

Sermon & Small Group Study Guide



Spring Term 2023

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Welcome to this new study guide for the Spring teaching series at St James.

This term we are not following *one* particular theme as there are quite a number of one-off specific issues we need to address, such as Finance, Vision and Racial Justice, not to mention Mothering Sunday, Lent and Easter. So, we will be flitting around a little, but the common thread running through the whole term is the New Testament as that is where our focus will be.

You may be holding this study guide because you are a member of a small group at St James. That's fantastic! Small groups are key to our strategy for nurture and discipleship, so we are delighted that you are in one. We hope you enjoy using this guide to prepare for your group meetings and then to explore the material together. Being in a small group is by far the best way to learn and grow as a disciple of Christ.

You may be holding this study guide as a member of St James who, for whatever reason, is *not* in a small group. You can find out more about small groups by reading the Small Group Purpose Statement on page 3 of this study guide. If you would like to join one, then please speak to Rob or Johan. If you can't manage that, then we don't want you to miss out on the benefits of the studies. Why not work through the studies yourself after each sermon or, better still, arrange to do them with a friend over a coffee.

The study guide is also available on the church web site – www.stjames-streatham.org

We have included some blank pages for sermon notes. Why not bring your study guide to church on Sunday morning or use it when you watch the service online at home and take notes during the sermon. And, if you miss a sermon, you can always catch up by watching the recording of the livestream on our YouTube channel or visiting the church web site.

So, buckle up, here we go!

P.S. If you haven't yet discovered the Bible Project, I strongly recommend taking a look at www.bibleproject.com You will find numerous short videos on biblical themes, overviews of each book of the Bible, and even a series on how to read the Bible for yourself. The material is excellent.



Small Group Purpose Statement

Small Groups at St James are small, Christ-centred communities meeting regularly for Bible study, fellowship, prayer, worship and service, fun, mutual support, accountability, and mission. Group members will encourage each other to grow as active disciples, rather than passive spectators, encourage others to join a group and support those who wish to grow in leadership.

Our expectation is that:

Group members will come to know the saving love of God in their lives more deeply as they pray and study the Bible together.

They will be mutually encouraged to become more like Jesus in every part of their lives.

Group members will support each other in prayer and keep all prayer requests confidential. They will come to trust each other and be accountable to each other for those things the Holy Spirit is prompting them to change in their lives.

Group members will share each other's practical needs and seek to provide what they can to meet them.

They will be encouraged to grow as active disciples rather than passive spectators.

Group members will encourage others to lead and join a group.



Study 1: Epiphany #1 – The Visit of the Magi

Matthew 2 v 1 – 12

Context:

The early weeks of January every year are known in the church calendar as the season of Epiphany. The word 'Epiphany' means 'appearing', 'revelation' or 'manifestation' and the season focuses on the way in which the New Testament reveals Jesus as the unique Son of God, sent by the Father to fulfil his great and precious promises made through the prophets in the Old Testament. In today's passage we see that this revelation of the true identity of Jesus wasn't restricted to Israelite Jews, but even reached to the Gentiles (non-Jews), in keeping with God's prophetic promise centuries earlier. So, let's meet our intrepid stargazers from the East.

Observation:

1. Where was Jesus and born and when according to v 1a?
2. Who came to Jerusalem in v 1b?
3. What question did they ask in v 2?
4. What was the reaction to their question according to v 3?
5. Who did he summon and what did he ask them in v 4?
6. What was their answer in v 5 and how did they know this according to v 6?
7. What did Herod then do in v 7?
8. Where did he send them and why in v 8?
9. What did they see as they left Herod in Jerusalem (v 9) and how did they feel when they saw it (v 10)?
10. Where did they arrive and who did they see according to v 11a?
11. What did they do according to v 11b?
12. Why did they take a different route home (v 12)?

Meaning:

NOTE #1 : Herod the Great was born in Idumea (OT Edom) and ruled Judea from around 37-4BC as a client-king of Rome. He was known for two things in particular: his cruelty and his creativity. He regarded human life as cheap and expendable, even killing members of his own family who he suspected of plotting against him. Yet, he was a fantastic builder, undertaking huge and ambitious projects, including expanding the Jerusalem Temple.

NOTE #2: Magi were wise men who served as spiritual and political advisors to kings in the eastern realms of Babylon (modern Iraq) and Persia (modern Iran). They would often use 'magic' to discern what advice they should give to their masters and were experts in astrology.

1. If the Magi were Gentiles (non-Jews), why would *they* be expecting the birth of a King of the Jews and what was the significance of the star (v 2)? – see Numbers 24 v 17, Isaiah 9 v 2.
2. Why do you think King Herod and the population of Jerusalem were so disturbed (v 3)?
3. Why do you think Herod didn't know something as important as where the Messiah would be born (v 4)?
4. Why do you think the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem – what was the significance of this little town in the Old Testament (v 5-6)?

5. The religious leaders quoted the prophet Micah in their reply to Herod. Read Micah 5 v 2-4 and see what else he prophecies about the Messiah in addition to his birthplace.
6. Why do you think Herod wanted to know the exact time the star had appeared (v 7)?
7. What was so hypocritical about Herod's words in v 8?
8. How can we explain what happened in v 9? – see Joshua 10 v 12-14, 2 Kings 20 v 8-11 for examples of God interacting with the heavens to accomplish his will.
9. Why were they so happy to see the star again (v 10)?
10. Christmas cards often depict the wise men as *kings* visiting the *newborn* Jesus *in the stable*. We already know from NOTE #2 above that they were *advisors* to kings rather than kings, but how does v 11 also undermine the traditional nativity scene (see also v 16)?
11. What does their action in v 11a tell us about the Magi's understanding of who Jesus was?
12. What do you think might have been the significance of the 3 types of gift in v 11b?
13. Why do you think God warned them not to go back to Herod (v 12)?

Application:

1. Do you find it surprising that God would reveal Jesus to pagan stargazers? What might this tell us about the way God works in our world today?
2. The Magi went on a physical journey and a spiritual journey. Can you describe these two journeys and the transformation experienced by the Magi?
3. How would you describe your own spiritual journey?
4. Herod was deeply insecure and cruelly suspicious of any potential rivals to his power. Where do we find our security and how can we avoid the trap Herod fell into?
5. We can't really understand this biblical event, the visit of the Magi, without accepting the possibility that miracles can and do take place in the universe - the star that appeared in the East, the accuracy of Micah's prophecy spoken hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the dream which warned the Magi to take a different route home – all miracles! Do you believe miracles happen today and can you give any examples from your own life or someone else's?
6. The Magi gave Jesus gifts. What gift might you give Jesus today?

Pray:

- Thank God for the birth of Jesus.
- Pray that you might be open to the miraculous in your life.
- Pray for God's grace to be secure in Him, not like Herod.

Sermon Notes:

Study 2: Water into Wine

John 2 v 1-11

Context:

In this second and final of our two studies on the theme of Epiphany, a season that is all about the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, we advance around 30 years in time as we move from worshipping the *child* Jesus with the Magi in Bethlehem, to attending a wedding with the *man* Jesus in Cana of Galilee. In today's study Jesus saves the blushes of a groom and his family and reveals his glory to his disciples.

Observation:

1. Who had been invited to the wedding at Cana (v 1-2)?
2. What disaster struck in v 3 and who brought the matter to Jesus?
3. What was Jesus' initial response in v 4?
4. What, however, did Mary tell the servants in v 5?
5. What was standing nearby (v 6)?
6. What did Jesus then tell the servants to do in v 7-8?
7. What had happened by the time the servants reached the master of the banquet (v 9a)?
8. What compliment did he give to the groom in v 10?
9. How does John summarise this miracle in v 11?

Meaning:

1. In 1st Century Israel, weddings could last at least 7 days, as they often do in Palestine today. The groom and his family had responsibility for catering for the many guests who would come to celebrate with the couple. In a culture where family honour is a big deal, what do you think would have been the implications of the wine running out?
2. Why do you think Mary told Jesus of the problem (v 3)? What do you think she expected Jesus to do about it and why would she think he could do anything to help?
3. What do you think Jesus meant by his reply in v 4 and why do you think he overcame his initial reluctance and got involved?
4. What would the stone water jars have been used for (v 6) and what do you think was the significance of Jesus turning *this particular* kind of water into wine?
5. At what point do you think the water turned into wine (8-9a) and what can we learn about the importance of obedience here (see also v 5)?
6. What do you think is the spiritual significance of the words in v 10, in light of the answer to question 4 above?
7. Why do you think John calls what Jesus did a 'sign' rather than a miracle (v 11)? What is the difference between the two?
8. What does John mean when he says Jesus '*revealed his glory*' through this sign (v 11)?
9. What do you think the disciples believed about Jesus after this incident (v 11)?

Application:

1. How can we apply the spiritual significance of Jesus turning water into wine to our own life? What might the 'water' be in our lives and how might Jesus transform it?

2. Why is it important to obey Jesus, even when what he commands seems crazy or potentially costly?
3. Can you think of any other miraculous acts of Jesus in the Gospels which serve as signs of his glory? What aspects of his glory do those miraculous signs point to?

Pray:

- For God's grace to be obedient to Jesus no matter what.
- For Jesus to turn your 'water' into 'wine'.
- For the eyes to see who Jesus really is, to see his glory and to believe in him.

Sermon Notes:

Study 3: Catching the Vision

Acts 2 v 42-47

Context:

In November last year the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and a few other members of the St James Church family met together for a day to prayerfully ponder what God might be saying to us about His vision for our life together. The 2020 Vision Mission Action Plan (MAP) has shaped and guided our mission and ministry for the last five or so years, but we felt that this needed to be renewed and refreshed as we seek to understand what it means to fulfil our calling, **'All of Life for Christ'**, in a post-pandemic world. Our heartbeat as a church is to **Empower** ordinary people to live extraordinary lives by **Enabling** them to know Christ as Saviour and **Equipping** them to live for Christ as Lord. This high calling finds concrete expression in 5 Marks of Mission: **Tell** (Evangelism), **Train** (Discipleship), **Tend** (Compassion for the needy), **Transform** (Justice and Inclusion), and **Treasure** (Creation Care). Of course, as a church which takes the Bible seriously, St James seeks to fashion our life together, our mission and ministry, our vision and action, on biblical principles, and we need look no further than Acts 2 v 42-47 for a superb description of what church should be like. Here we see the first church in Jerusalem learning what it means to follow Jesus together, shortly after the stunning historical events of Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost. Let's dive in.

Observation:

1. What four things did the believers devote themselves to in v 42?
2. What was the emotional state of the church and why according to v 43?
3. How is the church described in v 44 and what practical expression of this do we find in v 45?
4. How often did the believers meet according to v 46a?
5. Where did they meet and what did they do in their gatherings according to v 46b-47a?
6. What impact did their common life have on the wider community according to v 47b?

Meaning:

1. Who does the word *'they'* in v 42a refer to – see the earlier part of Acts Chapter 2, especially v 37-41?
2. What does the word *'devoted'* in v 42a say about the attitude of the believers?
3. The first thing they were devoted to was the 'apostles teaching' (v 42). Read John 14 v 26, and John 16 v 12-13. What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do for the apostles after he had ascended and what does this tell us about the kinds of things they would have taught the believers in Jerusalem (see also Matthew 28 v 19-20)?
4. How can we access the apostles teaching today?
5. The second thing they were devoted to was 'fellowship' or 'koinonia' in the Greek language in which the New Testament was written (v 42). 'Koinonia' means a deep and intimate sharing of life between two or more people. What does this word imply for our life together as a church and how might it be practically expressed?
6. The third thing they were devoted to was 'the breaking of bread' (v 42). This would have had a religious and social aspect to it. The believers would have met to eat together and to share the Lord's Supper as part of that common meal. How do we put this principle into practice today?

7. The fourth thing they were devoted to was prayer (v 42). What might it mean to be devoted to prayer and what difference might such devotion make to their lives, both as a church and as individuals? Why do so many churches in UK find it so difficult to be devoted to corporate prayer today and how might this change?
8. Why do you think signs and miracles played such an important part in the life of the Jerusalem church (v 43)? Do we see such things happening today?
9. V 44-45 describe a practical outworking of the 'koinonia' mentioned in v 42. What do you think led them to live like this? How do we see this practiced in our church today and how might we be better at it?
10. The Jerusalem believers had a pattern of meeting in two kinds of gathering as a church (v 46) – they met as a large group in a religious building (the Temple courts) and as small groups in homes. Why do you think both of these types of gathering were vital to their common life and how might we follow this pattern today?
11. The believers had a daily commitment to meet together (v 46)! What are some of the challenges we face today in following this practice?
12. Why do you think the church in Jerusalem enjoyed such an excellent reputation in the wider community (v 47)?
13. This dynamic church in Jerusalem was constantly growing (v 47). Why do you think this was the case? What are the challenges we face today in growing our church and how might we overcome them?

Application:

1. Everything that was good in the life of the Jerusalem church flowed from their 'devotion'. To what extent is the state of our *hearts* the key to the quality of the vibrancy of the life of our church? How can we dial up the level of our devotion, both in ourselves and in our fellow church members?
2. How are we doing as a church in our devotion to the four principles of v 42 and what can we do to develop them?
3. What kind of reputation does St James have in our community and how might it be developed?

Pray:

- Thank God for the Acts 2 blueprint of what a church should look like.
- Pray for God's grace for St James to more closely resemble the Jerusalem church.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit might fan into flame the fire of our heart's devotion to Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

Study 4: The Duty & the Joy of Giving

2 Corinthians 9 v 1-15

Context:

“God loves a *cheerful* giver”. So writes Paul to the Christians in Corinth. But is that honestly our mindset as we approach this spiritual discipline? Paul wrote in the Greek language and the word he uses is better translated ‘*hilarious*’. So, God loves an hilarious giver! It’s as if Paul is saying that there should be tears rolling down our cheeks as we give our hard-earned money to God. We should be shedding tears because we are so *happy* to be giving God our cash, not weeping because we are doing something we don’t really want to do. It is difficult as a church to get the right balance in preaching about money and giving. Some churches seem to talk about it all the time and get something of a bad reputation for doing so, while others seem too afraid to mention it at all. Here at St James we try to address the issue towards the beginning of each year, to share with the church family the church budget that has been approved by the elected Parochial Church Council (PCC) and to invite us all to respond as God leads us. As a church that loves the Bible it is vital that our approach to giving at St James, like everything else, is firmly based on biblical principles. So, in today’s study we explore some of those principles in Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 9 and we find encouragement and inspiration to motivate our own giving in 2023.

Observation:

NOTE: In 2 Corinthians Chapter 8 Paul has reminded the Christians in Corinth (a city in the Roman Province of Achaia) that he is organising a collection to support the churches in Judea, including the church in Jerusalem, whose members are experiencing hardship due to a local famine. Paul is inviting every church he visits to contribute towards this relief aid. He reminds the Corinthians that they had begun to set aside money for the collection some time ago, but they seem to have lost enthusiasm for it and their giving has ground to a shuddering halt. So, he is sending some of his team, including, Titus, to get things moving again, so that, when Paul himself next visits, the collection will be ready for him to take to Jerusalem.

1. What reasons does Paul give in v 2 for his bold statement in v 1?
2. So, why is he sending members of his team to Corinth according to v 3?
3. What scenario is Paul trying to avoid in v 4?
4. What does Paul want his team (‘the brothers’) to do in Corinth and why according to v 5?
5. What spiritual principle does Paul state in v 6?
6. What further advice does Paul give in v 7 and why?
7. What promise does Paul give in v 8 and how does he underscore it in v 9?
8. How, in v 10, does Paul employ the analogy he used in v 6 to illustrate the promise of v 8-9?
9. How does Paul expand on the promise in v 11 and what will be the ultimate result?
10. What two consequences of their giving does Paul mention in v 12?
11. For what will people praise God according to v 13?
12. What will be the emotional attitude of the prayers of those who are on the receiving end of the collection and why (v 14)?
13. How does Paul conclude this teaching in v 15?

Meaning:

1. In what ways can *our* giving stir *others* to give? Paul specifically mentions in v 2 that he had told the Christians in Macedonia of the enthusiasm of the Corinthians to contribute to the collection and their example had inspired the Macedonians to join in the giving. Read 2 Corinthians 8 v 1-5 and see how Paul describes the attitude and practice of the Macedonians.
2. What do you think of Paul's pastoral method in v 3-4? Is it ever right to use this kind of approach? Why/Why not?
3. What is the difference between a generous gift and a grudging gift (v 5)? How can we tell the difference between the two in our own case?
4. Describe the spiritual principle and illustration Paul uses in v 6, 8-9 & 10-11. Does this principle promise that those who give will become wealthy? Can you share any examples of how you have experienced this promise in your own life?
5. Why does Paul warn against giving reluctantly or under compulsion (v 7)? How can we avoid this danger and become cheerful (hilarious) givers?
6. What biblical reasons can you think of for Christians supplying the needs of the Lord's people (v 12), either through occasional relief collections like Paul's or by regular giving to your local church? Why should we do this according to teaching elsewhere in the Bible?
7. In what sense would the Corinthians 'prove themselves' by their giving (v 13)?
8. Paul makes it clear that it is *God* who should get the praise for our giving, *not us* (see v 11b-13). Why is this the case according to v 14-15? Read 1 Chronicles 29 v 9-18 for an Old Testament example of what Paul is teaching here.

Application:

1. How do we decide *how much* we should give to God? What is more important – the amount we give or the attitude with which we give it?
2. How can we face the challenge of giving generously to God during a cost of living crisis? What can we learn from this study to help us in this?
3. How might our giving prove that our faith is genuine? – see also Matthew 6 v 21.
4. In what sense should giving *both* a duty and a joy?
5. The Bible teaches that the glory of God is the ultimate goal and end of all things in the universe. So, how does our *giving* fulfil this great purpose of glorifying God?

Pray:

- For God's grace to so grip our hearts that we become hilarious givers.
- For God to help us decide how much and to what causes we should give.
- For God to be glorified in our giving.

Sermon Notes:

Study 5: Candlemas

Luke 2 v 21-40

Context:

It was only a few weeks ago that we celebrated the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Details of Jesus' childhood following his birth are quite scanty in the Bible, but Luke does invite us to look in on a few significant milestones in Jesus' early days and in today's study we will explore two of these family celebrations.

Observation:

1. What happened on the eighth day after Jesus' birth according to v 21?
2. Why did Mary & Joseph give their baby the name 'Jesus' (v 21)?
3. When, why and where did they take Jesus in v 22-24?
4. How is Simeon described in v 25?
5. What amazing thing had the Holy Spirit revealed to him (v 26)?
6. Why did he go into the Temple Courts (v 27a)?
7. What did Simeon do when he saw Jesus (v 28)?
8. What was the theme of his song in v 29-32?
9. How did Joseph and Mary react according to v 33?
10. What blessing did Simeon pronounce over them in v 34-35?
11. How is Anna described in v 36-37?
12. What did she do when she saw Jesus (v 38)?
13. What did Jesus' family do afterwards (v 39)?
14. How is Jesus described in v 40?

Meaning:

1. What was the cultural and spiritual significance of the ritual of circumcision (v 21)? – see Genesis 17 v 1-14.
2. It would have been unusual for parents not to name their firstborn son after his father. What was the spiritual significance of the name 'Jesus'? – see Matthew 1 v 20-21.
3. What was the cultural and spiritual significance of the two rituals Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem to observe in v 22-24? – see Exodus 2 v 1-16 & Leviticus 12 v 1-8.
4. What do these details tell us about the economic circumstances of Mary & Joseph?
5. What do you think Luke means when he says that Simeon was waiting for the 'consolation of Israel' in v 25?
6. In what ways was the Holy Spirit at work in Simeon's life according to v 25-27?
7. Read Isaiah 42 v 1-9. How does this Old Testament prophetic promise help us to understand Simeon's song of praise in v 29-32 and how does it explain why he was so excited as he took Jesus in his arms?
8. What had Joseph and Mary already learned about the identity of Jesus before this point and why do you think they marvelled at Simeon's words (v 33)?
9. What do you think Simeon's prophetic blessing means (v 34-35)? In what ways was it both good news and bad news?
10. What does v 37 tell us about the spiritual state of Anna?

11. What do you think Luke means in v 38 by 'the redemption of Jerusalem'? How does this phrase relate to the similar phrase in v 25 (see question 5)? Can you think of any Old Testament passages that shed light on what these two phrases might mean?
12. What impression of family life do we receive from the final verses in this passage (v 39-40)?

Application:

1. Describe the various ways Joseph and Mary demonstrated their obedience to God in this passage. How might we follow their example today?
2. Simeon was saturated in the Holy Spirit. How might we follow his example today?
3. Anna was totally dedicated to the service of God. How might we follow her example today?

Pray:

- For grace to follow the examples of Joseph, Mary, Simeon and Anna.

Sermon Notes:

Study 6: Racial Justice Sunday

Ephesians 2 v 11-22

Context:

As we mark Racial Justice Sunday it is probably worth noting that racial injustice is not a new thing. Human beings have been wrestling with issues concerning race for thousands of years as the Bible can testify. In the biblical world the racial fault line ran between Jews and Gentiles and woe betide you if you fell on the wrong side of that line. Every morning a pious Jew would say a prayer of thanks that God had *not* made him a Gentile or a dog! You get the picture?! So, let's dive into today's study and imagine the cataclysmic impact Paul's words would have had in his day and what effect they *could* have on the issues of racial injustice we encounter today.

Observation:

1. What does the word 'therefore' at the beginning of v 11 refer to? – check out 2 v 1-10 to find out.
2. Who is Paul addressing in v 11? What are they commonly called and by whom?
3. What does the phrase 'at that time' in v 12 refer to?
4. What was their state or condition at that time according to v 12?
5. But what has now happened and how (v 13)?
6. How is Jesus described at the beginning of v 14 and why?
7. What did Jesus do to accomplish this according to the beginning of v 15?
8. What was Jesus' purpose according to the second part of v 15-16?
9. To whom did Jesus preach peace according to v 17?
10. What has Jesus accomplished for both Jews and Gentiles (v 18)?
11. What are the glorious consequences of Jesus' work for Gentiles according to v 19?
12. What image does Paul use in v 20-22 to describe those who trust in Jesus?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think Jews who were circumcised used the Gentiles' uncircumcision as an insult and a slur (v 11)?
2. In what ways do racial, cultural or religious differences divide people today? Why do you think this is the case and what would be some of the equivalent insults or slurs used today?
3. How does Paul's language in the brackets at the end of v 11 demote the spiritual significance of circumcision? – see also Romans 2 v 28-29, 1 Corinthians 7 v 19, Galatians 5 v 6, Galatians 6 v 14-15, Philippians 3 v 3, Colossians 2 v 11-13.
4. Having subtly challenged Jewish racial prejudice in v 11, Paul is nevertheless honest about the spiritual condition of those Gentiles who have not put their trust in Jesus (v 12). Why is their condition so serious?
5. How has the blood of Jesus brought believing Gentiles, who were once far away from God, near to Him (v 13)?
6. Jewish distinctiveness from Gentiles was symbolised by circumcision, the Law of Moses and the Temple in Jerusalem. So, only those who were circumcised and following the Law of Moses could enter the Temple to worship God. Gentiles could pray in the outer courts of the Temple, but a large wall separated them from the inner courts and a large sign was

hung there saying 'No Access to Gentiles'. So, what has Jesus done to change this situation (v 14-17) and what is the effect?

7. How are we meant to gain access to God now, whether we are Jews or Gentiles (v 18)?
8. What do you think it would have meant for Gentiles to be told that through faith in Jesus they were now equal citizens of spiritual Israel and equal members of God's family along with believing Jews (v 19)?
9. In v 20-22 the church, the multi-racial, multi-cultural community of believers in Jesus is described as God's new Temple, the new dwelling place of God's Spirit. In what sense is the church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus as the cornerstone (v 20) and how should this amazing spiritual truth impact and influence the relationships between members from different races and cultures?
10. How would this teaching in v 20-22 have demoted the spiritual significance of the physical Temple in Jerusalem?

Application:

1. Have you ever experienced racism a) in society, b) in church? How did it impact you? How did you deal with it?
2. Do you think the church, nationally or locally, is racist today? If so, how is this racism expressed and what do we learn from today's Bible passage that could help us overcome such prejudice, exclusion and injustice?
3. What might the peace Paul speaks of in v 14, 15, and 17 look like in practice in our church?
4. Why and how does the cross of Jesus undermine all forms of racism?

Pray:

- Give thanks for all that Jesus has done through his death on the cross.
- For forgiveness for our own racist attitudes.
- For the peace that Paul speaks of to be more fully established in our church.

Sermon Notes:

Study 7: Preparing for Lent

Matthew 4 v 1-11

Context:

'What are you giving up for Lent?' It is a common question at this time of year. Lent is a period of preparation for the celebration of Easter and is based on the forty days Jesus spent in the Judean wilderness after his baptism by John in the Jordan and before his ministry of teaching and miracles began properly began. This was a hugely challenging and symbolic time for Jesus and there is much we can learn to encourage and inspire us as we get ready to journey through Lent and towards the cross and empty tomb.

Observation:

1. Where was Jesus led, by whom and for what reason according to v 1?
2. What did he do for the next forty days and how did he feel at the end (v 2)?
3. Who then came to him and what was the first temptation thrown at Jesus (v 3)?
4. What was Jesus' reply (v 4)?
5. Where did Jesus go next (v 5)?
6. What was the second temptation faced by Jesus according to v 6?
7. How did Jesus respond in v 7?
8. Where did Jesus go next in v 8?
9. What was the third and final temptation thrown at Jesus (v 9)?
10. What was Jesus' final riposte in v 10?
11. How did the encounter end in v 11?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the Spirit deliberately led Jesus into a situation where he would face spiritual danger (v 1)? Does God ever do this with us?
2. What do you think is the spiritual symbolic significance of Jesus facing temptation in this way? What was God seeking to accomplish by sending Jesus out to face the devil? – see Genesis 3 and Numbers 14 v 21-23.
3. The first two temptations began with the words: 'If you are the Son of God' (v 3 & 6). What was the devil trying to do by saying this (look back to Matthew 3 v 16-17 for a clue)?
4. What was the essence of the first temptation (v 3). What was at stake if Jesus had given in to this temptation and how might we experience this same temptation today?
5. Each time Jesus replies he quotes directly from the Bible (v 4, 7 & 10). In fact, he quotes from just two chapters in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. Why do you think Jesus does this – what is the significance of quoting from this particular OT book?
6. What do you think is meant by Jesus' first reply in v 4 – you may want to look at the original context in Deuteronomy 8 v 3. How might we obey this command today?
7. What was the devil seeking to achieve with his second temptation in v 5-6? What was at stake if Jesus had given in and how might we face a similar temptation today?
8. Are you surprised that the devil quoted from the Bible in v 6 (he quotes, or misquotes Psalm 91 v 11-12)? What does this teach us about the devil and what warning does it give to us when we quote from the Bible ourselves?

9. What do you think is meant by Jesus second reply in v 7 – you may like to look at the original context in Deuteronomy 6 v 16.
10. What was the essence of the third and final temptation in v 8-9? What was at stake if Jesus had given in and how might we face the same temptation today?
11. What is meant by Jesus' final response in v 10 – you may want to look at the original context in Deuteronomy 6 v 13.
12. What do you think the angels did for Jesus after the devil left him in v 11?

Application:

1. In 2 Corinthians 2 v 11 Paul says that he doesn't want Satan to outwit us, so we are not unaware of his schemes. What can we learn from Matthew 4 v 1-11 about the devil's schemes, tactics and strategies and what are the similarities with his approach in Genesis 3?
2. The devil's purpose here is to undermine Jesus' confidence and security in his identity as the Son of God, as declared at his baptism in 3 v 17. How might having our own confidence and security in our identity as God's children cause us to be vulnerable to temptation?
3. Read Hebrews 4 v 15-16 and 1 Corinthians 10 v 12-13. How do these verses apply the victory of Jesus in the wilderness to our own lives – what practical and spiritual difference does it make to us that Jesus didn't give in to the devil's temptations?
4. How might knowing the Bible better strengthen you to face and defeat temptation?
5. How might today's study inspire your journey through Lent this year?

Pray:

- Give thanks for the victory of Jesus over temptation.
- Pray for a renewed and robust sense of our own identity as God's beloved children.
- Pray for strength to resist the devil by standing on the word of God in the Bible.

Sermon Notes:

Study 8: The Calling of the Church

1 Peter 2 v 4-12

Context:

Opinions abound about what the church is and what it should be doing. The Greek word used in the New Testament which we translate into English as 'church' is 'ekklesia'. This word is a compound of two Greek words and literally means '*called out*'. So, the church is a community of people who have been *called out* of the world to belong to Jesus and each other. This fundamental truth about the identity of the church shapes our understanding of what the church is and what it should be doing. Peter, upon whom Jesus famously said he would build his church, has much to say about these things in his first letter in the New Testament and in today's study on the calling of the church we will explore a key passage in chapter 2.

Observation:

1. Who does the 'him' refer to at the beginning of v 4? – see v 3 for a clue.
2. How is he described in the rest of v 4?
3. How is the church described in v 5?
4. What do the Old Testament quotes in v 6, 7 and the beginning of v 8 say?
5. What does Peter say at the end of v 8 about those who disobey the message of the Gospel?
6. What does Peter say about the identity and the purpose of the church in v 9?
7. How does he amplify this in v 10?
8. How does Peter address his readers at the beginning of v 11 and what does he urge them to do?
9. What does he say in v 12 about their daily lives and the impact they could have?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think Peter refers to Jesus as the Living Stone in v 4?
2. What is the contrast between the attitude of people and of God towards Jesus (v 4) and how were these two attitudes evident in the life and ministry of Jesus?
3. What analogy is Peter using to describe the church in v 5 and what significance does this have for the identity and mission of the church?
4. What is Peter teaching us about a) Jesus, b) the church, and c) unbelievers, by quoting Isaiah 28 v 16 (v 6), Psalm 118 v 22 (v 7), and Isaiah 8 v 14 (v 8)?
5. Peter's readers were Gentiles (non-Jews) living in what is now Turkey. In v 9-10 he uses language and titles to describe the church, made up mainly of Gentiles, which would have previously been used to describe the people of Israel. Why does Peter use this language and what impact do you think it would have had?
6. What do v 9-10 tell us about the identity and calling of the church?
7. What is the significance of the terms Peter uses in v 11 to describe the church and how does this language contrast with the terms used in v 9-10? How do we hold together this dual identity of a church that is incredibly precious and privileged on the one hand and yet not truly at home in the world?
8. In what way is the content of Peter's urgent plea in v 11-12 a natural outworking of what he has said about the identity and purpose of the church in the previous verses?

9. In what ways do sinful desires wage war against our souls (v 11) and how can we fight this battle in such a way as to win?
10. How can the godly lives of believers have such a powerful evangelistic impact on unbelievers, as Peter suggests at the end of v 12? In what ways could your life draw others to faith in Jesus?

Application:

1. Peter says that the primary calling of the church is worship (see v 5 & the end of v 9). Do we take this calling seriously enough at St James and how might we do better?
2. God urged and commanded Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament to be very careful not to simply fit in with or imitate the moral standards of the surrounded society which rejects God, but to be different and distinct, a holy nation (v 9). What are the challenges of obeying this calling today and can you give any specific examples?
3. What is at stake here – what, according to Peter, are the benefits of living up to our calling as a church and what are the dangers of failing to do so?

Pray:

- Thank God for all that Jesus has done to save us.
- Thank God for the church and pray that we may live up to our calling.
- Pray for forgiveness for ways we have failed Him.

Sermon Notes:

Study 9: Fasting & Feasting in Lent

Luke 10 v 38-42

Context:

So, we are a couple of weeks into the season of Lent. How is it going for you so far? Of course, Lent is a time for fasting, not just from food, but from anything that may be getting in the way of your relationship with God. At the same time it is also a time for feasting – feasting on the goodness and grace of God. The whole point of fasting is to give up some lesser pleasure in order to feast on the greater pleasures that God offers to us in Jesus. But, like lots of things in the Christian life, it is easier said than done! We see this contrast between fasting and feasting dramatically played out in today's study. So, let's dive in.

Observation:

1. Where did Jesus arrive and who welcomed him (v 38)?
2. Who was her sister and what did she do in v 39?
3. How was Martha feeling and why in the first part of v 40?
4. What did she ask Jesus in the second half of v 40?
5. How did Jesus reply in v 41-42?

Meaning:

1. What do you think v 38 tells us about the status and relationship of Martha and Mary and what might that have meant in their culture?
2. Why would Mary's actions in v 39 have been culturally and spiritually radical?
3. Martha was fulfilling her role culturally in v 40, but why do you think she was so distracted?
4. Can you sympathise with Martha's anger in v 40?
5. In what sense were her words in v 40 seriously inappropriate?
6. Jesus' repetition of Martha's name at the beginning of v 41 is a sign of his care and concern for her. How does he go on to express this care and concern in what follows?
7. What do you think is the one thing Martha needs that Jesus is referring to in v 42?
8. The phrase 'Mary has chosen what is better' in v 42 should literally be translated 'Mary has chosen the better portion', where 'portion' means a portion of food. Why do you think Jesus uses this term and what does he mean by it?
9. How do you feel about the way Jesus treats both Martha and Mary in this encounter?
10. Read John 12 v 1-8. To what extent do you think Mary and Martha learned from their experience in Luke 10 v 38-42?

Application:

1. How can we best show our love for Jesus and serve him – by doing things for him, like Martha or by letting him do things for us, like Mary?
2. How can we serve God in a way that doesn't give the impression that God has needs that we can meet by our hard work and effort?

3. What is distracting you from listening to Jesus at the moment? What are you worried and upset about and how is that getting in the way of your relationship with God? What can you do about it?

Pray:

- For time and space to sit at Jesus' feet and listen.
- For God's help to serve him with a right attitude.
- For God's grace to overcome your distractions and worries.

Sermon Notes:

Lenten Litany on Fasting and Feasting

Fast from judging others; Feast on the Christ indwelling them.
Fast from emphasis on differences; Feast on the unity of all life.
Fast from apparent darkness; Feast on the reality of light.
Fast from thoughts of illness; Feast on the healing power of God.
Fast from words that pollute; Feast on phrases that purify.
Fast from discontent; Feast on gratitude.
Fast from anger; Feast on patience.
Fast from pessimism; Feast on optimism.
Fast from worry; Feast on divine order.
Fast from complaining; Feast on appreciation.
Fast from negatives; Feast on affirmatives.
Fast from unrelenting pressures; Feast on unceasing prayer.
Fast from hostility; Feast on non-resistance.
Fast from bitterness; Feast on forgiveness.
Fast from self-concern; Feast on compassion for others.
Fast from personal anxiety; Feast on eternal Truth.
Fast from discouragement; Feast on hope.
Fast from facts that depress; Feast on truths that uplift.
Fast from lethargy; Feast on enthusiasm.
Fast from suspicion; Feast on truth.
Fast from thoughts that weaken; Feast on promises that inspire.
Fast from shadows of sorrow; Feast on the sunlight of serenity.
Fast from idle gossip; Feast on purposeful silence.
Fast from problems that overwhelm; Feast on prayer that undergirds.

William Arthur Ward (American author, teacher and pastor, 1921-1994)

Study 10: Lost & Found?

Luke 15 v 1-10

Context:

It can be one of the most frustrating experiences in life, to lose or mislay something important. We have all done it! In Luke 15 Jesus draws on this common experience to illustrate the universal human spiritual condition and God's amazing response. He tells three stories of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and two lost sons. In today's study we are going to explore the first two stories.

Observation:

1. Who was gathering around to hear Jesus in v 1?
2. Who was unhappy in v 2 and what was the source of their discontent?
3. What is the first story Jesus tells to address their discontent (v 3-6)?
4. What is the meaning of the story according to v 7?
5. What is the second story Jesus tells in v 8-9?
6. What is the meaning according to v 10?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think such notoriously sinful people wanted to listen to Jesus (v 1)? Is this surprising to you?
2. Why do you think the religious leaders were so unhappy that Jesus welcomed such people (v 2)?
3. Do you find it surprising that the shepherd in the first story leaves the 99 sheep to go after the 1 that was lost (v 3-4)?
4. Why do you think he is so keen to share his joy with his neighbours (v 5-6)?
5. Who do you think is doing the rejoicing in heaven in v 7?
6. What does it mean to 'repent' (v 7)?
7. Each coin in the second story was worth about a day's wages and it is possible that the 10 coins were the woman's marriage dowry which would have been worn in an elaborate headband. So, why do you think she was so desperate to find the lost coin?
8. Why was she, like the shepherd in the first story, so keen to share her joy with others (v 9)?
9. Who is doing the rejoicing in v 10?
10. What do you think it means to be 'lost', like the sheep or the coin? Why are these stories such good news for 'lost' people?

Application:

1. By telling these stories Luke invites us to identify ourselves either on the one hand with the tax collectors/sinners/ lost sheep/ lost coin OR on the other hand with the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Which do you identify with more?
2. In what ways do 'religious people' look down on others?
3. Do you think by welcoming and eating with sinful people Jesus was condoning their lifestyles?

4. Is there a difference between welcome and affirmation – i.e. in what way does Jesus *welcome* sinful people without *affirming* or condoning their lifestyle or choices? Can you think of any other examples of this in Jesus' life and ministry? How should this principle apply in the church and in the world today?
5. What image of God do these stories present to us? Do you find this surprising?
6. How should we as a church and as individuals embody and reflect the image of God which is presented in these stories?
7. How do you feel about God searching for you and rejoicing over you, despite your sin?

Pray:

- Thank God for His amazing love and grace.
- Pray for those you know who are spiritually lost, that God may find them.
- Ask God to help you get the balance right between welcome without necessarily affirming or condoning sin.

Sermon Notes:

Study 11: Mothering Sunday

Luke 2 v 41-52

Context:

Being a mother must surely be one of the highest and most challenging callings in life, and hopefully one of the most rewarding too. The Bible presents us with many examples of what being a mother might look like in action and in today's study we explore just one of them.

Observation:

1. Where did Jesus' parents go every year and why (v 41)?
2. How old was Jesus on this particular annual visit (v 42)?
3. What happened at the end of the festival (v 43)?
4. How long did it take for Mary & Joseph to realise Jesus wasn't with them (v 44)?
5. What did they then do (v 45)?
6. How long did it take them to find him? Where was he and what was he doing (v 46)?
7. What impact was Jesus having on the crowd (v 47)?
8. How did Mary and Joseph react when they saw him and what did Mary say (v 48)?
9. How did Jesus reply (v 49) and what was the impact on his parents (v 50)?
10. What did they then do according to the beginning of v 51?
11. What did Mary do with this experience according to the rest of v 51?
12. What does Luke then tell us about Jesus in v 52?

Meaning:

1. What does v 41 tell us about the character of Mary? [Note that in Jewish Law only the male head of the family was required to travel to Jerusalem for the three main festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles]
2. How do you think it was possible for Mary & Joseph to be unaware that Jesus had stayed behind in Jerusalem when they left (v 43-44)? How do you think they would have been feeling at this point? Have you ever experienced something like this as a parent?
3. Why do you think Jesus was spending his time in the temple courts with the teachers and why do you think he had such an impact on those who heard him (v 46-47)?
4. Do you think Mary was right to chastise Jesus (v 48)? Can you identify with her feelings and actions here?
5. V 42 tells us that Jesus was 12 years old when they made this visit to Jerusalem. This was the age at which a boy would become a man in Jewish tradition. He would now take on personal responsibility for obeying the Torah (Jewish Law) and would leave school to join with his father in the family business. So, how does v 41 help us to understand v 49?
6. V 50 tells us that his parents didn't understand what Jesus meant in v 49. Are you surprised at this, given what they had already experienced and heard in Luke chapters 1 and 2? What do you think Jesus meant by his reply in v 49 and what does this tell us about Jesus developing sense of his own identity and mission?

7. The Bible teaches that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. How does the description of Jesus in v 51-52 shed light on Jesus' human nature and how do we reconcile this with his divine nature?
8. What do you think it means that Mary 'treasured all these things in her heart' (v 51) – see also 2 v 19? How might we follow her example?

Application:

1. What are some of the joys and challenges of being a mother today?
2. What *particular* joys and challenges might Mary have experienced as the mother of Jesus?
3. What can we learn from Mary's example about how to be a mother? What can we all learn from Mary about how to grow in faith and understanding of Jesus?
4. How did Jesus go on to work in both his earthly father's business and his heavenly father's business and what might this mean for our own lives?

Pray:

- Thank God for Mary's faithful example of motherhood.
- Thank God for Jesus understanding of his identity and mission.
- Pray for a greater desire to treasure & ponder spiritual things in our heart so we may grow.

Sermon Notes:

Study 12: On the Way with Jesus

Luke 18 v 31-43

Context:

Today, as we approach the end of this season of Lent, we turn our attention to Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem. Luke tells us in 9 v 51 that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem and since then he has been making his way south to the ancient political and spiritual capital of Judea, slowly but deliberately, knowing all that lies ahead of him there. His journey would have brought him from Galilee down the Jordan Valley as far as Jericho, then up the Wadi Qelt to Bethany, and then over the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. In today's study we find Jesus on the outskirts of Jericho where he performs a miracle which carries a profound spiritually symbolic significance. Let's see what happened.

Observation:

1. Who did Jesus speak to in v 31a?
2. What did he tell them in v 31b?
3. What further details did he give them in v 32-33?
4. What was the impact on the disciples according to v 34?
5. Who are we introduced to in v 35?
6. What did he ask and why (v 36)?
7. What was the reply in v 37 and how did he respond in v 38?
8. What was the reaction of the crowd and how did he respond (v 39)?
9. What did Jesus then do and say (v 40-41a)?
10. How did the man answer Jesus in v 41b and what did Jesus do in v 42?
11. What did the man then do and what was the impact on the crowd (v 43)?

Meaning:

1. What is the significance of Jesus calling himself the 'Son of Man' in v 31? – see Daniel 7 v 9-14 for a clue.
2. In light of the prophecy about the Son of Man in Daniel 7, what is so surprising about the things Jesus says will happen to him in v 31-33? What other Old Testament prophecies might Jesus have been referring to here to add more detail to Daniel's prophecy?
3. Why do you think the disciples failed to understand what Jesus was saying (v 34)?
4. Why do you think the blind man used the title 'Son of David' to refer to Jesus (v 38) – what does this title mean? – see Isaiah 9 v 1-7, Isaiah 11 v 1-9, Isaiah 42 v 1-9, Isaiah 62 v 1-3 for clues.
5. Why do you think the crowd rebuked the blind man (v 39)?
6. What does the blind man's reaction to their rebuke tell us about how we should respond when people discourage us from reaching out to Jesus?
7. Why do you think Jesus asked the question in v 41 when surely the man's need was obvious?
8. What does the way in which Jesus healed the man tell us about his power (v 42)? Can you think of other occasions when Jesus just spoke a word to heal or perform a miracle?

9. What do you think Jesus meant by saying that the man's faith had healed him (v 42) when it was clearly Jesus who healed him? What role does faith play in healing?
10. Luke deliberately places the healing of the blind man next to the failure of the disciples to understand Jesus's words in v 31-34. What do you think Luke intended us to see by doing this? In other words, what is the spiritual significance of the healing of the blind man? – you may also want to refer to Luke 24 v 13-35.

Application:

1. What reasons might people have for failing to see or understand Jesus' true identity and mission today?
2. Why did Jesus' path to glory, as prophesied in Daniel 7, have to pass through such suffering and pain, as prophesied in Isaiah 53? [See also Luke 24 v 25-27, 44-49].
3. What does the healing of the blind man tell us about how people who are spiritually blind come to see who Jesus truly is? How should this impact the way we pray and engage in evangelism today? – see also 2 Corinthians 4 v 4-6.

Pray:

- For eyes to see Jesus in his true identity as the Son of Man and the Son of David.
- For those we know who are blind to Jesus' identity and mission.
- Thank Jesus for his love which led him to the sacrifice of the cross for us.

Sermon Notes:

Study 13: Palm Sunday

Matthew 21 v 1 – 17

Context:

It was undoubtedly the most significant week in the history of the world. There had never been a week like it before, nor has there been since. Maybe this is why Christians around the world and throughout history have called it 'Holy Week'. The cataclysmic events of that week that took place in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago began with the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city on what has become known as Palm Sunday. This is the theme for today's study. So, let's join the crowds and travel in with Jesus.

Observation:

1. Where are we at the beginning of v 1?
2. What instructions does Jesus give to two of his disciples (v 1–2)?
3. What were they to say if questions about their actions were raised (v 3)?
4. Why did this take place according to v 4-5?
5. What did the disciples do (v 6-7)?
6. What did the crowds do (v 8)?
7. What did they say (v 9)?
8. What was the mood of the city (v 10)?
9. How did the crowd accompanying Jesus reply to the question in v 11?
10. What provocative prophetic action did Jesus perform in v 12?
11. What explanation did he give for this in v 13?
12. Who came to Jesus in v 14 and how did Jesus respond to them?
13. Why were the religious leaders so indignant in v 15?
14. What did they say to Jesus in v 16 and how did he respond?
15. How did Jesus end the day (v 17)?

Meaning:

1. Do you think Jesus was being *practical* in making arrangements in advance in v 1-3, or was he being *prophetic* in supernaturally knowing there would be donkey and colt available for him to use? What do we learn about Jesus from the answer to this question?
2. Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies over which he had no control (e.g. that he was conceived by a virgin, born in Bethlehem, lived in Nazareth, crucified on a cross etc). However, he seems to have consciously and deliberately fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy (v 4-5). Read Zechariah 9 v 9-10 and discuss what Jesus intended people to understand about his identity and mission by deliberately fulfilling this ancient prophecy.
3. What did the disciples and the crowds mean by their symbolic actions in v 7-8? – see 2 Kings 9 v 13.
4. John, in his account of this event (John 12 v 13), tells us the branches the crowds spread on the floor and waved in the air were taken from palm trees. The palm branch had become a very potent symbol of political freedom and independence in Jewish culture. Given that it was just before the Passover Festival, and bearing in mind the political situation of the time,

what do you think the crowds accompanying Jesus meant by using palm branches and why would this have caused such a stir in the city (v 10)?

5. The Aramaic word 'Hosanna' means 'Lord, save us!'. The crowds quoted from Psalm 118 in v 9 and this psalm was recited by worshippers in the Temple at Passover Time. Read Psalm 118 and discuss how by quoting this psalm the crowds supported their actions in v 7-8.
6. How might Jesus' actions in v 12 have disappointed and even angered the crowds who had just been hailing him as the promised Messiah?
7. The area Jesus cleanses in v 12, which Jewish traders had made into a market place, was meant to be reserved for Gentile worshippers who were not allowed to go any further into the Temple because they were not Jews. Jesus explains his prophetic actions in v 12 by quoting two Old Testament prophets in v 13. Read Isaiah 56 v 1-8 and Jeremiah 7 v 1-15 and discuss what Jesus was trying to communicate by his provocative actions.
8. In Jewish history, King David, conquered Jerusalem seven years after becoming king and moved his capital from Hebron. Read 2 Samuel 5 v 6-8 and discuss the significance of what Matthew describes in 14. [NOTE: It is interesting that that the only healing miracles of Jesus performed in Jerusalem that *John* describes in his Gospel are the healing of the *lame* man (John 5) and the healing of the *blind* man (John 9). Could he also have seen some significant connection with David in 2 Samuel 5?]
9. What does the presence and actions of the children in v 15 and the defence of them by Jesus in v 16 tell us about the place children have in Jesus' mind and heart?

Application:

1. Why do you think the tide turned so quickly against Jesus during Holy Week, from 'Hosanna' on Palm Sunday to 'Crucify him' on Good Friday?
2. The crowds demonstrated their acceptance of Jesus as King in actions and words. How might we demonstrate our acceptance of Jesus' kingship today?
3. The Jewish traders and religious leaders were very religious but their hearts were far from God (see Isaiah 29 v 13). In what ways can 'religion' stifle and even work against spiritual truth and action?
4. How should the church collectively and Christians individually follow Jesus' example towards the marginalised (the blind and lame)?
5. How should the church follow Jesus' example towards children and what should this mean for the place children are given in our church today?

Pray:

- For God's grace to welcome Jesus as our King.
- For forgiveness when we have allowed religion to stifle truth?
- For the marginalised and children to find a warm welcome at St James.

Sermon Notes:

Study 14: Easter Celebration

Luke 24 v 1-12

Context:

As I write this study, it is a week before Christmas and the snow is on the ground. Preparations are well under way for our annual celebration of the birth of Jesus just a week away. In some ways, therefore, it seems slightly surreal to be writing a bible study for Easter Sunday. And yet, it is a powerful and helpful reminder to me that Christmas and Easter are inextricably linked. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the death and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem 33 years later must be considered together. The whole point of Christmas is Easter, for Jesus was born to die and rise again – that was his mission, that's why he came. So, let's join the women on that first Easter Sunday and feel the shock waves that flowed out from the empty tomb to eventually touch the entire world.

Observation:

1. When did this amazing event take place according to v 1?
2. What did the women who were close to Jesus do (v 1)?
3. What did they discover on arrival (v 2)?
4. What did discover on entering the tomb (v 3)?
5. What happened next (v 4)?
6. How did the women react (v 5a)?
7. What question were they asked (v 5b)?
8. What shocking news were they then told (v 6a)?
9. What evidence were they reminded of in v 6b-8?
10. What did the women do on returning home (v 9)?
11. What were the women's names (v 10)?
12. What was the reaction of the men and why (v 11)?
13. What did Peter do (v 12)?

Meaning:

1. Why do you think the women took spices to the tomb and why do you think they went so early (v 1)?
2. What do you think they were thinking and feeling when they discovered the stone rolled away (v 2) and the body of Jesus no longer inside (v 3)?
3. Who do you think the two men were in v 4 and why?
4. How would their words in v 5-6 have struck the women?
5. The women were reminded that Jesus had told them that he MUST be delivered over, crucified and raised on the third day (v 7). Why did these things HAVE to happen?
6. Why do you think the followers of Jesus had failed to understand what Jesus was saying about these things, even though he told them at least three times that they would happen?
7. Why do you think Luke mentions the Eleven rather than the Twelve in v 9?

8. What do you know about the women named in v 10? Can you take a guess as to who some of unnamed 'the others with them' might have been?
9. Why do you think the women's words seemed like nonsense to the men (v 11)?
10. How do Peter's actions provide a good example of how sceptics about the resurrection today might address their doubt or scepticism?
11. Why do you think Luke mentions the strips of linen lying by themselves in the tomb (v 12)? Why would these have been significant to Peter's view?

Application:

1. Jesus' understanding of what would happen to him (v 7) was based firmly on his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. Can you suggest any OT verses that prophesied a) the delivering of Jesus over into the hands of sinners, b) his crucifixion, and c) his resurrection on the third day?
2. How might we help someone who thinks the resurrection of Jesus sounds like nonsense?
3. Why is the resurrection so important to Christian doctrine? What did it accomplish?

Pray:

- Thank God for raising Jesus from the dead for us.
- Pray for those we know who think it is all nonsense.

Sermon Notes:

Study 15: On the Road to Emmaus

Luke 24 v 13-35

Context:

I imagine it must have been somewhat bewildering for the friends and followers of Jesus on that first Easter Sunday. They had seen him die on Good Friday – there could be no doubt that he was well and truly dead – but now, on the third day, the tomb was empty and some of their number were reporting that he had risen from the dead. Could that really be true, and, if so, what did it mean, what was its spiritual significance and what difference would it make to their lives? All this was swirling round in the hearts and minds of two of those disciples as they travelled home in the late afternoon of Easter Day. They were joined by an unknown traveller. Let's walk alongside them and listen in to their conversation.

Observation:

1. Where were the two disciples going (v 13)?
2. What were they talking about (v 14)?
3. Who joined them on the road (v 15)?
4. Why did they not recognize him (v 16)?
5. What question did Jesus ask them in v 17?
6. How were they feeling (v 17b)?
7. Who answered and what did he say (v 18)?
8. How did Jesus reply (v 19)?
9. What was their reply in v 19-24?
10. What was Jesus' response in v 25-26?
11. What did he then do (v 27)?
12. What did Jesus do when they arrived in Emmaus (v 28)?
13. What did they do (v 29)?
14. What did Jesus then do (v 30)?
15. What happened to the disciples and to Jesus (v 31)?
16. What was their reflection after Jesus had gone (v 32)?
17. Where did they then go and who did they meet with (v 33)?
18. What were they told on arrival (v 34)?
19. What did they do (v 35)?

Meaning:

NOTE: Luke tells us that one of the two disciples in this story was Cleopas (v 18). As it appears they lived together in Emmaus (v 29), it is highly likely that the other disciple was Mary, the wife of Cleopas (also known as Clopas), who was present at the crucifixion of Jesus (John 19 v 25).

1. What specific things do you think the two were talking about as they walked (v 13) – see v 19-24 for clues. Why do you think they were feeling low (v 17)?

2. The phrase in v 16 implies that some external power kept them from recognising Jesus. What or who do you think that power was and why would he/it want to keep them from recognising Jesus?
3. Jesus asks two questions in v 17 and v 19 to which he already knows the answers. Why do you think he still asks them?
4. Jesus mildly rebukes them in v 25 for failing to understand from the Old Testament Scriptures what would happen to the Messiah. Why do you think they missed what the Bible was saying?
5. Why do you think Jesus says the Messiah HAD to suffer before entering his glory (v 26)?
6. The Old Testament was divided into three parts: The Torah/Law (this was the first five books written by Moses); the Prophets; and the Writings (sometimes known as the Psalms as that was the biggest book in this section). Jesus refers to the first two sections in v 27 and later to all three sections in v 44. So, where in the Old Testament can you see shadows or prophecies about the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus – the kind of shadows and prophecies Jesus might have been referring to in v 27 and v 44?
7. Why do you think their eyes were opened as Jesus broke bread and gave thanks (v 30-31)?
8. What do you think they meant in v 32 and have you ever felt like that?
9. The gathered crowd in v 33-34 report that Simon Peter had seen the risen Jesus. The last time we saw him was in v 12 as he walked away from the empty tomb wondering to himself what had happened. So, when do you think this appearance happened? Why might Jesus have singled Simon Peter out for a special visit and what might the encounter have been like for him? – Note: Paul also refers to this appearance in 1 Corinthians 15 v 5 where he calls Simon Peter, Cephas, meaning 'Rock', the name Jesus gave him.

Application:

1. Why might we sometimes fail to recognise Jesus or understand what the Bible says about him?
2. What does passage teach us about how spiritually blind eyes can be opened?
3. How might we experience a burning of the heart more often as we read the Bible?

Pray:

- Pray for God's supernatural power to open our eyes to see Jesus as we read the Bible and partake of Holy Communion.
- Thank God for the resurrection of Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

Study 16: A Living Hope

1 Peter 1 v 3-16

Context:

In our previous study we talked about the special appearance Jesus made to Simon Peter after his resurrection on Easter Day. Peter went on to lead the church and his life and ministry were clearly shaped by the historical fact that Jesus rose from the dead and all the wonderful implications that flow from that stunning truth. Here, in the first of two letters he wrote to local churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), he begins by waxing lyrically about the empty tomb. Let's see what he has to say.

Observation:

1. Who does Peter address his praise to in v 3a?
2. What does he offer praise for in v 3b?
3. What does this lead to in v 4a?
4. Where is this gift being kept according to v 4b?
5. What guards and shields believers so that they will finally receive this gift (v 5)?
6. How do believers feel about all this (v 6a)?
7. On the other hand, what are they experiencing (v 6b)?
8. What is the purpose of these trials according to v 7?
9. How do the believers feel about Jesus, even though they have never seen him in person (v 8) and why do they feel this way (v 9)?
10. Who tried to understand God's great plan of salvation through Jesus (v 10) and what were they specifically trying to find out (v 11)?
11. What was revealed to them (v 12)?
12. Who else longs to understand the fulness of God's salvation through Jesus (v 12)?
13. How does Peter apply all this teaching in v 13?
14. What does this mean practically for the believers (v 14)?
15. Why does Peter call them to be holy in v 15-16?

Meaning:

1. What do you think Peter means by the phrase 'new birth' in v 3? – see also John 3 v 3, James 1 v 18, 1 Peter 1 v 23.
2. What is the 'living hope' of which Peter speaks in v 3 and what does the resurrection of Jesus have to do with it?
3. Why do you think Peter uses the word 'inheritance' to describe God's gift to us in v 4 and how does his other description of this inheritance at the end of v 5 help us understand it?
4. What do you think it means that this inheritance can never perish, spoil or fade, but is kept in heaven for us (v 4)?
5. Having said the inheritance is being kept for us (v 4), Peter then says we are being kept for it (v 5). How practically do you think this works?

6. The way Peter writes v 6-7 implies that God has sovereignly brought or allowed trials to come to the believers for a particular redemptive purpose. How do you think this works and can you share any experiences of this from your own life?
7. How do we hold in tension the joy of our faith and the grief of our trials (v 6-9)?
8. How does it make you feel to think that Old Testament prophets couldn't and angels can't fully understand God's salvation plan in the way that YOU can (v 10-12)?
9. What does it mean have a mind that is alert and sober (v 13)?
10. Why should we set our hope fully on the grace that will come to us when Jesus comes again (v 13)? How might we do this without withdrawing from the world or checking out of reality?
11. Why should our future hope (v 13) have an impact on our life now (v 14)?
12. What does the word 'holy' mean (v 15-16) and what practical difference should it make to our life?

Application:

1. "Too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use!". This should never be said of biblical Christians. So, how does this passage teach us to get the right balance in our lives between setting our hope fully on our future in heaven and yet living faithfully for Jesus in the nitty gritty reality of this as we wait?

Pray:

- Thank God for the living hope that comes through the resurrection of Jesus.
- Pray for grace to live in hope for the future with our feet firmly on the ground.
- Pray for grace to live with inexpressible joy in the midst of the grief of the trials of this life.

Sermon Notes:

