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Pontius Pilate (Part 2)

Philo of Alexander, a Jewish philosopher, said that **Pilate's** rule was corrupt and full of bribery. He allowed executions without trial and was cruel and vindictive. His behaviour wasn't all that different from other Roman rulers, but none did it more ruthlessly than **Pilate**. As long as he kept insurgency, riots and unrest under control, the Legate (higher-ranking Roman military officer) would not interfere with his command.

During his ten year governorship, his greatest ally was **Caiaphas**, the Jewish high priest. At Jesus's trial, **Pilate** couldn't find anything to indict Jesus with: as far as he was concerned, it was purely a religious matter. **Pilate** was headstrong, ruthless, authoritative; he wasn't the type to be cowed by anyone or any crowd. Jesus's predicament wasn't a bother to him, despite the fact that his wife interceded for Jesus ([Matt 27:19](#)). What really bothered him was the restlessness of the crowd and ugly way it was behaving. The mob was probably made up mainly of **temple priests and supporters of Barabbas**, not the people of the town of Jerusalem!



They had been agitated and stirred up and the mood had turned vindictive and venomous, just as the priests had hoped for! **Pilate** could see that this could overspill and become a riot maybe turning into an uprising. He had to do something to quell the uproar! ([Read the final Part 3 tomorrow](#))

A Prayer for Today

Help us, Lord, not to act solely in the interests of our own comfort and selfish desires, but to do what is right whatever the cost



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Pontius Pilate (Part 1)

Pilate could find no charge against Jesus, yet he allowed an innocent man to be put to death. What kind of person would let that happen and why? Little is known about **Pontius Pilate's** early life and what happened to him after his Judean period, but his name is mentioned in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds ('suffered under Pontius Pilate') and in a few ancient writers' historical works. At Jesus' trial he is often portrayed as weak, ineffectual and abdicating his responsibilities by capitulating to the crowd, but is this really the case?

He came from the **equestrian (middle class) strata** of Rome's society. It may have got his lofty appointment because of a connection of his, Sejanus, who was a favourite of Tiberius the Roman Emperor. He would more than likely have had a **military background**. He had to be a good leader of men and be proficient in army matters. Because of his status and standing, the army would give him total respect, loyalty and obedience. Only a strict authoritarian, military background person could have suited this position, as Judea was a known **high trouble spot**.



A Prayer for Today

We pray today, Lord, for Christians who are mistreated for the sake of the name of Jesus

Pilate was the fifth Governor of Judea and served under the Emperor Tiberius from 26AD to 36AD. A span of 10 years was quite a remarkable length of time to serve in such a position, so it would appear that he was a competent governor. He did not have autonomous rule of Judea as he was responsible to the Legate (higher-ranking Roman military officer) of Syria. [\(Read more in Part 2 tomorrow\)](#)



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Crowds

Those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it. Only dead fish go with the flow. Go the extra mile; it's never crowded. *(Popular Sayings)*

The story of Jesus is a story about **crowds** and **multitudes**. We constantly find Jesus in the midst of a **crowd**, teaching people and healing the sick. [\(Luke 5:15\)](#). We see the **crowd** outside of a house where Jesus is preaching and when a stretchered man is lowered through the roof by his friends for the Lord to heal him, as they are unable to get any closer because of the vast throng. We have the miraculous **feeding of the 5000**, and Palm Sunday involves the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, where the **crowds** hail him as their King by waving palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna in the highest!" And yet days later, the same people are shouting for Jesus to be crucified.

Crowds have a mind of their own. They can be exhilarating in a football stadium, but threatening on the streets. They are used as an excuse for lack of independent thought: "I only did what everyone else was doing!" But the gospel is addressed to **individuals**, to people like you and me. Jesus always had time for those who were thrust into the shadows by the **crowd**. He took time out to heal blind Bartimaeus, to save Zacchaeus, the hated tax-collector, and to confirm the healing of the sick woman who touched his robe, as they were being jostled along by a **crowd**. Yes, we often find ourselves in groups and mass gatherings, but let us ensure that we **keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus** ([WWJD - What Would Jesus Do?](#)) and *not* on following the **crowd**! *(Colin)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, transform our thoughts, words and deeds so that we might turn away from sin and live the Gospel



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How Beautiful on the Mountains...

You may well not be interested, but I'm going to tell you anyway, I **don't really like feet!** Of course they have their uses – we'd fall over without them, but I'd never have made a chiropodist. Babies' **feet** are, of course, not an issue, they are beautiful and soft and adorable, but as we age...

At work, we used to weigh and measure all the children coming to clinic as accurately as was practical, which meant asking them to remove their shoes. Whilst this did not always present a challenge to one's sense of smell, in certain cases (usually teenagers!) it did. If you have never smelt a sweaty foot, you may indeed count your blessings. Then of course, **feet** change as we grow older - hard skin, callouses, corns, bunions.

Yet these were exactly the sort of **feet Jesus chose to wash** at his last meal with his friends. One of the most menial tasks you could find - and he did it, to show his loving, caring compassion. "**I came not to be served, but to serve**", he said - do we follow his example? **If it's good enough for Jesus, shouldn't it be good enough for us?** (*Judith*)



A Prayer for Today

Help us to follow your example, Jesus, in caring for others



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Peace Be with You (John 20:19) (Part 2)

The first lines of Horatio Spafford's hymn refer to his dreadful loss and his painful grief: 'When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows, like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say: it is well, it is well with my soul.'

The bereaved parents had the greatest comfort in knowing that all four children had accepted Christ as their Saviour at one of Mr Moody's evangelistic meetings, shortly before the fatal voyage.

Three times in [John 20](#) the risen Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "**Peace be with you**", but previously Jesus had explained to the disciples a deeper meaning to what he meant when he spoke of **peace**. In [John 14:27](#), he said it was a **gift** and that it was a **peace** that he gave that the world couldn't give. It's a **peace** that we, as humans, just cannot fathom out, for it is totally different from what the world refers to as **peace**. The world's **peace** is circumstantial and depends on comparison. **God's peace** overshadows and drives away the anxiety of the world. It transcends all understanding. No matter what we face, a tragedy, illness, even death, in **God's peace** we will be able to handle it. Our faith in God dispels our fear and leaves us content, whatever life brings. Mr Spafford and many millions of other believers have experienced God's true and amazing **peace**.

'That evening, on the first day of the week, the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them and said, "Peace be with you!"' (John 20:19). *(Bill)*

A Prayer for Today

Prince of Peace, we bless you for our lives and ask for peace in our mind, body and soul. Please forgive our faults and heal and remove everything that is causing stress and sorrow in our lives



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Peace Be with You (John 20:19) (Part 1)

Whenever I feel overwhelmed by circumstances that come crashing into my life, and I start to bemoan my misfortune, I often turn to a **hymn** that has given me a lot of comfort. My gaze then gets diverted from myself to Christ. Here is the story of how this hymn came about.

In 1874 a French steamer, the 'Ville de Havre', was on her homeward voyage from America. It collided with a sailing vessel midway across the Atlantic and sank within half an hour. One of the passengers was a **Mrs Spafford**, wife of a Chicago lawyer, along with her **four daughters**. As the vessel sank she knelt with her children in **prayer**, asking God that if it was possible they might be saved, or be made willing to die, if this was **his will** for them. The ship went down and **all four children were lost**, but **Mrs Spafford was rescued** by a sailor rowing over the spot where the ship had sunk. She was floating in the water. A few days later she was landed at Cardiff and she sent this telegram to her Christian husband, Horatio Spafford: **'SAVED-ALONE'**. He kept and framed the telegram and hung it in his office.

Two years later, **Moody and Sankey** (American evangelists) were staying with the Spaffords. During this visit, Mr Spafford wrote, in commemoration of his children's death, the hymn **'It Is Well with My Soul'**, with its triumphant chorus, which has become such a favourite all over the world. The music was composed by Philip Bliss. *(Bill)*

Listen to the hymn now by clicking [here](#) and read more about it tomorrow.

A Prayer for Today

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) - Lord Jesus, you call us to repent and to believe - for the kingdom of God is at hand



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Give Thanks

'I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of your wonders.' (Psalm 9:1)

This verse, with its tone of optimism, in the real sense (a Christ-like mind, in this instance) is a divine admonition, along with [Psalm 100:4-5](#). It is easy to give thanks when we have food on our tables, favourite drinks in the fridge, wines (for the connoisseurs), offspring who are exceeding expectations, relatives that are supportive and selfless and friends that are outrageously loyal, with beautiful souls. However, when life is going the way we envisaged is not the only time to be **thankful**. In [Philippians 4:6-7](#) we read 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'



God's wisdom and human hard work and diligence have given a light at the end tunnel for the enemy all mankind share now: COVID! Even before this dreadful pandemic there were problems, like illnesses, setbacks, disappointments, etc, and these will continue, even after the majority get the jab. It is **THEN** when we should be most thankful, because God is not only our Heavenly Father when we have all we desire, but even in our greatest despair, he was, is and will still be ours, as **he has promised never to forsake us**. *(Victor)*

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, we are thankful for the good days we have enjoyed and are still enjoying. We pray that you will strengthen us to be more grateful in times when life does not go as we planned



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New Life in Spring

As we sloshed through the mud on our 'exercise' around Dean Clough reservoirs recently, I thought of a poem by e e cummings called 'In Just Spring', where he talks about the world being 'puddle-wonderful' and 'mud-luscious'. It is certainly that, at present, now the frost and snow have gone. On coming home, I looked at the garden and saw **snowdrops** dancing in the sunlight and the splash of yellow against purple of **crocuses** and the opening buds of early **daffodils** - so beautiful and hopeful!



On [Day 1](#) of our Lent Calendar we read that 'Lent' comes from the word 'lencten' meaning 'spring' when, as the days lengthen, things suddenly shoot up from the ground. The bulbs are in the dark for months and then out the flowers burst.

It led me to think of **Jesus** being in the dark of the tomb and all seemed lost, but like the bulbs in the ground shoot up, he **conquered death** and rose from the grave. **It gives us such joy and hope!** *(Brenda)*

'Because he lives, I can face tomorrow, because he lives, all fear is gone; because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because he lives!'

(W & G Gaither)

A Prayer for Today

Thank you Lord, for the returning spring and its reminder of all your promises and the hope and joy you bring if we give you our trust



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The Temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11)

During **Lent**, we remember the 40 days and nights Jesus spent **fasting** in the wilderness, being **tested** and **tempted** (the same word in Greek). Jesus had just been baptised by John the Baptist, seen the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove and been affirmed by his Heavenly Father, **“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”**

After such a wonderful experience, he is now **in the desert!** So often for us too, after having experienced God at work in our lives, the devil will then try to attack us. Jesus was being tested by God and he tests us too, but it is only the devil who **tempts** us to do evil. Jesus gives us the model to fight **temptation**. For each of the challenges, he responds, quoting from Scripture. Satan knows who Jesus is, but taunts him with, “If (Since) you are the Son of God...” He is tempting him to use his powers for his own ends, rather than to glorify his Father. Jesus responds, **“It is written...”** His knowledge of Scripture was absolute; knowing the Bible helps us too – to challenge us but also to comfort and reassure.

The apostle Paul writes, “...God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear...he will also provide a way out so that you can stand.” (1 Cor 10:13). During this, our time in the COVID wilderness, we have this hope, that **our God is faithful and will provide a way out.** (Jane)

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, thank you that you do not leave us to manage the trials of life on our own. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to follow in the way that Jesus showed us



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Betrayal

Lord, it was I led you there; the way to Calvary.
Dipped my hand into the dish, betrayed you with a kiss.

Lord, it was I ran away from the garden then.
Denied I ever knew your name when your captors came.

Lord, it was I washed my hands, my own blame to free.
Scourged and saw how much you bled, placed thorns upon your head.

Lord, it was I freed the thief; you - I had crucified.
Fastened by nails upon the tree, I let you die for me.

Father forgive, Father forgive, a cry of love through agony.
Not for himself he pleads, but for you and me.

(Ruth Martin)

We remember our sister Ruth with fondness and gratitude for the words she shared with us through her poetry.

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for giving yourself for me, unworthy as I am. Free me from anything that obstructs my way to you. Cleanse me of thoughts filled with anger, envy or self-pity.



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Lockdown Lent

Lockdown may have had its challenges, but it's also been an opportunity for some of us to look afresh at the **beauty of the created world**.



Walking through Corporation Park most mornings ([click to enlarge the pictures](#)), there is so much to appreciate. The **birdsong** was probably one of the first things to be noticed 12 months ago, when the lack of traffic made the area very quiet and peaceful. Since then, we've been able to watch the **changing seasons** and delight again in the wonders of the natural world. From the host of **golden daffodils** last spring, to the silhouettes of the **leafless trees** in winter; from the gorgeous **blue skies** and sunshine we so quickly forget, to the **snow** at the start of this year, and the shrieks of delighted children sledging down the slopes - **we have so much to be thankful for**.

No wonder '**God saw and it was good**' - yes it was and still is! (*Judith*)

A Prayer for Today

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful world in which we live. We give you thanks for the beauty that we so often take for granted - the rain glistening on a spider's web, the water sliding off a duck's back, the colours of a falling leaf, and ask that we would stop and marvel at your creation



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I Thirst

“I thirst.” (John 19:28) We can understand at some level why Jesus, on the cross, experienced a terrible **thirst**. He had lost much blood and, before the unusual darkness, had been hanging unprotected in the sun. Jesus, fully God, was also fully human. This expression of human need, John tells us, was to fulfil the scripture – in [Psalm 22](#), David, under Holy Spirit inspiration, wrote: ‘My strength has dried up like sun-baked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.’ ([Psalm 22:15](#)).

Yet Christ’s **thirst** was more than just physical. The Bible also describes a **‘spiritual’ thirst** - the desire for fellowship with God our maker ([e.g. Psalm 63:1-2](#)). Jesus, the eternal Son of God, had enjoyed eternal fellowship with his Father up until this moment. Then, on the cross, as he bore our sins, he was cut off from that fellowship – and so experienced an intense **spiritual thirst**.

Jesus is a sympathetic saviour who is well acquainted with every form of suffering - physical and spiritual. He was prepared to face them so that **our spiritual thirst** might be quenched for ever.

‘I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give the living water, thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live!” I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream: my thirst was quenched, my soul revived and now I live in him.’ (*H Bonar*)

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for all you suffered on our behalf. Thank you for the new life that has flowed from your sacrifice on the cross.



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The Curtain

As Christ died, Mark's Gospel tells us that the **curtain of the Temple** was torn in two from top to bottom ([Mark 15:38](#)). This seems a strange detail until you realise its significance. In [Exodus 26](#), God set out his plans for the **Tabernacle**, the Temple's forerunner, specifying the making of a **curtain** to be hung before the **Holy of Holies**, the place of God's presence. The **curtain** was a barrier - sinful humans could not enter the presence of God and live. Only the high priest could enter, only once a year, to make an **Atonement sacrifice**.

When the **curtain** tore at Jesus' death, it signalled a new era. Jesus was the final **Atonement sacrifice**, his death sufficing for all sinners for all time, allowing all who rely on his shed blood to enter God's presence whenever they want, as often as they want, with no intermediary needed. The **curtain** was thick and about 30 feet tall - and ripped top to bottom, a sure sign of God's hand at work, eager to open the way for repentant sinners to come to him.

So often we take it for granted that we can talk to God, present requests or just enjoy being with him. Let's remind ourselves afresh of the **privilege** Christ's death has brought. In a year when so many have not been able to enter the homes of loved ones, **it's great to know that we can always enter God's home to talk with our Heavenly Father**. His door is always open. *(Debbie)*

A Prayer for Today

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of prayer and open access to your presence – free to us and so costly to Jesus. May we exercise this privilege regularly.



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Mary (Part 1)

In our [Advent calendar](#) we remembered that 'Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.'

Soon after the birth, she and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and, whilst there, a devout man, **Simeon**, expressed the words we read in [Luke 2:29-32](#). Mary and Joseph marvelled at this and also words about Jesus from the prophetess **Anna**. In Matthew we hear how God sent the family as refugees to **Egypt**, as Herod wanted Jesus killed. Later, back in **Nazareth**, they settled into life with Joseph working as a carpenter and, together with Mary, raising Jesus and the rest of the family. She must have noticed how **special** he was as 'the child grew and became strong in spirit' ([Luke 1:80](#)).

When Jesus was twelve, we read about the family visiting **Jerusalem** for the Feast of the **Passover** where, thinking they had lost him in the crowd, they searched everywhere for him. We hear the worry in her voice, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" ([Luke 2:48](#)) - and also feel their puzzlement when he says he had to be in his **Father's House**. So 'Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men' and we read that his mother treasured all these things in her heart' ([Luke 2:51-52](#)) trusting that all would go well. (*Brenda*)

A Prayer for Today

May we too, Lord, along with Mary, treasure the thoughts of Jesus in our hearts, and ponder continually all that he has graciously done for us.



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The Gospel of the Kingdom

After his temptations, Jesus returned to his home county of Galilee and started to preach the **gospel of the kingdom** (Mark 1:14,15). The 'kingdom of God' is better translated as the 'kingship of God', as the stress of the original Greek is not so much on the 'realm' over which God rules, but on the nature of the reign itself. The term recalls the promise of the Old Testament prophets that God himself would come in person and save his people and rule over them (Isaiah 40:10,11). In other words, the coming of the **kingdom** is the coming God's messianic rule, marking the age of salvation through the 'outpouring' of the Spirit.

During the ministry of Jesus, whenever his **kingship** was welcomed, **kingdom-blessings**, like the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, were experienced. After the events of Easter and the Ascension, these **kingdom-blessings** have gone global, for his Lordship is now universal. That is why the disciples were given the Great Commission to go into the whole world and make disciples of all nations. Thus, wherever Jesus Christ is lifted up, his **kingly**, saving power can be felt in the here and now.

Are we living fully, today, in the power of God's rule? For the living Lord Jesus can make a big, eternal difference to your life and mine. *(Colin)*

A Prayer for Today

Lord, create space in my life for more kindness and less spitefulness, greater generosity, fewer self-centred needs, stronger compassion and weakened judgement of others.



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Forgiveness

The story of the deceased 'Yorkshire Ripper' springs to mind. This brutal, heartless and cold murderer, with a wife at home, killed young women in the dead of the night in a cowardly yet cold manner. He had done nothing worthy of **forgiveness**, in particular in the hearts and minds of his victim's relatives. The intriguing thing is that the son of his second (recorded) victim, whose Mum was fatally murdered in Leeds, said in various media outlets that **he forgave** the man who killed his Mum. Justifiably, he could have resented that man throughout his life - for the terrible experience of the untimely snatching away of his mother, for having to live in care and other pitiful reasons, BUT he **chose to forgive**, and did this both privately and publicly. The picture to the right ([click to enlarge it](#)) depicts Mary Magdalene, who mercifully received the **forgiveness of Jesus** and was recorded to then have lived a holy, unblemished life for the rest of her days. As we are freely enjoying the **redemption** that comes from being heirs and heiresses of THE gracious King, let us imbibe the **spirit of forgiveness** towards every and anyone who has wronged us. *(Victor)*



A Prayer for Today

Lord Jesus, clear away the clutter of petty grudges, remove smudges of resentment and bitterness, and grant me the grace to forgive as I have been forgiven.

'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.'

Romans 3:23-24



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It Was for Me

As a boy, Jesus preached in the temple, well pleasing to his Father God.
Baptised by John in the Jordan - "Son whom I love" came God's Word.
Now led by the Holy Spirit, a journey to the wilderness he made
And tempted 40 days by the devil, to every temptation he said,
"You must worship the Lord and serve only him,
His angels guard me wherever I am led. Do not put your God to the test."
Then the devil finished his tempting and fled.
Jesus now began teaching and healing, crowds flocked to hear what he said.
Some mocked and jeered, others listened, trusted and believed.
All this time, Jesus continued to obey and do as his Father willed,
At God's appointed time, triumphantly entering Jerusalem, another scripture fulfilled.
Having celebrated the Last Supper, soon after he was betrayed and tried,
And as he hung on the cruel cross obeying his Father's will,
The awful price for our sins was paid. **Lord, please help us to appreciate and thank you for the great sacrifice of love you made.** *(Morag)*

"Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus, thank you Lord for loving me. You went to Calvary, there you died for me. You rose up from the grave, to me new life you gave. You're coming back again, and we with you shall reign. Thank you Lord for loving me."

(A Revell)

A Prayer for Today

Lord, may we appreciate what it cost for you to give your only Son for us. Let our lives show your love shining through so others will want to get to know you too.



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It Is Finished

Most of us, probably all of us, go through life and leave behind us **unfinished business** – projects we started but didn't complete, letters we meant to write but never got round to, places we meant to go with our children, but never quite found the time.

There's only one person in history who could truly say that he **finished** completely and perfectly everything he set out to do. The whole purpose of Jesus' life and ministry was to go to the cross, there to give his life for ours, satisfying completely the rightful judgement of God the Father against sin.

When Jesus said on the cross, "**It is finished!**", it was not a cry of despair, but one of triumph. In Greek it's just one word – **Tetelestai**. It was the word that was stamped on a debtor's bill when they had finally made the last payment that cleared them completely of their obligations – proof that they could no longer be held liable for what they owed. It meant '**paid in full**'.

Jesus, the humble, obedient servant of God, fulfilled his Father's mission perfectly. He **finished** the task and **paid in full** so that we never have to.

Hallelujah!

A Prayer for Today

**Create in me a clean heart,
O God; and renew a right
spirit within me.**

Psalm 51:10



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Lent

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday**, which is traditionally a day of repentance when Christians confess their sins and profess their devotion to God. It is the period before **Easter**, when Christians remember Jesus's withdrawal into the **wilderness** for 40 days and nights. A **wilderness** is a rough, uninhabited or neglected region, not the sort of place where you would want to spend a long time.

The word '**Lent**' originally came from the word '**lencten**' meaning 'spring', a time when the days start to lengthen and things begin to spring up. You have probably noticed that happening this year. During **Lent**, many people decide to try to deny themselves as Jesus did and give something up that they love - perhaps chocolate, sweets or biscuits.

It is also a time to commemorate the **passion** and **death** of **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God, our Saviour, and an opportunity to think about all that it means to be a follower of him. *(Brenda)*

'Follow him, follow him, yield your life to him, he has conquered death, he is King of kings; accept the joy which he gives to those who yield their lives to him.' *(C Simmons)*

A Prayer for Today

Enlarge my heart with a spirit of gratitude this Lent, so that I recognise the simple gifts that lay in abundance all around me. In your precious name, I pray.

