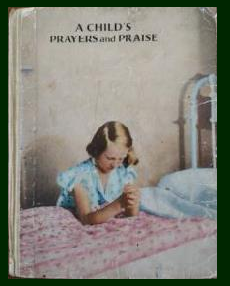
# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 45

Previous day




## *Good Friday*

Recently I came across one of my favourite childhood books by Rev G R Harding Wood (*click to enlarge picture*). It has lovely prayers and pictures in it and one of the prayers is a special one to read today – **Good Friday**. Here it is:

'Lord, as I say the words of this hymn, teach me to understand them. 'There is a Green Hill far away, outside a city wall; where the dear Lord was crucified, who diedto save us all.' Nobody else could have died for me and for all the world. It would have been useless for any ordinary person who had sinned himself to die for us. It was because you had never sinned that you could die for us. Now you are alive and have gone back to heaven, where the gate was open to you because it is your home. Now the gate is open for all who follow you.

Is there anything I can do, Lord Jesus, to show my love for you? 'Oh dearly, dearlyhas he loved, and we must love him too, and trust in his redeeming blood, and try his works to do.' I see there are just two things I can do, two things I feel I must do, to show my love to you who died in pain on the cross for me. I must 'trust in your redeeming blood'. That means I must believe that when I ask God to forgive me for your sake, he really does, and I must not doubt it. Also, I must 'try his works to do'. That is: I must be like you in my thoughts, words, and actions.'

Listen to this great old hymn by Cecil Frances Alexander here. It was first published in 'Hymns for Little Children' in 1848, but is just as relevant today *(Brenda)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Lord Jesus, live always in my heart so that I may be really like you, and always thank you for your death for me, not only in words, but in deeds**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 44

Previous day Next day

## *Maundy Thursday*

John's gospel tells us that during the Last Supper, Jesus laid aside his garments, filled a basin with water and began to wash his disciples' feet. Peter said, "You Lord, washing my feet. I will never let you wash my feet." Washing of feet was common practice then for people coming in from dusty roads, but usually done by a servant, not the host. Jesus explained, "You call me Master and Lord, and rightly so. If then I have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example."

This practice was taken over by the early Christian church and carried out during a special service, first by the clergy on the clergy, then by the clergy on poor people. In later years Royalty became involved, and the washing was replaced by giving food and clothes. Then, over the years, these gifts were replaced by the giving of money.

John tells us that Jesus gave Peter and the other disciples a command, a mandatum, (Latin) which has led to the gifts being known as Maundy money, and the day of the Last Supper, **Maundy Thursday**. In April 2014, I had the privilege, together with Phyllis Gorton and 174 other men and women, to attend Blackburn Cathedral and receive a gift of money from her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. *(Click to enlarge picture)*

John 13:34 tells us that Jesus said, "A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Listen to two hymns here and here which remind me of these words and that day in the Cathedral. *(Barbara)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Lord, may our lives reflect your love for us as we serve each other**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 43

Previous day Next day

## *Anointing at Bethany (Matthew 26: 6 – 13)*

During the week before his death, Jesus spent some time in the village of **Bethany** near to Jerusalem. Whilst there, Matthew records that a woman came to him and used some very expensive perfume to anoint him. The disciples called this an extravagant waste, which could have been put to better use, yet Jesus commended her for what she had done, which was effectively to prepare him for his burial.

We can often be like the disciples, wanting to decide what would be a worthy use of resources in God's kingdom. We don't like what we judge to be a waste of time, money or energy – but do we sometimes judge such things without having all the facts?

God's love for us is extravagant, too – it's a fitting word for the love that God, in Jesus, lavished upon us as he endured all that he did so that we could receive eternal life. It should prompt us, like the woman of Bethany, to respond in kind and in gratitude, giving all we have to serve God and our neighbours, even if that seems extravagant to some. She chose to pour out her heart along with her perfume to prepare Jesus for his sacrifice, and Jesus deemed it a worthy gift. *(Tim)*

### A Prayer for Today

**What can I give him, poor as I am? May I be prepared, Lord, to give my whole heart and soul to you, for my life to be under your direction**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 42

Previous day | Next day

## *The Disappointing Fig Tree (Matthew 21: 18 – 22)*

As Jesus and his disciples came towards Jerusalem during passion week, they got a surprise - a **fig tree** in full leaf *(click to expand picture)*. It was too early in the year, really – but if the tree was in leaf, there should be figs. They looked but found none.

The tree seemed, on first sight, to be remarkable, but proved a disappointment. So Jesus said to the tree, "May you never bear fruit again." The disciples were amazed to see that the fig tree withered straight away and expressed their shock. But Jesus was using this incident to teach the disciples (and us) two lessons.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aICQ7fbUhEA

The first lesson was about spiritual life – the fig tree looked outwardly healthy but bore no fruit. We can pretend to be spiritually alive and may look good outwardly to others, but we won't bear any good fruit for God.

The second lesson was about faith. Jesus says, "Have faith in God." We are to trust in him for all we need – physically and spiritually. When our lives are rooted in Jesus through prayer, our faith will bear fruit and will be strong enough to make a difference. By his power at work in us, we will show that he is alive! *(Tim)*

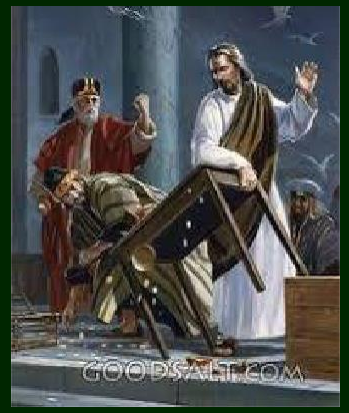
## A Prayer for Today

**Lord, help us to have strong faith in you. Fill our lives with the kind of fruit that brings honour to you and blesses those around us**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 41

Previous day | Next day

## *Turning the Tables (Matthew 21: 12 – 17)*




Perhaps one of the most startling scenes in the Gospels is Jesus' entering the temple just days before the crucifixion, kicking out merchants, and **knocking over tables**. It's unsettling! Imagine the shocked looks, coins flying around, animals loose. Chaos and confusion!

The *presence* of the merchants was not the problem - they needed to be there. People came from all over the world to make sacrifices and needed to change their foreign currency and buy animals. But Jesus basically called the merchants 'robbers' – the problem was that they were inflating prices and exploiting the travellers – it had become a forum for greed. Yet at the same time that Jesus was so indignant about this, amazingly, he also had time to heal the blind and lame.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aICQ7fbUhEA

Jesus wasn't just **turning tables over**, but turning the established order over too. He was here not for the greedy, but for the needy! His kingdom was good news not for the elite, but for the poor. The temple, the symbol of God's presence, would be destroyed, as Jesus soon would reveal, but the fullness of God's presence was in Jesus himself and that would never fail or fade.

Your life might feel like it's in chaos like the temple that day – but come to Jesus even so. Discover for yourself that he is the great healer and friend of the needy. *(Tim)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you came to heal and restore those who recognise their need of you and that you turn the world's values on their head**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 40

Previous day Next day

## *Holy Week*

Palm Sunday begins **Holy Week**. It's the day that Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Palm Sunday inaugurates something far greater than anything that any person could ever conceive or plan. What did they want? They wanted someone to fight their battles in the present day world; but God had the ultimate and final solution to their greatest need - salvation! It was to fight the final battle over death. This is the greatness of why we celebrate **Holy Week**; because of Christ's sacrifice we can be set free of death.

Let us choose to focus on worshipping our Lord, thanking him for the gift of his sacrifice, celebrating the power of his resurrection and the new life found in him alone. We have so much to be grateful for in this special week, so do not let anything distract us from the true meaning of what **Holy Week** means. May God direct our thoughts and attention towards what matters most – **Jesus Christ our King.**

'Jesus said to her "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."' (John 11:25)

'Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!' (2 Corinthians 9:15) *(Bill)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Father God, that at exactly the right point in human history, the Lord Jesus fulfilled perfectly the plan you had formed from eternity past for our salvation**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 39

Previous day Next day

## *Memories of Palm Sunday*

As with all our services, hymns and songs are an important part of our church worship. How we are missing being able to sing out loud in praise to God during this pandemic. In normal times, in the weeks before Easter, choirs throughout the country would be getting out their copies of 'Crucifixion' or 'Olivet to Calvary' to perform, usually on Palm Sunday. This we used to do at Leamington Road (see also Day 21 of our calendar). One year a number of us went to the Cathedral, with our copies, to sing in a 'Sing It Yourself Crucifixion', where we were able to join in and sing the choruses of the oratorio.

On two occasions the choir from Leamington Road was invited to join Sacred Heart's Choir to perform in their church, in which I took part. That was interesting, as the man who sang the tenor solos was Michael Boe, the brother of Alfie Boe.

Another special memory is of a moving occasion one Palm Sunday over fifty years ago at Leamington Road. During the singing of 'Tell me the stories of Jesus' (listen to it here) the children came in from the Sunday School, with the crèche first and at the head of the procession was Brenda's mother carrying my daughter Elizabeth, holding her palm cross. They walked up one aisle, along the vestibule at the back of the church and down the other aisle to sit on the front pew. They were all carrying crosses like this one *(click to expand picture)* made from a palm leaf, representing palm leaves of long ago. It was a proud and memorable moment for me! Listen here to a Palm Sunday favourite hymn. *(Barbara)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Lord God, for memories of joyful occasions sharing with others in music and worship**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 38

Previous day | Next day

## *Darkness (John 20:18) (Part 2)*

"Why are you weeping, who are you looking for?" She had just encountered shining, dazzling angels and her eyes were filled with tears. She didn't know the voice at first till he spoke her name: "Mary." She knew then, immediately. He was alive, her Saviour right before her. Out of the grave clothes had come the risen Christ, Son of the Living God, Saviour of the world, the Light for our darkness. He called her name, and the darkness fled from her spirit. In the presence of Jesus, darkness flees. Have you heard Jesus call your name? He loves to use your name, just as he loves you to use his name. He knows you and loves to speak with you.

What about you today? Are dark clouds gathering? Are you weighted with despair and losing hope in this world? Mary had felt like that twice, first when she was possessed with demons and then at the foot of the cross, but when she heard Jesus say, "Mary", she remembered that he had said, "I am the light of the world. Those who follow me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) and "I have come as light into the world, that whosoever believes in me will not remain in darkness." (John 12:46). Mary believed and the darkness had to flee.

If you are in darkness, you can experience what Mary experienced. She opened her heart, the light of Christ flooded in and the darkness evaporated. Like Mary, come to him who knows your name and invite the light of Christ to drive away your darkness. In him there is no darkness at all. Like Mary you will be able to say "I have seen the Lord." He is risen! He is risen! Hallelujah! *(Bill)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes, let me see beauty that made this heart adore you, hope of a life spent with you**

Listen to today's prayer in song here

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 37

Previous day | Next day

## *Darkness (John 20:18) (Part 1)*

**Darkness!** Mary knew about darkness. She had been with her Lord through Friday's darkness. Patiently, agonisingly, she had stood with the other women at the cross. They had watched him die and as he did so they felt the darkness descend. Now, unable to sleep, it was very early in the morning, dawn hadn't broken, as she made her way to the tomb in the garden. There wasn't a soul to be seen.

Mary had known another darkness. She was from the fishing village of Magdala on the west side of Galilee, known for its licentiousness and wickedness. However, there is nothing in the four gospels indicating that Mary was involved in any way with that sort of life. On the contrary, the gospels reveal that Mary had had seven demons. Seven is the Biblical number of perfection, so, in other words, Mary was completely overwhelmed by the demons' power. She was a frightened young lady.

But something happened in Mary's life. Luke 8:1-3 tells us of Jesus' travelling around with his disciples and preaching. A group of women, whom he had healed, supported him from their own means and Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out the seven demons, was one of them. He had freed her, brought light into her darkness, and now she had come to share the darkness of his burial place.

The stone was rolled away! She peered in. Who had stolen his earthly frame, and why? Mary ran to tell Peter and John, who returned with her, but they couldn't make sense of it. He wasn't there! They had no thought of the resurrection, so they returned home - but not Mary, she stayed behind, weeping. (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

### A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Lord, that no matter how deep our darkness, there is no place or issue in our lives where you cannot shine your light**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 36

Previous day Next day

## *I Am Always Right! (Isaiah 64:6)*

As human beings, there is always a natural sense of justification and satisfaction that comes from **being right**. It could be something as little as scoring a point in an argument. Some people go as far as painting anyone in their way cruelly bad, just to look **'right'**.

The term 'filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:6) is quite strong. The word 'filthy' is a translation of the Hebrew word 'iddah', which literally means 'the bodily fluids from a woman's menstrual cycle'. The word 'rags' is a translation of 'begged', meaning 'a rag or garment'. Therefore, these 'righteous acts' are considered by God as repugnant as a soiled feminine hygiene product. As condemned throughout the Bible (Ezekiel 33:13; Romans 3:27; Titus 3:5), **self-righteousness** is what the topic is admonishing us against, going extra-length to prove we cannot get it wrong, glorying in our ability to 'do good'.

We are reminded in Isaiah 64:6 that 'our righteous acts are like filthy rags'. This is in no way justifying unrighteousness or encouraging scandalous acts, but instead, a reminder that our salvation is not the result of any of our efforts, abilities, intelligent choices, personal characteristics, or acts of service we may perform, but a stern reminder that we are saved by GRACE.

In the end, we must recognize that even our righteous acts come as a result of God within us, not of ourselves. On our own, our 'righteousness' is simply self-righteousness, and vain, hypocritical religion produces nothing more than 'filthy rags'. *(Victor)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Lord God, search our thoughts and attitudes, when we are found vainly glorifying our 'righteousness'. Replace them with true humility to acknowledge that it is by only your grace we are called inheritors of your Kingdom**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 35

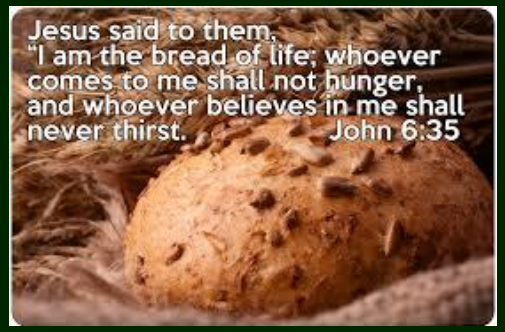
Previous day Next day

## *Bread of Life*

Some **foods**, associated with this time of year, have reminders for us:

Simnel Cake was originally baked for Mothering Sunday. It offered a break in the 40 days of Lent fasting; the mother church was visited and simnel cake was a treat. It is a boiled and then baked fruit cake, traditionally decorated with eleven almond paste balls, representing the number of disciples left after Judas hanged himself.

Hot Cross Buns, perhaps first baked in the 12th century, were marked with a cross, in honour of Good Friday. They gained popularity, were baked at home and eaten on that day. Millions are now baked and sold in the shops each year, so we hope that people will see the cross on them and ask why it is there! They are also spicy, which reminds us of the spices around Christ's body.




Lamb is often eaten at Easter to remember the Lamb of God and his sacrifice and that lamb's blood was smeared round the doors, to protect the firstborn of the Israelites.

Eggs at Easter, made in chocolate, help us to remember that, just as new life comes from an egg, Jesus rose from the tomb and we have new life in him! He is the **Bread of Life**, who feeds our souls, which we remember each time we eat bread and drink wine at our communion services. *(Brenda)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Lord, for each reminder of what you have done for us. May we use the symbols of Easter this year to teach us afresh the greatness of your love**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 34

Previous day | Next day

## *Water of Eternal Life (Part 3)*

The Bethlehem story is beautiful, but the cross is ugly and painful, a place of suffering and death, where you and I would never willingly go. But Calvary is the time of sin's defeat. Sin put Jesus on the cross - not his sin, but ours. God demonstrated the defeat of sin once and for all when he raised up Jesus from the dead.

Do you have a **thirst**? Is there deep within you the desire for something better than you have or to be someone better than you are? God can meet that need in Christ Jesus. He said, "Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst again, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14). Life could be so different for you by accepting Jesus' gift of everlasting life, for he thirsted at Calvary, and is the source of the **water of eternal life**.

'Jesus knew that everything was now finished, and to fulfil the scriptures, he said "I am thirsty."' (John 19:28) *(Bill)*

You may wish to listen to the song and full words of today's prayer here.

### A Prayer for Today

**'In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, a wondrous beauty I see; for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, to pardon and sanctify me'**

***(George Bennard)***

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 33

Previous day | Next day

## *Water of Eternal Life (Part 2)*

We read in Mark 15:23 that, as Jesus was being prepared for crucifixion, he refused the drink offered to him then, so why refuse the first drink and not the one on the cross?

The first drink of vinegar had myrrh mingled with it which was to deaden the pain, a form of anaesthetic. Jesus refused to meet death in a state of stupefaction. He would conquer sin, not through the flesh, but through the spirit. Jesus chose to experience the worst of human suffering and not yield to the temptation to ease his agony. He defeated all that Satan could throw at him, first the temptation of food, now the temptation to minimise his pain and agony. If he had escaped from the pain and suffering he would not have borne our sins completely. He would drink the dregs of this dreadful cup and do his Father's will. The second vinegar drink did not in any way deaden the pain or make his suffering any less for our sins.

From a pain-racked body that was dehydrated, that had hung on the cross for many hours, he, now, at the point of death, wanted to deliver his final words. His lips were parched, his throat dry, he needed moisture, "I thirst." he said. (Read Psalm 22:15.) So an unknown soldier offered up a sponge of vinegar. He accepted the drink and then uttered the words of victory "It is finished." (see also Day 2 of our calendar). He bowed his head and gave up his spirit into his Father's care.

(Read the final Part 3 tomorrow)

## A Prayer for Today

**Lord, you triumphed on the terrible cross over all that Satan could inflict upon you – and death and sin were defeated once for all. Praise you for your perfect obedience and the victory it gained**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 32

Previous day Next day

## *Water of Eternal Life (Part 1)*

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry he began a conversation with a sinful woman of Samaria by asking her, "Will you give me a drink of water?" (John 4:14). He did this as a conversation opener. He used this occasion to talk about the Kingdom of God, offering her eternal water and saying that if a person drinks of it, they will never thirst again. So he began his ministry by asking for a drink and on the cross, as death draws near, he also ends it by asking for a drink. "I thirst." (John 29:28).

Although this cry may seem mild compared to the other brutalities that were inflicted upon him, in reality it may have been the greatest punishment. To die of thirst is a cruel death. Thirst was a part of the Saviour's suffering (see also Day 8 of our calendar). He also hungered when tempted by Satan, who tried to defeat him into taking a short cut to his Messiahship. He did not yield, but did he weaken during his last few minutes of earthly life?

When Jesus said "I thirst" a soldier soaked a sponge in vinegar and gave it to him. It's easy to think that this was still part of the mocking, jeering and taunting that surrounded the cross, and that the soldiers were heaping more insults onto the Saviour. But Roman soldiers would often drink vinegar (wine gone off, heavily diluted and flavoured with herbs – called 'posca') when drinking water was hazardous. A bowl of vinegar would have been at hand, near the cross, for their own refreshment. Diluted vinegar could hydrate a whole army! (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Jesus, that you did not turn away from the terrible cup of suffering that you had to bear on our account – and that, because of that, we can know everlasting life.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 31

Previous day | Next day

## *Legacy*

This past week I have heard of the death of Jean Horrocks, formerly known to some of us as Jean Peacock. When I first came to Blackburn in 1970, Jean and George, her husband, became my unofficial second parents, mentors and close friends. Their love and example were 'exemplary' as a Christian couple.

Thinking of Jean reminded me of another Christian lady, Miss Peel, relative of Robert Peel, Prime Minister and Metropolitan Police Force founder. She lived in my home town of Midhurst and was once my mother's employer. I have her to thank for the book (see picture – click to expand) which she gave me along with some funds for books when I went to study at the London College of Furniture. This book, printed in 1866, is an English translation of four original books in Latin, published c. 1418–1427, by Thomas à Kempis, entitled, 'The Imitation of Christ'. Written in almost 'King James' style English, it had a formative influence on my early teenage Christian life, growing up in 'digs' amidst London's bright lights in the late 1960s.

Now 'flower power', my over-the-shoulder hair, kaftan and long beard have departed, but the love given and words written in this book remain. What **legacy** and influence will you leave to others on your life's journey? Below are some quotes from Thomas à Kempis. *(Paul)*

- First keep the peace within yourself, then you can also bring peace to others
- Without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living
- Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you for all the people, books and other influences that help us on life's road. May we seize each opportunity to learn more about you and to pass that 'legacy' on to others**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 30

Previous day | Next day

## *Caiaphas*

**Caiaphas** was the Jewish high priest during the time of Jesus' ministry. He was of the Sadducee sect who involved themselves in politics and, as they didn't accept the spiritual world, were completely at odds with the teachings of Jesus and obviously wanting to bring him down.

When Jesus was arrested, **Caiaphas**, as the high priest, was directly involved. Many false accusations were made against Jesus, then finally **Caiaphas** spoke directly to him, "Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus's answer led to him being condemned as "worthy of death". Since the Jews could not legally execute prisoners, **Caiaphas** sent Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. **Caiaphas** and the other religious leaders then stirred up the crowd against Jesus and so he was sentenced to death and led outside the city to be crucified. It's what **Caiaphas** had wanted all along! However it was all part of God's plan to save the world through the death of his Son. What must **Caiaphas** have thought when three days later Jesus rose again!

Afterwards, he continued to persecute the followers of Christ, and was present at the trial of Peter and John, but his opposition did nothing to stop the spread of the gospel. **Caiaphas** was someone who faced Jesus directly and yet denied what he could see. As high priest he had wealth, an honourable position, and the respect of the people, but was never able to accept the truth of Jesus. What about you? *(Brenda)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Jesus, you are the truth, the life and the way. May none of us harden our hearts against you the way Caiaphas did, but gladly accept you**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 29

Previous day Next day

## *Father Forgive Them (Part 2)*

…one thief died in sin because he rejected, up until the very last, the divine love. The second thief died, pardoned, forgiven from sin because he, at the last hour, pleaded for mercy. The one in the middle was sinless and the only perfect sacrifice that could satisfy God's wrath and provide full atonement for our sins.

Forgiveness means 'to remove' and is the deliberate act of God releasing us from the guilt and consequences of our unrighteous acts and attitudes. **Forgiveness** removes the sin that mars our daily fellowship with him, so we must forgive in order to understand God's forgiveness. Someone who has never forgiven another does not truly understand what takes place when God, for Christ's sake, forgives them. Jesus presented God as a Father who meets the prodigal son, offering forgiveness. He practised this during his ministry many times. When Jesus asked God to forgive when on the cross, he was doing the very thing he taught his followers. "Love your enemies" and "pray for them that abuse and persecute you." (Matthew 5:44).

Do you have a forgiving heart? (see also Day 4 of our calendar). There was an army general who listened to a sermon about forgiveness preached by John Wesley. The general said to Wesley, "I never forgive." John Wesley replied, "Then sir, I hope you never sin." Are you a forgiving person? One becomes a Christian only by experiencing the forgiveness of God. Jesus said in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive these people because they don't know what they are doing." *(Bill)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 28

Previous day | Next day

## *Father Forgive Them (Part 1)*

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

There was a man who unfortunately couldn't speak a word as he was mute, but he was asked how he'd describe the word 'forgiveness'. He took a pencil and wrote, 'It is the beautiful fragrance a flower yields when trampled upon.' Words are like windows! They let us see into the speaker's mind and heart.

The first recorded words Jesus spoke from the cross were, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." This was the first of the seven sentences he spoke from the cross and was the foundation for the others he uttered. Jesus possessed a deep, godly, divine and forgiving heart, even towards those that were causing his excruciatingly painful and slow death.

Isaiah 53:10 opens the window into the heart of God the Father when it says, 'Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.' This does not mean that God took a fiendish delight in the suffering of Jesus, but rather the death of Jesus had God's approval because it was in accordance with his eternal will. The Saviour who died at Calvary in history was slain in the heart of God from the world's foundation.

God took human hatred and used it to demonstrate divine love. He is in the process of doing this even today. On Calvary's hill that fateful day, there were three deaths, three different kinds of death... (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

### A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Father, for your great salvation plan, agreed with your Son before the dawn of time. Thank you that Jesus fulfilled it perfectly at just the right time in history**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 27

Previous day | Next day

## *Justification (Romans 3:24)*

'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus'

The doctrine of **Justification** provides the answer to the all-important question of how the unrighteous - sinners of 'the deepest dye' - like you and me, can be judged as righteous (i.e. sinless) in the sight of a righteous and holy God. (Psalm 24:3-4; Isaiah 1:18).

**'Justification'** arises from the language of the law-court and the Day of Judgement. The biblical idea is that God, the righteous Judge, declares the verdict of **'just'** (or righteous) on the accused (defendant), the unjust, who, apart from the mediatorial efficacy of Christ, the Just One, would be guilty of transgressing God's perfect standard of righteousness, as revealed in the Law of Moses. It must not be confused with the doctrines of regeneration, sanctification and glorification. It is not that the sinner is *made* righteous, which is the purpose of these teachings. Rather they are *declared* righteous and acquitted (or pardoned) by God of all guilt; that is, they are **justified**, or, as some preachers put it, **'Just-as-if-I'd'** never sinned! In other words, Christ's righteousness is credited to the sinner through faith in 'the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' (Galatians 2:20). So, at the heart of the gospel is the incredible truth that we sinners, though worthy of divine judgement, can know real peace with God today through the forgiveness of sins, and so experience true freedom. 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Romans 5:1). This is truly 'Amazing Grace!' *(Colin)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Father God, that through the work of Jesus, his perfect righteousness is credited to us and you view us as free of all guilt. What an amazing exchange!**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 26

Previous day Next day

## *Mary (Part 2)*

[For Part 1, see Day 6]

**Mary** with Jesus and the disciples were all at a wedding, when the wine ran out. She mentioned it to Jesus and soon the water in the jars became wine! 'He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.' (John 2:11). The teaching he also gave then must have made **Mary** see and feel his effect and power as well.

We read in Mark 3 that the family of Jesus looked for him as he spoke to a crowd indoors. They were concerned about him and didn't understand his purpose (v 21). Perhaps **Mary** was puzzled when she heard him say "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother".

Surely **Mary** followed him, prayed for and listened to him and to all she heard about him. What torture later to see her son hanging on a cross, perhaps remembering the angel's words to her years before. Jesus, as he died, committed her into the keeping of John, showing that he cared deeply for his mother, as **Mary** witnessed the last hours of Jesus's earthly life (John 19:25-27).

After the Ascension, Luke tells us in Acts 1:13-14 that she was in an upstairs room in Jerusalem praying with the eleven remaining apostles, other women and the brothers of Jesus. **Mary** knew her son was alive again, had conquered death and ascended to heaven, but must surely have known that this was just the beginning! *(Brenda)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Heavenly Father, on this Mothering Sunday, we thank you for all mothers and pray that they will cherish and care for each child as Mary did for her son.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 25

Previous day | Next day

## *Spring is Coming!*

Have you noticed that **springtime** is approaching? The days are lengthening, the weather is (sometimes) warmer, the daffodils are starting to flower, the birds are singing and the lambing season is underway.

As Brenda reminded us at the start of this calendar, our word **'Lent'** is derived from the word 'lencten', old English for 'spring'. We are already more than half way through Lent, and tomorrow will be the 4th Sunday, which has a special significance, being known as **Mothering Sunday**. It may be more commonly referred to now as Mother's Day, with the accompanying trappings of cards, flowers, presents and breakfast in bed for some, but was originally a day when workers returned to their 'mother churches' for a rare day off! However, it gives us an opportunity to think of the mothering aspect of God's love, which we will remember in our service tomorrow. We hope you will join us, and you may wish to have a square piece of paper to hand! All will be revealed... *(Judith)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, God, that you are both Father and Mother to your children. We remember those for whom tomorrow may be a difficult day, for all sorts of reasons, and pray that your love will surround each and every one.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 24

Previous day Next day

## *Counsellor (Part 2)*

He gave the disciples a promise of 'another Comforter', which they were incapable of understanding, and to add confusion: "I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you." (John 14:18). Jesus said that he was 'going', yet somehow he would still be there! How? His personal presence had been brief, now it seemed that he would leave them. Speaking of the Comforter he used the Greek word allos, which means 'another of the same kind'. He was saying, "I'm going to pray to the Father and he will give you another **Counsellor**, another Comforter, another helper of exactly the same kind as I am."

As we face the unknowable future, and move towards Holy Week with Christ's passion, trial and crucifixion, we need to accept by faith, the presence of the Comforter who came on the Day of Pentecost to dwell in the church. He came at our conversion to dwell in our hearts (1 Corinthians 3:16). We should be filled with joy knowing that his indwelling presence is with us forever, and through his Spirit, we can face each new day whatever good or bad may come our way.

It's with eagerness and anticipation that we should listen for his voice as he speaks to our innermost being, as we study the scriptures, pray, and see a needy world. If we love our Lord and his people, shouldn't we be fully co-operating with this divine Comforter and **Counsellor** as we walk through this day and future days? For the disciples, the page of how they had been with Jesus was closing and was history, but a new page, a new dawn was opening up - and the same Jesus who had walked with them in the past was walking with them into the future. *(Bill)*

### A Prayer for Today

**Dear Heavenly Father, in the Name of Jesus, stir up within us the fullness of your Holy Spirit. Enable us to live in his power and use his gifts that you may be glorified.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 23

Previous day Next day

## *Counsellor (Part 1)*

"I will ask the Father and he will give you another **Counsellor**, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth" (John 14:16-17)

There are often sad and solemn moments in our lives when something gently ends. Like an old year moving off the pages of time into history. In contrast, it is exciting when a new year arrives, and is a blank page upon on which we will write new things that we never dreamt would happen during the year. The future can be seriously daunting and create an increasing anxiety within us. More so now, with the COVID pandemic which has taken so many lives and destroyed normal peaceful family life. COVID gives us a future that can look fearful and leaves many of us plagued with a sense of helplessness and insignificance.

Our Lord's disciples were horrified at thinking of the future without the comfort of his continuing companionship. He sought to allay their fears and challenged them to faithfulness with his promise of another **Counsellor**. Towards the end of his ministry, Jesus concentrated upon the twelve apostles. Much time was spent in seclusion to avoid his enemies and to strengthen the twelve for the task ahead with great and precious promises to fortify and encourage them.

"Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust me" (John 14:1). "Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, even greater, for I am going to be with my Father. You can ask for anything in my name and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father" (John 14:12-14). (Read more in Part 2 tomorrow)

### A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Lord, for being our refuge in times of trouble, keeping our feet steady upon the road and watching over us.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 22

Previous day | Next day

## *Names (Philippians 2:10-11)*

Have you ever thought what the meaning of your **name** is? Have you linked your **name** or names to any circumstances in your life? Sometimes I do. With some research amongst us, some **names caught my eye** (apologies if your name is not mentioned - everyone matters). Let's start with our church pastor:

- Alec - defender of the people (no wonder he is our pastor)
- Colin - victory of the people (well done, Colin)
- Paul - means humble (I have always thought our Paul comes across as warm; no surprise, as humble people are warm)
- Trevor - from the LARGE village (hello Trevor)
- Judith - means from Judaea (no way! Judith looks more English than Judaean)
- Janet - means God is Gracious (Janet actually comes across as gracious)
- Adewale (Western Nigerian origin) means the king/crown/royalty came home (perhaps I shall be going home after all) and of course, I had to be biased and put my name

Our **names** definitely do matter, as they are the symbol of our identity, but there is a **name** that means more than all of the world's populations combined, because 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth'. Any time life is more beautiful than first feared, look to **that name** and show your gratitude to him; more importantly, any time life is overwhelming, call on **THAT name** to which every knee should bow! *(Victor)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Lord Jesus, thank you for being the Prince of Peace, speak calmness to every troubling situation in our lives.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 21

Previous day | Next day

## *Singing the Crucifixion*

Various composers have written beautiful works about the passion and death of Christ. Two that remain in my memory are Stainer's 'Crucifixion' and Maunder's 'Olivet to Calvary'.

When I was in my teens I was in the choir at Leamington Road and we sang one of these two works on alternate years on Palm Sunday, with an augmented choir and 'imported' soloists. We were in a row up in the choir, ladies in front and the men behind and at the side – I wonder what it sounded like!! The photo *(click to enlarge)* shows the choir gallery (at that time a pipe organ was there rather than a curtain). It made you very familiar with the Bible words and feel the emotion of the solos and choruses. It was moving to sing words like 'Crucify Him', 'We have no king but Caesar' or to cry out 'Barabbas'.

One of my favourites was 'God so loved the world...' from 'The Crucifixion'. You can listen to that song sung beautifully here. The same work ends with a moving congregational hymn, which you can listen to here: "All for Jesus, all for Jesus, this our song shall ever be; for we have no hope, nor Saviour, if we have not hope in thee."

Choir and congregation sang it enthusiastically; the choir, not only because of its words and tune, but because our little choir had again successfully sung through that great work! *(Brenda)*

## A Prayer for Today

**Thank you, Lord, for every reminder in word, song, music or art, of all that you have done on our behalf. May we never lose sight of it.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 20

Previous day Next day

## *Pontius Pilate (Part 3)*

Surely **Pilate** knew the crowd was being manipulated, but his job, on behalf of Rome, was to restore peace and calm. So he gave the crowd a choice, Jesus or Barabbas. Whatever it would take to remove the heat out of the situation, he was willing to do it.

What was his thought pattern at that vital moment? Surely the crowd wouldn't want a murderer, a trouble maker, an insurgent like Barabbas released among them to carry on his nasty work, rather surely they would want the innocent and gentle-natured Jesus? Was he seeking Jesus' release via the crowd's reasoning? Whatever his reckoning, it went spectacularly wrong. The priests made sure of that! So Jesus was handed over for crucifixion.

What happened to **Pontius Pilate** after that? Later on he was responsible for the violent suppression and slaughter of the Samaritans at Mount Gerizim, their sacred mountain. He was recalled back to Rome by Emperor Tiberius to answer for his actions, but Tiberius died before **Pilate's** return. Whether the Senate (Rome's governing body) dealt with the matter, no one knows, but like all rich Romans of the day, he more than likely would retire from civil life and live in luxury on the Naples coast, in a palatial villa.

Note: During excavation work, coinage minted during Pilate's governorship has been found, and also very recently a ring with his personal insignia on it. Was it his, did he lose it, or did he give it to someone he favoured who lost it? *(Bill)*

## A Prayer for Today

**What kind of love is this? What kind of man is this, that died in agony? He who had done no wrong was crucified for me. Thank you, Lord, for the love of Jesus.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 19

Previous day | Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 18

Previous day | Next day

## *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.

**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)

### A Prayer for Today

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

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 17

Previous day | Next day

## *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)*

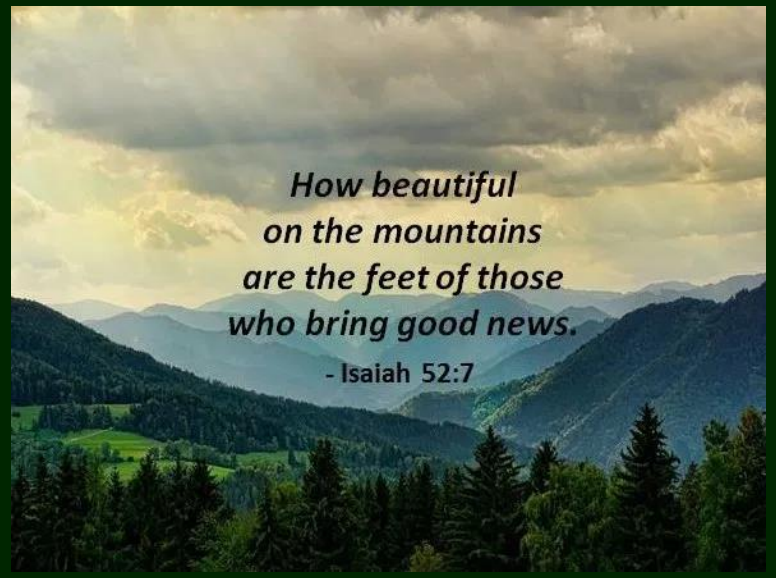
### A Prayer for Today

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

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 16

Previous day | Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 15

Previous day Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 14

Previous day Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 13

Previous day Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 12

Previous day Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 11

Previous day | Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 10

Previous day Next day

## *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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 9

Previous day Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 8

Previous day | Next day

## *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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 7

Previous day Next day

## *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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 6

Previous day | Next day

## *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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 5

Previous day | Next day

## *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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 4

Previous day | Next day

## *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)*

'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*

### 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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 3

Previous day Next day

## *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.**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 2

Previous day | Next day

## *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**

# BBC Calendar for Lent Day 1

Next day

## *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.**