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LENT 5C

3rd April 2022

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayers

By some mystery, the Spirit of God is here,
By the grace of God, I am loved and accepted here,
In some unknown, unknowable way,
I am connected with people all around the world who are praying right now.
Open my heart to your Spirit Lord, today.

Amen.¹

Dear God,
Help me to be brave like Esther.

Help me to know who you are calling me to defend,
Protect,
And speak up for.

Give me strength to be bold,
Confident,
And relentless in the face of injustice.

Lord, sometimes I am unsure of what my next step is.

I want to speak but don't have words,
I want to act but don't know how to start.

Please send me people to partner with,
To journey with,
To be stronger together.

God of Wisdom,
Hear my prayer.

Amen.²

You may now wish to say The Lord's Prayer in a version most familiar or comfortable to you.

Hymn:

274 STF – Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice - [YouTube](#)

Reading: John 12:1-8 – [Click for reading](#)

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by All We Can, as part of the *Let Wisdom Speak* Lent resource

Response to the reading

Two stark characterizations from John: the full-blown devotion of Mary and the brooding cynicism of Judas. (On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I think this may perhaps be the same story as that in Luke 7, where the woman is a 'sinner' and the host, and chief grumbler, is a Pharisee called Simon. Writing this on a Thursday, I acknowledge that the host in Matthew's and Mark's parallel to John is called Simon, but I still think Luke is talking about a different occasion.) Lazarus is alive again, and his sisters play out their accustomed roles, Martha serving and Mary at Jesus' feet.

Modern cities fill with noise, ancient ones (in the pre-soap days) with smell; Mary's perfume wafts its welcome fragrance all through the house. Of course it's outrageous, over the top. That's the point. Brothers don't get raised from the dead every day.

But whenever people worship Jesus with everything they've got, there's always someone in the background muttering that there's no such thing as a free jar of ointment. We watch in horror at the disintegration of Judas. First, we assume, his devotion has evaporated, then his loyalty, then his honesty towards others (his thieving), then his honesty towards himself (as in the present passage, where he says one thing, no doubt telling himself he really means it, while in fact meaning another), then, not long afterwards, his ability to choose good over evil altogether.

The downward slope starts gently, but gets steeper. Judas goes on choosing a world which revolves around himself, which then itself deconstructs. Judas symbolizes the way of self-destruction, just as Mary stands for the way of self-giving. Both are costly, but in utterly different ways: 'consumed by either fire or fire'.

Paul went through the process twice over. First, he gave up everything – his pride of birth, upbringing and character – in order to obey the crazy gospel of the crucified Messiah. Then, he discovered that following this Messiah meant a continual self-giving, pouring out his own energy, devotion and life itself at the feet of the one who had 'made him his own'. Jesus validated Mary's devotion by referring to his own approaching death; that same death was woven so deeply into the fabric of Paul's thinking that his life was now dedicated, as he says elsewhere, to filling the world with the fragrance of the gospel.

The contrast of Mary and Judas, the one surprising by depth of devotion, the other by depth of deceit, runs back through Scripture. The creator and redeemer God makes rivers flow in the desert, and paths appear in the sea. The wild animals look on and pay him homage. Israel, the people for whose benefit these mighty acts are done, looks the other way, bored and sulky. Worth taking a minute, at this stage of Lent, to reflect on what smell we're giving off.³

[Pause]

What smell are you giving off?

³ Taken from NT Wright – Twelve Months of Sundays

How are you wrestling with the challenges our churches are facing at the moment? The pandemic, and many other factors, have left many of us in difficult and fragile places - how are we responding to that?

Do you have a 'depth of devotion', like Mary?

Do you sometimes find yourself straying too close to Judas' line of thinking, which is driven by earthly things like survival and greed?

A moment of prayer.

Lord, you know my situation better than I know it myself,

You know each and every part of me, and you are calling me to follow in your way.

Lord, I come to you this day, knowing that I have fallen short of your glory,

That sometimes I have strayed too close to the way of Judas in this story from the Bible.

Help me to see again today the way of Mary, the depth of devotion she had for you.

Show me how to reach those depths again, Lord God.

Amen.

Blessing

Let me go from this place, from this moment, O God

With a renewed commitment to justice, to love, to hope and to grace.

As the season of Lent begins to draw to a close, and we get closer to Holy Week,

I commit myself to live a life inspired by the resurrection again.

Amen.⁴

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week

Monday 4th April

- God of all grace, I am seeking to know more about you, use this day to show me something new. Open my eyes that I might see the wonder of your creation. Open my heart that I might feel the depth of relationship with my brothers and sisters in the world around me. Open my ears that I might hear your still small voice, whispering to me in the quiet moments of today. Open my hands that I might do the work you are calling me to do.
- Show me. Show me. Show me. Amen.

Tuesday 5th April

- Creator God, great shepherd of the sheep, fill me with your hope as I pray. Holy Spirit, give me the strength and courage for this day, fill me with the peace I need, and the joy of being surrounded by your love. Help me to notice where your love is at work in the world, and to get involved where I can. Lord of love, show me what is mine to do today.
Amen.

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Wednesday 6th April

- The International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSDP) is an annual celebration of the power of sport to drive social change, community development and to foster peace and understanding.
- Amongst ongoing conflicts around our world, and ongoing uncertainty about our future, we pray for peace, and we give thanks for all those who are work to bring about development and peace, including those working within the context of sport.

Thursday 7th April

- Prayer can be enriched by a connection to nature – sometimes even a physical connection with nature. If you are someone who regularly gardens or works on the land, then this won't feel strange to you, but if you don't have your own garden or don't regularly spend time in it, it might feel a little odd...
- At some point today, hold some soil in your hand. You might like to go outside and find somewhere where you can sit on or near the floor, or you may get a pot-plant and dig out a handful of the soil.
- Feel the earth between your fingers, let it run through your hands, allow your hands to feel the dirt.
- As you do so, pray this line from the Psalms: 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it'. You might like to repeat the line over and over again.

Friday 8th April

- As the working week ends, take a moment today to offer thanks to God for some sort of blessing you have received, something that you can give thanks for, as a gift.
- You might like to start a gratitude diary, or to write down the things you are grateful for every day. Take time to read them aloud, and to say thank you.

Saturday 9th April

- Holy God, today I am thankful. I come in prayer, recognising and remembering this day that all I have received is grace, all is gift. I have received so much, and so often I take it for granted. Today, I come with a thankful heart, knowing how richly blessed I am, and seeking to offer gratitude.
- You might like to list the things you are grateful for – go on as long as you possibly can!
- Thank you God. Amen.