



Lowton and Golborne Team Ministry



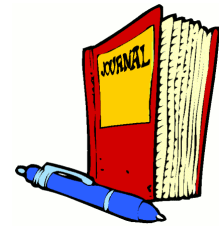
Lent 2021

Prayer Reconciliation, Renewal, Redemption

Once again we find ourselves in lockdown.
Perhaps you are thinking when will it ever end. Perhaps you are finding it very challenging.
Or perhaps you have found interesting ways of getting through it all.

Once again I would like to thank Reverend Trevor for agreeing to email this Lent reflection leaflet out to you all. If you have any comments about the leaflet please send them to me via Trevor.
Also please feel free to send the leaflet to friends. Gail

Before we start I would like to put a challenge out to you all.
To keep a daily journal during Lent – some of you might already keep a journal but this is a specific one. At the end of each day write down, very briefly, three events or three people or a combination which have made you smile, brought you joy or made you happy.
Then spend a few moments and give your thanks to God.



We start on Ash Wednesday and will finish just before Palm Sunday.
The reflections are set out week by week but you might like to stay with one topic longer or skip one completely. There will be a further leaflet to cover Holy Week.

As usual you will find some readings, quotes and prayers – these are only suggestions.



You might find it useful to have a note pad and something to write with, a candle to light as you start each reflection and your bible.

I would like to encourage us to hold the following throughout Lent as part of the reflections.

Have you ever watched The Repair Shop on TV, where craftspeople lovingly and carefully restore artefacts bringing them back to life?

During Advent 2020 I was reading a book written by Chris Wright (with John Stott) called Advent in all Scriptures – Rejoice! Towards the end of the book I read the following words:

Have you seen what amazing things expert restorers can do with oil paintings these days? They can take an oil painting that has become blackened and encrusted with centuries of dust, grease, candle smoke and human carelessness, and, with care and powerful substances, restore it to what it looked like when it left the artist's hands. It can seem like a totally new work of art, and yet in fact it is the original, restored to its intended beauty and glory.

Over Christmas the above words resonated with me.
This is what Jesus came to do for God's people.

Read the words in italics again, not just once more but several times.

Let them rest in you and ponder on them. Now read these words:

Have you seen the amazing things that God can do with people?

How he can take someone, someone who wants to have him in their lives, and wash away their previous existence?

Not with any powerful substances but with love, forgiveness and his grace.

How he can cleanse away the years of spiritual neglect, the human selfishness, the greed of putting self before others and the sinfulness by neglecting our need for God.

This Lent I would like us to hold the words in italics as an encouragement that we too can be restored, renewed, reconciled and redeemed and one way we can do this is by developing our prayer life.

Ash Wednesday

The main overarching theme of these reflections during Lent is about our prayer life and how we can use it to refresh our relationship with God.

From the very beginning God's people communicated with him. They did this in various ways: prayer, sacrifice, covenants, building altars, temples and other places to worship him, and responding to his 'voice' – when angels or his messengers spoke to them. They communicated with him throughout their daily lives – in times of worry when they didn't know what to do next; in times of sorrow when life was treating them badly; they complained to him; but they also communicated in times of joy giving him praise and thanksgiving. You can read about this throughout the bible – there are so many examples. Spend a few moments thinking about how and when you pray....are you like the people mentioned above? Make a list of the various times and reasons why you have prayed to God over the past year. Now possibly a hard question at this moment in time: did you remember to include thanksgiving and praise?

A couple of quotes to think about:

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." Martin Luther
"Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God" Mother Teresa

Reading: St. Matthew 6: 1 - 6 and 16 – 21.

Read these verses, especially verses 5 and 6, through several times and then consider how you pray. Think about when do you pray, why do you pray, how do you pray. Having read these verses carefully is there anything you would like to change in how you pray?

Other readings: I Thessalonians 5:16 – 18: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

St. Luke 11:1 – 13 or continue the St. Matthew reading: 6: 5 – 15.

This reading contains the prayer we call the Lord's Prayer. And it is a model for our prayers.

Spend the rest of the week thinking about this prayer taking each phrase and meditating on it.

For example it starts *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.*

So what does that mean to you, today?

*Thy kingdom come.....*what do you see when you say these words....what does God's kingdom 'look like'?

And then think about these words *thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven:*

Do you really want God's will to be done here, today? If so, how?

What can you do to ensure that it is God's will that is being done in your life and not your own?

Now think about the rest of the prayer.

Now, make a promise to say it every day of Lent slowly and meaning every single phrase.

Prayer:

Gracious God, today begins a period of inner reflection and examination.

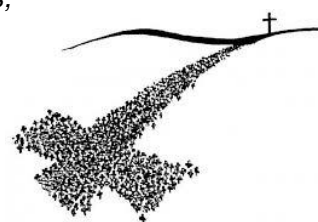
The days stretch before me and invite me inward to that silent, holy space that holds your Spirit.

This special time beckons me to see my life through Christ's eyes and the truth and reality of your love incarnate. Give me the grace to enter the space of these days with anticipation of our meeting.

And, when I open my soul to your presence, let your loving kindness flow over me and seep into the pockets of my heart. I ask this for the sake of your love.

Prayer: The Ash Wednesday Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing that you have made and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may receive from you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen



First Sunday of Lent Finding life hard

Have you been finding life hard recently? So many rules, regulations and guidance to follow. It is sometimes very difficult to know what to do. We can read in the press or see on the television different people telling us what we should or should not be doing.

Readings: One of the gospel readings set for today is that of Jesus's baptism followed by his time in the wilderness when the devil came to try and tempt him into following his ways rather than God's. The reading that is set is found in St. Mark's gospel chapter 1 verses 9 – 15. I must admit I prefer either St. Matthew's version chapter 3 verses 15 – 17 and chapter 4: 1 – 11; or the St Luke's version chapter 3: verses 21 – 23 and chapter 4: 1 – 13.

The reason why I prefer these readings rather than the St. Mark's version is that Jesus explains why he cannot follow the devil's way. He keeps repeating the words found in Scripture.

When we have problems deciding what to do, or who to listen to, what do we do? Think back to a time when you had to make a choice of action, make a note of this. And then read the passage about Jesus facing the temptations of the devil again. Where does he get his strength from?

There are plenty of stories in the bible when God's people turned to him for guidance, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Job just to name a few. You might like to spend some time this week looking into their stories. Why did they turn to him when things got tough and they didn't know what to do? Because they trusted him. God is always faithful to his people....he keeps his word.

Quotes to ponder on:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3: 5

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.
Corrie Ten Boom

One of the prayers of David can be found in Psalm 25: verses 1 & 2 and 4 – 6.

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.....

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

This is a prayer for guidance, David is asking God, whom he trusts, to guide him in the right ways. So that he doesn't listen to those who might lead him astray.

Prayers: you might like to use David's prayer as a way to focus on God. You can also modify the other prayers (below) to make them personal to you.

The Collect for the first Sunday of Lent (the shorter version)

Heavenly Father, your Son battled with the powers of darkness, and grew closer to you in the desert: help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer that we may witness to your saving love in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Most Holy Lord, you were tempted, as we are; be our strength in times of weakness.

When we fall lift us up, when we are in error direct us. In all our wanderings, be our guide; that we may be your faithful people to our life's end. Amen (taken from Traces of Glory – David Adam)

Lord, you do not give up on us, even when we wander; you guide us in your truth, illuminating a path that we can safely follow.

You do not give up on us even though we fail you; you bless us as love, so amazing, pours in and through our hearts in a constant stream of grace.

You do not give up on us; in you alone we trust.

(adapted from a prayer by John Birch in his book The Act of Prayer)



Second Sunday of Lent Repentance and Reconciliation

When it comes to Lent many people who write books for reflection concentrate on repentance and reconciliation. This is only right as Lent is about fasting and spending time improving our relationship with God, even though the bible doesn't actually mention Lent. God's people had times when they fasted as part of their worship of God. I am not going to suggest that you fast or give up anything except that it might be helpful to give up some of your time and spend it in prayer rather than on Facebook or social media sites. I know we need to stay in touch with friends and family, and using these technological sites is a wonderful alternative to meeting people face to face. But don't forget to spend some time with God each and every day....don't leave it to chance...plan it into your day by setting aside a definite time.

So find a quiet place, light a candle, put on some quiet, restful music and sit in silence and review your past few days. Think about the good times and offer these to God.

Now think about those times when you have done something that may have made God sad.... when you have not been your 'best self'. Offer these to God and ask for his forgiveness. God is merciful...his grace when forgiving us is immeasurable.

Now sit a while and think about the following: What does the word sorry mean to you?

In this time of covid lockdown we read stories in the media about celebrities (and others) disobeying the guidance and then saying sorry....do they mean what they say?

Or is just a quick word of apology and then they might go and do the same or similar things again?

Is it enough to just say sorry when we do something that hurts God?

Saying sorry in itself is not enough is it? Or do we need to do something more?

Do we need to look deeply into how we are living our lives and then make changes...changes that will help us to restore our relationship with God?

Thinking back to those things that you have asked forgiveness for think how you can prevent yourself from doing these things again....how you can be your 'best self'.

There is the other side of the forgiveness coin isn't there? As has been said God is merciful, are we merciful when we make judgements about others? During the past few weeks has someone done something that has made you upset and you are feeling that you cannot forgive them?

Again offer these thoughts to God and ask him to help you through this difficult time.

Reading: There are several instances of Jesus teaching about forgiveness in the bible the following are just a couple of examples.

St. Matthew 18: 21-22 *Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?'*

Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

St Luke: 6: 37 *'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;*

Jesus also told the parable of the prodigal son St. Luke 15: 11 – 24.

I must admit I prefer how the NIV bible titles the parable: The Parable of the Lost Son, because the son was lost in so many ways until he returned to his father. We, too, can feel lost when we 'walk away' from our Father in heaven and we only feel found or whole again when we make that journey back to him.

Read it and put yourself in your today's circumstances in to the story.

The other instance that resonates with me is the story in St. John's gospel chapter 8 verses 1 – 11.

Read it, put yourself into the event and listen carefully to what Jesus says to the woman right at the end in verse 11.

Quotes to ponder: *Forgiveness is God's command. Martin Luther*

To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.
C. S. Lewis

Prayers: Collect for the Second of Lent: *Almighty God, you show to those who are in error the light of your truth, that they may return to the way of righteousness: grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion, that they may reject those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

Lord God, we are prone to wander from the path you place us on, eyes easily distracted, listening to a different song and tempted to follow our own ways. We humbly ask your forgiveness to keep us safe from harm.

For in you alone, O Lord do we place our trust.

(adapted from a prayer by John Birch in his book The Act of Prayer)



Third Sunday of Lent Ways of praying – Silence

Something different this week. I would like us to spend time in thinking about how we pray. The first two weeks we spent some time thinking about some of the reasons for prayer. We thought about times when times are hard and things are not easy and we need God's guidance. Then last week we thought about when we need reconciliation with God, when we have needed his forgiveness.

There are all sorts of ways in which we can pray. We can use prepared texts, we can have lists of intercessions, we can light candles, we can join others in prayer (when allowed to); we can sit, kneel or prostrate ourselves, we can sing or chant and we can be silent.

I would like us to think about being quiet and silent before God. To do this we need find a place where we can be silent – away from the busyness of daily life, away from the noise of the TV or radio. Preferably we need to be on our own with no other distractions. This can be hard to do if you live with other people.

In St. Mark's gospel we read about Jesus leaving his disciples to go and pray by himself: St. Mark 1: 35 or chapter 6 verses 45 & 46. St. Luke writes in chapter 6 verse 12: *Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.* So we have a good example to follow – Jesus himself.

Read through the following suggestions a couple of times so that you know what you are going to do: You need to find somewhere where to sit where you feel comfortable. You need to clear your mind of everyday matters – not an easy task but have a go. Write them down. So for a few moments you are going to be still...really still...now tense the muscles in your legs and then relax them...move your feet until they are firm on the floor. Now tense your body....hold everything in....shift your body slightly until it is firm and then relax your muscles gently. Shrug your shoulders and arms and then relax them...move your head gently and then relax and then keep completely still. Don't focus on anything...don't try and clear your mind....just stay still. This will take a few seconds to do.

Now focus on your breathing without moving the rest of your body...start by taking small breaths in...and out...in and out...then lengthen the breaths...deepening them as you concentrate on your breathing...keep all the other parts of your body still

Feel the silence that has built up...just embrace it...take it into your very centre...through the silence listen for God...do not speak to him...just open yourself to God. It doesn't matter if you don't hear him speak to you...just sit in silence before him and offer yourself to him. Whatever you do don't try and fill the silence...it is very tempting to let our minds create thoughts...but if a thought strays into your silence briefly acknowledge it and let it float away you can always come back to it later on. If you find it difficult to stop things coming into your mind spend a few minutes before you start and think about all things that have been troubling you in recent days and offer them to God and then put them to one side.

Start with being silent for a short time and over time build up the silence. Encourage yourself to listen for God's voice speaking to you and after your time of silence reflect on what has come into your mind and make a note of it. It might not feel like prayer as you know it but you have spent time allowing God to speak to you – after all conversation is a two way thing.

Another way to be silent in prayer is to find a picture to help you relax and come into the presence of God – focus on it to help clear your mind of everyday matters and then listen for God's voice. Here are two examples:

Some words to consider from John Birch from his book *The Act of Prayer*:
*Earth joins heaven in declaring your glory, Creator God.
No words are spoken, no song is sung, but in the solitude of the mountaintop
or setting sun their voice can be heard above the murmurs of this world.
Such beauty, such provision, such knowledge dispel the mists of doubts,
until our hearts are joined in the one
who is the source of all and we are drawn to worship.*



Prayers: the Collect for the third Sunday of Lent (the shorter version)
*Eternal God, give us insight to discern your will for us, to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

Something to finish with in these times of using technology to converse with others such as Zoom, Skype, Teams etc. etc. people can use the mute icon when they don't want to hear your voice...whatever you do not 'mute' God!

Fourth Sunday of Lent Thanksgiving

The fourth Sunday of Lent is traditionally Mothering Sunday.....a time when we remember our 'mother churches' and the people who have mothered us.

The following information has been taken from the Church of England web site:

Here are some of the traditions that have shaped Mothering Sunday into the celebration recognised today:

The Journey to the Mother Church: In the 16th century, Mothering Sunday was less about mothers and more about church. Back then, people would make a journey to their 'mother' church once a year.

This might have been their home church, their nearest cathedral or a major parish church in a bigger town.

The service which took place at the 'mother' church symbolised the coming together of families.

This would have represented a significant journey for many.

A day off to visit Mother: Another tradition was to allow those working in the fields on wealthy farms and estates in England to have the day off on the fourth Sunday of Lent to visit their mothers and possibly go to church too. This was a variation on the theme of visiting the 'mother' church and was a move towards a more family focussed occasion. Before the days of cars and roads, family get-togethers were far more rare, (and Face time was still a long way off). In some ways this tradition is still alive today as grown up children often visit their parents on Mothering Sunday.

Today we use this day to say thank you to those who have provided a 'mother's care' for us.

Spend a few moments and think about what you think a 'mother's care' means and then relate it to how God cares for you.

So I would like us to think about a couple of things this week.

One is gratitude – giving God thanks for all that he has done for us.

I know that at this particular time we haven't had much to be thankful for – some of us may have lives which have been severely restricted,

we may have lost loved ones this last year, also some of us may have lost our jobs or been furloughed.

As I said not a lot to be thankful for, but I am sure that amongst the dark times we have found some things which we can be thankful for.

A question now: at the very beginning I asked you to try and keep a journal and at the end of each day write down, very briefly, three events or three people or a combination which have made you smile, brought you joy or made you happy.

Now is the week to look back at your entries and remember what has been helping you through.

I would like you to carry on keeping the journal until the end of Lent and perhaps for several months.

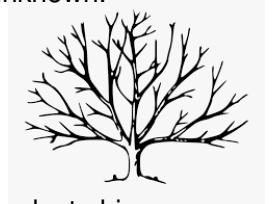
The other area I would like to you think about this week are the people who have helped you on your Christian journey over the years. The people who have nurtured you, cared for you, helped you to learn more about God's love for you, who have possibly held your hand as you took steps into the unknown.

Perhaps you could draw a skeleton tree and write their names on the branches....

putting God in the centre and yourself nearby.

If you are artistic you could draw their faces, or add how they have helped you.

Then draw another tree and put the names of the people whom you have helped to learn more about God's love.



Readings: there are so many verses in the bible about God's people expressing their thanks to him, that I have only picked out a few. See if you can find others that might be more appropriate for you.

Psalms: 107: 1; 7 – 9; 17; 95: 2 – 3;

100:4 *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.*

Jonah 2: 9

1 Chronicles 16: 34 *O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever.*

Colossians 3: 17; Philippians: 4: 6 – 7

Ephesians 5: 19 – 20 *as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Prayers: The Collect for Mothering Sunday (shorter version)

God of love, passionate and strong, tender and careful: watch over us and hold us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

If your name is preached, or in conversation discussed, a seed is sown that may in due course germinate, grow and blossom in the fertile ground of a receptive heart. For those who sow, whether on well-tilled soil or barren ground, and for the lives which now bear fruit from that faithful service, Lord, we give you our grateful thanks. (John Birch from his book The Act of Prayer)

Fifth Sunday of Lent Jesus's prayer for his Disciples

This week, in the lead up to Palm Sunday I would like us to focus on Jesus.

Sit and ponder what you know about Jesus – go through his life from his birth, his baptism, his ministry. Note what you think is important in his teachings – what has meant a lot to you on your spiritual journey. See if you can find out what he taught about prayer – in general and specifically. Also if you have time read what Isaiah had to say about the Messiah – I have included a few of the passages: Isaiah Chapters 7: 14 – 15; 9: 2 – 7; 11: 1 – 9; 42: 1 – 4; 52: from verse 13 to the end of chapter 53.

We are coming closer to Holy Week and the prayer we are going to look at is the one that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane was not a garden as we know it, it was an area where olive trees grew. It was outside the walls of Jerusalem, but you could see the city across the Kidron valley. I have always wondered why Jesus chose this place to go to after sharing the Passover meal with his friends. I was in Israel in November 1999 and we visited the Garden of Gethsemane and I found it a very sombre place. Setting the scene, you may like to read the chapters that come before to see what Jesus was telling his disciples.



Now read the following passage: St. John's gospel chapter 17. It is quite long so once you have read it all the way through you may want to break it up over the week. Remember Jesus prayed this prayer just before he was arrested.

Jesus prays for his disciples: verses 6 – 19. See what Jesus says, to God, about his disciples. Now read it again and see if you can put yourself into the place of one of the disciples. Sit in silence after you read these verses and listen for God's voice speaking to you.

Now read verses 20 – 23 when Jesus prays for the world. Read it again and then sit in silence again and listen to how God is calling you to be messengers of his word, just like the disciples. What can you do to spread the gospel message – in your home, in your church, in your community and in the wider world.

Make a list of all the places and people in world who need your prayers. Plan to set aside a day of the week to pray for specific areas of the world in the coming months. You might like to add this list to your journal.

Quote from Teresa of Avila to ponder on: *Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks out his compassion to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about. Yours are hands with which he is to bless us now.*

Now read from verse 24 to the end of the chapter. Sit and ponder on these words from Jesus.

Read through the whole chapter again and see what phrase stands out for you...make a note of it and perhaps incorporate it into your prayer times.

Prayers: The Collect (short version) for the Fifth Sunday of Lent
*Gracious Father, you gave up your Son out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion, that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

When our lives do not reflect the light that is within, and by word, action or inaction we cause you sorrow, failing to become along our daily walk your voice, our hands or feet, forgive us, gracious God. Revive again the fire once lit within our hearts and grant once more a love that overflows with you. (John Birch from his book The Act of Prayer)