

Lent Studies 1 – The Way of Intimacy

(Dictionary definition of intimacy: very friendly; familiar; close personal relationship)

Key Character: Mary, the sister of Martha

Key Symbol: Fragrant oil

Key Challenge: To develop a closer relationship with God

Test different fragrances, think of your favourite flower fragrance and the memories it brings and thank God for the gift of smell.

Focus

We live in a world of fast communication. In any one day we might receive messages by e-mail, voice-mail, text message AND letter. Wherever we go we might be contacted via mobile phone, broadband hyperlink, through a palmtop, laptop or pager. If you travel on a train, you are likely to be surrounded by people having conversations on their mobile phones but not speaking to any of the other passengers! Communication seems to increase as personal intimacy declines.

With so many other distractions in our lives, we often find it difficult to focus on the most important communication of all – prayer and meditation, the ways we communicate with God.

We would probably find it easier to communicate with God by e-mail, because e-mail doesn't demand as much from us as prayer. If we are to discover an intimate level of relationship with God, it requires spiritual and emotional commitment which takes time and practice.

- What makes a good friendship?
- What kind of friend is Jesus?
- In what ways do you think of Jesus as your friend?

Bible Reading: John 12 – Jesus anointed at Bethany

- What kind of dinner party do you think this was meant to be?
- Why do you think Mary chose this moment to anoint Jesus?
- What does this incident tell us about Judas?
- What does it tell us about Mary?

Background Information

The Jews always used scent and fragrance in their ceremonies. Mary used a pint of pure nard. Nard is an oil which comes from the root of the nard plant. It was often used as a medicinal ointment and was imported from Nepal and India. That was why it was so expensive. A pint was a very generous quantity for Mary to use, so it's not surprising that "the house was filled with the sweet smell of the perfume".

It is interesting that Mary anointed Jesus' feet. It was more customary to anoint the head with such an expensive perfume. However, often the anointing of a body for burial began with the feet rather than the head.

When Mary undid her hair to wipe the feet of Jesus it was an unusual thing to do. Jewish women kept their hair tied up and would only let it loose when undressing or as a sign they were in mourning.

The combination of anointing, pouring the nard on His feet and loosening her hair all suggest that Mary was already thinking about the death of Jesus as she expressed her love for Him so powerfully. This was a sign of her devoted love and the close relationship she shared with Jesus.

- How would you show a close relationship with Jesus?
- How can we show this relationship together as well as individually?
- In the Ten Commandments, God asks us to have one day of rest per week. Why do you think He did this and how should we use it?

Read Mark 15:47 & 16:1

- Why did the women go to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter morning?
- How could they best show their love now that Christ was risen?
- How best can we show our love for Jesus today?

Response

Intimacy with God begins with the desire to cultivate a relationship with Him throughout the day, every day. Prayer is about talking to God as a friend and companion and our daily lives should be lived as an offering to Him. So our everyday activities like doing the shopping, driving the car, doing the washing, travelling on the bus etc. can all be offered to Him and we can talk to Him as we do these things. The people we meet in our lives can be helped and prayed for. In this way, the whole of our lives become worship to God and we spread His fragrance into the lives of others.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14 & 15

Lent Studies 2 – The Way of Service

Key Character: Peter

Key Symbol: A towel

Key Challenge: To develop a life of care and concern for others

At a wedding reception would you prefer to be sitting and eating the food with the most important guests or be serving the food to the guests? Why? Be honest!

Background Information

Servants and slaves were a common part of Roman middle class and upper class life. Roman society was a society of masters/mistresses and servants/slaves.

Open-toed sandals were the most common footwear and the dusty dirty roads of Palestine resulted in dusty dirty feet. When guests arrived, it was the task of the lowest servant or slave to wash the feet of the guests and dry them with a towel.

- What kind of jobs would you ask a slave to do today if you had one?!

Bible Reading: John 13:1 – 17 – Jesus washes the disciples' feet

- How do you think the disciples would have reacted when Jesus started washing their feet?
- Explain Peter's reaction.
- If Jesus lived in your home town, whom would He serve first do you think?
- When do you feel you're not being appreciated?
- If we are genuinely serving God with our lives, should we expect to be appreciated?
- What makes someone great in the world's eyes? What makes them great in God's eyes?

Response

The way of service is about entrusting ourselves to Jesus. If you are an "activist" you probably find it much easier to "do" rather than to "wait". However, the way of service begins when we allow Jesus to wash our feet – to cleanse us from sin and to befriend us. We need to be humble before Him, admit and confess our sinfulness, ask for His forgiveness and then asked for the Holy Spirit to change our attitudes and behaviour so we can live a life of Christian service.

The way of service is also about following Jesus' example and living our lives for others rather than for ourselves. This isn't easy in Western culture which is focussed on **me**, my rights and meeting my needs. Jesus asks us to live our lives focussed on **them**.

- Name six incidents in which Jesus served others

- What does living a life of service mean to you practically?
- How would our lives change if we took all this seriously?
- How would the world change?

Musical Reflection

From heaven you came, helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served, but to serve
And give your life that we might live

Chorus

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King*

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load He chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
“Yet not my will, but yours” He said

Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered

So let us learn how to serve
And in our lives enthrone Him
Each other’s needs to prefer
For it is Christ we’re serving

(Composed by Graham Kendrick)

Lent Studies 3 – The Way of Salvation

Key Character: Adam

Keynote Symbol: A cross

Key Challenge: To know the saving power of Jesus Christ

One of the most popular subjects for films, books or plays is the battle between good and evil. Why do you think this is such a popular subject? Which films, books or plays have you enjoyed which deal with this topic?

Bible Reading: John 12:20 –33 – Jesus predicts His own death

In order to understand the important symbols of the snake, tree and a man which we will be considering later, we need to read the following verses –

- Genesis 3:1; 14 -15
- Numbers 21:4 –9
- John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32 –33; 19:28 –30
- 1 Corinthians 15:21 –22
- Revelation 20:2

A tree

In the Garden of Eden, God made a covenant (promise) with Adam which depended upon Adam's obedience regarding the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Satan used this tree to tempt Adam and Eve to disobey God which meant they lost their innocence.

Therefore it is significant that Jesus died on a cross which was made from the wood of a tree. Jesus death on the cross was the method used by God to offer people the opportunity to come back into God's family and to have a relationship with Him just like Adam and Eve had done before they sinned.

A snake

The other image which runs from the Garden of Eden right to the end of the Bible is that of a snake. When the Israelites were overwhelmed by a plague of poisonous snakes, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole. The Bible tells us that anyone who looked at it was healed from snake bites. The snake's power was defeated by what was "lifted up". John saw this incident as a prophetic picture of what happened when Jesus was "lifted up" on the cross. Some early records of crucifixion suggest that the victims' feet were nailed to the cross through the heel. When a snake is hit on the head it dies. The cross did not destroy Jesus because He came back to life, but through His death Satan was defeated forever.

A Man

Adam broke his side of the covenant with God and so sin entered the world. It became a world of selfishness in which God rules are disobeyed and God is ignored by many.

However, God then sent another “man” into the world – His only Son, Jesus Christ, to offer people the chance to put their lives right with God and to restore a covenant relationship with Him.

Questions

- Why do you think the image of a snake for the power of evil is a strong one?
- What happens to the snake at the end of time?
- How do the symbols of a tree, a pole and a cross help you understand what Jesus did by His death?
- If Jesus defeated evil on the cross, why is there still evil in the world today?
- How can we overcome evil in our lives?
- What do you think heaven will be like, where there is no evil?

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus

Thank you for walking the way of the cross for me

Thank you for bearing the brokenness, suffering the pain and facing the rejection

Thank you for taking upon yourself all my sin and the sins of the rest of the world

Thank you for taking upon yourself the battle against evil and evil powers

Thank you for doing all this so I can discover

A new life to live

A new strength in facing suffering

A new forgiveness for sin

A new power over evil

A new hope for tomorrow

Thank you that all this is possible only through the work and power of your Holy Spirit in my life

Amen

Lent Studies 4 – The Way of Commitment

Key Character: Peter

Keynote Symbol: Bread

Key Challenge: To obey the call of Christ

In a village a boy stood watching
A baker baking bread
He watched the kneading of the dough
And the shaping into loaves
He felt the heat of the oven's fire
He smelt that baking smell
And when they asked him what he'd do
I'll feed them bread, he said.

A man stood and watched crowds walk away
Taking in lessons learned
His friends gathered left over food
From a meal they all had shared
And twelve baskets full of barley loaves
Was what there was to spare
For when they'd asked him what he'd do
I'll feed them bread, he said.

When the people asked him for a sign
Food sent down from heaven
The truth is, I'm the bread
And although you don't believe
If it's life you are seeking, then
Of me you will have to eat
I am the bread the Father sent
I'll feed you bread, he said.

This can't be true, in anger they cried
How can we eat your flesh?
Unless you do, he told them all
And also drink of my blood
Then within you there cannot be life.
I give that the world might live
And when you ask me who I am
I'll feed you bread, he said.

And at a table sat the man with
A number of his friends
Taking a loaf, breaking it said
This is my body broken
And the wine in this cup is my blood
Poured out in forgiveness
Eat, drink, so you'll never forget
I'm feeding you bread, he said.

As night fell on the Emmaus road
 We ate with a stranger
 Who'd shared with us from Scripture
 And then taken up a loaf
 I recognized him as he blessed it
 And breaking it, shared it
 His body that's broken for me
 I'm feeding you bread, he said
 I'm feeding you bread, he said.

From "Breaking Bread" by Steven Deal

- Why do you think Jesus used bread as such an important symbol?
- When Jesus fed the 5,000 some of them followed Him around the lake. Why?
- What kind of bread did Jesus really want them to enjoy?

Bible Reading: John 21:1 – 14

- How do you think the disciples felt after their night of fishing?
- What had happened the last time Jesus performed a fishing miracle? Read Luke chapter 5: 4 – 13
- Why did Jesus repeat this miracle now?

Peter

For three years, Peter had been determined to be committed to Jesus. Read the different promises he made –

“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death” Luke 22:33

“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you”. Matthew 26:35

“I will lay down my life for you”. John 13:37

- What did Peter actually do when Jesus was arrested?
- How do you think he felt when he failed?

Bible Reading: John 21:15 – 17

- How do you think Peter felt when Jesus asked him these questions?
- Why do you think Jesus asked him three times?
- How deep is our love for Jesus? Are we prepared to give up everything to follow Him?

Just as Peter denied knowing Jesus three times before the Crucifixion, so he is asked by Jesus to affirm his love three times. This can give us encouragement to know we are forgiven when we are truly sorry about

the times we have broken our commitment to Jesus. Even though we may frequently fail, just like Peter did, Jesus still gives us the commission to continue to follow Him and to care for others.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that the Bible is full of stories about people like Peter who make mistakes and fail to follow you and your ways.

Thank you that the Bible teaches us we can be forgiven for our failures because of Jesus' death for us on the cross.

Please forgive us for the times when our behaviour suggests we are not your followers.

Thank you that we can start afresh every day like Peter.

Amen