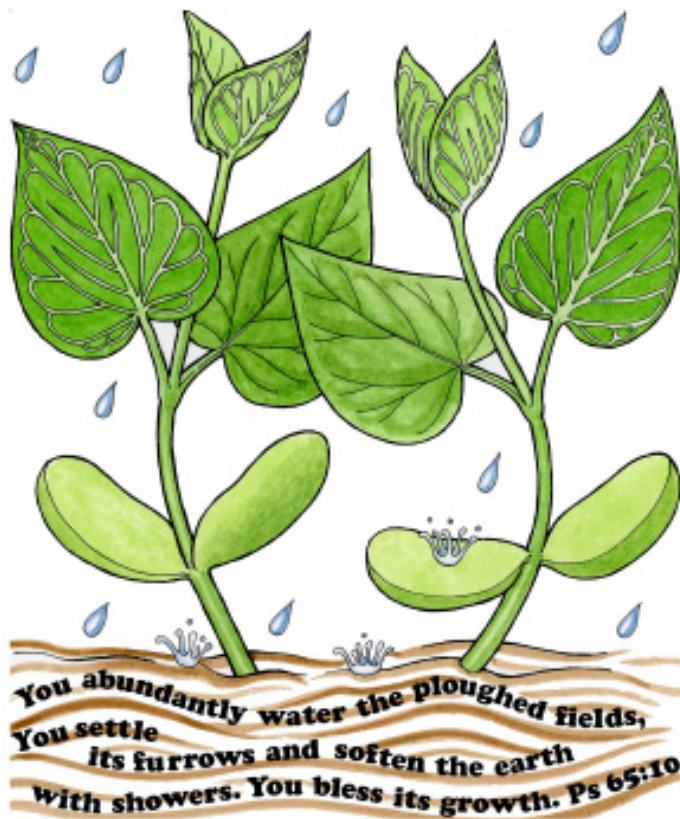


THE MUSTARD SEED

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

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April 2024 50P

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Our Tools or Spiritual Disciplines, Given By God



From April 7th we're looking as a church family at the tools or spiritual disciplines that God has given us to help us grow our relationship with Him and gain greater spiritual strength.

We'll be looking at Richard Foster's teachings, that relate to what the Bible teaches us heavily, about these tools, as well as the teachings of a few others, like Dallas Willard. From the youngest to the eldest among us, we pray that we'll look on these tools or disciplines not as legalistic constraining thing but instead as rich resources to draw near to the Lord.

I'd like to share an excerpt from Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline* to get us all thinking about all of this: -

'In *The Imitation of Christ* Thomas à Kempis says, "The life of a good man must be mighty in virtues, that he should be inwardly what he appears outwardly to others." We need God's life and light to trans-

form our inner spirit so that righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit begin to pervade all we are and think. But such purity of heart does not just fall on our heads. We need to go through a process of sowing to the Spirit, through the exercise of the classical Disciplines of the spiritual life. As Elizabeth O'Connor has said, "no person or group or movement has vigour and power unless it is disciplined." We must take up a consciously chosen course of action that places us before God in such a way that he can work the righteousness of the Kingdom into us.

These Spiritual Disciplines concern both group and individual life. They include both inward and outward experiences. Through **the inward discipline or experience** of meditation we come to hear God's voice and obey his word. Prayer is the life of perpetual communion. Fasting is one means through which we open our spirits to the Kingdom of God and concentrate upon the work of God. Through the spiritual experience of study the mind takes on the order and rhythm of whatever it concentrates upon.

These inward disciplines are joined by **outward disciplines**. Simplicity, the life characterized by singleness of purpose, sets us free from the tyranny of ourselves, the tyranny of other people and the tyranny of material possessions. Solitude invites us to enter the recreating silences and let go of our inner compulsions. Through the liberating discipline of submission we can lay aside the burden of always needing to get our own way. In service we can experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves which in the end bring resurrection and life.

Finally, disciplined living also includes important **corporate experiences**. Confession is that gracious provision of God through which the wounds of sin may be healed. Worship ushers us into the Holy of Holies where we can see the Lord high and lifted up. Through the corporate discipline of guidance we can know in our own experience the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Celebration offers the wonderful, hilarious, exuberant experience of walking and leaping and praising God.

These Disciplines of the spiritual life can be for us a means of **receiving God's grace in a wider sense. This can never replace the most**

important way in which we have received grace – when we were saved by Jesus' blood, but these disciplines, experienced or tools can put us in a place where we can experience inner transformation as a gift'.

As we think about inward, outward and corporate or gathered (when we're altogether on Sundays for example) disciplines, let's remember that they do relate to one another outside of these categories. Remembering this is part of us realising how dynamic that they different tools or disciplines can make our faith in the Lord.

As we journey more into April, and then into May, June and July there is going to be a lot I pray we can have our eyes opened about these amazing disciplines, to make us more and more free in the Lord.

With love and many blessings in Jesus,

Rev'd Gayle



Mark, disciple, apostle, writer of the second gospel

Mark, whose home in Jerusalem became a place of rest for Jesus and His 12 apostles, is considered the traditional author of the second gospel. He is also usually identified as the young man, described in Mark 14:51, who followed Christ after his arrest and then escaped capture by leaving his clothes behind.

Papias, in 130, said that in later years Mark became Peter's interpreter. If so, then this close friendship would have been how Mark gathered so much information about Jesus' life. Peter referred to him affectionately as his 'son'.

Mark was also a companion to Paul on his journeys. When Paul was held captive at Rome, Mark was with him, helping him. Mark's Gospel, most likely written in Italy, perhaps in Rome, is the earliest account we have of the life of Jesus. Mark died about 74 AD.

Early in the 9th century Mark's body was brought to Venice, whose patron he became, and there it has remained to this day. The symbol of Mark as an evangelist is the lion, and is much in evidence in Venice.

The Treasure of Easter!

It's amazing what treasure can be unearthed with metal detectors! In this season of Easter, let's rediscover the greatest unburied treasure of the Resurrection.

The Apostle Peter reminds us that God *'has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.'* (1 Peter 1: 3,4). What does he say about this treasure?

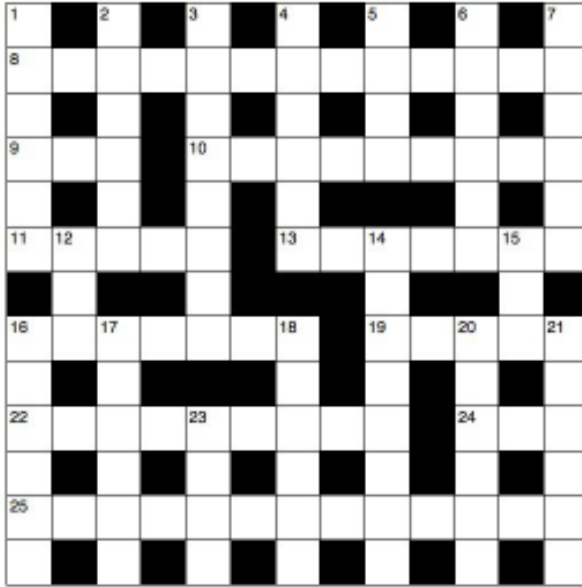
On the one hand, it is the reason for hope. Peter was writing to Christians in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) who faced persecution under the Emperor Nero. In an uncertain world we know that Jesus suffered, but by His resurrection has secured eternal life for us. This inheritance not only guarantees life now, but also for eternity, as it *'is kept in heaven for you'* (4). Do we share this confidence? D.L. Moody, the 19th Century American evangelist, spoke of the time when people would read his obituary: *'Don't believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now'*.

On the other hand, this treasure is a source of joy. This unburied treasure fills us *'with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.'* (8,9). We face all kinds of trials in our lives, but God uses them to refine our faith and character, *'These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.'* (7).

We reflect this treasure by developing the Jesus' character and becoming more holy, obedient and loving.

'Christmas is the promise, and Easter is the proof!'

Of all the things that will surprise us in the Resurrection morning, this I believe, will surprise us most: that we did not love Christ more before we died. - J C Ryle



ACROSS

- 8 'He poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the -' (Isaiah 53:12) (13)
 9 When they had sung a hymn, they went - to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30) (3)
 10 Comes between Galatians and Philipians (9)
 11 'Your heart will - and swell with joy' (Isaiah 60:5) (5)
 13 Muslim holy month (7)
 16 Ten ears (anag.) (7)
 19 Under (poetic abbrev.) (5)
 22 How Abram described himself to God when he complained that his inheritance would pass to a servant (Genesis 15:2) (9)
 24 'Go to the -, you sluggard' (Proverbs 6:6) (3)
 25 Debar from receiving Communion (13)

DOWN

- 1 My - for His Highest (Oswald Chambers' best-known book) (6)
 2 Festival of the resurrection (6)

- 3 'His sons will prepare for war and - a great army' (Daniel 11:10) (8)
 4 'Let not the string his bow' (Jeremiah 51:3) (6)
 5 Name of the River Thames in and around Oxford (4)
 6 'From then on Judas watched for an opportunity - - him over' (Matthew 26:16) (2,4)
 7 'But Christ is faithful - - - over God's house' (Hebrews 3:6) (2,1,3)
 12 Long-handled implement used to till the soil (Isaiah 7:25) (3)
 14 Order to which monks and nuns devote themselves (8)
 15 Appropriate (Proverbs 15:23) (3)
 16 I, uncle (anag.) (6)
 17 'They gave him - - of broiled fish' (Luke 24:42) (1,5)
 18 'Weren't there three men that we - - and threw into the fire?' (Daniel 3:24) (4,2)
 20 Mountain where Noah's ark came to rest (Genesis 8:4) (6)
 21 'Don't you know that friendship with the world is - towards God?' (James 4:4) (6)
 23 Prominent architectural feature of large cathedrals such as St Paul's (4)

Historically, the Church of England has had its share of eccentric clergy. Even nowadays, hiding away in remote parishes, there are still some colourful clergy about. Clergy such as the elderly, Anglo-Catholic Uncle Eustace, who is incumbent in the small parish of St James-the-Least-of All, somewhere in Very Rural England. Eustace despairs of his nephew, Darren, who has become an Evangelical curate in a busy urban parish... and so he writes letters, to try and properly 'educate' Darren in parish life.

On why a church should always resist change

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

I am not the least surprised you have got yourself into trouble; innovation is never to be encouraged. New ideas tend to cause revolutions. The move from incandescent lightbulbs to energy saving ones may ultimately change the Church of England.

Change is something everyone claims to be in favour of – provided it has no measurable effect on their own lives. I remember as a young curate once suggesting that at the Harvest Supper, tables might be enlarged so that eight people could sit together rather than the traditional six, thus helping more people get to know one another. The response would have been similar if I had suggested we travel to London to murder the Prime Minister. I was firmly told that tables for six had been perfectly adequate for parishioners in Queen Victoria's day. For the rest of my curacy, I was regarded as a revolutionary, to be watched carefully.

So, at your last visit to our church, to suggest that our 11am Mattins

might be moved to 10.30am, in order to encourage those who wanted to have more of the day free to themselves, certainly lobbed a hand grenade among the post-Service coffee cups. The only person who was mildly in favour was Colonel Wainwright, who quickly realised that it would give him an extra half-hour at the gin and tonics before lunch.

Should you ever feel that people lack imagination, you should watch them in action when they find reasons for resisting an unwelcome suggestion. One said that the time couldn't be moved, since it would then be too early for the local bus – omitting to mention that none of our congregation travel to church by bus and that the service doesn't run on Sundays anyway. Another pointed out that it would confuse those who didn't attend church – not explaining why if they never attended, it mattered what time the Service was. A third, rather touchingly mentioned that it wouldn't give the rector time to enjoy his breakfast after the rigours of the 8am Service.

Your suggestion did, however, serve one useful purpose; it brought our congregation together in united opposition. They may not necessarily always know what they are for, but they certainly know what they are against. For that, I thank you.

Your loving uncle

Eustace

Always remember . . .

There are no strangers in our church –
just friends you haven't met yet.

Readings for April

The readings are the ones we will use in church and online.

7th April 2024 – Morning Service -
2 Timothy 1 v 1–7

7th April 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 133 & John 20 v 19–end

14th April 2024 – Morning Service -
Galatians 5 v 13–26 & Luke 15 v 11–27

14th April 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 4 & Luke 24 v 36–48

21st April 2024 – Morning Service -
Psalm 145 & Matthew 4 v 1–11

21st April 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 23 & 1 John 3 v 16–end

28th April 2024 – Morning Service -
1 Peter 4 v 1–11 & Luke 10 v 25–37

28th April 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 22 v 25–end & John 15 v 1–8

The probability of life originating by accident is comparable to the probability of the complete Oxford dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing factory. - Edwin Conklin

The Easter Glow

For three years Jesus had held the tiny band together, through journeyings, storms and opposition. And now – following a public trial and execution – He was gone.

Take away the dominant figure, and an organisation can quickly crumble. Take Theudas, an earlier messianic claimant. Once killed, his 400 devotees melted away. Then there was Judas the Galilean. When he, too, was removed, the movement scattered.

Now, it was Easter Day. Here were two disciples walking to Emmaus. As far as they were concerned, their leader was dead. The ‘scattering’ process had already begun. It had started on that fateful Thursday evening of Christ’s arrest, when Jesus had quoted to His disciples from the prophet Zechariah: “It is written ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Matthew 26:31).

The dream was over. “Let’s go home - back to Emmaus.” Yet *Luke 24 is the glowing account of the entire re-building of a worldview*. As the apparent Stranger joins the two, it was like the uncorking of a bottle; the story pours out. Surely *crucifixion and the future Redeemer of Israel had nothing to do with each other!*

Then began a fascinating Bible study on the road. Evidently in their studies, the two had skipped the passages that spoke of a suffering Messiah. The Stranger says, “Let me fill in those bits for you.” Now the figures of a Conquering King and a Suffering Servant begin to coalesce into a single photo fit. Then, at supper with the two, comes the familiar action of the breaking of bread, and – **Why.... it’s Jesus.**

The disciples rush the seven miles back to Jerusalem. They can’t keep the glowing news of the risen Christ to themselves!

If Jesus had not been bodily raised from the grave, the demoralised movement – like those of Theudas and Judas the Galilean – would have folded within days. And you and I would never have heard of Him!

Every day is a gift; that’s why they call it the present. - Anon

Don't be afraid of clouds

Have you ever sat and watched the clouds drift by? Some of them are vast, towering up and up into the sky.

There can be clouds of discouragement and suffering in our lives as well, circumstances that temporarily blot out the sunlight of God's love for us. You may have such a cloud hanging over your life right now. You may be in a hospital bed, or suffering discouragement, fear, despair or bereavement.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes, when you board a plane, the sky is like a thick grey ceiling? It looks impenetrable. But the plane does not hesitate - it climbs steadily onward and upward straight into the cloud. And what happens? Nothing! The cloud cannot block your progress, it must give way before you.

The simple truth is, you may not be able to see through clouds, but *you can go through them*. The plane uses navigational aids for guidance, and we have the Holy Spirit to guide us through the darkest times. And finally, we emerge through the cloudbank, and there before us is a sun-drenched sky of blue and golden glory, far above the dismal and disappointing things far below.

Whatever cloud is hanging over you at present, whether suffering, discouragement, fear, there IS something you can do about it NOW. Pray – pour out your heart to the Lord about it. He has promised that His grace will be sufficient for anything that we encounter in this life.

And – look up. Look towards heaven, *think beyond* those clouds, and remember His promise that the sufferings we may be undergoing *here* are nothing compared to the glory that God has prepared for us there.

The Bible assures us: *'The Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man that trusts in you.'* Psalm 84: 11-12

Do not believe in miracles...rely on them.- Anon

Prayers & Poems

The God who answers prayer

There is a God who answers prayer
Who intercedes before the throne,
The Son of God who ever cares,
Do not believe you walk alone.

When life seems hard, no answers come
He knows the path that you now tread
Believe on Him though all seems lost
He knows about the tears you shed.

Hold on to Him who is your strength,
Although it seems there's no way through,
Though pain and heartache both are near,
Who holds the world holds also you.

There is a day when all is clear
A day when we all understand
That all our lives but marked a way
That led us to the Promised Land.

By Megan Carter

Prayer for April 2024 *based on John 20: 19-end*

Almighty Father, In these weeks after Easter, help us to receive afresh the new life Jesus' resurrection makes possible. Lord, come to us. Walk through the locked doors of our fears. Bring us your peace. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Send us onto our daily front lines to share your resurrection peace and hope and love with those who are lost and lonely. Thank you for meeting us in Jesus, our Lord and our God. We are your Easter people. Hallelujah. Amen.

By Daphne Kitching

Places of Welcome

Place of Welcome is an open invitation to come and join us for a cup of tea or coffee and a friendly chat every Tuesday morning. You are equally welcome if you just want to spend a few moments of quiet in church alone.

We also have our Knit & Natter group at the same time – 10-12 noon every Tuesday.

Life Groups

There are now five Life Groups which are meeting on a regular basis. It would be good to think we could increase the number meeting, so if you would like to be involved, please speak to Revd Gayle in the first instance.

Telephone Prayer

If you would like any prayer ministry via the telephone, please contact Gayle on 07545 657 636, or Liz Corbett on 01543 370162.

Magazine Articles

If, in your reading, you find an article that you think bears repeating in the parish magazine, please let us know and we will try our best to include it in a future issue.

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