

The Jesus Tree

a visual and reflective journey through the weeks of Lent using
John's Gospel.



Part 1: 1-10

Ash Wednesday
to Saturday 27th
February

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Welcome



Welcome to the Lent Jesus Tree; a visual and reflective journey through the weeks of Lent using John's Gospel.

[The Jesus Tree Journey](#)

For each of the 40 days of Lent (which doesn't count Sundays) I will add a decoration to the Jesus tree, share a short reading (and sometimes a link to a longer one), a reflection to think about, a short prayer and activity.



What is a Jesus Tree?

The idea is a development of the Jesse tree. Originally the Jesse tree showed the [ancestors of Jesus](#) just like our family tree would. Sometimes churches and cathedrals had Jesse Tree windows. Now the Jesse tree is a way of reflecting on the story of God and us, God's people; a journey that is full of love and promises and that foretold the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus. A Jesus tree takes this idea further, and focuses on Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection.

Making your own Jesus Tree

There are a number of sites online where Jesus Tree decorations can be downloaded free or patterns or decorations may be bought, for example Etsy. The pictures and the Bible stories covered vary. If you want to make your own, just choose the set you like the best. If you don't have a tree, put together some sticks, hang the decorations on a ribbon, decorate a window or door; be as creative as you wish!

My set is modified from a pattern from [Do small things with love](#).¹

These are the first 10 days of decorations



¹Patterns available via Etsy

https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/586080341/jesus-tree-felt-ornament-patternlenten?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=John+gospel+Jesus+tree&ref=sr_gallery-1-2&organic_search_click=1

Day 1: Ash Wednesday - Jesus, the Word



"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Today we start at the beginning of John's Gospel with the prologue; verses we usually hear around Christmas Day. As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John 1: 1-18 (NRSV)

For Reflection

Today is a different Ash Wednesday for many of us; the start of another church season where nothing is the same due to Coronavirus. We may feel that we can identify more than ever with the Jesus' forty days in the wilderness. Yet, despite this, we can still enter into the Lenten journey knowing that wherever we are, even if we do feel alone in the desert, God is with us. One of the acts suggested in the liturgy for today is that, as a part of our Lenten journey we read and meditate on God's holy word; something I hope that this Jesus tree will help us to do, as we travel together through John's Gospel.

Where better to begin than at the beginning? Here we read not just the word of God, but we read of the Word – Jesus. It is such a few weeks since Christmas that the Christmas story itself has had little time to fade in our minds. That story, woven together from Matthew and Luke is one of wonder and joy. Yet it is in these words from John that the true immensity of Christ's actions for us are described. The One who created the universe, who helped to form us in God's own image, didn't just look on from afar. Jesus, the living word became one of us. As we remember we are but dust, we also remember how God embraces and inhabits and becomes one with that dust.

He was born a tiny, vulnerable baby and learned to walk and talk, just as we do. Imagine Jesus, for whom the cold, immense, vacuum of space was a canvas, experiencing human touch, taste, warmth and cold, pain and happiness, tiredness and joy, friendship, betrayal and loneliness and even death. If we wonder if God can understand what we are living through, I believe the answer is yes. For us too, in these difficult days, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

As today we ponder our mistakes and missteps, we do so knowing how great is God's love for us. Can we bring all our sorrows and regrets before God, trusting in that immense love?

Prayer

Loving Lord, living Word
who created stars and planets
and brought forth life in all its richness,
we ask forgiveness for our wrongdoing.
As we journey with you
though these difficult and dark times,
draw close to us through this Lenten season.
May you be our light. Amen.



Activity

Look around for ways in which the light shines for you today. Perhaps light a candle, write down your favourite verse from today's reading or express your thoughts through a drawing.

Day 2: The Baptism of Jesus



"The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Just like Mark's Gospel, (the lectionary Gospel for this year) we jump forward in time to John the Baptist. It is a rather different perspective on the baptism of Jesus.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said,

*"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"*
as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel." And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending

from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

John 1: 19-34 (NRSV)

For Reflection

John's gospel is full of signs and wonders. As I came to read this passage about John the Baptist, I was very aware of how different it seemed from the story we hear in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Yes, we still have John baptizing; preparing, getting people ready because God is doing something new, is still very much part of the story. But a passage that begins with, "Who are you?" focuses little on John the Baptist. It rapidly becomes all about Jesus and who he is; who John sees that he is – the Messiah, the baptiser with the Holy Spirit. We start to get some of the wonderful phrases that occur in John's gospel.

"Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."


John the Baptist testified that the Messiah was coming to a world that was unprepared, unsure how to judge who might be their longed-for saviour. He was sure he knew. The presence of the dove of the Holy Spirit, descending and resting on Jesus showed him all he needed. He saw his role as simple; to tell all who would listen that Christ was here amongst us. John the Baptist denied being anybody special. He even denied the title of prophet. He declared he was not even good enough to untie the Messiah's sandals - a job for a servant or slave. Faithful, courageous humility seems to sum up John the Baptist's character here; characteristics he shares with our servant King Jesus. He may not have considered himself important; yet 2000 years later we celebrate the role he played in announcing the beginning of Jesus' ministry amongst us. He taught us to turn and seek for God, knowing that our sins will be forgiven for no-one is unimportant to God.

Do you feel unimportant to God today, or valued as one Jesus came to love?

Prayer

Loving Lord, Lamb of God,
as we turn to you again
we ask that we may know
the love you have for us
deep in our hearts, setting us aflame
to share your love with others. Amen

Activity



Cup some water in your hands and think about your own baptism. Thank God for those who helped lead you to faith and those whose lives you have nurtured.



Day 3: 19th February: Calling the Disciples



“Come and see.”

We begin to hear of people coming to find out more about Jesus in today’s reading. Let us come and see how God’s Word speaks to us today. As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.” Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

John 1: 35-51 (NRSV)

For Reflection

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" asks Nathanael. "Come and see." is Philip's response. It may just be local rivalry; Nathanael was from Cana, the next village along from Nazareth (the 1st century equivalent of looking down one's nose and saying "we're better than you"). There again, we all know of places people dismiss, where they don't want to live or visit; places that people don't want to admit they are from, because they fear judgement and mistreatment.

I wonder whether Nathanael followed Philip expecting his comments to be justified? If so, he was in for a shock. Jesus saw him and welcomed him with generous words. It takes moments for Nathanael's doubts and scepticism to be overturned and for him to recognise Jesus as Son of God and King of Israel. The Messiah had arrived.

For me, Nathanael's story shows someone who was hoping for and seeking God's promised Messiah, but had, perhaps, certain expectations in mind. Yet he was willing to "Come and see" and allow his own preconceptions to be challenged. When given the chance, he saw that this carpenter from an unimportant, poor village was something unexpected, someone greater than had seemed possible. Jesus' response to Nathanael's declaration of faith?

"You haven't seen anything yet!"

(The Message)

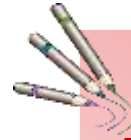
Nathanael hadn't – and as we shall read, this Messiah was probably far from the ideal he had in his mind when he made his declaration. Just imagine what he witnessed, what each of the disciples learned about God and Jesus. All they did was answer a simple call to *"Come and see"* and *"Follow me."*

Too often we and the world around us think we have God all worked out; safely contained in the box of our preconceived ideas. Today, let us ask God to help us set these aside so we may discover anew the wonder of a God who says *"Come and see; you haven't seen anything yet!"*

Does it feel like God is asking you to embrace endless wonder today, or a set of expectations?

Prayer

Loving Lord,
renew our sense of wonder
and free us from unhelpful images
of you and others.
As we read your word
and live in your world
help us to “Come and see”
where you are working
in us and others
to bring about
healing, refreshment and new life.
Amen



Activity

Find a map and/or images of places (in the world or close by) where people are disadvantaged and discriminated against. Create a collage or write a prayer and add the words “Come and See” as we remember that God wants us to see them as his children too.



Day 4: 20th February: The Wedding at Cana



"the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

Today we read the story of the first of Jesus' "Signs" at a wedding about to lapse into disaster.

As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

John 2: 1-12 (NRSV)

For Reflection

Here is God among us, joining in with the important celebrations of human life that mean so much to us, even today. Jesus (albeit reluctantly) steps up to ensure that the celebration of this couple's new life together doesn't descend into shame and embarrassment due to a lack of hospitality. The need (of which the bride and groom were probably totally unaware) was met; and with such abundance! Six jars full of water each holding between 20 to 30 gallons. That's a minimum of 120 gallons of wine - or in bottle terms around 600 bottles of wine. God, in Jesus, doesn't do things by halves.

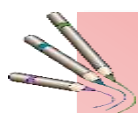
Yet it is a sign that is done quietly, behind the scenes, visible only to the servants and the disciples. We are let in on the secret, to learn from it. There is more here than just a dramatic miracle demonstrating Jesus' divinity.

It's a sign of what Jesus has in store for all of us, the abundance of new life that he brings. It reminds us again that God is the source of all life, all good things. Perhaps it also challenges us to use the resources we have received wisely, remembering God gifts them to us for everyone to share, as all shared in this bounty at the wedding.

What might we do today to embrace God's generosity?

Prayer

Loving Lord,
who rejoices in our celebrations
and comforts us in our tragedies,
we thank you for the gifts you bring us.
We praise you for the beauties of this world
whose resources we often take for granted.
Help us to treasure what we have from you
and share with all in generosity.
Amen



Activity

Look around you today for signs of new life that spring brings. Perhaps watch the birds or look for bulbs just coming into flower. Make a note, a picture or take a photo to remind you of Jesus' promises.



Day 5: 22nd February: The Cleansing of the Temple



“Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

Yesterday’s private miracle is a contrast to today’s very public spectacle in the temple.

As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

John 2: 13-25 (NRSV)

For Reflection

The temple complex of Jesus’ time may seem very different from our ideas of a place of worship. Full the noise and smells of animals; sheep bleating, the fluttering of doves’ wings as they tried to escape their cages.

Imagine the buzz of talk in the air, as people waited to change their corrupting Roman coins bearing the face of the hated Caesar into the Temple coins, so they could buy their sacrificial lamb.

Even though this is not our experience, we can tell that Jesus' actions in clearing the Temple grounds are shocking and surprisingly violent. It seems even more so due to John's positioning of this story as Jesus' first public act. What a way for a nobody prophet from the back of beyond to introduce himself!

It is, however, an act that makes us ask questions; is this the right way to be worshipping God? Previously it may have been hard for us to imagine just how deeply Jesus' actions hit at the heart of Jewish belief as the temple really did lie at the centre of their faith.

Yet over the last year, we have also lived through events that have deeply affected the ways we participate in, and understand, worshipping God. Our routine, honed through the centuries, has been overturned like the tables in the temple, as some of us attend limited services in buildings, whilst others seek God within their own walls. Yet, through all this, new ways of reaching out and worshipping together whilst apart, have been found. Jesus came to bring God's message anew and we have been rediscovering what that means for our worship today. He would pay the price for overturning and unsettling the way things were with his life; but, in his resurrection, the new life – and hope- he brings is freely offered to all people.



What is upsetting and overturning our lives today?

Prayer

Loving Lord, many of us do not deal well with the shock and change that has overturned our normal lives. Comfort us, we pray. Help us to see your hand at work and, through your Spirit, help us to worship you knowing you are dwelling within our very being making us living temples. Amen



Activity

Hold a coin in your hands and imagine those coins spinning and scattering on the ground in the temple; a symbol of confusion and disruption. Light a candle of hope and place the coin bathed in the light that Christ brings.

Day 6: 23rd February: Nicodemus



“But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

After the commotion in the temple, perhaps it is not surprising that the Pharisee Nicodemus came in the darkness to see Jesus. The quiet of the night, however, was also a good time to study the scriptures.

Throughout John’s Gospel, light and dark are used as a means of telling the story. As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the

wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

John 3: 1-21 (NRSV)

For those wishing to read the whole Gospel of John, on some days I will be adding an additional reading. For those with an electronic copy of this document, just click on the button below.

[John 3: 22-36](#)

For Reflection

Nicodemus was already a devout man. Not yet knowing all, he saw enough in Jesus to realise he came from God. One who sought to nurture his faith, he went to ask questions.

As far as Nicodemus could see, Jesus was telling him riddles that he could not solve. Born into God’s chosen people, why would rebirth be desirable? He was, indeed, in the darkness of misunderstanding. He took Jesus’ comments very literally; something we all too often do today and unfortunately, he couldn’t quite grasp the good news Jesus brought.

Yesterday’s and today’s readings have something that we can understand, having the benefit of knowing the whole story. Both allude to Jesus’ death and what it would bring. Yesterday we had a foretaste of the coming resurrection; the rebuilding of the temple in three days. Today, in the image of the bronze serpent (lifted up by Moses to save the lives of the Israelites) we see, projected forward, the long shadows of the cross and the light of eternal life it brings.

Here, the new life that Jesus brings is symbolised by new birth, a birth where the Holy Spirit's work leads us from the darkness of unknowing into the light of a new dawn. A new purpose for our lives comes into focus. One where serving the loving God, who sent God's only son to bring us eternal life is the reason for all that we do.

There are times in our lives when we, like Nicodemus, don't quite understand; we misinterpret God, or look for the literal truth. Are we aware that God wished to enlighten any dark and mistrustful places in our hearts?

Prayer

Lord of Light and Life,
fill us with your Holy Spirit
and renew the life within us.
Help us to open our hearts to your truth
and do your will
in our lives and your world.
Amen



Activity

Reflect on the well-known words of John 3:16.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

You may find listening to Stainer's setting useful, or looking at a picture of the world or using a holding cross or rosary as you ponder these words.



Day 7: 24th February: The Woman at the Well



“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

As the belief in Jesus increased, so did the mistrust. Jesus headed back to Galilee, taking the shortcut through Samaria; somewhere most Jews would try to avoid.

As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’— although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.’

Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come back.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’

Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

John 4:1-42 (NRSV)

For Reflection

It was hot, and Jesus was tired, hungry and thirsty. A woman comes to the well at the hottest part of the day and Jesus asks for a drink and gets a theological discussion!

Let's stop for a moment and acknowledge that this is one of the moments where we clearly see Jesus as fully God and fully human. Here is God resting, suffering from the normal effects of a long walk in the hot sun, yet able to know the woman's life history, and needs, at a glance. He ends up explaining and offering the new life he brings – the living water -with someone most good Jews wouldn't be seen with; notice the disciples' astonishment when they returned. Here we see a woman acting as messenger, encouraging others to come and find what she had found by chance. They did, and Jesus stayed with them, teaching them.

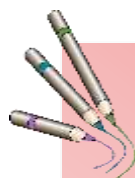
Of late, in my part of the United Kingdom on the River Severn, we have had to deal with the effects of too much water. Rivers rising and overcoming the human-made barriers designed to keep people and property safe, causing great damage and disruption at an already difficult time. It can be hard to imagine a life where water is a scarce, precious resource; our perspective may have become distorted and we can miss some of the symbology here. These people were spiritually thirsty – perhaps almost drought stricken. So much so that a woman had a conversation with a complete stranger at the well and then urged others to do so.

Jesus saw this and stayed with them for 2 more days, teaching, assuaging that burning thirst that they had. I wonder what the disciples thought of that?

How are we feeling at the moment? Desperately thirsty for God's living water, or just plain swamped with other things to notice our thirst?

Prayer

Living Lord, we thank you for the gift of water essential to our lives, both physically and spiritually. During these difficult times, nurture us and help us to bring the water of life to those who need it. Amen



Activity

Fill a glass or small bowl with water; as you do, thank God for clean running water, especially during this pandemic. Sit with the glass and think about the symbolism of living water. What does it mean to us? Interact with the water in some way; by drinking it, or watering a plant; something that demonstrates its power to bring life.



Day 8: 25th February: The Official's Son



“Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.”

Today we head back to Cana, and a distraught father’s pleas lead to a second sign.

As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in the prophet’s own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.

Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Unless you [plural] see signs and wonders you will not believe.’ The official said to him, ‘Sir, come down before my little boy dies.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your son will live.’ The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, ‘Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.’ The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, ‘Your son will live.’ So he himself believed, along with his whole household. Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

John 4:43-54
(NRSV)

For Reflection

Believing in the words Jesus spoke, or the amazing things he did and believing in Jesus are two different things.

Here is Jesus' second sign, a public event in the same town as the first. A high-status father comes to beg for the life of his son. It is unclear exactly who he is, but many believe that then man was not a Jew, but a gentile. One thing we do know for sure, he was desperate and had no time for religious discourse about signs:

'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.'

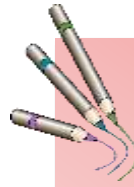
That's heart-rending. Jesus' response seems almost dismissive at first glance. Yet what more was actually needed from the Messiah who brings new life? So often John's gospel works on many levels. We have the same pattern of behaviour here as at the wedding: a request is seemingly rebuffed, yet the person asking will not give up. They then act obediently, doing the task given, and a miracle, a sign, occurs. We can analyse the use of location, of language, of patterns; but it all comes down to people asking and acknowledging Jesus' true identity; everything points to God.

Here Jesus heals at a word and the word is 'live'. Miles away, at that very moment, that precious little boy starts to improve. No-one would know that until the father had begun his journey home, trusting enough in Jesus' words to leave rather than to continue to beg his attendance. Imagine the official's relief, the next day, meeting those bringing news. This good news he truly recognises. It leads him in to a deeper insight about Jesus. That father no longer just believes in Jesus' words. He now truly believes in Jesus himself – the living Word.

We may feel that we would like to see a few of those signs ourselves at the moment. We may wonder why those we pray for so hard do not recover. We admit that we do not have all the answers and at times cry out to God for the precious children we desperately want to see saved. If that is where we are, that is fine – the psalms show us that lament is as valid a way to worship God. Yet through our lament, through bringing to God all the things that are wrong, we acknowledge that God understands our pain and is with us in it. New life will come, and in the meantime, God walks alongside us and holds our hand. Like the official, we walk the road in hope. Are we reluctant to cry out to God today?

Prayer

Lord of life,
who heals with a word,
we cry out to you today.
So much seems broken,
so many are overwhelmed
so many sick and dying.
Bring healing we pray
and an awareness of your presence with us
through your life-giving Spirit.
Amen



Activity

We all know people who are in need of healing at the moment; many with desperate loved ones. Light a candle and bring to God all who are ill. Perhaps write their names down as we bring them to the living Word.



Day 9: 26th February: Healing on the Sabbath



“Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’”

Jesus travels to Jerusalem and the healing of a man has unexpected consequences. As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ The sick man answered him, ‘Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, ‘It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.’ But he answered them, ‘The man who made me well said to me, “Take up your mat and walk.”’ They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, “Take it up and walk”?’ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.’ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is still working, and I also am working.’

For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

John 5: 1-18 (NRSV)

Additional Reading

John 5: 19-47

For Reflection

Thirty-eight years. The man had been ill for thirty-eight years. That seems a long time for us, but for the people of the time, that was around the average lifespan. We are all being affected by the length of our lockdowns, feeling isolated and limited – no-one thought it would go on this long. He had endured the limitations of his illness for a generation. In an instant, Jesus recognised for how long that poor man had been suffering. I don't think many of us can come close to grasping the life changing events for that child of God when Jesus healed him. This healing should have been a matter for great joy. It should have demonstrated that someone of God walked amongst the people. Jesus should then have been sought out as someone to listen and learn from. Yet, some around saw nothing but a breach of the Sabbath rules.

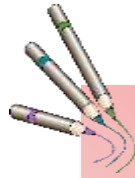
God's power isn't limited to days or events. God is.

The pattern of work and rest was set up for humanity. The man's illness hadn't taken a day off, but the man had believed that the only time he could come to God to be healed was limited to when the water moved. That was his 'sin' and it was definitely not the reason for the illness that crippled him. A whole lifetime of waiting, limited to that mat or a too slow stagger to the pool. The people around thought that the healing was an act of work and denounced it for happening on God's day of rest. They, unfortunately just couldn't see it as a miracle from God; was that their sin? It was an act of great mercy, and love; all things that are more than just work and what the Sabbath was made for. Look how the act gave respite to the man and glory to God.

What do Sabbath and Sabbath rest mean to us? Do we ever limit when turn to God?

Prayer

God of the Sabbath
sometimes we cannot see clearly
where you are at work in the world.
So many of us are in lockdown,
feeling helpless,
whilst others work endlessly
regardless of the hour or day
to help the sick and isolated
with love and compassion.
Wherever we are,
grant us the form of rest we need
and show us your love.
Amen



Activity

On a piece of paper, on one side write down everything that the man's mat might have represented about his limited life. On the other side, write down any ways you feel limited at the moment; or ways we might limit God in our lives.

Roll up the paper, just as the man rolled up his mat. Offer it to God; perhaps by placing it by a candle, cross or in a Bible or under your own Jesus Tree.

Day 10: 27th February: Loaves and Fish



“Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat.’”

We approach Passover and wherever he goes, Jesus is followed by a crowd intrigued by his actions.

As we read the verses, what stands out, what thoughts come to mind?

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

John 6:1-15 (NRSV)

For Reflection

John's Gospel doesn't have an account of the last supper. It is this feeding of the five thousand, close to Passover, which forms the base for thinking about Holy Communion in this Gospel.

We will be looking at this in more detail in the coming days, so today we spend some time with this story of another of Jesus' signs.

Find a comfortable place to sit and spend some time with the story. Read through the story again, slowly, trying to enter into it imaginatively. Perhaps you are one of the crowd, perhaps you are one of the disciples or maybe you are the boy offering his packed lunch? Think about the journey, the grassy spot with Jesus. From your perspective, how do you feel about that meal you are given?

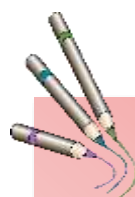


Sometimes we believe we have little to offer God. Yet look what God could do with a boy's offering of five loaves and two fish, given willingly. Jesus' disciples had seen him do wonders as they had travelled with him. Phillip despaired of feeding everyone because of the cost; he did not have the resources needed and didn't know where to get them. Andrew did bring what was available, which to him seemed a drop in the ocean. It was enough.

Can we bring what we have, no matter how big or small it is, to God today and ask for it to be used for God's glory and the good of others?

Prayer

Loving Lord,
You take what we can offer
and use it to build your kingdom.
Yet too often we feel that
we have nothing good enough to bring.
Help us to see, Lord,
that whatever we freely offer is a joy to you.
We pray for all struggling
to feed themselves and their families
and for the work of charities and foodbanks.
Amen



Activity

Take a piece of bread, or food of your choice and hold it in your hands. Thank God for the food in your cupboards and pray for those who have little or nothing. Eat the bread slowly, relishing the texture and taste of this life-giving food. Is there a way you can share what you have to help feed others?

About



I'm Julia, an Anglican curate in the diocese of Worcester.

I love worshipping and nurturing my faith with crafts. Creating is a form of praying for me.

Acknowledgements

All the Jesse tree decoration designs used were modified from a pattern from [Do small things with love.](#)²

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