

5 WEEK LENTEN COURSE

# JOURNEY TO THE CROSS



## INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

I had the opportunity to preach a sermon recently on a passage (Hebrews 5:11-14) in which the Hebrew churches were encouraged to stop eating baby food and feed on something more substantial in order to grow and mature in their faith (which was looking a bit wobbly at the time!).

There is no better season than Lent to heed that advice as we ready ourselves for the celebration of Easter through spiritual disciplines of prayer, repentance, fasting, study of the Word, and giving to those in need. Through opening our minds, softening our hearts and putting ourselves into a right relationship with God, we prepare to receive Christ at Easter with the praise and honour due him, and to enjoy his blessings more fully!

I was inspired to write a course about spiritual journeys by a unique travel guide my husband received from our daughter. It was a carefully considered listing of alternatives to the obvious and often insalubrious motorway service stations in the United Kingdom. It struck me that coming off the beaten track during our journeys, literal or metaphorical, is a wonderful opportunity to not only meet our physical needs for food, water and the like, but to refresh our minds, rest our bodies, and perhaps learn something new.

This fitted perfectly with the time-honoured metaphors of eating and traveling, basic facets of our human life. Jesus himself was an itinerant preacher, moving by boat and on foot in ancient Palestine, regularly sharing meals with others. Our Christian feasts and Scripture are steeped in Jewish history and the culture in which Jesus lived, so our avenues for discovery are limitless.

Included, are some spiritual exercises, stopping points for spiritual reflection, which is a practise of using fresh ways of looking at Scripture and God himself. The course is optimal for a group; however pairs or individuals could enjoy and benefit with small adjustments.

Anyone is welcome to use this course material, and to share it. However, if it is altered or used by anyone without a connection to St. Saviour's Church, Bournemouth please kindly notify the church office at [office@stsaviours.net](mailto:office@stsaviours.net) as this current edition has been produced under the auspices of the vicar, Rev. Andy McPherson.

So, we might think of ourselves as a new kind of adventurer, the 'spiritual food tourist'. We'll make stops along our virtual journey at some places that come with excellent recommendations. So pack light, and let's prepare to break bread together!

Laura Simpkins  
*Discipleship coordinator*  
[discipleship@stsaviours.net](mailto:discipleship@stsaviours.net)

# WEEK 1

Daniel was taken on an unpleasant journey against his will, kidnapped by the Assyrians and taken into exile in Babylon in c.600 BC along with the best and brightest in Jerusalem. He and his contemporary Joseph, in Egypt, dealt with the reality of hunger in different ways to bring glory to their God.

Based on what we already know:

- 1) What was the aim of food laws given to the Jews given in Leviticus, and expanded on by the Pharisees?
- 2) Explain how these apply or don't apply to Christians today.



**READ: DANIEL 1:8-16**

- 3) How would Daniel and his colleagues have defiled themselves if they had eaten King Nebuchadnezzar's food?
- 4) In what ways do we trust in the belief system of the world rather than in God?
- 5) What is the critical difference between a fast and a famine?
- 6) Daniel necessarily stood up against the ruler of the day to show allegiance to his God. Reflecting on the story of Joseph's storehouses (Gen. 41:48-49, 53-57), how did Joseph work within the system of the day to impact on history to God's glory?
- 7) How can we see his economic, social, financial and spiritual values in our world today?
- 8) How can we approach the New Testament challenge, similar to Joseph's task, to be 'in this world but not of it' (1 John 2:15-17)



## INSIGHTS:

Although too many are still suffering food insecurity, there are fewer people in the world starving for physical sustenance than ever before thanks to a broad, concerted global effort. But in Jesus day, real hunger was much more a part of daily life.

Jesus had been ministering to a large crowd for three days. Mark 8:2-3 says that he was very concerned for their hunger. So, in the Miracle of the 4,000 he fed them all.

9) Have you ever felt physical hunger like that of the crowds following Jesus?

10) Aside from physical hunger, what was the greatest concern of Jesus?

11) What was the opportunity Jesus made out of the situation?

12) What was Jesus' frustration in verse 11?

13) Compare Jesus' words to those of the prophecy in Joel 2:12-17

14) How do these last two passages point to repentance?



#### **STRETCH: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE**

Imagine you are one of the crowd listening to Jesus, very hungry and approaching faintness. You are familiar with the stories of heroes of faith Daniel and Joseph.

Explore what it would have sounded like, smelled like, and looked like.

What is drawing you to stay there and listen?

What needs do you have which are more important than physical hunger?

How do you respond to Jesus' provision of food for all the people gathered?

Share these thoughts with God.



#### **CHALLENGE:**

In our part of the world with physical plenty, how do we speak the truth of saving righteousness through Christ so that others can receive it?



*If you are happy to, can you share some of your new discoveries with the group?*

## **INSIGHTS:**



In the week ahead...

#### **REVIEW, READ, PRAY, REFLECT**

Psalm 84; Isaiah 58;  
Philippians 4:12-13

If you have not already taken up a practise of fasting for Lent, consider doing so, or taking something up instead.

(This could include giving to a new cause, taking up new study or prayer time, or serving someone in need).

Ask God to empower you, and to protect you from the enemy as you commit to this.

# WEEK 2

Jesus tells the crowd a parable to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like, which belies the misunderstanding of the Pharisees; the same religious leaders disagreed with Jesus' approach to meeting and teaching people, which he leaves us as a model.

- 1) How does the way you dress reflect your lifestyle and values?
- 2) Has it changed over time? If so, in what ways?



**READ: MATTHEW 22:2-14**

- 3) Why was the king so angry with the guest without wedding clothes?
- 4) In what ways was this parable like the kingdom of heaven (v.2)?
- 5) Who do the wedding guests represent?
- 6) How does St. Paul suggest that we should 'dress' to be prepared for the return of Christ (Hint: Colossians 3:12-14)?
- 7) Do we give enough thought and reverence to the coming event of his return?
- 8) What other thing might we do to prepare ourselves?
- 9) What should we be doing to help unbelievers prepare?



**READ: LUKE 5:29-35**

- 10) What do we know about symposia in the time of Jesus (eg. meals with Levi in Luke 19:1-10, Simon in Luke 7:36-50)?



## INSIGHTS:

- 11) What was the concern of the Pharisees about Jesus attending them?
- 12) Why does Jesus think they are wrong and missing important opportunities?
- 13) What parallels can we see between these two stories?
- 14) Who here is like the wedding guests in our above parable?
- 15) Compare and contrast the symposia to the Last Supper of our Lord and our practise of the Eucharist?



#### **STRETCH: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE**

Imagine Jesus travelling about our area. Where would he go to find people to share the news of the Kingdom with? What would those people be like? How would you engage if you were there too?



#### **CHALLENGE:**

The current pandemic aside, very few people with no faith experience just 'turn up' in church out of the blue. How can we creatively emulate Jesus in meeting people where they are, both literally and figuratively? Think about our setting in the modern tech-based world.



*If you are happy to, can you share some of your new discoveries with the group?*

## **INSIGHTS:**



In the week ahead...

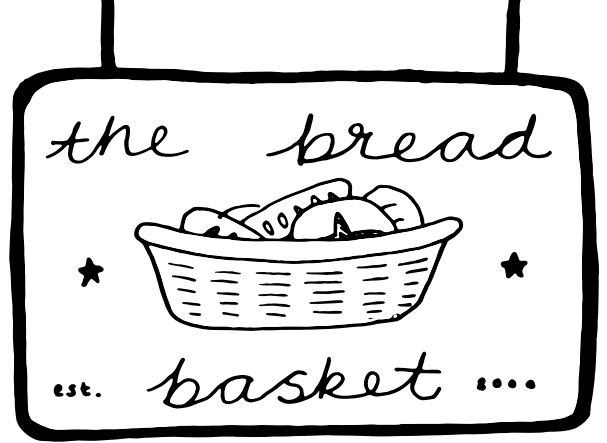
#### **REVIEW, READ, PRAY, REFLECT**

Psalms 138; 1 Corinthians 13:2

When you are out for essential reasons, or are at home, ask God to show you how you can reach out to those who don't know Him 'in small ways with great love' in the words of Mother Theresa.

You might also consider how to use new technology as a means to expand and enrich your personal time with God.

# WEEK 3



As modern Christians, with our needs met at a click of a button, we can become oblivious to the supernatural goodness of God in which He provides the essentials for us to live and thrive. Without Him, we have nothing. Let's think today about giving proper thanks and repenting of our sense of entitlement.



**READ: JOHN 6:26, 31-35, 49-51**

- 1) In vv. 26, 31-35, what were the crowds following Jesus lacking?
- 2) Why was manna so important to the Israelite ancestors in the wilderness?
- 3) Why was manna important to the Jews of Jesus time who were challenging him (v.30)?
- 4) Can you think of how their interest in manna could be seen as a bit ironic (hint: Numbers 11:4-6)?
- 5) In what ways do we sometimes behave ungratefully in response to God's provision?



**READ: MATTHEW 6:9-13**

- 6) What kind of effort went into putting food on the table in Bible times?
- 7) In the Lord's Prayer, what did 'our daily bread' (v.11) mean to the people of Jesus' time?
- 8) What does 'our daily bread' mean to us today?
- 9) What can we learn about God's gift of manna and Jesus' words to the crowds in John 6 about what we really need?
- 10) What happens to our perspective when we forget who the source of all good in our lives is?

## INSIGHTS:



### **STRETCH: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE**

Imagine a banquet, festive event, or even an overflowing fruit bowl. Take in the scene and the sense of joy and pleasure.

Reflecting honestly on God's physical blessings:

Do we feel guilty for accepting his generous gifts? Do we take the more essential, mundane things for granted?

Do we find it difficult to go without or to give to others, even if it's of spiritual value to do so? Reflect prayerfully about money, possessions, food, drink, giving or other areas where God may want to speak.



### **CHALLENGE:**

In what ways is Jesus the Bread of Heaven to you? How might we share with others our experience of his provision during Lent? How can we share the provision itself?



*If you are happy to, can you share some of your new discoveries with the group?*

## **INSIGHTS:**



In the week ahead...

### **REVIEW, READ, PRAY, REFLECT**

Psalms 51, Matthew 6:19-34

In what ways do I need 'more' or 'less' of anything either physically or spiritually?  
Offer these to God.



# WEEK 4



We know that water is in fact more urgent than food for our physical survival. God's gifts include things we need as well as things we enjoy. These passages show us which things are the most important.



## **READ: PSALM 81**

- 1) How does the narrative of this Psalm parallel our modern world situation?
- 2) What do the Israelites have to be grateful for that they have underestimated?



## **READ: EXODUS 17:1-7 AND NUMBERS 20:1-13**

- 3) Do you feel the Israelites had a fair gripe against Moses? Why?
- 4) If you were in their predicament, how do you think you would have reacted?

Imagine you are Moses at Meribah the second time (as recorded in Numbers 20), and God has commended you to speak to the rock.

- 5) What is going through your head when you disobeyed?

Now imagine Moses himself time-travelling to the present.

- 6) If he were the spiritual leader of the Christian church today, what challenges would he face?
- 7) How might he respond?
- 8) In what specific ways might he entreat us to be faithful?

## **INSIGHTS:**

Psalm 81:16 says, "But I would feed you with the finest wheat, with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

9) What are the literal and symbolic meanings of this phrase?

10) How might this shed light on why God provided water from a rock in particular?

11) How might these ideas enhance our understanding of God's provision?



#### **STRETCH: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE**

Reflecting again on Psalm 81, write your own Psalm or poem, or rewrite this one. You might like to use some of the imagery we discussed, for example, to talk about our relationship with God and his provision for us.



#### **CHALLENGE:**

Reflecting again on Psalm 81  
What basis for trusting God do we share with the Israelites?  
Knowing that Christ has fulfilled God's promise for redemption on the cross, how can we actively challenge ourselves to be more faithful than the Israelites during Lent despite real modern day challenges?



*If you are happy to, can you share some of your new discoveries with the group?*

## **INSIGHTS:**



In the week ahead...

#### **REVIEW, READ, PRAY, REFLECT**

Psalms 103 & 143

Reflect on a time when you really needed God's provision (physical or spiritual) and He met that need. Offer Him thanks and praise!

Can you think of a way to remind yourself of it for strength in future situations?  
Practise using that reminder this week.

# WEEK 5

As well as being a reminder of God's faithfulness, today's journey is a touching one on a human level. It also holds many parallels with the journey of Christ to the cross, when he returns to Jerusalem entering in a triumphal parade which led him to his death. Let's keep this in mind as we look at our own faith journeys.



## READ 1: RUTH 1:1-19

- 1) What caused Naomi's life to take the direction it did?
- 2) What was difficult about this journey for Naomi?
- 3) What caused Ruth's life to take the direction it did?
- 4) What was difficult about this journey for Ruth?



## STRETCH: SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

We are now going to spend some time thinking about our own 'life journeys'. Using any combination of words and drawing (such as sketches, a map, or timeline), explore these questions:

- 1) What has the path of my life looked like generally (such as events, landmarks, emotions)?
- 2) Has it been as I might have expected, or quite different?
- 3) What have been high and low points?
- 4) How have I related to God in those times, if at all?

(Use the blank page overleaf for creating 'My life map'.)



## INSIGHTS:





**READ: RUTH 3:1-13, 4:11-17**

- 1) Despite the suffering of these two women, how did God ultimately bless both Naomi and Ruth in their final destination?
- 2) Can you identify how God has blessed you similarly through situations that initially were difficult or unexpected?
- 3) Are there any biases or expectations that have come from your culture or background which have shaped (positively or negatively) your efforts to find God in events in your life? Describe them.
- 4) How did the way God worked through Naomi and Ruth have eternal consequences?
- 5) Might there be ways in which God is using you to make an eternal difference? Take a moment to ask Him to show you more about this.



**CHALLENGE:**

Take a moment to add to your 'life map' to show your new insights from thinking about Ruth chapters 3 and 4.

Are there any lessons to be learned about how to face challenges by trusting more in God's provision? How might these insights shape your Lenten journey?



*If you are happy to, can you share some of your new discoveries with the group?*

**INSIGHTS:**



In the week ahead...

**REVIEW, READ, PRAY, REFLECT**

Psalm 139; Luke 18:31-33

You might like to reflect on Jesus' life journey and consider what it was like for him to know what it was going to be like. Thank him for taking on the enormous task for our sake.

Reflect on where (figuratively and literally) has placed you including, for example; skills, experience, personality, background. What new ways might he want to use you to assist or bless someone in someone their own journey?