

16th – 21st November *Compiled by Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

Monday 16th November

Psalm 1

Luke 18 : 35 -end

Jesus stands still and asks the blind beggar who is crying out for mercy be brought to him. He asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus does not presume to know his wants (and notice it is ‘wants’ not ‘needs’) - Julian of Norwich, a 13th century female mystic, speaks of God treating us all with courtesy and respect. Here we see it demonstrated. Stand or sit still and ponder:

- a) When have you presumed to know someone’s wants and got it badly wrong?
- b) If Jesus asked you “What do you want me to do for you?” what is your reply for today?

Tuesday 17th November

Psalm 15

Luke 19 : 1-10

Grumble, grumble, grumble..... picture the scene: Jesus going off ‘for tea’ with the loathed Zacchaeus. “Why HIM of all people?” Grumble, grumble, grumble. We can only imagine the conversation over tea but it brought a big change to Zacchaeus. Prayer has sometimes been likened to sitting down and having a cup of tea with God. Why don’t you pause and do that either in your imagination or get up and put the kettle on, then sit down with your tea and tell God how it really is for you right now – grumbles included.

Wednesday 18th November

Psalm 150

Luke 19 : 11-28

Hear the force of the instruments in this psalm of praise to God but I doubt there were similar shouts of praise for the nobleman of the parable who returns as King. You may be very familiar with the parable, often called ‘the parable of the talents’ but today notice the context. Jesus tells it very close to Jerusalem, a city to which he was returning to be proclaimed King both as he enters to the city on Palm Sunday and as the crucified ‘King of the Jews’ on Good Friday. Which parts of your life do you want Jesus to be King over, and which parts do you resist, even fear, his Kingship? Don’t get distressed by what you notice.... just lay it all down before the King, then return to the psalm and say the last verse over them three times as a way of offering it all to God.

Thursday 19th November

Psalm 149 : 1-5

Luke 19 : 41-44

It can be embarrassing and distressing if we fail to recognise someone or they fail to recognise us. It is something we are facing more of as we are ‘locked down’ once more, and even when we do see people they are often wearing masks. Pause, picture and pray for one or two of the people you used to see regularly but can’t now. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem which had failed to recognise the things that make for peace. Hindsight is a great thing – but only if we learn from it! Ask God to reveal to you something from your past which will help bring you peace today.

Friday 20th November

Psalm 119 : 65-72

Luke 19 : 45-end

Many of us know that Psalm 119 with its 176 verses is the longest psalm in the Bible, and every one mentions the word of God, His law or His commandments. Contrast this with what Jesus says about the temple and how it has lost its true focus. Have our churches, which remain locked for the majority of the week (leaving aside lockdown) done the same? Are we intent on keeping the building safe at the expense of denying it functioning as a 'house of prayer'? When I visited Gloucester last year, I was surprised and delighted at how many of the suburban churches were open and unattended. The last annual questionnaire from the Archdeacons' to Churchwardens asked what would we need to enable our church to stay open during the day. Pray for St Laurence Church that we may be able to enable it to fulfil its duty to be a house of prayer within the community.

Saturday 21st November

Psalm 144 : 1-9

Luke 20 : 27-40

Verses 3 & 4 of our psalm put our earthly lives into the context of all of history... our days are a mere breath of wind and yet God cares for each of us in our earthly life. The Jewish tradition that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no children, the brother should marry the widow demonstrates God's concern for the vulnerable (widows were often financially bereft) and His desire that human life should continue. Our lives may be very short compared with eternity but each one is precious, and each shapes the future whether or not we have children. And in the resurrection? Our primary relationship is that of being 'children of God' against which our human relationships, vital as they are now, pale into relative insignificance. Look back and give thanks for those who have 'shaped your lives for good' and ponder how you can 'pass on their baton.'

23rd – 28th November *Compiled by Revd Theresa Morton (Assistant Curate)*

Monday 23rd November (Clement, Bishop, Martyr, c100)

Psalm 24 : 1-6

Luke 21 : 1-4

Today's Psalm reminds us that everything comes from God; Luke encourages us to ask: how much of what we have do we give back to God, or use for his glory?

Tuesday 24th November

Psalm 96

Luke 21 : 5-11

In Luke 21:9-11 Jesus speaks of dramatic and unexpected things that will happen before the end times. Over the centuries people have taken wars, famines, plagues – and now Covid – as signs that the end is coming. But Jesus didn't intend this as a list of disasters to tick off a list, rather, he wants his disciples to be prepared for a difficult period of waiting. Perhaps this is a good time to reflect on how we are coping with waiting for these days of Covid restrictions to pass. Are we able to join the Psalmist in offering praises to the Lord in these dark times? Pray about this.

Wednesday 25th November

Psalm 98

Luke 21 : 12-19

Today's readings continue yesterday's theme of praising God whilst patiently coping with all the world throws at us. Re-read Psalm 98 : 7-9 with its imagery of the sea, floods and hills roaring, clapping and singing for joy at the Lord's presence. Why not spend some time looking at a picture you have on the wall, or an old photo, of a landscape, a forest, a beach, or a sunset. How does the beauty in the picture bring you closer to God?

Thursday 26th November

Psalm 100

Luke 21 : 20-28

"Make a joyful noise to the Lord...come into his presence with singing" says the Psalmist. Many of us are missing being able to sing in church. What's your favourite hymn or worship song? Spend a bit of time thinking about what you love about it. Then sing it at the top of your voice as an act of praise to God – you might find it lifts your spirits too!

Friday 27th November

Psalm 84 : 1-6

Luke 21 : 29-33

Luke's Jesus invites us to "look at the fig tree" to better understand what's happening around us. Did you know that the figs we eat aren't really fruits at all; they're actually inverted flowers! They are pollinated by a particular kind of wasp that crawls in through a hole in the bottom. This topsy-turvy-ness might be how we're feeling at the moment; our lives have changed and we can't see things ever being quite the same again. Perhaps Jesus' early disciples had a similar experience, sensing things were changing but not sure when or how. But through it all, God is our dwelling place, and our strength is in him (Psalm 84). You probably don't have any figs, but next time you eat a piece of fruit, or something else sweet, savour the flavour and let it remind you of the sweetness of God's love for you.

Saturday 28th November

Psalm 95 : 1-7

Luke 21 : 34-36

Like Luke's original audience, our patience can wear thin. There are times when our hopes for the kingdom wane, When will Jesus come again? When will everything in the world be made right? Sometimes we may even question whether it's worth being a Christian at all. But to keep going is a life of true discipleship: staying steadfast to the God who is steadfast to us throughout all the difficulties of life. Today, pray for perseverance through the tough times so that you are ready for when the glorious future comes.

30th November – 5th December *Compiled by Fr John Richards*

Monday 30th November (St Andrew the Apostle)

Psalm 19 : 1-6

Matthew 4 : 18-22

What cost discipleship? Today we read of the call of the first disciples which include Andrew. Matthew does not tell us why they follow Jesus. The story is simple. Jesus calls them and they follow him. They do not know where they are going, there are no details of what discipleship will involve. Nothing is promised and nothing is signed. Think about your own calling. How did you become a disciple for Christ? Could you trust Christ as the disciples did, without a clear understanding of their journey or purpose?

Tuesday 1st December

Psalm 72 : 1-4, 18-19

Luke 10 : 21-24

This strange story from Luke's Gospel contains many truths but for me it is essentially about the mystery of the incarnation. St John uses the phrase 'The Word became flesh', but that is difficult. What do you understand it to mean? To put it very simply, if we want to know what God is like, then we need to look at Jesus. As we approach the season of the Incarnation, we do well to think on its meaning and particularly what it means for us and our faith.

Wednesday 2nd December

Psalm 23

Matthew 15 : 29-37

In this passage we glimpse the grace and kindness of Jesus. In these words we can see him relieving every kind of human need. As you read the passage, see how many you can discover. I believe we see here the power and compassion of God going out to meet the needs of every human situation. Have you ever seen this happening in your own life, or in the lives of others. Are we always aware when it is happening?

Thursday 3rd December

Psalm 118 : 18-27

Matthew 7 : 21, 24-27

This passage is about obedience. It's not a word we hear very often and some may find it hard. Only a house whose foundations are firm can withstand the storm. Jesus demands obedience, for only a life whose foundations are sure can stand the test. We need to look at our own foundations and make sure that we are not counted as foolish and that our faith stands firm, whatever challenges we face. Do your foundations in faith feel firm?

Friday 4th December

Psalm 27 : 1-4, 16-17

Matthew 9 : 27-31

These two blind men came to Jesus not really knowing who or what he was. All that Jesus asked was that they were sincere in what they were asking for. He wanted to be sure that their request was genuine and that their sense of need was real. That applies to us. Are there times when our need is not as genuine as it should be? Do we spend time asking for the wrong things? Do we sometimes mistake our needs for our desires?

Saturday 5th December

Psalm 146 : 4-9

Matthew 9 : 35 – 10 : 6-8

Jesus tells another parable that is full of grace but also contains many warnings. It's about being offered a second chance, and finally the threat of the last chance. The second chance is a beautiful thing. The fig tree normally takes three years to reach maturity. If it is not fruiting by that time it is not likely to fruit at all. But this fig tree was given another chance. We sometimes need second chances ourselves, and sometimes we need to give others a second chance! Has this happened in your life?

7th – 12th December *Compiled by Fr David (Associate Priest)*

Monday 7th December

Psalm 85 : 7-end

Luke 5 : 17 - 26

Read the meditation first. Then read the Bible passage.

You have heard that there is an inspiring preacher in town and that he is at the National Arena. You are eager to hear what he has to say, especially as you have heard that he is healing people that others could not help. You get there, it is a busy and everyone is crowded in. Friends are outside and call you to say they have a friend with them who cannot walk but they cannot get in. How do you react? Do you try to get out, do you stay where you are? A little later you see the roof cover being cut away and a body being lowered on a stretcher. What do you feel? You see and hear the preacher tell the man on the stretcher to stand, that his sins are forgiven. The crowds separate as he picks up his stretcher and walks out.

There are some there who challenge the preacher asking how he can forgive sins? Do you stay or leave? Do you think the lame man needed forgiveness for his sins?

Tuesday 8th December

Psalm 96 :1, 10 - end

Matthew 18 : 12 - 14

Read the meditation first. Then read the Bible Passage.

Can you imagine being a sheep? You are on a hillside and as you search for the best grass you wander away from the flock. After a while you decide that the grass must be far better along a narrow path and over the hillside. You are on a mission now and edge along the narrow path until you cannot go any further and cannot go back – it is hard to turn round walking on all fours. You call out but no one comes for what feels like for ever. Eventually the shepherd reaches you, picks you up and carries you back to the flock. What did it feel like to be stuck on the ledge? How did it feel to be rescued? Did the shepherd throw you around roughly or was he gentle and caring? What does this experience teach you about your life of faith?

Wednesday 9th December

Psalm 119 : 103:8 - 13

Matthew 11 : 28 - end

Read the meditation first. Then read the Bible Passage.

Are you weary, do find it hard to stay awake? Are you anxious about being able to pay the mortgage, put food for the family on the table? What are the burdens that are weighing you down? Tell them to Jesus now. Then sit and wait. Do you hear a voice in your head, a voice of wisdom and calm saying “Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” For the next few days each evening take a little time to lay your burdens before Jesus and listen, then listen and listen again. Listening is the most important part of prayer.

Thursday 10th December

Psalm 145 : 1, 8 - 13

Matthew 11 : 11 – 15

Imagine being on a walk to the top of a high hill, a mountain. Imagine the views as the meadows give way to wooded slopes to rock strewn hill tops. When you get to the top look around and imagine all that has taken place in this area since before the days of Jesus.

Think of the violence committed against people of faith. Think how the prophets were imprisoned when they foretold ill tidings against the rulers of the kingdom. Think of those in more modern times who have suffered for their faith. Give thanks for their courage and witness and pray that more faithful prophets will be raised to speak the wisdom of God to the world and not just say what the world wants to hear.

Friday 11th December

Psalm 1

Matthew 11 : 16 - 19

Read the meditation first. Then read the Bible Passage.

To what would you compare the world, Northfield, the street on which you live, the block in which you live? Is it like children in the street or playground calling to each other? What do they call? When someone they know and trust comes along and asks if they would like to play football, tennis, or cricket how do they react? Another person they trust comes along with a computer game. How do they react now? Do they join in with what either person has to offer or do they carry on calling to each other? How do you feel about their reaction? How did you expect them to react?

Saturday 12th December

Psalm 80 : 1 – 4, 18 - 19

Matthew 17 : 10 - 13

Read the meditation first. Then read the Bible Passage.

What do you think will happen before Jesus returns? Could it have happened already? What do you expect will happen before and after Jesus returns? What will the new kingdom be like? Are you ready for this? Many good and holy people have lived on earth and a number have been martyred. Does this mean that Jesus, the one whom we crucified has yet to return? Where might you look for Jesus today? There are those who would say that the kingdom of God is here on earth in how we respond the challenges of life by caring for others, using our knowledge of medicine to cure people. What then do you make of the current crisis? There have been many crises. Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work in the world today?

14th – 19th December *Compiled by Claire Whitmore (Ordinand)*

Monday 14th December

Psalm 25 ; 3-8

Matthew 21 : 23-27

The psalmist today asks God to lead them in truth, so that they can follow God's paths. By comparison, some people are challenging Jesus and questioning his authority. The moods of the two passages stand in contrast to each other – one is angry and combative, the other is calmer and trusts in God. Which mood resonates with how you are feeling today?

Tuesday 15th December

Psalm 34 : 1-6, 21-22

Matthew 21 : 28 - 32

Today's readings make me think about the importance of humility before God. Whilst the psalmist remembers that we are utterly reliant on God, and seeks God in times of trouble, in the reading from Matthew, Jesus reminds us that feeling self-righteous and judging others is not what ushers in the Kingdom of God, but rather following in God's ways, and seeking to walk the life of faith.

Wednesday 16th December

Psalm 85 : 7- 13

Luke 7 : 18b-23

John has sent his disciples to report on Jesus' behaviour – is it really true that he is the Messiah? Jesus points to his actions – healing, raising the dead and proclaiming good news to the poor. The same themes are present in the psalm today: "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." In Jesus, these ideas are embodied, and the Kingdom of God is proclaimed on earth.

Thursday 17th December

Psalm 72 : 1-5, 18-19

Matthew 1 : 1-17

A long genealogy may not be everyone's idea of a gripping read, but today's traces Jesus' adopted genealogy (through Joseph), showing how his ancestry reaches back to Abraham. The psalmist writes about how the sun and moon endure from one generation to another, reminding us that God is faithful to each generation, and the God's plan for humanity spans many hundreds of years. How do you fit in the history of God's saving action?

Friday 18th December

Psalm 72: 1-2, 12-13, 18 - end

Matthew 1 : 18-24

Normally at this time of year we might be singing "O Come O Come Emmanuel", a beautiful advent hymn. We may not be able to sing together this year, but we can still celebrate that God has chosen to be with us. In Jesus, God came to be with us in all the joys and sorrows of life. You might like to pause and look back on the past year, looking for the moments when you most felt God's presence.

Saturday 19th December

Psalm 71 : 3-8

Luke 1 : 2-25

Today we hop from Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus being announced, to Luke's account of the announcement of John the Baptist's coming. I'm struck by how Zechariah laughs at the angel's promise of joy and gladness. As we face a strange Christmas with limitations on how we celebrate and who we celebrate with, perhaps we might also wonder about the possibility of joy and gladness. Yet God who is faithful promises this to us. Perhaps when our faith waivers we need to remember the words of the psalmist "you are my hope, O Lord God, my confidence".

21st – 26th December Compiled by Janice Wones (Reader)

Monday 21st December

Psalm 33 : 1-4, 11-12

Luke 1 : 39-45

Think of mothers, particularly those whose pregnancy was unexpected. Think of teenage mothers, particularly those whose pregnancy was unplanned. Think of older mothers, particularly those who just thought they were going through the menopause.

Consider the gossip they hear. Consider the joy or shame of their pregnancy. Pray for them.

Tuesday 22nd December

Psalm 113

Luke 1 : 46-56

Think of the inequality of the human race. Think of those who have great wealth and power. Think of those who struggle to find enough to feed themselves and their families.

Pray for them.

Consider where you think that you are on that spectrum. Express your gratitude for the blessings that you have.

Wednesday 23rd December

Psalm 25 : 3-9

Luke 1 : 57-66

Think of fathers, particularly new fathers. Consider how they will have to accept the responsibility for this new life, how they will have to alter their way of living to include this new person. Think of those who can not cope and run away or avoid the responsibility in other ways. Pray for them.

Thursday 24th December (Christmas Eve)

Psalm 89 :2, 19-27

Luke 1 : 67-79

This is the time in the year when the nights are longest.

Think of those who are living in darkness - physically, mentally and spiritually. Think of those who are lost in some dark place. Think of those in prison. Think of those who are uneducated. Think of those who have no faith and no hope.

Pray for them.

Friday 25th December (Christmas Day)

Psalm 96

Luke 2 : 1-14, (15-20)

Have you attended or are you going to attend a Christmas service?

Take time sometime today to go outside and experience the world as if as a new born baby for the first time. Look around you and really see. Listen to the sounds around you and really hear. Touch something and really feel it, or experience the cold. Close your eyes and recognise what you can smell. Then go inside and enjoy a mug of coffee or a glass of Bucks Fizz and really taste it.

Thank God for the wonder of being able to experience creation.

Saturday 26th December (Stephen, Deacon, First Martyr)

Psalm 119 : 161-168

Matthew 10 : 17-22

The excitement of yesterday is over. Briefly think of all the problems that are waiting for you. But do not despair. The Holy Spirit is there to support and inspire you.

Give thanks to God, trust and look forward with hope.