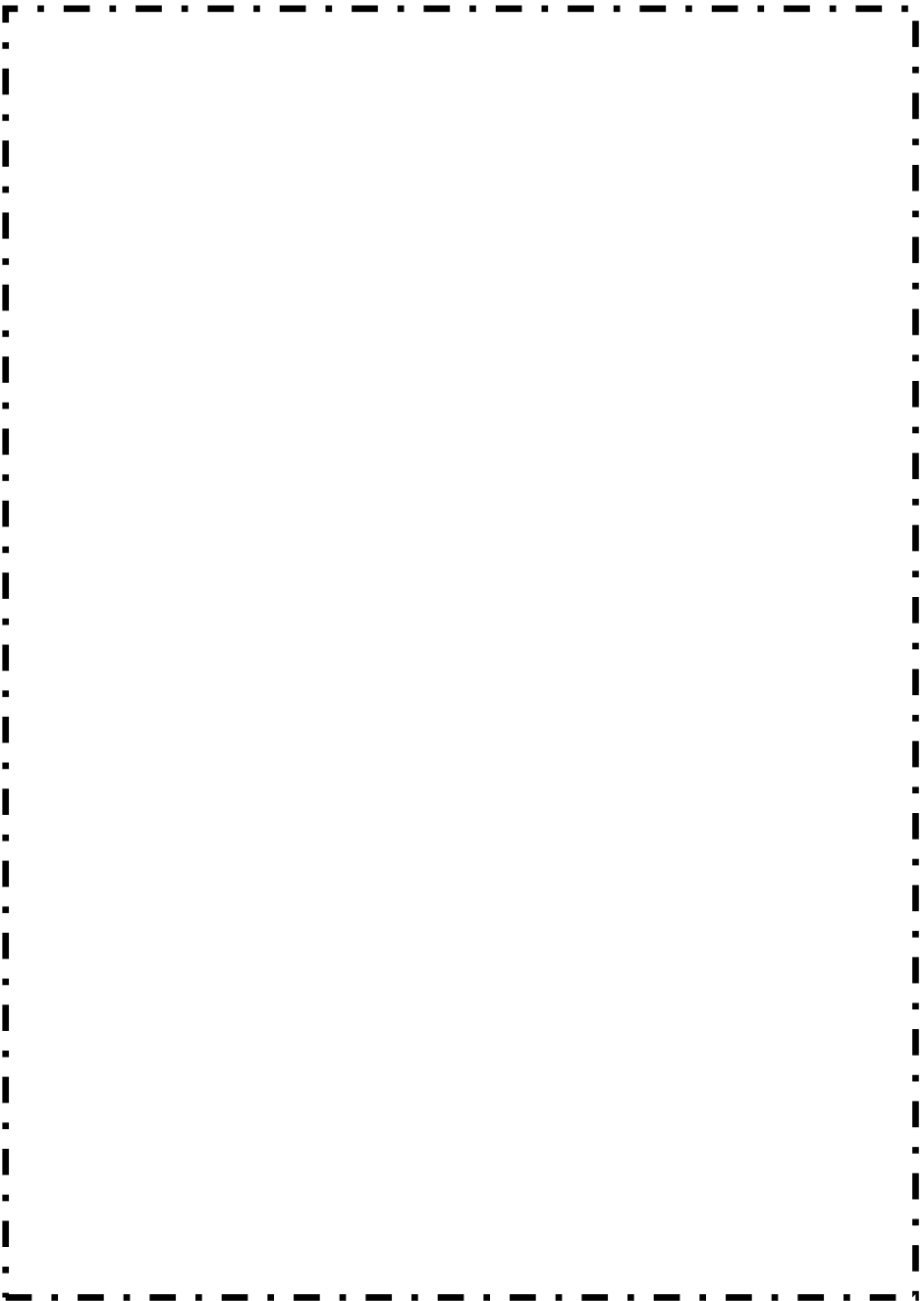
Hosepipe rainbows

On a sunny day, head outside with your wellies on (and wrap up warm if it's chilly!) With your thumb partly covering the end of the hosepipe, turn the water on and allow the stream of water droplets to spray into the sky. If the mist is fine, you should see a rainbow!

Disc rainbows

If you have a spare CD or DVD, why not sit in a window and try to catch the sun on the shiny side of the disc? By moving the disc around, you should be able to project the rainbow onto a wall or a piece of paper.

Why not try and draw your rainbow here?



I will answer you

Our colour of the week is yellow, remind us of God's promises to Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the beach. We remember God's promise, "I will answer you..."

God said to Abram, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

God said to Abraham, 'As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her. '

(Genesis 17:4-7, 15-16)

May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.

May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.

May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.

May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen

Loving God, may we see in every person of any age
your promise and potential.

May we live as your people of promise.



I will answer you



In my tradition (the Oroko of Cameroon), there is the superstition that yellow birds are 'spiritual messengers' that communicate to people their personal power. So, if a yellow bird visits you when you feel that you've been defeated, the message is that you're stronger than you think, you do have strength to make it through the storm.

Abraham and Sarah have got to their final years and childless, going through numerous obstacles and trials. God finally gives them their heir Isaac (Genesis 21: 1-7).

It is not uncommon these days for someone to send an email and then a text to make sure the recipient got the email. If there isn't a quick response to either of these, a cell phone call is not far behind. We want answers and we want them now. We can also be like this in our communication with God, telling God to hurry up.

What are you struggling with in your life?

Are there things you'd like God to do in your life or in our world right now?

Have you told Him?

What prayers have you deemed unanswerable or too big for God?

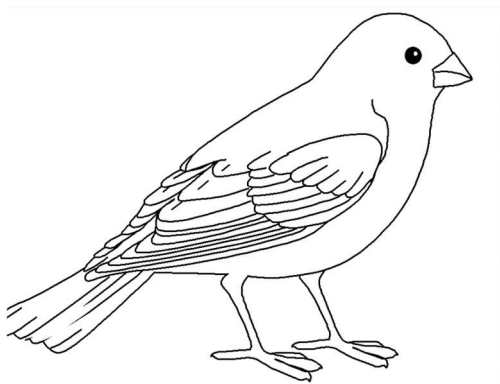
How might your daily outlook improve if you began to fully trust that God has a plan for answering your prayers in ways you cannot imagine?

At this time of anxiety and uncertainty, sorrow and pain, we can trust God and have faith that He will not forsake us. He is our refuge and strength. Hold tight to His word and pray for strength to move through the fog with His light on your path.

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of John Wesley, is a God who delights in answering the prayers of His people as He sees fit and in His timing. We see His promises being fulfilled every day in our lives.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord that You are ever present and always available to listen to our prayers. Thank You for Your numerous promises that we see being fulfilled in our lives every day. In Jesus' name **Amen**.



Rev'd Edward Sakwe

A golden light

When I was a little girl, during school holidays, I used to stay with an aunt in Lancashire. Her house was quite high up and looked out across a valley. In the evenings I would look out of my bedroom window towards a house which was on the hillside on the other side of the valley. I was convinced this house had special windows... for they almost burst into flame as they shone with dazzling golden light. How marvellous it would be to live in that house, I thought...much better than my aunt's and certainly even better than the flat where I lived with my parents in London! Back in the 1950's, one of the jobs my aunt had was as an insurance agent. Every so often she visited people's houses to collect their insurance money. One day she suggested I went with her on one of her expeditions but it was to be an early start. When we arrived at this house, I realised it was the very house I used to gaze at in the evenings! But, what disappointment, it was just an ordinary house...one even smaller than my aunt's and...the windows didn't reflect fiery flames of light at all... The strange thing was, in the brightness of the morning sun, as I looked back across the valley to my aunt's house, her windows were flashed with gold instead!

So, what do we conclude from this...that what we wish for is not always what it seems to be or we need? That the grass is never greener on the other side...? That we have blessings but we're not always grateful for them? That although we may marvel at God's world, at its' beauty and diversity, do we always care for it as we should? And, although we might trust in God when things go well, yet in times of trouble or uncertainty, how likely are we to trust God to lead, guide and totally be our strength?

Dorothy Turnpenny

I don't know about you, but I can picture the scene Dorothy describes, why not try and draw that view from the window of your imagination?



Journey sticks

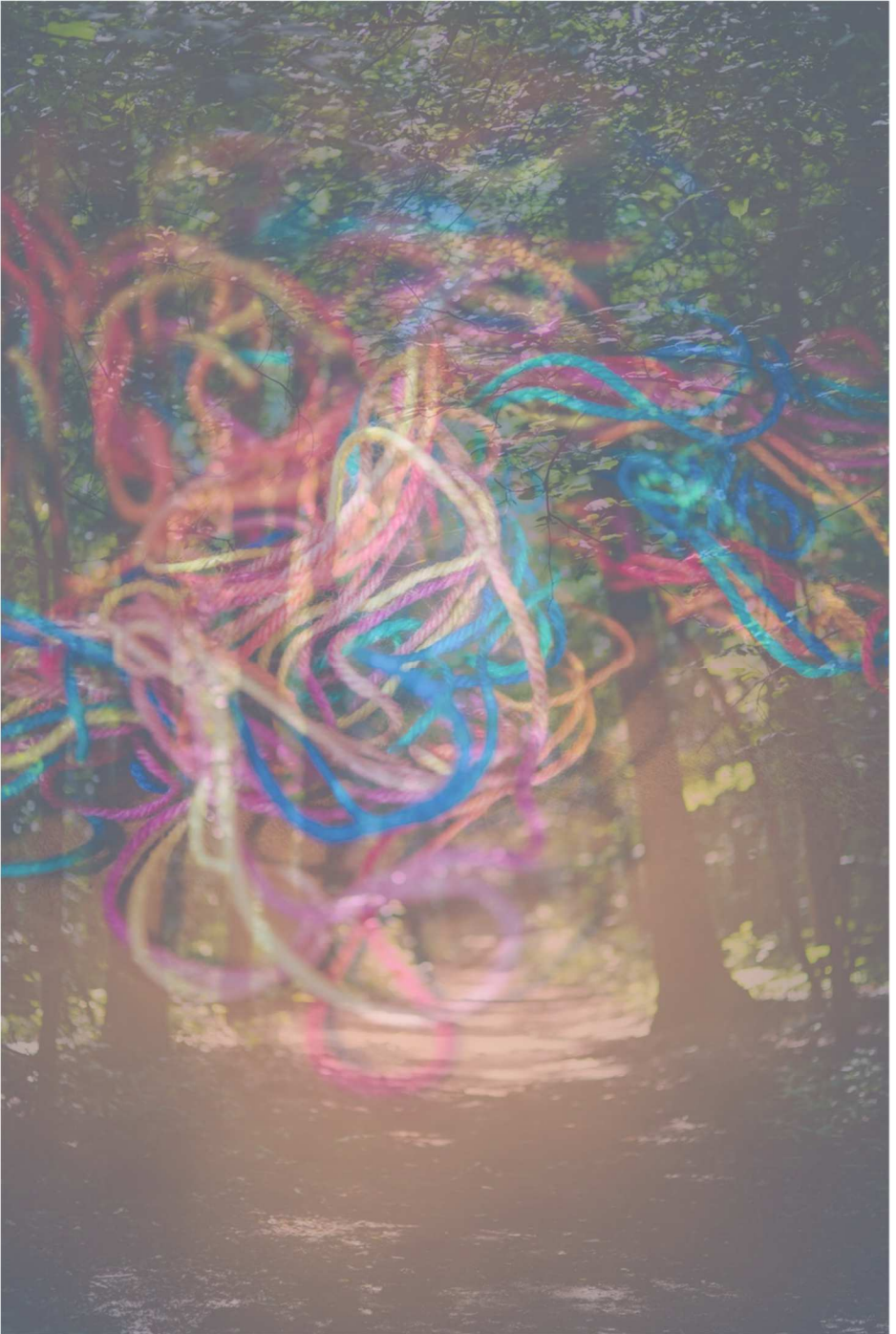
Abram's journey is one which changed the world for people of faith. Along the way, there were memorable moments, for good or for ill.

Head out for a walk, and take with you several quite long lengths of colourful wool or string (multi coloured is best!) As you start your walk, find a stick, ideally long enough to be a walking stick.

Continuing along your way, spot special things or note particular moments. Each time you see something or experience something you want to remember, take a piece of your wool or string and wind it around the stick as a reminder. Leave a little tail each time so you can add the next colour of wool or string on to it.

Heading home, you'll have a beautiful rainbow of moments to remember!

Keep your stick somewhere to remind you of the wonderful walk, and to remind you of God's answering to Abram on his journey, and how God answers you on your journey through life.



I will be your strength

The fiery colour of orange is for this week, as we remember Moses encountering God in the burning bush that wasn't burning. It's a strong colour, going with God's promise for this week, "I will be your strength..."

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

(Exodus 3: 1-12)

May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.
May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.
May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.
May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen



*Healing God, may we know what hurts us all
and learn to forgive and heal each other.*

May we live as your people of promise.

'I am who I am'

Lord God, unfathomable and beyond our understanding,
when I question you, you tell me,

'I am who I am';

When I tremble and fear for the future, you tell me,

'I am who I am';

When I am in doubt and feel anxious, your promise to me is,

'I am who I am'.

I find comfort in your power, your certainty and constant presence.

I know that whatever happens in the future I can rest in your assurance,

'I am who I am'.

Erica Moores

“I will go over and see this strange sight...”

This story speaks to me of God’s delight in surprising us, in taking unlikely opportunities to give us a new insight, a fresh perspective, and bring us hope and joy and strength.

I remember attending a short service some years ago, in a church on the Isles of Scilly. It was one of those events like the lectures, the tours and the concerts put on especially for the tourists, which everyone attended en masse and I went with no great expectations. The hymns chosen were well known, I had sung them all many times before; so why did the phrase ‘Ponder anew what the Almighty can do’ hit me right between the eyes on that particular occasion? Even now when I get to the lines, ‘Ponder anew what the Almighty can do, who with his love doth befriend thee’ I am reminded of that particular occasion and consider its message yet again.

In his book about St George’s Crypt, *‘Entertaining Saints’*, Revd Roger Quick reflects that is uncommon, but not impossible for their guests to be ‘overwhelmed by hope and surprised by joy:

“Standing outside one day, having a smoke with one of the lads, he looked down at the gutter. There, in the middle of the collected muck and rubble was a tiny blue flower. How on earth it had come to take root there, and managed to survive against all the odds, was a small miracle. ‘That’s my life’, he said. ‘That flower, it’s all happened by chance. But I’m still here somehow.’ For him, it was a moment of hope that gave him courage to go on.”

Let us be ready for those unexpected flashes of revelation which inspire us, giving us hope and courage to go on.

Angela Britton

Cap Blanc-Nez

There's a place in northern France, near Calais, called Cap Blanc-Nez which I have visited several times with family. If you were to look at an image of the place, it's not particularly remarkable, looking a little like the white cliffs of Dover perhaps.

On our autumnal visits to the Pas-de-Calais, we would walk to the top of Cap Blanc-Nez, and it would always be windy. By that, I don't mean some sort of stiff breeze which lifts the hair and freshens the cheeks. I mean it could be really, extraordinarily windy.

I recall visits where we simply wouldn't let my very skinny little sister out of the car while the rest of us, who were fortunate to have a little more ballast, would fight to open the doors of the vehicle, cling on to make sure the doors didn't disappear, and then arm-in-arm would take some slow but exhilarating steps into the gale force wonder.

Atop Cap Blanc-Nez, we have watched ferries blown off course and cars reeling on their chassis. Atop cap Blanc-Nez, we have struggled to walk ten paces, and laughed as we've taken photographs with very little by way of visage in where we had longer hair. Atop Cap Blanc-Nez, we have refused to let go of my younger sister when we eventually let her out of the car, for quite genuine fear that she would be carried off the edge of the cliff.

The forces of nature are breath taking when we meet them like this. They can be scary, exciting, good for the soul and dangerous too.

When Moses meets fire which burns without consuming, surely it was all these things for him. The fire could have been extremely dangerous, not least because it didn't act as he would expect. It must have been terrifying, but exciting too, and ultimately good for the soul.

Moses is given a task, to lead the people of God away from slavery. Naturally, he doubts his ability to do this, and who could blame him? We've made the story tame with its frequent retelling and Sunday School colouring sheets of frogs jumping about and the sea swelling high as it's parted. But surely this was a terrifying job: to command the obedience of the people of God, to persuade a ruthless Pharaoh, to make a journey into the unknown.

Into Moses' doubt, it's not the petal of a flower or the breeze in a tree that God speaks from. God speaks from a fire, a reminder of all the strength and power of the creator. God reminds Moses, and through the story us too, 'I am who I am': the one who can control the roaring seas, who makes the sun rage in its heat, who can make the winds on Cap Blanc-Nez so formidable.

God's strength is beyond anything we can imagine. So when I try to understand what it means that God promises to be *our* strength, I can't help but think of that windy clifftop. How can I fall when the creator of such powerful forces will be my strength? How can my weakness ever stop me, when God who set the seas raging is my strength?

'I am who I am' says the Lord. And I will be your strength.

Revd Becki Stennett



‘We stand on holy ground.’

As I sing those words, from the hymn ‘Be still’, in on-line worship these days I look around at the un-holy mess (in my half of the study, anyway!), and sometimes have to try hard to sense that ‘the Holy One is here’.

Perhaps being out of our church buildings, or not being free to go to other special places, has made us appreciate them more, as holy places. Or perhaps in this ‘wilderness’ experience we have come to see other familiar places with new eyes.

When the call in Exodus came to Moses it was as he was doing his day job looking after his father-in-law's sheep. But his openness - mindfulness, we might say now! – led him to see; he turned aside, and listened. Overwhelmed at standing on holy ground.

And so, his story and the whole story of the Jewish people was transformed.

For that vision was not about God treating Moses to a ‘feel-good’ experience. It was to call and inspire him for the enormous task ahead. Moses came up with all the excuses: I’m a nobody; my own people may not believe me; I’m no good at speaking ... ‘please send someone else’. At which, we’re told, God became angry! God would call Aaron, his brother, to do the talking, but Moses was to lead – and so he did, through the long battle with Pharaoh and then the forty weary years leading people through the wilderness towards a holy land of safety and plenty.

But remember most of all in this story how God is so intimately involved with God's people: 'I know all about their sufferings; I have come to rescue them; I will bring them out...'. *'I will be their strength'*. God entering the struggle to set men and women and children free from slavery, all that drags them – and us – down.

Entering the struggle most of all in Jesus Christ, so that in 'Holy' Week we stand at the foot of the cross on Golgotha, that place of horror and degradation, and know that there we stand on holy ground. But for us, as for Moses, that's just the beginning of the story.

Susan Howdle



Fire lighting

Even in the coldest evening, a real fire can be a wonderful warming comfort.

If it is safe and permitted to do so, why not find a space outside to make a small fire?

Try to use chemical-free firelighters: a little dry bark, nut shells, some natural firelighters from an eco-shop, or some old paper perhaps.

A fire doesn't need to be big to be powerful. Even with a tiny fire, you could toast a marshmallow, make some toast, or simply warm your hands.



Why not spend time simply gazing into the flames, marvelling at their beauty, and contemplating the strength of God who created all the forces of nature.

After a while, you might like to sing by the fire, or tell stories if you have company.

Make sure the fire is well extinguished before you leave it and **DO NOT** leave fire or hot embers unattended.



I will comfort you

Purple for mourning is our colour as we reach the first anniversary of Lockdown 1. We remember those who've died during the pandemic, and hear God's promise to us all, "I will comfort you..."

Then God spoke all these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy."

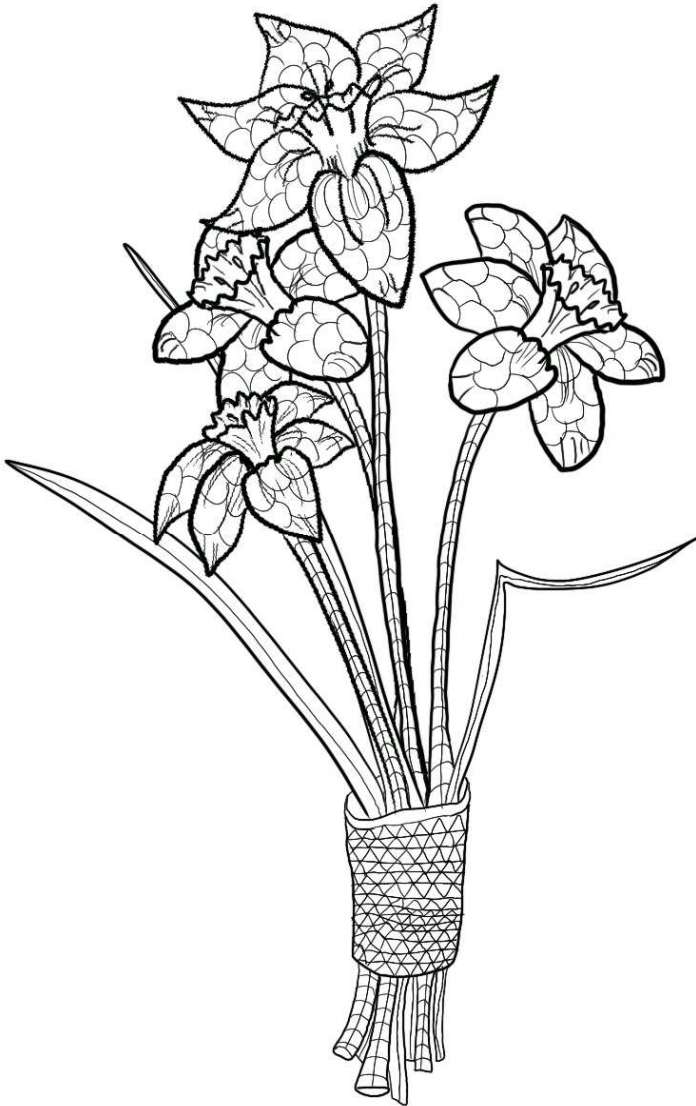
(Exodus 20:1-3, 7-8)

May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.

May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.

May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.

May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen



*Ancient God, may we live fairly with each other
and in friendship with you and our world.*

May we live as your people of promise.

My little salt and pepper people

Sabbath etymology- to rest, to cease.

On the seventh day God rested he stopped making, maybe we're still in Gods seventh day , I don't know. I can't imagine God resting as in stopping, ceasing to act. I can imagine god taking pleasure in his creation though, in smiling at it with the love of a mother over her newborn, with the love of a young girl whose faith in him was such that she was able to smile at her own child, the son of god.

For many mothers there is such a moment, however short or long, such a connection with their offspring that it surpasses the love of all others .

And so I am reminded again of the love of God that surpasses all understanding, even that of a mother. And there we have have God taking time and space to rest in his love, his all surpassing connection with creation.

The sabbath a day to take rest, a day to pause and take succour in the arms of God. A space we can permit ourselves to stop and move close to God. To listen, to speak and shout and rail against; to confess, to cry in his arms. Just to take rest, to be restored, to be comforted, to be held.

To be hugged. Whether we are in lock down or not even those who have not been hugged for a year can be hugged by God, be embraced and find comfort there.

Pray for those who have never felt the love of God, or the unfettered love of a parent carer, or friend. Pray that this Mothering Sunday you or someone else will show them that loving acceptance and metaphorically hug them , giving them a taste of God's love.

My little salt and pepper people who offer such different things, offer each other that we can all try and share, each in our own particular way.

Make a phone call, or write to someone, or speak to someone.

And then enjoy your sabbath in the arms of him whose love for each of never ceases.



Mary Patchett

A mother church

Traditions around Mothering Sunday date back to the 16th century when people returned to their 'mother church'. So why might this return be of such significance to us as we travel forward in faith? Mothering Sunday reminds me of my own 'mother church' and my formative faith experiences, where a number of adults were hugely significant in nurturing me through my teenage years. I come across reminders of these people as I continue my journey of faith and they serve to remind me of the importance of where we have come from in our desire to continue that journey.

Recently, one of the young people from Oakwood interviewed people from the church community to hear about their journeys of faith and featured significant moments and people who have been part of the nudging along the road to Christ. All of these people had 'mother churches' which have been instrumental in loving, teaching and encouraging.

Since the beginning of our Covid lockdowns in March 2020, Sunday evenings for our Church teens have involved us gathered around devices in different homes as we enjoy our youth fellowship group together and yet apart over Zoom. Young people have experimented with leading worship, in developing prayer resources and in teaching from the Bible. My prayer is that we too can send these young people out into the world, to whatever future lies ahead of them and that they too can look back on their years in our Church with fondness and feeling encouraged to be the people that God has created them to be. That we might be a 'mother church' that they will want to return to.

Romans 12:7-8 *If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.*

Fran Bailey

Stone sculptures

This week, why not head out for a walk, and collect some stones on the way?

Feel the solid stones, the unyielding surface of them, but notice also the way they become warm in your hand.

When you have collected a few, stop and try to make a sculpture or a piece of art with the stones, for someone else to find.

Could you make a tower with your stones?

Could you make the shape of a cross? Or a rainbow? A heart?

If you have time, and quite a few stones, you could make some concentric circles, or the shape of an animal.

Stones have the feeling of permanence, hence why the commandments were written on them. Your art won't last, but why not spend a moment thinking about how long those stones have been around, and how many more decades they'll stay around, one way or another!



I will love you

Red is often associated with love - red roses, a red heart. This week we recall God's promise to write on our hearts, as he says, "I will love you..."

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

(Jeremiah 31:33)

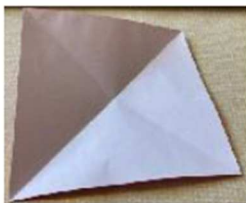


May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.
 May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.
 May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.
 May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen

Simple Origami Heart



Start with a square of paper, white side up, if it's coloured on one side. Fold in half, corner to corner, then open.



Fold in half corner to corner the other way, then unfold.



Fold the top corner down to meet the horizontal fold line.



Fold the bottom corner up to meet your last fold.



Fold the right side up so what was along the bottom meets the middle crease.



Fold the left side up to meet the right side in the middle.



Turn over, then fold the top points down a little.



Fold the two side corners in a little.



Turn back over. Your heart is finished.

Living God, may we put you at the centre of life
and hear your heart beat with ours.

May we live as your people of promise.

Love so amazing so divine

When I first came to England from South Africa in 2004 I lived in Essex. I worked as a pharmacy technician in one of the hospitals and knew next to nothing about this new culture I found myself in. Of course one tries to blend in and pretend to understand the subtle nuances of living in a foreign land; and for the most part I think I fared rather well. However there was one aspect of Essex tradition that made me stop in my tracks again and again. I still remember one of the first occasions when I experienced it: a young man at the fruit and veg stall addressed me as 'his love'! Of course I soon came to understand that he was not, in fact, declaring his love for me, but that it was merely a polite greeting.

It took a long time for me to become accustomed to this!



I guess we all have our own idea(s) of what love is, what it looks like, how it works. I have found my notions of it challenged again and again these passing months in hearing and experiencing especially through The Meeting Point Café, the many stories of selfless acts of compassion and help within and across communities as people draw together to weather the storm of a global pandemic. I have often felt the need to simply stop and acknowledge that this was the tangible love of God for his people flowing through the hands and hearts and pockets and actions of so many.

God loves us. He loved us before the foundations of the earth were formed. He loved us even whilst we were being knitted together in our mother's womb. He loves us still with a unfailing, everlasting love. All that he does for us, protecting us, listening and answering, strengthening and comforting us, bringing us his peace, is because of his love for us. And he does so, just as we are – with all our shortcomings, regardless of how we or others view us. God's love for us is unconditional; it is undeserved; it is limitless; and because its depth is beyond our ability to fully grasp, I think we sometimes place it in that same superficial, meaningless category of a careless greeting or a dusty old concept.

It is not. He proved it: 'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends'. John 15v13 (NIV).

In those times when we are able to grasp more fully this amazing love for us, we find our souls could respond no better but to echo those famous words of a beloved hymn written in 1707 by Isaac Watts:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all!

Deacon Liesl Warren

The cost of love

"I have loved you with an everlasting love..." Jeremiah 31:3

"I.....I.....I.....will always love you..." is a song that was made hugely popular by Dolly Parton and then by Whitney Houston. That haunting title line connects with the deep human need to love and be loved. Sadly, sometimes people find themselves trapped in abusive relationships when they are seeking to meet that human need.

Genuine love is costly. The statutes of ten 20th Century Christian martyrs over the entrance to Westminster Abbey in London is a reminder of that fact. They include Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Wang Zhiming; and the stories of each one can be found at www.westminster-abbey.org/about-the-abbey/history/modern-martyrs In the Christingle service that is very popular at Christmas time, we tie a red ribbon around the orange to remind ourselves of the costliness of the love that this Christ Child will offer to the world. Christ, in his passion and Cross, shows us the power of gracious love, rather than the love of controlling power.

The experience of "being loved" is the transforming grace that leads to salvation. It is love that changes people for the long term not forceful demand. However, sometimes that love does need to be the "tough love" of confrontation. In Mark's Gospel one of the astounding things about Jesus is the way he confronted the evil forces that had taken hold of people's hearts and minds, so they were freed from evil. That transforming power is displayed in Jesus, dying on the cross. Let love be real.

Rev'd Robert Creamer

*Let love be real, with no manipulation,
No secret wish to harness or control;* StF 615 v3



Muddy, seedy hearts

When we think about the love of God, who writes our names on His heart, we surely think about the way we are loved and called to love others. We might also think about the fact that God so loved *the world*: that all of creation is loved by God, and that we are asked to love all of creation too.

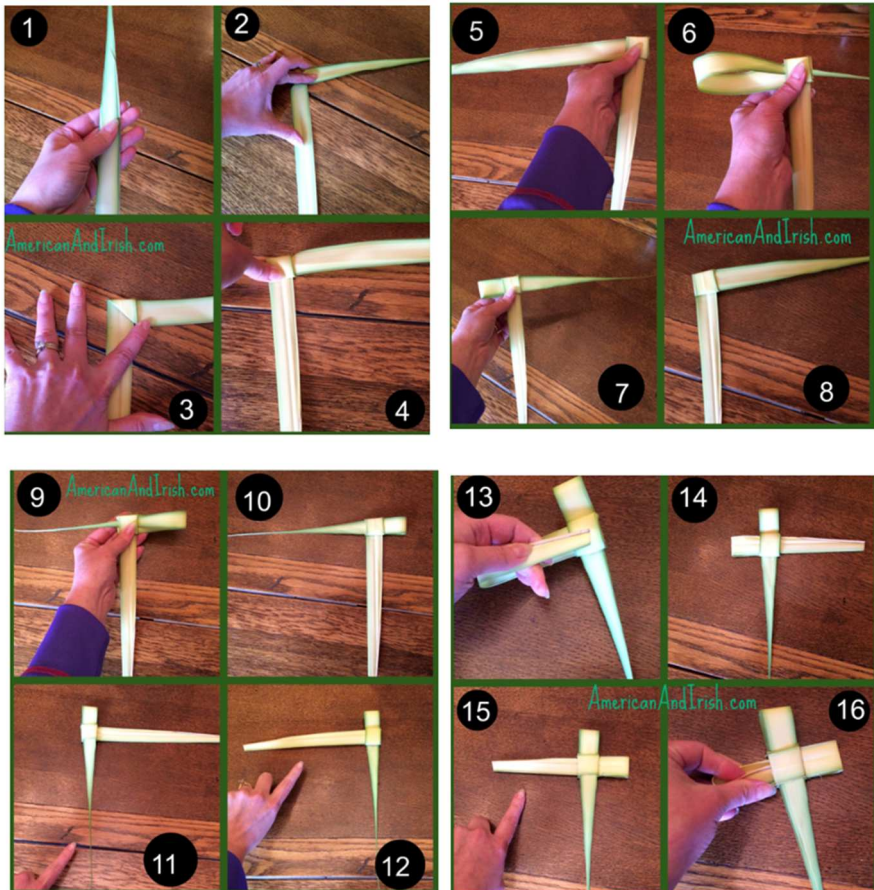
You'll need a small packet of wildflower seeds, and a good handful of clay soil. Moisten the soil with a little water: enough to make it sticky but holding together. Roll this round and round in the wildflower seeds until it's covered. You could shape it simply as a ball, or you could use the shape of this week and form it into a heart shape. Let this dry, and then take one with you to throw in a place that needs cheering up with some beautiful wild flowers. Why not make a few and wrap them nicely for friends and family?



Folding palm crosses

The Palm Cross is a powerful symbol for many Christians in Holy Week.

Why not follow the instructions below, either with a palm strip or a long strip of paper to make your own, or some for friends too?



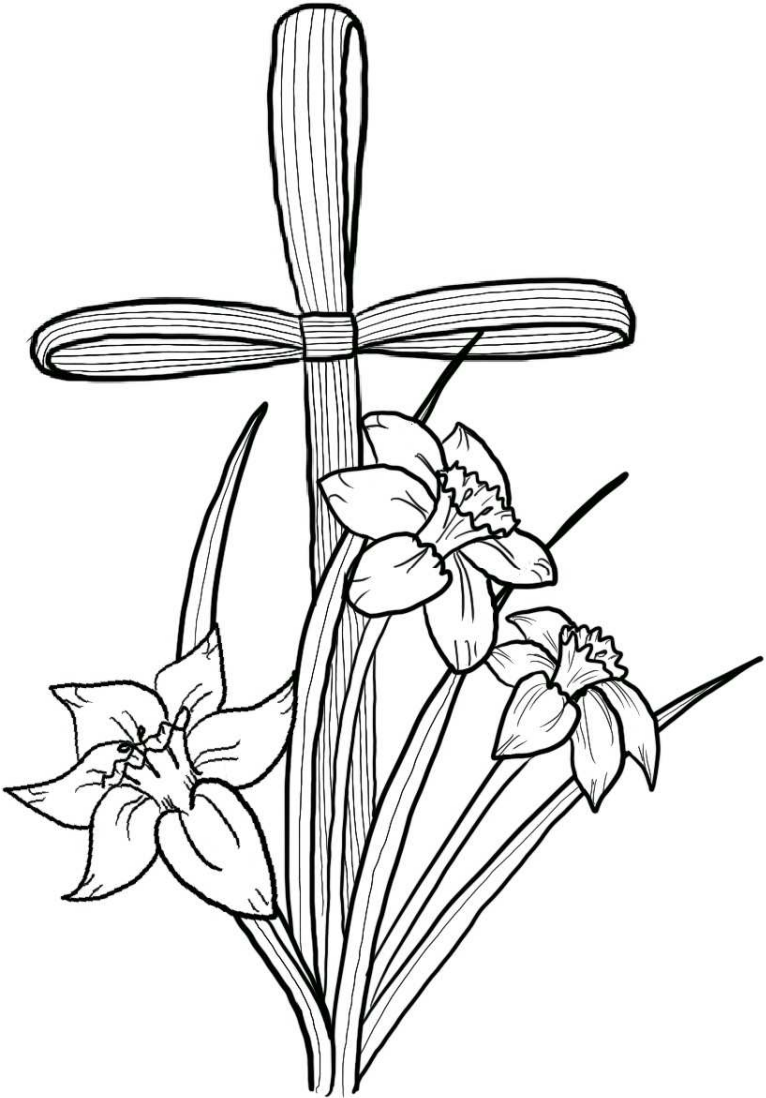
I will give you peace

How many of us have come to appreciate bring outside in green spaces, especially when we've been restricted to staying in as much as possible. Green spaces that are calm and peaceful. That's not where this Sunday's reading takes place, but this week does come with the promise, "I will give you peace..."

Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

(Mark 11:8-10)

May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.
May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.
May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.
May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen



Journeying God, may we travel with you to Jerusalem and beyond and find your cross there ahead of us.

May we live as your people of promise.

Aunt Peggy

My great aunt Peggy was very special. She lived with her husband and sister in a small bungalow where the subdued colours of the paintwork and wall-paper did not reflect her cheerful personality. Her disposition was remarkable considering she had been housebound for much of her life. She had a heart condition, for which the main treatment in the 1950s was rest. Yet, despite her isolation, she had a positive outlook on life, expressing thanks for all her blessings. She spent hours on her own, sitting in an armchair by the fire, while her husband and sister were out at work. A glass of water and her trusted Bible were within easy reach.

Aunt Peggy was kind, generous and patient. She had an outer frailty but an inner strength that originated from her faith in God. In my youth I used to visit Aunt Peggy with my mother, and the most memorable aspect of these visits was that no matter how I felt when I arrived, I always left feeling better. I believe that Aunt Peggy had found God's peace. It was a personal peace, a blessing from God.

God's peace brings us inner peace and calm. It is steadfast and secure no matter what is happening in our lives. It is a peace that helps us be at one with ourselves and at one with God. God's peace has been spoken of for thousands of years. David spoke of how God "blesses his people with peace"(a). Prophets spoke of God's "covenant of peace"(b)(c). Jesus spoke of giving his peace to his disciples(d). And when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a colt, it was not as a warrior king but as the "Prince of Peace"(e). Jesus brought God's peace to the world.

Aunt Peggy cherished the gift of God's peace. But she didn't keep it to herself. She shared it with others by listening to people's stories, sharing their happiness and sadness, their successes and failures. She shared God's peace through her hospitality and generosity of spirit. And that is why, after visiting her, I always left feeling better than when I arrived. I left with her gift of peace.

(a) Psalm 29:11, (b) Isaiah 54:10, (c) Ezekiel 37:26, (d) John 14:27,
(e) Mark 11:7-10

Karen Illingworth



A tale of two donkeys

Thirty years ago Jenny and I visited our daughter who was in her gap year working on the ambulances in Jerusalem. One morning we caught a bus to the top of the Mount of Olives. We then took the path down towards the city. This path has been taken by countless people over the centuries and by a famous donkey. That donkey carried Jesus along this track on his journey into Jerusalem.

We reached the Garden of Gethsemane at the bottom of the path. Outside the garden were various stalls including one selling fresh orange juice. The orange juice seller had a little stall and behind it was his donkey tethered to railing of the garden. The donkey could possibly have been a descendent of the famous one from years ago. The orange juice seller served me a refreshing drink by squeezing three oranges on a little machine like an old fashioned chip chopper. I asked him what he did with the orange peel. He said that he took it home to feed to his goats.



Jenny and I went inside the Garden and into the Church of All Nations built a hundred years ago. When we came out the orange juice seller had loaded the orange peel into two large sacks. He put one sack on one side of the donkey and one on the other. The sacks almost reached the ground so you could hardly see the donkey. Off they toddled.

Both that donkey and the one 2,000 years ago did what was expected of them. One carried the Prince of Peace and the other carried orange peel. One did something very important and the

David Laycock

The peace of the Lord

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phillipians 4:6-7 (NIV)

The Peace that our Lord brings us is a peace that, as believers, we will have probably prayed for in many difficult and anxious times before. In the current Covid pandemic, peace will probably be a desire by the majority of people across the world.

At Christmas time we hear of God's angels delivering messages to several chosen people, the Virgin Mary, chosen to be Jesus' mother, Joseph asked to support her, pregnant before their marriage and then afterwards to flee with his family to Egypt. Also, the Magi to take a different route home, avoiding Herod, to name a few. These messages must have felt like tough advice or a 'big ask' but came with 'do not be afraid' attached to them! God was with them.

We can be consumed by sins, uncertainty, anxiety, doubts and numerous other things in our thoughts and hearts, but if we draw on our faith and trust in our Lord, he assures us he will bring us his Peace. God is with us.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14:27 (NIV)

Sharon Walker

The last supper

We are in the middle of the Holy Week moving gradually, meditatively, yet forcefully to Good Friday and the hope of Easter Sunday.

The scene of our text is the Last Supper. Jesus tells His disciples that one of them will betray Him, and while they are all wondering who it can be, Jesus privately hands to Judas a piece of bread which He had said would signal the betrayer. After receiving the piece of bread, He Judas, immediately went out. And it was night. When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in Him."

I have always felt a degree of sympathy for Judas. We all know how his story ended: recognising the enormity of his mistake he takes his own life. He may have acted out of pure greed. Have we never been greedy ourselves? He may have acted out of a complete failure to understand Jesus' true identity as Messiah. Can any of us fully understand Jesus of Nazareth, the One we acclaim as Christ, Son of God, the One who is incarnate, God with us?

It is rightly an uncomfortable week, but out of the horror of the events of this week came the road to hope. God brings light out of darkness, hope out of despair, forgiveness in the face of terrible evil, life out of death.

Our salvation is surely, also Judas' salvation. Paul the apostle reminds us that the cross is a scandal and the depth of God's love knows no bounds.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you knew one of your disciples would betray you, another deny you, yet still you went to your death.

You know that we are not better and that, with far less reason, we continue to betray, deny and forsake you today, yet still you love us.

Despite the weakness of our faith and the poverty of our discipleship, you go on caring, faithful to us no matter how faithless we may be to you.

Accept our thanksgiving and give us strength to show our gratitude through staying true to our calling, wherever the path may lead, for your name's sake. **Amen.**

Revd Edward Sakwe



I will provide

Maundy Thursday

A Gentle Kiss

Why this gentle kiss?

I know you could have faced the marching feet

The rough grabbing hands

The clink of armour and smell of sweat.

You knew this was coming,

Prayed about it just moments before.

So did it matter really?

Does it matter?

Must it be this gentle kiss?

This kiss that makes me feel like it could have been me?

This kiss that I might have greeted you with,

Brother, friend,

So many times before.

Why this gentle kiss?

Words would surely have done the job?

Why such a tender gesture to condemn you?

You whose hands held all of creation, whose lips spoke life.

Yet this kiss, I cannot shake this kiss.

It was Judas, yes

But it's me too, so easily.

This kiss, so gentle, loving,

Reminding me of all my good intentions.

Those times I've said I loved you,

That I want to follow you.

This kiss. It haunts me.

Perhaps because I know I could never have said the words aloud.

Like Judas.

Perhaps because when the moment came I'd have trembled,

Wept,

Fallen to your feet and begged your forgiveness.

Even then you would have picked me up, embraced me.

This kiss, it's mine.

For every time I've come so close to loving you well

And come up short.

For every time I've imagined I would have stood up in the crowd and asked

'what is this madness? How can we kill the Son of God?'

Why this gentle kiss?

So terrible, so tender.

Cold, with fading warmth,

As the good intentions of yesterday

Meet the betrayal of today.

By Becki Stennett

2nd April 2021

I Forgive

Good Friday

As we've travelled through Lent this year, we've had a colour for each week. But what about for today? Grey, darkness, everything drained of colour, and life.

Darkness covered the earth - for three hours...
 But how dark was it?
 As dark as it is underground?
 As dark as a tomb?
 Or just as dark as a starlit night?
 Reminding us of the beginning
 when dark was separated from light - day and night.
 Reminding us of another beginning, Jesus' birth,
 when the wise followed a star.
 Or the beginning of the Gospel of John:
 'The light shines in the darkness,
 and the darkness has never put it out.'

So even at this moment,
 was it really as dark as the tomb
 that borrowed space in which Jesus would soon be lying?
 The light hidden from sight - but not extinguished.
 The sun hidden from sight - a total eclipse.
 Dark, but not completely dark.

Is that how it was on Good Friday, as Jesus breathed his last?
 The whole of creation still.
 The earth quiet
 even the birds ceasing their singing.
 Recognising the awfulness
 the awe-filledness
 of that moment.
 What *have* we done?
 What have we *not* done,
 to avoid this apparent ending?

"Father, forgive them. They know not what they do."

Leeds North and East Methodist Circuit. All Images and materials used with permission



I will wait with

Low Saturday

When it comes to Holy Week and my own experience, growing up in a rural community didn't give much opportunity to explore Holy Week activities like other churches and communities would do. Our house was surrounded by fields, and even our local chapel was located in a village that ran the length of two fields (possibly three). With no other village locations to speak of, it never really lent itself to a Good Friday walk of witness. Placing this alongside a circuit where we only had one minister across all of the 12 churches, it meant that Holy Week wasn't observed in the ways others were used to, that I became used to later. I mention this, not for any sympathy, or even with any insightful inspiration to offer, but rather to highlight that when we miss out on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and even Low/Holy Saturday, it throws the Easter message out of kilter. Let me explain.

If we remove recounting/remembering the events of Holy Week and only celebrate the Sunday services, then we journey straight from the recognition and celebration of Jesus arriving into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday through to the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. And so we skip the heartache and significance of the journey in-between. In Jesus we see his farewell teaching through foot washing and the Last Supper. For governance of the day, it shows how they completely misunderstood the wider mission and ministry of God, and for the disciples, they struggle with the heavenly agenda and sacrifice through Holy Week and some reject Jesus and flee in grief and upset.

(Sometimes even the title of Low Saturday (or Holy Saturday) is overlooked and mislabelled as Easter Saturday, which technically is the one following Easter Sunday.)

All these things are important to the celebration on Easter Sunday, and today, the importance of 'Low Saturday' too. Because it's on this day, following the tragedy of Good Friday, that Mary, Jesus' mother, and the disciples are in despair, in free-fall. From a worldly perspective all feels lost. It's important not to skip these feelings of loss, of confusion, of upset, but instead to meet them in this place, ahead of the celebration. It's in this rollercoaster journey of Holy Week that we see the importance and true celebration of Easter: that when all seems lost, the message of the resurrection is even more exciting. So this year I encourage you not to skip over the events of Holy Week but journey through the highs and lows which will hopefully make the celebration of Easter more special.

Revd Mark Stennett



Holy Week

Hapa-zome

Hapa-zome is the art of making patterns with leaves, a mallet or hammer, and fabric.

Root around and find a white sheet that you don't want to keep. Cut it into some pieces- square shape or even triangles for bunting.

Next, get collecting the leaves and petals or flower-heads to make beautiful designs. (Be careful not to take too many dandelions which the bees will need when they wake up!)

When you've collected all you want, arrange them on your fabric. This could be a mandala shape on a square piece, or a single leaf on the bunting, triangles, whatever takes your fancy!

Lay another piece of fabric on top, then give it a good smash with a mallet (or hammer). Consider carefully the surface you're doing the bashing on...!

The colour and detail from the leaves and petals will print onto the fabric, giving you a beautiful natural artwork.

The events of Holy Week are like these colours splashed across a blank canvas.

There are particularly memorable moments in the days leading to the cross, and of course the moments leading to the crucifixion too which break into our lives as bursts of dramatic colour. While some of these events are sad and even terrifying, let's give thanks for the events of Jesus' life and his crucifixion too. We remember that He was bruised and beaten for us, and from that comes our life.



I will be with you ...

and you will be with me

I wonder what colour you would choose for Easter. Remembering the flowers so many of us decorate crosses with in church, we decided we couldn't narrow Easter down to one colour, any more than we can completely describe or explain God, who said, "I will be with you... and you will be with me."

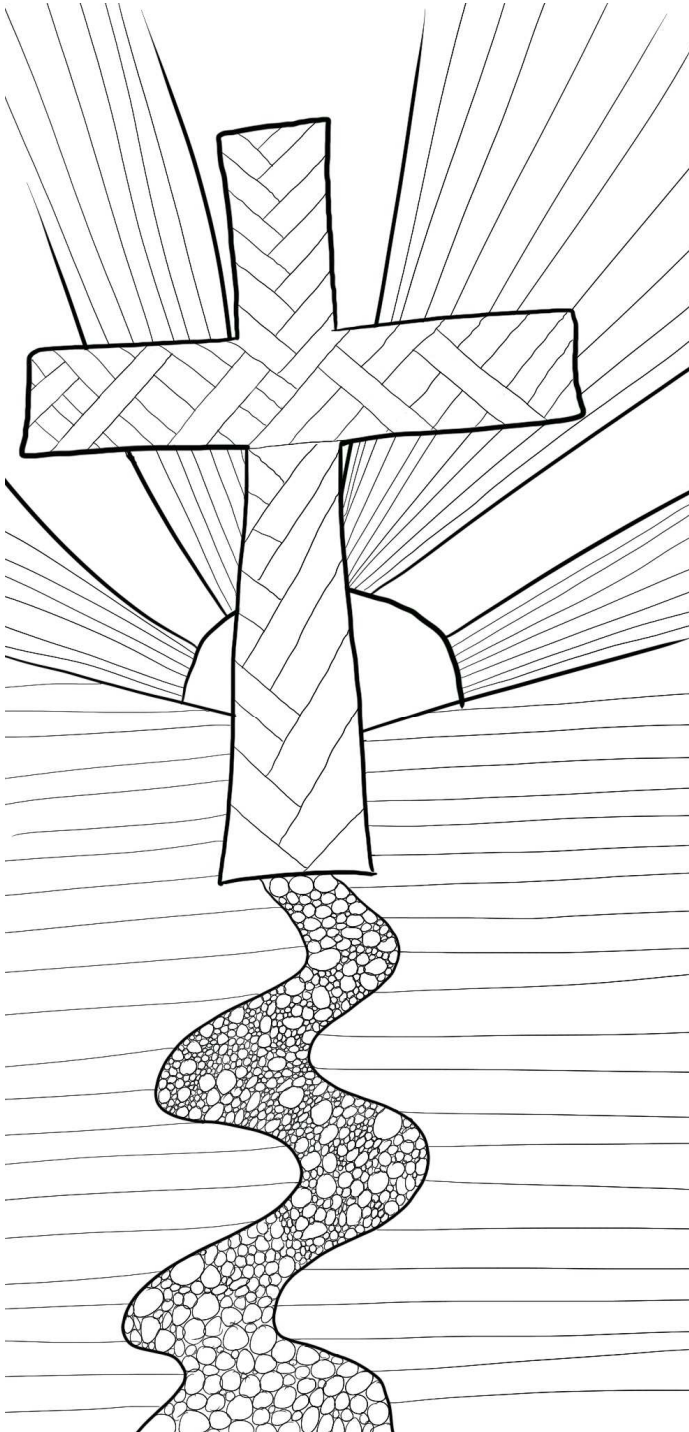
As Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.

(Mark 16:5-6)

May the love of the covenant maker,
be known to us this day.
 May the promise of the new covenant,
be claimed by us today.
 May the assurance of a covenant relationship,
bring hope and peace to our days.
 May the Lord of the new covenant,
bless us richly this day. Amen

Resurrection God, may we celebrate a Saviour alive and a world reborn and renewed.

**May we live as your people of resurrection.
 Amen.**



Up and awake!

On Easter Sunday, there are many Christians who wake up early and perhaps see the sunrise or share breakfast outside. Why not brave an early start (or two!), and as you rise early, think of the wonderful news of Jesus being raised to life. Here are one or two ideas to keep you company in the early hours!

Dropping by the dew

Pop on your wellies and make footprints in the dew left on the ground in the early hours. Before it all evaporates, take your hands and get them wet in the dew. Why not wash your face in it too? Refreshing!

Up for the Sun

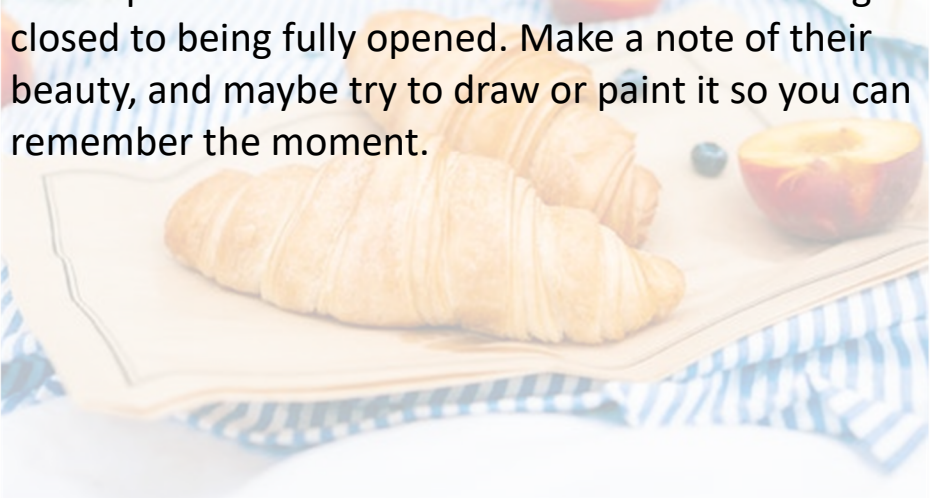
Check out what time the sun will be rising tomorrow morning. Why not take a walk or a drive to a nearby hill to watch the sun coming up. You could pack a little picnic, or take a hot drink with you.

Breakfast in the Open

If you're not used to eating your breakfast outside, or even if you are, give it a try this week. It doesn't need to be warm, just not too rainy! You could make a warm porridge topped with your favourite jam or honey and fruit as a really warming hearty breakfast, or enjoy wandering about your garden with a slice of warm buttered toast perhaps.

Morning All!

If you have a garden or a green space near to you, why not get there just as the sun rises so that you can see the flowers waking up. Enjoy seeing the world come to life as you get started on your day, and give thanks for the creation God has gifted to us. Stop and watch one or two flowers from being closed to being fully opened. Make a note of their beauty, and maybe try to draw or paint it so you can remember the moment.



Starting from the end

‘What we call the beginning is often the end.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from...’

from *Little Gidding* by T.S. Eliot

The purpose of Lent is not to get to the end of the season’s journey, but to help us reach the beginning of the age of Easter. A likely origin of Lent is as a time of preparation for those being baptised at Easter. Baptismal candidates would pray, read scripture and learn Christian doctrine and lifestyle. To be baptised on Easter Day is a deep symbol of the way all Christians are united with Christ. Paul put it like this – ‘we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life’ (Romans 6:4). Today remember your baptism. If you have not yet been baptised, think prayerfully about what that might mean.

I was baptised as a baby aged about six months, and as I get older I have reflected on this fact of my life which has always been a given for me, and valued more and more the knowledge that God has been with me, whether or not it felt like it at the time. I have brought all four of my own children to be baptised as infants at the local church of which we were members – three different places through those years. At the baptism of my first child our minister spoke of the way that as a parent we were now acknowledging that this child was not just ours, but was also a child of God, his heavenly Parent. So far, I have been privileged to baptise many infants and also five adults. Baptism as a new start for someone making their own decision feels different than for a baby, but the effect is the same – we know ourselves to be loved by God, and to be a child of God.

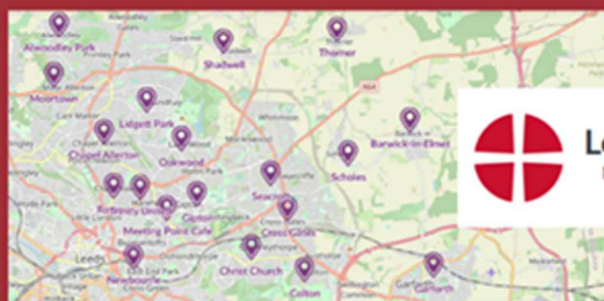
In the Methodist baptism service these words are spoken to the person being baptised, whatever their age. As you celebrate the rising of Jesus from death, hear this word from God for you today:

...for you Jesus Christ came into the world;
for you he lived and showed God's love;
for you he suffered death on the Cross;
for you he triumphed over death,
rising to newness of life;
for you he prays at God's right hand:
 all this for you,
 before you could know anything of it.
In your Baptism,
the word of Scripture is fulfilled:
'We love, because God first loved us.'

Methodist Worship Book, p.67

Rev'd Dr George Bailey





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