

Praying the Scriptures



Matthew 4: 1-11
The temptation of Jesus



John 4: 5-42
Samaritan woman
at the well



John 3: 1-17
Nicodemus comes
to Jesus



John 9: 1-41
Jesus heals a man



John 11: 1-45
The raising of Lazarus

A Joint Study for Group and Personal use.



+John Hallam



+Arthur Leeds



+Tony Pontefract



+Stephen Wakefield

In 2009, we met together for an historic Joint Assembly of the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Hallam and Leeds and the Anglican Diocese of Wakefield. One of the pledges we made was for us to walk together the way of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in Lent 2011.

This course, *Praying the Scriptures*, is the fruit of that desire to work and worship together. Since the earliest days, disciples of Jesus have met together to break open the Scriptures, praying that the Spirit will inspire them to hear the word of God speaking afresh.

This course is based on the ancient practice of *lectio divina*. Together we attend to God speaking to us. We listen for the voice of his Word. We pray that we will be fed, for we do not live 'by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' We listen too to one another as Christ speaks through them to us.

We are excited about waiting to hear what God has to say to us this Lent. We are delighted that we can meet together to pray the Scriptures. Many churches will bring other friends from other traditions too.

So, let us attend patiently to God's word. Let us attend lovingly to one another. Let us wait with expectation and longing for God's word to us!

We look forward to seeing you at the central *lectio divina* services.

In Christ,

+ Tony Pontefract + Arthur Leeds
John Rampton + Stephen Wakefield.

Study Group Material: Lent 2011

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“Your Word is a Light for my Steps” (Ps 119: 105)

Praying the Scriptures –

Introducing Lectio Divina

Early on in St Matthew’s Gospel Jesus urges us not to live by bread alone, “*but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.*” (4:4) *This Word of God is something “alive and active”* (Heb 4:12) and we are to be attentive to it. (cf. 1 Tim 4:13) In short, the Word of God feeds us. We draw life from the texts of the Bible which Christians hold in common. Among the many different ways in which the Scriptures can be approached, **Lectio Divina** has a privileged place within the heritage of Christian spirituality.

Lectio Divina (literally ‘*divine reading*’) is an ancient way of reading through, meditating upon, praying with and contemplating the Scriptures. While especially important in the monastic tradition, it is also used by Christians today from all walks of life as a means of pondering the living Word of God. Sometimes also called ‘*prayerful reading*,’ *Lectio Divina* opens our hearts and minds to what God is saying through passages of the Bible. To put it another way, *Lectio Divina* allows us to ruminate with the texts, to chew them over and over in our mind and heart. By doing so, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to hear and respond to God’s Word more deeply, allowing it to penetrate our lives and nourish our discipleship.

There are traditionally four moments within *Lectio Divina*: **reading** (*lectio*) – **meditating** (*meditatio*) – **contemplating** (*contemplatio*) – **praying** (*oratio*). These were first formalised by a 12th century Carthusian abbot by the name of Guigo. Each stage has a particular focus:

Reading – carefully and attentively reading the particular passage of Scripture

Meditating – reflecting on the text to understand what God is saying through it

Contemplating – living out of the experience of our encounter with the text

Praying – in the light of the text, responding prayerfully to the Lord from our heart

In deciding which Scripture texts to use for *Lectio Divina* it can be very helpful to turn to those given in the liturgical calendar for Sundays and Weekdays, especially texts from the Gospels

*“Seek God in reading; find God in meditating; knock through prayer
and God will open the door of grace in contemplation.”*

Week 1



A Testing Time

The temptation of Jesus - Matthew 4:1-11

Optional Ice Breaking Activity

Imagine that you're stuck on a desert island. You can take with you one piece of music, one book (which is not the Bible or Shakespeare) and one luxury item. What would you take? Why?

When people have had some time to think, share your choices with the group.

Opening Worship

We say together the words in **bold** type

Leader:

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits;

**Who forgives all your sins
and heals all your infirmities;
Who redeems your life from the Pit
and crowns you with faithful love and compassion;**

Who satisfies you with good things,
so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's.
The Lord executes righteousness
and judgement for all who are oppressed.

**He made his ways known to Moses
and his works to the children of Israel.
The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,
slow to anger and of great kindness.**

He will not always accuse us,
neither will he keep his anger for ever.
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.

**For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his mercy upon those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he set our sins from us.**

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Psalm 10.1-12

A hymn/song may be sung or a piece of music listened to.

Short Introduction by the group leader

First Reading of the Passage

To be read clearly and slowly, with a second's pause between the verses (marked with •) As the passage is read listen carefully for a word or phrase that attracts your attention.

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

• ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. •
³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' • ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."' •

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, • ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' • ⁷Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' •

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour; • ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' • ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."' • ¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Silence

Reflection 1: 'Listening for Christ the Word'

Personal reflection: Which word or phrase caught your attention? Silently repeat the word or phrase to yourself.

Sharing aloud: When the leader invites members of the group to share a word or phrase that struck them, just say the word or phrase out loud (without any need for explanation or comment). It's also fine to keep the word or phrase to yourself if you prefer.

Second Reading of the Passage

You may either read the same version of the passage as before, or read the following modern translation from 'The Message.' If the first reading was by a female voice, then this reading should, if possible, be by a male voice, or vice versa.

¹⁻³ Next Jesus was taken into the wild by the Spirit for the Test. The Devil was ready to give it. Jesus prepared for the Test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger, which the Devil took advantage of in the first test: "Since you are God's Son, speak the word that will turn these stones into loaves of bread."

⁴Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: "It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God's mouth."

⁵⁻⁶For the second test the Devil took him to the Holy City. He sat him on top of the Temple and said, "Since you are God's Son, jump." The Devil goaded him by quoting Psalm 91: "He has placed you in the care of angels. They will catch you so that you won't so much as stub your toe on a stone."

⁷Jesus countered with another citation from Deuteronomy: "Don't you dare test the Lord your God."

⁸⁻⁹For the third test, the Devil took him to the peak of a huge mountain. He gestured expansively, pointing out all the earth's kingdoms, how glorious they all were. Then he said, "They're yours—lock, stock, and barrel. Just go down on your knees and worship me, and they're yours."

¹⁰Jesus' refusal was curt: "Beat it, Satan!" He backed his rebuke with a third quotation from Deuteronomy: "Worship the Lord your God, and only him. Serve him with absolute single-heartedness."

¹¹The Test was over. The Devil left. And in his place, angels! Angels came and took care of Jesus' needs.

Eugene H Peterson, The Message

Reflection 2: 'How Christ the Word speaks to me'

Personal reflection: In silence, reflect on how this reading touches your life today.

Sharing aloud: The leader will invite members of the group to share what they feel the Lord is saying or enabling. If you would like to, share aloud a brief sentence beginning 'I hear the Lord...' or 'I see the Lord...' Again, it's fine to keep your thoughts to yourself if you prefer.



You might like to focus on the desert image while the jottings on the passage are read. Larger colour versions will be available from your group leader.

Reflection 3: Jottings on the Passage

Jesus is *tested*. He undergoes three trials. Tests (like exams) and trials (in courts) ask what is true or right. When Satan tests Jesus he abuses the Scriptures. Jesus, though, is a better reader of Scripture. He replies with the truth.

In the first test, is Satan suggesting that if Jesus gives them full bellies they will follow him? Jesus says we need more than food alone. God sustains us in body, mind and spirit. God fed the Israelites manna in the desert to remind them of that (Deuteronomy 8.3). So we pray 'give us today our daily bread.'

Satan wants Jesus to prove he is divine by jumping from the Temple, when he would be saved by angels (Psalm 91.11-12). Jesus, however, is obedient to his Father's way of truth, goodness and justice; obedient even to death. Even on the cross he doesn't jump down (Matthew 27.39-40). He doesn't cheat death but destroys it by dying and rising again. Jesus does not test the Father (Deuteronomy 6.16) but obeys him. And so we pray to the Father, 'your will be done.'

Satan wants Jesus to worship him and then he will let him rule earthly kingdoms. Jesus quotes the commandment to worship only God (Exodus 20.3-5; Deuteronomy 6.13). Jesus knows that it is only when we worship the one God of peace that we will see true peace and unity among the peoples of the world. Only then will we see the Kingdom of God grow. So we pray, 'hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.'¹

Silence

Optional Guided Questions

1. What might it mean to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God? What words does it refer to? Are there different answers to this?
2. Jesus says he is the bread of life (John 6.35). Does that give a different twist to the first trial in this passage?
3. In the second trial, Satan quotes Psalm 91.11-12. Read on to verse 13, which Satan misses out. It says that God will help us trample the serpent under foot. What relevance might that have?
4. What does it mean to test God? Job famously questions God. Is that the same thing? What *questions* do you have for God? How might we look/listen out for answers?
5. We wouldn't normally think that we worship Satan. Yet, we do all have things we worship (give worth to) which sometimes we let stand in the place of God. What idols might be in your life?
6. In what ways do you feel tested? What angels or messengers of God might come to serve you in times of trial?

Silence

Contemplation:

'What is Christ the Word inviting me to be and to do?'

Personal Reflection: *'I believe God wants me to ...'* What would you answer?

Sharing aloud: When invited by the leader, share something about your reflection. Listen especially to the person on your right. If you do not wish to share anything, that's fine.

Finally, the leader draws the session to a close by either:

Inviting the members of the group, in turn, to pray for the person on their right. You can pray out loud if you would like to, or pray in silence and then say 'Amen ' so that the next person knows when you have finished.

Or

Taking it in turns to pray: *'In the light of this text ...'* Again, it is fine to simply keep silent and say 'Amen' to signal that your quiet prayer is finished.

Together We Pray

Leader:

Loving Father,

your Son was tested in the desert like your people Israel,
he shared our fears in the garden of Gethsemane,
he knew the weakness of our humanity.

Yet, he was obedient to your will,
sharing your love for the world.

Give hope to the dispirited and despairing,
strength to those who are tested,
and grant grace to all your people
that we may be faithful to your will.

**Merciful Father,
call us back when we flee,
draw us back when we resist,
lift us up when we fall,
support us when we stand,
and accompany us as we walk. Amen.**

(Based on a prayer of St Thomas Aquinas)

Almighty God,
who wonderfully created us in your own image
and yet more wonderfully restored us
through your Son Jesus Christ:
grant that, as he came to share in our humanity,
so we may share the life of his divinity;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Let us pray for the coming of God's kingdom
in the words our Saviour taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

May God bless us,
that in us may be found love and humility,
obedience and thanksgiving,
discipline, gentleness and peace.
Amen.²

Week 2



New Birth, New Hope!

Nicodemus comes to Jesus - John 3:1-17

The leader invites participants to share any reflections on anything that has come to mind since last week's session.

Optional Ice Breaking Activity

Share the name of the place where you were born and something interesting or significant about it

Or:

If you could have been born anywhere in the world, where would you have chosen and why?

Opening Worship

We say together the words in **bold** type

Leader:

Lord, open our hearts and minds as we gather in your name to ponder your Word
Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

You must be born from above:

born again, born anew.

You will be washed clean.

You shall live now because of God's Spirit.

You will have to learn a new language:

words of faith; speech of love; punctuation of compassion.

You will have to learn a new way of walking:

a path you do not choose; a route you cannot map but must accept in trust.

You will have to understand new things:

that less is more;

that giving is receiving;

that losing is finding;

that earth is wonderfully for now, but heaven is spectacularly forever.

You will become - you are - a new creation.

Your rightful inheritance is not to be condemned, but saved.

All this is gifted in Christ.

And you too will be lifted up on the last day

That our lives might be renewed

By the power of God's love

That we might be born afresh

By the power of God's Spirit

That everyone might believe

In Christ Jesus, God's Son, Our Lord. Amen

A hymn/song may be sung or a piece of music listened to.

Short Introduction by the group leader

First Reading of the Passage

John 3:1-17

To be read clearly and slowly, with a second's pause between the verses (marked with •) As the passage is read listen carefully for a word or phrase that attracts your attention.

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. • ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' • ³Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' • ⁴Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' • ⁵Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. • ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. • ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." • ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' • ⁹Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' • ¹⁰Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? •

¹¹ 'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. • ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? •

¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. • ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, • ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. •

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. •

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. •

Silence

Reflection 1: 'Listening for Christ the Word'

Personal reflection: Which word or phrase caught your attention? Silently repeat the word or phrase to yourself.

Sharing aloud: When the leader invites members of the group to share a word or phrase that struck them, just say the word or phrase out loud (without any need for explanation or comment). It's also fine to keep the word or phrase to yourself if you prefer.

Second Reading of the Passage

You may either read the same version of the passage as before, or read the following modern translation from 'The Message.' If the first reading was by a female voice, then this reading should, if possible, be by a male voice, or vice versa.

¹⁻² There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it." ³Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom." ⁴"How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?" ⁵⁻⁶Jesus said, "You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit. ⁷"So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be 'born from above'—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God." ⁸Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?" ¹⁰⁻¹²Jesus said, "You're a respected teacher of Israel and you don't know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing second-hand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don't believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can't see, the things of God? ¹³⁻¹⁵"No one has ever gone up into the presence of God

except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life. ¹⁶⁻¹⁷"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.

Eugene H Peterson, The Message

Reflection 2: 'How Christ the Word speaks to me'

Personal reflection: In silence, reflect on how this reading touches your life today.

Sharing aloud: The leader will invite members of the group to share what they feel the Lord is saying or enabling. If you would like to, share aloud a brief sentence beginning *'I hear the Lord...'* or *'I see the Lord...'* Again, it's fine to keep your thoughts to yourself if you prefer.



You might like to focus on the image of Jesus and Nicodemus while the jottings on the passage are read. Larger colour versions will be available from your group leader.

Reflection 3: Jottings on the Passage

How often have I felt like Nicodemus? Jesus intrigues and entices me; he pulls me towards himself like the sun raising a shoot through the soil. Jesus makes my heart ache with longing to draw closer, to be enfolded by acceptance and discover reasons for hope.

But with Nicodemus I need the cover of darkness. Sometimes to shade me from myself; sometimes from other people; even sometimes, it seems, to hide me from the Lord's full gaze. I can become so anxious that I'm not good enough, that others will look on and not understand or, even worse, make me feel ridiculous. Perhaps, if I'm really being honest, I'm actually afraid that I might not receive what I need, that my poor faith will be weakened not strengthened.

So I will always be grateful to Nicodemus for his reckless courage and 'give it a go' spirit. Despite the night air, he approached the light with confidence. Putting fear and doubt aside, he sought the Lord whose irresistible actions were revealing the living God. And Jesus, intelligently yet artfully, shared the most intense truth about salvation. We can be spiritually re-born. We can surpass even the miracle of physical birth by the greater wonder of being born to eternal life.

Here is the Gospel on a postage stamp: God's love; Son given; life forever. Of course there were questions to be answered, but ultimately by love. So thanks Nicodemus. You were called out of darkness into God's wonderful light. And so am I.

Silence

Optional Guided Questions

1. St John describes how Nicodemus came to Jesus 'by night' (v 2). How would you interpret this?
2. Nicodemus was attracted by Jesus because of the 'signs' he did which signalled the 'presence of God.' (v 2) What are the 'signs' that make Jesus attractive? What 'signs' in our own lives might lead people to experience God's presence?
3. Nicodemus misunderstands what Jesus is saying (v 4, 10). What helps us to hear and understand the voice of Jesus today?
4. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born 'from above.' (v 7) What does being 'born from above' mean for a Christian?
5. What are the opportunities and challenges related to sharing our faith in 'heavenly things' (v 12). Can you share an experience of where your faith in the 'things of heaven' has made a difference to the 'things of earth'?
6. John 3:16 is often described as the essence or kernel of the Gospel. How would you finish the sentence: 'God's love means...?'

Silence

Contemplation:

'What is Christ the Word inviting me to be and to do?'

Personal Reflection: *'I believe God wants me to ...'* What would you answer?

Sharing aloud: When invited by the leader, share something about your reflection. Listen especially to the person on your right. If you do not wish to share anything, that's fine.

Finally, the leader draws the session to a close by either:

Inviting the members of the group, in turn, to pray for the person on their right. You can pray out loud if you would like to, or pray in silence and then say *'Amen'* so that the next person knows when you have finished.

Or

Taking it in turns to pray: *'In the light of this text ...'* Again, it is fine to simply keep silent and say *'Amen'* to signal that your quiet prayer is finished.

Together We Pray

Leader: To each petition we respond: **R. Almighty God, we thank you**

For the beauty of creation **R.**
For the waters of the earth **R.**
For the 'Word made Flesh' **R.**
For the proclamation of the kingdom **R.**
For the action of the Spirit **R.**
For the Son of Man being lifted up **R.**
For freedom from sin **R.**
For freedom from death **R.**
For the power of faith **R.**
For the gift of baptism **R.**
For all who are seeking Christ **R.**
That all might share new life **R.**

Pause - please add any further petitions, followed by the response

God loved the world so much **That he gave his only Son**
So that everyone who believes **Might have eternal life**

Amen, let it be so, Amen.

Week 3



Conversation Matters!

Samaritan woman at the well - John 4:5-30, 39-42

The leader invites participants to share any reflections on anything that has come to mind since last week's session.

Optional Ice Breaking Activity

Share a conversation that you have had this week where you have learnt something new, changed your mind on an issue or even stood your ground!

Or:

What is the best conversation that you have had this week?

What is the worst conversation that you have had this week?

Opening Worship

We say together the words in **bold** type

Leader:

God's deep heart of life
is like a well of infinite love.
It flows towards all creation
in living waters of grace.

Praise be to God.

Christ sits beside our life,
inviting us to open ourselves,
body, mind, heart and soul
to the flowing newness of eternal life.

Praise be to God.

Let us rejoice in hope.

Be known to us in this place
and wherever we pause to be near to you, O Christ.
Take us by surprise if we cannot believe that you would visit us.
Meet us wherever you will so that we may receive
the wonder of your living water.

This we pray in your name.

Amen.¹

Pilgrim God
Striking water in the desert
Refresh us and quench our thirst

Revealing God
Sitting by the well side
Refresh us and teach us truth

Dancing God
Moving over the waters
Refresh us and bring us life.²

A hymn/song may be sung or a piece of music listened to.

Short Introduction by the group leader

First Reading of the Passage

To be read clearly and slowly, with a second's pause between the verses (marked with •) As the passage is read listen carefully for a word or phrase that attracts your attention.

John 4:5-30, 39-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. • ⁶Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. • ⁷A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." • ⁸(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) • ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) • ¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." • ¹¹The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? • ¹²Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" • ¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, • ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." • ¹⁵The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." • ¹⁶Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." • ¹⁷The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; • ¹⁸for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" • ¹⁹The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. • ²⁰Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." • ²¹Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. • ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. • ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. • ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." • ²⁵The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." • ²⁶Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." •

²⁷Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" • ²⁸Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the

people, • ²⁹“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” • ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him..... • ³⁹Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” • ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. • ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. • ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.”

Silence

Reflection 1: ‘Listening for Christ the Word’

Personal reflection: Which word or phrase caught your attention? Silently repeat the word or phrase to yourself.

Sharing aloud: When the leader invites members of the group to share a word or phrase that struck them, just say the word or phrase out loud (without any need for explanation or comment). It’s also fine to keep the word or phrase to yourself if you prefer.

Second Reading of the Passage (a reflection)

You may either read the same version of the passage as before, or read the following dramatic reflection.

I met Jesus in the most unusual way. It really never should have happened -- that is if things just happened. Because, you see, he is a Jew and Jews don't talk to Samaritans, and men don't just talk to women, no one in my town talks to me, and normally, I would not have been there at the well, and if he really knew what I was like, he would not have wanted to talk to me, except he did.... Am I confusing you?

My life was really a mess. If you had told the little girl I used to be that this is how it would turn out, I would have screamed and run.

So, anyway, no one ever spoke to me. I was THEIR worst nightmare, too. Rather than embarrass them I just stayed clear. That was why I went to get water in the middle of the day when no one would be there. Imagine my surprise when I saw a man sitting alone -- a Jew of all things, and he looked at me. All sorts of thoughts raced through my head and I nearly turned and walked away, but then he spoke. And of all things, he asked me to do something for him! He asked for a drink! I was really intrigued.

He asked me if I wanted living water. I wondered how could he draw water, and, of course, why he had asked me if he could have done it himself. He said that I would never thirst again and I started to talk about almost everything I knew about the well, about Jacob who gave it to us, and so on -- people usually didn't give me any credit for knowing anything.

But as I babbled on about how nice it would be never having to draw water again, he got to the heart of the matter and turned my thoughts to my real need. He did it by asking me to bring my husband. Now, of course, I had been divorced several times and all this was irrelevant and too messy to talk about so I just said I did not have a husband. He told me how many times I had been married and that I was now living with another man. That absolutely floored me! First of all, how did he know? Then since he did know, why did he not condemn me? Why did he even talk to me?

He was obviously a prophet and I had a few questions I had always wanted to ask a prophet, like where we should worship -- who was right, my religious leaders or the Jews? He started to talk about worshipping God in spirit and truth. I said that when the Messiah came, he would teach us. Then he said that he was the one.

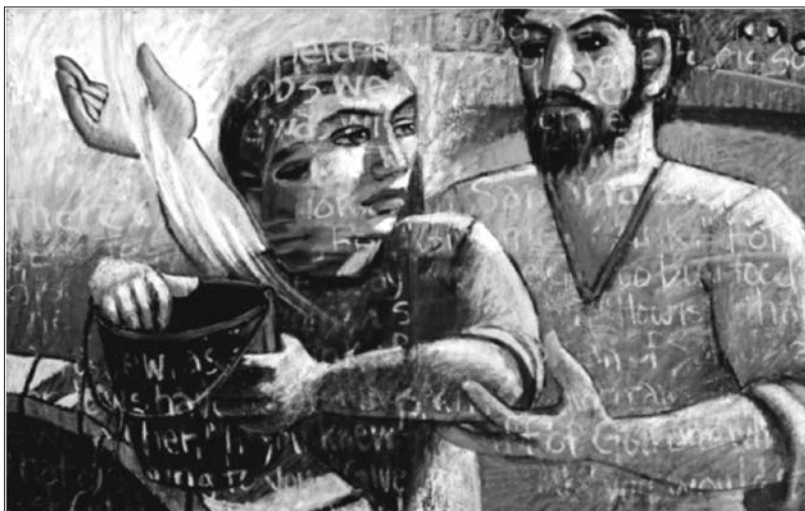
Just at that moment, his friends came back and started to ask him why he was talking to me and I wanted to disappear. But I realized that I could not ignore what I now knew. He was the answer to all my questions. I did not slink away out of embarrassment, I had a mission.

It suddenly did not matter that I was the pariah of the town or what people would think if I approached them, I ran back, even forgetting my water jar, and told them all that this man knew everything and that he must be the Messiah. In fact, I knew that if He were the answer to MY deepest longings, he was also the answer to everyone else's, too.³

Reflection 2: 'How Christ the Word speaks to me'

Personal reflection: In silence, reflect on how this reading touches your life today.

Sharing aloud: The leader will invite members of the group to share what they feel the Lord is saying or enabling. If you would like to, share aloud a brief sentence beginning '*I hear the Lord...*' or '*I see the Lord...*' Again, it's fine to keep your thoughts to yourself if you prefer.



You might like to focus on the image of the woman and Jesus while the jottings on the passage are read. Larger colour versions will be available from your group leader.

Reflection 3: Jottings on the Passage

When Jesus asked the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, he was shattering convention. Creating a storm in a water cup. Jews and Samaritans didn't mix. Jewish men never talked to women in public, and this particular woman wasn't likely to be received in the best circles, not with her reputation.

But Jesus was never inhibited by convention. Not when he saw human need. Somehow he recognised a human being whose relationships were in a mess. Someone going about the routine of ordinary life, but whose life below the surface was dislocated.

To reach her, he broke the rules, opened doors locked by centuries of tradition.

Even she found it hard to accept at first. She hid behind the common prejudice. She misunderstood. She prevaricated by changing the subject, trying to divert Jesus' attention. She didn't want to face herself as she really was. As Jesus saw her. Eventually, she did and, in facing herself, found the Christ.

It's easy to leave it there, simply to see Jesus as the one who breaks the barriers. But there was a message here, a challenge, for the disciples. It was their business too, to break barriers. And beyond them, he's speaking to the orthodox. "Your life isn't in rules and regulations. It's in relationships. Not in law, but in loving."⁴

Silence

Optional Guided Questions

1. 'Give me a drink.' (v 7) This sounds like a straightforward request by Jesus, but why might it be significant for this woman in this time and place? (v 7,9,27 may help)
2. Jesus offers 'living water.' (v 10) What might he mean?
3. 'True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth..' (v 23) How might these words speak to our divisions over religious belief and practice?
4. Jesus makes an honest assessment of this woman's life circumstances. (v 16-18) Does this help or hinder her response to him? How might we feel about such self exposure? (v 29)
5. Consider the disciples' unspoken concern, 'why are you speaking with her? (v 27). What kind of person might you struggle to offer acceptance and welcome to as Jesus did?
6. 'He told me everything I have ever done?' (v 39) How might sharing honesty about our own struggles help others to find faith for themselves?

Silence

Contemplation:

'What is Christ the Word inviting me to be and to do?'

Personal reflection: *'I believe God wants me to ...'* What would you answer?

Sharing aloud: When invited by the leader, share something about your reflection. Listen especially to the person on your right. If you do not wish to share anything, that's fine.

Finally, the leader draws the session to a close by either:

Inviting the members of the group, in turn, to pray for the person on their right. You can pray out loud if you would like to, or pray in silence and then say 'Amen ' so that the next person knows when you have finished.

Or

Taking it in turns to pray: *'In the light of this text ...'* Again it is fine to simply keep silent and say 'Amen ' to signal that your quiet prayer is finished.

Together We Pray

Leader: Let us pray.

In you, gracious God,
the widowed find a carer,
the orphaned find a parent,
the fearful find a friend.

**In you,
the wounded find a healer,
the penitent find a pardoner,
the burdened find a counsellor.**

In you,
the miserly find a beggar
the despondent find a laughter-maker,
the legalists find a rule-breaker.

**In you, Jesus Christ,
we meet our Maker,
and our match.**

And if some need to say, 'Help me'
and if some need to say, 'Save me'
and if some need to say, 'Hold me'
and if some need to say, 'Forgive me'
then let these be said now
in confidence
by us.

(Silence)

**O Christ,
in whose heart is both welcome and warning,
say to us,
do to us,
reveal within us
the things that will make us whole.**

And we will wait;
and we will praise you.

Amen.⁵

Week 4



The Sign of the Man Born Blind

Jesus heals a man - John 9:1-41

The leader invites participants to share any reflections on anything that has come to mind since last week's session.

Optional Ice Breaking Activity

Share an image, a view or occasion that was so memorable because it took your breath away.

Or:

What sight would you mourn if you were unable to see?

Opening Worship

We say together the words in **bold** type

Leader:

Lord, you mark out my journeys and my resting place
and are acquainted with all my ways.

There is not a word on my tongue,
but you, O Lord, know it altogether.

You encompass me behind and before
and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
so high that I cannot attain it. Amen

from Psalm 139.2-5

Timeless God,
you sustain the space our world inhabits, you are the mystery before time;
you alone are worthy of the gladness and praise of our lives.

Timeless God,
you approach us in humility and weakness,
willing to be misunderstood or ignored for the sake of love;
you alone are worthy of the gladness and praise of our lives.

A hymn/song may be sung or a piece of music listened to.

Short Introduction by the group leader

First Reading of the Passage

To be read clearly and slowly, with a second's pause between the verses (marked with •) As the passage is read listen carefully for a word or phrase that attracts your attention.

John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. • ²His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' • ³Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. • ⁴We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. • ⁵As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' • ⁶When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, • ⁷saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. • ⁸The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' • ⁹Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' • ¹⁰But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' • ¹¹He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' • ¹²They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. • ¹⁴Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. • ¹⁵Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' • ¹⁶Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. • ¹⁷So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.' •

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight • ¹⁹and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' • ²⁰His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; • ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' • ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. • ²³Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.' •

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' • ²⁵He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' • ²⁶They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' • ²⁷He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' • ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.' • ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' • ³⁰The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. • ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. • ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. • ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' • ³⁴They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' • ³⁶He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' • ³⁷Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' • ³⁸He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. • ³⁹Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' • ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' • ⁴¹Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.

Silence

Reflection 1: 'Listening for Christ the Word'

Personal reflection: Which word or phrase caught your attention? Silently repeat the word or phrase to yourself.

Sharing aloud: When the leader invites members of the group to share a word or phrase that struck them, just say the word or phrase out loud (without any need for explanation or comment). It's also fine to keep the word or phrase to yourself if you prefer.

Second Reading of the Passage (a reflection)

You may either read the same version of the passage as before, or read the following dramatic reflection.

I never even saw the day coming. I would have never imagined such a prophet even approaching me. I felt His presence as surely as I heard first the hubbub; then the questioning murmurs of excitement; and then the taste of dust as the crowd drew nearer. I sensed the subject of conversation turn to me; I felt the cut of their probing – spoken as if I was invisible. 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'

Even from that position of being overlooked by everyone and at the same time falling under their scrutiny; he saw me, sensed my very core, my story, my pain and joys – my very soul.

He spoke in terms of light and darkness and the power of God. Light I could not comprehend, but God was a part of my dimmed Jewishness. Then Jesus brought his light to bear in sensations I could understand. Mud on my eye, messy touch, sent to wash, cool balm of the pool and clear vision after all these years.

I put faces to names and yet they do not recognise me. 'You look like a man who was blind from birth.' What a coincidence they still cannot see me. But he saw me!

Who is the one without sight? My community without my sightlessness didn't recognise me. The Pharisees certainly didn't distinguish me as 'the blind one'. The blind one, that's rich, they call Jesus a sinner, are they so blind they see neither the humanity nor the holy. They say he is a bad man. Blind to the good his presence brings. They say he is a sabbath breaker but he talks of God's works being revealed. Are they blind to a prophet's task and a prophet's fruits?

They say I was born in sin and iniquity, he used not my faults, but certainly my failings, to point others towards God. It is though Jesus I glimpsed God. He lifted the veil whilst everyone else saw my incapacity, jumped to conclusions and left me well and truly in the dark.

Jesus perceived their blindness and their sin in not recognising God or their need to have their sight restored. Seeing is believing...I can claim both.

Reflection 2: 'How Christ the Word speaks to me'

Personal reflection: In silence, reflect on how this reading touches your life today.

Sharing aloud: The leader will invite members of the group to share what they feel the Lord is saying or enabling. If you would like to, share aloud a brief sentence beginning '*I hear the Lord...*' or '*I see the Lord...*' Again, it's fine to keep your thoughts to yourself if you prefer.



You might like to focus on the image of the woman and Jesus while the jottings on the passage are read. Larger colour versions will be available from your group leader.

Reflection 3: Jottings on the Passage

In chapter 9 we find John grappling with the problem of suffering when we meet a blind man from birth who is given his sight by Jesus. The blind man is physically healed by Jesus and the interaction between Jesus and the blind man, his parents, the disciples and Pharisees challenge assumptions and prejudices around the whole area of healing.

The blind man in coming (literally) from darkness to light is born again and we have in his story a case history of a Christian convert. At the beginning of the story we have a blind man who is a beggar and an outcast in the old community of Judaism and then at the end of the story he acknowledges and worships Jesus.

What's worse: physical blindness or moral and spiritual darkness? Sin clouds the mind in darkness and closes the heart to God's love and truth. Only in the light of God's truth can we see sin for what it really is, a rejection of God and opposition to his will.

The Pharisees equated physical blindness and sickness with sin. While the scriptures indicate that sin can make the body and mind sick as well as the soul, not all sickness, however is the result of sin. Sickness befalls us for a variety of reasons. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Romans 8:28).

This is one of the most remarkable miracles of Jesus. Even the blind man, once cured, marvelled and proclaimed that "never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind" (John 9:32).

Silence

Optional Guided Questions

Our questions for discussion are approached through the eyes of the main characters in the story:-

1. **The blind man** – what must it have felt like after being born blind to meet Jesus and suddenly see the world for the first time? Are there areas in our own lives that we are blind to? How might we need to allow Jesus to open our eyes?
2. **Jesus** – What do you think Jesus meant by saying in verse 3 – ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him’. Do you think there are any positives to be found in the experience of suffering as a Christian?
3. **Blind man’s parents** – how do you think the man’s parents felt during their blind son’s life prior to his being healed? How would they have felt after the healing had taken place?
4. **Disciples** – what prejudices did the disciples have about the blind man’s condition and what did they learn as a result of the healing? Are there any lessons for ourselves in the disciples’ response?
5. **Pharisees** – what do you think was the main problem the pharisees had with the blind man being healed? Do you have issues or questions surrounding the whole area of prayers for healing?
6. Finally, which character in the story do you relate to most and what does the story teach us about how Jesus transforms lives and situations.

Silence

Contemplation:

‘What is Christ the Word inviting me to be and to do?’

Personal reflection: *‘I believe God wants me to ...’* What would you answer?

Sharing aloud: When invited by the leader, share something about your reflection. Listen especially to the person on your right. If you do not wish to share anything, that’s fine.

Finally, the leader draws the session to a close by either:

Inviting the members of the group, in turn, to pray for the person on their right. You can pray out loud if you would like to, or pray in silence and then say *‘Amen’* so that the next person knows when you have finished.

Or

Taking it in turns to pray: *‘In the light of this text ...’* Again it is fine to simply keep silent and say *‘Amen’* to signal that your quiet prayer is finished.

Together We Pray

Leader: Let us pray.

These eyes have seen horror and beauty combine,
blood shed on rolling hills, scars torn into children's faces,
hunger borne by noble bodies, injustice laid on courageous shoulders.

**These eyes have seen and looked away
at the first hint of pain and sting of tears.
It is a sin to see such things on the face of the earth.**

These ears have heard truth and lies confused.
I am powerful, powerless. I can do something, nothing.
Violence is not the way, the only way.

**These ears have heard and grown deaf
to too many cries, so much discomfort.
It is a sin to hear such things on the face of the earth.**

This mouth has spoken wisdom and half truth together.
Words from God lost through selfishness,
kindness mingled with self-interest,
comfort tinged with rebuke, love buried through fear.

**This mouth has spoken and grown dumb
in a world of words in the noise of conflict.
It is a sin to speak such things on the face of the earth.**

Put your hands on my eyes, Jesus, on my ears, on my mouth.
Daub them with earth that I may see, hear and speak
things true to this creation.

**Fill my eyes with the wonder of what you have made.
Fill my ears with the still small voice that blows the Spirit in and
through me.
Fill my mouth with the word of life to speak love, peace and hope.
Take away the sin that refuses to see, hear and speak of God.
Take away the sin that refuses to see, hear and speak of the least of the
children of God.
Bring sight, hearing and speech, all over the face of the earth. Amen.¹**

Week 5



A Woman does Theology

The raising of Lazarus - John 11: 1-45

The leader invites participants to share any reflections on anything that has come to mind since last week's session.

Optional Ice Breaking Activity

Share with your neighbour:

Some good news that you have had this week

Or:

Where have you witnessed a sign of new life and resurrection this past week?

Opening Worship

We say together the words in **bold** type

Leader: In this silence Lord, speak to our hearts and lives. Give us grace to recognise you in the breaking of the word.

(We pause and remind ourselves of the holiness of this time and space.)

I arise today through a mighty strength:

The invocation of the Trinity.

Through belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness of the Creator of creation.

**I arise today through the strength of Christ with His Baptism,
through the strength of His Crucifixion with His Burial
Through the strength of His Resurrection with His Ascension,
through the strength of His descent for the Judgment of Doom.**

I arise today, through the strength of Heaven:

Light of Sun, brilliance of Moon, splendour of Fire,

Speed of Lightning, swiftness of Wind, depth of Sea,

Stability of Earth, firmness of Rock.

**I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me:
God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me,
God's host to secure me: against snares of devils, against temptations
Of vices, against inclinations of nature, against everyone who shall
Wish me ill, afar and near, alone and in a crowd.**

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right,

Christ on my left, Christ in breadth, Christ in length,

Christ in height, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,

Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me.

**I arise today through a mighty strength: the invocation of the
Trinity. Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness of the Creator of creation.
Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord.
Salvation is of Christ.**

May Thy Salvation, O Lord, be ever with us. Amen.¹

A hymn/song may be sung or a piece of music listened to.

Short Introduction by the group leader

First Reading of the Passage

To be read clearly and slowly, with a second's pause between the verses (marked with •) As the passage is read listen carefully for a word or phrase that attracts your attention.

John 11: 1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. • ²Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. • ³So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' • ⁴But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' • ⁵Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, • ⁶after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. •

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' • ⁸The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' • ⁹Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. • ¹⁰But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' • ¹¹After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' • ¹²The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' • ¹³Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. • ¹⁴Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. • ¹⁵For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' • ¹⁶Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' •

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. • ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, • ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. • ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming; she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. • ²¹Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. • ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' • ²³Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' • ²⁴Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' • ²⁵Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, • ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' • ²⁷She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' •

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' • ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. • ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. • ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. • ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' • ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. • ³⁴He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' • ³⁵Jesus began to weep. • ³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' • ³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' •

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. • ³⁹Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' • ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' • ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. • ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' • ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' • ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Silence

Reflection 1: 'Listening for Christ the Word'

Personal reflection: Which word or phrase caught your attention? Silently repeat the word or phrase to yourself.

Sharing aloud: When the leader invites members of the group to share a word or phrase that struck them, just say the word or phrase out loud (without any need for explanation or comment). It's also fine to keep the word or phrase to yourself if you prefer.

Second Reading of the Passage (a reflection)

You may either read the same version of the passage as before, or read the following dramatic reflection.

Martha's prayer.....

Doesn't he understand? Doesn't he care? Why isn't he here?

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord.

Lord, where are you?

Forgive me Lord, I'm confused and feel alone. The pain – the shock of my brother's death. He's gone. The boy I grew up with and played with and cared for, lying cold and lifeless: dead.

Where are you Lord? Why have you left me? Why do I feel this rock of hardness around my heart?

Free me, Lord. God help me.

I'm so cried out – I am exhausted.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my suffering.

Where are you, Lord?

Help me to wait for you. Give me strength to stay with you.

Give me grace to believe when I pray.

Hear me in my pain, listen to my pleading.

I hope in you Lord, everything else seems gone.

Be with me as I pour out my soul.

Let me grieve –

Free me –

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, I hope in his word.

I wait and watch for the Lord, more than a watchman for daybreak,

I wait and watch for the Lord, more than a watchman for daybreak.

Reflection 2: 'How Christ the Word speaks to me'

Personal reflection: In silence, reflect on how this reading touches your life today.

Sharing aloud: The leader will invite members of the group to share what they feel the Lord is saying or enabling. If you would like to, share aloud a brief sentence beginning '*I hear the Lord...*' or '*I see the Lord...*' Again, it's fine to keep your thoughts to yourself if you prefer.



You might like to focus on the image of Jesus raising Lazarus while the jottings on the passage are read. Larger colour versions will be available from your group leader.

Reflection 3: Jottings on the Passage

The little family in Bethany were experiencing a family crisis, Lazarus their brother had died and Jesus the one person this family had known and relied upon in times past had not been with them. He who had eaten with them, prayed with them and loved them had not been with them during this time of crisis. Life for this family had fractured.

When eventually he did arrive at their home, Jesus was met by Martha who was angry with him, telling him "if you had been here my brother would not have died".

Jesus, recognising her grief and pain – wept with her.

But Martha, ever the pragmatist, can't believe what she hears when Jesus orders the grave stone to be taken away; and through gritted teeth reminds Jesus that Lazarus' remains would have started to rot. (Not only had Jesus let them down by his absence, now he wants to make them look foolish by ordering their grave to be reopened.)

At Jesus' Command – Lazarus came out of the tomb.
He was unbound from everlasting death.

The work of God had been glorified.

Life can be unfair, hard: but with Martha we may allow ourselves to feel angry with God. God can take it. With Martha we are allowed to have times of questioning and feeling let down by those we have faith in.

But with Martha, our call is to recognise the daily moments of resurrection: a smile, a kind word, hope shared.

In the great and the small things we are called to carry the Gospel with us. We are called to be sources of resurrection and new life to a broken world.

Silence

Optional Guided Questions

1. "Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" What does this mean for your life, right now?
2. What kind of new life do you need?
3. What kind of life is Jesus offering?
4. "Lord, he whom you love is ill" . . . (v 4) Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus (v 15) . . . "When Jesus saw her weeping, he was deeply troubled in spirit." (v 34) . . . "Jesus wept" (v 35). Can you imagine Jesus feeling these things about you? Does he?
5. Martha said "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world". What are the things you find hard to believe? Over the next week take them to The Lord, ask him for understanding.
6. This passage of Scripture records a conversation with Jesus. What conversation do you need to have with him? What conversation have you been putting off with another person?

Silence

Contemplation:

'What is Christ the Word inviting me to be and to do?'

Personal reflection: *'I believe God wants me to ...'* What would you answer?

Sharing aloud: When invited by the leader, share something about your reflection. Listen especially to the person on your right. If you do not wish to share anything, that's fine.

Finally, the leader draws the session to a close by either:

Inviting the members of the group, in turn, to pray for the person on their right. You can pray out loud if you would like to, or pray in silence and then say 'Amen' so that the next person knows when you have finished.

Or

Taking it in turns to pray: *'In the light of this text ...'* Again it is fine to simply keep silent and say 'Amen' to signal that your quiet prayer is finished.

Together We Pray

Leader:

For all things rising
out of the hiddenness of shadows
out of the weight of despair
out of the brokenness of pain
out of the constrictions of compliance
out of the rigidity of stereotypes
out of the prison of prejudice;

for all things rising
into life, into hope
into healing, into power
into freedom, into justice;

**we pray, O God,
for all things rising.**

In the coming days, may you place yourself in the path of the Christ who desires our wholeness. Together. Blessings to you! ²

**Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
make me an island, set apart,
alone with you, God, holy to you.**

**Then with the turning of the tide
prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
the world that rushes in on me
till the waters come again and fold me back to you.**³

(Prayer of St Aidan)

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The Colour image can be found at:

<http://www.freenaturepictures.com/desert-rocks-pictures.php>

¹ The jottings based on thoughts from: Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles our Judgement* (2000) Fount, London; Stanley Hauerwas, *The SCM Theological Commentary on the Bible: Matthew* (2006) SCM Press London. They both refer to Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov, Part 2, Book V, Chapter 5, 'The Grand Inquisitor'*.

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Week 2

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Christ Instructing Nicodemus, Crijn Hendricksz (1604) The Colour image can be found at: www.freechristimages.org/biblestories/how_to_be_saved.htm

Week 3

The colour image can be found at:

[http://web.me.com/tiagoforte1/WayneForte.com/Search/Entries/2008/2/3_\(984\)_Woman_at_the_Well_\(Seeds\)_06.html](http://web.me.com/tiagoforte1/WayneForte.com/Search/Entries/2008/2/3_(984)_Woman_at_the_Well_(Seeds)_06.html)

¹ From *Liturgies for High Days* by Dorothy McRae McMahon, SPCK, London (2006) p59-60. Used with permission Ref. F23091001

² Liturgy for 3rd Sunday in Lent, from *Eggs and Ashes: Practical & Liturgical resources for Lent and Holy Week* by Ruth Burgess & Chris Polhill (2004) p80 by Wild Goose Publications. © 2004 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow, G2 3DH, Scotland. Used with permission.

³ http://www.rossolson.org/drama/other_bible/woman_at_well_abb.html

⁴ Written by Eddie Askew, *Breaking the Rules*, (1992) p6. The Leprosy Mission International, Essex. Available from TLM trading to buy.

⁵ From '*A Wee Worship Book: Fourth Incarnation*' (1999) p14-15. Published by Wild Goose Publications. © 1999 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow, G2 3DH, Scotland. Used with permission.

Week 4

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Week 5

The colour image '*The Raising of Lazarus*' by: Vincent van Gogh (1890) can be found at: <http://www.artbible.info/art/work/vincent-van-gogh.htm>

¹ The Breastplate of St. Patrick, The Deer's Cry,
Traditional Trans: Professor Gearoid McEoin NUI: Galway)

² '*Prayer for All Things Risin*' © Jan L. Richardson from
Sacred Journeys: A Woman's Book of Daily Prayer (1995) Nashville: Upper Room Books,

³ Prayer of St Aidan, traditional, taken from: http://www.prayerfoundation.org/aidans_prayer.htm)