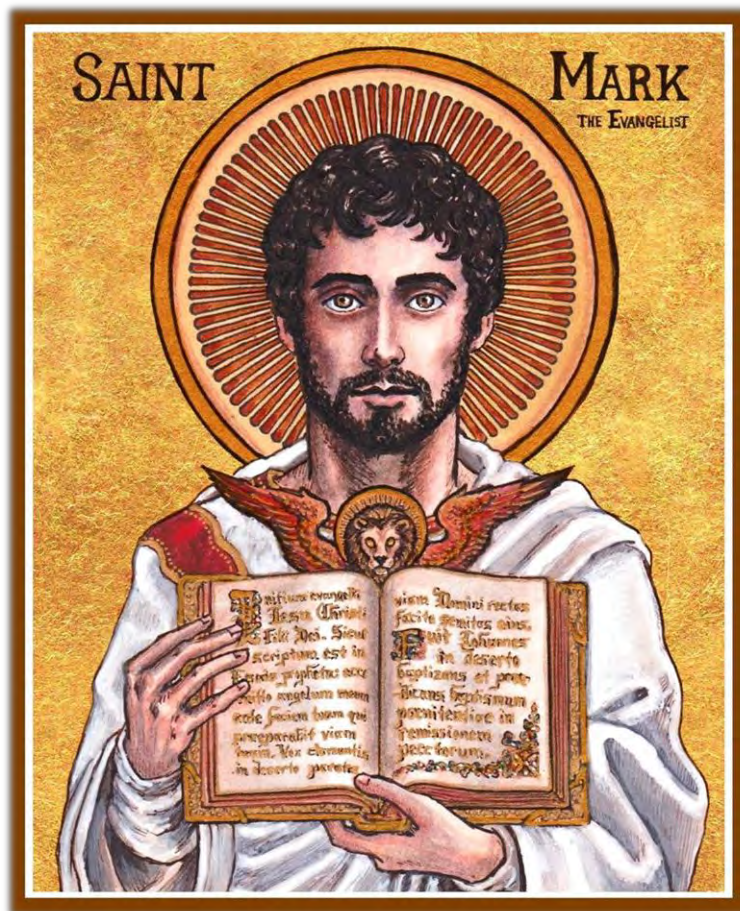


# Lent with Mark



A reading through the Gospel with thoughts, prayers and poems from the communities of St Stephen's, Rochester Row and the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York

## **Ash Wednesday to the First Sunday in Lent**

### **Ash Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 1: 1 - 13**

We are grateful for the opportunity to get confirmed this Easter. Like the beginning of the gospel of Mark, this is also the beginning of a new stage in our journeys of faith. During our time in Church most people share in the one bread as part of the Body of Christ. We look forward to getting confirmed to be a part of that and spending Lent in preparation. We would like to be fully a part of the church family because at the moment we feel a little bit left out, although we like Graham and Cath's blessing! During this Lent, as well as attending confirmation classes, we would also like to commit to saying thank you to God each night for one blessing in the past day. Perhaps you might like to join us in doing the same.

*Faith and Fain Igaba, Confirmation Candidate (2018), St Stephen's*

### **Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 1: 14 - 28**

As someone who is contemplating career change, I'm amazed at the alacrity with which James and John follow Jesus. I have healthcare and a job that pays the bills, but it lacks the challenges I crave. I wonder, if the right opportunity comes along, if I'll be able to recognize it as the "real thing" and give up the security I've become accustomed to.

In the second half of our text, Jesus acts with "authority," calling out "the unclean spirit." 1970's horror movies aside, I think for our current day, Jesus is demonstrating the importance of calling out evil and injustice when we see it. He gives us the courage to remember that while we should love and find common ground with those who differ from us, there are some issues we must take a stand on; there are not always two equally valid points of view or good people on both sides.

*Alexandra Harrington Barker,  
Teacher and Community Board Member, Holy Trinity*

### **Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 1: 29 - 45**

As a retired Church Army Sister, I have been able to draw on the vast experiences of working with homeless women and working in different parishes around London. During these years in ministry I learnt the importance of establishing routines in a busy life. So, I know the importance as well as the enjoyment, of coming to morning prayers or at the Eucharist, which strengthens me for the task throughout the day. It is at those moments I can seek the compassion and love for the tasks ahead.

As to as I walk to St Stephen's every morning, I also prayer walk through the streets lifting up in prayer the schools, the flats, the streets, and the people that I walk past and through, asking our Lord to make us modern day disciples, ones who will be filled with compassion for our needy world. Is this something you can do?

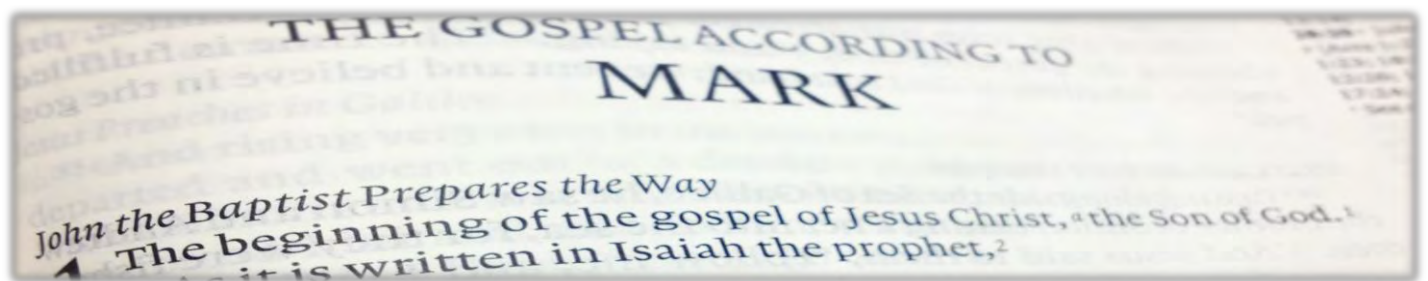
*Sr. Theresa, mid-week congregant, St Stephen's*

**Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 2: 1 - 17**

I have an uneasy relationship with the Gospel of Mark. It was often used to indoctrinate new converts when I was in the evangelical church. When I read that gospel now, I still have flashbacks to a time when I was taught about a petty and abusive God who would smite sinners unless they believed in Jesus. So, when I read lines like "son, your sins are forgiven," I get very anxious. Undoing that anxiety is a process.

One way I approach the text is by noticing its strangeness. "Son your sins are forgiven" is a strange thing to say to someone when their friends have just demolished a roof on their account. But maybe the writer doesn't intend for us to draw any easy conclusions. Perhaps acknowledging that point is enough for now. Maybe the whole point is to wonder why Jesus picked that time to talk about sin, and, what exactly he meant.

*Eunice Ng, Young Adult and Choir Member, Holy Trinity*



## **The First Sunday in Lent**

### ***A Reflection***

We are trying something new this year; And new things are always good and challenging. We propose to read through the whole of Mark's gospel through lent, with members of our communities contributing passages for reflection throughout the week with thought on a Sunday to help collate our focus. As we have seen, with Mark we get straight into the "nitty-gritty" of the matter.

There is no birth narrative or theology on creation, we are just projected straight into Jesus' adult life and proclamation of who Jesus is. In the late 1960's controversial play 'The Son of Man, Dennis Potter depicts Jesus being tormented by having this divinity bestowed on him; A Jesus who struggles with his own nature whilst being vulnerable to human frailty. This presents us with some doctrinal problems, but also an interesting thought to take with us. It also highlights the nature of the gospel we are beginning to read; The Verses we have read this week from the first chapter go straight into Jesus's ministry, we almost haven't had time to breathe. But as we enter this reading and reflecting together as two communities across the Atlantic, may we do so with our eyes and ears open to God's word through Mark's interpretation of the gospel message, which is good news for each of us.

Creator God, help us to see and understand your love in our reading of Mark's gospel so that we may be enlightened to your message for us and our community, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

*The Revd. Graham Buckle, Vicar of St Stephen's*

## **The First Week of Lent**

### **Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 2: 18 - 28**

One of my favorite movies is Mame, starring Rosalind Russell. (She attended my college, and I think I had her dorm room!) One of the most over-quoted lines in Mame is “Life is a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving.” In another favorite movie The Color Purple, one character says “God [doesn’t like it] if you walk by a field and don’t notice the color purple.”

We starve for a lot of stupid reasons, when we are surrounded by all kinds of Wonderful. One of the Wonders is God’s love for us. On any day, there is no reason for us to deny the Love and Grace of God, whether that Love and Grace is forgiveness for a sin, a flower garden, a friendship, a beautiful sky, or a great book, we should not deny ourselves that joy. Because we enjoy those gifts, we can be better people (joy!) to ourselves and to others.

*Erlinda Brent, Parish Secretary, Holy Trinity*

### **Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 3: 1 - 12**

“What have you given up for Lent?” is a question which probably expects an answer such as “drink”, but I have never been entirely convinced that denial and fasting are essential ways in which to observe Lent. Indeed, they can lead to an eagerness to over-celebrate every possible feast which falls during Lent.

When I was a governor of Burdett Coutts & Townshend Foundation School and was working nearby in Tachbrook Street I tried one Lent to attend the Wednesday lunchtime Communion service at St Stephen’s. It was a small way in which to feel more part of the community I served as a governor but didn’t take me away from my own church on Sundays. I kept it up on an occasional basis but would recommend the idea, or variations on it, to others. Of course, St Stephen’s now has three weekday Communion services!

*David Richards, Lay Chair of St Margaret’s Deanery*

### **Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> February: Mark 3: 13 - 35**

Mark’s gospel is so fast-paced, it’s sometimes hard to keep up. This mishmash of stories has a structure, though. Like a stone thrown into a pond, the short stories structure into concentric circles around Jesus’ conflict with the scribes. The central narrative acts as a key to unlocking the rest. First, the scribes judge Jesus bedeviled. Jesus, then, asks the scribes if they understand evil at all. Jesus’ family judges him insane and wants to remove him from society. But Jesus claims they are no family of his. Jesus gives poor men unrelated to him, the power to cast out demons and then calls them his family.

Throughout the ages, evil got sold as good and good as evil. Often through the same methods encountered in this text. Neither authority nor family should ever blind us to doing good, for Jesus is our ultimate authority and family.

*Calvyn du Toit, Musician and Theologian, Holy Trinity*

**Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February: Mark 4: 1 - 20**

Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." We envisage a careless sower lobbing seeds without a care so seeds are scattered in four separate areas and they don't all flourish. But what if these areas are not actually separate? What if they are four areas within us? In my role as deputy head teacher in a central London primary school, my day means I hear many things - conversations with pupils, parents, colleagues and other professionals. This parable reminds us to listen deeply and with reverence. God is teaching us and speaking to us through our daily interactions with others. Our ears must not be like the stony ground where sounds ricochet off carelessly, where we rehearse responses while someone is still speaking like the weeds that choke. Instead we are called to be welcoming and absorbent to what we hear- just like the fertile soil so that the word of God can flourish within us.

*Lucy McMullan, Deputy Head,  
Burdett-Coutts Church of England Primary School*

**Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February: Mark 4: 21 - 34**

*Sankaty light shines across the dark bay  
The keeper's loving hands polished the lenses  
so His light will protect  
"those in peril on the sea"  
from hidden rocks and sandbars.*

*God's love is a light in the darkness  
growing in us as we give it away.  
God's economy, not ours.*

*Patsy Weille, Social Worker and Volunteer  
(with help from Susan Hill), Holy Trinity*

**Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 4: 35 - 41**

Lent is not about suffering. It is about re-examining our relationship with God and trusting more deeply. We worship God the creator who created the seas and the mountains. In our reading today even the sea and the wind obey God. We too must do what God commands of us. Sometimes we don't stop and reflect upon what God wants of us. Only God is holy. We must listen to and understand Jehovah. We are all created in the image of God. I like to come to St Stephen's because he is one of the first Christian martyrs. I pray that God would give you strength this Lent and that we would all have the same courage as St Stephen's. We can never run away from God.

*Maria, regular member at Tea@3 and Monday Eucharist, St Stephen's*

## **The Second Sunday in Lent**

### ***A Reflection on Mark 8: 31 - 38***

As often as I read Jesus' words to Peter, they startle me - until I recall the meanings of that word, "Satan." Rather than being a proper name like "John" or "Mary," "Satan" comes from the Hebrew word meaning "adversary, accuser, one who resists." By calling Peter "Satan," Jesus is not suggesting that Peter is possessed, but rather, is naming the defeating tone and attitude of Peter, a sentiment that might have only magnified Jesus's own questions about his future. The work of the devil - around Jesus and around us - often accuses us by planting suggestions in our heads that cause us to second-guess ourselves, others, and even God. To "take up our cross and follow Jesus" means that we struggle to hear Jesus above the little voices that might accuse or question.

*The Revd. John Beddingfield, Rector of The Church of the Holy Trinity*

## ***The Second Week of Lent***

### **Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 5: 1 - 20**

The story of the tormented man who calls himself "Legion" is at first a perplexing one. We are presented initially with a man who is an outcast, spending his time among the tombs of the dead. One almost upon whom the living have given up, for no one could restrain him anymore. Yet, on seeing Jesus, he is one of the few that recognises Jesus for who he is, and greets him as the Son of God.

Jesus heals the tormented man, evidently ill with an unidentified affliction. Yet healing takes many forms and has different outcomes, not always the way we would like. Take the swineherds; I have no doubt they would be pleased that the man was healed, but I imagine they would be greatly irked that their livelihood has just rushed down the hill and drowned, potentially bringing about great poverty for them.

I myself feel a connection with both the good side of the healing here, and the negative. I have Crohn's Disease, a lifelong condition that causes inflammation of the digestive system and all of the symptoms that that brings about. When inflammation heals, that leaves behind scar tissue. Anywhere else in the body it isn't a problem; in your digestive system that means that you are left with part that doesn't absorb properly anymore, doesn't stretch or be flexible any longer, meaning that eating and digesting and many of the other processes necessary for life can be difficult, uncomfortable and painful. The two faces of healing; not always what we want.

Sovereign God, the defence of those who trust in you and the strength of those who suffer: look with mercy on our affliction and deliver us through our mighty Saviour Jesus Christ.

*Andrew Crawford, Weekday Verger, St Stephen's*

**Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 5: 21 - 43**

This accounting of two miracles of Christ - the healing of the woman with hemorrhages and the raising to life of Jairus's daughter - appear together in all three of the synoptic gospels, and therefore must have been well known among the early church. In them, we see plainly Christ's willingness to aid and heal all who came to him in faith. The woman reached out to Jesus from behind and touched his garment, and was healed, as Christ subsequently told her, by virtue of her faith. Jairus, as a synagogue leader, was likely much more socially and economically prominent than the woman, who had spent all that she had in twelve years' time on doctors to no avail. But rich or poor, prominent or unknown, Christ helped them both because they approached in expectant faith. If we, as Christians, are Christ alive in the world today, should we not also aid all people, regardless of status? May we, through and in Christ, be people of grace to all whom we encounter.

*Greg Kinsey, Banker, Holy Trinity*

**Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> February: Mark 6: 1 - 13**

When I first moved to Westminster I searched for a church, but found none. I only felt compelled to enter all prior churches once, and I never returned. One day on my way home from my son's school, my son ran into St Stephen's church, as though it was a family home, and was greeted by the priest. They both bonded immediately over what flavour ice cream they liked. So everyday en route to and from school my son would check if the church was open, highlighting one morning that it was and I discovered Morning Prayer. I was welcomed and love my (the) Morning Prayer, I found in St Stephen's. It's a community that made Church homely being the only church in Westminster I attend as often as possible. I have found this territory to be a place God speaks very often and clearly to me through the Church. As a priest's granddaughter, this has been a home coming and a place of love, of worship, a place where you were only a stranger outside but are a member as soon as you choose to enter. The welcome is continuous.

*Linda, midweek prayers, St Stephen's*

**Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> March: Mark 6: 14 - 29**

The passage opens with Herod's observation that Jesus is John reincarnated - and one can almost hear the guilt and hopefulness in Herod's voice.

How often have we made decisions that we know to be suspect because of a fear that we couldn't back out, or that we would be met with opposition or disdain? Here, Herod's open-ended offer results in his undoing, much as Pilate's offer to the crowd results in a cry to crucify Jesus, whom he was trying to spare.

Lent is a time of reflection, which too often morphs into a time of regret. As Lent moves on, I pray that God grants me the courage to choose what I believe to be right even when to do so comes at some personal risk. May God also grant me the peace to move beyond the regrets of the past, knowing that, for all my failings, I am no less his beloved child.

*Beth Thomas Kleinbart, Lawyer and Vestry Member, Holy Trinity*

## **Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> March: Mark 6: 30 - 56**

We read in the Bible that there were so many in need of the basics in life. Jesus in his own words said we shall always have the poor with us, which was a clear indication that we who have plenty must take up that challenge to help where we can to give to those in need.

The reading of the feeding of the five thousand reminds us that we can be part of this miracle to feed those in need today. The news is full of those in desperate need we are bombarded with adverts for help.

My local church ran a Lent course where the heading was '£1 can make a difference in someone's life'. From thereon at the Family Service we collect an additional donation, a minimum of £1, to make a difference in someone's life. My church also has a Food Bank for local residents who are in need to collect food.

The reading also has another meaning for those who have faith that we too need Jesus to feed our souls. That we may continue this work and bring others to encounter spiritual food for their soul. Jesus is the bread of life who came to offer himself as food for our souls in this famished world. Amen.

*Volta Bushay, Chef at Westminster Kingsway Catering College*

## **Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March: Mark 7: 1 - 23**

We still worry a lot about counteracting defilement from outside, but now we call it "detoxifying" ourselves (raw foods diet, juice cleanse, only non-GMO foods, etc.). Thousands of years after this passage was written, the idea of defilement coming from inside us is still wildly counter-cultural, unexpected... and completely accurate.

No outside remedy or regimen can purify the human heart. Lately I am especially aware of how words provide a window to what's in our hearts. As one example, consider the difference in heart of a person who says, "undocumented worker," versus "illegal alien." My yoga practice has taught me to ask myself three things before speaking: is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? Now I talk less (!) but I hope I speak from the heart more. And I thank God when I realize how many ugly, unkind or unhelpful things I left unsaid.

*Liz Poole, Yoga Teacher and Vestry Member, Holy Trinity*

## **The Third Sunday in Lent**

### ***A Reflection***

Any contemporary of ours who wants peace and comfort above all, has chosen a bad time to be born', so spoke Trotsky in January 1933, a year which by any measure marks a turning point in the twentieth century. 1933, would go on to see the establishment of Nazi dictatorship in Germany, the signing of the Reichskonkordat, the Simele Massacre in Iraq, the Holodomor Massacre in Ukraine, and the infamous 'King & Country Debate' at the Oxford Union.



What, you might ask, do these discordant events and this fateful year have to do with weeks readings? Why begin any Christian reflection with a quotation from the irreligious, indeed, anti-religious Trotsky? The answer, I fear, is that these events tally almost completely with those discussed in this week's scripture. For each of this week's passages deals with the failure of formal authority and calls upon us as Christians to do what is right, and not what is easy.

1933, also saw such a failure, no power acted to stop Adolf Hitler from shutting down Unions, persecuting mainstream opponents, imprisoning and murdering those on the left or starting the gradual but terrible isolation of the Jewish people - which would ultimately create the pre-conditions in Germany for the Holocaust. Instead, much like the Pharisees in Mark 7: 1-23, traditional stereotypes and traditional tribalism provided a moral mist within which conscience could be stifled and duty ignored. When Britain ignored the Simele Massacre, which saw some 6,000 Christian slaughtered in Northern Iraq, it did so because the alternative would be costly and failure might lead to derision. In this action, can we not see a near direct parallel with Herod's weakness and almost incidental cruelty in Mark 6: 14- 29. We might argue the same of the pitifully weak central leadership that allowed the Catholic Church to sign a Concordat with Nazi Germany, or the privileged denizens of the Oxford Union to foreshadow in their debate, the chilling insouciance of Neville Chamberlains' 1938 words on the crisis in Czechoslovakia.

It would seem increasingly likely that we are facing a similar crossroads now. Consensus is breaking down globally. In the United States people are increasingly concerned that families are being deliberately torn apart by a President with a mid-twentieth century racist agenda, meanwhile nations in the East of Europe lurch towards authoritarianism, while in the West relations are being re-assessed without a fixed structure. The devils it seems are once more among the pigs (Mark 5: 1- 20).

However, there is hope and this too emerges loud and clear from this week's passages. For if formal authority fails in the week's passages, Christ and the power faith, at work in the best aspects of humanity are revealed. In this week's readings; Christ defeats death and restores a child to life (Mark 5: 21 - 43) and he drives the demons out of a man whom the world has chosen to forget (Mark 5: 1- 20). We have in this part of the Gospel five miracles in quick succession, and we are given the choice between an easy but brief stroll through this world or the duty to challenge and the gift of eternal life. These passages are therefore about hope and duty.

1933, is fixed in our minds as the beginning of the descent into barbarism that was the Second World War. But, there was another road that could have been travelled. 1933, could have been the year that the world said no to the dictators, that the League enforced caps on armaments, the massacres were stopped and not ignored and that people demonstrated through the ballot box that the way of peace and unity was far superior to the way of hate and war. It was not and world suffered accordingly. We are not world leaders or opinion setters, but as Christians, we can take heart from this week's passages. We can marvel at the miracles and we can recognise the power of faith to deliver us from evil. We can also through the means at our disposal, seek to help those facing persecution throughout the world, whether in the East, the Middle East or the Americas. We can write, we can protest, and we can pray, that in 2018 if the world does stand at a crossroads, it follows Christ's examples and not the loud braying of authoritarianism. Let us hope that the world turns towards the sunlit uplands of peace and not the lake described in Mark 5: 1- 20.

*Dominic Smith, Deputy Head Teacher, Westminster Under School*

## **The Third Week of Lent**

### **Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 7: 25 - 37**

We are being asked to see Christ in our neighbor. But community is messy, comprised of jostling egos at times wonderful, disagreeable, unpredictable and/or impossible. Ideally, we should be nonjudgmental, accepting and not self-asserting and self-justifying. That requires a spiritual maturity I do not have.

However, recently I was in Nepal where everyone greets each other with “namaste” which was translated for me as “I salute you”. The thought of “saluting the other” temporarily short-circuits my natural tendencies and opens me more fully to people and to more attentive listening and speaking. For now, I hope to be able to salute my neighbor; I pray in the future I will see the Christ in my neighbor.

*Simone Crockett, Peregrino (spiritual pilgrim), Holy Trinity*

### **Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 8: 1 - 21**

This is from the chapter in Mark, which includes the ‘feeding of the five thousand’, but this particular line struck me as it could have been written yesterday. In today’s world I am struck how skeptical and materialistic we have become; ‘seeing is believing’ is fast becoming the way we approach life. Even in my work I am constantly asked for proof to back up my claims; that’s not to say we should take everything people say for granted, but I think trust in others is beginning to be eroded.

When I was younger I would get frustrated that God wasn’t giving me a sign my prayers were being answered (I wanted proof that he was listening!), but soon I came to realise it wasn’t a simple ‘ask and get’ transaction. For me prayer takes time and requires patience – God’s reply won’t come immediately or in the way you expect, instead it is important to take your time and continue to be thankful for all the blessings he has already provided.

*Ben Anderson, member of St Stephen’s*

### **Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 8: 22 - 9: 1**

*Dear Greater Being,*

*My life has so many distractions - no more or less than the lives of others, but distractions nonetheless. Sometimes, I react to the distractions, and ignore my beliefs.*

*Please help me be true to my convictions. I must not be ashamed to admit that I am a beloved child of God, even when I don't deserve it. Even when I forget how to behave.*

*Jesus loves me. This I know. All I have to do is know it and own it by being Love.*

*Erlinda Brent, Parish Secretary, Holy Trinity*

**Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 9: 2 - 29**

A blind man gradually recovers his sight following the touch of Jesus. He says at first he sees trees moving, then they become people. That certainly rings true for me! As someone who has benefitted from eye surgery and a powerful ophthalmic drug, I feel that the age of miracles is still with us.

Jesus then tells the man not to talk about his cure. A few verses later Jesus is telling his disciples not to continue speculating about his identity. In our world of endless comment, perhaps we should try to be more attuned to listening and experiencing.

*John Turpin, Choir member and Gardener, St Stephen's*



**Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 9: 30 - 5**

This passage from Mark brings up the topic of discipleship. It begins with the disciples listening to Jesus and, being frightened, not able to bring themselves to seek clarification. Jesus speaks of expectations he has for them.

Discipleship involves a pupil learning from a teacher (Greek). We are there to study, to learn (Latin), and to listen to him. He teaches us to be attentive to the needs of others including the vulnerable, the defenseless, the child - and to learn from where we fall short.

Very helpful for me in exploring discipleship have been the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, especially *The Cost of Discipleship*. In it, he states, "To the question - where today do we hear the call of Jesus to discipleship, there is no other answer than this: Hear the Word, receive the Sacrament; in it hear him himself, and you will hear his call.

*Marlin Mattson, Psychiatrist and Vestry Member, Holy Trinity*

**Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 10: 1 - 16**

"I am invisible, no one sees me and no one wants to see me. I don't know if I am here." - child age 9.

To feel invisible, unaccepted, lost, drifting, hurt and vulnerable is something that affects us at any time in life and can be incredibly painful and all consuming. As long as we have strategies to help us and anchors to hold on to, we can recover, adapt and move on. Jesus accepted and welcomed the children as people of value, unjudged and included. He provides us with the biggest strategy and anchor of all - his very self.

*Victoria Buckle, Primary Learning Mentor and MHFA, St Stephen's*

## **The Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**A Reflection** (*The appointed Gospel this Sunday is not from Mark, but John 3: 14 - 21.*)

While I don't pretend to understand the full power of the cross, one thing I do understand is that part of the mystery of the cross involves God turning pain into power. God uses wounds to bring about healing.

We experience this whenever people gather with others who have suffered as they have. When we share the same wounds - whether that be an addiction, some experience of violence, an illness, or another challenge - healing can happen as we share stories and strength.

It can sometimes be helpful to remember that the cross points us vertically toward God who dwells in highs and lows, as well as horizontally, as Christ moves us out of ourselves into the lives of others. God uses both directions for healing.

*The Revd. John Beddingfield, Rector of The Church of the Holy Trinity*

## **The Fourth Week of Lent**

**Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 10: 17 - 34**

“Go and sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.”

Our personal wealth and that of our church is a gift from God, to be used to further God's kingdom on earth. How should we use the wealth which God has given to our church and to us? We should not just preserve our heritage and feed and help our families, but continue to use it to help others less fortunate than ourselves as part of living out our faith in the community. I see my contribution to managing the finances of St Stephen's as helping to facilitate our work helping others, including involvement in the Night Shelter, the welcome offered to people with many needs who come to spend time at our church, the work with victims of torture and our link with Burma.

*Alison Neilson, Bursar, St Stephen's*

**Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 10: 35 - 52**

Jesus asks James and John, “What is it you want me to do for you?” Jesus also asks Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” The brothers James and John did not comprehend what Jesus was saying to his disciples. James and John were blind to what was going on around them. The blind man Bartimaeus had a good sense of what was going on around him. Upon his request, Jesus restored Bartimaeus' sight. Are we too blind to see what is required of us? Do we want to vie for power and position? Jesus is calling us to servant leadership. In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail was able to seek and use power positively. Her intervention teaches us that when we have wisdom to impart, faith to share, and help to offer, we must not hesitate to take any risk that may be involved.

*Yvonne O'Neal, Advocate and Vestry Warden, Holy Trinity*

**Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 11: 1 - 11**

Reading this passage, I was instantly reminded of Robert Bresson's 1966 film 'Au Hasard Balthazar', a work concerning the titular ass that is passed between various cruel owners over its brief lifetime. Some critics have seen the donkey as a Christ-like figure and the director has addressed Christian themes in other films, including even using a Mozart Kyrie on the soundtrack of a previous film. The slow movement of a Schubert piano sonata provides the musical soundworld for Balthazar - but the effect is the same: to imbue the film with the suggestion, as the film scholar Sam Rohdie argues, of God's grace.

Douglas Knight, Assistant Organist, St Stephen's



**Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 11: 12 - 33**

*The road of life was bright  
It stretched before my sight.  
The Lord was at my side  
to be my friend and guide.  
And so, I started out.*

*But then the sky grew dark,  
and the road grew steep and stark.  
Rocks and ruts cut my feet.  
My legs grew sore and weak.  
I scarce could travel on.*

*I turned and cried 'My Lord!  
Why this pain; why this plight?  
Why these ruts; why these rocks?  
Why this darkness? Where's the light?  
I cannot carry on.'*

*The Lord replied, 'My child!  
Why this fear; why this fright?  
Where's your faith? Where's your trust?  
Love chose this road for you.'*

(Author unknown)

The stories of the fig tree are teachings about faith. Jesus is saying to his disciples that their faith in God should be their sole assurance. All else will pass away. Faith moves mountains. Faith makes miracles.

*Lydia Colón, Cursillista and Holy Trinity  
Neighborhood Center Treasurer, Holy Trinity*

**Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 12: 1 - 17**

I have spent all my working life within the ambit of the Catholic Church walking alongside people whom society has largely rejected. En route I have met some remarkable people who have inspired me. I have also met people who simply don't seem to be able to accept what is for me the core of the Gospel that 'whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me.' They hang on in there in their vineyard, safe behind their walls, and looking out from their watchtower. They are so focussed on holding on to what they have - even though they do not own the vineyard - that they have become blind to the truth and complacent in their faith. And so in killing the landlord's beloved son, they have absolutely no idea that they are thereby rejecting Jesus Christ the cornerstone. And that goes for me, too, when I build my own walls high.

*Cathy Corcoran, Chief Executive of Cardinal Hume Centre*



**Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 12: 18 - 37**

Politics, money, religion: topics which often elicit idle chatter. Our reading today is no different. Jesus' interlocutors barrage him with current issues. In the previous section, the religious leaders ask, "Should we pay taxes to an occupying regime?" Jesus' reply: "Who's face is on the coins?" Another group of religious leaders asks about the logistics of the resurrection. Jesus' answer is double. First, speculating about resurrected life is futile. Second, God is God of a living tradition, not dead speculation. These two answers suggest those who constantly theorize about politics, money, and religion are already half-dead. In effect, don't be preoccupied with endless speculative chatter. Such empty chatter distracts; turns you into a panicking, paralyzed, zombie. Rather, Jesus suggests, cut through the chatter by letting your words and actions flow from a love of God and your neighbor.

*Calvyn du Toit, Musician and Theologian, Holy Trinity*

## The Fifth Sunday in Lent

### A Reflection

A wingèd lion, swift, immediate  
Mark is the gospel of the sudden shift  
From first to last, from grand to intimate,  
From strength to weakness, and from debt to gift,  
From a wide deserts haunted emptiness  
To a close city's fervid atmosphere,  
From a voice crying in the wilderness  
To angels in an empty sepulchre.  
And Christ makes the most sudden shift of all;  
From swift action as a strong Messiah  
Casting the very demons back to hell  
To slow pain, and death as a pariah.  
We see our Saviour's life and death unmade  
And flee his tomb dumbfounded and afraid.

*A sonnet by Malcolm Guite in Sounding the Seasons:  
Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year. Canterbury Press, UK, 2012*

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*The Revd. Catherine Duce, Curate, St Stephen's*

## The Fifth Week of Lent

### Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 12: 38 - 44

I suppose most of the time, when I hear this passage from Mark, I'm torn between a grudging respect for a widow's generosity, and a feeling of shame that maybe I'm just not doing enough to live into her example. It seems a tailor-made passage for stewardship season: let's all be like her.

But while the poor widow may be a poster-child for sacrificial giving, Mark's gospel makes clear she is as much a victim as a hero. Instead, what Jesus asks us is to open our eyes to the reality of poverty; that while some may be poor by reason of poor choices, the greater caution belongs to those who siphon resources upward in large gulps, and either leave the vulnerable to fend for themselves, or trickle to them dribs and drabs. Indeed, the more important question becomes: how much am I like them?

*The Revd. Deacon Geoffrey T. Smith, Chief Operating Officer  
of the Episcopal Church and Assisting Deacon at Holy Trinity*

## **Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 13: 1 - 23**

Jesus reminds us that before he returns there will be many wars and threats of war on the earth, that there will be natural disasters and that such catastrophes must happen but do not signal the end.

It is certainly true these wars have marked our history over the years since Jesus' Ascension and if we think of the more recent adversities and disasters that we have witnessed (both natural and caused by man) we would be forgiven for wondering why God permits this suffering, why our prayers are not answered or how long we must endure through such times.

Nations continue to engage in wars (we have only to turn on the news each day to hear of yet more conflict that has broken out between countries or regions) and then there is the seemingly weekly threats of nuclear annihilation that we face due to the bombastic - "my button's bigger than yours" rhetoric as well as the irresponsible and antagonistic actions of the few. It is as though we as individuals are to take comfort from Jesus' words; from the pain, suffering and despair felt by us all when these events happen or the constant threats of the end of time as we know it.

It is plain that Jesus intended his followers to endure this and for these catastrophes to shake our faith but in all honestly maintaining this faith and belief is incredibly hard and challenging at times. So why does God allow these things to happen? Is it because of the free will he gives to us to make our own choices about doing good or bad deeds? Is it for God's greater good? Is it God's invitation for prayer to bring good out of evil? Is it part of God's plan and that we must simply trust in him?

Of course, we as committed Christians and followers already know the answer to this question.

Don't we?

*Tony Sewell, Weekend Verger, St Stephen's*

## **Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> March: Mark 13: 24 - 37**

We must all stay awake. This means at least two things. One, actively keeping informed and aware of the mechanisms underlying the destruction of our world, both apparent and insidious: from the rolling back of protections against environmental degradation, to the undercutting of many of the advances made in the civil and human rights arena. Admittedly, this can be exhausting work to stay on top of such developments, much like a hypervigilant immune system.

Staying awake also means being prepared for unanticipated versions of the "Son of Man coming... with great glory". The more we grasp the idea of inner divinity, of God within each of us, then the greater the possibility of this Coming likewise being an internal evolution, a cultural shift, a societal reckoning with the 'forces of darkness'.

Staying awake: there couldn't be a more apt prescription for the state of our democracy, our world, now.

*Cleveland Kersh, Organist and Director of Music, Holy Trinity*



**Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March: Mark 14: 1 - 11**

God, you lead us to call out Abba, father. By the power of your Holy Spirit, in the spirit of your son, help me to hand over self in love. That I may understand, in a deeply personal way, the same meaning of inner freedom. Help me to see more and more clearly your ways - handing self over. To live it in my daily life and experience and to be of service to you and my brothers and sisters in love. I ask this through Jesus Christ, my elder brother and Lord. Amen.

*Clare, Midweek Prayers, Secretary of 12 Step Group, St Stephen's*



**Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March: Mark 14: 12 - 31**

I keep coming back to these words: "...and they prepared the Passover meal."

Possibly the twelve male disciples actually did prepare that meal. Probably it was men who sacrificed the Passover lamb. I strongly suspect, however, that most of the food was prepared by some woman or women, followers of Jesus not mentioned as present at the Last Supper. (After all, a few of them were around several days later to discover the empty tomb.)

I like to think of the woman whose name we'll never know, mixing unleavened bread dough and placing it in the oven, humming a tune, one eye out for the children playing nearby and her husband's early return home. She had no idea of the significance of her humble chore as she prepared the bread Jesus would later take in his hands, and bless, and say "Take; this is my body."

*Melanie Hill, Volunteer Coordinator for the Holy Trinity Neighborhood Center*

**Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 14: 32 - 52**

For nearly 40 years now I have suffered from anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. When things get especially bleak I lie awake in the middle of the night while my family are blissfully asleep around me. One of the coping strategies that the therapists recommend is to imagine yourself somewhere that is a 'happy place' for you. My imagination has many of these but included in my repertoire is the Tennant Chapel at St Stephen's. Here I sit in comfortable warmth watching the light play on the mosaics of saints Stephen, Paul, Peter and Edward the Confessor and for a while I feel at peace.

*Ann Duggan, PCC member, St Stephen's*

## **Palm Sunday**

### ***A Reflection on Mark 14: 1 - 15: 47***

Mark's Passion can seem lonely and bleak. Two criminals are there, but they say nothing. Mark does not mention Mary the Mother of Jesus being there (though he does say Mary Magdalene and some other women were there). John the Beloved disciple is not mentioned. The whole scene seems darker than in other Gospels, less crowded, and lonelier.

As dark as it can seem on Calvary, the story doesn't end there. We may not see the light for all the clouds. Our hearts and heads may be so filled with internal noise that we don't hear the word of encouragement or kindness when it comes. And we may not believe that God is concerned or even cares. But the power of the cross of Christ is to remind us that God does care and the Resurrection lifts us into God's eternal love.

*The Revd. John Beddingfield, Rector of The Church of the Holy Trinity*

## **Holy Week**

### **Monday in Holy Week, 26<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 14: 53 - 72**

Probably one of the most important questions in life for anyone to consider is "who do you think Jesus was?" As C.S. Lewis put it, was Jesus mad, bad or God? Jesus answered the high priest simply and clearly. He did not claim to be just a good moral teacher but to be the Messiah, and God's son.

The question this raises is how will we respond to Jesus? The religious leaders responded by condemning him. Peter followed him, but under the pressure of the difficult circumstances he denied him three times. What about us? I chose to follow Jesus as a teenager and have sought to walk with him and honour him in my life. But I, like everyone, have had my challenges and sometimes kept quiet when I should have spoken up! And as a result have not been the follower Jesus would have wanted. But isn't it great to know that Jesus does not give up on us. And as he later restored Peter, he can strengthen and restore us.

*Richard Gough, General Secretary for London Diocese*

### **Tuesday in Holy Week, 27<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 15: 1 - 20**

Oh, the irony! Religious leaders sending one of their own to the occupying government for execution. A cruel governor amazed at the silence of the prisoner. The crowd exchanging Barabbas (literally named "son of the father") for Jesus (the actual Son of the Father). Soldiers mocking the true King with a fake crown and sarcastic royal honors. And the ultimate irony of it all: the way to Life is through Death. Thanks be to God for showing us the way through Jesus, because we might never have found it on our own!

*Maryann Tyrer, Morning Prayer Attendee at Holy Trinity  
and Pastoral Associate at St. Monica's Roman Catholic Church*

### **Wednesday in Holy Week, 28<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 15: 21 - 39**

The moment of this death has come. Now is time to let go, time to let die. How unfamiliar in this world of choice, where we can always choose comfort, to be left with no choice! My gods must die, the curtain to the temple must be torn and my deepest fear must be confronted. We must face the fact that our beloved Jesus died in humiliation, in dependency on others in this crucial moment. The cross is not some ethereal abstract which can satisfy our endless projections. It is through this specific crisis - this death of this Jesus - that we can begin again, that we can face ourselves, that we can look forward. There is no resurrection, there is no hope without this cross, what it reveals of God, the sin it reveals in me and what I must leave with it. Confront it, weep and look forward.

*Mark Siddall, Ordinand, PCC and Church Member, St Stephen's*

### **Maundy Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 15: 40 - 47**

Preparing is a concept and a series of actions. It happens in the mind and with the hands. It is also a form of devotion, of being there, ready for what is to come.

There is planning for what is needed, setting aside time to prepare, doing the work, waiting for the moment to come, thinking about it, watching, maybe adding something or simplifying and clarifying in some way. It is a process of anticipation, of paying attention. All those steps, recorded and unrecorded, were part of that day of preparation.

*Alden Prouty, Altar Guild Coordinator and Vestry Member*



### **Good Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> March: Mark 16: 1 - 8a**

I have lived in Pimlico and worshipped at St Stephen's for over 25 years now but it is only since I retired last summer that I have been able to participate in some of the church's many community activities, particularly the Zumba classes where I have been warmly welcomed by the other women and where we all have fun and support and encourage each other.

I am always reminded of and thankful for women's strength and their great capacity for kindness and caring. Like the three women who went to the tomb on the third day. They were united in their love for Jesus: they had followed Him and tended to Him during his life; endured and supported each other in their long vigil through the dark hours on Golgotha; and, finally, were determined to provide one further personal service to the man they loved. I like to think the Lord acknowledged and rewarded their love and loyalty by choosing them to be the first to hear the amazing good news of His promised resurrection.

*Sue, Zumba Class and Church member, St Stephen's*

## **Holy Saturday, 31<sup>st</sup> March: Mark 16: 8b - 20**

The earliest versions of Mark's gospel ended "for they were afraid." Rather somber, considering its target audience was the first urban Christians; a group often targeted by neighbors and the State as social and religious deviants. Yet, as we know, a few centuries later, Christianity became Europe's main religion. Christians soon forgot "being afraid," and instead installed the fear of God into anyone who dared to be too different. A shameful history, which should remind us what happens when power corrupts.

A few years after the gospel's completion, an anonymous author wrote a more hopeful ending. Instead of fear, the new ending describes God's protection, hope, and resurrection. Instead of silence, it encourages sharing Jesus' hope. May we continue our anonymous friend's mission this Lent. May we especially share God's protection with good people who live in fear of their neighbor or the State.

*Calvyn du Toit, Musician and Theologian, Holy Trinity*

## **Easter Day**

### ***Reflection***

So here we are then - At the end of our journey together. I wonder how we are all feeling? What effect has this gospel and people's daily reflections had on you? Endings are important and strange, particularly when the main person, the main character of our focus has so little to say at the end. Surely we should have had more to take away this final week? Archbishop Rowan Williams remarks, "Jesus' near-total silence during his trial and crucifixion emphasises the mood of resignation and despair". I wonder what that means to and for us? But the twist in the tale is that we also rejoice in hope and certainty of resurrection, but even that's uncertain in Mark, as some scholars suggest that this gospel actually ends at the moment of Jesus' death with the centurion, who executed him, proclaiming that he truly was "The Son of God", linking it with the beginning of the gospel with God's proclamation. But these details are not important, for wherever it or we might end, that ending has changed us. It has had a profound effect upon us - We are all different in some way. The process has enabled something in us, to hear and receive fresh insights and reflections, as we read together the whole of Mark's gospel. The change and affect means we are renewed in a different way. The change in Jesus in resurrection also changes things...everything. Our response is to have a little faith to understand and allow that change to affect and enhance our lives. And to find the strength to be able to communicate that to others in our communities and lives - for it is good news. And our world is crying out for better news - there is a need for it. So perhaps the silence in Jesus, is also a reminder that we have the communicating to do. The responsibility is ours.

Almighty God, Lord of all life and power, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him: grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ, may reign with him in glory; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity. Amen.

*The Revd. Graham Buckle, Vicar of St Stephen's*