

THE MUSTARD SEED

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

A Family Following Jesus

www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk



March 2024 50P

*Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share
God's love with words and actions*



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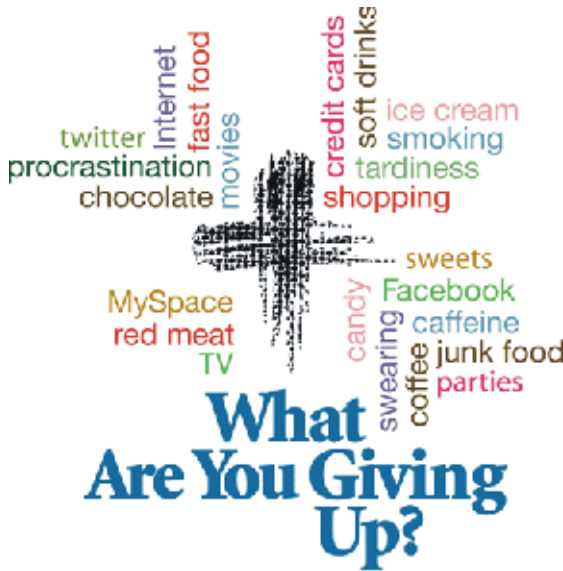
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Living Generously Through Lent & Beyond!?



When it comes to Lent and Christmas, we often see advertisements like 'a dog is for life, not just for Christmas' – and when I think about Lent, I often think: 'deep prayer and examining our hearts and lives before the Lord isn't just for Lent, it's for all year round!' Nevertheless, Lent gives us a special opportunity to assess what's happening in our hearts and lives. This is because during Lent we can take special time out to be mindful of the suffering and sacrifices of Jesus for our sake and for the sake of the world.

As a church family we've moved on now from considering being stewards of God's beautiful creation (although we'll be keeping our attention on that in various ways going forward). Now we're looking on Sundays and in our Life Groups at being the stewards of our personal and material resources who God calls us to be. We're looking at that topic because Jesus talked and taught a great deal about money and the issues related to it.

Although money can be a sensitive topic, as we read Jesus's words in the Gospels we understand more about how important our attitude towards money and generosity is to our discipleship. To be increasingly Jesus-Shaped people we're to embrace His message to us that we cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6: 24).

Traditionally, the season of Lent is a time of internal examination as we journey through the forty days, in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Historically many Christians used this time for fasting, following the example of Jesus who fasted for forty days in the wilderness. Today, some choose to use the season to commit to a Lenten discipline - giving something up or taking something up - as a tool to reflect on how we can become more like Jesus and grow to become the people who God has created us to be.

With generosity in mind, I'd like to share with you some ideas of things you could have a go at to increase your awareness and practice of being generous during this Lenten season: -

1. Take up the 40acts challenge (<https://40acts.org.uk/>)

40acts, created by Stewardship, presents a different challenge each day to practice generosity in your life. This is a really creative way of doing Lent differently.

2. Donate something every day.

Find a charity or a selection of charities which you can donate to each day throughout Lent. You could include giving supplies to a local Food Bank, or put aside clothes and toys to donate to a charity shop.

3. Commit to praying for your community.

You could commit to giving thanks for the generosity of your com-

munity each day in Lent, reflecting on the gifts of money, time, hospitality and other means. You could also prayerfully discern where God is calling you and your church to use these gifts.

4. Sign up to volunteer.

Commit to giving your time to volunteering with a charity. This could be done in person at our Lamp Foodbank for example. This could also be done virtually, and there are plenty of opportunities for this, such as the Crisis Text Hotline, Help from Home and Help a Hero.

5. Set aside money for mission.

In addition to any regular planned giving, you could set aside an additional gift amount each week, in order to resource the mission of St James' or another charity. You might want to have a particular ministry in mind for this, or generally to bring glory to God in a watching world.

6. Practice gratitude.

Giving springs from the attitude of a grateful heart. Gratitude is a spiritual discipline rooted in the belief that everything good that happens around us is given from God out of love for us. Our giving is an expression of gratitude. Commit to giving thanks each day, either by sending a message to someone or by making a note of three things you are grateful for each day.

I pray that these ideas give each of us inspiration for these coming weeks that lead up to Easter, and that we'll take to heart the truth that living generously brings us so much freedom.

With every blessing in Jesus, who gave Himself up for us on the Cross,

Rev'd Gayle



Looking for the Resurrection

An old couple are driving down the motorway when the wife gets a call from their daughter. *'Mum, there's a car driving the wrong way down the motorway!'* The wife warns her husband that there is a lunatic on the motorway. Her husband, clutching the wheel in terror, replies: *'One lunatic? There are dozens of them, all headed straight for us!'* What we see is determined by our perspective on life.

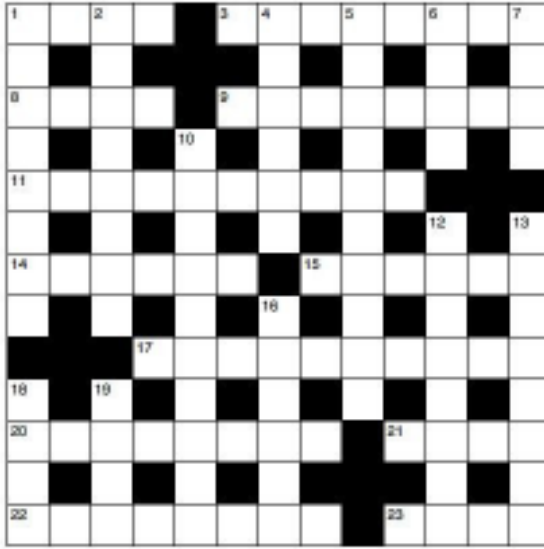
In the Nicene Creed we say: *'We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.'* In the gospel accounts of the Resurrection, there is a lot of looking and seeing. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome went early to the tomb. They saw the stone rolled aside and inside the tomb a young man dressed in white said to them: *'Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him...He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see Him'* (Mark 16: 6,7).

Like the women we would probably have been left *'trembling and bewildered'* by what we saw that morning. Had the body been taken? Was the young man an angel or deceiver? Was Jesus raised to life again, or was this an elaborate hoax?

Easter gives us a choice. We can approach life looking for disappointment, fear and despair. Or we can look for resurrection and find not just an empty tomb, but encounter the living Christ. He continues to meet us in our daily lives bringing new hope, forgiveness of sin, healing and wholeness and the assurance of His presence through the darkest of times. God invites us to see our lives differently and look for Christ's resurrection life at work in our lives and the people around us.

The world cannot bury Christ. The earth is not deep enough for His tomb, the clouds are not wide enough for his winding-sheet. - E Thomson

March



Crossword

Across

- 1 Made from the fruit of the vine, symbol of the blood of Christ (4)
- 3 'You are to set an ambush behind the city. Don't go very far from it. All of you be on __' (Joshua 8:4) (3,5)
- 8 Seep (4)
- 9 Celebrated by Jesus on the night of his betrayal (Luke 22:15) (8)
- 11 One of the supposed sites of Christ's burial place in Jerusalem (6,4)
- 14 'A city on a hill – be hidden' (Matthew 5:14) (6)
- 15 He inherited Elijah's mantle (2 Kings 2:12-13) (6)
- 17 Where Jesus prayed 'Not as I will, but as you will' (Matthew 26:36, 39) (10)
- 20 'Only in his home town and in his -- is a prophet without honour' (Matthew 13:57) (3,5)
- 21 Sail (anag.) (4)
- 22 How Jesus was punished before his crucifixion (Matthew 27:26) (8)
- 23 Eye sore (4)

Down

- 1 Can't grow (anag.) (5,3)
- 2 A servant girl to Peter, 'You also were with that – Jesus' (Mark 14:67) (8)
- 4 Well-being (Proverbs 3:8) (6)
- 5 Pentecostal denomination, – of God (10)
- 6 One of the 'obvious' acts of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:19, 21) (4)
- 7 'I preached that they should repent and – to God' (Acts 26:20) (4)
- 10 '– – , the world will not see me any more, but you will see me' (John 14:19) (6,4)
- 12 He betrayed Jesus: Judas – (Luke 6:16) (8)
- 13 Jesus to Peter: '– – of my sheep' (John 21:16) (4,4)
- 16 The centurion said, 'Surely this man was – – of God' (Mark 15:39) (3,3)
- 18 Baked bread (Mark 8:14) (4)
- 19 'Blessing and honour, glory and power, be – Him' (Handel's Messiah) (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 pews SHOULD be uncomfortable

The Rectory
St. James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

Visits from your parishioners to our church are always welcome. But I did not expect them to return to you complaining because our pews are uncomfortable.

Pews are meant to be uncomfortable. The unshakeable belief of our congregation is that the more uncomfortable the pew, the holier the worship must be. By the same token, an 8am Service is more fervent than one at 11am, since it is much more socially inconvenient. If you add on enduring sub-zero temperatures and damp, then sainthood clearly beckons. Your people may be used to lolling in upholstered chairs in tropical temperatures, but I am sure such comfort places their souls in grave peril.

Our pews were built 500 years ago, when people were several inches shorter and many pounds lighter, and so could accommodate themselves on them perfectly adequately. The fact that a twenty-first century body is in constant danger of sliding off the seat and requires knees to be folded

somewhere near ears at least helps to keep minds focussed – apart from Colonel Wainwright, who still manages to sleep peacefully throughout Mattins every Sunday.

I could point out that your chairs make kneeling almost impossible – although I suspect that posture is not encouraged in your church, as people would then be unable to read the words on your overhead projector or wave their arms about quite as easily during the hymns. While the majority of our congregation find the Anglican crouch perfectly adequate, you can see those who flop to their knees on hearing “let us pray” from the clouds of dust sent up from suddenly compressed hassocks, which were purchased to commemorate Queen Victoria’s Accession.

I may also point out that our box pews are very useful for modern times. Once a family is seated, with the door firmly shut, then any toddler is penned in and unable to use the aisles as a racing circuit. Medieval carpenters were clearly forward-thinking people. Admittedly, box pew doors do tend to stick, and few manage to look dignified while they wait for step ladders to be brought before they can climb out.

If only you would remove your chairs and substitute benches without backs, turn off all heating and replace carpets with slate slabs, I am sure your congregation’s religious zeal would soar.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

Always remember . . .

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

Readings for March

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

3rd March 2024 – Morning Service -
Luke 19 v 1–10

3rd March 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 19 & John 2 v 13–22

10th March 2024 – Morning Service -
Psalm 34 v 11–20 & Luke 2 v 33–35

10th March 2024 – Evening Service -
Numbers 21 v 4–9 & Ephesians 2 v 1–10

17th March 2024 – Morning Service -
Jeremiah 31 v 31–34 & Luke 19 v 1–10

17th March 2024 – Evening Service -
Psalm 73 & John 11 v 17–26

24th March 2024 – Morning Service -
Malachi 3 v 1–12 & Luke 21 v 1–4

24th March 2024 – Evening Service -
Mark 14 v 1–9 & Philippians 2 v 5–11

*Treasures in heaven are laid up only as treasures
on earth are laid down- Anon*

Why we should be like donkeys

Are you a pet-lover? Many people own a dog, a cat or a budgie, but most of us don't own a donkey! Yet in Bible times, donkeys were essential to daily life. They did everything from helping to grind corn, to ploughing, to carrying people, to transporting their belongings. Despite their small frame, donkeys are surprisingly tough. They can survive on poor fodder, can travel an average of 20 miles a day.

There are two occasions in the Christian calendar where donkeys walk into the picture. At Christmas, Mary travelled the 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem on a donkey. And although a donkey doesn't get a specific mention in the manger story, that same one that transported her was probably there; where else would it have been?

On Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus deliberately chose this animal rather than a horse. Why? In Bible times, the horse was associated with war, conquest and worldly might. But the donkey was a symbol of peace and humility. So, Jesus used this animal to show that He had come with the dignity of the king of peace. His entry into the Holy City also fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy concerning the Messiah.

Donkeys are hardworking and undemanding. They wait for their master to put them to the work He has chosen for them. And, remarkably, each one bears the mark of the Cross on their backs!

Perhaps that is something we should learn – to wait for Jesus our Master, to be always obedient to Him, to serve Him with all our hearts, and to bear the mark of His grace in our lives.

The shortest distance between a problem and its solution is the distance between your knees and the floor. - Anon

Why saying hello is important

What lessons can Christians learn from a London rail worker who was recently honoured by King Charles, for talking 29 people out of taking their own lives?

Maybe something about the power of conversation and being willing to 'stop for a chat.'

Rizwan Javed helped to save each life over a period of eight years, by being alert and approaching vulnerable individuals in difficult situations. He was awarded an MBE in the New Year Honours earlier this year.

Rizwan was alert, and willing to engage people in conversation.

Anglican priest Jemima Prasadam's style of talking with people has been described as 'bus stop theology.' She put it into action on the half-mile walk from her home to the church in Lozells, an inner-city area of West Birmingham, with high unemployment and poverty.

Her engaging approach is featured in *Stick with Love*, a recent book by Arun Arora, Bishop of Kirkstall in northern England.

She explained: "I don't go out looking to talk to people, but I am ready to do it. I don't pass anybody without saying 'Hello' and when I leave, I always say 'God bless you.' Meetings happen on a daily basis, but often only last as long as it takes for the bus to arrive.

"People often say they are not religious, but I say we are all spiritual beings, and they agree. So, I simply tell them that weak and simple people like me call that God."

Sadly, we are living in a society where conversations are being closed down. People who might have chatted on the bus or train, are now deeply involved with their mobile phones.

Supermarkets are phasing out staffed checkout points, so that elderly people and others who live alone are deprived of those conversations that can make a difference to their day.

Jesus asked questions as a vital component of His earthly ministry. His deep conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 begins with Him asking for a drink.

Maybe we, as Christians and churches, need to be looking out for more chances to start conversations, to give people the opportunity to open up about their lives. In our busy, rushing-around world, there are many people out there who are just longing for a chat...

Prayers & Poems

The Crossroad

The road was hard, no turning back,
The way ordained by mighty God.
'Your will, not mine' was all He said,
As humbly down that path He trod.

The crowd that cheered Him once with palms
Began to shout for Him to die,
They chose Barabbas in his stead
And with one voice cried 'Crucify!'

Between two thieves on Calvary's hill
They put to death the Prince of Life
One cried for help, the other cursed.
The first was promised Paradise.

This promise now is for us all:
Christ gave His life to set us free.
The Cross divides, it always will -
The question is: what side are we?

By Megan Carter

Your will

Father, I wait Thy daily will;
Thou shalt divide my portion still;
Grant me on earth what seems Thee best,
Till death and heaven reveal the rest.

By Isaac Watts

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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