

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	4-6
SESSION 1 .....	7-13
Contemplative Action	
SESSION 2 .....	14-20
Contemplative Action	
SESSION 3 .....	21-29
Obedient Listening	
SESSION 4 .....	30-36
Ongoing Conversion	
SESSION 5 .....	37-45
Joyful Perseverance	
SESSION 6 .....	46-53
Living the mission of Jesus	
SERMON 1 .....	54-56
Contemplative Action Part 1	
SERMON 2 .....	57-60
Contemplative Action - Engaging	
SERMON 3 .....	61-64
Obedient Listening	
SERMON 4 .....	65-67
Ongoing Conversion - Mothering Sunday	
SERMON 5 .....	68-70
Joyful Perseverance	
SERMON 6 .....	71-73
Living the mission of Jesus	

# INTRODUCTION TO: CALLED TO CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION

Jesus says:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion?  
Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life.  
I’ll show you how to take a real rest.  
Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it.  
Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.  
I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you.  
Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message)

Jesus’ invitation as paraphrased here by Eugene Peterson expresses just what we’re doing in the Diocese of Winchester this Lent.

The course we’ve prepared works at several levels; engaging with the Benedictine tradition which has shaped this Diocese, with a view to creating a Rule of Life. Such a Rule is not an end in itself, but a flexible framework to support our vocation – so no two Rules will look the same.

Our personal Rules of Life will be shaped by our individual vocations, which will be shaped by our vision: Living the Mission of Jesus. Discovering our vocation means exploring what it means for each of us to become ‘Jesus-shaped’ in every part of our lives.

As we focus on Living the Mission of Jesus, we will grow together into a Mission-Shaped Diocese, characterised by the ‘3 Ps’:

Passionate Personal Spirituality  
Pioneering Faith Communities  
Prophetic Global Citizenship

And we’ve agreed (at the Diocesan Synod conference in September 2013) that the way to turn the vision into reality is to concentrate first on four strategic priorities:

Growing authentic disciples  
Re-imagining the Church  
Becoming agents of social transformation  
Belonging together in Christ

We’ve also agreed that this can only be possible ‘Under God, delighting in his grace and rooted in the Diocesan Rule of Life’.

Each Rule of Life which emerges at the end of this course will share the Diocesan family likeness, because it will have been shaped by the same basic Benedictine principles:

Contemplative Action  
Obedient Listening  
Ongoing Conversion  
Joyful Perseverance

There is no prescribed structure or content for an individual Rule of Life, but it is likely to include a relationship dimension and a time dimension – a rhythm. As the purpose of a Rule is to support a Christian in their particular vocation, that would be the test of its effectiveness. And as a person grows in their vocation, so they would revise their Rule accordingly; it is meant to evolve in order to remain effective. Some may already have a Rule, in which case this course provides an opportunity to review it.

This main book contains all of the group material as well as suggested sermon outlines.

## THE BEN VIDEO

Each week there is a short video clip which introduces the session. The clip is divided into three sections: an introduction to Ben, a way into the scripture and a brief reflection on the application for us today.

The videos are a vital part of the material, and we recommend that groups start their sessions here if at all possible. The videos will play directly from the DVD in a DVD player or on a computer, you can access them direct from the website ([www.winchesterlent.org](http://www.winchesterlent.org)) and stream them, or you can find a link from the website to vimeo where the video can be very simply downloaded. If you have any troubles accessing the videos then please get in touch with us at [lent@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:lent@winchester.anglican.org) and we will do all we can to help you. The video can be used in small groups at the beginning of each session, or in church as part of your service.

## THE SESSION OUTLINE

In order to make planning a session as simple as possible we have divided each session up into four sections, each representative of part of a day in an abbey. We recommend that in each session you attempt one activity from each section, in order to ensure that you have as rounded an experience as possible. We recognise that many people will have preferences towards certain activities, and whilst we certainly wouldn’t push you to participate in something which you wouldn’t find helpful, we also recognise that people learn best when they do a variety of activities. So be brave and attempt activities that might stretch your comfort zones just a little bit.

The four areas of abbey life are:

**The Refectory** It can be difficult to come from a busy day, or a stressful work environment straight in a bible study. Most of us will need time to slow down, catch our breath and find a bit of space. Furthermore, we can often hear the voice of God through the voices of those we travel with most closely. Sitting around a table, talking and sharing food is an amazing way to meet with Christ and to hear his voice – it was transformational for Zacchaeus!

Refectory activities will allow the members of your group to spend time with each other – talking about the theme for the week and setting the scene. Hopefully it will also give space for you all to get to know each other better. We believe in a relational God in whose image we are made: relationships are worth pursuing!

**The Chapel** We want to allow space in each session for groups to spend time in worship, prayer and reflection. Members of an Abbey community worked their whole day around chapel, and stopping to pray together was absolutely central to the rhythm of their lives. Our chapel ideas will allow space for prayer, worship, silence and discovery.

**The Library** Equally important with chapel time, for the abbey dweller, was time of study. Benedict was very clear that the place where we primarily hear God’s voice was through scripture. This year’s lent course contains, amongst other things, some more traditional Bible study questions, written by Bible scholars from around the diocese. It will be tempting for many to skip the other parts of the material and to head straight for the Biblical ‘meat’. We recommend that you allow space for people to come into God’s presence before dipping into scripture. Our time in the Bible is always greatly improved by good preparation. We heartily recommend that groups dip their toes in a variety of the library activities on offer; again, learning is always enhanced by a varied approach. If you’ve never explored *lectio divina* together as an incredibly powerful way of reading scripture, then we commend it to you! (See below for instructions on reading the Bible using the Lectio Divina method).

**The Marketplace** One of the notable things about members of Benedict’s communities was that they engaged with their communities. They went out into the marketplace and met with local people. This final section of the group material helps participants to think through how they might engage with the local community.

Each abbey space has four options to choose from, with activities that we hope will stimulate any learning preference. Choose activities that your group will enjoy, and will help them learn, but avoid always playing too safe. Needless to say if you know that a particular activity will send your group running for the hills then don't use it! Feel free to adapt the material to fit your situation. We've done our best to create material that will engage with the widest audience possible, but we can't ever write something that would be perfect for everyone.

## BOOK CLUB AND THE RULE OF BENEDICT

Groups that want to take the Lent course even further might want to run a book club throughout lent. If so there are references throughout the material to *Seeking God* by Esther du Waal (ISBN 978-1-85311-346-8) and *The Rule of St Benedict* in English translated by Timothy Fry O.S.B. (ISBN 978-0-8146-1272-9)

## LECTIO DIVINA

This classically Benedictine approach to reading Scripture is summarised here; you might like to try it on the passage from Matthew's Gospel quoted at the beginning of this section.

The idea is to read the text very slowly, engaging deeply with God through his Word in five stages:

**Relax** and be still, so that you are ready to receive.

**Read** the passage slowly several times, silently or aloud, until a word or a phrase catches your attention.

*What is it?*

**Reflect** on the word or phrase in silence, absorbing it and unpacking its meaning.

*What is God saying to you?*

**Respond** to the God who has spoken to you, silently or aloud.

*What would you like to say to God?*

**Rest** in God, the One who knows you and loves you. Enjoy his presence and receive his peace...

## WHERE CAN I GET THE MATERIAL?

All of the printed material is available in this book, on the accompanying DVD or on the dedicated Lent Course website at [www.winchesterlent.org](http://www.winchesterlent.org). Please feel free to print or photocopy the material as much as you need. If you need any help please email [lent@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:lent@winchester.anglican.org)

The DVD will work in a variety of ways. Put it into your DVD player and it will play like a standard DVD giving you a list of options of which video clip to watch. If you put it into a computer it will allow you to watch the video clips or copy them onto your computer. It will also give you access to a folder called 'PDF Files' where you will find all of the printable material for the course. Again if you get stuck please email [lent@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:lent@winchester.anglican.org)

## LENT 2015

## WEEK ONE: CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION

Mark 1:9-15

### AIM OF THIS SESSION:

**To introduce participants to the format of this year's lent course and to help them join Jesus and Benedict in setting time apart for reflection and going deeper with God.**

### INTRODUCTION

If the Benedictine Rule of Life could be summed up in just two words it would be these: Contemplative Action.

As we start our 6 weeks exploring the Scriptures and the life of St Benedict together this is where we begin, with the simple understanding that we are called, as Christians in the Diocese of Winchester, to be the kind of people who think and who do. Who reflect and who act.

Life in the 21st Century could be described as frenetic and so in this first session we are going to do something very Lenten. We're going to head out into the wilderness with Jesus, into the cave with Benedict, to commit ourselves to 40 days of contemplation and reflection. To try and simplify life a little and to slow down, even if it's just for a short while. Together we are going to consider what it is that God has called us to, and how we might work that out together in a simple rule of life, a simple text that might help us to become even more the kind of people that God has created us to be.

### GROUP MATERIAL

#### Video 1

If at all possible begin your time together by watching the first episode of the Ben videos. It's available on the DVD that accompanied your pack and so can be played on a standard DVD player or in a computer or laptop. It's also available on both Vimeo and YouTube and can be accessed from the lent course website: [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org).

If you have any problems accessing the video then please email [lent@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:lent@winchester.anglican.org) and we will do all we can to help you.

### BOOK CLUB

If you're reading *Seeking God* by Esther de Waal together then this week focus on Chapter I: St Benedict.

If you're studying *The Rule of St Benedict* together then focus on the Prologue and Chapter 4 this week.

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## THE REFECTORY

**1. A Meal (Food, Discussion)**

Start Lent 2015 by having a meal and talking about what you hope to get out of your time together. You could go for broke and have a big dinner, order in take away, or if you're meeting for a short while on Sunday morning just have a simple breakfast. Alternatively, for a more Lenten themed gathering stick to a simple meal of soup and bread.

You may want to keep a journal throughout Lent this year to keep track of your thoughts and reflections along the way, either individually or shared as a group.

**Talk about questions such as:**

1. Do you feel like you've been 'living the mission of Jesus' since Lent 2014?
2. What do you hope you'll discover during Lent 2015?
3. What are your worries/concerns?
4. How do you hope you'll be challenged/changed over the next 6 weeks?

**If you start Lent 2015 with a meal, then you might want to consider eating together every week; It's a brilliant way to build community and a great way to encourage conversation).**

**2. Paper Dinner (Creative)**

Imagine you were going to have Jesus round for a meal; What food would you serve and why?

Using paper plates draw a picture of the meal you have in mind and on the back write some thoughts on why you've chosen particular dishes.

To go the extra creative mile use junk, scrap, glue, pens and paint to make a model of the meal you might make. Feel free to use your creations as a display in church, or take photos of them to upload to your church webpage, FaceBook page or Flickr PhotoStream

**3. Kneading the Dough (Creative, Food, Reflective)**

Mix up enough bread dough for everyone in your group to have a portion. In silence knead your piece of dough as you reflect on Jesus' response to the tempter in Matthew 4 to turn stones into bread. As you consider Christ's reaction that 'Human beings cannot live on bread alone, but need every word that God speaks' commit yourselves to Lent: a time of restraint and going deeper into God's word.

The proving bread might make a good reflection at the end of your session as you consider how we might be changed by our time together throughout Lent. If you have an oven then this would be a good time to cook the bread, maybe to share over a lunch. If not invite people to take some of the proved dough home and bake themselves.

**4. Strategic Priorities (Discussion)**

On four index cards write these four words, reminiscent of the four strategic priorities we studied in 2014:

Authentic, Creative, Transforming, Generous

Spend a moment considering which word best applies to you and then explain your thinking to the rest of the group.

if there are members of your group who weren't involved in the Lent course last year then this would be a good chance for people to talk about the four strategic priorities and what they are.

The four strategic priorities can be found at [www.winchester.anglican.org/what-we-do-exec/mission/](http://www.winchester.anglican.org/what-we-do-exec/mission/)

## THE CHAPEL

**5. Consequences (Discussion)**

Create a 'consequences' type story as you consider the start of the Lent course to help your group reflect on how they feel about following Jesus.

Give everyone a piece of paper and a pen and ask them to answer the first question you read out, then fold the top of the paper down and pass it on to the next person in the group. Keep going until all the questions are done. Pass the paper on one more time and read out the answers. Allow time for people to respond thoughtfully. **If you would like a template to work from one is available at [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org)**

1. What is one reason why you follow Jesus?
2. What is one thing that is difficult about following Jesus?
3. What is one thing that you've discovered about Jesus recently?
4. What is one question you would like Jesus to answer?

**6. 40 (Tech, Reflective)**

Search YouTube™ for the video clip '40 lent' and choose one version of the video of Christ in the Wilderness by Si Smith. As you watch together think about which image most speaks to you. Provide people with pens and paper (or journals) to make notes of anything which catches their attention.

Share your thoughts with the group.

**7. Sand (Creative, Reflective)**

Prepare a tray of sand (slightly wet play sand works best) and as you imagine Jesus walking out into the wilderness make your own footprints in the sand to show that you want to follow him at the start of Lent 2015. If you don't fancy taking your shoes and socks off you could make handprints, or simply use a finger to write 'follow' in the sand. You can either use seed trays for individual prints, or garden centres sell trays that will hold a whole grow bag if you want to have something that you can all contribute to.

Think about what it might mean to follow Jesus.

What might you have to leave behind?

What might you discover?

To take this activity to the next level, why not pour Plaster of Paris into the footprints to keep as a reminder of your time together.

**8. Baptism (Reflective, Discussion)**

Re-read Mark 1:9-11. No doubt, as he walked in the desert, Jesus would have spent time reflecting on his Baptism. As you join him in that reflection wash your hands in a bowl of warm water and dry them on a towel. This activity would follow the bread making particularly well!

On pieces of card next to the water have the words 'from death to life' written, or read out loud the words from the baptism service that begin 'We thank you Father for the water of baptism...'

How does it feel to share in Christ's baptism?

## THE LIBRARY

## 9. The Monastery (Discussion)

Look at the picture of the monastery that we will be using as our guide for group work over the next few weeks, talk about what each of the spaces represent:

- The Refectory – where we spend time socialising with other Christians, building relationships.
- The Chapel – where we meet with God in prayer and worship
- The Library – where we read and study, going deeper into God’s word
- The Marketplace – where we go to work, or to play, in the world, sharing the Good News

Place something to represent you – even just a cut out person outline – on the space you find most attractive. Talk about why you have chosen that particular space.

*This activity will help the leader decide how to structure the rest of the course according to the needs of your group.*

## 10. Lectio Divina

Read Mark 1:9-15 together in the Lectio Divina style (you can find instructions on how to do this in the introductory notes at the front of your pack), then talk through the questions below:

Which words or phrases particularly caught your attention from this reading?

What emotions or feelings are you aware of?

What might God be trying to reveal to us through these words do you think?

In an all age setting you could have a tray of sand available for everyone to run their fingers through. Think of other things that you could include reminiscent of the desert – rocks, thorny sticks, toy animals. You could also have a few Playmobil™ people available for people to make footprints in the sand with.

## 11. Bible Study (Discussion)

Read Mark: 1:9-15 and use some (or all) of the questions below.

We begin our journey standing on the banks of the Jordan just as Jesus is about to begin his mission, proclaiming that the Kingdom of heaven has come.

1. Imagine being on the bank of the Jordan at the time of Jesus’ baptism. What might you be thinking?
2. Jesus went through a time of testing and wrestling before setting out on His divine mission. Why do you think that was necessary? What might have been the result of this time of testing? Have you ever experienced a time of testing before stepping out into something new for Christ?
3. Re-read verse 13. What might ‘tempted by Satan’ have meant for Jesus? What kinds of things might he have been tempted with? Can we relate to any of his temptations?
4. Later in verse 13 the temptation from Satan is contrasted with him being waited on by angels. Can you imagine what this might have been like? Have you ever felt like you’ve been waited on by angels?
5. What is the good news that Jesus is proclaiming in verse 14?
6. What did Jesus mean by ‘the kingdom of God has come near’ in verse 15? When are we most aware of the kingdom of God being near?
7. How do you think Jesus’ audience would have responded to this proclamation, perhaps before any signs or miracles had been seen?
8. Imagine Jesus entering your school/college/ community/place of work and proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven has come near. How do you think people would respond? Do you think people would be receptive to this message? Why or why not?

## 12. Cross Reference – Matthew 13 (Discussion, Creative)

Read Mark 1: 9-15 together. Notice that the final 2 verses concern Christ proclaiming the imminence of the kingdom of God.

Now read together Matthew 13, either from beginning to end with different voices, or pausing after each parable.

Together consider the question: What might the kingdom of God look like?

Feel free to have art materials available as people read so that they can respond to the different images they hear in different ways. People with a preference for visual or kinaesthetic learning styles are likely to gain far more from this activity this way.

## THE MARKETPLACE

### 13. Picture Show (Tech, Creative)

Download and print out the **picture slide show** from the winchesterlent.org website.

You will need post-it™ notes (if you can get speech bubble shapes from ebay or similar – even better) and pens.

As you think about Jesus’ words from Mark 1: 15 think about what Christ might say in each of these different places.

How can we represent him as we make our way though each day?

### 14. Pebbles (Creative, Reflective)

You will need small pebbles – enough for each member of the group to have one, and fine permanent markers. If you have time you could use paints and small brushes and make this a longer activity.

In another version of Jesus’ time in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), the tempter suggests that Christ might want to turn rocks into bread to satisfy his appetite. Jesus replies that ‘Human beings cannot live on bread alone’.

Ask your group to consider what one word they would want to take away from your time together. Write it on the rock and keep the rock with you throughout the week – to remind yourself of your time together and to help you remember to carry the message into the week with you.

### 15. Mission App (Tech, Discussion, Creative)

If you were to make a Christian app, that had everything you needed to live the mission of Jesus throughout the week what would it contain.

Use an app making website (appsbar.com allows you to make apps for free) get creating!

If your tech skills aren’t up to it, you could simply sketch the kinds of things you’d like to have in your app, or simply write down the concept.

### 16. Commitment (Discussion)

As it’s the beginning of Lent why not decide together on some commitments you’d like to make. Invite the group members to think about one thing that they’d each like to commit to personally and one thing that they’d like to set down for the next 40 days.

Then as a group decide on one thing you’re going to do together throughout Lent, and one thing that as a group you’re going to sacrifice.

Consider creating a closed Facebook group for your Lent group, so that you can check in with each other each day.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GROUP:

Have a read through all of the activities suggested. We would suggest choosing ideas that your group will be comfortable using, but also trying the occasional idea that will stretch people a little. So if your group tends to like serious discussion and Bible study then one of the more creative ideas will be good to help people explore something different. Lots of the ideas are suitable for children and young people to use, but may need a little adaptation; suggestions for how to do this are below.

#### ADULT SMALL GROUP

##### Refectory

1 (if you have time)  
3 (if your time is limited)

##### Chapel

6 or 8

##### Library

9, 10, 11 or 12

##### Marketplace

14 or 16

#### CHILDREN’S GROUP

##### Refectory

2 or 4

##### Chapel

6 or 7 (you may have to simplify the questions for 7)

##### Library

10 (using the sand tray) or 12 (adapt this idea by simply reading the four short kingdom parables from Mark 13 (31-33 and 44-46) and asking the children what they think the parables tell us about God’s kingdom. Have artefacts ready for them to get their hands on: flour, seeds, coins and beads).

##### Marketplace

14

#### YOUTH GROUP

##### Refectory

1 or 4

##### Chapel

5 or 6

##### Library

9, 10, 11 or 12

##### Marketplace

13, 15 or 16

WEEK TWO: CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION

Mark 8:31-38

AIM OF THIS SESSION:

To encourage participants to consider that our contemplation leads to action; to building community and to living the mission of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

Last week we explored the first half of this simple summing up of our rule, the call to contemplation. This week, as Jesus leaves the desert and as Benedict emerges from his cave we focus on the second half of this little paradox – the call to act.

Benedict quickly realised that solitary life in his cave wasn't sufficient: rather he had to step out and create community. Jesus is unequivocal as he speaks to his disciples: following him means action. A life of discipleship is a life that includes taking up our cross and setting our sights on the same goal as Christ. **That action is not however, in order to earn salvation; the promise of eternal life with our Heavenly Father is a gift of grace from Him. Our action, rather, is carried out in response to that grace.**

In this second session we are going to spend time together considering what it means to follow Christ, what is the action that we are called to and what might that look like in our faith communities and in the wider diocese.

GROUP MATERIAL

Video 2

If at all possible begin your time together by watching the second episode of the Ben videos. It's available on the DVD that accompanied your pack and so can be played on a standard DVD player or in a computer or laptop. It's also available on both Vimeo and YouTube and can be accessed from the Lent course website: [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org) if you have any problems accessing the video then please **get in touch** and we will do all we can to help you.

BOOK CLUB

If you're reading *Seeking God* by Esther de Waal together then this week focus on Chapter 2: The Invitation.

If you're studying *The Rule of St Benedict* together then focus on Chapter 7 this week.

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THE REFECTORY

1. Dollar a day meal (Discussion, Food)

You will need: rice, tins of very cheap beans, elderly bananas, porridge

Start your meeting with a meal, but a meal with a difference (this will be particularly effective if you ate a good celebration meal together last week). Serve up to your group the kind of food that people in the poorest parts of the world will have to live on; rice, beans, porridge and the fruit that wasn't good enough to export to the West.

Talk together about what it must be like to have to survive on just one meal like this a day.

- How does it make us feel about the abundance that we have in the west?
- What should Christians do to respond to this kind of need? (Talk about what people already do, or what you could do together).

2. Dollar a day meal (Creative, Discussion)

You will need: food magazines (Saturday/Sunday supplements often include these), paper plates, oats, rice, dried beans, gloopy glue and scissors.

Create together a paper plate collage comparing the kinds of food that we'd really enjoy eating and the kind of food that the poorest people in the world have to eat. Put the pictures on one half of the plate and the rice etc. on the other so that it's a really obvious comparison.

Use the discussion and questions from the activity above.

3. Uncomfortable cross part one (Creative, Reflective)

Using some stiff cardboard (from a cereal box for instance) cut out the shape of a cross and then cut it up into jagged pieces, enough so that each member of your group has one piece.

As you begin your session quietly hand out the pieces to your group, without making too much reference to them. You will refer back to them during the chapel activity for this session.

4. Priorities (Discussion)

Invite the members of your group to write a list of their top five life priorities. Talk together about what people have chosen – what do you have in common? Where are the differences?

Now ask your group whether they can focus their list down to just one thing.

## LENT 2015

# THE CHAPEL

### 5. He chose the nails (Creative, Reflective)

You will need a box of large nails and a box of slightly smaller ones, some thin wire, wire cutters, pliers.

Using a large nail and two smaller ones make a cross and carefully twist them together with the wire. Reflect together on the sharpness of the nails and the discomfort from twisting the wire round.



Explain that in today's reading Jesus challenges his followers to 'take up their crosses and follow him' – confronted with the cruel nails, how does your group feel about following Christ, even to the cross?

### 6. Uncomfortable Cross part two (Creative, Reflective, Discussion)

If you are using the uncomfortable cross activity then you will need to save this chapel activity until after you have completed your time in the library.

Invite your group to reflect on what they have discovered holding the pieces of card. Were they comfortable? Were they aware of the sharp edges? What was going through their minds as they held on to them?

Once everyone has spoken, collect the pieces together and recreate the cross.

### 7. Acting out (Creative)

Using the Message version of the Bible read together Mark 8:30-38.

Jesus uses all sorts of incredibly descriptive language as he speaks to his disciples here – engage with the passage by encouraging your group to act out or mime some of the things that Jesus says: 'You're not in the driver's seat; I am', 'Don't run from suffering, embrace it', 'Follow me and I'll show you how', 'Self-help is no help at all' and so on.

Acting out parts of the passage may seem uncomfortable for some, but for people who have a preference for kinaesthetic learning this is a great way to help them engage with the passage.

### 8. When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (Reflective, Discussion)

*When I survey the wondrous cross* is the most wonderful hymn reflecting on the cross. If your group is up for it, sing the hymn together, if not you could listen to it on CD; Search the internet for a video of it being performed or simply have the words printed out for your group to be able to read.

Once you've reached the end of the words, allow silence for a short while and then encourage your group to talk about which lines caught their attention or which lyrics stood out for them, and any images that came to mind as they listened.

## LENT 2015

# THE LIBRARY

### 9. Lectio Divina (you can find instructions on how to do this in the introductory notes at the front of your pack).

Which words or phrases particularly caught your attention from this reading?

What emotions or feelings are you aware of?

What might God be trying to reveal to us through these words do you think?

### 10. Bible Study

Read Mark 8: 30-38 together and use some (or all) of the questions below.

1. What does Jesus teach his disciples about the *kind* of Christ he is?
2. Peter has recently come to understand that Jesus is the Christ (8:29). But his rebuke of Jesus for speaking of a life of suffering, rejection and death (before new life), shows he is yet to understand the mission and identity of Jesus as the suffering servant and saving King.

How does Jesus' understanding of who he is, enhance our understanding of him and what a life following him will look like?

3. We could describe Jesus' life, and therefore his followers' lives, as 'suffering now, to bring good news, with glory later'. In pairs use a pen or highlighter to underline or mark how Jesus describes a life that is set on the things of God, not of man.

Feed back to the group what has struck you.

4. 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself...'. In your experience, what tempts you to invest in selfish me-centred rather than self-denying Christ-centred lives?
5. Take a moment to re-read v35-37. How does this bring perspective and challenge to you in how, who or what you invest your whole life in?

6. Jesus says in v38 – 'whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

What does it mean to be ashamed?

7. In what specific situations and in which issues today are we easily ashamed of Jesus and his words?
8. What will it look like practically for you to not be ashamed of Jesus and his words in those specific situations and issues? Perhaps share from the different areas of life you are in.
9. Jesus' words come as a great challenge but with an even greater promise. Jim Elliot helpfully comments - 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose'. Look again at the passage. What encourages you about Jesus' promises in this passage?
10. How can we cultivate a community that is marked by self-denial and unashamed disciples holding fast to Jesus and the gospel?



### 11. The Nazarene (creative, discussion)

Open Doors is a charity that supports Christians around the world who are persecuted for their faith.

Visit [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org) and download a copy of Ruth's picture ([bit.ly/1qFBRym](http://bit.ly/1qFBRym)) – either look at it together on a screen, or print it off. Use the questions in the bottom right hand corner of the picture to lead your study time.

Read Philippians 4:6 together as the picture suggests and then also read Mark 8:34-37 together.

There was a campaign recently, concerning Christians in Iraq and Syria who were having the Arabic symbol for the letter N painted on their door to mark them out as followers of 'the Nazarene'.



All over the world people were using the symbol on their social media accounts as a sign of solidarity with these persecuted Christians. Finish this section of your time together by marking the symbol on the back of your hands with a pen (or a permanent marker).

**To take this activity to another level, why not plan a visit with your group to the chapel of St Alphege at Winchester Cathedral which is a place dedicated for the prayer of the persecuted church and for martyrs worldwide.**

### 12. Belief in Action (Discussion)

Read together Mark 8:31-38

Jesus calls his followers to put their belief into action. Ask whether anyone can think of examples of where else in the gospels Jesus does what he says – puts his teaching into practice. For instance: Jesus' anointing at Bethany (John 12: 1-11), Jesus washes his disciples' feet (John 13: 1-17), The wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12), Jesus cries for his friend Lazarus (John 11: 1-44)

What do you learn about Christ from all of these different stories?

## LENT 2015

# THE MARKETPLACE

### 13. Lollipop prayer walk (Creative)

You will need: lollipop sticks (available from ebay or shops such as Wilkinsons), permanent pens.

Plan to go on a prayer walk together around your community, praying for the people you see, the places that you pass, and in particular anywhere where you would love to see God make a change.

As you walk, if any particular words or bible verses occur to you, write them on a lollipop stick and then push the stick into the ground where you might pass it again. Use the stick as a reminder to pray for something specific whenever you pass that same spot in the future.

### 14. Promises Kept and Promises Broken (Reflective, Discussion)

You will need luggage tags (two per person) and pens

On one luggage tag, invite your group to think about promises that they have made and kept – is there anything in particular that they are proud of having done, even if it meant some cost to them? Now on the other tag ask them to consider and write a promise which they have failed to keep. How does it feel to know that you have let someone down? What might you all commit to together – a promise that you will try to stick to? After a while you may want to destroy the second tags together as a sign of confession and absolution. Consider shredding them, or burning them in a metal pot.

**It may be important to remind your group of God's great grace at this point; don't allow anyone to leave feeling weighed down by guilt, but rather use this as a time to celebrate together God's wonderful forgiveness.**

### 15. Paper Prayers (Reflective)

Have a newspaper or two available and offer them to your group to go through. You're looking together for a story that moves you all, and then set yourself the challenge of actually doing something about it – responding to a need. You might choose a global issue, or maybe something local. How will you make sure that you put into action what you have committed to? There's an election coming up, so you could use party political fliers rather than newspapers.

### 16. Print out a map of your community (Creative, Discussion)

Big enough for everyone to see, or several copies if your group is large. If you want a really impressive resource why not see if a local printer could produce an A1 or A2 map of your area for you. Using marker pens, mark on the map everywhere that your group goes in the community. Think about walks, commutes to work, clubs/societies, shops that you visit etc.

Once you've exhausted your list, see if there are any 'dark spots' on the map; places that none of you visit. As a group can you think of ways that you can get into those areas?

Pray for your community together.

# LENT 2015

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GROUP:

Have a read through all of the activities suggested. We would suggest choosing ideas that your group will be comfortable using, but also trying the occasional idea that will stretch people a little. So if your group tends to like serious discussion and Bible study then one of the more creative ideas will be good to help people explore something different. Lots of the ideas are suitable for children and young people to use, but may need a little adaptation; suggestions for how to do this are below.

ADULT SMALL GROUP	CHILDREN'S GROUP	YOUTH GROUP
<b>Refectory</b> 1 or 4	<b>Refectory</b> 1 or 2	<b>Refectory</b> 1, 2 or 4
<b>Chapel</b> 5 or 8	<b>Chapel</b> 5 (if your group is particularly young then they may just want to hold the nails, or to use cardboard cut out nails and split pins to make simpler versions of the cross) or 7	<b>Chapel</b> 5 or 7
<b>Library</b> 9, 10, 11 or 12	<b>Library</b> 9 or 12 (read the bible story to the children and then ask them the question 'what other stories do you know about Jesus where he helped people out')	<b>Library</b> 9, 11 or 12
<b>Marketplace</b> 13, 14, 15 or 16	<b>Marketplace</b> 13 (if you can't go on a physical walk, why not ask your group if they can suggest people or places near their homes that they would like to pray for, decorate the lollipop sticks and then take them home to stick in their own front gardens to remind them to pray for their neighbourhood)	<b>Marketplace</b> 13, 14, 15 or 16

# LENT 2015

## WEEK THREE: OBEDIENT LISTENING

Philippians 2:1-11

### AIM OF THIS SESSION:

To help participants to engage with the Benedictine practice of listening to God, ourselves, each other and the world, and to obediently commit to being listening people.

### BOOK CLUB

If you're reading *Seeking God* by Esther de Waal together then this week focus on Chapter 3: Listen.

If you're studying *The Rule of St Benedict* together then focus on Chapter 5 this week.

### INTRODUCTION

This week we move into the first of three sessions exploring the three main points of the Rule that we have interpreted from Benedict's writings. Listening alongside obedience, or stability, was at the absolute top of Benedict's list of priorities for his followers. Committing to listening to God through the scriptures, to each other in our faith communities and the wider world, and to listening to our leaders is absolutely central to the life of a Christian.

**One of the toughest parts of obedience in the Benedictine sense is the decision to stay: Our culture abhors commitment, and yet as Christians we are required to have a high degree of constancy in our lives. Benedict called this quality 'stability' – the decision to stick to one teaching or school of thought rather than constantly flitting from church to church or teaching to teaching.**

This week you will be making space with your groups to listen: to God, yourselves, each other and the world and to make a commitment to being obedient to God's call on them to be agents of change in their world.

### GROUP MATERIAL

#### Video 3

If at all possible begin your time together by watching the third episode of the Ben videos. It's available on the DVD that accompanied your pack and so can be played on a standard DVD player or in a computer or laptop. It's also available on both Vimeo and YouTube and can be accessed from the lent course website: winchesterlent.org if you have any problems accessing the video then please get in touch and we will do all we can to help you.

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# THE REFECTORY

## 1. Charades (Discussion, Creative)

Play a game of charades acting out the roles of people that we need to listen to i.e. teachers, police officers, politicians, parents, vicar etc.

Once you've run out of ideas, use these questions to prompt discussion:

- Why is it important to listen to these people?
- Are there some people we find it easier to listen to than others?
- Are there some people that we resent having to listen to?
- How might we hear God speaking through other people?

## 2. Clay Hearts (Creative)

You will need: air drying clay, heart cookie cutters (the larger the better, something around 10cm across the top would be ideal), rolling pin, ribbon, pencils, tools for engraving, paint (optional)

Roll out the clay until it's between 5 and 10mm thick and then cut out heart shapes using the cookie cutter. Using a pen or pencil make a 5mm hole in the top of the heart ready to thread some ribbon or string through to hang your heart up. Mark one side with a big number one, either with a stamp or just with a tool of some kind. On the other side write words or make pictures to represent the things that we have in common, you could do this whilst the clay is wet using any pointed tool, or if you prefer leave the clay to dry and then draw or paint your ideas on the back.

Whilst you create your hangers use these questions to prompt discussion:

- What do you think Paul means when he writes: "make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind"?
- Is it possible to have that kind of unity with other Christians? Why/why not?
- How might we strive towards the kind of church where we actively listen to each other?

The idea of any kind of activity like this is to give people something to do whilst they talk (it's much easier to chat when we have something to do to focus on), so as far as possible, ask the questions and have the conversation whilst people are being creative.

## 3. Our Stories (Discussion)

It would be good to have someone share a story of a time that they were aware of God speaking to them. You may want to invite someone to come and join you if you know of someone with a particular story to tell, or you might simply invite members to share stories together as you start your session with refreshments or over a meal. Think about all the different ways that God speaks to us – through scripture, through each other, through nature, directly by the Spirit.

If you think that it's going to be difficult to get these stories going, why not prepare your own story in advance, try and tell it in just a minute or two, and then put numbers in a hat for people to pull out, and then tell their stories in order. It may just break the ice a little, and remove some of the fear. Needless to say, if someone doesn't want to take part then they should be welcome to just listen.

*Be careful with your language in this discussion, Christians often talk about how God has spoken to them, without explaining what that means. Encourage your group to really think through what it means for God to speak to us and to unpack it really carefully.*

## 4. The Gift of Encouragement (Discussion, Creative)

You will need: post-it notes, pens

**How deep are the relationships in your small group? How deeply have you committed to each other? It's very simple in Christian circles to be quite shallow in our relationships, especially if we only see each other briefly on a Sunday morning, or for a few evenings a year at a Lent course.**

Encourage everyone to spend some time thinking about the other members of group and bearing Philippians 2:5-8 in mind to think of how they can see Christ in each other. Scribble down your thoughts on Post-it notes and stick them onto each other's backs. Once everyone is done remove the notes and read them.

Thank God for the gift of encouragement. If your group struggled to think of things to write about each other – then use this as an opportunity to explore how you could spend more time with each other and enrich your relationships.

### 5. Noise meditation (Reflective)

Lead your group in this guided meditation from labyrinth.org.uk. You could put some quiet music on, or alternatively go for complete silence.

*Sound engineers speak of two things - signal and noise. The signal is the meaningful part of a transmission. The noise is all the unwanted stuff that interferes with our ability to hear and understand the signal. Our lives are full of noise - so much information, so many messages, all competing for our attention. We find it hard to find the signal.*

*Take some time to identify the noises around you one by one: traffic; children playing; dogs barking; the hubbub of life... As you recognise each one, savour it and then place it to one side.*

*What are the noises on the inside? That song you can't get out of your head; thoughts that won't stop chattering; nagging worries; hurt; anger; things you have to do tomorrow... Identify them one by one, listen to them and place them to one side.*

*Let God still the radio of your soul, turn the noise off and give you peace. Then listen for his signal.*

BE STILL

QUIET

LISTEN

STILL

BE

If you want to listen to the meditation, then visit [labyrinth.org.uk](http://labyrinth.org.uk), click 'online labyrinth', then click 'Please remove your shoes and click here to begin the labyrinth', and finally click '2'.

After a time of silence invite your group to talk about how they found the experience.

Texts © Kevin, Ana & Brian Draper, Steve Collins, Jonny Baker  
Labyrinth design & logo © Steve Collins

### 6. Nailing it to the cross (Creative, Reflective)

You will need: a wooden cross or rugged piece of wood, hammers, nails, ribbon or scraps of paper, pens.

Read Philippians 2:3 to your group.

Ask them to reflect for a while on areas in their lives where they are aware that they have 'selfish ambition' or 'vain conceit'.

After a while invite them to write or draw their thoughts on the scraps of paper or the strips of ribbon and then to nail them to the cross/piece of wood.

Spend some time discussing when it's good to listen to your own thoughts, desires and feelings and when we need to set them aside.

Ask the group how it feels to nail that selfish stuff to the cross. **Spend some time thinking about Christ's humility in submitting himself to death on a cross, and the humility that we need in order to accept his help.**

Reflect on the phrase 'God helps those who help themselves' does it sound like something Jesus might say?

### 7. Praise Collage (Creative)

You will need: the outline of a cross drawn on a piece of A3 or A4 paper, sheets of different coloured paper (different textures and so forth will add to the final look of the cross), glue sticks, the words of Philippians 2: 9-11 written or printed out for everyone to see.

Read Philippians 2: 9-11 to the group and explain that the words are part of a hymn of praise that the early church probably sang together. Reflect on the words in the verses, **and the concept that Jesus' obedience is set as our example.** Invite your group to write some of the words of praise out onto pieces of paper, tear them out and stick them onto the cross.

Keep going adding words of praise of your own until you have filled the outline.

### 8. My Community (Tech, Discussion, Creative)

This activity will take a bit of preparation... In advance of the session, and whilst you are driving through your local community, ask someone to film the view out of the window on their mobile phone. Try to get lots of different pictures on the video – looking at the best parts of your community and the worst. Picking out well-known landmarks, and maybe the houses of some of the members of your group. Keep the video short, maybe 2 minutes and definitely no more than 5. If you have someone on your group who enjoys making videos then this may be their opportunity to shine!

Benedict asks us to listen on all sorts of levels – to ourselves, to each other, to God and also to our community. As you watch the video together listen to what God might be telling you about where you live:

Where did you see Jesus?

Where do you think he might be asking you to go?

What caught your attention?

**9. Lectio Divina**

Read Philippians 2:1-11 together in the Lectio Divina style, then talk through the questions below:

Which words or phrases particularly caught your attention from this reading?

What emotions or feelings are you aware of?

What might God be trying to reveal to us through these words do you think?

For a change, why not print the words of the passage out and give the members of your group highlighter pens so that they can highlight the different words and phrases as they catch their attention. Or even a selection of coloured pens and pencils so that they can doodle and annotate as you read and reread the passage. As ever, instructions on how to use Lectio Divina can be found in the introductory notes at the front of this pack.

**10. Bible study**

Read Philippians 2:1-11 together and then work through the questions below.

1. How does *'encouragement from Christ'* demonstrate itself in your faith community?
2. If we are to listen to ourselves, how do we avoid *'selfish ambition or conceit'*?
3. How did Christ listen obediently and how did this relate to his humbling of himself?
4. In what ways must our dying to self be an act of obedience and our obedience an act of dying to self?
5. How can the *'interests of others'* be a litmus test of our obedience to God?
6. How does conforming to God's will fit in with his desire that we should find freedom in Christ?
7. Who is Jesus Christ for us now as we seek to follow God?

8. If Paul were to look at our faith community, in which ways would he be encouraged? In which ways would he be disappointed?

**11. Different Perspectives (Reflective, Discussion)**

In advance of the session collect together some examples of how different church traditions in your community and beyond listen to God, including:

- A rosary
- A bible
- Candles
- Wooden holding crosses
- Icons
- The prayer book
- Picture of a stained glass window
- A model of an open hand, or a picture of hands held out
- A CD of worship music
- Incense
- Stations of the cross

Use these questions to form your discussion:

What do each of the things say to you?

What could we learn in our tradition from these different symbols?

How do we listen to God?

What could we share from our tradition?

**12. Listening to Jesus (Discussion)**

Jesus used all manner of different methods of sharing the Gospel with people. If possible, divide your group into four or five and share the following passages around. Invite the small groups to read the passages and to discuss together what method Jesus used to share the Good News with his listeners.

Once everyone has had a good discussion come back together and invite each small group to share with the rest of the group what they discovered.

Together talk about how we share the good news in our community. What other ways might we try to reach people? Perhaps you could work together to create a poster of the things that you have discussed together.

Matthew 5: 1-12 – the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 8: 23-27 – Jesus calms the storm

John 8: 1-11 – the woman caught in adultery

Mark 4: 1-20 – the parable of the sower

## THE MARKETPLACE

### 13. TSP Paper Prayers (Creative, Reflective)

You will need: copies of local (or national) newspapers, 3 sheets of paper marked T, S and P.

Share the newspapers around your group and invite your members to prayerfully go through looking at the stories and pictures. As different stories catch their attention, invite them to reflect on whether they are stories that make them want to say thank you to God, sorry or please; to ask God's help. Tear the stories out and put them with the relevant lettered sheets: **T** for thanks, **S** for sorry and **P** for please.

### 14. Serving the Neighbourhood (Discussion)

In advance of your meeting invite your group members to ask around the community to see if there is any way that your group could serve others in the neighbourhood.

Try approaching all these different people: Police Community Support Officers, Local Councillors, Shopkeepers, Teachers, Neighbours, Pub Landlords etc.

Pool your discoveries and plan an act of service in your community based on the needs that you have heard.

Alternatively download a copy of your parish spotlight by visiting [winchester.anglican.org](http://winchester.anglican.org) and searching for 'spotlights'. Choose your deanery from the results and find your parish data.

### 15. Community Website (Discussion, Tech)

If you had to create a website for the community in which you live what would you put on it?

**What would be the most important things you want to communicate? What would people on the outside really want to know?**

Why not use a free website creator like wix.com or the 'simpl' app on the ipad to put your ideas into action.

### 16. Easter Party (Foody, Discussion)

In the UK very few people know their next-door neighbours.

Why not plan an Easter Party for the your next-door neighbours – plan the food, and activities, create invitations. Set aside a special time to build relationships with the people who live around you and to get to know them.

**This doesn't have to have any specific 'Christian content' – it's just an act of Christian hospitality and building of community.**

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GROUP:

Have a read through all of the activities suggested. We would suggest choosing ideas that your group will be comfortable using, but also trying the occasional idea that will stretch people a little. So if your group tends to like serious discussion and Bible study then one of the more creative ideas will be good to help people explore something different. Lots of the ideas are suitable for children and young people to use, but may need a little adaptation; suggestions for how to do this are below.

#### ADULT SMALL GROUP

##### Refectory

3 or 4

##### Chapel

5, 6 or 8

##### Library

9, 10, 11 or 12

##### Marketplace

13 or 16

#### CHILDREN'S GROUP

##### Refectory

1 or 2 (rather than use the questions listed, just encourage the children in your group to talk about what is special about being part of a church)

##### Chapel

6 (although you will need to simplify the phrases 'selfish ambition' and 'vain conceit') or 7 (ask the children what the word 'praise' means to help them understand what words they are looking for)

##### Library

11

##### Marketplace

13

#### YOUTH GROUP

##### Refectory

1, 2, 3 or 4

##### Chapel

5, 6, 7 or 8

##### Library

9, 11 or 12

##### Marketplace

13, 14, 15 or 16

# WEEK FOUR: ONGOING CONVERSION

Philippians 3:1-11

## AIM OF THIS SESSION:

**To enable participants to engage in the daily act of coming to Christ and to find ways of responding to the ever changing world they live in.**

## INTRODUCTION

There's a wonderful phrase of St Benedict's that struggles for an English translation. *Conversatio Morum* is the call on Christians to engage in continuous or ongoing conversion. It's important to have a good understanding of salvation from a multi dimensional aspect in order to be clear about what Benedict means when he says that our conversion needs to be ongoing. Paul, in his letters, refers to salvation in three tenses: 'I was saved from the penalty of sin' (Ephesians 2:8 for instance), 'I am being saved from the power of sin' (Romans 5:10 for instance) and 'I shall be saved from the presence of sin' (Romans 13:11 for example).

As we daily turn to Christ, in prayer, scripture and confession, we are reminded that being like Christ requires our constant attention; that we have to turn and return to Christ day in day out.

This week you are going to help your group remember that their conversion is an ongoing daily act, and that together in community, you can discover the wonderful freedom that comes with continuously throwing ourselves at the feet of the saviour.

## GROUP MATERIAL

### Video 4

If at all possible begin your time together by watching the fourth episode of the Ben videos. It's available on the DVD that accompanied your pack and so can be played on a standard DVD player or in a computer or laptop. It's also available on both Vimeo and YouTube and can be accessed from the lent course website: [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org). if you have any problems accessing the video then please get in touch and we will do all we can to help you.

## BOOK CLUB

If you're reading *Seeking God* by Esther de Waal together then this week focus on Chapter 5: Change.

If you're studying *The Rule of St Benedict* together then focus on Chapter 58 this week.

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# THE REFECTORY

## 1. Cleaning the Potatoes (Discussion, Foody)

You will need: muddy potatoes (most greengrocers still stock unwashed potaoes even if supermarkets often don't), bowls of warm water, brushes and scourers.

Settle in for some cleaning and as you do so reflect on the change that happened to Paul when he met Jesus.

Use these questions to prompt discussion:

- Why did meeting Jesus have such a profound effect on Paul?
- How do you relate to Paul's conversion?
- Do you think Paul's conversion was a 'once-for-all' kind of thing, or a daily commitment and recommitment? How about you?

Once you've finished you could put the potatoes in the oven (if one is available) and finish your time together with jacket potatoes. For a bigger project, buy a piece of furniture from a second hand shop or car boot, and sand it down before cleaning it and polishing it up. Either sell it and give the money to charity, or find someone to give it to.

## 2. Balloon Cocoons (Creative)

You will need: long balloons, wool of a variety of different colours, pva glue, small chocolate eggs.

Push an egg or two into each balloon and then inflate them until they are just blown up. Dip the wool into the pva glue until it is well soaked and then wind it round and round the balloon until it is completely encased in sticky wool, with holes no bigger than the size of the chocolate eggs (you don't want them to fall out). Set it aside until it has dried, then burst the balloon to leave yourself with solid wool cocoons with eggs hidden inside. Do an Internet image search for 'wool balloon eggs' for pictures of what you are trying to create.

Questions to prompt discussion:

- The Christian story is full of pictures of the change from death to life. At baptism we shed the old life and put on the new, in our daily offices we celebrate new life in the morning and set aside the old at night time. Our cocoons remind us that in nature sometimes things appear to die in order to come to new life.
- As we continue to join Jesus in the wilderness in Lent, what things are we setting aside; letting die from our lives?
- What are we looking forward to about Easter?

### 3. Amazing Grace (Reflective, Discussion)

You will need: Copies of the lyrics for *Amazing Grace*, if you want you could search YouTube for a video of the song being performed (in your preferred style) or listen to a version on CD.

Discuss these questions together:

- What does your group know about John Newton who wrote *Amazing Grace*? (He was a slave trader (one of the most awful by all accounts) who became a Christian during a storm that nearly wrecked his boat. In his later life he joined William Wilberforce as a key voice in the call for the abolition of slavery. *Amazing Grace* is his most famous hymn. Search *Wikipedia* for his biography).
- What are current issues that we think we should be fighting for?
- How might we need to continue as we carry on in our discipleship?

For a longer activity, or on a separate occasion, why not watch the 2006 movie *Amazing Grace* which tells the story of Wilberforce's struggle to outlaw slavery. Include popcorn etc to make a real event of it!

### 4. Weird Science (Creative)

If you've never made corn flour slime then you're in for a treat. It's a clever little science experiment which children (and adults) absolutely love. When you mix a little water with enough corn flour (it's difficult to give exact measurements) you'll get the most amazing substance which is liquid until you push, prod, or poke it, when it turns solid. You can make balls with it, throw and catch it, in enough quantities you can walk on it, and with the correct equipment you can even make it dance... (search YouTube for 'ooblek speaker').

As you play with your slime talk about how it feels and how it changes. Did you expect the transformation? Are you surprised by the outcomes?

There's a great explanation of the science on the BBC website at [www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/22880407](http://www.bbc.co.uk/science/0/22880407)

## LENT 2015 THE CHAPEL

### 5. "I once was, but now I'm..." (Reflective, Creative)

You will need: a mirror, and pens that can write on glass.

There's a wonderful story from John 9 of Jesus healing a blind man. The man and his family are hauled up in front of the Pharisees and asked to explain how this could have happened. The man is unable to respond to any of the questions posed to him, responding simply "...I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25)

As a group spend some time in silence reflecting on that statement. Ask yourselves the simple question "how has meeting Jesus changed me?"

After a time of silence, use the pens to write on the mirror your "I was... but now I'm..." statements.

For instance you might write "I was lonely but now I have friends" or "I was scared now I have hope".

### 6. You are more beautiful than you think (Tech, Reflective, Discussion)

Search YouTube for 'Dove Real Beauty Sketches'

Watch the clip together as a group and then reflect together on the experience.

Ask your group how they think the way God views them differs from the way that they view themselves.

Reflect together on Colossians 3:12 – God sees us as "chosen... holy and beloved" – how does that differ from how we view ourselves?

### 7. Morning Prayer, Night Prayer (Reflective, Discussion)

Read together Philippians 3:10-11 (it might be worth reading it lectio style as it's short, to give your group a good opportunity to really reflect on the words).

Together write a morning prayer and a night prayer, borrowing from the passage. Something that reflects on resurrection and new life for the morning, and the putting off of the old and death for a night prayer.

Create enough copies for everyone to take one and then commit to praying the words each morning and each evening for the rest of the week.

### 8. Changed from one thing to another (Creative, Discussion)

You will need: reflective music, ice cubes, a bowl of warm water.

Play some gentle music and then put the ice cubes into the bowl of warm water. Invite the group to watch the melting ice in silence and to reflect on how we might continue to be changed by God. What needs to melt in our lives?

To make this activity even more exciting, try freezing coloured water and then letting it melt in a glass bowl filled with clear water, to see how the water mixes as the ice cubes defrost. Alternatively have a glass bowl filled with warm red water and slowly pour cold blue water into it.



## THE LIBRARY

9. **Lectio Divina**

Read Philippians 3:1-11 together in the Lectio Divina style, then talk through the questions below:

Which words or phrases particularly caught your attention from this reading?

What emotions or feelings are you aware of?

What might God be trying to reveal to us through these words do you think?

As ever, instructions on how to use Lectio Divina can be found in the introductory notes at the front of this pack.

10. **Bible Study**

Read Philippians 3:1-11 and use some (or all) of the questions below.

1. Are you aware of any 'chains' within your church and within yourself that hinder or even prevent you from stepping out on this journey of continuous conversion? If so, how might you release those 'chains'?
2. Do you see yourself as a guardian of the past or as a shaper of the future?
3. What would '*pressing on towards the goal...*' and '*straining towards what is ahead...*' look like for you tomorrow and this week in your current circumstances? Try to be specific.
4. The question that Sister Joan Chittister asked her own community is one I could turn round and ask of myself and my own situation. 'If you are not committed to your own adulthood, if you are just coming in and going out, letting others take care of all the ragged edges of our life together, then you will forever see the problem in someone else. If you want to know if you are committed to your own adulthood ask yourself, "In the last three things that bothered me in this community, whom did I blame?" this is no more and no less than taking responsibility for myself. ('Seeking God, the Way of St. Benedict' p.61)

How do you respond to Sister Joan Chittister's words?

How did you respond to the last three things that bothered you in your community of faith?

5. What are your idols and past certainties and why might they need to be broken?
6. From the Bible passage, what three words would you use to describe the sort of Christian that Paul was?
7. What do you think are the marks of a mature believer and what are the marks of an immature believer?  
Which are you?
8. Why is it always easier to keep rules about how to live in relationship with Jesus, than actually to keep in relationship with Jesus?

11. **Look at Me (Discussion)**

Read Philippians 3:1-11 together and then focus on verses 5&6.

Paul wrote a long list of reasons why he should be respected or held in regard. Can you write a contemporary list of reasons why someone should 'look at me'? Either write for yourselves or for an imaginary person, depending on the confidence of the group.

Now write a list of the kinds of things that Paul might have considered worth measuring after he had met with Jesus.

How can we encourage each other to build on the second list, and not be seduced by the first?

12. **Death and Resurrection (Creative, Discussion)**

Once you've read the passage together, spend some time reflecting on your faith community as a whole. Prepare two sheets of paper, one with a cross drawn on it, and one with an empty tomb.

On the picture of the cross, write ideas about how your church community demonstrates Christ Crucified to the wider community, and on the sheet with the empty tomb note ways in which your faith community demonstrates the resurrected Christ.

Which list is longer? What might need to change? What do you learn from this activity?

## THE MARKETPLACE

13. **Life Laundry (Creative)**

As a very visible act of renewal why not work to transform an area as a group? If you're a small group then you could find a piece of ground or land that needs tidying or cleaning, or somewhere that could be planted up with flowers or vegetables. As a family you could declutter your house, garage or garden and then sell the 'stuff' on eBay or Gumtree, or even give things away to charity shops.

How does it feel to 'make something new' together?

14. **Looking forward (Discussion)**

As you reflect on Easter just around the corner, write together an article for a local paper giving your thoughts and reflections on why we should be excited about this most important of Christian festivals. **Can you write an engaging article, that's not too long (500 words or so) and that isn't complicated, jargony or preachy?**

Read out loud what you've written and if you think it sounds good, and that people outside the church might find it helpful, send the article in and see if you can get it published.

15. **Prison (Discussion)**

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians from prison. This passage feels a little like he is saying that in losing everything – including his freedom, he discovered just how much he had gained. As a group, why not explore how you might get involved in supporting people who are in prison in this country, or the families of those who have been incarcerated.

As a start, why not watch together the video from Prison Fellowship at <http://vimeo.com/92767137>

Talk about how the film made you feel – what difference does a charity like Prison Fellowship make?

How could your group continue to support an organisation like Prison Fellowship (you may know of other charities that you could get involved with) maybe raise money – or sign up to become a letter writer to someone in prison: <http://www.prisonfellowship.org.uk/what-we-do/letter-writing/>

16. **Change (Creative)**

You will need: plastic coins, key ring loops, a bradawl, permanent markers

There are so many areas of our lives where we need to be renewed, where we need to daily remind ourselves that we need the transformational hand of God at work. For many of us money is a place where we really struggle to let God take over.

Each member of your group will need a plastic coin. Carefully, using a bradawl, make a small hole at one edge. Young children can take part in this activity too; just make sure you supervise them carefully. Write the word 'change' across the face of the coin with a permanent pen, or a question mark if you find that easier, and then carefully loop the coin onto a key ring.

Use the activity time to discuss how you feel about letting God have control of your money. Is money a taboo subject? Would you struggle to ask for help if you needed financial support? Does the concept of tithing seem painful because 10% is 'just so much'? How does that compare with St Paul's encouragement to 'set aside what you've decided' from 1 Corinthians 16:2? How can we be aware of where God might want us to use our money?

# SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GROUP:

Have a read through all of the activities suggested. We would suggest choosing ideas that your group will be comfortable using, but also trying the occasional idea that will stretch people a little. So if your group tends to like serious discussion and Bible study then one of the more creative ideas will be good to help people explore something different. Lots of the ideas are suitable for children and young people to use, but may need a little adaptation; suggestions for how to do this are below.

ADULT SMALL GROUP	CHILDREN’S GROUP	YOUTH GROUP
<b>Refectory</b> 1 or 3	<b>Refectory</b> 2 or 4	<b>Refectory</b> 3 or 4
<b>Chapel</b> 5, 7 or 8	<b>Chapel</b> 8 (rather than quietly watching the ice melt, give each child an ice cube to squeeze and squash as it melts, see who can make the nicest shape, or make it melt the quickest)	<b>Chapel</b> 5 or 6
<b>Library</b> 9, 10, 11 or 12	<b>Library</b> 12 (simplify the questions a little – what things would they like to change about church for the cross picture and what things do they love about church for the empty tomb)	<b>Library</b> 9, 10, 11 or 12
<b>Marketplace</b> 13 or 15	<b>Marketplace</b> 13 or 16	<b>Marketplace</b> 13, 14 or 16 (young people might want to reflect on the difference between a monthly phone bill, for instance, and the cost of an Embrace the Middle East selection pack ( <a href="http://bit.ly/10nBNZb">http://bit.ly/10nBNZb</a> ))

# WEEK FIVE: JOYFUL PERSEVERANCE

Philippians 3:12-21

## AIM OF THIS SESSION:

To help your group explore what it is about the Christian Faith that inspires joy, and to support each other in persevering with the tough stuff with that joy in mind.

## INTRODUCTION

It’s nearly here. The shops are overflowing with chocolaty goodies, you probably already know what you will be eating with whom on Easter day, and your church celebrations are probably well prepared. As Christians Easter is our most joyful festival, when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, and the defeat of death itself.

This week we tackle one of the great Benedictine paradoxes together. As we wrote this material we were challenged about how quickly we focussed on perseverance rather than picking up the call on us as Christians to be joyful! We often fall into the rhetoric of struggling on, of hanging on in there, at the expense of remembering that actually following Christ is about lives filled with joy. Don’t confuse that with the fixed grins of people trying to give the impression of eternal happiness, but instead with the wonderful deep experience of being joyful people.

It’s in persevering, with God, with prayer and scripture, *with each other* that we find true joy, rather than the hollow worldly practice of flipping from thing to thing, constantly seeking the latest buzz.

This week your group will spend time considering what it means to commit to Christ and to each other for the long haul and to model to their community the joy that comes from knowing Christ as Friend and Saviour.

## GROUP MATERIAL

### Video 5

If at all possible begin your time together by watching the fifth episode of the Ben videos. It’s available on the DVD that accompanied your pack and so can be played on a standard DVD player or in a computer or laptop. It’s also available on both Vimeo and YouTube and can be accessed from the lent course website: [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org). If you have any problems accessing the video then please get in touch ([lent@winchester.anglican.org](mailto:lent@winchester.anglican.org)) and we will do all we can to help you.

## BOOK CLUB

If you’re reading *Seeking God* by Esther de Waal together then this week focus on Chapter 4: Stability.

If you’re studying *The Rule of St Benedict* together then focus on Chapter 7 this week.

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## THE REFECTORY

## 1. Cheese (and wine!) (Food)

You will need a choice of different cheeses – some very new (cream cheese, mozzarella, maybe even babybel or cheesestrings) and some much more mature. (If you like you could also do the same with wine – have a bottle of a new wine, and something much older).

Together taste the new and the mature and talk about the different flavours.

- How does maturity change something?
- Is it worth persevering for a better final product?

## 2. House of Cards (Creative, Discussion)

As a group, set yourself the challenge of completing a house of cards, using a full deck of playing cards. Keep going until either you complete the challenge, or give up through frustration. Reflect together on what you have learnt about perseverance together.

## 3. A Choice of Video Clips... (Tech)

There are so many film clips which illustrate the concept of perseverance, that it's impossible to recommend just one. Here are a few options for you to watch together:

- Search YouTube for 'batman begins why do we fall' (<http://youtu.be/nFfozZTjItQ>). As the Wayne mansion burns to the ground, Alfred rescues Bruce and together they descend in the lift to the caves beneath the house. At the bottom of the lift shaft Alfred asks Bruce "Why do we fall sir? So that we can learn to pick ourselves up."
- Search YouTube for 'Derek Redmond' to find a clip of the Olympic Athlete who injured his hamstring during the 1992 Olympic games, but with his Father's help continued to the finish line nonetheless. (<http://youtu.be/t2G8KVzTfw>)
- Search YouTube for 'team Hoyt' (<http://youtu.be/dDnrLv6z-mM>). Dick Hoyt and his son Rick compete in IronMan events, despite Rick being profoundly disabled.
- Search YouTube for 'chariots of fire he who honors God' (<http://youtu.be/uwyltmUR3MU>) to watch Eric Liddell compete in and win his race at the Olympics 1924.

All of these clips demonstrate in some way the importance of persevering, of not giving up. Use these questions to help your group reflect together:

- What motivated these people to keep persevering?
- Where was the moment of joy in the clip?
- Where are the areas in our own lives where we need to persevere?
- Where might this lead us to joy?

## THE CHAPEL

## 4. ParkRun (Creative, Discussion)

Every week, all over the country, people compete in local free ParkRun events; timed 5km runs, free to enter, attracting people of all sorts of different abilities, ages and backgrounds.

As a group attend your nearest ParkRun (visit [parkrun.org.uk](http://parkrun.org.uk) to find the closest event to you) and watch the people competing – if there are members of your group who are runners you could go and cheer them on. Compare how people of different abilities cross the line, watch how a parent and a young child persevere round the course, make a note of how people react as they cross the finish line - regardless of how long it's taken them to get round.

If you really enjoy the event, why not volunteer sometime, or maybe do a couch to 5k training plan and enter the run yourself!

**If you don't have ParkRun nearby, why not simply go for a walk together, or a bike ride, any kind of enjoyable activity that requires a bit of perseverance.**

## 5. Jesus has put me here for the benefit of other people (Discussion, Creative)

You will need: small credit card sized piece of blank card, pens, coloured pencils etc.

As a very simple *aide memoir* encourage your group to write the words 'Jesus has put me here for the benefit of other people' on their piece of card – and then to decorate the white space with coloured pencils if appropriate. Invite people to place the cards in their purse or wallet, or to take it home and put it above a desk or mirror, and to use it as a reminder that Jesus places us in various situations for the benefit of the people around us.

Feel free to make as many copies of these cards as people like, and then to spread them liberally around!

- Do we sometimes forget what we are called to do?
- Are there places where we find it hard to represent Jesus?
- How might God use us more effectively for his purposes?

## 6. Thine be the Glory (Reflective, Discussion)

Have copies of the hymn Thine be the Glory for your group to be able to read. Alternatively watch a performance of the hymn together on YouTube, or listen to a version on a CD. If you have a musician in your group, why not sing it together.

- As you read through the lyrics do any in particular stand out for you? Why?
- What are the emotions you feel as you read these words?
- Do you find any of the lines difficult? Which ones? Why?
- What would your group add if they were to write another verse?

## 7. Millstone/Tombstone (Creative, Discussion)

You will need: a circle of card (ideally grey or yellow), black pens.

On one side of the card draw a black circle in the middle so that the card resembles a millstone, leave the other side blank to resemble a tombstone, similar to the one that will be rolled away from the tomb on Easter morning.

In a moment of quiet, invite your group to think about the things in their lives that draw them away from God, the things which feel like millstones around their necks. Invite them to write or draw something on the millstone side of the card that represents the thing that they are thinking of. Then turn the cards over and invite your group to spend some time thinking about something that fills them with joy. Again write or draw something that will bring that thing to mind for them.

Lead your group on a time of prayer – bringing our millstones and tombstones before God, asking for strength as we persevere with the things that weigh us down, and giving thanks for the joyful things in our lives.

## 8. What about you inspires me? (Creative)

You will need: paper (white or coloured), pens, scissors, sticky tape.

Get your group to draw around their hands on the piece of paper and to cut out the shape.

**Invite them to write their name on the palm of the hand they have just created.**

Pass the hands around the group. As you get someone's handprint, you will need to spend a moment reflecting on the person whose hand you have, and in particular to think whether there is something about that person that inspires you. When you have thought of something write it down and then pass the handprint on to the next person. Keep going until the hands have gone full circle.

To make the activity more active you could stick the hands to your back, and work your way round the group, writing on each other.

Together give thanks to God for the members of your group, and celebrate together all the ways in which you inspire each other.

## LENT 2015

# THE LIBRARY

### 9. Lectio Divina (Discussion, Reflective)

Read Philippians 3:12-21 together in the Lectio Divina style, then talk through the questions below:

Which words or phrases particularly caught your attention from this reading?

What emotions or feelings are you aware of?

What might God be trying to reveal to us through these words do you think?

### 10. Bible Study (Discussion)

Read Philippians 3:12-20 and use some (or all) of the questions below.

1. Paul is writing to the church in a Roman colony in Macedonia, a prominent city in the region. (Acts 16:12) He is probably under house arrest in Rome. Locate Philippi and Rome on a map and re-read the passage again. Does the knowledge that Paul is in prison add anything to your reading?
2. What might be the goal that Paul is referring to in this passage?  
Why does he press on towards it?
3. How does Paul describe the way in which he seeks to attain the goal?
4. What is the difference between a goal and a prize? (verse 14)
5. What do you think are the signs of spiritual maturity? (verse 15)
6. What kind of example has Paul set in Christian living? (verse 17)
7. Paul describes enemies of Christ in verse 19 whose minds are on earthly things.  
In your group can you think of modern examples?  
Is 'enemies of Christ' too strong an expression for our present culture?  
Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy wrote a poem called 'Indifference' in which Jesus, coming to Birmingham, faces not cruel torture but indifference, (an internet search for 'Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy indifference' brings up a

couple of websites where you can find the poem in full). Which of the two, hostility or indifference, is the most pressing concern in your community?

What responses do they require?

8. Paul refers to citizenship of heaven in verse 20. Roman citizenship would have been prized in Philippi. Citizenship is once again something desirable in the UK.  
What might be included in a heavenly citizenship test?
9. Discuss whether there might be any disadvantages to focussing exclusively on heavenly citizenship.

### 11. World Café (Discussion)

For a change, try reading this passage in your group in a World Café style. Divide your group into four or five smaller groups (if possible) and then in a time of silence invite everyone to read the passage through two or three times to really familiarise themselves with the words.

In their groups allow them up to ten minutes to each share what the core message of the passage might be, and to record any thoughts on a large sheet of paper (flipchart paper would be ideal) in the group. When the time is up, invite everyone to move round so that no one is with anyone that they have already been with. Repeat the exercise two or three times and see if by the end the group has come up with some definitive reflections on the passage.

Give thanks to God for speaking to your group.

## 12. Great Lives (Discussion)

Read Philippians 3: 12-21 together.

Hand out copies of the 'Great Lives' sheet that accompanies this session. If possible share the stories out so that several people in the group have access to a copy.

Once people have read their stories in the small groups or individually, invite them to explain and/or retell the tale to the group and to reflect on how the characters reflect Paul's teaching in Philippians.

Finish by asking the group if they can think of stories about people from your own church where people have shown similar perseverance in the face of adversity.

### David Wilkerson

Can you imagine selling your TV and devoting the time you spent in front of it in prayer instead? That's what David Wilkerson, a 27-year-old American, did in 1958. One night he decided that instead of spending his evenings watching TV he would commit to pray from midnight to 2 a.m. every night.

Having sold his TV, and while praying, he found himself drawn to a copy of *Time* magazine. At first he thought he must just be suffering from the usual kinds of distractions any one of us struggles with when we set time aside to pray. He turned the distraction over to the Lord and simply asked: 'God, is there something you want me to see?' He recalls the story:

At first glance, it seemed that there was nothing on the page to interest me. It carried a pen drawing of a trial taking place in New York City, 350 miles away. I'd never been to New York, and I never wanted to go, except perhaps to see the Statue of Liberty.

I started to flip the page over. But as I did, my attention was caught by the eyes of one of the figures in the drawing. A boy. One of seven boys on trial for murder. The artist had caught such a look of bewilderment and hatred and despair in his features that I opened the magazine wide again to get a closer look. And as I did, I began to cry.

'What's the matter with me!' I said aloud, impatiently brushing away a tear. I looked at the picture more carefully. The boys were teenagers. They were members of a gang called the Dragons. Beneath their picture was the story of how they had gone into Highbridge Park in New York and brutally attacked and killed a fifteen-year-old polio victim named Michael Farmer. The seven boys stabbed Michael in the back seven times with their knives, then beat him over the head with garrison belts. They went away wiping blood through their hair, saying, 'We messed him good.'

The story revolted me. It turned my stomach. In our little mountain town such things seemed mercifully unbelievable.

That's why I was dumbfounded by a thought that sprang suddenly into my head – full-blown, as though it had come into me from somewhere else: *Go to New York City and help those boys.*

David Wilkerson was the most unlikely person you could imagine to give up everything and head into New York to work with drug addicts and criminals, but that's exactly what he did – trusted in God, trusted in his calling, and started one of the most famous and well-documented missionary works in the world. Teen Challenge, the charity David Wilkerson eventually started, runs to this day, helping people face life-controlling addiction problems through a Christian faith-based solution.

### Jackie Pullinger

At the age of 21 Jackie Pullinger stepped off a boat in Hong Kong ready to be a missionary. She had no idea where she should go and no idea what God was calling her to do, just a feeling that this was the right place for her to be. So with just HK\$100 in her pocket she found a job as a primary-school teacher in Kowloon, a huge poverty-ridden walled city.

Kowloon was a slum city with little law and no order, ruled instead by the Triad gangs who sold drugs and ran gambling and prostitution rackets across the city.

Jackie was quickly overwhelmed by the desire to help the young people there (many of whom were heavily addicted to drugs), so she began a youth club in an effort to meet with young people, build relationships with them and above all pray with them that they would be released from their drug addictions. Jackie remembers that drug use was so widespread and commonplace that just walking down the street entailed stepping over a hundred people 'chasing the dragon' – smoking their drugs.

One night Jackie arrived at her youth club to discover that it had been so badly vandalized it seemed impossible her ministry could continue. That night she met Winson, an opium addict who'd been sent to 'guard' her. It was when Winson later turned to Christ and was instantly and painlessly freed from his addiction, without any withdrawal symptoms, that Jackie's calling was confirmed: to meet with and pray for healing from drug addiction for the inhabitants of the Walled City of Kowloon.

As she demonstrated her commitment to the city, staying despite having little or no money and despite the disbelief and scepticism of the inhabitants, she slowly began to work an incredible change in that terrifying place.

One by one the boys in her youth club, many of whom had already fallen in with the Triad gangs, turned their lives over to Christ, and as they did so, through prayer, began to be released of their addiction to opium and heroin.

Eventually, in the 1990s, the Walled City was pulled down by the Hong Kong authorities. In its place now stands a park with a model replica of the city and a plaque commemorating the work Jackie did with drug addicts and gang members. Through her charity, St Stephen's Society, her work with drug addicts and the homeless across Asia continues today.

### William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce was a young schoolboy when his fight against evil first began. Before his tenth birthday he wrote his first letter to a newspaper protesting against slavery.

An incredibly eloquent and intelligent young man, he spent many years exploring what it meant to be a Christian, meeting teachers who told him about a living faith in Jesus and at times battling with his mother, who was concerned about the faith that was growing in him.

At the age of 21 William became an MP and forged strong relationships with other reforming politicians like himself. At 24 he once again came face to face with the Christian faith – and made a commitment to Christ that would change his life forever. His conviction about the evils of the slave trade, combined with his new-found fervour for Jesus Christ and the Bible, combined to form a force that was unstoppable.

Following in the footsteps of others who'd already picked up the baton with regards to the fight against slavery, and horrified by the appalling way slaves were packed into ships like sardines and sailed hundreds of miles around the world, their captors not caring whether they lived or died, Wilberforce committed himself to driving a bill through Parliament abolishing the slave trade once and for all.

In 1789 William delivered a stunning speech in Parliament, forcefully calling for the end to the slave trade, but despite being one of the 'ablest and most eloquent speeches' Parliament had ever heard, and despite being backed by a nationwide campaign, such was the strength of support for slavery in Parliament that the plans were stalled.

Two years later Wilberforce again brought the issue to Parliament. This time it passed, but only after the word 'gradually' was added to the text of the final bill, rendering the decision pointless.

To Wilberforce's great credit he never gave up, in spite of these continual setbacks. By 1805 he'd brought the bill to Parliament no fewer than 11 times and every time he'd been defeated.

It wasn't until 1807, some 18 years after his first speech in Parliament, that eventually slavery was abolished in Great Britain. As Parliament cheered his success, William Wilberforce sat in tears, unable to believe that he'd eventually succeeded in his life's ambition.

# THE MARKETPLACE

### 13. Street Pastors (Discussion)

Find out where your nearest Street Pastors group is running and invite a member of the team to come and talk to your group about the ministry that they are involved in. Ask them to help people think especially about perseverance and the joy they find or share through their work.

### 14. Guerrilla Planting (Creative)

For a bit of fun, head out with your group and plant some bulbs, or sunflower seeds in points around your community where you (and others) will see them regularly. When the plants begin to grow and eventually fill your community with colour, use them as a reminder to give thanks to God for where you live, and to praise him for the joy which a relationship with him brings.

If you planted lollipop prayers in Week 2, then perhaps you could plant your seeds around your prayers. Or if you marked 'dark places' on maps, you could brighten those up with some flowers.

If you can't get out and about to do your planting, bring pots, bulbs, seeds and compost to your group and then encourage people to place their pot somewhere visible when the session has finished.

### 15. Difficult prayers (Creative, Reflective)

You will need: small pieces of paracord or similar rope/string.

Spend some time in quiet with your group; use gentle music if that would help.

Encourage your group members to bring to mind someone who they see regularly, outside of the normal church environment, who they have a difficult relationship with. As you think of a person or a situation that's tough, why not tie a knot in your piece of rope.

Paul urges the Philippians to 'hold fast'; as you hold your piece of rope, reflect on a climber, holding fast to a cliff face or a climbing wall, pressing on towards a goal.

Sometimes, relationships can feel like that, there are people who we find it so difficult to be with, or to care for, that the effort of trying is almost painful. Use this time to commit to pray for the person that you have in mind, and take the piece of rope away with you as a reminder to keep on praying for that particular person.

Maybe encourage your group to untie one or two of the knots if they feel able, and to consider untying further knots in the future as they feel able.

### 16. The joy of the Lord is your strength (Reflective, Creative)

Read Nehemiah 8:9-12 together, use Lego bricks, or wooden blocks to build walls together as you listen to the words.

Nehemiah was called by God to go and rebuild his neighbourhood, a place so broken, that when the people read the laws of that place their only response was to break down and cry. Nehemiah gave the people hope, to persevere, and to look forwards to a time of great joy when the walls of Jerusalem would be rebuilt.

Talk together about your own community. What might God want you to weep over? What might he want you to celebrate? Who are the people who have 'nothing prepared'? What might God be asking you to do for them?

Encourage the group to keep building the walls as you talk.

# SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GROUP:

Have a read through all of the activities suggested. We would suggest choosing ideas that your group will be comfortable using, but also trying the occasional idea that will stretch people a little. So if your group tends to like serious discussion and Bible study then

one of the more creative ideas will be good to help people explore something different. Lots of the ideas are suitable for children and young people to use, but may need a little adaptation; suggestions for how to do this are below.

## ADULT SMALL GROUP

### Refectory

1, 2, 3 or 4

### Chapel

5 or 6

### Library

9, 10, 11 or 12

### Marketplace

13 or 15

## CHILDREN'S GROUP

### Refectory

1 (for smaller children use blocks or Jenga pieces rather than cards)

### Chapel

8 (use more understandable language than 'what inspires you; Try 'what do you really like about...' Try to encourage the children to think about what other people in the group are like rather than physical attributes)

### Library

9 (if you haven't tried lectio with your children then this might be the time to give it a go. Maybe get them to run from one end of the room to the other between each reading to embed the idea of pressing on towards the goal, or have some old running shoes or sports equipment to look at. If you have some way of showing video why not try a compilation of sporting action for them to watch. Search for 'Best Bits of the London 2012 Olympics' on YouTube)

### Marketplace

14 (if you can't get out and about to plant seeds or bulbs, try just planting them by the church, or in pots to take home. Talk about the patience of waiting and the joy of something popping out of the soil)

## YOUTH GROUP

### Refectory

1, 2 or 4

### Chapel

5, 7 or 8

### Library

9, 10, 11 or 12

### Marketplace

13, 14, 15 or 16

# WEEK SIX: LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS

Mark 11:1-11

## AIM OF THIS SESSION:

To enable participants to complete their Rule of Life.

## INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of Lent 2015 has been to give your group the opportunity to think through what they might put in a rule of life to help them go deeper in their relationship with Jesus, and to help us all in the Diocese of Winchester to strive for simpler lives; having Jesus at the core, and his mission as our focus.

People are busy... There's no secret or surprise there, and so if at all possible, we recommend that you commit this final meeting to allowing people the space to complete their rule of life together. However we are conscious that many groups will want to follow the usual Lent Course pattern and so we have provided some material in order that you can do that if you prefer, and then leave people with the rule of life postcards to complete in their own time.

If you decide to complete the postcards together then, after watching the Ben video, use this first section of material. If you would rather do them separately then watch the video and then skip on to Part 2.

## PART 1

### Video 6

If at all possible begin your time together by watching the final episode of the Ben videos. It's available on the DVD that accompanied your pack and so can be played on a standard DVD player or in a computer or laptop. It's also available on both Vimeo and YouTube and can be accessed from the lent course website: [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org). If you have any problems accessing the video then please **get in touch** and we will do all we can to help you.

## BOOK CLUB

If you're reading *Seeking God* by Esther de Waal together then this week focus on Chapter 10: Praying.

If you're studying *The Rule of St Benedict* together then focus on Chapter 73 this week.

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## PART 1

# THE REFECTORY

### Making space (Foody)

As you are going to be doing some serious brain work together in this session why not start your time together with some food, and a chance to chat and recall all that you have covered together over the last six weeks. Begin the meal by watching the final Ben video together and then read Mark 11:1-11. You may want to use the following three questions to help you focus your conversation (feel free to re-order the questions if you prefer):

- What have you learnt about God?
- What have you learnt about each other?
- What have you learnt about yourself?

Hand out copies of the postcards to each member of your group. In silence spend some time reflecting on the three headings: Obedient Listening, Ongoing Conversion and Joyful Perseverance.

Feel free to play some quiet music, light a candle or provide anything else that will help your group to be still.

After a while invite people to share which of the headings they feel they most resonate with after five weeks of study. Are there any that they still can't quite get their heads around? Which one do they find the most exciting?

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# THE CHAPEL

You will need: plenty of leaf shaped post-it notes (several per person), or pieces of green paper that are roughly leaf shaped. Normal Post-it notes would do, but it would be good to help people think about the palms that the people of Jerusalem laid on the ground in front of Jesus.

Read through Mark 11:1-11 again, and invite people to think about the crowd.

As we have gone through Lent we have been gathering the tools that we need in order to create a Rule of Life, a gift that we can lay in front of the King of kings. Invite your group to look at the headings on the three postcards and to write on their Post-it notes the things that they might be able to offer to God in response. Encourage them to think about things that they personally might want to do in response, that you could do together as a group, and things that maybe only the whole church could achieve together. Also encourage people to think about both 'spiritual' ideas and practical ideas; reading a chapter of scripture each day, and making sure that the kitchen sides are clear before bed time are both ideas that might find a place in a Rule of Life.

Again, allow plenty of time for this to happen, feel free to use music or any other tool to aid reflection.

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## THE LIBRARY

Read Mark 11:1-11 again.

Consider the disciples. How did they respond to Jesus' instructions? What might they have been feeling? What questions might they have suppressed, or what may they have talked about with each other as they headed off to complete their tasks?

Gather all of the Post-it notes in the middle and see what others have written, which catch your attention? Which resonate with you? Which don't you understand?

Once you've had a good look and a discussion, start to place the ideas in different piles; one for obedient listening, one for ongoing conversion and one for joyful perseverance.

Are any of the piles much smaller than the others? If so can you think of specific ideas or activities that would balance them out a bit?

## THE MARKETPLACE

Read Mark 11:1-11 for a last time.

Now go through the piles and identify which of the ideas are primarily personal, which are very much 'me and God' ideas; which are corporate, things that you and your small group might want to aim to do together or which will primarily benefit you as a group; and which are global, things that the Church in its widest sense might want to offer the world.

Think of them as gifts – which are the gifts that God might want for you personally, which are a gift that together you might offer your local community and which are global gifts – things that the wider Church could offer to the world.

As you find ideas that really resonate with you then you can start writing them on to your postcards. In an ideal world each postcard might have several ideas written on it – some personal some corporate and some global, and of those some would be more spiritual ideas and others would be more practical.

There are no hard and fast rules; God might have a very different Rule of Life in mind for you than he might for anyone else in the Diocese. That's why this needs to be a reflective and prayerful activity.

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## PART 2

### THE REFECTORY

#### 1. Palm Crosses

With your group make palm crosses using either strips of paper or palm leaves, depending on availability. They're very simple and you can find video instructions here (the sound isn't great): [youtu.be/oT-0Z6YSJoU](https://youtu.be/oT-0Z6YSJoU) or there's a pdf from the Diocese of Birmingham here: [bit.ly/lu1tKF](http://bit.ly/lu1tKF) or [www.birmingham.anglican.org/upload/pdf/HowTo\\_PalmCross.pdf](http://www.birmingham.anglican.org/upload/pdf/HowTo_PalmCross.pdf) Reflect together on the story of the triumphal entry and what it means to each member of your group.

#### 2. Watch the movie *The Book of Eli* together.

This isn't a film for the faint hearted (Christianity Today says: Its brutal content is not for all tastes, but this thoughtful action movie finds Denzel Washington protecting the last copy of a very important book: the Bible). It contains 'some brutal violence and language' and definitely won't be right for everyone. However as its message is about a man who has a mission that he is called to and who commits his life to its completion it would be a good way in to this week's theme and give your group plenty to talk about and reflect on.

If you don't have time to watch a whole movie together watch this clip from the film on the movieclips.com website: <http://cli.ps/SzW8C> (The clip is available to view on [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org)). The book they are talking about is the Bible – why might Denzel Washington's character be so determined to protect it? Why might all copies have been destroyed? Why might the second character in the clip be so keen to get his hands on a copy? How far would you go to protect the last remaining Bible?

**Spoiler Alert:** The movie culminates with the revelation that Denzel Washington's character, who we discover is blind, doesn't have a copy of the Bible, rather he has memorised the whole book from cover to cover in order to preserve it. As Jesus rides to his death, and with his command from week two to 'take up our crosses and follow him' ringing in our ears, what might we be called to give or to sacrifice to follow Christ?

#### 3. 'Palm' Trees

You will need: green paper, brown paper, scissors, pens, glue sticks

Each member of your group will need to draw and cut out 4 hand prints from the green paper and a palm tree trunk from the brown paper. Use the hand shapes to create the palm fronds on top of the trunk, and then on three of the leaves write: obedient listening, continuous conversion and joyful perseverance, on the 4th leaf write 'living the mission of Jesus'.

Encourage your group to write or draw something on each leaf that they have learnt or discovered during Lent, and then on the 4th leaf something that they might do now to put that learning into action.

If you would prefer to follow a more typical Lent course session then please choose from the following activities as usual. If at all possible begin the session by watching video 6 together.

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# THE CHAPEL

## 4. Laying down our cloaks

You will need: strips of scrap material, permanent markers/fabric pens

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowds laid their cloaks on the ground for his donkey to walk over. Use the pens to write on the strips of material the things that we might need to lay down before Jesus today. Don't confuse this with a confession activity, it's not saying sorry for sins, but rather a chance to examine our lives and decide what it is that taking up our new rule of life might mean we have to lay down: busyness, church activities that aren't core to living the mission of Jesus; time in front of the TV; money spent on unnecessary luxuries...

## 5. Hosanna Banner

You will need a big sheet of paper or material with the word 'Hosanna' written on it in outline.



Ask your group to reflect together on what it is that they would like to celebrate from the time that you have spent together throughout Lent. What have you discovered new about God and your relationship with God? How have you changed? What might you be called to now as a group?

As you colour in and decorate your banner together, share what it is that you want to celebrate.

## 6. Psalm 118

The words that the crowds cheer as Jesus rides into Jerusalem are from Psalm 118. Have the words available for everyone to read, either in Bibles or printed out from BibleGateway or another online Bible.

Read the words of the Psalm together in a manner that you are comfortable with (all together, antiphonally or any other way that works for you).

Spend some time talking about what these words must have meant to the people who sang them.

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# THE LIBRARY

## 7. Lectio Divina

Read Mark 11:1-11 either lectio style (see the instructions in the introductory notes) or in another reflective style. It's a very descriptive passage, so it would be a great one to read to your group slowly. They may want to shut their eyes and try to picture the scene, to imagine how all of the different characters felt and responded at each stage of the story. Use the questions below as you reflect together on the passage.

Which words or phrases particularly caught your attention from this reading?

What emotions or feelings are you aware of?

What might God be trying to reveal to us through these words do you think?

## 8. Bible Study

1. To where was Jesus travelling? What is the significance of this place?

What did the people think and do when they saw Jesus riding into Jerusalem? (See Zechariah 9:9)

2. Read Mark 15:6-15. How do the crowd change a few days later?

3. Jesus is travelling to the place of his trial and death, the culmination of his three years of ministry on earth. He does it with no holding back, there is no shown trepidation here (Although in 14:32-42 we see him ask God if it is possible for him not to suffer, yet he still submits to his Father's will). How do you think Jesus can travel to the city of his death, knowing what will come a few days later?

4. Was his death the end of his mission?

5. What might we expect as we walk/live out our rule of life?

6. How can we persevere joyfully in the light of these truths?

7. Are there times when we're like the crowd, praising Jesus when it's all good, but rejecting him when he doesn't live up to our expectations?

8. In what ways can we actively live to change that?

## 9. Thinking Deeper

You will need: Bibles, dictionaries, study Bibles, concordances (all these are available online if you have access to the internet where you meet). If you have Tom Wright's Mark for Everyone book then you'll find a really useful glossary in the back.

The reading from Mark 11:1-11 contains all sorts of hints and clues that we can try and dig into to get a better understanding of what is going on. Once you have read through the passage a couple of times, use all of your reference material to find out as much as you can about the following people, words and terms:

David, Jerusalem, colt, hosanna, Bethphage, Bethany, Mount of Olives, kingdom, twelve.

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# THE MARKETPLACE

## 10. Keep it simple

There is something really incredible about the fact that Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a colt. It's the lowliest of beasts, it signifies humility and service rather than the grandeur of a horse or a camel.

Why not spend some time as a group exploring whether there are things that you could simplify about your own lives, are there things that you know you spend too much money on, or overly extravagant areas of your lives? Do you have more clothes in your wardrobe than you really need, or old toys or bits of tech lying around that you really don't need and which could benefit other people? Together make a list of all the things that you could do without as you choose the colt over the warhorse.

## 11. What kind of greeting?

Produce 3 large pieces of paper, one with the word 'home' written on it, one with 'school' or 'work' and one with 'church'.

Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem with songs, shouts, cloaks and palm leaves – how would he be welcomed into your home, your church and your place or work or your school? Scribble ideas on the sheets, or draw, paint and stick your thoughts.

## 12. How busy?

There's a feeling that 'busyness' is something of an epidemic in our culture. Busy used to be a word that we used to describe brief periods of our lives when there was more than usual on, but now it's more often used as a description how we live every day.

Together, make a list of the busiest people that you know – feel free to use real people (including yourselves) or alternatively consider some fictional people, or people with specific roles: parent, teacher, business man, the individual who's a cleaner, shop assistant and dinner lady all in one...

Who's the busiest?

How could they be less busy?

How could you help?

Finally have a look at the three headings from our Rule of Life: obedient listening, ongoing conversion and joyful perseverance. How might a Rule of Life help these people avoid being 'busy'? How might a Rule of Life help you be less busy?

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# LENT 2015

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR GROUP:

Have a read through all of the activities suggested. We would suggest choosing ideas that your group will be comfortable using, but also trying the occasional idea that will stretch people a little. So if your group tends to like serious discussion and Bible study then one of the more creative ideas will be good to help people explore something different. Lots of the ideas are suitable for children and young people to use, but may need a little adaptation; suggestions for how to do this are below.

ADULT SMALL GROUP	CHILDREN'S GROUP	YOUTH GROUP
<b>Refectory</b>	<b>Refectory</b>	<b>Refectory</b>
1 or 2	1 or 3	1 or 2
<b>Chapel</b>	<b>Chapel</b>	<b>Chapel</b>
4 or 6	4 or 5	4, 5 or 6
<b>Library</b>	<b>Library</b>	<b>Library</b>
7, 8 or 9	7	7, 8 or 9
<b>Marketplace</b>	<b>Marketplace</b>	<b>Marketplace</b>
10, 11 or 12	11	10, 11 or 12

**Dahlias and bread pudding.**

*When I was growing up we visited my grandparents reasonably often. They lived in council housing in South East London, in a corner house off a small green. Two things I remember from those visits: the sights and the smells. Being a corner plot there was space for my grandfather to grow vegetables. And more than that – dahlias. Hundreds of them creating a smorgasbord of colours across an ordinary London garden (for which he won many London-wide trophies). Once you made it inside the house there was the smell of home-baking - pies, bread and most of all cakes, like bread pudding. Great chunks of it, offered freely. And even now when I see great banks of flowers, or smell fresh baked bread pudding, I am taken back to that time. I have taken that awareness with me through my life.*

As we begin this Lenten journey to explore a Rule of Life for this Christian community, we begin necessarily with Jesus in the wilderness. Why do we begin here apart from the fact that we are using the traditional readings? We begin here as Jesus did, **to sharpen our senses**. So today we are concerned with sharpening our attention to the voice of God so that we can live our lives around Christ, day to day, and with one another. To do that we need to withdraw, we need to come aside – contemplation comes before engagement.

Benedict in his rule suggests we need to “wake up, listen and take action”. What might that mean for us as a church today?

**1. Wake up –**

**God has called us to play a part in his plans**

The time Jesus came was at the end of hundreds of years of not hearing the voice of God. The last prophets had died (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi) and then there had been silence from heaven for a long time. A long excruciating silence! A silence which meant the people of God, God’s chosen, His special people through whom he was to change the world, heard nothing. The silence was loud, painful and distanced them from their God. ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’, as the Psalmist puts it in Psalm 22. Still in slavery, yes some returned from the Exile, but Yahweh was not at work. Or was he? God’s chosen people are asleep to his call to them to be a light to the nations.

I wonder what people in the local community would say we are about? What would they highlight as being our priorities and emphases? What “smell” are we giving off? Of course we are part of a worldwide movement, down the ages, to transform this world, to serve in the name of the one true God. We too here and now are part of his purposes. How do we fit into those purposes and what do we bring to that as his people in this place at this time?

Some churches are engaged with supporting the Persecuted Church in a big way, campaigning for the release of prisoners, writing to them in prison, lobbying MPs and organisations to take notice. Often many from the church family are engaged in playing their part. But perhaps that isn’t far enough? What if God were calling us to campaign against the wrongful arrest and detention of all people, a wider injustice than just against Christians? Not just Christians but standing up against human rights violations of all kinds? How could we engage with that?

Just as Jesus the Christ was part of the purposes of God, so we here today are too. We need to sharpen our senses so that we are open to his unique call on our life together, to be sensitive to his word to us. We need to wake up to his call to us! God is not asleep, but at work!

**2. Listen –**

**we need to be prepared for our part in his story (history)**

*Affirmation not criticism.*

*Children need much more affirmation than criticism if they are to be shaped and formed into the people they can be. I remember when my nephew spotted me leading worship at theological college. He wasn’t abashed by the context. He pointed at me and wriggled so that he could come and see me like he always did. So his parents gave up the struggle, and he ran down the middle aisle calling my name (nice and affirming for me!). It would have been easy to tell him off, but instead I picked him up and carried on leading worship with him in my arms – my nephew, the beloved, precious member of our wider family.*

At Christ’s baptism heaven cracks open, torn apart like the Red Sea, or the splitting of the rock during the time of Moses, or the ripping of the curtain of the temple at his death. As Jesus was driven away into the desert he had those wonderful words from the Father ringing in his ears: ‘You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well-pleased’ (Mark 1:11). Perhaps those very words were what he needed to ponder upon as he pursued God in the desert.

Jesus is being prepared for his future ministry, sharpening his senses. He will need to see as the Father sees, he will need to do as he sees the Father doing, and his heart needs to beat for the things that the Father’s heart aches for. He is being prepared for his future ministry by hearing the words of affirmation and encouragement from the Father himself. What a start to his ministry!

God has so much encouragement to give to us his people if we would only listen! The Scriptures are full of affirmation and promises – how much time do we spend reading them and hearing them being said to us, today, in this church, at this time? Helping one another to discern God’s call on our individual lives is crucial, as well as what he wants us to do and be together. We need to make sure this is a priority.

Jesus went into the desert with those words of affirmation ringing in his ears. We need to sharpen our senses to the affirmation he has for us here, today.

### 3. Take action –

**we are called to be prophetic citizens in his world**

Red Arrows.

The Red Arrows are based in Norfolk. The runway is set in 2 parishes of a rural benefice, the landing lights in one and the tarmac in another. The Vicar has decided to take an active interest in their work. He looks up their flight schedules on the internet and prays for them as they go through the different stages of training. First the new pilots learn to fly in a formation of five aircraft, then they go through their safety certificate out in Cyprus. Once they have done that their training is complete. Their disciplined flying, in trusting and following precise protocols allows them to do something amazing: to entertain hundreds and thousands of people by flying amazing aerobatic routines across the skies, at amazing speeds, in close proximity to each other, working together to produce something memorable and lasting.

In her book *Seeking God*, Esther de Waal suggests that Benedict recognises his monks are “ordinary people and he will lead them in ways that are accessible to ordinary people”<sup>1</sup>, “...that day to day living which revolves around Christ both individually and corporately”<sup>2</sup>. So how are we as a church preparing our members for Monday to Friday living, to contribute something memorable and lasting?

One way we can encourage one another in this is to work at our spiritual disciplines together. Perhaps we need to focus on one discipline each week during this Lenten period, and help one another to engage with it. Just as the pilots need to be trained and equipped to be ready to fly, so we too need training. The word asceticism correlates to the Greek word for training. What will help us in our training so that we are ready to act?

We need to sharpen our senses and be ready to act, for God is ready to use us to change the world.

### Conclusion

Holidays.

*This time of year many of us are looking forward to being away from the busyness of life in the summer. To get there we spend time both planning what we will do and where we will go, and also preparing. Anyone been to Uganda recently? Got the jabs to prove it?*

Holidays are great. But we can't always be on holiday. Withdrawing from the busyness of this world is important, but we can't stay there. The key is taking with us the inner silence and peace that comes from wrestling with God into our full-on world, and being people of love and joy and peace amongst them. In that way every day becomes a holy day, for God is at work within us and without us to bring in his kingdom. Let's continue to work to help one another play our part to change this world and be found faithful when he returns.

<sup>1</sup> Page 15, *Seeking God*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p15

### LENT 2015

## WEEK TWO: LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION – ENGAGING

Mark 8:31-38

A verse in Proverbs says this: *as water reflects the face so one's life reflects the heart* (27:19).

#### Early mornings!

*For the “owls” among us, mornings are a challenge. First we struggle to the bathroom. Then, prising open our eyelids, we glance in the mirror to see how we're doing. Not good if the image that comes back to us is anything to go by! Really should not have stayed up so late\*, had that extra pudding\*, finished that bottle of wine\*, agreed to have that tattoo done\* (\* - delete that which does not apply). We don't like what we see!*

As we review and reflect on the life of our Christian communities, and the life of this Diocese (our community of communities), what would people looking in from the outside understand as our priorities and passions? What do they see us doing and engaging with? What do they see us set aside and ignore? Have we really looked hard into the mirror recently?

As water reflects the face so our life together reflects the heart. What do people see us doing, saying, being passionate about? Or do they see us as only being concerned about our own agendas and needs E.g. raising money for the church tower, rather than working to combat world poverty which is becoming more and more an issue for us<sup>1</sup>. Our theme today is looking at how once we have withdrawn to prepare and plan, we can then engage with the issues of this world as a church. What do we need to consider as we engage in contemplative action, action which flows from that stillness of withdrawing first? What does contemplative action actually mean? And what then might we want to include in our Rule of Life to reflect that?

<sup>1</sup> Of course, this could well be an important issue that does need to be addressed. It is not about what's right but about what others perceive.

## 1. A clear understanding of Jesus the Christ

V31-33

### Trains.

*I am standing on platform 1 waiting. According to the timetable the train is due to arrive in 8 minutes – the screen on the platform tells me so. It's coming from Bournemouth, and will take me on towards London, if I should get on. It's not like there will be any deviation, unless there's been an accident, or they're making improvements to the tracks or signalling equipment. I know if I wait I can soon get on board and before long I will be able to enjoy the urban delights of London, or Basingstoke if I decide to get off earlier! And there will be many others who will join me – the London train is hardly ever empty. The tracks have been laid down, the train is soon to arrive and my hope rises. Soon it will be here, soon we will be off on our great adventure.*

The disciples' problem was that they had been drip-fed what the Messiah came to do in a very narrow way. They were expecting the conquering King to rip up the recent history, restore Israel's rightful place as God's chosen people, throw out the Romans and establish a new age of peace and justice, with the Jews at the centre of position and privilege. If you like, they were simply waiting for the train to arrive that would take them to this glorious position, and usher in the new age that they so desperately wanted. They knew how it should work – the tracks and timetable dictated it.

But Jesus confounded their perspectives, and challenged them with a different understanding of what the Chosen One had come to do. He turned to Isaiah, and explained how he had come to die in order that they might truly live. Jesus began to teach them. It was a start but it seems from the gospel account that Jesus needed to keep on teaching them about this because they simply did not get it the first time! For example, see 9:31, 10:33.

Jesus came to save the world by dying. It was not a popular message. Peter's response is to rebuke Jesus (v33) – rebuke here means to challenge evil in its most vile form. It is a very strong response! Peter could not understand what Jesus had come to do – the train tracks restricted his understanding. Jesus then rebukes him. How must that have felt?

As we read the gospels again and reflect on Jesus' actions, are we constrained in our understanding of what he has called us to do? Are we blind to his full engagement with the world which he loved, and what that cost him?

## 2. A clear understanding of discipleship

V34-35

Contemplative action begins with a clear understanding of Jesus the Christ. But more than that, it involves a clear understanding of discipleship. Jesus summoned the wider crowd to join the disciples – this was something for them all! If you want to be a kingdom-bringer you will need to die to your own agendas and your right to be noticed. It's not just about being part of God's chosen people, and resting on your laurels. It's about doing whatever needs doing – and not worrying about whether you are noticed or not. It's about deliberately and painfully signing away your life, and being open to whatever the master calls you to, even death for him.

Benedict in his rule demands a whole life approach to living as a disciple of Christ. His call is to *awake, listen and take action*. Once we have withdrawn to sharpen our senses through prayer and reflection, through fasting and stillness, we need to engage and to act. And this action will affect all aspects of that person's life, and that person's engagement with the community of disciples – it should impact how they worship, how they offer hospitality, how they take care of themselves and how they work.

People often talk about the *work/life balance* as if it is something good to aspire to – to keep your life in balance (there is some link here with eastern mysticism I think). And yet Jesus' challenge here is that it is about *whole-life giving* – giving up the rights to your life and giving everything to the work of the Kingdom. Or to put it another way, it is a *full-life investment* – which is a very unbalanced view of life i.e. everything belongs to the King of kings.

The challenge to us as communities of faith is how willing we are to change our agendas to engage with the needs of the world. Yes of course we are willing, we should be! But how far will we go?

*Sally is a human rights lawyer. As a person of faith she prayerfully approaches her difficult and complex work, and engages in it energetically and fully. She works long hours and often gets home late, and tired. She is on the electoral roll of her local parish, but she travels a lot and so is not in church on a Sunday very often. And when she does come people don't really talk to her, because they don't really know her, or think she is a visitor.*

How many Sallys do we have in our churches and what can we do to support them and link them in? How do we resource them to live out their full-life investment? Too often work and the rest of the week is simply not engaged with enough in our church community gatherings. But work is where we spend most of our time – that's where we live out our discipleship. And if we have retired or do not work, then we spend most of our time not in a church service, but elsewhere too!

### 3. A right understanding of what a full life is

Chocolate.

Remember the advert for Twix? Most chocolate bars are “one bite and it’s gone”, but with Twix you have two bars of caramel filled chocolate which makes it far superior. Or so we were led to believe!

Jesus’ focus was to bring life in all its fullness. In the scriptures we have some insight into what this might mean – pressed down and flowing over, the abundance and joy at the Wedding of Cana, the rich provision seen briefly in Eden and then looked for in Revelation. This is the top-quality life that Jesus seeks to offer both those he has made and the world which he is restoring. It’s so much more than having a good time on a Sunday together, or experiencing a larger time of fellowship at conferences or festivals. It is a lasting, durable reality that he seeks to both offer and bring in with those who turn to him. When the Son returns in great power and glory to complete this restoration, will we have given up on his grand vision?

Jesus calls us to be his people, to be available for his good will and purpose. This means engaging with hope – holding onto a perspective which is eternal - and beginning to see that vision come into being now. Have we settled for less?

Esther de Waal talks of the Benedictine rule being “simply an aid to live by the Scriptures”. In their time the members of the Benedictine community wanted not knowledge about God, but strength to continue to live for God, to keep on engaging when times are hard. Conversely what some seem to want today is knowledge rather than strength. We are sometimes in danger of being a contemplative separated community, rather than an engaged, informed people living for God.

### Conclusion

*Flying high*

*To be a trapeze artist you need courage and timing. Flying from one swing to another high above the ground, you need to give yourself fully to the moment, letting go of the safety of the swing you have hold of in order to link up with the other person as they swing towards you. There is no middle way – either you let go and give yourself to it fully, or you keep swinging on your own and your partner just passes you by. As a church we need to continue to focus on working together, helping one another to courageously let go of what is unhelpful from the past and grasp the reality of the present. We need to both withdraw and to engage, and it’s not easy – it will demand everything of us.*

LENT 2015

## WEEK THREE: LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS OBEDIENT LISTENING

Philippians 2:1-11, John 2:13-22

### Introduction

The challenge laid down by Paul in Philippians is to live a life worthy of our calling. And living in a western, individualistic society we think it’s all about “me”. However, in this letter Paul is writing to a church community, a church that he loves and that loves him. It’s often those closest to us who want the best for us, for they know and love us like no one else. But also because they know us like no one else, they have the capacity to stir us like no one else!

*“...live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”  
Philippians 1:27.*

So how can we together live out our calling as God’s people in a manner worthy of the good news which we have ourselves experienced? The answer lies in the two passages we have as our readings – and we turn to them for their insight.

## 1. We need to listen to and accept one another

*“St Benedict does not find it good enough that I am not really paying attention to the people who interrupted me and upset all my nice plans for myself, that in my heart I’m furious and my calm smile is no more than a façade behind which I am inwardly fuming”<sup>1</sup>*

Hymn Books

*In the old hymn books, the verses are laid out with annotations to indicate whether a verse should be sung loudly and with gusto, or quietly and with reverence. There are also verses marked for a descant, and others to be sung in unison. The key it seems to me is that to sing everything in unison can become monotonous, whereas the inclusion and recognition of different parts brings a greater diversity and variety. And some words need to be sung PPP, to reflect the meaning of the words. At other times, FFF is required with preferably an organ to sound out the words loudly! Sadly not all newer hymn books take the necessary time and care to include these marks. These variations remind us that the people of God too is a varied collection of voices, some of whom are quiet and contemplative by nature, others louder and bolder by design.*

Paul, in chapter 2, challenges the church at Philippi to remember what they had in common, and then be united in mind, heart and purpose. We find encouragement from walking the way of Christ together, we find the strength to go on when times are tough, we walk by the Spirit and find satisfaction from knowing he is at work in us and through us, and deep within we know that God has reached out and touched us in a tender and compassionate way, drawing us to himself.

<sup>1</sup> Page 28, Esther de Waal, Seeking God

As a Christian community, we can spend more time listening to the vocal minority who disagree with us, than with the quieter members of our community. And then there are those whom we fundamentally disagree with, and begin to avoid, because they are so far from what we might consider a “correct” view. This results in *selective* love and acceptance. We are called however to love all, even those who seem weird to us.

## 2. We need to listen to God and discern together

*“Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise” Proverbs 19:20*

Obedient listening though is far more than just listening to one another in the church community. It is about learning to hear God’s still small voice and discern together what he is saying to us.

In our Gospel reading today we read of Jesus visiting the Temple as he consistently would have done. Jesus himself says he does exactly what the Father has commanded him (John 14:31). And yet one day he takes up a rope of cords and drives out the moneychangers, the dovesellers, the animals and all the traders who had conspired to make the house of God not a house of prayer for all nations, but a marketplace. Jesus discerned the Father’s displeasure and then acted, willingly, openly and determinedly, with zeal/energy as the Gospel writer puts it.

Being *prophetic global citizens* means offering a Christ-like perspective on what is happening in the world around us and getting stuck in. As a church community how do we hear the prophetic voice, and value it? Often such a perspective is challenging and can be seen as threatening to the status quo. But we need to intentionally listen to it, weigh it and learn from it if we can. One way of doing that is to give time and space to those from other contexts who don’t have the cultural baggage we have. And this is where our national and overseas partnerships are vital. Seeing our challenges through the eyes of someone from Newcastle or Uganda helps us to listen to God together. So whenever we do have “outside” speakers or events, make them a priority. We can listen to God through their perspective and wrestle together over what the implications are for us as a church community. They can help us to see differently.

Travellers.

*There was a man I met from the American branch of the Church Army. He had come over to this country to be involved in talking to tourists in the West End of London. I discovered talking to him that he spent 6 months of the year living out of a suitcase, because he felt called to serve God and speak about his faith. Then there was a youth worker from a well-to-do church who sensed God was calling him and his wife to go and work with street children in Guatemala. So he left his relatively comfortable role, and set up a new project to serve them. Today it has become a well-known Christian charity.*

Mark Green in his book *On the frontline*, suggests we all have a frontline, where we most regularly meet those who are not yet disciples. The challenge then is to be available to be used by God there and then. Not all of us are called to go overseas, but we are called to serve Christ where we are, among the people and networks he has set us, with the neighbours and colleagues alongside us. And the first thing we can do for them is to listen to them.

### 3. We need to listen to the world and serve others together

#### Cinema

*At London Waterloo there is a place where you can not only see something, but become part of it. I'm talking of course of the BFI iMax cinema. If you go to see a film, you discover there is so much more than just seeing it – you experience it, with action all around you. You live it! Flying off into space, swimming with the fish at the Great Barrier Reef, riding the railroad across the great plains of America, it's an all-consuming experience.*

In our reading from Philippians, Jesus, since he was God, gave up his position in heaven to come and tabernacle among us (as John's gospel has it). From there he was obedient to his calling, to die upon a cross in our place. It was an intentional, sacrificial act, to play his part in God's salvation plan. He emptied himself, and humbled himself, and then died on the cross. From there the Father raised him to new life, the first-born over all creation.

In the Benedictine rule of life, the task of the church is more than just hearing and discerning what God is saying to us – it is obedient listening. The word obedience comes from the Latin *oboedire* which itself derives from *audire* to hear. So obedience is about hearing and obeying, and for the Benedictine, it is about being obedient to that call. In other words, once we know what we need to do, we need to do it. And once we have done that how do we then work out of all the things we could do, which ones to prioritise? So how can we best listen to the world and discern our place in it and contribution to it?

### Conclusion

In one sense it is about church vocation. Why has God called this group of people, together in this place, at this time, with these challenges and opportunities? Together we need help to see and to hear what God is saying to us. As a church community that might mean changing what we have been doing, and perhaps even stopping doing something so that we can focus on and make a real difference to a few aspects of the Kingdom of God. So what needs to go into our Rule of Life as a church community? What will help to listen and be obedient to what we think God is calling us to do and to be?

Of course, what we don't need is monochrome church communities competing to be the same as other churches around them. We all have a vocation, we are all different, and once we work out what God is calling us to, we need to do it we need to live it!

### LENT 2015

## WEEK FOUR: LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS

### ONGOING CONVERSION

Philippians 3:1-11, John 3:14-21

### MOTHERING SUNDAY

#### Introduction

#### Shaped!

*Martin Luther was a man used by God to bring the Church back to its roots. Born in 1483 it was his experience of corruption when he visited Rome in 1510 that shaped his life. He was appalled by what was being done in the name of God. After decades of corruption and dis-ease, in 1517 he was compelled to publish his 95 theses condemning the current practices in the church – and tradition has it, nailing them to a church door in Wittenberg. He went on writing, publishing and campaigning for change throughout his life. In 1534 he published a complete translation of the Bible in German, saying that all should be able to read the Scriptures in their own language. His actions and convictions refounded the Church in the West, the Church we know today. He was used by God in a mighty way!*

Today we are looking at the Benedictine commitment to ongoing conversion. As individuals we are continually shaped by the transforming love of Christ. As we press on to know him better we are not the people we once were – we are continually shaped and fashioned to be useful in his service.

What does that look like as we consider ourselves as the church community, the Bride of Christ? What can we learn from St Paul's self-understanding here in his letter to the Philippians?



## 1. Shaped by the past

No waste!

*Imagine celebrating Christmas with the inlaws and outlaws, aunts, uncles, friends and family. You need something big and festive. Duck would be nice, but you would need a number of them. Venison? Beef? Perhaps! But the staple diet we are told for this nation is turkey. Kelly bronze turkeys, Britain's most awarded turkey. Once it's cooked up you have succulent breast meat and full of flavour thigh meat. And yes of course then there is cold turkey to be had on Boxing Day, and then turkey keeps popping up throughout the festive season in curries, in sandwiches, warmed up with gravy – you name it, we can use turkey in it. And of course there's the carcass once the meat is gone – the opportunity for making a rich stock for soups. In the end nothing is wasted – every part of the turkey has been useful to feed the masses during the season (of course, those of you who lived during the war will have some real-life stories to tell on this subject I'm sure!).*

Nothing is wasted in God's economy! For Paul, his upbringing and his past experiences of pursuing righteousness as the Pharisees saw it, equipped him for his future work. How many times do we read of his entering a town and going first to the synagogues to engage in arguing for his new Christian perspective? Again and again he draws from what the past has made him, to be effective in the present.

On this day we give thanks for our mothers and those who care (and have cared) for us. As we grew up we were not aware of how much their self-sacrifice and service shaped us. But the older we become the more we are able to look back and see what a great influence they had on our lives. Yes, like Paul, not all we experienced was great. And yes, as parents, we often wish we could go back and do things differently. But we are what we are today because of our experience of the love and care of others. And none of that love was wasted in shaping us.

As church communities we are the sum of all those past experiences. We are a rich community, with huge potential and insights to offer in the shaping of our communities, and the wider world. We need to learn to appreciate how we have been formed for service, and what then we can do together to steward God's world.

## 2. Shaped for the present

One of the great lines in the Old Testament is found in the book of Esther. "For such a time as this" Esther 4:14. Esther finds herself in a position of privilege, just at the point when someone needs to speak up for God's people. Paul too, shaped by his upbringing, is equipped and able to speak to Jews about the Messiah who has come, lived, died and risen again at a key moment in the history of this new movement called church. And his current passion, as we read this letter, is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection – it is a passionate determination to continue to be shaped for service.

How has God shaped us as a church community, drawn us together around him, and prepared us to serve in this time and place? What tasks has he set aside for us to do for him together as a community?

*Politics*

*The General Election is now fast approaching, and we will soon be asked to choose a government to lead us now, and on into the future. How can we contribute to the political debate and apply our Christian faith and values to what is being said? What do we uniquely bring as people of faith? Of course it is good to be able to host political debates in our church buildings if they suit. More than that though, our challenge is to keep a Christ-like perspective of issues today on the agenda. What question do we need to ask, and raise, and offer a perspective on which needs to be addressed at local council level, at county level and at national level? The rich/poor divide, the issues surrounding immigration, guarding our environment, what's taught in our schools and so on.*

And if we are not confident to engage externally with these issues, what can be done to offer church members a chance to think these things through, so that they can then engage more fully in the political arena? How can we prepare them?

## 3. Shaped for surprising things

*Consistent yet unpredictable.*

*Very intelligent, energetic, loving, loyal, all words that could be applied to Corrymeela our border collie (no, not your new Vicar!). No need for dog-training classes, she caught on after a few repetitions at home. "Potty training" went like a dream. Watchful and attentive, she lay on the corner of the stairs so she could see what was going on and guard the house. And when the children were sick, she would lie across the foot of their beds, with an expression which said, you should be here too! But, and there is a but, she was unpredictable. If she heard a whistle, like those referees use, she would bolt for it, ignoring usually accepted commands. She was off into the distance in a flash, running full pelt for miles, until finally the red mist cleared. Then she, being intelligent, would find a way to be found. And we would get a call to pick her up – from the police station, back of someone's van, someone else's front door step where she had placed herself. Consistent yet unpredictable.*

God is love, and consistently love. Yet he still laughs at our plans and overturns our easy vision for the future – he is both consistent and unpredictable. Ongoing conversion happens according to his own agenda and he uses all he can to change our hearts and minds, including suffering and difficult circumstances. We are not in control, we do not tell God what to do with us – we instead offer ourselves together and individually to be open to his surprise. If we pray Paul's prayer in verses 10 and 11 of chapter 3, then God will shape us using everything at his disposal. Paul himself is here writing from prison, yet he still prays the prayer – shape me, use me.

What's also unpredictable is what God calls us to do in his world. Churches and individuals who end up with a "ministry" often don't choose them so much as they stumble across something that God brings to life by his Holy Spirit. Did Lucy Moore intend that Messy Church be used round the world? I suspect not. And sometimes we simply get offered a chance to get involved where we have not been able to before, after praying for God to show us what to do – the way forward opens up before us. Two questions come to mind: how are we as the Church waiting on God to be used by him? This takes prayer and discussion together. As you think about your church response to the Diocesan Strategic Priorities (pMAPs), what is God calling you to do?

## Conclusion

We are people of the way, people on the way, being changed from one degree of glory into another. The God who loves us, who has called us to be his, and sent us out in his service wants to use us to change this world, to bring his Kingdom in. And he has chosen us! Are we ready to join with John Wesley in praying these words?

*Ready for all thy perfect will,  
my acts of faith and love repeat,  
till death thy endless mercies seal,  
and make my sacrifice complete.*

What will you add to your Rule of Life for the church community to keep this priority of ongoing conversion a reality?

WEEK FIVE: **LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS**

## JOYFUL PERSEVERANCE

Philippians 3:12-20, John 12:20-33

**Introduction***Limited!*

*In a couple of years' time we will be commemorating the death of Leonardo Da Vinci, painter, sculptor, architect, musician, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, geologist, cartographer, botanist, and writer. His paintings survive him and are widely acclaimed, and yet they are not all there is to the radical Renaissance man as the list suggests. He had drawings in his notebooks which showed he had already designed/invented the helicopter, the parachute, the aeroplane and the bicycle, 500 years ahead of his time. An 'artist' in so many ways, he was not shackled by the understanding of his time, nor the limited materials that were available to him. He worked within them to leave an outstanding legacy of art and science, through careful study and application. His was a creative and fruitful life.*

The third commitment of the Benedictine Rule is one of joyful perseverance. To persevere is to continue steadfastly in something, giving it your full attention, pressing on to the end. But the adjective reminds us it is to be done gratefully, grasping every opportunity that life presents, to squeeze out every ounce of juice from the fruitful life Christ offers us. As our reading this morning suggests, we like Paul need to press on to win the prize for which Christ has called us heavenwards in Christ Jesus (v14).

How do we do that as a church community?

**1. We press on to deepen our faith**

Paul is being accused it seems of suggesting that he is perfect, that he has somehow "arrived". You know the sort of people who give off those vibes? When you get to my stage, they imply, when you've had my experience and know what I do, then you might be able to claim that you are like me. But Paul was quick to fend these views off. He is saying something like: 'I am not perfect, nor can I offer you perfection this side of the return of Christ, unlike some are suggesting'. Paul is aware that it takes a lifetime to take hold of Christ, as Christ has taken hold of him.

Esther de Waal in her book *Seeking God*, suggest that one aspect of this commitment is that "men and women need to find their stability in God"<sup>1</sup>. The Psalmist echoes this thought - "my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust"<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes church communities become hospitals, where people come to be "fixed". And we can easily collude with that by how we explain to others what we are about: come to Jesus and your problems will be over (we cringe, but it has been said in my hearing!). The challenge for the local church is to point people to Jesus, to be a clear signpost that unambiguously challenges people to look to the rock from which they were hewn, to their creator and redeemer. It's not that we are perfect, individually or together, so that we are somehow superior to others – it's that God has called us, and found us and carried us home rejoicing on his shoulders (Luke 15). And we as a result press on to know him better, spurred on by that self-giving love.

Today is Passion Sunday, and we celebrate the story of the one who gave up his life to set us free - "who for the sake of the joy that was set before him, endured the cross..." (Hebrews 12:2). He calls us to follow him, to spend a lifetime reflecting and learning from his self-giving sacrifice. Let's be careful of putting ourselves on a pedestal: let's point them to the one who saved us and who will meet them where they are.

<sup>1</sup> p40<sup>2</sup> Psalm 91:2**2. We press on in our relationships***Goats!*

*And that leads us to how we are together. The childhood tale of the Billy Goats Gruff is one of "the grass is greener" syndrome. Three goats look longingly at the green grass on the other side of the bridge. The only trouble is that the bridge is guarded by a Troll. The three goats go in leaner order, each promising the Troll a better meal if he waits for their brother. Finally the largest of the goats comes face to face with the Troll and kicks him off the bridge, and the goats are free to eat both sides of the water. They can have their grass and eat it!*

'The grass is always greener' – but is it really? Joyful perseverance reminds us that 'God is not elsewhere', that where we are now is where we encounter him and where we are called to exercise love. Just as Paul does not give up on the church he is writing to, and wants them to join him in pressing on to know Christ (see for example verse 17), so we are called to learn to love those around us, where we are – both within and without the church community. How many times have we thought, it would be so much easier if we had a different Head Teacher in our local school, or a different Local Councillor – then we could really bring in the Kingdom of God. When we get a new Vicar, or Bishop, things will be different. When that difficult person in the church family leaves, then we will be able to get on.

True fulfilment does not consist in constant change. We cannot find true happiness elsewhere, as Esther de Waal puts it. We need to accept this particular community, this place and these people, this and no other, as the way to God<sup>3</sup>. We are called to die to our own preferences, and agendas, and to love those around us, those in our families, at our workplaces, our neighbours and colleagues, our local shop workers and those we meet at the gym. God is not elsewhere – joyful perseverance means loving those God places in our path, and to accept that through knowing them he can shape us and use us for his glory.

<sup>3</sup> p41

### 3. We press on in our ministry now

Runners.

*There is a frightening intensity to top-level athletes. Their bodies are fashioned by an unwavering commitment to training and diet, their eyes are fixed on the finishing line of the race, and their minds are focussed on one thing only – to cross that line, and to do so to the best of their ability as far as they are able. Paul uses this analogy of running a marathon-like race to call to the Christians at Philippi to run with him – to make his goal their goal. We belong with Christ (v20), says Paul, not like those who live for the passing pleasures of this world (v18-19). We are citizens of another country – we belong elsewhere.*

This teaching can take us off-track if we do not handle it correctly. If we belong elsewhere then surely we wait – we wait for Christ to return and “do his thing”? God’s purposes are not that we sprint now, and then relax, like Usain Bolt, who for a few brief seconds gives his all in an explosion of sprinting power. We are called to run the race of faith together, to serve God now, and then to continue to serve his missionary heart in the age to come.

As God’s people in his world we need to “keep on keeping on”, to follow the standing orders to love him, ourselves and those around us. As church communities, we need to be careful not just to focus on what’s current or trendy. Rather we need to continue with a determined commitment to the local and worldwide community. And as global Church we are called to persist with upholding the values of the Christian faith, even when we don’t seem to be getting through. “The now” matters to God – we want to be found faithful when he returns in Christ.

## Conclusion

Historically the Benedictines have committed themselves to live within the bounds of the community. They were helped to see that it was not a prison, but an anchor which held them tight in a restless sea. If a person wanted to leave that community, it showed that he was “tired of facing himself”. And in our culture today, “if only” suggests that changing our church family, our job, our relationships will solve everything. Ultimately we all need to face ourselves, just us before God, and re-discover his self-giving love. So what does that mean we need to put into our corporate Rule of Life? What is Christ calling us to highlight, to work at?

Why not take off your shoes and go and stand in the garden? Ask God to help you to be truly earthed where you are now. Ask him to help you to press on with the life he has called you to.

## LENT 2015

# WEEK SIX: LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS

### Introduction

*Campfire Songs.*

*Ever been a member of an uniformed organisation like the Rainbows, Brownies, Guides or Beavers, Cubs, Scouts, Ventures? When these groups are away under canvas, they gather round the fire to sing songs and recite poems. These are normally intended to be fun and engaging. For example, do you know “3 treacherous buzzards”, or “you’ll never get to heaven...”? Pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for one of the major Jewish festivals would sing Psalms 113-118 as they were travelling. These were their campfire songs.*

Psalm 118 is about a victory of someone like King David, who overcomes the enemy and then goes to the temple to worship and share his victory with God. Our Palm Sunday reading uses words from that Psalm as Jesus goes into Jerusalem. Then later in Mark’s account Jesus too goes to the Temple to worship, just as the victor does in the Psalm. But there are two big differences – first that Psalm is not sung to God but to Jesus; and then, instead of the returning conqueror being welcomed at the gate, Jesus is confronted by a sacrificial business venture rather than a house of prayer for all nations.

What can we glean from this passage in relation to this Rule of Life we are creating together and individually? How can we follow in the steps of the Master?

## 1. By trusting in his Victory

For Jesus the task is to live up to his calling. He has already set his face to Jerusalem and now he enters Jerusalem. The different groups of people respond to him differently: the disciples are now really confused; the crowds are ready to party; the authorities see the “Jesus problem” getting bigger. They all have their agendas, and want Jesus to fulfil their needs.

But Jesus of course is about his Father’s work, focussed on his calling and vocation. He knows where he has come from and where he is going – he is set on engaging the enemy on the battlefield of his choosing, a classic leadership strategy: he knows his way will lead to the cross and to his death. In this way evil will be defeated, and the gates of heaven (not just the Temple – Psalm 118:19) will be opened to all believers. It is the only way and it is costly. It is also misunderstood by most of those who see and hear what is happening.

### *Scaffolding*

*Outside my house they are building a new school – there’s a picture of what it will look like when it’s finished outside on the road. We have watched while the ground was cleared and trees removed to allow a new access road to be built. Then came the diggers and earth-movers to shape the ground. After that the foundations went in. Then the scaffolding went up – and it’s still there, and will be, until the building is completed. Once it’s all over then the scaffolding will come down, and we will see the new building as it was intended to be.*

Jesus was not limited by the scaffolding of the cross – he used it to fulfil the Father’s will and defeat evil and death once and for all. In the same way our corporate and individual Rule of Life does not limit us, but helps us to live out our calling. It is neither prescriptive nor restricting – it is there, like the scaffolding, to help us achieve our life’s work. It is there to help us see the Kingdom of God come here on earth as it is in heaven.

Before we meet Christ face to face, we are challenged with being and becoming the people he has created us and intended us to be. To do this we will need to be passionate about our own spirituality, we will need to pursue new ways of being his people at this point in history and we will need to speak up and engage with the global issues that face our societies. It won’t be easy, but it is what we were made for. And our Rule of Life will provide the scaffold to help us to do just that.

## 2. By joining in his Celebration

Following his victory, the character in Psalm 118 goes off to the Temple to pray, to offer his thanks for the victory achieved. He hammers at the gates to be let in, and then he recites his praise and thanks to God for what he has done.... ‘his steadfast love endures for ever’ is his closing line! Jesus goes to the cross, and after his resurrection is seated in the place of honour and power at the right hand side of the Father. He too has been victorious. He has gone before us and will one day greet us, and celebrate all that has been achieved in his name.

Today we can look back to the definitive action of Christ on the cross. Each week we celebrate his self-giving sacrifice. Though it was costly for him, it is certainly something to give thanks for, and announce to the world: death has been defeated, our relationship with God has been restored and the future is bright for all who choose to turn to him.

As we look back over this last 6 weeks, we can begin to see what God has been doing in us. What have you learned? How have you changed? What is God asking of you? Our task as a Diocese is not to allow this Lent to remain a paper exercise, but to allow the Holy Spirit to shape our lives so that we live out Jesus’ mission, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. It’s not about us; it’s about Him. And one day when we meet him face to face, we will be welcomed into the greatest party ever, to celebrate all that has been done in his name. Our confidence is not in our own small-mindedness, but in his great love.

## 3. By realising we are part of something bigger

*Elijah!*

*Remember when Elijah was under pressure from King Ahab? Having called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, he ran from the King out into the desert. There he cried in prayer for help and guidance. He claimed he was the only faithful follower of God left (1 Kings 19:10). God’s answer? What about the other 7000 faithful people who have not bowed the knee to the baals? You need to raise your eyes, Elijah, and see that you are part of something that is still going forward – you are part of something much much bigger.*

Sometimes, it seems to me, we think that we are part of a small company that is gradually closing its doors and will in the end fold. If that’s your view of the Church of England, remember that God’s priority is his Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. Whatever part the C of E has in his purposes, as his Christian people in this Diocese we are part of something far, far bigger and eternally lasting – God’s chosen people. The King of kings has called us to be his own – and we serve him: “For we are God’s servants working together; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). And he knows what he is doing – we can trust him! Isn’t that something to celebrate?

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Lined writing area for page 75, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

The 2015 Lent Course for the Diocese of Winchester includes a range of material. This book is for groups who would like to explore the Benedictine tradition which has shaped the Diocese, with a view to working together to find a Rule of Life. This material works best when used in conjunction with the other resources provided for the 2015 Lent Course, including a DVD with six short introductory video clips, a booklet of material for individuals and a website with an array of further information: [winchesterlent.org](http://winchesterlent.org)



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# CALLED TO CONTEMPLATIVE ACTION

The Diocese of Winchester Lent Course 2015

