

8th – 13th February 2021 *Compiled by Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

Monday 8th February

Psalm 104 : 1 - 2, 6 - 13, 26

Mark 6 : 53 - end

There may not be any crowds in our streets or on the football terraces but there are plenty of them in this section of St Marks Gospel. Since we left it on Saturday, Jesus has fed 5,000 men (women and children in addition), crossed Lake Galilee, walking on the water part of the way, and now having barely moored the boat he is greeted by a great rush of people who wanted to listen to him and be healed by him. Would you like to have been part of this crowd or would you rather approach Jesus with a few friends or on your own? All are important. Which ways are you approaching him at the moment, and do you need to change the balance, even though we can't crowd into church! Take time today, even if alone, remembering that "the earth is full of your creatures" and together we can sing, shout or whisper your praise.

Tuesday 9th February

Psalm 8

Mark 7 : 1 - 13

Hand washing! I noticed one day last month that I am now routinely washing my hands more thoroughly than I had ever done. It has taken about 8 months for this to become 'ingrained behaviour.' Although this reading is about 'ritual handwashing,' good hygiene has enabled many medical advances. Have you noticed, in pre-Covid days, the ritual known as 'lavabo' whereby the presiding priest ritually washes their hands after taking the bread and wine for Holy Communion.

Are there any church rituals you have wondered about and never dared to ask what they mean? It isn't unusual to do them or watch them without understanding them, but let me encourage you to ask. There are plenty I wondered about for years, even after ordination!

Wednesday 10th February

Psalm 104 : 11 - 12, 29 - 32

Mark 7 : 14 - 24

Our psalm reminds us of the gift of water. Take time to notice water today and when and where you use it. Pray for those homes who are defiled by flood water, those who don't have access to sufficient clean water and those who tend our sewage systems.

With the 'stay at home' message still in force for almost everyone, the opportunities to 'indulge' in some of temptations listed in v 21 & 22 are limited but not all! If you are holding onto the guilt of having fallen prey to some of them, picture yourself standing under a waterfall (on a sunny day!) and being washed clean of it by the stream of God's love and mercy.

Thursday 11th February

Psalm 128

Mark 7 : 24 - 30

There's quite a lot to wrestle with in both the psalm and the reading, particularly if you long to have had children and it has never happened or they have never made it into the world or died young. No answers in this meditation but an acknowledgement of the pain; and also the pain of families where children have long-term illnesses or have special needs. I've been imagining with some amusement Jesus trying to sneak into this house in Tyre, without being noticed and without success! Place yourself in the scene as one of

the named participants or as an observer and 'play it out' in your imagination. If you receive new insights, just note them. If you don't immediately you may do later...

Friday 12th February

Psalm 32 : 1 – 8

Mark 7 : 31 - end

The psalm laments, "I held my tongue and my bones wasted away." Today Jesus heals a man who is deaf and not surprisingly has a speech impediment. His friends **beg** Jesus to heal him. They feel his frustration. I wonder what his first words were when 'his tongue was released and he spoke plainly.' (NRSV) Is there anything you need to hold your tongue about at the moment? Is there anything you should speak freely about? Bring it all before God.

Saturday 13th February

Psalm 90 : 1 - 12

Mark 8 : 1 - 10

"The days of our life are three score and ten, or if our strength endures, even four score... teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom."

As I write this the number of deaths from Covid has just exceeded 100,000. How has the last year affected the numbering of your days?

Hear Jesus' compassion on the crowd who have been with him for 3 days and now have nothing to eat. Pray for those who have been on the front line for nearly a year now and are exhausted, those whose financial resources have been utterly eroded, those who want their days to come to an end.

We can't help them all, but we possibly can give the equivalent of 7 loaves and a few small fish amongst 4,000 and leave the rest to God. We can also graciously receive similarly when offers of kindness are proffered.

15th – 20th February *Compiled by Revd Theresa Morton (Assistant Curate)*

Monday 15th February

Psalm 50 : 1, 8, 16 - end

Mark 8 : 11 - 13

Today's Gospel reading is very short, but it weighs heavily. Verse 12 tells us Jesus "sighed deeply in his spirit" at the Pharisees' lack of understanding. Is there anything that makes your spirit sighed deeply at the moment? Perhaps bringing it to God in prayer will help ease the weight of it.

Tuesday 16th February

Psalm 29

Mark 8 : 14 - 21

Mark's Jesus seems to be very frustrated at the disciples' inability to understand the miraculous signs as evidence of God's generosity and goodness, which he contrasts with the pervasive corruption (the 'yeast') of the religious and civic leaders. Today's Psalm reminds us that God's voice is in all things. Perhaps spend some time thinking about how you can hear God's voice speaking into difficult situations.

Wednesday 17th February (Ash Wednesday)

Psalm 51 : 1 - 18

Matthew 6 : 1 - 6, 16 - 21

Today is Ash Wednesday, traditionally a day of prayer and fasting at the beginning of forty days of penitence leading up to Easter. Psalm 51, a prayer for cleansing and pardon, is often read at Ash

Wednesday services. Perhaps read verses 1 -12 again, and offer them to God as your own prayer for forgiveness.

Thursday 18th February

Psalm 1

Luke 9 : 22 - 25

In Luke 9:23, Jesus states that his followers should “take up their cross”. He certainly doesn't expect discipleship to be easy, but the rewards of the Kingdom of God are unimaginably wonderful. What does it mean to you to “take up your cross”? Ask God to support you in being able to do this as a faithful disciple.

Friday 19th February

Psalm 51 : 1 - 5, 17 - 18

Matthew 9 : 14 - 15

Jewish prophets had often referred to Israel as a bride awaiting her bridegroom. That bridegroom, Jesus, is now here, calling for a time of great celebration. But Jesus also warns that he will soon be leaving, causing great sadness. Fortunately, we know the rest of the story; that Jesus is raised from the dead and has left the Holy Spirit to be a continuing presence with us until he comes again. Perhaps today, reflect with thanks on what Jesus went through so that we have the promise of a glorious future with him.

Saturday 20th February

Psalm 86 : 1 - 7

Luke 5 : 27 - 32

Imagine you are planning your ultimate dinner party (with no Covid restrictions!). You can invite anyone you like. Who is on your guest list? Would some of your guests be surprised at who else you'd invited? Jesus used these feasts to share the bountiful love of God with people who were usually excluded from such events - much to the disapproval of the religious leaders. Do you have the courage to invite people who might be seen as not fitting in? Why, or why not?

22nd – 27th February *Compiled by Fr John Richards*

Monday 22nd February

Psalm 19 : 7 - end

Matthew 25 : 1 - 18

At the beginning of Lent we think about making choices. Jesus tells the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. Five were wise and prepared for any eventuality. However, five were foolish and unprepared. Perhaps we need to prepare ourselves to make our journey through Lent and to make the right choices in our daily life and in our discipleship. Let us not waste this precious time but use it wisely so that we are able to face Holy Week and truly celebrate Easter.

Tuesday 23rd February

Psalm 34 : 4 - 6, 21 - 22

Matthew 6 : 7 - 15

Here we have the teaching of Jesus on prayer. One of the choices we must make during this time of Lent is to give more of our time to pray and draw ever closer to God. Sometimes it seems very difficult to pray,

we don't have the right words. But Jesus says that doesn't matter. Keep it simple, follow his example. Say slowly the words of his prayer and repeat them over and over until they really speak to you.

Wednesday 24th February

Psalm 51 : 1 - 5, 17 - 18

Luke 11 : 29 - 32

Just as once long ago Jonah had been God's sign to Nineveh, so now Jesus was God's sign to the Jews, and they failed to recognise him. We recognise God through Jesus, the Bible, the Church and the breaking of bread, and in one another. As we continue our journey through this Lenten season, we need all these things in order that we walk in Christ's footsteps. Do you recognise the signs that God has given to you through your lifetime?

Thursday 25th February

Psalm 138

Matthew 7 : 7 - 12

Some more teaching on prayer. God will always listen and answer our prayers; but he will answer them in his way, and his way will be the way of perfect wisdom and of perfect love. Think of your prayers and what you ask and tell God. Think of the answers to your prayers or the times when you haven't recognised an answer. The important thing is to keep praying. Knock, seek, ask!

Friday 26th February

Psalm 130

Matthew 5 : 20 - 26

This passage contains a lot for us to think about, but most of all it's

about our relationships and the way we treat each other. Anger is one of the most difficult of our emotions to manage. We began this week by thinking about making choices and we are reminded once again to make the right choices in our everyday lives and to control our anger. Anger can destroy relationships and if not checked may become corrosive. Have you experienced anger like that?

Saturday 27th February

Psalm 119 : 1 - 8

Matthew 5 : 43 - end

Here we are at probably the most famous section of the Sermon on the Mount. We know that it describes essential Christianity in action, and even non-Christians recognise the words of Jesus. How are we to live up to these words and reach perfection? It is when we learn to forgive as God forgives and to love as God loves.

1st – 6th March *Compiled by Fr David (Associate Priest)*

Monday 1st March

Psalm 79 : 8 - 9, 12, 14

Luke 6 : 36 - 38

I don't want to cause anyone discomfort in this reflection. Imagine being out for a walk along the river Rea or elsewhere. You take a seat, to reflect. You recall a time when you did or said something that you wish you had not – most of us have done this at some time. How do you feel? Were you forgiven for your error by those concerned? God certainly forgives you. Can you recall a time when you have been treated unjustly? Were you able to forgive the other person for their error? How do you feel about this incident? A stranger sits on another seat, at a socially safe distance. They ask you if you are ok. Do you explain your feelings?

What else does this stranger say to you? After a little time the stranger gets up and leaves. After they have gone you get up. Which way do you walk? Read Luke 6:36-38 again.

Tuesday 2nd March

Psalm 50 : 8, 16 - end

Matthew 23 : 1 - 12

Imagine that you have received an invitation to a banquet. The organisers send a car to collect you. *How do you feel?* The driver takes you the entrance with smartly dressed doormen to greet you saying welcome sir or welcome madame. *How do you feel? Are you comfortable with this?* You walk along the red carpet, you are greeted by the host and escorted to your seat. *How do you feel?* You chat to those you have been seated with. *Do you feel comfortable?* As the meal is served you recognise one of the waiters, someone you know very well. They serve you, politely, without greeting or speaking to you. *How do you feel?* The next day you see this person in the street. What do you say? How do you feel? Do they say to you "I'm not sure how I should greet you - should I kneel or bow?" How do you respond? Read Matt. 23:1-12 again.

Wednesday 3rd March

Psalm 31 : 4 - 5

John 20 : 17 - 28

Imagine that you are out for a walk around a lake, enjoying the scenery. You look at the many shapes of the stones, the branches and the leaves on the trees. You sit down and, as you look at the clouds, you realise that you can see a face in one cloud. A stranger sits, a safe distance away, and asks what you are looking at. You explain but they look puzzled; they cannot see what you see in the clouds. You try to explain what you see but still they do not see what you see. Do you feel frustrated or sad that they cannot see what you see? Do you start to get impatient as you try to explain what you can see? After a while the stranger walks on. Are you disappointed that you could not explain what you saw? Disappointed that the other person could not see what you saw. How do you feel about Thomas and his initial inability to recognise his risen Lord? What must it have been like to see the risen Jesus?

Thursday 4th March

Psalm 1

Luke 16 : 19 - end

Many have died unexpectedly in the last year, before their time. Many are sad and even angry that they were not able to say goodbye to those they loved who have died. This parable is about the need to believe Jesus and stressing how those who do not believe the prophets or Jesus, will believe no one who tells them what awaits them. The rich man is not chastised for challenging Abraham but for failing to recognise the importance of believing God's messengers. Have you lost someone close to you, someone you care for deeply? Remember that it is okay to be angry with God. It is ok to express your pain and hurt but it is important to listen to the words of encouragement and comfort offered by the psalms. Read Psalm 1 and be like a tree planted by a stream of water, nourished by the love of God, yielding fruit that bring healing and encouragement to others and let the love of God prosper. Do not be driven in all directions like chaff, the husk of the barley, that is blown away in the wind.

Friday 5th March

Psalm 105

Matthew 21 : 1 - 16

Can you imagine being in the crowd that welcomed Jesus? Were you carried along by the enthusiasm of the crowd? Did you understand who was being welcomed? This Jesus was not a true Rabbi but people called him that. He was hailed as the saviour of Israel but he rode on a small donkey. It looked comical. Was it right that Jesus threw the tables over in the Temple? Now that all this has taken place what do you think will happen next? Can you imagine this Jesus over-throwing the Roman authorities? Do you fear a reprisal from the Roman authorities? Where would Jesus be today? Would he be in Russia challenging the

governing body, would he be in the USA or this country challenging the government or the established church?

Saturday 6th March

Psalm 103 : 1 - 4, 9 – 12

Luke 15 : 1 - 3, 11 - end

There are many relying on foodbanks for the basic essentials of life. Those needing foodbanks can be people we know and would not imagine are in such need. Can you imagine being in this situation. Imagine that the universal credit has not arrived after 3 months and you have exhausted your savings. You cannot afford to run the car but need to be able to get to job interviews, the children need new shoes. What would you do if you found yourself in this situation? What would you do if you had fallen out with your parents and had not spoken to them for years? What would you say to your parents if you went back to them? Would you ask if they could give you a job, if they could take the children for a few days? Would you start to re-evaluate some of the things you had done in the past? Would you try to heal the division with your parents? Would you consider begging on the streets? What do you wish to say to God our heavenly Father?

8th – 13th March *Compiled by Claire Whitmore (Ordinand)*

Monday 8th March

Psalm 42

Luke 4 : 24 - 30

We might feel a little uncomfortable with this story in the life of Jesus. Rejected and nearly throw of a cliff? Not how we like to think of Jesus being treated! It's not clear quite what happens in verse 30 – does he escape by means of his power? Or does the crowd lose interest? Jesus seems to be able to stay calm and in control even when in danger. What things make you lose your cool and get angry or anxious? Try offering them to Jesus today.

Tuesday 9th March

Psalm 25 : 3 - 10

Matthew 18 : 21 - end

I once read that forgiveness is not about finding excuses or understanding why someone who wronged you behaved the way they did, but rather acknowledging that they were wrong, but choosing to forgive anyway. In this parable we are reminded that we all are called to live a life of forgiveness – or at least to strive to! The psalmist reminds us that we can look to God for help when we struggle with this, or any aspect of following God.

Wednesday 10th March

Psalm 147 : 13 - end

Matthew 5 : 17 - 19

Are you interested in your family history? Or perhaps the history of Northfield? Jesus' words in Matthew today remind me of the importance of the Old Testament – the Scriptures that Jesus knew, followed and loved. They show the history of God's saving work in the world over thousands of years, and have got it all: drama, conflict, prophets and miracles. Most importantly of all, they chart God's loving kindness and faithfulness.

Thursday 11th March

Psalms 95 : 1 - 2, 6 - end

Luke 11 : 14 - 23

In Hannah Arendt's reporting on the war crimes trial of Nazi operative Adolph Eichmann, she coins the term "banality of evil". She writes how, without careful scrutiny of the morality of our behaviour, the actions we are asked to perform by others, people can fall into the trap of doing truly evil things. Today's readings make me glad to have chosen Jesus' side in the battle between good and evil, but also remind me that evil still persists in this world, often in ways that we hardly notice: homelessness, violence, poverty. Are there things you can do to take a stand against these evils?

Friday 12th March

Psalms 81

Mark 12 : 28 - 34

This Gospel reading is an example of what I mentioned on Wednesday! God has been speaking a message of love throughout the centuries, in the Old Testament and the New, and in the world today. How have you heard the whisper of God's love in your life? How do you show that love to others?

Saturday 13th March

Psalms 51

Luke 18 : 9 - 14

This is a funny story! Funny because this is exactly how a Pharisee is unlikely to behave! Pharisees were very concerned with sticking to every rule, often worried about their tiny infractions. So this man isn't a typical Pharisee. The tax-collector is also unusual, since his type were not known for their piety and repentance. As is so often the case, Jesus is catching his audience's attention with outlandish ideas and extreme examples. We may not be as extremely judgemental or as extremely repentant as the characters in this story, but it can still speak to us today.

15th – 20th March

Compiled by Janice Wones (Reader)

Monday 15th March

Psalms 30 : 1 - 5, 8, 11 - end

John 4 : 43 - end

The pagan royal official travelled a day's journey to ask for help from Jesus.

He asked and was rebuffed. He persisted and his request was granted. He had faith, travelled home and was rewarded with the answer to his prayer.

Do you persist in prayer? Are you prepared to make the effort that may be asked of you? Have you the faith to believe that your prayer has been answered?

"You have turned my mourning into dancing."

Tuesday 16th March

Psalms 46 : 1 - 8

John 5 : 1 - 3, 5 - 16

There were five colonnades, one at each side of the double pool and one across the middle, between the two pools. The paralysed man had been there 38 years. His limbs and his hopes had withered. He may have made a living by begging, but he had no one to care for him.

Which part of your life has dried up and withered? Do you really want it to be healed? Can you trust Jesus's word of life? Will you try to sin no more?

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Wednesday 17th March

Psalm 145 : 8 - 18

John 5 : 17 - 30

Jesus claimed to act as God's agent in giving life and pronouncing judgement. He said that he was dependent on God, not equal. Any who hear and believe what he says have life. Any who reject his message have judgement. That judgement will be by a man – one who has lived and experienced all that life can contain. Do you read and hear God's word in what Jesus says? Do you believe it and know that you have life beyond judgement? "The Lord is loving to everyone and his mercy is over all his creatures."

Thursday 18th March

Psalm 106 : 19 - 23

John 5 : 31 - end

The witnesses that Jesus produced as evidence of the truth of his claims were John the Baptist, the signs that God allowed him to perform and the prophecies in the scriptures. The authorities studied the scriptures deeply, but it was mental analysis not with spiritual penetration. Their proud belief that obedience to the Law would give them eternal life meant that their thinking was inflexible.

Do you read the scriptures? Do you think that you know what they mean? Are you open to finding a deeper, spiritual meaning in them?

"They forgot God, their saviour, who had done great things in Egypt."

Friday 19th March (Joseph of Nazareth)

Psalm 89 : 26 - 36

Matthew 1 : 18 - end

Joseph was a righteous man. He followed the Law and the rules. He was a thoughtful man. He considered before he acted. He was a merciful and caring man. He did not want to submit Mary to disgrace. He was a humble man. He was able to change his mind. He did not consider that he was always right. He was an obedient man. He did what God instructed him. He was a self-controlled man. He restrained himself until after Jesus was born.

Can you claim to have any of these virtues?

"His seed shall endure for ever and his throne as the sun before me."

Saturday 20th March

Psalm 7 : 1 - 2, 8 - 10

John 7 : 40 - 52

In the passage that has been skipped, Jesus claimed to be 'the bread of life' and he invited any who were thirsty to 'come to him ... and drink'. Moses had provided bread and water to the people during their desert wanderings. Some of the people thought that he could be the promised Prophet. Some thought he could be the Messiah. The soldiers had their doubts. The authorities knew that he could not be the Messiah and Son of David because he came from Galilee and so they assumed that that was where he had been born. They thought the majority of the people were ignorant and, therefore, cursed.

What is your response to Jesus? Are you so convinced of your own point of view that you dismiss or despise what others tell you about him?

"Establish the righteous; for you test the mind and heart, O righteous God."