

AT THE
FOOT
OF THE
CROSS

THE MINOR PROPHETS

Diocese of West Malaysia

The Reverend Eddie Ong
(Editor)

CONTENTS

Foreword	The Rt Rev Dr Steven Abbarow	4
Lent	The Rev Eddie Ong	5
Who Are The Twelve Minor Prophets?	The Rev Eddie Ong	7
Day 1 Carnal Faith	The Rev Eddie Ong	8
Day 2 The Prophet And The Prostitute	The Rev Dr Vijendra Daniel	10
Day 3 The Sacred Covenant	The Rev Dr Vijendra Daniel	12
Day 4 Cheap Grace	The Rev Dr Vijendra Daniel	14
Day 5 True Religion	The Rev Dr Vijendra Daniel	16
Day 6 God Will Not Forsake His People	The Rev Dr Vijendra Daniel	18
Day 7 Look Around And See The Destruction	The Rev Gerrad Emmanuel	20
Day 8 Judgment And Love	The Rev Gerrad Emmanuel	22
Day 9 The Lord Is King And Righteous Judge	The Rev Gerrad Emmanuel	24
Day 10 The Warning	Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee	26
Day 11 The Charge	Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee	28
Day 12 The Visions	Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee	30
Day 13 The Restoration	Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee	32
Day 14 What You Did, It Will Be Done To You	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	34
Day 15 The Challenge Of Discipleship	The Rev Eddie Ong	36
Day 16 Prayers From The Deep	The Rev Eddie Ong	38
Day 17 God Of Second Chance	The Rev Eddie Ong	40
Day 18 Unbecoming Of A Prophet	The Rev Eddie Ong	42
Day 19 Coming Judgment On God's People	The Rt Rev Charles Samuel	44
Day 20 A Fragrance Of Life, A Smell Of Death	The Rt Rev Charles Samuel	46
Day 21 Prophecy Of Jesus' Birth	The Rt Rev Charles Samuel	48

Day 22	What Does God Want From Us?	The Rt Rev Charles Samuel	50
Day 23	A Jealous And Avenging God	Ms Lee Sue Yee	52
Day 24	Woe To The Bloody City	Ms Lee Sue Yee	54
Day 25	Why Does Evil Continue Unabated?	The Rev Tan Meng Poo	56
Day 26	Why Does God Tolerate Evil?	The Rev Tan Meng Poo	58
Day 27	A Prayer Of Hope And Trust In The Lord	The Rev Tan Meng Poo	60
Day 28	Seek The Lord	The Rev Miles Toulmin	62
Day 29	Justice Verses Love	The Rev Abel Cheah	64
Day 30	Build My House	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	66
Day 31	Keep Up The Good Work	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	68
Day 32	Return From Your Evil Ways	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	70
Day 33	Sins Removed	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	72
Day 34	What God Really Wants Us To Do	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	74
Day 35	The One They Pierced	The Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah	76
Day 36	The Lord's Name Profaned	The Rev Paul Lau	78
Day 37	The Covenants Profaned	The Rev Paul Lau	80
Day 38	The Unchanging Lord	The Rev Paul Lau	82
Day 39	The Day Of The Lord Is Coming	The Rev Paul Lau	84
Day 40	Who Is Jesus?	Deaconess Jacintha Tagal-Cheah	86
Day 41	More Important Than Burnt Offerings	The Rev Dr Richard Loh	86
Day 42	The Doorkeeper	The Rt Rev Dr Jason Selvaraj	90
Day 43	Watch Out, Be Not Presumptuous	The Venerable Edward John	92
Day 44	Preparations	Mr Edward Clayton	94
Day 45	For Us	The Rev Mark Knight	96
Day 46	They Buried Him	The Rt Rev Dr Stephen Soe	98
Day 47	Easter Joy	The Rev Eddie Ong	100



*The Right Reverend Dr Steven Abbarow
Diocese of West Malaysia*

Over the years, our Diocese has engaged many writers who have faithfully, carefully and prayerfully written devotional messages during Lent. We are grateful to them. For this year's Lenten Meditation, we appreciate deeply the work of the Rev. Eddie Ong and his team of writers and editors for producing this year's "At the Foot of the Cross – The Minor Prophets" We are pleased to note that the Diocesan 10-year theme, "Behold, I Make All Things New" and, the three foci were highlighted throughout these devotionals. I wish to suggest that this Lenten Meditation be used in the following ways to enhance its usage.

1. Church congregations gather together early each morning throughout Lent and Holy Week to study and apply lessons learnt from the daily devotions.
2. Those who have completed their Diocesan Spiritual Platform program may organize a short one-day retreat during Holy Week, using this devotional.
3. Godparents and godchildren can use this devotional to talk and pray together at least once a week; a Sunday will be nice. Remember the vows made during your baptism.
4. Married couples may use this Lenten Meditation to journey through Lent, meditating on the Word of God and praying together. There is a whole section on faithfulness to your marital vows in the Book of Malachi.
5. All of us commit to fasting, at least once a week, while reading through the Minor Prophets and Holy Week 2023's devotional.
6. Finally, do use this booklet daily as part of your daily devotion or the Quiet Time.

May God continue to empower you so that you, in turn, may empower others and become a more Jesus-shaped believer. Blessed Easter!

Veni Sancte Spiritus.

+Steven

LENT

What is Lent?

The word 'Lent' originates from the Latin word '*quadagesima*' or Greek '*tessarakoste*' which is the 'fortieth' day before Easter. In old English, Lent simply is springtime (or '*lenz*' in German and '*lente*' in Dutch). In the early years of the Church, it was confined to a few days before Easter. But by the 4th century AD, it was extended to forty days before Easter, a period associated with the forty days and nights that Jesus spent fasting in the desert just after his baptism. Lent is still observed for this duration today.

When is Lent?

Ash Wednesday heralds the start of the season of Lent. There are six Sundays in Lent, all of which are distinguished as celebrations of the Resurrection on which Christians feast. Six days are added to complete the original forty days of the season.

How was Lent observed by the Early Church?

The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. The season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time for those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful and were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Saviour and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith. (Liturgy for Ash Wednesday, Book of Common Prayer).

Why Lent?

The main purpose of Lent is to enrich our awareness of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the individual four letters: L, E, N, T, will assist us in appreciating the significance of the Lord's (and our) mission.

Listening & Learning

Lent is primarily about our walk with the Lord – to listen, to learn and to obey the words of the Lord. For 2023, our Lenten reflection is based on the Minor Prophets. A total of

sixty-seven chapters, the Minor Prophets tell us so much on what it means and how to (1) be genuine and not-half-baked or insincere disciples; (2) be responsible leaders with integrity whether one is a priest, pastor, politician, employer, civil servant, magistrate, lay leader or a parishioner; (3) be faithful witnesses – for God’s kingdom, for social justice, for the poor and the marginalized; (4) be merciful and compassionate yet firm and true in the proclamation of God’s word, both good news and divine warnings; and (5) finally, in the Minor Prophets, we read of fulfilled prophecies after prophecies on the coming Saviour of the world (Christmas), his coming into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), his crucifixion, resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost)! There are also prophecies of the yet-to-come End Times. May God the Holy Spirit, our divine Teacher and Counsellor, bless us as we reflect this year’s Lenten devotions.

Examination

Lent is a contemplative preparation for seeking spiritual renewal. “I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial.” (*Liturgy of Ash Wednesday - Book of Common Prayer*)

Needs

Lent exalts compassion-in-action in response to Divine love. Jesus said, “When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others.” Instead, we are to take care not to practice righteousness in front of others.

Thanksgiving

Lent is a time of Thanksgiving to the Lord for the blessings of life. If not for his grace, there will be no conversion, no abundant life, no forgiveness of sins, and no eternal life. Thanks be to God for his great love and mercy.

Remain blessed in Christ Jesus our Lord!

The Reverend Eddie Ong
Editor

WHO ARE THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS?

Prophet	Meaning (name)	Focus (nation/city)	Time (probably)	Key Verse	Theme
Hosea	"Salvation"	Israel	753-715 BC	Hosea 3:1	God's steadfast love. ("hesed" love)
Joel	"Yahweh is God"	Judah	835-796 BC	Joel 2:12,13	The Day of the Lord. Call for national repentance.
Amos	"Burden bearer"	Israel	760-750 BC	Amos 5:25	Rebuking hypocrisy, idolatry, social evil.
Obadiah	"Servant of the Lord"	Edom	627-586 BC	Obadiah 1:15	God judges those who harmed his people.
Jonah	"Dove"	Nineveh	785-760 BC	Jonah 4:11	God's sovereign mercies even for enemies
Micah	"Who is like Yahweh?"	Israel Judah	742-687 BC	Micah 6:8	Judgment against evil, Pardon upon repentance.
Nahum	"Consolation"	Nineveh	663-612 BC	Nahum 1:7-9	Judgment on Nineveh, city of blood.
Habakkuk	"Embracer"	Judah	612-589 BC	Habakkuk 3:2	God's character and sovereignty.
Zephaniah	"The Lord hides"	Judah	640-621 BC	Zephaniah 2:3	Seek the Lord, seek righteousness & humility.
Haggai	"My feast"	Jerusalem	520 BC	Haggai 1:4	Call to rebuild God's Temple.
Zechariah	"Yahweh remembers"	Jerusalem	520-480 BC	Zechariah 9:9-10	Visions, hope and redemption.
Malachi	"My messenger"	Jerusalem	430 BC	Malachi 4:1-2	God admonishes his people's indifferences.

Historical Dating and Key Verses as suggested by Life's Application Study Bible.

The unifying message of the minor prophets: in God there is no split between the work of worship and the work of daily life, individual wellbeing and the common good.

CARNAL FAITH

The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”
(Isaiah 29:13)

During the time of the Prophet Isaiah and the minor prophets, both Israel and Judah prospered, initially. However, despite the nations’ economic and political success and stability, their pride, greed and covetousness led them into a state of moral and spiritual decline. God sent many prophets including the Minor Prophets, to warn them of their deepening spiritual darkness, social injustice, economic exploitations and religious indifference. (You will read them in the pages of this Lenten booklet.) There were four groups of irresponsible and unholy leaders who led the people of God astray.

- The *Prophets*, supposedly the voice and eyes of the Lord, erred in their prophecies. They prophesied utterances of men, not of the Lord.
- The *Priests*, as guardian of the true faith, failed to teach steadfastly the commands of God. As a result, the knowledge of the Word of God stifled.
- The *Palace* and her princes indulged themselves in public pagan festivities, idolatrous worship, carefree indulgence and committed unjust acts of violence.
- The *Profiteers* (businessmen) exploited the poor with their dishonesty and grabbed unguarded properties through corrupt judges. Social injustice and evil prevailed.

Having done all these shameful, unjust and violent acts, these irresponsible leaders entered the House of the Lord and offered devout prayers, sang worship songs and gave huge donations of animal sacrifices. With faces that looked most pious, prayerful and penitential, they then demanded prosperity from God. There was no humility and repentance, neither compassion nor care for the poor. Literally, with their ill-gotten gains as their sacrilege offerings, they turned the House of God into a den of robbers. How do you think God will react to their shameless hypocrisy? God was repulsed and said, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain” (Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:8-9). Through the minor prophets, God told them, “Repent and live or face judgments.” History tells us that there was no genuine acts of repentance (except by a few godly kings like King Jotham, King

Hezekiah and King Josiah). The rest of the irresponsible transgressors carried on with their hypocrisy and disobedience as if God is not watching or that God will forgive them again and again. Finally, the judgment Day of the Lord, as forewarned by the prophets, fell on Samaria (capital of Israel, the Northern Kingdom in 722BC) and on Jerusalem (capital of Judah, the Southern Kingdom in 587 BC). Thousands of local inhabitants were tortured, killed, starved and those who survived were humiliated with heavy chains and sent to captivity. History also tells us, very sadly, that a few of these godly prophets had to pay with their lives (Isaiah included) and others severely afflicted. Why? Because they stood up for the Lord and proclaimed his commands faithfully.

Ponder

Today is Ash Wednesday, a timely day to examine our actions and search our hearts sincerely once again, to see whether our words and actions match, our conversation and conduct coherent, and our public declaration of faith in God and our private lifestyle as his disciples aligned. Lip Service Christianity is unacceptable. Offerings from ill-gotten gains is repulsive. The Lord wants your heart, soul, strength, mind, humility and genuine love for your neighbours (Luke 10:27) and within your household.

Promise

“Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.” (Jeremiah 7:3)

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Eddie Ong, Chaplain at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang / the Alpha hub. Eddie also assists at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 2 – Hosea 1:1 - 3:5

THE PROPHET AND THE PROSTITUTE

Then the Lord said to me, “Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the Lord still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them.” So, I bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver and five bushels of barley and a measure of wine. Then I said to her, “You must live in my house for many days and stop your prostitution. During this time, you will not have sexual relations with anyone, not even with me.” (Hosea 3:1-3)

How would you feel if God asked you to marry a prostitute? In addition, after marrying her this woman would continue to be unfaithful, give birth to illegitimate children and, if that was not enough, after she leaves you, God would ask you to redeem her back at a hefty price!

Hard to accept, isn't it? Yet, this is the picture that God paints of his relationship with Israel.

God had made a covenant with his people. It was a covenant that was enshrouded in God's love, mercy, faithfulness and reliability. If his people would love, obey and trust him, then God would protect, provide and bless them (Deuteronomy 28).

Sounds straight forward, right?

But the nation of Israel rejected God's Covenant. They gave their allegiance to Baal and were guilty of infidelity, idolatry, immorality and ingratitude.

“A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God...A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord.” (4:12, 5:4)

The Book of Hosea was God's final and last warning to Israel. They had forsaken this covenantal relationship and were now in imminent danger of judgement.

However, before we can wag a finger of accusation at the Israelites and judge them for their foolishness and for violating the sacred covenant, we must see ourselves as having committed the same treachery. Like Gomer, Hosea's prostituting wife, and like

the Israelites, we too have prostituted ourselves and fallen away from our “first love”. “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery...” (4:1-2).

Ponder

“*Intelligentia prima est ut te noris peccatorem*” are the immortalized Latin words of St. Augustine which read, “The beginning of knowledge is to know oneself to be a sinner”. As we begin this holy season of Lent it will be good to start with an assessment of our own relationship with God. Have we been unfaithful? Have we broken our covenant with him? Have we lost our “first love”? The season of Lent is a good time for soul-searching and presents a wonderful opportunity to get right with God again.

Promise

“This is a trustworthy saying: If we die with him, we will also live with him. If we endure hardship, we will reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny who he is.” (2 Timothy 2:11-13 NLT)

Prayer

“Dear Lord, forgive those things we have done which have caused you sadness and those things we should have done that would have brought you joy. In both we have failed ourselves, and you. Bring us back to that place where our journey began, when we said that we would follow the way that you first trod. Lead us to the Cross and meet us there.” (Source: www.faithandworship.com)



Article by the Reverend Dr Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya. Viji has served in the Diocese of West Malaysia for almost thirty years. Married to Joan, they have two teenage children, Deanna and John.

Day 3 – Hosea 4:1-19, 11:1-12

THE SACRED COVENANT

Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admahor demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy. (Hosea 11:8-9 NLT)

The Hebrew word to describe the relationship between God and Israel is “*hesed*”. It is one of the most difficult words in the Old Testament to translate. At least 3 scholarly books have been written on its meaning. It incorporates overtones of loyalty, love, and other concepts such as mercy, faithfulness, and kindness. Some translators render it as “covenant faithfulness” or “loving kindness”, but these still fall short of its inherent meaning. *Hesed* is the sort of thing we see in the best of friendships, in the most-enduring marriages, in athletic teams that band together to achieve a goal, in soldiers who stick together through hell and high water, and partnerships in business or non-profits that attain their highest goals while upholding honourable relationships.

The closest English word we used to have was “troth”. Sometimes we hear it still used at weddings as “betroth”. It encompassed commitment, loyalty and faithfulness in one word. Sadly, this word along with the adjectives it seeks to describe - commitment, loyalty, and faithfulness - seems to have been lost!

Hesed is used in Hosea over and over again to describe God’s covenantal love for Israel. In Hosea 2, we’re told that God’s *hesed* is so great and strong that he will not ultimately forsake his people but will faithfully love them forever and loyally care for them based on the promises of his covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David. Even though Israel is a faltering and weak partner in those promises, God will be faithful. In fact, God is saying that because of Israel’s inability to exhibit *hesed*, God will pick up the slack, so to speak, and bring it all to fruition because he is a *hesed* sort of God. He is merciful. He is faithful. He is loving.

God shows us what true love is like, what faithfulness is like and what mercy is like. It always begins with him and it changes us who encounter this God of grace.

Ponder

The love of God is undeserved and extravagant. God's grace is beyond our understanding and enduring. This Book of Hosea is not about God's accusations, as it is about his affection. It is not about his warnings as it is about his wooing. It is not about his justice as it is about his mercy and it's not about his toughness as it is about his tenderness.

Promise

"And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord." (Hosea 2:19-20 ESV)

Prayer

You were a man of suffering acquainted with grief, loved and despised in equal measure. You understand humanity, know our failings, love us despite the people that we are. When we, like Peter, deny you by word or action, forgive us. When we, like Judas, are tempted to follow a different path, forgive us. When we, like those in the crowd allow you to be crucified, forgive us. Bring us to the foot of the Cross to stand next to the one who, looking into your eyes declared, 'Surely this is the Son of God.' (Source: www.faithandworship.com)



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Day 4 – Hosea 5:1- 6:3

CHEAP GRACE

In just a short time he will restore us, so that we may live in his presence. Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring. (Hosea 6:2-3 NLT)

According to the NIV Study Bible Footnote on 6:1-3, these verses display the presumption of the Israelites and not true repentance. They thought God was a loving and kind God who would only punish them minimally or not at all! So, they continued in their sinful ways and did not turn from their idols, did not regret their sins and did not make changes in their lives - despite all the warnings from the prophets. Little did they realise that soon they would be carried away into exile!

It's a common practice for us to sin frivolously from Monday to Saturday, then come to church on Sunday and "confess our sins" almost mechanically. We say the prayer of confession like some sort of mantra without true repentance. In short, we have cheapened God's grace.

So, what exactly is cheap grace? Cheap grace is continuing sinful habits because "we've already been forgiven." Cheap grace is refusing to take the plank out of our own eyes as we continue to judge those who wronged us. Sounds harsh, doesn't it? But the truth is this, how we live reflects how we value or cheapen God's grace.

The idea of cheap grace originated in 1937 by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was a pastor and theologian who opposed the Nazis. He was arrested in 1943 after being implicated in a plot to assassinate Hitler and was executed in 1943. But his works for Christ became the legacy he left the world. Specifically, *The Cost of Discipleship*, based on Luke 14:25-33 wherein he shares how grace and truth always go together:

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate...Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly

because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*)

The people of Israel took God's love and grace for granted. Theirs was a religion of convenience. There was no true repentance.

Ponder

Is Christianity a "religion of convenience" for us? What do we hope to gain from following Jesus? Do we "repent" thoughtlessly without serious consideration of the cost that true repentance demands in making changes in our lives? True repentance should result in a change of mind and heart which naturally leads to a change in actions.

Promise

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."
(James 1:12)

Prayer

"Lord Jesus Christ, who didst for me endure the horror of deep darkness, teach me by the depth of your agony the vileness of my sin, and so bind me to yourself in bonds of gratitude and never allow me to take your grace for granted or cheapen it in anyway, so that I may be united with you, my Saviour, my Lord and my God." (William Temple)



Article by the Reverend Dr Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya. He has served in the Diocese of West Malaysia for almost thirty years. Married to Joan, they have two teenage children, Deanna and John.

TRUE RELIGION

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.
(Hosea 6:6 ESV)

The people of Israel were very good in all the outward forms of “religiosity”. They offered their prayers, sacrifices and burnt offerings with great fanfare but inside they were unchanged. Their love was “like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.” (6:4b) It never lasted. They continued in their evil and wicked ways as recorded over and over in these chapters.

It’s easy to externalize our religion. We go to church regularly, we pray, we fast, we tithe, we do everything that is required of the “religious” person and as a result we congratulate ourselves. But the very heart of the law is a call for us to be merciful. Do you love others? Do you love God? Have you missed that what God desires is that in all your relationships, you must be touched by a spirit of compassion, so that you be merciful in your basic approach to people? Jesus is gently calling those of us who think we are better than others. You’re not going to honour someone if you don’t love them.

Begin to recognize where you overestimate the sins of others and underestimate your own. Often, we don’t show mercy because we think others have it coming. But that’s not love. Under God’s direction from Jesus, we learn that the heart of obedience is to love others. This enables you, in freedom, to admit the bitterness and resentment you’re harbouring against other people. You can love and out of that love you can show respect to others. You can be this way because Jesus has called you and he is your partner in it. When you know that Jesus loved you so much that he died to break sin’s power over you, you can’t help but leave behind your harsh attitude of superiority toward others.

Religious rituals, like our Quiet Time, Sunday church and Holy Communion can help people understand God and deepen their relationships with him. However, a religious ritual is helpful only if it is carried out with the correct attitude and motive. If a person’s heart is far from God, ritual will become empty mockery. God does not want our rituals;

He wants our hearts. "The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Ponder

What is the motive behind your "offerings" and "sacrifices"?

Promise

O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
Be thou forever near me, My Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.
(Hymn: "O Jesus I Have Promised." Author: John Ernest Bode. 1869)

Prayer

"Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen." (Collect of Purity)



Article by the Reverend Dr Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya. He has served in the Diocese of West Malaysia for almost thirty years. Married to Joan, they have two teenage children, Deanna and John.

Day 6 – Hosea 10:1-15, 12:1 - 14:9

GOD WILL NOT FORSAKE HIS PEOPLE

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for your sins have brought you down. Bring your confessions and return to the Lord. Say to him, “Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer you our praises.” (Hosea 14:1-2 NLT)

The Lord’s steadfast love for his people is simply amazing. Just as Hosea would redeem and continue to love his philandering and unfaithful spouse, God would continue to love unfaithful and disobedient Israel and he still continues to love us despite our sins, our unfaithfulness and our failures.

“For I am God and not man – the Holy One among you” (11:9). God’s love towards us is not a fickle kind of love. It is not a love that rests on conditions. His love is not like ours. He made a covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and he has faithfully kept that covenant to this day. Yes, even when they messed up, he still loved them! And he still loves us!

- 1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
- 2 But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.
- 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms;
but they did not realize it was I who healed them.
- 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love.
To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.
- 8 How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboyim?
My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again.
(Hosea 11:1-9)

Ponder

God's love and grace should lead us to repentance and a greater desire to please him in all we do. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9 NIV)

Promise

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39 NIV)

Prayer

"Father God, you are the one who leads us from darkness into light, from captivity into freedom, from anxiety into peace, from despair into joy. Yet we long to break free, choosing independence, convinced of our own wisdom, forgetting your love and grace. Forgive us, draw close to us, embrace us once again in your loving arms, and enable us to follow you in worship and grateful service each day of our lives. Amen."
(Source: www.faithandworship.com)



Article by the Reverend Dr Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya. He has served in the Diocese of West Malaysia for almost thirty years. Married to Joan, they have two teenage children, Deanna and John.

Day 7 – Joel 1

LOOK AROUND AND SEE THE DESTRUCTION TURN TO GOD!

Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.
(Joel 1:14)

I remember sitting in front of the television, watching the church service on live news after the September 11 attacks. For a moment people looked for God to deal with their grief, shock and confusion as they faced unimaginable loss. Not surprisingly, this is not new and has been observed many times in history – people turn to God (at least temporarily) during great disasters. Researchers confirm that there is a great interest in spirituality when things go wrong. But will people ever learn that they need God all the time? Will they really repent when given the opportunity and time? These are the questions that Prophet Joel was dealing with.

The 8th century B.C. was a time of prosperity for God's people. However, when things were fine, for some reason these people lost interest in God. They delved into idolatry, drunkenness and corruption. Then the unexpected disaster came. There was a great locust attack (1:4). All farms were destroyed and as a result food supplies became scarce (1:17-18). This created a chain effect as the economy went down and sacrifices at the Temple were disrupted (1:9-10). What could they do?

The Prophet Joel called for both individual and national repentance (1:13-14). Everyone had to stop whatever they were doing and turn to God. The drunkards must awake (1:5). People must lament like a bride losing her bridegroom (1:8) and priests and their congregations must mourn (1:9). Joel himself called to the Lord (1:19) and what's more, he wrote, 'the beasts of the field pant for you' indicating that even nature was seeking God (1:20). They need to immediately repent for, if they fail, greater destruction is looming, warns Joel (1:15).

We have gone through challenging times during the pandemic. Many of us were affected in terms of health, income and even worship. Furthermore, experts are warning of economic challenges ahead. As Christians, we know that the best thing to do is to turn to God. But will we learn from the past and stay faithful to God when things get better? Will we ask ourselves, “where do we need to change or repent?” Or should disasters remind us that our hope and foundation is in God alone and not in our wisdom, ability or possessions!

Ponder

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8 ESV)

Promise

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age”. (Titus 2:11-12 ESV)

Prayer

Father, forgive us for the times we strayed far from you because of our false confidence in our possession, strength or wisdom. There is no foundation more secure than having faith in you and trusting in your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we receive forgiveness of sins. We sincerely repent and turn to you today. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Gerrad Emmanuel, Vicar of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ipoh. Gerrad is married to Marie Anne and they are blessed with two children, Alyssa and Timothy.

Day 8 – Joel 2

JUDGMENT AND LOVE

Rend your heart and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.
(Joel 2:13)

As a father of two children, I quickly realize that parenthood is not about being cool or fun “daddy”. There must be a balance of love and discipline. With too much love without discipline, the children will “climb over your head” (Asian expression), and climb over the head they do literally and figuratively! On the other hand, with too much harsh discipline without love, they will simply hate you as they grow up. I guess Aristotle’s Golden Mean is applicable even in parenting as well. When we read the Old Testament, we find that God too is a righteous judge who disciplines his wayward children as well as a merciful father who showers them with covenantal love. In chapter 2, Joel begins with the warning of a coming judgment and ends with hope and promise for those who repent. It is similarly a message of judgment and love.

The warning is quite vivid like a resounding alarm – just as the locust devastated the land previously, an army of God will trample and overpower the people soon (2:1-11). It will be a time of darkness, destruction and pain. Of course, no one ever wants this but with much reminder and warning, will the people heed the warning of the prophet? Some may have listened but history tells us that most of them ignored the message until destruction and exile came to both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Yet God still demonstrates his mercy and promises restoration. All they needed to do was to return to God (2:12). God wants genuine repentance from his people; not just an outward religious expression. “Rend your hearts not your garments,” says the Lord (2:13). True repentance is about transforming oneself from sinful living to walking in God’s ways. Of course, it is not based on our ability to change but on readily depending on God’s grace and steadfast love (2:13). Furthermore, it involves not just the individual but the community as a whole (2:15-17).

True repentance then leads to restoration and renewal. In Joel 2:18-32, he writes about hope and promise. The land will see blessings and prosperity again. However, more importantly, there is a spiritual hope – “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (2:28). These were the same verses that Peter referred to in Acts 2:17 to explain the outpouring of the Spirit of God on all disciples as a seal of salvation. Peter too calls for repentance in order to receive this gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus (Acts 2:38-39). The Gospel therefore is a message of hope and grace for those who have faith in Jesus but also a message of judgment to the unrepentant. Joel sums up with great assurance that ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (2:32). To that, Peter adds that ‘there’s no other name by which we be saved’ other than the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). Will we see the warning signs of our time, repent and believe in Jesus in order to be saved and have eternal hope?

Ponder

“For the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” (Proverbs 3:12 ESV)

Promise

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Joel 2:32 ESV)

Prayer

Father, you are the righteous judge and yet our merciful God. Thank you for your grace and the hope of salvation through Christ by which we live as your children. We pray for true repentance in our community and nation so that everyone who call upon your name will be saved. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Gerrad Emmanuel, Vicar of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ipoh. Gerrad is married to Marie Anne and they are blessed with two children, Alyssa and Timothy.

Day 9 – Joel 3

THE LORD IS KING AND RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem;
the earth and the heavens will tremble.

But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.
(Joel 3:16)

What can we do when everything is falling apart in the nation and leaders so often fail us? We try our best to be good citizens and to do what is right but does it matter when many around us live irresponsibly and are corrupt? Can you imagine how it would be if you were the only Christian in the world today? Our challenge as believers is to continue doing what is right even if no one else around us does so. Often, we may feel disheartened as God's people but Scripture promises that the time will come when God will fully reign over his creation through Christ our King. And judgment will come against the corrupt and evil.

Joel chapter 3 begins with the message that God will restore everything and he will judge the nations. Judgment will come upon those who practice evil and are corrupt (3:2-16). The nations have scattered God's people into exile and exchanged young boys and girls for prostitutes and wine (3:3). They have taken the Lord's silver and gold away for their own pagan temples (3:5). They have removed God's people far away from their homeland (3:6). Therefore, God himself will sit to judge all nations in the valley of decision (3:12-14). The locust brought devastation to the land, the armies brought pain and destruction to the people, but nothing is comparable to the "Day of the Lord" where everyone and nations will be judged. Jesus affirms this in Matthew 25:31-46 where he is the one who will judge all nations when he returns as King.

Therefore, as people of God, we are not demotivated to live righteously and to do what is right. The corruption and evil we see today will cease on the day of the Lord. The day of judgment is frightening only for those who continue in evil but joyful for us because God will be our refuge and stronghold (3:16). The future is bright for the people of God (3:17-18). With that future glory in mind, we shall continue to be faithful to God even when it is difficult and challenging.

Ponder

“Then I saw heaven open, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.” (Revelation 19:11 ESV)

Promise

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:27-28 ESV).

Prayer

God our King and righteous Judge, you reign over your creation and among the nations. Empower us to be faithful and to continue to do what is right until your Son, Jesus our Saviour returns to judge the nations and to bring us to the glorious hope that you have prepared for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Gerrad Emmanuel, Vicar of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ipoh. Gerrad is married to Marie Anne and they are blessed with two children, Alyssa and Timothy.

Day 10 – Amos 1:1 – 2:16

THE WARNING

The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

(Amos 1:1)

Amos was a regular “church-going” guy who one day received a divine calling while attending to his regular “daily job” as a shepherd. It was a difficult job that God gave him. Nevertheless, he travelled north to deliver a divine warning. Along the journey, he must have wondered how to execute his task. “Should I speak like this? Or talk like that? Shall I stand on a platform where all eyes can see me? Or simply shout from a corner?” These thoughts could have been playing endlessly as he journeyed his way northward.

In the perfected hour God presented the best method for Amos to deliver the Lord’s message. There he stood on a platform on the last day of a religious festival, where the entire nation of Israel had come together. This was the height of “the event” and he spoke judgment on the cities and nations neighbouring Israel – Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab and Judah. His audiences were delighted. That was great! Finally, judgment for Israel’s neighbours! It was about time. Starting from the furthest and the audiences clapped in excitement. One after another, the nations mentioned came closer and closer to Israel. The cheers of delight over judgment for their neighbours brought much joy and relief to the Israelites. Finally, at the peak of the exuberant joy, Amos pronounced judgment on Israel – the worst of all the nations deserving judgement was Israel! The joyful atmosphere suddenly went dead silent.

Imagine the utter silence. While Israel harboured hatred and resentment toward her neighbours, she did not realize that she was worse than the worst of her neighbours. Israel saw the wickedness of her neighbours – the injustice and social disparity. She saw the cruelty, the idolatry, and the utter disgust of the neighbouring nations but was not able to see all that happening right within herself.

Amos' oratory skills were superb. He captured the attention of his listeners, led them to participate in the narrative before dropping the bomb-shell which caught them off-guard!

Ponder

Do these scenes reflect the church today? Do we possess a judgmental spirit at others while failing to see the wretchedness of ourselves?

Promise

“And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.’” (Hebrews 12:5)

Prayer

Lord, grant us a teachable spirit to learn your ways and walk in the light of your truth always.



Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee, a native of Penang. She lectures at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and serves among the indigenous church.

Day 11 – Amos 3-6

THE CHARGE

But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!
(Amos 5:24)

After capturing the attention of his audience, Amos presented the charge against Israel. God raised Israel to be a holy nation, a model or an example of what holiness is all about. God brought them into the Promised Land to exhibit how people should live; how their lifestyle should be; how they should interact with the nations surrounding them. God raised Israel to be that beacon of light to shine his righteousness in the effort to eliminate the stronghold of evil practices. However, instead of influencing the world around them, Israel was influenced by the world surrounding them. They became like their neighbours and this was bad...very bad. Because,

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." (Luke 12:48)

Israel knew what God expected of them but they went against those expectations.

The audiences listening to Amos would probably try to rationalize. After all, it was a social norm to earn a living (Amos 2: 6-8; 5:11-12). There will surely be "victims" in the quest to earn a profit. So, what was the issue? "Smart" people earn big profits at the expense of the "not so smart." That was an accepted way of life. Some people gained big and some people lost big. They forgot their history that shaped them as God's people where there should be no poor among them (Deuteronomy 15:4).

The call of God somehow appeared so foreign.

"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

However, it was not possible for social justice to happen. People worked hard to earn for themselves a lavish lifestyle. The rich were getting richer as they continued to oppress the poor. On the other hand, the poor were getting poorer as the rich continued to oppress them and squeezed them dry on every side.

Ponder

Were the scenes described in Amos' writings reflective of Christians today? Often, we make the "separation of secular and religious" departmentalizing our life while permitting ourselves to follow the ways of the world. It is the social norm. Everyone does it. So, what is the issue? God built the church to influence the world but it is the world that is influencing the church today. We continue to be indifferent. What is the problem? Everyone is doing it. We charge interest to earn a profit. We give "opportunities" to those we know. Church, let us pause to seek God. Let us learn to discern God. Let us resolve to live a life that is pleasing before his holiness. Just as the Israelites who had the Law, we have the Bible.

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Luke 12:48).

Let the church take heed because, 'it is time for judgment to begin with God's household...' (1 Peter 4:17).

Promise

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

Prayer

Lord, grant us the humility to repent. Teach us to submit to your perfect ways and mould us to be worthy vessels for your glory.



Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee, a native of Penang. She lectures at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and serves among the indigenous church.

Day 12 – Amos 7:1 – 9:10

THE VISIONS

For I will give the command and will shake Israel along with the other nations
as grain is shaken in a sieve, yet not one true kernel will be lost.
(Amos 9:9)

Chapter 7 through to the first part of chapter 9 of Amos were vision reports. It began with the visions of locusts, of fire, and of plumbline. Amos must have been terrified as he saw the gruesome visions of judgment. There would be total destruction – destruction that would hit the very core of Israel’s pride.

Then, inserted in the report was a clash between Amos and Amaziah (7:10-17). We were told that Amaziah was the priest of Bethel and his reactions toward Amos revealed to us the sorry state of the religious institution in Israel at that time. Prophets were prophesying for money (7:12) instead of proclaiming the word of God. Being a prophet – a false prophet - was an income-generating “profession.” No wonder Amos’ strong judgment on Israel. Sinful behaviours were not only found among the people of Israel. It crept right into the religious circles. Dishonesty, oppression, and evil practices were found at all levels of Israelite society. They were in a very sorry state.

Notice that after the visions of judgment by locust (7:1-2), and fire (7:4-5), Amos interceded for Israel and “the Lord relented” (7:3,6). This was followed by the vision of the plumbline (7:7-8). The plumbline explained it all. Judgment was due. The vision of a basket of ripe fruit (8:1-2) was another “confirmation” to the reason why judgment was due to Israel. “The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer” (8:2b).

Next, Amos saw a vision of the Lord standing by the altar (9:1). Amos heard the Lord detailing the extent of destructions that were to come. It was scary. There would be no escape. Anywhere and everywhere that men could possibly hide, they would be found by God. God was serious - that huge, total destruction was coming. No more delay. No more chances.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:31)

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

Ponder

Do we, as the church, take heed of biblical warnings? Life is too short to learn from our own mistakes. Rather, learn from the mistakes of others. Do we, as church leaders, take time to examine ourselves? Because the church we lead will be a reflection of our leadership team. Remember,

“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)

If we gossip, there will be gossip among our church members. If we are rebellious to higher authority, we can expect rebellion from our church members. If we give bribe to the police when we were caught running a red light, expect to find our church members using material means to “escape” penalty. Being a leader in God’s church is a heavy spiritual responsibility. Paul cautioned that,

“If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1Timothy 5:3)

Above all, a church leader ought to strive to be blameless (1 Timothy 3:1-13) so that the church of God can be built on righteousness and be a witness to the world.

Promise

“Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. He was faithful to the one who appointed him.” (Hebrews 3:1-2a)

Prayer

Lord, forgive our transgressions. Teach us to be your under-shepherds that reflect Christ-likeness in all of our conducts that the world can see you through us.



Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee, a native of Penang. She lectures at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and serves among the indigenous church.

Day 13 – Amos 9:11-15

THE RESTORATION

I will bring my exiled people of Israel back from distant lands,
and they will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again.
They will plant vineyards and gardens; they will eat their crops and drink their wine.
(Amos 9:14)

From the very start of the Bible, God revealed to us his character. God is just, merciful, loving, and always gives a second chance. God is the same: yesterday, today and forever. Knowing this gives us a lot of confidence and relief that, should we sin (intentionally or unintentionally) God will surely accept us when we truly repent.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God punished them. He had to because he is a just God and cannot contradict himself. But when he punished Adam and Eve, he also gave them the grace to bear the consequences. He sent them out of the Garden of Eden but made clothing of animal skin to cover their nakedness. The first-hand object lesson for Adam and Eve was to witness that the consequences of sin and the need of repentance must be accompanied by the shedding of blood (killing of an animal for its skin).

This pattern repeated in the incident of the first murder where Cain murdered his brother Abel. God punished Cain but provided his grace by a mark to protect him. The major flood where flood waters destroyed the whole earth but God provided his grace through Noah. The Tower of Babel where God confused the language of the people but provided grace through Abraham whom he nurtured to be the channel where Israel would be formed and through which the Messiah would enter human history.

Here in the final part of the book of Amos, we see again the never-changing character of God. Israel sinned – they sinned terribly. And God had prepared severe punishment on them. Yet, he will provide the grace. He promised, as a loving father who needed to discipline a “naughty” child, that there would be restoration.

“In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the Lord who does this.” (Amos 9:11-12)

That is the God we serve. A God who cares to mould each and every one of us lovingly, gently and surely to be a holy, priestly and worthy vessel that can reflect his likeness. The entire biblical narrative is to affirm this to the whole world through his church.

Ponder

Do we, as Christians – God’s children, his chosen people and servants – understand the extent of responsibility we have to proclaim God to the world? Do we, as the church – the community of believers – live in a manner worthy of our calling? Does our conduct within the Malaysian society reveal our identity as a people set apart because we observe socio-ethics of a divine standard?

Promise

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the ploughman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills, and I will bring my people Israel back from exile...” (Amos 9:13-14).

Prayer

Lord, teach us and keep teaching us that we may be constantly reminded of the responsibilities we have as your children living in a fallen world that desperately need to know who you are.



Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee, a native of Penang. She lectures at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia and serves among the indigenous church.

Day 14 – Obadiah 1:1-21

WHAT YOU DID, IT WILL BE DONE TO YOU

The day of the Lord is near for all nations.

As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.
(Obadiah 1:15)

The nation of Edom was descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob – the ancestor of Israel. The vision of Obadiah, which came soon after Jerusalem was destroyed, is a prophecy about Edom. God was summoning the nations to attack Edom (1:1) and bring her to ruin. Edom proudly thought they were safe as they were strategically located in high ground that was only accessible through narrow gullies that were easily defended (1:3). But God would bring them down (1:4) and their treasures would be completely pillaged (1:5). Even their allies would turn against them (1:7) and their own wise men and warriors would be killed (1:8). Why?

This was because of how they treated Judah (1:10). When Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed, the Edomites stood aloof (1:11), gloated (1:12), joined in the plunder (1:13) and even trapped the fleeing Israelite refugees and turned them over to their enemies (1:14). So, God would soon bring them to judgement. Sure enough, within a few hundred years, Edom ceased to exist. For God punishes those who attack his people.

But this vision is not just for Edom. In verse 15, the prophecy moves up a key to speak about the “Day of the Lord” – a day of judgement - for all nations. God will pay the nations back for the things they have done (1:15b). They will drink the cup of God’s wrath (1:16). But in Mount Zion (Jerusalem) there will be those who escape. It shall be holy and God’s people there will possess their inheritance (1:17). They will consume Edom (1:18), and be re-established in an extended version of the Promised Land (1:19-20). And the Kingdom will be the Lord’s.

Edom’s sinfulness can be contrasted with Jesus’ righteousness. Edom proudly trusted their defences, their possessions, their friends. Jesus humbly trusted his heavenly Father. The Edomites stood aloof when their brother was in trouble. Jesus came to seek and save those who were lost. The Edomites gloated over the fate of Jerusalem. Jesus wept when he prophesied the destruction of the city. The Edomites waited to kill

the Israelites or hand them over to their enemies. Jesus died for God's people, to save them from their enemies of sin and death.

Yet like Edom, Jesus was betrayed by his own friend. He was covered with shame and was completely destroyed as he faced God's awful punishment. The Day of the Lord came for Jesus as he hung on the cross – but he was judged for our sin not his own. God paid him back for what we did. He drank the cup of the wrath of God, on our behalf.

The Day of the Lord is still coming for all nations. God will judge the world and the nations will drink the cup of his wrath. And if we, like Edom, proudly think we can survive on our own, we will be destroyed. But if we are part of Zion, where Jesus reigns as our heavenly King (Hebrews 12:22-24), there will be deliverance. For Jesus has already faced the Day on our behalf. God's people will inherit our greater Promised Land – the New Creation. And the kingdom will be the Lords.

Ponder

Consider the future of those who, like Edom, persecute God's people (see 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Promise

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:9 ESV)

Prayer

Thank you, Father, that you will judge the world, that Christ has borne your wrath for us, and that we will receive our inheritance in your eternal kingdom.



Article by the Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral and Miss Danielle Cheng, a full-time theological student in the Equip-MBS program. Danielle serves on the ministry team at the Cathedral.

Day 15 – Jonah 1:1-16

THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLESHIP

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”
(Jonah 1:1-2)

“Jonah and the Whale” is a well-loved bible story in the curriculum of many Sunday Schools. Teens and adults may think that it is just fictitious, meant for children. Let us think it is just a tale, Jonah - son of Amittai (1:1) was actually a person, ministering in the courts of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC), the 14th King of Israel / Northern Kingdom. He was mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as a ‘servant of the God of Israel, the prophet from Gath Hopher’ (modern-day Nazareth). Jesus made reference to the prophet Jonah four times (Matthew 12:39-41) and his opponents, the Pharisees, did not quash that name as fable. In Mosul, Iraq, (ancient Nineveh), a ruined “Jonah’s Tomb” (damaged by ISIS in 2017) stands with an inscription of Jonah’s mission to Nineveh and the latter’s repentance. Jonah means “dove” and Amittai means “truth”.

God directed Jonah son of Amittai to ‘go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment’ (1:2 NLT). Nineveh was then the capital of a ruthless Assyrian regime, Israel’s declared enemy. In Jonah’s mind, Nineveh is worthy of divine judgment and destruction. So, why should he go and warn this people? Since he concluded that he could not see any good reasons for God’s command, there couldn’t be any. In defiance ‘Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish’ in Spain (1:3,10). But before long, Jonah began to pay the price of disobedience to God’s commands. From the day he disobeyed God, Jonah had been going downhill:

- down to Joppa (1:3) - Defiance.
- down into the ship’s hold (1:5) - Dispirited.
- down into the sea (1:15) – Desperation.

In addition,

- *His pocket was hurt.* Running away from God did not help his finances. He had paid an expensive fare to a destination he did not get to reach nor enjoy.
- *His pride was hurt.* As a Hebrew prophet of the Lord, the ‘God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land’ (1:9), Jonah should have been a blessing to those around him; but instead, his disobedience brought misfortune to the sailors around him.

• *His penitence saved the day.* The sailors asked the crucial question, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us? (1:11) Humiliated, Jonah confessed, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you” and God stilled the storm the moment Jonah was thrown overboard. (1:12,15)

God sent the storms of life not to destroy his servants, but to discipline, to guide and realign us with his good and perfect will. Defiant disobedience to God’s commands brings no peace, no blessings, no joy except going down into the deep of dissatisfaction, despair and disaster. The sooner we return to God’s way, the sooner the restoration of God’s blessings and peace.

Ponder

The Bible does not say that every difficulty is the result of sin—but it does teach that every sin will bring you into difficulty. All sin has a mighty storm attached to it. (Timothy J. Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy.*)

Promise

“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.” (Jonah 4:2)

Prayer

Lord, make me less like Jonah and more like Jesus. Save me from being the kind of person who selfishly cares more about my comfort, my reputation and my success than I do about the people you are calling me to serve. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Eddie Ong, Chaplain at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang / the Alpha hub. Eddie also assists at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 16 – Jonah 1:17 – 2:10

PRAYERS FROM THE DEEP

Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah,
and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.
(Jonah 1:17 – 2:1)

There are three layers of Jonah's prayers – rising from hopelessness, to cry for divine help, and finally, a re-dedication of his life to serve the living God. These prayers ascended from inside the fish belly.

- Jonah's Cry of Hopelessness.

Hurled into the depths of the Mediterranean Sea, with 'currents swirling and its waves and breakers sweeping' over him (2:3), Jonah cried in hopeless desperation. As he sank into the heart of the ocean, 'the engulfing waters threatened him, the deep surrounded him and seaweed wrapped around his head' (2:5). He was drowning, like a man 'banished from God's sight' and wondered whether he would live to see God's holy temple (2:4). As his breath was slipping away, he remembered the God he served and his prayers rose to him (2:7). Suddenly, Jonah found himself in total darkness. Jonah 1:17 states that the Lord appointed a big fish to swallow him into its belly for three days and nights.

- Jonah's Cry for Help.

From hopelessness, Jonah sought help from the Lord. Despite being isolated and in total darkness inside the big fish, Jonah's most distant, muffled cry for help was heard. "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry (2:1-2). A human father would probably have shrugged Jonah off in disgust and found someone else more willing to take his message, but not so our Heavenly Father. Though Jonah tried to leave the Lord, the Lord never left him. What an inspiring message about God's patience and unbounded grace. To such a God, Jonah reaffirmed that the Lord is his God (1:6b) and so must we. "God is both too holy and too loving to either destroy Jonah or to allow

Jonah to remain as he is, and God is also too holy and too loving to allow us to remain as we are.” (Derek C Johnson)

- God heard Jonah’s Cry for Help.

“Jonah’s deliverance came after Jonah’s repentance was complete. He wasn’t just *sorry* for what he did; he was now *trusting* God again.” (David Guzik). After three days and three nights in the fish belly (1:17b), the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land (2:10). What Jonah expected to be his tomb, the Lord had provided for his transport. Jonah realized he had been spared and given a second chance.

Ponder

“Jonah went into the depths of the sea in order to save the sailors, but Jesus went into the depths of death and separation from God—hell itself—in order to save Jonah and humanity.” (Tim Keller)

Promise

But you, O Lord my God, snatched me from the jaws of death! (Jonah 2:6c)

Prayer

I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfil all my vows. For my salvation comes from the Lord alone.” (Jonah 2:9)



Article by the Reverend Eddie Ong, Chaplain at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang / the Alpha hub. Eddie also assists at All Souls’ International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

GOD OF SECOND CHANCE

The Ninevites believed God.
(Jonah 3:5)

- A second chance. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. Jonah was not disqualified from further service because of his earlier disobedience - nor are we. But the Lord reminds him and us, that we must speak and share faithfully God's message always without fear nor favour.
- A sorcerous city. 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and ... Jonah obeyed' (3:2-3). Although Nineveh was a great capital city, it was superstitiously idolatrous with deities and demons. Incantations on black magic, witchcraft, sorcery and evil spell are well-documented in Assyrian cuneiform. The Assyrians worshipped a collection of over 2,400 Mesopotamian deities with Ashur as their chief god.
- A solitary call. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (3:4). It's never easy to be a lone voice, and more so, for a Hebrew missionary in Nineveh, a wicked city infamous for horrible treatment of prisoners. The brutal Assyrians impaled their enemies i.e., sticking wooden spikes on the ground with a very sharp point and literally spike them from the bottom inside. They burned their victims' children alive, behead their enemies' hands, limbs and ears. Here, the lone voice of the prophet dared to call them to repentance.
- A surprising conversion. To everyone's surprise, the Ninevites began to believe in Jonah's warning. They immediately called for a national fast. "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence." (3:7-8)
- A capital saved. "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened" (3:10). Who would expect the Assyrian king and his nobles calling for a national repentance? Who would expect the arrogant and vicious Assyrians to submit themselves to a lowly and lone Hebrew preacher? The answer lies in the sovereign power of God. Even before Jonah's arrival, the biblical God of the nations ensured that this cruel Assyrian

regime should see signs of God's judgment upon their land. Neo-Assyrian cuneiform revealed difficult times facing the people and land during the time. In a short period of six years, Assyria was hit by a disastrous plague in 765 BC, a total Assyrian solar eclipse in 763 BC, a major 8.2 magnitude earthquake about 700 kms south of Nineveh in 760BC, another round of plague in 759 BC and civil wars (763-759 BC).

When Jonah knocked at the Assyrian door around this time, they welcomed his message. I believe God had pre-empted the prophet's message. He had been knocking at the Assyrian door 'because its wickedness has come up' before him (1:2). I also think Jonah's miraculous testimony as in Chapters 1 and 2 were received with deepest conviction. God asked for messengers, "Whom shall I send?" Thousands have responded. Will you also be his mouthpiece in this part of the world at this juncture of time? Be assured: he will go before you and with you.

Ponder

Submitting to the will of God is both fulfilling and productive; resisting his will is both futile and counter-productive.

Promise

"Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." (Jonah 3:9)

Prayer

Lord, we are so grateful that we serve a merciful and compassionate God of the second chance. You do not easily give up on us. In gratitude, help us to trust and submit to your commands daily without hesitation nor fear. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Eddie Ong, Chaplain at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang / the Alpha hub. Eddie also assists at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

UNBECOMING OF A PROPHET

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?
(Jonah 4:11)

Jonah knew God but didn't care like God. Although the 40-day city revival mission culminated with a national repentance, Jonah was heartlessly uncharitable, unconcerned, and uncomfortable. When he realized that God had decided to give the Assyrians a second chance, he was very upset, displeased and angry (4:1).

- The Uncharitable Prophet. Jonah did not think the Ninevites deserved even an ounce of God's goodness. He wanted so much for God to destroy them. He sounded like the two sons of Zebedee who wanted fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritan village (Luke 9:54). Jonah's racial and religious prejudice were in sharp contrast to the attitude of the Lord he professed to worship who is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

- The Unconcerned Prophet. Jonah should have stayed longer in Nineveh instructing the newly repented converts on discipleship. But "No!" He had reluctantly done his part; the forty days were up! He strategically relocated himself from the anticipated epicentre of divine wrath and sat safely away in solitude. When he realized that God had decided to relent from sending calamity, Jonah sulked with death wishes, "Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." (4:3,8,9) Do you "threaten" God when things are not working out according to your plan?

- The Uncomfortable Prophet. While Jonah was angry, God was patient and he taught Jonah an object lesson. Just as the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow him, the Lord now provided a broad-leafed, castor oil plant and made it grow up over Jonah to shield him from the sun. Jonah was very happy about the plant. But when a worm chewed the plant so that it withered (4:6-7), Jonah was visibly uncomfortable and angry. The Lord had to admonish him, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should

I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left? Jonah was rebuked for loving the plant more than the people. He was selfishly angry that the plant died, but he couldn't care less, if the whole population of Nineveh should perish (4:10-11).

Note: God did judge Nineveh (as recorded in the book of Nahum). Nevertheless, in light of their repentance, he delayed the promised judgment for another 150 years.

Ponder

"It is a warning that it is possible to obey God but to do so with such a degree of unwillingness and anger that, so far as we are concerned, the obedience is no better than disobedience." (James Boice)

Promise

The mission God gave Jonah meant possible death and suffering. Jonah, however, refused to go, thinking only of himself. The mission God gave Jesus, however, meant *certain* death and *infinite* suffering, and yet he went, thinking not of himself but of us. What a contrast!

Prayer

My God, my God, I do see Jonah's attitude in me – uncharitable, unconcerned and uncomfortable – only thinking about me and myself. Make me less like Jonah and more like Jesus who thought not of his own pain and comfort but the salvation and redemption of humanity. Give me grace to serve you obediently, faithfully, and joyously. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Eddie Ong, Chaplain at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang / the Alpha hub. Eddie also assists at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 19 – Micah 1 - 2

COMING JUDGMENT ON GOD'S PEOPLE

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!
(Micah 2:1)

Micah prophesied during the momentous years surrounding the tragic fall of Israel to the Assyrians (722 BC). In the process he encountered people with authority and power who made ordinary people suffer and pay high taxes. This was the time when Micah the prophet lived outside the governmental centres of power in his nation, which led him to voice concerns for the lowly and less fortunate of society—the lame, poor, the outcasts, and the afflicted (Micah 4:6). The prophet, who had a strong sense of his calling, directed much of his prophecy toward the powerful leaders of Samaria and Jerusalem, the capital cities of Israel and Judah, respectively (1:1). These leaders misused their authority and force unjust laws on the disadvantaged people.

Micah prophesied a coming judgment on Samaria where he spoke out against sin - idolatry, money spent on idol worship and spiritual adultery, and those who oppress others through their greed, personal vendettas, lust for power and position. He spoke against those who devise iniquity, spending all night thinking of evil things to do, and eagerly woke up early, at morning light, to carry out violence and oppression against the deprived people (2:1). While all sin is bad before God, premeditated sin is worse. Further, the powerful abused Israel's law courts and bribed the magistrates. Micah denounced their wicked and selfish schemes to get power and ill-gotten gains. Take note that the prophet didn't just announce judgment and then yawn. When he saw judgement coming down on his people, he stood alongside the poor, hungry and those deprived of true justice. His care was so deep that he wept with his people (1:8), a sign of a shepherd who cares for his sheep.

Ponder

God's judgement falls on everyone and it begins in the house of God. It begins with us. What will it be for those who misuse the House of God and continue with premeditated sin? If we live only for this life, and everything in this life, but forget to prepare for the life to come we have lost our direction. We are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19)

Our only incurable wounds are the ones we refuse to bring to God. With him, all things are possible (Luke 18:27), but when we refuse to bring our sin to him, then our wounds are incurable.

Promise

Micah didn't give up, even though the results were slow in coming. Micah preached for anywhere between 16 and 25 years before there was any response. Though judgment was promised because of the great sin of God's people, they were still not beyond the grace and goodness of God. Though they sin against his word, God promises restoration to his people. He still promised restoration to the remnant of Israel. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The preacher's duty is more than to just announce judgment and to walk away. He must *care*. "Many who have rejected a Christian's logic have been won by his tears." (Boice). The process is painful but the preacher should care for those who have been wrongfully judged and treated.

Prayer

Faithful God, we are by no means worthy of your presence. We are often slanderers of others. We cast judgment upon our neighbours while we are guilty of worse things. Lord, help us to live not as hypocrites but as faithful stewards of your many gifts. Control our deceitful tongues and our judgmental eyes. Make sober our minds, Lord, so that we harbour no delusions about ourselves. Instead, help us to see our sins, that we might more clearly be able to see the sins of others and bring them the good news of salvation. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by the Right Reverend Dato' Charles K Samuel. Following +Charles recent retirement, he was reassigned by the Bishop to lead the Diocese's Liturgical Formation and Footprints of God.

Day 20 – Micah 3 - 4

A FRAGRANCE OF LIFE, A SMELL OF DEATH

Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel.
Should you not embrace justice, you who hate good and love evil.
(Micah 3:1-2a)

In Micah 3, there are three prophecies of doom that pertain to the misuse of justice for personal gain by Israel's leaders: corrupt political rulers (3:1–4), false prophets (3:5–8), and mercenary priests (3:9–12). To protect the defenceless, the Lord had set up over Israel's judicial system a final court of appeal that consisted of the priest and an officiating judge (Deuteronomy 17:8–13). When a corrupt priest and judge favoured the rich and powerful, the Lord sent prophets to reform them. Tragically, however, even the prophets began to preach for personal gain. These doom oracles reach a crescendo in foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem (3:12). The Spirit-filled Micah is a foil to these false prophets (3:8).

Micah prophesied, in the last days, salvation to a distressed nation. He proclaimed that God is established in the highest mountain (Zion). The city is exalted and the people recognise the mountain of the living God and the blessings flowing from it. In the New Testament, Christ inaugurated the “last days” with his atoning death, triumphant resurrection, and outpouring of the Spirit after his ascension (Acts 2:17).

In Chapter 4:2–4a, Micah overhears the worshippers encouraging one another: “Come, let's go up to the mountain of the Lord.” There at his temple, his priests will teach them the law, and his prophets will preach his Word. Here he reflects upon what he has seen and heard and relates in detail three unfolding benefits: (1) God, through his Word, reduces national tensions, (2) wars will cease, and (3) every individual will enjoy the fruit of his or her own labour with security.

God's secret strategy was to transform distress into salvation e.g., cries of a woman in labour, the birth of a Son (Messiah), and like sheaves to the threshing floor, nations will be crushed, which leads him to focus on the Messiah's place and birth by pointing to the ‘One will come from you,’ not for himself, ‘to be ruler over Israel for me’ (5:2). The Lord chose Bethlehem for two reasons. Firstly, because, Bethlehem was too “insignificant” to be mentioned “among the clans of Judah.” God chooses the small and lowly for his saving acts ‘so that no one may boast before him’ (1 Corinthians 1:27–30). Secondly, the Messiah repeats the career of David, ‘who was the son of an

Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah' (1 Samuel 17:12). This is what is meant by 'his origin is from antiquity, from ancient times.' This 'root from the stump of Jesse' (Isaiah 11:1) restores David's former dominion. Lowly Jesus, cradled in a manger for animals, more than fulfils the prophecy (Matthew 2:6). His origins are in the eternal past (John 1:1).

In a fragrance of life, a smell of death (5:7) continues. The remnant of Jacob becomes a strong nation, it becomes like dew, not showers as signs of God's blessing. The remnant is chosen by God not by any form of lobbying or human manipulation but through God's providence, faithfulness and grace, and will become like a fearsome, ferocious 'lion among animals of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which tramples and tears' (5:8). And so, it can be inferred that God's generosity extends to those who worship him. In fulfilment, the triumphant Church is 'an aroma that brings of life among those being saved; and an aroma that brings death among the perishing' (2 Corinthians 2:14–16).

Ponder

What led "her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money"? What made them assume the Lord's support and say, "Is not the Lord among us?" (Micah 3:11)

Promise

The Messiah comes to us a Suffering Servant who will free his Church from those who misuse his name, authority and gifts. Punishment is in the hand of God.

Prayer

Pray that we may be 'filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.' (Micah 3:8)



Article by the Right Reverend Dato' Charles K Samuel.

Day 21 – Micah 5

PROPHECY OF JESUS' BIRTH

'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.'
(Micah 5:2)

Micah foretold the destruction of Jerusalem because of its wickedness, its judges and kings will get "a slap in the face". God would give up his people. They would become subjects of foreign rulers and this condition would continue 'unto the time she will bear forth a son.' Here is a reference to a prophecy spoken by Micah's contemporary, Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Isaiah. 7:14).

Ancient Rabbis interpreted these words to be the voicing of Messiah's name in eternity. In Hebrew, he is mentioned as "King Messiah," a Jewish Leader, physically descended from the paternal Davidic line through King Solomon and King David. He will reunite the tribes of Israel, rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, and usher in a global Messianic Age of universal peace.

But Micah speaks of a going forth and of the birth of a person, a future king. The birth of this child shall be from Bethlehem, by a human mother. Micah said that the future king born in Bethlehem will be called Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14). He knew that Isaiah spoke of a man-child who will be Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. It is this child who can save them from destruction. Born of a human mother and given the name Immanuel, he is the one connecting link between God and man, unifying divinity and humanity in one person.

This concept of Messiah also relates to the feeding and shepherding of his people. Indeed, he is the shepherd King who combined the royal power and majesty of deity with a shepherd's tender love. He is the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. What marvellous honour bestowed on human beings - frail, sinful revengeful, vindictive and mortal - to have such a King. This man shall be the Prince of Peace (5:5) who broke the enmity between the Law of the commandments by fulfilling it, who reconciled the Jews and the Gentiles at the cross, and through him we have access by the one Spirit to the Father.

The Messianic prophecy is further confirmed in Matthew's gospel (Chapter 2)

“Wise men from the East visited King Herod in Jerusalem and asked where the king of the Jews had been born. Herod assembled all the chief priests and scribes, and “he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea,’” basing their answer on Micah 5:2.

Only Jesus Christ fits the Messianic claims of Micah 5:2. He was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Matthew 2; Luke 2:1-20). Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, the ruler of Israel (John 4:25-26). He also fits the description as being “from ancient times” or eternal (John 1:1; Colossians 1:16-17). No other ruler in Israel fits these requirements. Dozens of other prophecies in the Old Testament fit Jesus’ birth, ministry and death.

Ponder

God plan, prepared and promised the world 700 years before the actual birth of Jesus, the Son of God, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2)

Promise

“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely ... and he will be our peace.” (Micah 5:4-5a)

Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.



Article by the Right Reverend Dato’ Charles K Samuel.

Day 22 – Micah 6

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FROM US?

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.
(Micah 6:8)

Chapter 6 opens like in a courtroom drama. Think of Micah as the prosecuting attorney arguing for God. Then the jury is the "mountains and the hills". The Israelites are the ones on trial in this section.

The Prophet Micah laid down God's charges against the people. "Am I still to forget your ill-gotten treasures, you wicked house, and the short ephah, which is accursed? Shall I acquit someone with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Your rich people are violent; your inhabitants are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully" (6:10-12). Officials ask for bribes and people are good at doing bad things with both their hands. Judges change decisions in court, important people do things as they like. Even the best of them is as crooked as a tangled thornbush. (7:4)

This is God saying to us, "Hey, I've provided a place for you to live and grow. I've provided air to breathe and a planet that provides fresh water, so you'll be able to sustain yourself. I've made it possible for people to be self-sufficient and all I'm asking in return is to acknowledge that I've created you and that you honour me for doing all of that. Is that too much to ask? It's not like I'm asking for human sacrifice or to starve as if I were to require that everything you earn be given to the nearest priest.

Amid so much corruption, manipulation of the civil systems, economic downturn and pandemic, what does the Lord require of us? How can we be restored to God? Micah goes so far as to suggest sacrificing his own child. "Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (6:7). With this statement, Micah shows the desperation of God's people to return to him. But he immediately reminds himself that God has already shown the way and it is simple. In everyday words: "Be fair to other people, love kindness and loyalty, and humbly obey your God."

The first step to be fair to other people is "the quality of being impartial or fair." Secondly, mercy combines pity, compassion, or love, with some practical

demonstration of kindness, and finally, walking humbly with God is of key importance when working with people.

Micah's main point in this whole book is to remind us these three things - being fair, love mercy and walk humbly before God. In so doing we will cultivate the habit of being kind to others and as a result, be a good witness for him. In so doing we may sin less and care more about how to please God at any moment.

Ponder

Does God want us to give our time talents and money to church to prove to him how much we love him? In other words, do we have to "earn his love"? Of course not. We're called to give, to "put our money where our mouth is". When we put the needs of our kids or our spouse ahead of our own needs, we're putting our money where our mouth is. The same principle applies to God.

Promise

"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8 ESV)

Prayer

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:
a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;
a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;
a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.
Give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Prayer for Justice, author unknown)



Article by the Right Reverend Dato' Charles K Samuel. Following +Charles recent retirement, he was reassigned by the Bishop to lead the Diocese's Liturgical Formation and Footprints of God.

Day 23 – Nahum 1:1-15

A JEALOUS AND AVENGING GOD

The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble.

He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood
he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into the realm of darkness.

(Nahum 1:7-8)

Can you recall a time when someone stood up for you because you got bullied or intimidated? Perhaps it was in school, or a particularly tense family situation? Without a doubt, it must have felt empowering to know you're not alone. It must have felt good to know that you have support on your side and to learn that somebody is fighting for you. That was how God's people felt in the book of Nahum.

It may be surprising for you to learn that God feels pain when you are hurt. Despite his majestic sovereignty, not a single sparrow can fall from the sky without him knowing. Yet he says, you are worth far more than many sparrows. If God remembers even a sparrow, how can he forget you? He takes an interest in what is going on in your day-to-day life. He knows all your sadness and heartaches, including the ones you cry to sleep with, or the ones you're too ashamed to disclose or share. He doesn't condemn you for them. He simply cares. What more, he vows to take action to bring liberation to those pains. When you suffer, remember that you are not alone. God is on your side, and he is for you, not against you.

In Nahum, God is described as a jealous and avenging God. Those are pretty strong descriptions. What comes to your mind when you read them? Do you imagine a God who is somewhat bitter and revengeful? Do you struggle to understand how a loving and forgiving God can simultaneously be so angry? God's jealousy is not like human envy. Rather, it is a good and zealous passion that is borne out of concern for you - the subject of his love. With it, he protects you from harm and becomes your avenger by restraining evil and punishing the wicked. Like in a marriage, a husband will not stand idle when someone threatens his wife. God's jealousy is a good thing.

Even so, God is slow to anger and abounding in love. He desires that none perish, but that even the wicked repent and turn back to him. It doesn't delight him to execute

judgment on evildoers, but neither will he stand by and do nothing if his loved ones are threatened. Love is not just a feeling; it must result in action.

Nineveh's graphic savagery may be less popular in modern times, but when it comes to the subject of oppression, the choice of tools remains plenty. If you have ever been a victim of abuse, exploitation, injustice, or mistreatment, know that God has not forgotten any of it. He remembers all your sufferings and in due time, will call into account all misconducts. Resist taking matters into your own hands, but leave it to his righteous wrath. Instead, seek to bear the good news of the gospel, like the feet of those who proclaimed peace on the mountains.

Ponder

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne; love and faithfulness go before him. You need look no further than the cross of Jesus to see how both wrath and mercy came together, and yet it resulted in nothing less than good for you.

Promise

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He will bring final justice to all your unfinished business.

Prayer

Lord, grant me trust in your judgments and hope for all things.



Article by Ms Lee Sue Yee, a member of the Diocesan Ordination & Evangelistic Workers' Committee. She gives regular talks for schools, young adults and family ministries. She worships at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang.

Day 24 – Nahum 2:1 – 3:19

WOE TO THE BLOODY CITY

Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!

All who hear the news about you clap their hands at your fall,
for who has not felt your endless cruelty?
(Nahum 3:1, 19b)

Think New York, Shanghai, London, or Tokyo. Then imagine ancient Nineveh, a city symbolized by lions, that once ruled the powerful Assyrian empire. The people who lived there were exceedingly rich, powerfully influential, and full of hubris. However, Nahum described how their excessive living ultimately resulted in their moral degeneration and impending judgment.

Do you often feel like life is all about getting ahead and accumulating treasures? Are all your thoughts, desires, motives, and choices directed towards these goals? Do you strive to become self-sufficient because you believe there is no one else to provide for you? Or perhaps you battle with a syndrome called F.O.M.O. (“the Fear Of Missing Out”)? Seeing others ahead in the social status pyramid makes you want to catch up and join them there.

If this is the case, don’t be discouraged. Listen to what your Lord has to say. Firstly, he assures you that he will provide for all your needs. You will lack nothing. Secondly, he wants to bless you, but his blessing is not in the form of earthly prizes, power, or positions. While these things are very nice, they will expire and carry zero eternal value. Instead, he wants to give you the greatest treasure you can ever have for all eternity. The treasure he speaks of is himself. In him is life, and life in abundance. This is what he offers you in exchange for the self-striving rut you’re stuck in. Lastly, he has two pieces of advice for you. One, if you store up your treasures in heaven, they will be secure and preserved. And two, if greatness is what you desire, then you must become a servant of all.

Nahum described how the nations rejoiced upon hearing about the indictment of Nineveh, the city of blood. This is because like any survivors of heinous crimes, the first step towards healing often begins with validation, which is the proper acknowledgement of the crime committed and its impact on the wounded. It cannot be

underestimated how important it is for victims to be taken seriously and for their cries to be heard. Anytime wrongdoings are dismissed or downplayed, victims endure what is known as the second assault. Here, God brings vindication to the sufferers by exposing Nineveh's crimes and wickedness for what they are before pronouncing his fair punishment. God shows that the wheel of justice may grind slowly but surely.

Likewise, we have a duty to expose and speak up against injustices wherever they occur, especially within the church. For example, we must not be unwilling participants in whitewashing sins or aggravating suffering towards fellow believers. This is because God intends the church to be a safe and loving community who protects one another while welcoming the world in. Think about how you can better respond to the issue of justice within your local church? Reading Nahum's depiction of retribution while reflecting our own shortcomings on justice ought to be sobering because we know that when the time comes, judgment will begin with those in the house of God.

Ponder

When reading Nahum, we may identify ourselves with the Israelites. But at times, we may actually be more like the Ninevites. Either way, the path to redemption is found only at the cross of Christ. So run to it.

Promise

When criminals receive the due punishment, we deem it as justice. However, we may feel differently when we realize we are the criminals. But we can thank God because mercy triumphs over judgment.

Prayer

Save me O Lord. Deliver me from all wickedness, including the ones in me.



Article by Ms Lee Sue Yee, a member of the Diocesan Ordination & Evangelistic Workers' Committee. She gives regular talks for schools, young adults and family ministries. She worships at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang.

Day 25 – Habakkuk 1:1-11

WHY DOES EVIL CONTINUE UNABATED?

Look at the nations and watch — and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe, even if you were told.

(Habakkuk 1:5)

I wrote this article a week before GE15 (November 19, 2022). The issues raised during campaigning bears a striking similarity to what the Prophet Habakkuk had to say of his days: widespread corruption, rise of violence and wickedness, misuse of power, neglect of the poor, the physically able challenged the marginalised and deep chasm in the socio-economic sectors.

The key idea in this short book is simply this - is the Lord God still in control over the affairs of the nation of Judah? The society that the Prophet lived in, under the Assyrians, seems to be one that has totally gone out of control. The situation that he saw happening to his nation made him angry with the Lord. The Scripture recorded his outbursts in the form of two complaints. Much to his chagrin the Lord responded to his complaints in ways that is beyond his comprehension.

The Prophet first complaint - how is it that God seems to prosper the wicked people and those who belong to him are made to suffer?

Here are the prophet's complaints (1:2-4):

- I call for help but you do not listen.
- There is violence and you are not doing anything.
- There is injustice all around.
- There are strife and conflicts.
- The law is paralysed and justice never prevails.

Do these issues sound familiar? We pray and yet God did not seem to respond. It is like what Habakkuk says, 'you do not listen ... you do not save' (1:2).

The Lord's answer to Habakkuk is most surprising and shocking to him. The Lord said he was going to do something (1:5) with the injustice. He was going to send the Babylonians to conquer the Assyrians (1:6). God's solution over the wickedness and violence is to send the Babylonians. To the Prophet, this cannot be right. The Babylonians were known for their cruelty. Look at how they are described in Habakkuk 1:6-11. Might is right, because might is their god (1:11). They are just as vicious if not more than the Assyrians. God's solution is totally unexpected. To paraphrase the Prophet, did I hear wrongly?

Ponder

On a personal level, is unanswered prayer true for us? We pray but God's answers come to us in unexpected ways.

There are many similarities between the situation in the days of Habakkuk and that of ours today. How is your response to the Lord God? Is it like that of the Prophet?

Promise

"He (God) rules by his might forever; his eyes keep watch on the nations. Let not the rebellious exalt themselves." (Psalm 66:7)

Prayer

Lord, there are many things I do not understand of the world around us. But I rest that you are the sovereign God who still sits on the Throne and is still in charge of the affairs of the nations. Help me to be patient in waiting for you to act on behalf of the afflicted ones.



Article by the Reverend Tan Meng Poo of Hosanna Anglican Church, Ulu Tiram, Johore. Meng Poo is also Senior Vice President, Our Daily Bread Ministries Asia Pacific. Married to Wah Lian, they have four adult children – Olivia, Benedict, Dominic and Abigail.

Day 26 – Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:20

WHY DOES GOD TOLERATE EVIL?

See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—
but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness.
(Habakkuk 2:4)

The Prophet's second complaint is more direct (1:12-2:1). As a holy God, surely the Lord will not look at the evildoers and wrong doers but instead will punish them. Why did the Lord keep silent while the wicked seem to prevail over the righteous? (1:14-17) The Prophet took a defiant stand, "I will stand at my watch and station myself...I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint" (2:1). It is the same age-old question, why would a good God allow suffering, and injustice and poverty continue unabated? How can God allow evil to continue?

In response to the second complaint, the Lord said that his timing is totally his to determine (2:2). He is not careless. He does not operate on his whims and fancy and though the answer may not come immediately, it will certainly come and will not delay (2:3).

We may experience deep disappointment with God because injustice and corrupt practices still prevail. It affects almost every level of society. It seems what we asked and fought for is taking too long to bear fruit. This deepens our sense of despair. The obstacles and roadblocks in front of us look insurmountable. The good that we, the Church, does seems to be like a drop in the ocean. The ripple effect is miniscule.

In Habakkuk 2:4, the Prophet made this surprising declaration, that the righteous shall live by faith. At this point of time, in his relationship with the Lord God, he realises that there are some things beyond his full comprehension. He does not fully understand what was happening around him. But he accepts that God is still in charge. He needed to walk a journey of trusting in this God.

This seemingly obscure verse has been quoted in the New Testament and is the bedrock of our understanding of the Christian Gospel (Romans 1:16-17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38). The Gospel is the message of Christ's finished work at the Cross. We are being made right through our trusting in Christ for the gift of eternal life.

From the lofty heights of the Gospel, the Lord pronounced judgment. This was through the Prophet's recording of five woes that were pronounced on the Babylonians who were the instruments of God against the Assyrians.

- Woe to the thief – those who steal from others and become wealthy by extortion (2:6).
- Woe to the ones who become rich by unjust gain and unlawful means (2:9).
- Woe to the violent and the criminals – the evil politicians (2:12).
- Woe to the drunkards and sexually immoral (2:15).
- Woe to the idolaters (2:19).

The Lord shows that he is not silent even though it seems he is silent. He is still at work.

Ponder

This faith that Habakkuk has is faith in a God of justice. Habakkuk is right in that God is a holy God. Eventually, he will bring judgment on those who does evil. As Francis Schaeffer said, "He is there and he is not silent."

Promise

"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14)

Prayer

Lord, increase our faith in you.



Article by the Reverend Tan Meng Poo of Hosanna Anglican Church, Ulu Tiram, Johore. Meng Poo is also Senior Vice President, Our Daily Bread Ministries Asia Pacific. Married to Wah Lian, they have four adult children – Olivia, Benedict, Dominic and Abigail.

Day 27 – Habakkuk 3: 1-19

A PRAYER OF HOPE AND TRUST IN THE LORD GOD

The Sovereign Lord is my strength.
(Habakkuk 3:19)

After the two complaints, Habakkuk now learns to pray. He begins with worship; “Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy.” (3:2)

He marvelled at the Lord’s deeds, splendour, might, power over nature and divine wrath (3:2-11). The Lord is the deliverer (3:13); he who has power over nature and all that has breath.

Habakkuk came to a deep understanding that the Lord God is totally in control. Hence, he is weakened in that knowledge. There is somehow a sinking feeling within him, ‘my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled’ (3:16). This is the God whom he is accountable and praying to.

He now knows he must wait patiently for the outcome of what was revealed to him, that is, Babylon would one day be destroyed. The instrument, in this case, Babylon used by the Lord to fulfil his purposes will not escape divine judgment if that instrument runs rogue and conduct itself in evil ways. The conqueror will itself be vanquished.

The Scripture showed the Prophet’s rantings, his disbelief at the vision of things to come. It is all right to have doubts about the Christian faith. Nothing will be so earthshaking as to go to the root of our belief. The core of our Gospel remains intact – Christ incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and ascended. We need to turn our doubts to the God who hears the cries of our hearts and who will act to fulfil his plans and purposes.

When there is famine – no food, no sheep, no cattle (3:17) - in other words, when there is no hope, the Prophet could still say, ‘yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour’ (3:18).

Here is a summary of the book:

- Habakkuk's 1st complaint: Why does the righteous suffer in the midst of violence, oppression and injustice? The Lord's answer: He is sending the Babylonians to overthrow the Assyrians (1:5-11).
- Habakkuk's 2nd complaint: Why does God tolerate wickedness? The Lord's answer: I will deal with the wicked in my own timing (2:2-3).
- Habakkuk learnt the importance of watching. Watching also carries with it the meaning of praying (cf. Luke 21: 34-36; Mark 14:37-38).
- Habakkuk also learnt that the righteous shall live by faith (2:4).
- The Lord is Sovereign. He is in control despite the dark situation that Judah experienced. In the end, Habakkuk could praise the Lord (3:17-19).

Ponder

The Prophet was allowed to express doubts, anger, and even disappointment. The vision given to him, the Lord sending the Babylonians as the solution to rid of the Assyrians, was not anticipated. Is there something that is happening right now to the nation and to you, that you cannot see the hand of the Lord in it?

Promise

“The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.” (Habakkuk 3:19)

Prayer

Lord, please place a song in my heart in difficult times, “yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be joyful in God my Saviour.” (Habakkuk 3:18)



Article by the Reverend Tan Meng Poo of Hosanna Anglican Church, Ulu Tiram, Johore. Meng Poo is Senior also Vice President, Our Daily Bread Ministries Asia Pacific. Married to Wah Lian, they have four adult children – Olivia, Benedict, Dominic and Abigail.

Day 28 – Zephaniah 2:3; 3:15

SEEK THE LORD

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands.
Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered
on the day of the Lord's anger.
(Zephaniah 2:3)

As a child my favourite game was 'hide and seek'. Perhaps you played it when younger or play it now with children or grandchildren. In our verse today, the word 'seek' is used three times. Why is that?

The prophet Zephaniah, a contemporary of Jeremiah, was writing in Jerusalem during the reign of King Josiah from 640 BC. Zephaniah's prophecy essentially falls into two parts, the first a warning about the day of wrath to come, the second about the day of hope. Although King Josiah instituted reforms after the evil reigns of his predecessors, Manasseh and Amon, the people still worshipped the false gods Baal, Molech, and the starry hosts. Even the priests mixed pagan practices with faith in God.

With the fading power of Assyria, the people were also increasingly confident and prosperous and easily became indifferent about God. They placed their confidence in themselves rather than the Lord. Within this context, Zephaniah warns of the punishment to come because of their lack of repentance, the day of judgement. In the shorter-term this would take the form of invasion by the Babylonians, but his prophecy also refers to that final day when all of us, including you and me, will stand before God for judgement upon the return of Jesus.

But within these stark warnings, God offers a glimmer of hope within the prophecy of Zephaniah. Zephaniah 2:3 commands those 'who do what he commands' (those who obey God) to "Seek righteousness, seek humility" to be "sheltered" on the day of judgement. Obedient, righteous, humble – how can we be like this? The answer lies in Zephaniah's other command to "Seek the Lord". Jesus is described in Philippians 2:8 as the one who 'humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!' Jesus is the righteous one, the righteousness of God, and because of his death

on the cross, we too are now righteous in God's sight, and in him we find the model of humility and obedience.

This is why Zephaniah's glimmer of hope becomes a full ray of hope when later he proclaims, "The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy" (3:15). The wages of sin is death, and death is our greatest enemy. Through his death and resurrection, the Easter story reassures us that Jesus has defeated death. Therefore, on that last day when he returns, we too shall be resurrected and stand before God righteous in Christ. For those who have turned to Jesus in faith, the day of judgement will be the day of hope. Eternal life awaits in Christ Jesus, 'never again will you fear any harm' (3:15).

Ponder

What has distracted you from seeking Christ, and how might you turn to him again in the full knowledge that your eternal destiny is secure in him?

Promise

Seek the Lord Jesus to be sheltered from judgement and to never fear the future again.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you sent your Son, Jesus, to die for me and rise from the dead that first Easter. I am sorry for the ways in which I have sinned and been distracted. I turn from them now and accept your forgiveness. Please send your Holy Spirit to come and be with me forever and to banish all fear from my heart. Thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Miles Toulmin, Vicar of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang and Executive Director of Alpha Asia Pacific.

Day 29 – Zephaniah 3:8,17

JUSTICE VERSES LOVE

He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.
(Zephaniah 3:17)

The book of Zephaniah is a book of contrasts. On the one hand, it is about God's great justice, his fiery power against human evil, idolatry and corruption. In Zephaniah 3:8, the prophet speaks of his impending judgment on his people: "I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them — all my fierce anger."

On the other hand, this book describes the love of God in the most astounding way. In Zephaniah 3:17, we read about the God who sings lovingly over us: "He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

This contrast is so vast – even disorienting -- that believers have for centuries wrestled with the polarity of God's justice and love. Could this be the same Person? Early heretics in the church even claimed that the God of the Old Testament was an entirely different Being from the God of the New Testament, struggling to reconcile this stark contrast.

But love can only be as great as the justice that corrects anything that opposes love. As Martin Luther King Jr said, "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."

At the cross, we see how infinite power, love, and justice meet. In Jesus' sacrifice for us, God's justice was fully satisfied and his love fully demonstrated.

So great is our sin that God himself had to die for us. But so great is his love that God himself chose to die for us.

This is the God who loves us fiercely and who implements the justice required to fulfil his love for his people. He is not a domesticated deity of our making and comforts, but

the God of all creation, supreme and sovereign. And yet, he knows us by name. He loves us.

That the God who sees it all, knows it all, to whom all power belongs and in whom there is perfect justice... loves you – this is nothing short of breath-taking. Knowing this love will change your life, renew your mind, and capture your imagination. Receiving this love will sustain you in your darkest hours and compel you forward in times of trouble and anxiety.

For his promise, fulfilled in Christ, is that “The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves.” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Ponder

Drew Dyck writes, “We can’t truly appreciate God’s grace until we glimpse his greatness. We won’t be lifted by his love until we’re humbled by his holiness”. Take a moment today to ponder his great otherness – his holiness and righteousness. Then, give thanks for his great love that met the demands of his righteousness.

Promise

“The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves.” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for your great love for us, that you gave your Son Jesus Christ to live among us, to suffer with us and to die for us. We receive your love today and are so thankful that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)



Article by the Reverend Abel Cheah, the Associate Vicar of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang. Abel is married to Deaconess Jacintha Tagal and they have a young son, Levi.

Day 30 – Haggai 1

BUILD MY HOUSE

Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses,
while this house remains a ruin?"
(Haggai 1:4)

Way back when God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt, God made a covenant with them through Moses. He had rescued them and would bring them to the Promised Land. If they obeyed him, he would bless their land with an abundance of material blessings. If they disobeyed him, they would come under his curse and eventually be exiled from the land (Deuteronomy 28). Israel did disobey God, and were exiled from the land as a result.

The prophet Haggai was sent to the people of Israel, many of them had long returned from the Babylonian exile. They had started re-building the temple 18 years before, but this was stopped due to political opposition. Things has now changed but the returnees never restarted building the Temple of God; always making the excuse that it was not yet the right time (1:2). Actually, they were prioritizing their own securities, comforts, and building their own panelled houses (1:4,9). Therefore, they were not seeing God's blessing. The curses of Deuteronomy still applied to them, and we see what this looks like in Chapter 1 verses 6, 9, 10 and 11.

We are not under the Old Covenant, so our blessings and curses look different. In fact, we have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ. But we are still commanded by God to build his house! But what does this look like for us?

In the New Testament, Jesus himself is the true temple, the place where we meet God. We have no part in building that temple. But in a secondary sense, we as God's people together are his temple (Ephesians 2:19-22). This temple, build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets is growing, as more and more people come to trust in Jesus. This big universal temple, is also expressed in the local church – the people not the building (1 Corinthians 3:16). This is built by Jesus, through the work of his servants. We are to play our part in this by speaking the truth of God's word in relationships of love.

When God's people heard his word through Haggai, they feared him and obeyed (1:12). God promised his presence with them as they went about doing his work (1:13). And he stirred their spirits for the task (1:14).

In the New Covenant, we are motivated by the grace God has shown us at the Cross. But we still maintain a healthy fear, knowing that we will give an account one day to Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Jesus has promised to be with us as we do his work of making disciples (Matthew 29:19-20). And his Spirit stirs us on the inside to move forward with building his house.

Ponder

It is no secret that temptation to build and secure our own panelled houses still very much exists. What is it that keeps you from playing your part in building God's house?

Promise

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 29:19-20)

Prayer

Father, forgive us for our tendencies to be busy with building and storing up in this world our own treasures that will only last temporarily. Help us to have a right view of seeing you as our ultimate Provider who gives and takes away our earthly possessions. Stir our hearts through your Spirit to prioritize building your eternal temple, where you will dwell with us forever. Amen.



Article by the Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral and Miss Danielle Cheng, a full-time theological student in the Equip-MBS program. Danielle serves on the ministry team at the Cathedral.

Day 31 – Haggai 2:1-9

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

But now be strong ... Be strong ... Be strong, all you people of the land ... and work.
For I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty.
(Haggai 2:4)

A few months after the work of building God's temple resumed, God speaks again through the prophet Haggai. And he deals with the disappointment of God's people that the temple they were building seemed far less glorious than the previous one (1:3).

God encourages them to be strong. They need not fear, but should press on in the work because he was with them by his Spirit (1:4-5), as he promised to be. He also promised to 'shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land' and 'all nations', and would fill the house with much greater glory than the one before, and in it, he would give peace (1:9).

How would God fulfil his promise? The cloud of God's glory had filled the previous temple when Solomon dedicated it, just like it filled the tabernacle in Moses' time. But the cloud never appeared in this temple. What did come to the temple many years later, was a baby. For an old man with eyes to see, this baby was God's salvation – the light of revelation to the Gentile and for glory to God's people Israel (read Luke 1:25-32). God would one day come to this temple in the flesh. And that would indeed be the real glory of this temple.

This Jesus, would be God's true temple – the one to whom all previous temple were actually pointing. But like Haggai's temple, he didn't look glorious - he looked weak and unimpressive. But when he died on the cross, he bore the wrath of God for the sins of the world – that was a bigger 'shaking' that has ever been seen. God raised him from the dead as the permanent, glorious temple (John 2:19-22). The treasures of the nations – Gentiles like us – are coming to him. His glory exceeds the glory of any of the past temples. And in him we have peace.

In the meantime, we are involved in building the temple that consists of all God's people, and is expressed in the local church (see yesterday's devotion). Don't be discouraged when you see the weakness and seeming insignificance of the work that

we do. Don't be discouraged when you see all the problems we face in our churches. Don't be disheartened when ministry is hard and not glorious. Be strong, keep working, and do not give up.

For one day there will be another 'shaking' when Jesus comes for the final judgement (Hebrews 12:26). And God will take the temple we are building now and fill it with his glory. All our effort which he has strengthened us to exert will be worthwhile. And we will dwell with him there in peace forever.

Ponder

All the promises of God find their 'Yes' in Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:20)

Promise

"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing to us that Jesus is the true and glorious temple that came to bring peace to all those who believe and put their trust in him. As your people, we understand that we are being built up to be a part of this temple. Please encourage our hearts and hands to participate in this work, for it can often feel hard and toilsome. May we take heed of your coming judgement, and know that our labour to build your kingdom is not in vain.



Article by the Very Rev Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral and Miss Danielle Cheng, a full-time theological student in the Equip-MBS program. Danielle serves on the ministry team at the Cathedral.

Day 32 – Zechariah 1:1-6

RETURN FROM YOUR EVIL WAYS

Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to me, declares the Lord.
(Zechariah 1:4)

For the next 4 days, we will be looking at selected passages from the prophecy of Zechariah. Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet – he wrote at a time after the exile had happened and some of the Israelites had returned home from Babylon.

In this opening passage, God warns his people through Zechariah not to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors who provoked his wrath. God had sent prophets to them urging them, 'Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds' (1:4). Notice that returning *to* God, would mean returning *from* sin. That was what the prophets of their time called them to. But they did not repent until God had punished them with the destruction of Jerusalem and sent them into exile. And so, Zechariah calls the people of his day to repentance, and warns them not to be like their forebears.

We, in our time, must not take the warnings of God for granted. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that 'Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ...' (Hebrews 1:1). Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father; he has atoned for our sins and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And so, to ignore him is even more serious.

Ponder

Is God calling you to return to him? Is there sin in your life that you are harbouring? Is there an area where you are being disobedient? Is there something or someone that you prize more than you prize him, and so has become an idol in your heart?

Jesus has died so that you can be forgiven. But you cannot, like the Israelites of old, persist in disobedience. Return to God, *from* sin. Do not take the warnings of God lightly. ‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation’ (Hebrews 2:3)?

Promise

“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are repentant, according to your promises declared to mankind, in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy name. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)



Article by the Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 33 – Zechariah 3:1-10

SINS REMOVED

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.” (Zechariah 3:3-4)

In this vision, Zechariah sees Joshua the High Priest standing before God. Satan, which means ‘the Accuser’, is accusing him before God the judge (1:1). But instead of punishing Joshua, God rebukes his accuser because it was God’s plan to save him (1:2). Joshua’s dirty clothes (‘garments with excrement’) are removed, symbolising the removal of his sin, and he is given a clean priestly outfit (1:4-5). And God promises that he will lead his people if he walks in obedience to him (1:6-7).

God explains the meaning of the vision. Joshua (now cleansed from sin) and his fellow priests point forward to One who is to come, God’s servant, called ‘the Branch’ (1:8 – see also Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). Jesus would be God’s sinless High Priest who would always walk in obedience to the Father and lead God’s people forever.

In this symbolic vision, God then sets a stone before Joshua (often used in the Old Testament for a permanent reminder). The stone has seven eyes which means, it is all seeing, and an inscription is made on it which is linked to God’s promise ‘I will remove the sin of this land in a single day’. In other words, God is making a firm guarantee that he will deal with the sins of his people, like he dealt with Joshua’s sin in the vision. Sitting under one’s vine and fig tree (3:10) is an Old Testament picture of blessing (1 Kings 4:25, Micah 4:4.) So, when God removes the sin of his people, they will live together under his blessing which they will share (1:10).

All this is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sin and remove it in a single day. We, as God’s people, have now received every spiritual blessing in him and we are his people together. And we look forward to New Creation where we will share his blessings together forever.

In the meantime, the Accuser can no longer accuse us in the Courtroom of Heaven. We have an Advocate, one who speaks for us, who himself has taken the punishment for our sins. He is our Great High Priest who ever lives to intercede for us. And he leads and rules us, as God's people, forever.

Ponder

Ponder Zechariah's vision portraying graphically how we receive God's mercy: "We do nothing ourselves, God removes our filthy clothes (sins), then provides us with new, clean, rich garments (the righteousness and holiness of God – 2 Corinthians 5:21). All we need to do is to repent and ask God to forgive us. When Satan tries to make you feel dirty and unworthy, remember that the clean clothes of Christ's righteousness make you worthy to draw near to God." (Life Application Study Bible, page 1914.)

Promise

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2)

Prayer

Thank you Father for Jesus our sinless High Priest, and that you always keep your promises in him. Thank you that he made the once and for all sacrifice for our sins. Thank you for the cleansing we have through him. Thank you that he rules us now and will bring us to the place where we will share your eternal blessing. Amen!



Article by the Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 34 – Zechariah 7:1-14

WHAT GOD REALLY WANTS US TO DO

Was it really for me that you fasted?
(Zechariah 7:5b)

This vision comes 2 years later than the one we looked at yesterday. And it comes in response to a question raised by some of God's people as to whether or not to continue to fast and weep in a particular month as they had traditionally done (7:2-3).

God's response is sharp. When they had fasted, they were not really doing it for him. Likewise, when they ate and drank, they were also doing it for themselves (7:4-6). God had already told them what he really wanted them to do through the prophets before the exile (7:7). But Israel wouldn't listen (7:11), thus provoking his anger – leading to his punishment in the exile (7:12-13).

So, what was it that God really wanted them to do? Verses 9-10: "Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."

How we treat others is really important to God. Jesus criticised the Pharisees in first century Israel for disregarding this. They were meticulous in keeping the rules but neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

As God's people today, we need to remember that God still takes these things very seriously. Whether or not we observe Lent by fasting, what is really important is how we treat other people. It is not something that we can ignore.

Let us be very careful then, to act in ways that are just, whenever we are put in positions of responsibility whether it be at home, in church or in the workplace. Let us be very careful not to oppress those who are in a socially or economically disadvantaged situation compared to our own but instead be proactive in showing kindness to them. Let us do good to foreign workers, to refugees, and never take advantage of them in an evil way. Let us be mindful of those who are suffering from mental illness or physical disability. Let us be loving and merciful to one another, giving

each other the benefit of the doubt in our interactions. Let us refrain from slander but always be ready to forgive. And let us never be people who plot evil against others.

God is just, God is loving, God is kind. He has shown us his character in the person of his Son who died for us and rose again. And he calls us to put on the character of Christ. Therefore, “whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.” (Colossians 3:17)

Ponder

Are there ways in which I treat other people of which I need to repent?

Promise

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the Lord Almighty, “so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the Lord.” (Zechariah 8:14-17)

Prayer

Almighty God, you show to all men that are in error the light of your truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness—grant to all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)



Article by the Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 35 – Zechariah 12:1 - 13:1

THE ONE THEY PIERCED

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him.
(Zechariah 12:10b)

Much Old Testament prophets is in picture language - using images of the past to describe the future. In this prophecy, Zechariah uses various metaphors to picture the nations of the world attacking Jerusalem. But Jerusalem would be defended by the strength of God and ultimately glorified while the nations who attack them will be destroyed (12:1-9).

However, this does not, at least initially lead to rejoicing. God would give his people 'a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy' so that they would mourn for 'the one they have pierced' – whom God also identifies with himself - 'me' (12:10). The mourning will be great and widespread (12:11-14). But "on that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity" (13:1).

Like Jerusalem in the picture, Jesus was attacked by unbelievers. Although he was put to death, he was ultimately saved (in his resurrection), so that he, and all his people in him, will be glorified.

John 19:37 also identifies Jesus as 'the one whom they have pierced.' Those who put him to death would mourn for their sin of rejecting him when the Spirit comes to bring them to repentance. But one day, 'every tribe on earth will mourn when they see the pierced one' coming in the clouds (Revelation 1:7) to bring judgement upon them.

By his death, Jesus opened the fountain to cleanse us from sin and uncleanness. He died to take the punishment for our sins in our place, so that he could cleanse us from our sins. He is the fountain that sinners like us can come to and have all our sins washed away.

In Zechariah's picture language, that fountain is 'for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem' (12:10b). If we put our trust in Christ, we are united with him spiritually – we are in him - and we are part of the true Jerusalem. So, the fountain is for our cleansing. Like the Jerusalem in verses 1-9, the nations will oppose and attack us as God's people. But the day will come when God will save us and bring us to glory.

Ponder

There is a fountain filled with blood
drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
and sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains. (William Cowper)

Promise

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.”
(Zechariah 13:1)

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for giving your Son to be the one pierced for my transgressions.
Thank you that through his death you washed all my sins away.
Thank you that I can now stand before you forgiven and clean.
Please help me to keep trusting in Jesus, even when under pressure.
And to look forward to the day when you will bring all your people to glory in him.
I ask this in his name. Amen.



Article by the Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah, Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.

Day 36 – Malachi 1

THE LORD'S NAME PROFANED

Now plead with God to be gracious to us.
(Malachi 1:9)

The message of Malachi was directed to the people of God who lived in a period when their exiled brethren had long returned to Jerusalem. Many years passed but the anticipated “glory days” of Israel had not come to pass. Some of “Israel” were left wondering if God had forgotten his covenant promises to them (1:2b).

In Malachi 1, the Lord affirms his covenant love to the remnant of Israel in Judah. He did not forget his promises. The people of God, however, were in a spiritual malaise. The rebuilding of the temple and the city walls, and the reading of God’s laws in Ezra-Nehemiah did not result in true repentance from God’s people. In Malachi 1, the Lord specifically confronts the priests of Israel for enabling compromise and irreverence of worship through blemished animal offerings to him, something they would not dare to offer even the Persian governor of the day (1:6-8)!

It is a sad state highlighted by irreverent ‘retorts’ of God’s own people to his prophetic messages. We get a sense of this when they say:

- “How have you loved us?” (1:2)
- “How have we despised your name?” (1:6)
- “How have we polluted you?”... ‘What a weariness this is’. (1:7, 12-13)

Israel is still in the spiritual wilderness due to their irreverence and doubt. They have not learnt from the exile. They even have the audacity to question God’s faithfulness for not bringing the abundance promised. Despite Israel’s waywardness, God nevertheless sets out the eschatological trajectory of his glory in that all nations will one day revere him (1:11, 14b).

The message is clear: God will *not* compromise his glory. He will *not* accept half-hearted offerings and he will *not* grant favour to a community lacking in reverence for his name (1:9-10).

Judgment will continue for Israel due to their sin of profaning his holy name (1:11-12). Yet God's plans for Israel's redemption and the nations will gloriously come to pass in the fullness of time through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ponder

Do we honour and fear the Lord in our worship (1:6)? Are our liturgical / ritual offerings undergirded by a heart of faith, a posture of reverence, and a spirit of excellence?

How does our worship bear witness to our neighbours? Does the "quality" of our worship bring honour to the name of the Lord or does it cast doubt due to our half-hearted expressions, thereby profaning his holy name? The Lord (and our neighbours) can see for themselves whether we are more passionate about honouring our God or the 'governors' of the world!

Promise

We may sometimes feel like God is slow or isn't fulfilling his promises to us, his people. Let the Holy Spirit remind us that in Christ, according to his holy Word, we are the beloved children of God the faithful Father.

Prayer

Holy and Righteous Father, help us to give of our best to you! With Jesus, your Son, our Lord as the perfect example, enable us through your Holy Spirit to be joyfully obedient in his way, giving you our loyal devotion and the best that we have, for the honour and glory of your name. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Paul Lau, a Non-Stipendiary Minister (Priest) in the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia. He serves the Malaysian Church at large across denominations and ministry institutions.

Day 37 – Malachi 2

THE COVENANTS PROFANED

For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge,
because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty
and people seek instruction from his mouth.
(Malachi 2:7)

Matthew Henry, the 18th century pastor and bible commentator once wrote, “Nothing profanes the name of God more than the misconduct of those whose business it is to do honour to it.” In Malachi 2, the Lord addresses two specific covenants that are being broken by God’s people. Generally (in the Bible), a covenant alludes to the nature of a relationship with the Lord and his people. It expresses elements of promises and expectations.

The first covenant concerns the appointed priests (2:1-9). Continuing from the first chapter, God now threatens to remove them from their holy office. These priests were aligned to the vocation of the tribe of Levi with whom God instituted a covenant since the time of Moses and Aaron. Their display of irreverence and presumptuousness perverted the nation-nurturing and God-honouring vocation of priesthood. However, it is not only the priests who are at fault.

The second part of Malachi 2 addresses another covenant that is being profaned by the larger community of Israel. This pertains to both fidelity to God and within the institution of marriage (2:10-17). Malachi exposes and rebukes the abominable acts of Judah’s men in going after “the daughter of a foreign god.” Their infidelity is two-fold in that they end up betraying both the Lord and their divorced wives.

Again (as seen in Malachi 1), it is recorded for us here that these unfaithful of Judah have the cheek to groan and ask why God does not accept their offering and bless them. The answer is clear: they have broken the covenant of marriage instituted by the Lord through their unfaithfulness (2:13-14). Offspring that was meant to be produced for faithful worship to the Lord has now been compromised by pagan worship as well (2:15). Biblical marriage is not just between a consenting man and woman; it is a covenant with God at the indispensable centre for the nurturing of the next generation in his kingdom.

At the end of Malachi 2, we read of the utterly depraved state of God's people to the extent that the Lord is "wearied" by their unrepentance, ignorance, and irreverence (2:17).

Ponder

Are we as God's elected children in Christ committed to our faith covenant? We like to hear of God's "unconditional love" but how often are we disciplined in the way of "unconditional obedience" responding to God's redeeming love?

We are called holy, set apart, and set free from sin to be a nation of priests for the Lord (1 Peter 2:9). Only the Holy Spirit can nurture us in "unconditional obedience" to the new covenant we have in Jesus Christ. Let us *yield*.

Promise

We are reminded in Hebrews 12 that the Lord disciplines his children whom he loves for their good towards his holiness, eventually yielding the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:1-11). The Lord's discipline is *worth it!*

Prayer

"Help me the slow of heart to move, by some clear, winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay, and guide them in the homeward way.

In hope that sends a shining ray, far down the future's broad'ning way,
In peace that only thou canst give, with thee, O Master, let me live." *Amen*.

(Hymn: O Master, let me walk with Thee. Author: Washington Gladden.1879)



Article by the Reverend Paul Lau, a Non-Stipendiary Minister (Priest) in the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia. He serves the Malaysian Church at large across denominations and ministry institutions.

Day 38 – Malachi 3

THE UNCHANGING LORD

I the Lord do not change.
(Malachi 3:6)

In today's Bible reflection, we read of God's resolve to address the shambolic state of the children of Jacob. He declares to Israel the impending day of his coming. It will be a day of purification and judgment (3:1-5). This resolve is characteristic of God's unchanging nature.

What does it mean when Scripture describes God as "unchanging?" In Malachi 3:6, it is written, "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." Within the overall context of Malachi, it pertains specifically to:

- The Lord's overarching righteousness (1:5,11,14; 2:6; 3:2-12).
- The Lord's unfailing love and faithfulness (1:2 cf. 2:14-16).
- This is also reflected in the emphasis on "covenant-keeping" (2:4,5; 3:1).

God always keeps his promises despite the unfaithfulness of Israel. In Malachi 3, we read of God's commitment to cleanse those who are bound to him from their abominable acts and unrighteousness. Significantly, this shows that God metes out judgment with redemptive intent. His love is seen through his judgment in that the people of Israel would thereby go through a process of purification (3:3-4).

Therefore, judgment is not ultimately meant for his people's annihilation. Instead, it is to produce repentance intertwined with regeneration towards an experience of blessedness for the Lord's glory (3:11-12). The coming day of the Lord will bring about this dawn. It is a culmination of God's unchanging nature. He never gives up on his elect. The people of God are unfaithful. The Lord remains faithful and he will redeem and transform them.

Malachi 3 ends with a brief narrative of how "those who feared the Lord" will experience God's favour as his possession on the day of judgment. On that day, they will witness '...the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not' (3:18).

In the Gospels, we see the realization of God's plans in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to bring about redeeming judgment for Israel and the world. By repentance and faith in Jesus, we experience this redemption and transformation as God's beloved. Praise God for his righteousness, unfailing love and faithfulness towards his people. Thank God that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Ponder

As Christians, we now have the blessings of God's purifying power in our lives through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This is not simply a statement of belief. This is a powerful and eternal reality for all of God's repentant people today.

Because God is unchanging, we now experience this blessed state. Nevertheless, his unchanging nature drives us to be "changed" daily into the likeness of his Son, increasing in righteousness and love for the Lord and our neighbours.

Promise

Be assured of God's promise as found in Jeremiah 31:3b, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you."

Prayer

"You remain our loving Father, and your mercies last forever.
You remain. You remain. You remain.
Through the Son, you brought us freedom.
Washed us clean as white as snow.
We are saved. We are changed. We'll remain forever yours. Amen."

Title: "You Remain" by reSURrEct 14:6.

Composer: Rev Paul Lau. 2014. <https://youtu.be/nP2nM4RGFEg>



Article by the Reverend Paul Lau, a Non-Stipendiary Minister (Priest) in the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia. He serves the Malaysian Church at large across denominations and ministry institutions.

Day 39 – Malachi 4

THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING

See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you
before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.
(Malachi 4:5)

How would you react to news of God coming to judge your nation? Would you cower in fear and dread? Or would you run out with joy and singing, welcoming the righteous Lord of hosts like one who basks in the morning sun of spring after a season of gloom and cold?

The final chapter of Malachi begins with a pronouncement of the impending day of Lord. Post-exilic Israel had questioned God's covenant faithfulness. They had doubted his love for them. They became cynical about his commitment to uphold righteousness amid injustice and oppression caused by their own collective unrighteousness. Their grouses against the Lord were typical of an irreverent and self-seeking community.

As mentioned earlier in Malachi 3, the judgement of the Lord on Israel was with the intent of purification and repentance. It was in keeping with the unchanging righteousness and love of the covenant-keeping God. Malachi now points the reader towards the culmination of his will. The wicked will face the chastening fire of God's judgment. However, those who are God-fearing, who remain steadfast in his covenant love will emerge with joy!

Israel is called to be faithful to God's covenant laws given through Moses. God then pronounces the coming of his forerunner prophet, an "Elijah" who would call Israel to repentance in anticipation of God's appearance to judge and save in righteousness. The Gospel writers clearly understood this as a prophecy fulfilled in the 'repentance-ministry' of John the Baptist who prepared the people to behold the day of the Lord (Luke 1:17); leading to the advent of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)!

Ponder

In the New Testament, that day of the Lord dawned on humankind almost two thousand years ago. Jesus' coming ushered in the age of God's salvation for Israel

and the world. He was the light of salvation that triumphed over the power of sin and darkness: injustice, oppression, godlessness, unfaithfulness, etc. (John 1:1-18).

Today, we look forward to the culmination of this inaugurated age of salvation: the return of the Lord who will come as the righteous Judge to obliterate evil and make all things new (Revelation 21:1-8).

“A day is coming, it is surely coming where the groans of creation cease.
A day is coming, it is surely coming where a new world will live in peace.
A time is coming, it is surely coming where martyrs rise with a mighty voice.
A time is coming, it is surely coming – Emmanuel!”

Title: “The Way, The Truth, The Life” by reSURrEct 14:6.
Composer: Rev Paul Lau. 2014. <<https://youtu.be/Flg-37fJKEc>>

Promise

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:6-8)

Prayer

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Thou art the potter, I am the clay.
Mould me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway.
Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see Christ only, always, living in me!
(Author: Adelaide Addison Pollard, 1862-1934)



Article by the Reverend Paul Lau, a Non-Stipendiary Minister (Priest) in the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia. He serves the Malaysian Church at large across denominations and ministry institutions.

WHO IS JESUS?

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!
(Mark 11:9b-10)

If you had one week left to live, what would you do? Palm Sunday was the first day of the last week of Jesus' life and in this passage and the scripture following it we see how Jesus lived his last week: in light of his impending death on the cross – but equally, in light of his resurrection on Easter Sunday. In the passage today, we see how Jesus entered Jerusalem and began the journey towards the cross on Good Friday: on a donkey, amidst a crowd that spread their cloaks, while waving palm branches, and crying “Hosanna to the Son of David!”. But these weren't the only things the crowd did. In the Matthew account of the Palm Sunday passage, we are told the whole city of Jerusalem was “stirred” and they asked, almost in a hushed tone, “Who is this?” (Matthew 21:10).

Today, you may have family members and loved ones who are asking that question: “Who is Jesus?” and you have been praying that Jesus would reveal himself to them. Or perhaps, although you may have been a follower of Jesus for many years, you may be asking: “who is Jesus?” in a doubt that you are wrestling with, or “where is Jesus?” in a challenge you are navigating. What does this passage tell us about who Jesus is?

Firstly, it tells us that Jesus is a humble king. While the kings of the Earth would ride into battle on grand and beautiful horses, Jesus chose to ride into Jerusalem on a humble, baby donkey – a colt. And this is because Jesus was going to fight a different kind of war: one that is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms: against sin and darkness (Ephesians 6:12). It is through his humility that the battle was won. What battles can you bring before the Lord today?

Secondly, it shows us that Jesus is the Messiah who saves. The crowd acknowledged Jesus' saving power by shouting “Hosanna!” which means “Save us now.” The Jews at the time were hoping for a political salvation from the Roman empire, but Jesus was offering a much greater salvation: freedom for all eternity, and access to his kingdom of humility, righteousness, and peace. If you or your loved ones are needing to deal

with a messy situation, you can call on Jesus to save you. He is the Messiah in the mess of our lives.

And thirdly, it reminds us that Jesus is the true Temple of God. It is interesting that the first place that Jesus goes to as he enters Jerusalem is the temple courts. The temple represented where people would go to receive salvation. However, instead of being a “house of prayer”, it had become a “den of robbers”. By going to the temple, Jesus was saying that he was not just going to cleanse the temple, but that he *is* the Temple – it is through him we receive salvation and atonement for our sins.

Ponder

Steve Jobs once said, “If you live each day as if it were your last, someday, you’ll most certainly be right.” If you had one week left to live, what would you do?

Promise

- If Jesus is the king of kings, and heaven is his throne (Isaiah 66:1), scripture reminds us that you are a citizen of heaven. (Philippians 3:20)
- If Jesus is the Messiah who saves, scripture says “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)
- If Jesus is the true temple of God, scripture says that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you. (1 Corinthians 3:16)

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for your finished work on the cross. This Palm Sunday, help me to remember who I am in light of who you are – that I am loved. Holy Spirit, would you help me to live like Jesus did, and to be transformed into his likeness. Amen.



Article by Deaconess Jacintha Cheah. She is part of the pastoral team at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang. Married to the Reverend Abel Cheah, they have a young son, Levi.

MORE IMPORTANT THAN BURNT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES

A fast was proclaimed, and all of them,
from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.
(Jonah 3:5)

You would think that a person who faithfully performs his religious duties (e.g., regular church attendance, tithes, singing in the choir, preaching, evangelizing) is thinking of how best to please God. It's the equivalence of devoted Jews of Old Testament times faithfully offering burnt offerings and sacrifices. Here we are talking about 'burnt' offerings where everything of the offered item is wholly burnt as indicated of complete offering to God (compared to other types of Old Testament offerings where the person also shares part of the offerings as meal). This represents the best we can offer God, doesn't it?

Well, not really. Here, Jesus speaks of the 'greatest' commandment from God - to love him and to love one another as ourselves. Upon hearing this answer from Jesus, the enquiring scribe responded by saying that this commandment is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices. This scribe understood that the 'heart' of performing prescribed religious duties is about loving God and others. It's not that we stop attending and serving in church but that we realize loving God and others is the more important reason why we do religious duties. Jesus responded positively to the scribe's reply by saying that he was 'not far away from the Kingdom of God' (12:34). To experience real spiritual life is always about 'being' than 'performing'.

Interestingly, Jesus combined Leviticus 19:18 (loving others as ourselves) with Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (The Jewish creedal "Shema" which is recited by pious Jews twice a day). The scribe asked for one greatest commandment but Jesus gave him two. It seems that Jesus, the original author of Old Testament laws, wanted to qualify that loving God (with our whole being) will always be followed with loving others as ourselves too (first, then second greatest commandment). The Apostle John, at his old age, wrote profoundly about God's love and that loving God always means loving others also (e.g., 1 John 4: 20).

Ponder

Am I forgetting what matters most to God? Am I feeling great about my faithful performance of religious or spiritual duties but have lost the sense of loving God wholeheartedly? Do I forget about loving and caring for others (neighbours for Jesus also means the despised Samaritans) when I say I love God?

Promise

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4: 19)

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.” (1 John 4: 7a)

Loving God and others strangely become easy once we decide to obey God’s greatest commandment. This, I believe, is because of his grace being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5: 5). Just be willing to obey and exercise love.

Prayer

Father God and Lord Jesus, may I seek to love you with my whole being and to know that all else follow after this. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Dr Richard Loh, former Professor of Medicine in two universities in Malaysia. He worships at St George’s Church, Penang and serves in the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Platform.

THE DOORKEEPER

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.
(Mark 13:33)

Not many know that Mark 13:32-37 is actually a parable scholars referred to as the Parable of the Doorkeeper. It follows right after the Parable of the Budding Fig Tree. In this passage, we are encountering the mysterious way in which Jesus was limited in his full humanity as our Messiah and Saviour yet remained fully God at the same time. We read earlier in verse 31 of how Jesus assumed his complete divinity when he said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away” and yet in the very next line, he also assumes his own complete humanity when he speaks of the limitations of his knowledge in his role as our Messiah. Only Mark records this parable for us and although we don’t know the precise reason, it would seem that his decision to do so was due to the special application of the parable to a special kind of watching as we await our Lord’s return.

This parable is intended to show that Jesus would be going away for a time, after which he would return. It also indicates that there may be a significant delay in our Lord’s return since the master of the house is pictured as going to “a far country.” So, he gives his servants work to do along with the authority to accomplish the work. But the doorkeeper in the parable is given a specific kind of work to do. He is commanded to “watch”. Although the doorkeeper himself is simply another of the master’s servants, he is called upon to fulfil a special role. A doorkeeper had an important role that involved not just watching out for the master’s return but also involved the security of the master’s property and servants. It would seem, then, that the doorkeeper in the parable represents the special role that Jesus’ disciples would have in protecting the Church as each believer goes about the work he or she has been called to do. This special role would later be taken up by the elders in the churches after these disciples had all died.

Such was the role Jesus’ disciples were given. But, as we shall see in Jesus’ application of the parable, he will expand his command to include all believers indicating that we must all take part in this role to some degree. We find Jesus’ application of the parable in verses 35-37. Jesus wanted us to know with certainty that

we cannot know when he will return! It should not lead to apathy but rather to awareness of our responsibility. It should not lead to endless speculation about the future but rather to striving to live as we ought to live as we await his return.

In keeping with the imagery of the parable, Jesus' warning is to watch lest, coming suddenly, he finds us sleeping. Just as the doorkeeper should not fall asleep when he ought to be awake, alert and watchful, even so the disciples should not fail to be watchful when they are expected to be, namely, during the time in which we await our Lord's return. We all have the same obligation not only to watch for Jesus' return but to watch out for our fellow believers. All of us have a role to play in watching out for the welfare of the Church as we await our Lord's return. And this role involves knowing the Word of God, speaking the truth of his Word in love to one another, and being constant in prayer for one another as we look for his return. May God grant us all grace to be faithful both in watching for our Lord's return and in watching out for one another.

Ponder

"Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."
(Psalm 84:10 NIV)

Promise

"And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." (Mark 13:27)

Prayer

Merciful God, may I be a doorkeeper for you as I await your coming again. Amen.



Article by the Rt Rev Dr Jason Selvaraj, the Suffragan Bishop of the Southern Region, Diocese of West Malaysia. +Jason is based at Christ Church, Malacca.

WATCH OUT, BE NOT PRESUMPTUOUS.

He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready.
Make preparations for us there.
(Mark 14:15)

When we do something, often there is always the possibility of it losing its meaning. For an example, how many of us carefully follow the lyrics of the hymns we sing or the content of prayers we say during the Holy Communion services? What about the Lord's Supper?

While reading this passage, the following word 'preparation' caught my attention, "He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make *preparations* for us there" (14:15). During my 1st year in Seminary, we were taken to visit churches of different denominations. Our visit to the Syrian Orthodox Church in Brickfields is still very fresh in my mind. We were told before the service that we cannot participate in Holy Communion. The service was very different from all the other church services we had attended. When the time came for members to participate in the Lord's Supper, only one lady went up. She was in *tears*. After the service, we asked the priest why only one member participated in the Lord's Supper. His answer was simple. Anyone who wants to participate in the Lord's Supper must go for confession the day before (Saturday) as part of their preparation to participate in the Lord's Supper. I was very impressed. The seriousness and importance the Church placed on preparation before the Lord's Supper made a great impact in my own spiritual journey. Forty-two years have passed, yet the incident is very fresh in my mind.

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians writes, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:27,28). In my years of ministry, I have noticed the importance members place in the Lord's Supper. Unfortunately, I have also noticed the '*ching chai*' (careless) attitude of some of the members towards the Lord's Supper. The way one receives the Lord's Supper also reflects the person's attitude towards the death of Jesus. Paul writes, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). In Mark

14.15, Jesus told the disciples to *prepare* the place. In 1 Corinthians 11:28, St. Paul tells us to *prepare* our hearts before receiving communion.

Ponder

Lent is also known as “The Fasting Season.” You may have been fasting, if you have not, I encourage you to make fasting as part of your life. Take time to read the word of God diligently and reflect on what you read and pray seeking the will of God. Ask God to shine his light in every area of your life. Confess your sins like King David did when confronted by Prophet Nathan after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. Be in church before the service starts. Take seriously the General Confession, the Prayer of Humble Access, and in my view, do not participate in the Lord’s Supper if you come to church after the General Confession.

Promise

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

Prayer

We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table; but you are the same Lord whose character is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.



Article by the Venerable Edward John, Archdeacon of the Southern Archdeaconry and Vicar of St Christopher’s Church, Johor Bahru, Johore.

PREPARATIONS

So they prepared the Passover.
(Mark 14:16b)

Today's passage is all about preparation. First, during the day, the disciples asked Jesus where they should go to make preparations for the Passover which would be celebrated that evening. In the second step, Jesus gave them instructions about where to go to make preparations. Thirdly, the disciples went, found things as Jesus had explained, and proceeded to prepare the Passover.

Now evening comes, and Jesus has entered the city and gathered with the disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. This is a deeply symbolic meal, where the Jews remember the time when God's spirit "passed over" the firstborn of the Israelites but killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians (Exodus 12) The preparation for this meal actually started four days earlier, with the selection of a lamb to be sacrificed. This lamb was to be looked after for 4 days before being slaughtered, its blood smeared on the doorframe and lintel of the entrance where Israelites were staying using a hyssop branch, and then eaten at the Passover meal. Alongside the lamb, the Israelites were to eat bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. Nothing was to be left until morning – if it couldn't be eaten, it should be burnt.

Finally, after the firstborn of every house in Egypt had been struck dead, Pharaoh summoned Moses, that very night, and instructed him to take the Israelites out of Egypt, starting their journey to the promised land.

In the same way, Jesus used this Passover meal to start the journey – after the meal, where he told Judas to go and do what he had to do, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane and the path to the cross – and ultimately to the Promised Land for all Christians – was started upon.

In today's passage, Jesus also prepares the Church by instituting the Lord's Supper, which we celebrate to this day in the form of Holy Communion. The body, and the blood of the covenant. Once Jesus had done this, all his preparations were finished and it was time to start the journey to the cross.

Ponder

Jesus prepared a place to eat, a lamb to eat, and his disciples to eat and drink with him. They were fully prepared by the time of the Last Supper. What preparation is Jesus asking us to make in order to be ready to serve him most effectively?

Promise

'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for *many*' (Mark 14:24).

Prayer

Lord God, we thank you that all the necessary preparations were done by Jesus and his team prior to the Last Supper. We pray that you will guide us and show us how we should prepare for the tasks and roles you would have us do. Amen.



Article by Edward Clayton, a Lay Reader at All Souls International Community Church, Desa Sri Hartamas, Kuala Lumpur. Edward is also the Synod Representative for his congregation and is a Partner at PwC Advisory.

FOR US

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
(Mark 15:34)

Today we tread, with awe, in the footsteps of the God who allowed himself to fall into callous human hands for the sake of our redemption. Not only does Jesus endure being misunderstood, mocked and rejected, as Mark 15 unfolds, he even submits to being assigned the role of a dispensable character in a political game between Pilate, the restless Judeans, their religious authorities and the local Roman garrison. It's startling to realise that, in human perspective, very little of what happens next is really about him at all. But that doesn't deter God's Son in the slightest. Quietly, indiscernibly, Jesus now continues to serve rather than be served, as he gives his own life in ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

At first, a cynical Pilate taunts the jealous chief priests, with whom he so often sparred as Judea's governor. He wryly proposes to release this “King of the Jews” as a gesture of his own benevolence. Yet Pilate's top priority here is an uneventful Passover in a Jerusalem prone to unrest. When a way to placate the fickle crowd presents itself, Pilate spares no further thought for this mysterious figure whose life is the price of peace. He releases instead a violent revolutionary.

And now just imagine the infuriation of the soldiers tasked with keeping peace. A significant and influential prisoner, back on the streets because of a nonsensical local custom. Behind closed doors, they vent their outrage on the next available Jewish prisoner. They even stage a pantomime coronation with a sham robe and crown, before hiding the evidence. Theatricalities continue as Jesus is marched through crowds toward his execution as though this were a Roman triumphal procession. A mocking placard is hung alongside where he is crucified.

Of course, the Jewish leaders know that these soldiers are using Jesus to broadcast the futility of their own revolutionary hopes. Yet they swallow it, in order to neutralise this threat to their religious influence. They now assume Jesus will be soon forgotten. But this Good Friday, we remember again that despite all appearances, God's saving purpose was at work here. Even in all he endures, Jesus retains the initiative.

Jeered at for being unable to save himself as he saved others, it's precisely through the former that he does the latter. Challenged to establish his kingship by breaking his cross, Jesus reveals his kingship precisely by bearing it. Called out for allegedly claiming he'd destroy and again rebuild the temple of God's dwelling with us – that's precisely what takes place in his own body, dead and resurrected. One soldier realises, as descends and the temple curtain tears, "Truly, this man was God's Son."

Ponder

Jesus prays: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This Good Friday, we ponder with deep gratitude that most basic answer to Jesus' question: *for us*. We ponder all that is now ours: forgiveness; liberation from the power and effect of sin; union with Christ; the transformation of minds and hearts.

Promise

Jesus' death and resurrection unique and unrepeatable. Yet Jesus himself promises that where we suffer in his service, God will also be with us, and will use us. In Mark 8:34, he says "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Prayer

Lord, we pray today that as we journey with you to the cross, we would know afresh both who you are *for us*, and who we are called to be *in you*. May the whole of our lives reflect your redemptive pattern, despite all appearances to the contrary. Give us strength to wait with you and for you in all darkness and difficulty, and come to us in your resurrection power this Easter. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Mark Knight, Principal of St Paul's Theological College, Kuala Lumpur. Mark ministers at Holy Trinity, Bukit Bintang and is married to Rachel. They have two young children, Clementine and Angus.

THEY BURIED HIM

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. (Mark 15:46)

This passage reminds us of the burial and the burial place of Jesus; showing us where he was clearly buried. It helps us against false allegations that the disciples went to the wrong tomb.

MacArthur puts it this way: “Those are two very, very significant marks in the life and ministry of Christ. There is one, however, in the middle of them, between the cross and the resurrection that is equally monumental, although it is usually overlooked.” It is the burial of Jesus. It is a strong affirmation of his deity and his Messiahship, strong affirmation of the veracity of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the sovereignty of God and the purpose of history. All of that come from the burial of Jesus.

It is equally important to note that Jesus was truly dead. It is relayed to us several times to ensure that we know that he died. Joseph of Arimathea knows he’s dead. He stepped forward to prevent the body of Jesus from being profaned by being thrown rudely into a common grave with the two criminals. Pilate confirms with the centurion that he is dead. The centurion, a man of war who had seen many dead bodies, confirms that he is dead. He is buried by Joseph. “Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were looking on to see where he was laid.” (Mark 15:47)

The stage is set for the greatest miracle in the universe. The resurrection - the bodily resurrection - from the dead, of Jesus the Christ. He really died. They did not go to the wrong tomb. He is dead and buried. But God has a greater plan and will raise this Christ from the dead. There is no human explanation for it.

Sometimes we can sense that all is “dead.” Our plans and hopes and dreams. But God can make a way. He is the God of the resurrection who is breathing new life into his people through Christ and faith in Christ so that one day, we will be raised with him with an imperishable body when the last trumpet call shall sound. Our resurrection is guaranteed and certain. The Christian, then, even at the graveside, has a hope beyond

what the world can give. For they remember that Christ too was buried. And three days later rose again. He was buried, dead; but this is not the end of the story.

Ponder

As we ponder on the burial of Jesus, we are reminded that he will make a way where there seems to be no way.

God will make a way where there seems to be no way.
He works in ways we cannot see,
He will make a way for me.

He will be my guide, hold me closely to his side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way. He will make a way. (Don Moen)

Promise

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Prayer

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Collect for Holy Saturday)



Article by the Right Reverend Dr Stephen Soe, Suffragan Bishop of the Northern Region, Diocese of West Malaysia. +Stephen is based at St George's Church, Penang.

EASTER JOY

You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.
He has risen! He is not here.
(Mark 16:6)

Let us try to recapture the raw feelings, emotions and thoughts of the disciples on the first Easter. It began not with “joyful, joyful we adore thee.” On the contrary, it was shock, baffling and confusing. After the Good Friday’s crucifixion, the day was followed by an empty feeling of loss, grief and fear. The disciples were nowhere found in public but behind closed doors, perhaps thinking of an escape route to avoid arrest or stay to face martyrdom. Then, several news reports of something “unusual” were pouring in.

- The huge entrance stone at the tomb of Jesus had been rolled away (Mark 16:4).
- The inside view of Jesus’ tomb was empty. Jesus’ body was missing (Luke 24:3).
- The guards at the Tomb’s entrance had fled with fear (Matthew 28:4).
- There was a ‘violent earthquake’ (Matthew 28:2).
- There were reports of angelic visitation (Mark 16:5).
- The women – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome – with the spices to anoint Jesus’ body hurried back, ‘trembling and bewildered’ (Mark 16:8) ‘afraid yet filled with joy’ (Matthew 28:8), met the disciples and reported the angelic message: “He has risen! He is not here.” (Mark 16:6)
- Peter and John rushed to the tomb to seek verification on the women’s report and they found the same: Jesus’ tomb was empty, his grave cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen (John 20:5-8) and his missing body was not a stolen case (Matthew 28:13).
- Mary Magdalene, in full daylight, personally met the risen Jesus (John 20:16).
- Two disciples who were walking to Emmaus hurriedly turned around to Jerusalem to tell the disciples of their incredible encounter with the risen Christ and how he shared Scriptures and broke bread before their very eyes (Luke 24:27,30).

As more reports of sightings came in, the disciples’ hearts would have been pounding with the anticipation that around any corner they might actually see their Lord again. And would he be as they knew him, or would he be a zombie, a spirit, a bloodied ghost or will this be just a bad joke?

In John 20:19-21, Jesus came in person, supernaturally walked through their locked door and stood among them – in close view – risen and alive, whole and clean. He showed them his pierced hands and speared-mark side. He greeted them with “Peace be with you” and the disciples were ‘overjoyed when they saw the Lord.’ There were tears and laughter, gladness, elation and euphoria! Their grief on Good Friday and sorrow on Saturday dissipated. Their shock had been turned to sheer joy, agony to awe, despair to delight, helplessness to hopefulness.

This is sheer Easter Joy against a backdrop of despair, death and disaster. Let us receive this Easter joy afresh, renew our love for him, share the delightful news of his resurrection, risen presence and power today through our words and works, verbally and visually!

Ponder

“The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” (John 20:20) Perhaps, it is time to “see” the risen Lord again and receive his joy, his peace. Jesus is alive and nearer to you now than this page. Meet him daily in your prayers and Quiet Time.

Promise

“We live and die; Christ died and lived!” (John Stott)

Prayer

Almighty Father, who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord: give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth; 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 for ever.



Article by the Reverend Eddie Ong, Chaplain at Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang / the Alpha hub. Eddie also assists at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.