



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



The Archbishop's Lenten Course

2017

REFLECTING, PRAYING AND ACTING TOGETHER

**Six weekly teachings and daily readings centred on weekly themes for
Personal and/or Communal Prayers and Meditation**

ANGLICANS ACT

	Page
1 Preface	4
2 Introduction	6
3 Daily readings	8
4 Bible Studies/Weekly teaching	15
5 Pledge	32
6 Personal notes	33



Preface by the Most Revd Thabo Makgoba

Reflecting, Praying and Acting Together (Anglicans ACT)

Our theme for the Archbishop's Lenten Series—**Reflecting, Praying and Acting Together**—says it all: that this is an invitation to all of us as members of ACSA, to our friends, whether people of faith or of none, and especially to our ecumenical friends, to reflect prayerfully not only on our vision and mission statement ([“Anglicans ACT”](#)), but on God’s vision for the world.

In these Bible teachings we are given an opportunity to put flesh on what I would call the eternal ideals enshrined in the Bible or in our dogma. In other words, it is an invitation to us collectively to get into the mind and heart of the incarnate Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and to see how we as his followers can make him real by understanding his ways.

The series has been developed against the backdrop of Provincial Synod having declared this time a **Season of Evangelisation** and of ACSA having declared **2017** as being the **Year for the Young**. We have previously used Bible studies devised by *Anglicans Ablaze* on our vision and mission statement and the priorities arising from it, and by professors Gerald West and Jonathan Draper on the priorities. As with those, it is my hope and prayer that our 2017 series too will help us to dig deeper and deeper into ourselves and our context and focus, particularly on those things that separate us from one another and make us stray from the relationship we have with God or which God intends to have with us.

In these teachings, examples of society's failings such as inequality, corruption, unemployment, poverty and environmental degradation are highlighted. We rightly start with daily readings, for as Anglicans we need to begin with **Scripture** in order to apply our hearts and minds to our daily challenges, to read the mind of Christ in our readings and then to be deepened in our journey.

The lessons start on Ash Wednesday and give a brief summary of the day's passage for each day until Easter on April 16th. On the first day of each week, you may initially want to read all the lessons for that week to understand the broader picture of the week's theme before turning to the actual Bible study.

After reading **Scripture**, we then reflect and pray together and go into discussion. I particularly like the last question of week one, which asks: “What can be done in your local congregation?” This should be asked at the end of each week and I urge each one of you please to write a simple pledge at the end of each week on the pages provided for pledges and personal notes. Your pledge may entail forming ongoing teams or giving money and time for evangelisation in your Parish or the Province. Donations for youth work should be sent to the Provincial Treasurer, marked “Year of the Young donation”.

As I offer these Lenten studies to all of you, I hope you will be as excited as I am with this journey of **Reflecting, Praying and Acting Together**. I am grateful to the team of people who have prayed, reflected and acted on the challenge that I placed before them to help me construct these Bible studies and to those who have ably read and edited them.

God bless you and have a blessed journey together.

+ Mabo Cape Town

Introduction

Once, when the disciples saw Jesus at prayer they said to him, “**Lord teach us to pray**” (Luke 11:1-4). We all know what Jesus said in reply; “**When you pray say, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”**” (Matthew 6:9-10). Perhaps there was something so real, authentic and moving about that experience that the disciples wanted to share it.

The significant thing about the Lord’s Prayer is the way it begins and the priorities it sets. It asks that God’s **name**, character and very being should be **hallowed**, (reverenced and made holy). This happens when God’s **kingdom**, authority and kingship is established on **earth** as it is in heaven. God is glorified when his **will is done** on earth as it is in heaven.

This Lent course is all about seeking first God’s kingdom in the context of all that is happening in the world at the present time. But what does this mean in practical terms, and how can we, as God’s people, become the agents for God’s rule in a tangible way? Concerned about the prevailing social and political crisis, the Archbishop asked a number of people to prepare a Lent course with this question in mind, and what you have before you is a humble, if limited attempt, to suggest some answers. We want to stress that the first response must be **prayer**, earnest, intentional and committed prayer, asking that God may be the centre of all life and that God’s rule and authority may be taken seriously in the affairs of this world. In the context of such prayer, we are suggesting ways in which God’s people, **acting together**, might work for a more just and equitable society in the places where they live.

If the course deals with political issues it is because the Bible clearly indicates that politics is a part of God’s domain, as is every other aspect of life. Archbishop Thabo often says “God is God of all or no God at all”, as a paraphrasing of Psalm 24. If we leave God out of the political affairs of society we must not be too surprised if the devil fills the gap. However, we would stress that what is said here, and the actions which are recommended, do not arise out of **party politics**. Our concern has been solely with the issues of JUSTICE and TRUTH, and a desire to see God’s righteousness made visible in human affairs.

We have been mindful that not all who use this course live in South Africa, because the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) goes well beyond South Africa’s borders, covering Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Angola, St Helena and Namibia. We would therefore ask that wherever you are, you try to respond to this course in your own context and in the society in which you live.

The course consists of **six portions of teaching**, one for each week of Lent and they are intended to be used corporately or privately, for prayer, reflection, discussion and preaching. We would recommend that, wherever possible, prayer and reflection on the material should also happen in small groups. Each local parish should be free to use the material in a way that

fits with local Lenten custom. **The daily readings**, which tie in with the weekly themes, are for personal prayer and meditation.

We would recommend that each individual, as part of his/her Lent Rule, should set aside a portion of time each day to meditate on, and pray, over these biblical texts and then commit to action. Archbishop Thabo always says do not overlook the power of “one”.

We would recommend that the primary method of communicating it to the ACSA will be **electronic**. Dioceses will need to make their own plans for getting the material to their parishes and where there is awareness that some do not have access to computers, copies be made and distributed.

Our prayer is that God will bless and use this course to help us to **BE** the church, **reflecting and acting together** in response to God’s promptings. May the grace and peace of God be with us all as we enter upon this Lent, in and through the power of God’s Holy Spirit.

Daily Readings

These readings are intended for personal prayer and reflection. We therefore recommend that you give several minutes to pondering over the passage for the day and then, having been soaked in it, speak to God about the things which have “spoken” to you. Remember to do all of this prayerfully, asking earnestly for the help and illumination of God’s Holy Spirit.

Week 1 (until Second Sunday in Lent): Theme “Wake Up!”

Ash Wednesday: Blow the trumpet in Zion: sound the alarm...call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation... Let them say, “Spare your people O Lord”... Why should it be said among the peoples, “Where is your God?” (Joel 2:1, 15-17)

Thursday, March 2: “Awake O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light”. Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:14-16)

Friday, March 3: When they say, “There is peace and security”, then suddenly destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of the darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake. (Romans 13:11-12)

Saturday, March 4: You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day. (Romans 13:11-12)

The First Sunday in Lent: You once were dead because of your sins and wickedness; you followed the ways of this present world order... But God is rich in mercy, and because of his great love for us, he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead because of our sins; it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1, 4-5 REB)

Monday, March 6: Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light”. (John 12:35-36)

Tuesday, March 7: For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.... For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence. (Galatians 5:1, 13)

Wednesday, March 8: See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity...life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him, for that means life for you. (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19-20)

Thursday, March 9: When you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you search for me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord. (Jeremiah 29:12-14)

Friday, March 10: Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing for your flesh and refreshment for your body. (Proverbs 3:5-8)

Saturday, March 11: (The Lord says), "They will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own desires...but those who listen to me will be secure and will live at ease without dread of disaster". (Proverbs 1:28-31, 33)

Week 2: Theme: "Turn Around"

The Second Sunday in Lent - Theme for the week "Turn around": Yet even now says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him. (Joel 2:12-14)

Monday, March 13 (God says) I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. In their distress they will beg my favour: "Come let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up... He will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord." (Hosea 5:15 to 6:3)

Tuesday, March 14: The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse - who can understand it? I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings. (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

Wednesday, March 15: Thus says the Lord, Cursed are they who trust in mere mortals...whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert... Blessed are those who trust in the Lord... They shall be like a tree planted by water sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. (Jeremiah 17:5-8)

Thursday, March 16: There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich, some have wandered away from faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you... shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:6-11)

Friday, March 17; Jesus said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist of the abundance of possessions". (Luke 12:15)

Saturday, March 18: Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. "Come now, let us reason together says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land but if you rebel ..." (Isaiah 1:16-20)

Week 3: Theme: "Standing and Acting together"

The Third Sunday in Lent: For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

Monday, March 20: You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Tuesday, March 21: We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:14-16)

Wednesday, March 22: We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2 Corinthians 4:5-7)

Thursday, March 23: As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer a slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:27-28)

Friday, March 24: Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven". (Matthew 5:13-16)

Saturday, March 25: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you: I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from their dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. (Isaiah 42:6-7).

Week 4: Theme: "Ways and Means"

The Fourth Sunday in Lent: Jesus said, "Not everyone who **says** to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who **does** the will of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

Monday, March 27: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill", and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James: 14-17)

Tuesday, March 28: Jesus said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. (Matthew 23:23)

Wednesday, March 29: In the temple Jesus 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 doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:14-16)

Thursday, March 30: He (God) has told you O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

Friday, March 31: Listen therefore O kings and understand... Give ear, you that rule over multitudes... For your dominion was given you from the Lord; he will search out your works and inquire into your plans. Because as servants of his kingdom you did not rule rightly, or keep the

law, or walk according to the purpose of God, he will come upon you terribly and swiftly, because severe judgement falls on those in high places. (Wisdom 6:1-5)

Saturday, April 1: I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies... Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. (Amos 5:21, 23-24)

Week 5: Theme: "Against the Stream"

The Fifth Sunday in Lent (Passion Sunday): Jesus said, "This is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds are 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 3:19-21)

Monday, April 3: Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...and you will be children of the Most High for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:27-28, 35-36)

Tuesday, April 4: Again Jesus entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched Jesus to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (Mark 3:1-6)

Wednesday, April 5: And as Jesus sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (Matthew 9:10-13)

Thursday, April 6: As Jesus taught, he said, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." (Mark 12:38-40)

Friday, April 7: Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” (Mark 8:34-36)

Saturday, April 8: I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2).

Week 6: Theme: “Paying the Price”

The Sixth Sunday in Lent (Palm Sunday): It is credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly... If you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth”. When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten: but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:19-23)

Monday, April 10: Jesus said, “If the world hates you be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belong to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world - therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18-19)

Tuesday, April 11: But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. (1 Peter 4:13-14).

Wednesday, April 12: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of sufferings. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen and establish you. (1 Peter 5:6-10)

Thursday, April 13: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being found in human likeness. And being found in human form, he

humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:4-11)

Good Friday, April 14: Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. (Hebrews 12 1-3)

Holy Saturday, April 15: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Easter Day April 16: Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection from the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

Bible Studies/Weekly teaching

Week 1: Wake Up!

Beloved...you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. (2 Thessalonians 5:4-6)

We are living in challenging times and the world itself seems to be in turmoil: the violence of war, the flood of refugees, the evident results of climate change, the desecration of our environment, the reactions of ordinary people to the establishment (seen in Brexit and the recent election in the USA), the deep economic uncertainties, and the growing scarcity of world resources in the face of the massive population explosion. These things are giving rise to so much fear, insecurity and feelings of personal helplessness, and even hopelessness.

Huge problems also face us nearer to home and because this Lent course arose out of the crisis in South Africa, we hope our brothers and sisters in the other countries represented in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) will bring examples relative to their context. Our sense is that it will not be difficult for those outside South Africa to apply some of what we are saying to their own situation.

The issues we are facing in South Africa, have to do with crime, violence and unemployment, and the crisis in education both at the tertiary level and perhaps, even more so, for 6-18 year olds. We are experiencing a deep sense of disappointment and loss as people see the vision of 1994 being constantly eroded by corruption and the misuse of power at the highest levels. The tentacles of patronage seem to have spread far and wide so that the wealth and privilege of the few have become entrenched at the expense of the poor and the common people

What a gloomy way to start a Lent course! Yet let us remember the good news of our text that we **“are children of the light”**. It was said of our Lord when he came into the world as **the light** that, **“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it”** (John 1:5). Therefore, because we are followers of Jesus Christ, the darkness need have no power to overcome **us**, provided we stay close to him. However, we do need to heed the words of our text, **“Keep awake”**.

The church in Southern Africa, and perhaps elsewhere as well, needs to be reminded urgently that in the past, it played an enormous role, by prayer and action (alongside other faith and civic communities), in helping to bring about a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. In doing so it helped to bring about a measure of peace to some of our surrounding nations as we moved away from the widespread effects of apartheid.

In a democratic Southern Africa, pluralism, syncretism and unbelief are a concern. We are only too aware that many who frequent our churches have not yet come to a living faith in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. Our deepest wish, therefore, is that this Lent course will be used to awaken

faith so that all who participate in it really do know what it means to be children of light. What is said next week may be particularly helpful in this respect.

The church in Southern Africa has rich resources of people who have faith, love and commitment, manifested in a wonderful variety of gifts and talents. No government could persist in its corrupt ways if we, as the Body of Christ, were to rise up and say, "Enough". However, we must also recognise that no government, by itself, can solve the enormous issues being faced in all our countries. They need the gifts and skills of many people to meet these challenges and these gifts will have to be exercised with great courage and perseverance in the face of many obstacles. People generally need to see a new vision of godliness, marked by those who **"no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised"** (2 Corinthians 5:15). Yet behind all our actions and activities we need to remember that, **"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of"** (Alfred Lord Tennyson). As our Archbishop has said, "We need prayer today as never before" if hearts are to be changed and the walls of resistance broken down. So persistent prayer must be a major priority if we are to hope to make any lasting impact on our society.

The world we are living in is at a crossroads in so many respects and this applies also to the society in which we find ourselves. Psalm 1 is often called "The Psalm of the Two Ways" because it suggests that, in life, we can go in one of two directions. The way of God is depicted as the way of happiness and fruitfulness: the way of ungodliness as the path to destruction. The Psalm ends with the metaphor of being able to stand when one day we are face-to-face with God. This Lent course will challenge you to make a godly life choice or else renew your faith commitment. Then, from the standpoint of faith, to face, head on, the enormity of the tasks ahead and to explore ways in which, alongside others, you can work for a new world and a new society. The challenges will be immense and the opposition great but the power at work in us is nothing less than that which raised Jesus from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20).

You are encouraged to participate fully in the course and make full use of the weekly input, the questions for discussion and the daily Bible readings so that together we may stand.

A Prayer

Gracious Lord, your Son came into the world to bring us good news and the power to transform our lives. Set us on fire with love for you and renew in us the life and energy of your Spirit, so that we may give light to those who live in darkness and guide them into the way of peace, for Jesus Christ sake.

For Reflection, Prayer and Discussion:

1. In what ways do you think the church needs to wake up?
2. What kind of changes would you like to see in your country and your own community? How willing and available are you to work for change alongside others?

3. St Paul calls us “children of light”. One way in which we can appreciate this is when we share our faith journey with one another. Can you share **briefly** how you came to faith?
4. What can be done in your local congregation to help one another to come to a living faith in God?

Week 2: Turn Around

After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the gospel of God: “Time's up! God's Kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the good news of the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15 based on ‘The Message’ version.)

The earliest name given to the Christian faith was “The Way” (Acts 9:2) and this underlines the theme of pilgrimage that runs throughout the New Testament. We are called **“to follow Jesus in the way”** and to do so **“immediately”** (Mark 10:52).

For those who are walking in a different direction to Jesus, as regards their values and way of life, the gospel comes as a challenge to “turn around” and change your way of thinking and living. This is what the word “repent” means and it is what needs to be said to the world we are living in, and also too many South Africans of all races and cultures, rich and poor.

The church that issues this call has itself to be walking in the way of Christ if its message is to have any authenticity and power. The season of Lent is a time for Re-turning, though it is also something we are expected to do every Sunday at the Eucharist. The truth is that, in the words of one of our older confessions, **“We have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against (God's) holy laws. We have left undone the things we ought to have done; and we have done the things we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us”**. (*General Confession, Book of Common Prayer*)

It is helpful to remember that our confessions of sin in the liturgy are *both personal and corporate* and because, as a church, we have often failed our country dismally and we need to own it before God. To face this truth means that we can lead the way for others by making our own radical act of repentance and re-turning. Unless we do so, the things we say to those around us will have no authority and, worse still, will be seen as blatant hypocrisy.

If we ourselves are stealing, cheating, lying and acting corruptly at work or in our communities, we have nothing to say to the corruption at the higher levels of our society. If we disregard the rules of the road and drive through red robots, we too are acting

lawlessly and, at a very basic level, are helping to undermine the values of our country's wonderful constitution. Perhaps most serious of all is the scourge of covetousness, the desire for more, which seems to afflict the whole of our world at present. Paul called covetousness idolatry, a false god, and we as Christians need to pray that we can be freed from this sin in our own lives.

Every year in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, thousands of people make acts of Christian commitment at Baptism and Confirmation services, and in other contexts, including the Renewal of Vows at Easter. Serious vows are taken about turning from sin and renouncing evil in all its forms. We say we believe and trust **in** God and we commit ourselves to living in obedience to God's will and commandments. What would be the effect in our society if we took these vows seriously in an ongoing way?

One of the biggest words in the New Testament, as regards meaning, is the little word "**in**". It is small in size but huge in significance, especially when we say "I believe **in** Jesus Christ". Many years ago Billy Graham came to South Africa and at a large gathering in Durban told the true story of a man doing a tightrope walk across the Niagara Falls. A huge crowd of people was there to watch him as he balanced on a wire above a raging torrent of water and went all the way across and all the way back. When he got back he said, "Who believes I can wheel a man across in a wheelbarrow?". Nobody answered, so he said, "Let me show you." He took a wheelbarrow with a groove in the wheel and put a heavy weight in it. Then, putting it on the tightrope, he went all the way across and all the way back. When he got back he said, "Now, who believes I can wheel a man across in a wheelbarrow?" Quite a few people said, "Oh now we believe you can." So the man pointed to one of these and said, "Right then. You are first!"

To believe **in**, is not to sit comfortably in a crowd and utter platitudes. It is being willing to get into the proverbial wheelbarrow and risk all as we commit our lives to Jesus in faith and trust. From then onwards we are his and our lives are no longer our own. Amazingly, as Jesus himself said, this leads to finding life and not to losing it (Mark 8:35). It means living for something beyond ourselves and no longer being caught up solely with our own personal desires and agenda. Surely, what our country needs above all else is people who **"no longer live for themselves."** (2 Corinthians 5:15)

There is another way in which the word "**in**" is used in the New Testament and it is crucial. Jesus speaks of us abiding **in** him and he **in** us" (John 15:4-11) and Paul summed up this theme with his favourite phrase about being "**in** Christ". The secret of the Christian life is not **trying** to follow Jesus. It is rather to recognise that Christ dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. Our job then is to learn to do everything in utter dependence on God's power within us. This is why St Paul's famous prayer in Ephesians is worth pondering and praying over, both for ourselves and others: **"That according to the riches of his glory (the Father) may grant**

you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in your inner being, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (Ephesians 3:16-17)

The truth is, however, that we will not be effective in allowing God’s life to flow through us unless we know, at the deepest level of our being, that we are loved by God. Most people have doubts about their own self-worth and in South Africa the apartheid society deeply undermined many people’s sense of well-being. St Paul, in his prayer, implies that Christ’s presence within us begins a process whereby “(we) are being rooted and grounded in love” and he goes on to pray that we **“may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”** (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Jesus began his ministry by calling for a change of heart and a change of direction in the lives of those who heard him, but his call for repentance had an additional motivation. He said, **“Repent, because the Kingdom of God is at hand”**. God’s Kingdom exists where God reigns and our prayer is that God’s Kingdom may come on earth and his will may be done on earth so that God’s name may be hallowed on earth. THE primary task of the church is not even to grow itself. Its essential vocation is to seek first God’s Kingdom, God’s rule in all things and to be the agent through which God can establish his reign on earth in every facet of life.

As we consider again the mess the world is in, let us grieve with God at the world’s sin, living as it does without reference to God who is its Creator and Source of Life. Let us grieve also that we are part of this sin. What God does is give us, in prayer, a way of entering into God’s heart so that we feel God’s pain at the way humanity has misused God’s gifts and gone its own way. It is not unlike Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). As our Lord said in another context **“Blessed are they that mourn.”** (Matthew 5:4)

Let us then return to God so that God can use us as agents for healing, renewal, reconciliation and peace, and in our own society and in the world at large.

A Prayer

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is discord, union; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Divine Master, grant that we may not seek so much to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

For Reflection, Prayer and Discussion

1. It is not just the world that needs to return to God but also the church. If this is true, in what ways must we return?
2. Being a Christian is not trying to live a good life but rather letting Christ live his life in us. What does this mean in practice?
3. What steps can we take to root out covetousness and greed from our lives?
4. Prayer should include grieving for the world's sin and our own part in it. Can you identify your part in it as, for example, in the recent Apartheid South Africa? Take time to become silent and seek to enter into something of God's pain.

Week 3: "Stand and Acting Together"

By one Spirit were we all baptised in one body (1 Corinthians 12:13). All of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

One of our most basic needs as human beings is to belong: to feel that we are loved, accepted and needed by others. As the Bible says, **"It is not good that man should be alone"** (Genesis 2:18) and that applies to women as well. This is why we are born into a family, though sadly, not all families offer the love and acceptance that we need.

This same truth holds good in our following of Christ. As has often been said, "You cannot be a Christian on your own". Hence, when we are baptised and born into the Christian life, we are made members of the church. But what is the church and how does it relate to the things we are raising in this Lent course?

The Bible answers the first part of this question by offering us a variety of images for the church. St Paul calls it the Body of Christ and in 1 Corinthians 12 he shows how every limb and organ of the body is essential, if it is to function properly. What is implied is that when it does, then we, acting together, reveal Christ's presence to the world. Notice, however, that St. Paul was speaking about the Body as a living **organism** and not as an **organisation**.

Paul gives us an extension of his vision in Ephesians where he says, **"each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift"** (Ephesians 4:7). Then he goes on to say that, **"the gifts he (Christ) gave were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints (i.e. all Christians) for the work of ministry"** (Ephesians 4:11-12). In other words, **every** Christian has been given gifts and one of the reasons God raised up apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers was to equip **all** God's people for ministry

so that they may use their gifts for the common good. The New Testament could never have envisaged the church as a community in which ministers minister and congregations congregate! All of us belong, and all are needed for **“building up the Body of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:12). This is how Paul sees Christians coming to maturity but we need one another for this to happen (Ephesians 4:13-14). He completes his vision of the church by seeing the Body of Christ fully equipped and fully complete **“when each part (of the Body) is working properly”** (Ephesians 4:16). The church in which many of us have grown up has often been more like a paraplegic with the head doing the work of ministry and most of the body paralysed!

Another image of the church is that of a building or a temple with Jesus Christ as the foundation stone, or chief cornerstone that holds everything together. However, we must not be led astray by this picture. Many of us associate the church already with a building so we need to notice that the New Testament is a corrective to this. In 1 Peter, which is one of the places where this image is used, the writer says to his readers and to us, **“Come to him (Christ) a living stone...and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house”** (1 Peter 2:4-5). In other words, the church is not bricks and mortar but people who are alive with God’s Spirit. It may be helpful to remember that for the first century or so of the church’s history, the church existed without church buildings.

The building 1 Peter is speaking about is a temple and the writer goes on to suggest that we are **all** priests in God’s new temple, chosen by God, **“to proclaim the mighty acts of him who called (us) out of darkness into his marvellous light”** (1 Peter 2:9). We make this proclamation when we worship and glorify God for all that God is and all that God has done but we do so also when we make God’s mighty acts known to others. Again, this is an activity of the whole body and not just of the few, and certainly not just the clergy. Significantly, the church as a whole, and we as individual Christians, are all temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

One of our great divides in the church has been between those who are ordained and those who are not. We usually call the latter “the laity”. This too is a mistake. The word “laity” comes from the Greek word *“laos”*, meaning “the people” or, in gospel terms, God’s people. Bishops, priests and deacons are all part of the *“laos”*, the people of God, so we are **all** laity, just as we are all priests.

This emphasis on oneness between all members of the body is brought out especially in the term “brethren”, which is better translated as “brothers and sisters”. To be baptised into Christ and into the Body of Christ is to be welcomed into a family where we suddenly find ourselves with brothers and sisters of all races, languages and customs. This is well represented when we come to the altar to receive Holy Communion. At that point we receive Christ’s renewing life once more, but we do so alongside others in the Christian community. A helpful vision is to see the communion rail extending beyond the bounds of the church in which we are and running around the whole world. This is one of **the** expressions of what we call “The Communion of Saints” and it is significant that we give expression to it at Communion itself.

Lastly, Jesus gave us some pictures of the church which emphasise the influence we are supposed to have on the world around us. He called his followers **“the salt of the earth”** (Matthew 5:13). Salt was very important in the ancient world because it was used to prevent things from going rotten (compare the way biltong is made). Furthermore, we need only a little salt to give taste to our food, such is its “influence”. Jesus warned against losing our saltiness, that element in our faith which has power to affect others. Jesus also called his disciples **“the light of the world”** (Matthew 5:14). We are meant to manifest **his** light in the darkness of the world around us. Jesus went on to say that we are to let the light of Christ in us shine, and not hide it, but to do so in such a way that people see God rather than us (Matthew 5:16).

All of this has great relevance for the issues we are facing this Lent. True, there is a “the power of one” and we have known many individuals who have exerted an enormous power for good in our world: Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and our own Desmond Tutu. But the real call in the church is to stand together for truth, justice, goodness and the things of God. We have all been given gifts, we all belong and we all have importance and dignity. What we are called to do, as the people of God, the Body of Christ, the Household of God is to let God’s light and power be seen in us. We can do together what, as individuals, we can never hope to achieve. As we look at some of the things God may be calling us to do in our country, let us not hide or shrink away but take our place alongside others. Together we stand and, with God working in us and through us, who can say what the results might be.

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the church is governed and made holy: we pray for all members of the church that, according to their vocation and gifts, they may serve you and the world with true godliness; that working together they may fulfil your purposes and bring glory to your name.

For Reflection, Prayer and Discussion

1. What gifts has God given you for ministry within the church and beyond? If you are not sure, ask others to help you identify them.
2. The church is a place of belonging and acceptance where we meet every week as brothers and sisters. What can be done to make this more of a reality in your own congregation?
3. God has set aside pastors and teachers to equip everyone in the Christian community for ministry. Is this a reality in your parish? What can be done to make it more so?
4. “The church is the only organisation that exists for the sake of its non-members” (William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury). How do we turn the church inside out towards the world, and do it together?

Week 4: "Ways and Means"

Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10).

Christians are not saved **by** good works but they are certainly saved **for** them. We are brought into a right relationship with God solely on the basis of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and our faith in him as Saviour and Lord. When we **are** in a right relationship with God, we are certainly called to live godly lives and **DO** the things which are pleasing to him. These good works are not simply to be equated with charities or acts of personal kindness, important as these are. They also include standing for the truth and working for a just and equitable society, even when that means resisting the rampant evils which sometimes emerge. Here are some of those evils. What can we **DO** about them as the Body of Christ, acting together?

- 1. For too long we have experienced corruption and poor governance in our Region.** We have concerns in Swaziland, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique and need for sustainable peace in Lesotho. The actions of President Jacob Zuma of South Africa are in our public media. We need to intervene and pray for peace and good governance urgently. The SACC has for example called for the President to step down and Archbishop Thabo has called for him to step aside and be investigated. We salute those courageous persons such as the Archbishop of Cape Town, ecumenical religious leaders and people of our society who have spoken out. For everybody's sake there is an urgent need for restitution in our country, equality of economic justice and fair opportunity for everyone.

What should the people of God be saying in South Africa in response to our situation? We would suggest that: **1.** All corrupt leaders must go. **2.** Those who have stolen from the public purse must be held accountable and made to pay back what belongs to the people. **3.** Attempts to seize control of the Treasury must be resisted and the Minister of Finance protected. **4.** The new Public Protector must also be held accountable to the people she is called to serve. **5.** Vigilance must be maintained to ensure that the public enquiry arising from the "Capture of State Report" is rigorous and its findings fully implemented.

What can we do?

- 1. Set aside days for prayer and fasting against the evils we face and in support of all godly resistance.**
- 2. Participate in ongoing days of mass protest until there is real change, and the**

objectives set out above have been fulfilled. 3. Be open to taking more severe non-violent action if those in power refuse to respond.

The Education Crisis

There are two main areas of concern **(i) Education up to the age of 18 years and (ii) Tertiary education**. With regard to the former we need urgent and drastic solutions. We learnt at the recent *Anglicans Ablaze* conference in Cape Town that **1.** 5% of our schools are world-class; 20% are just functioning; 75% are dysfunctional. **2.** Of the 12 million pupils in school, 9 million need help. **3.** That the unemployment level in the Western Cape for 18-35 year olds is 54%, and the Western Cape has the best figures in the country! **4.** That the biggest crisis is for 6-15 year olds. **5.** That many grade 6's are still functionally illiterate **6.** Water. The Cathedral of St Paul London, St George's Cathedral Cape Town and Trinity Wall Street have devised a Lenten series for lent on water. I will say more about this and recommend that we adopt it after Lent as a Provincial teaching tool. We know the reality of drought or effect of El Nino. See our website <http://www.anglicanchurchsa.org/> for this brilliant series.

7. That this crisis is now beyond the government's power to solve and that there is a massive need for the church to help resolve this crisis. **8.** That the Archbishop has already set up an Anglican Board of Education so there is a basis on which we can respond to the crisis but many people are needed to back this initiative and offer their services.

What can we do?

1. Work with the Anglican Board of Education, asking them to set up an ACSA Task Team to provide guidelines for voluntary helpers in our church. 2. Encourage your parish to explore how it can become involved in the education crisis by, for example, making church buildings available as venues for additional help for learners. 3. Obtain resources and offer a local programme to help pupils. 4. Volunteer to help with one of these supplementary programmes. 5. Challenge the Education Authorities to inspect those schools where there is excessive absenteeism amongst teachers and where teachers are grossly neglecting or abdicating their responsibilities. 6. Visit local schools and offer help. 7. Raise funds to support these initiatives. In the field of Tertiary Education: 8. The presence of church monitors during the recent unrest in Cape Town was helpful and could be reproduced on all campuses if there is further unrest. 9. Lobby the President and the Minister of Tertiary Education to listen to the students and respond appropriately.

The Nuclear Deal and other Environmental Issues

President Zuma and the government have been determined to pursue a nuclear energy path. Apart from leaving a toxic legacy of radio-active waste for future generations to manage, this will be financially disastrous for our country. Nuclear is now the most expensive form of electricity

generation. Commitment to a fleet of new nuclear power stations will open further opportunities for corruption on a massive scale. Coal is no longer acceptable as the mining and burning of coal is destructive and polluting. God has given us the solution. It is shining on as every day and blowing in the wind every day and night. Renewable Energy is now the cheapest form of electricity generation and can be installed in rural areas within months. The government should open renewable energy to all investors. There are many other Ecological and Economic Justice (Eco-Justice) issues we should be involved in: the extinction of species, food security, water, waste, land use, marine resources, forestry and climate change.

What can we do? 1. Encourage your parish to become an Eco-Congregation and explore what your Christian responsibility is in caring for God’s creation. (This means embedding creation care in your daily prayers, worship and Bible study. It means including environmental responsibility in your parish management plans so that you save energy and use land, water and resources responsibly. It means making a conscious effort to tread lightly on God’s Earth and to reduce and recycle waste. It means getting involved in community projects and ensuring that developments are done in an ethical and sustainable way that is good for both people and the planet now, and in the future.) 2. Contact the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute (www.safcei.org) and Green Anglicans (www.greenanglicans.org) for guidance and support. 3. Promote and establish Eco-Justice at national and local levels, speaking out the voice of faith to uphold ethical principles for people and the planet. 4. Support SAFCEI’s stand against Nuclear Energy.

The Inequalities between Rich and Poor

The current economic system has resulted in some people becoming Super Rich whilst others are being increasingly impoverished. South Africa is now one of the most unequal countries in the world. The disparities between rich and poor are so extreme that we are sitting on a time bomb that is waiting to explode. The church must challenge the well-off to recognise this danger and use their wealth for the common good. Millions are caught in a debt-trap arising from impossible circumstances and excessive interest rates, and banks, the advertising industry and other institutions are guilty of leading people into these traps. Add to all of this the excessive levels of unemployment and a moribund economy and we have a recipe for disaster.

What can we do? 1. Adopt a simpler lifestyle and share our money, time and resources with proven NGO’s that are helping to deal with poverty, effectively. 2. Encourage church members to be involved in skills-training programmes and mentorship for those who are at present unemployable. 3. The church at all levels could be involved in (i) promoting and supporting a Basic Income Grant (BIG) and lobbying the government to implement it. BIG has been shown to provide security for all communities and lift the level of health, education and well-being; and (ii) encouraging the government to set up public works schemes to offer unemployed people work in

exchange for minimal wages and food. **5. Enormous and obscene payments and bonuses to CEO's and top management should be challenged.**

Other Issues

Crime and violence, the prevalence of gangs, the widespread problems of drug abuse and alcoholism, challenging ethical values in our society, the healing of past memories, the Hate Speech bill, the Commission on the control of religious freedom, the abuse of women and children.

Lord, grant us a vision for our land; a land of justice, where none shall prey on others; a land of plenty, where poverty shall cease to fester; a land of work, where all can be employed; a land of openness, where all are accepted as equal; a land of healing, where hatred and racial prejudice exist no more; a land of peace which is free of violence; and bring this vision to fruition, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Question: Where would you see yourself and your parish making a contribution towards solving some of these issues, in response to God's call to work for justice and truth in society?

Week 5: "Against the Stream"

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2)

One of the questions which is often asked is, "Why did Jesus have to die, and why did he have to do so in such a horrible way?" Here was a man full of love, goodness and godliness, whose love was unconditional and accepting of everyone. Why then was he crucified? If we answer this question simply by saying, "Because it was God's will", we turn God into a monster. The answer has to be much more subtle than that.

Let us begin at the human level. The world Jesus entered was the same as ours. The situation and context may have been different, and also the culture and circumstances, but some things never change. As Jesus put it, "**Light is come into the world and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil**" (John 3:19). The truth is that Jesus' way of life is deeply threatening to many people.

This world has been likened to a shop window in which all the articles have been wrongly priced: the things of real value are marked cheaply, and those that are worth very little are marked expensively. What Jesus did was to put all the price tags back into their proper place. When he spoke of love, he included everyone, even enemies and the people we dislike, despise or hate (Matthew 5:43-45). We speak of his “Parable of the Good Samaritan” but, for most Jews in Jesus’ day, there was no such thing as “good” Samaritan: as a people, they were the hated enemy. Similarly, when Jesus mixed with prostitutes, sinners and outcasts, he deeply offended the more orthodox Jews in his community.

Consider too the issue of money and possessions which was the subject of much of our Lord’s teaching. He said that it was virtually impossible for rich people to enter God’s kingdom, unless they had the very special help of God in order to do so (Mark 10:23-27). He went on to seriously challenge the value we give to money and material things. He said, **“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”** (Luke 12:15).

Then there is the issue of power and control. Jesus taught that the greatest had to be as the least, and that those who wanted to be “Number One” had to become the servants of all.

The question we are asking is, “Why did Jesus have to die?” Surely the teaching he gave can be admired or ignored; it can even be written off as hopeless idealism or the rantings of a lunatic, but surely there was no need to kill him because of it. The problem was that Jesus did not just teach things like this: he lived them, and he called on his followers to do the same. This was when he became a real threat to the status quo. People locked in hatred and bitterness could not respond well to our Lord’s teaching about forgiveness. Others who held long-standing prejudices against people of other races or lifestyles, reacted strongly when Jesus included all of these people in the orbit of his love. Those who loved money and possessions preferred to hang on to what they had and, if the way they had acquired their wealth was by devious means, then Jesus would not be someone they would have wanted to have around. Those who held power hated the thought of losing control. The same applies today.

Put all of this in the context of our present-day Africa. Try to imagine our Lord’s teaching being heard from the standpoint of those leaders who have become rich through corrupt means. It is not hard to imagine that some might be willing to fight and kill in order to hang onto what they have. Consider too the world of big business, which often increases its profits by getting people to buy what they do not really need and which usually has no problem if people land themselves in unpayable debt in order to do so. The recent film, “The Big Short” is a good illustration of this. Jesus would have a lot of problems with modern day capitalism. Then there are those in high positions,

in both church and society, who have fallen in love with power and status, and the feeling of being “important” and “looked up to”. All this talk about being a servant and **“taking the lowest place”** will certainly go against the grain.

Jesus spoke the truth in a world of lies and deception. He acted with great personal freedom in a context where many were enslaved by attitudes and possessions. He unmasked the lies that people live by and this was a very dangerous thing to do. It still is. However he did not confine his attention to society alone. Some of his harshest words were reserved for religious people who had become hardened and exclusive in their attitudes. How would he react in our day if he was confronted by racial prejudice amongst people who claim to be Christians?

Jesus was truly good and loving and free, but for that reason he was hard to live with and, if people could not respond to his message, it became easier to kill the messenger than to face the truth. We have done the same ever since and some modern examples include Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Steve Biko. There will be many others. People who took seriously their Christian faith during the apartheid era of South Africa’s history risked their lives by doing so and Desmond Tutu, and others like him, constantly faced death threats.

Jesus’ life was against the stream of this world’s values so THE man of **love** ended up being **hated**. Some people were even happy to see him die a horrible death on a cross. Yet here is the rub: those who truly follow him are likely to share the same fate, as regards hatred. In many parts of Africa, those in authority have often become entrenched in positions of power and corruption and they will mercilessly resist being challenged. Yet those who live in these countries are not likely to recover, or safeguard, their freedom without a struggle. What this Lent course is suggesting is that, in the name of all that is just and true, we Christians have to be part of that struggle. If we try to save our life and stay quiet and uninvolved, we are likely to lose the life we value and the country we love.

Next week we will have to go even deeper into the mystery of how Jesus’ suffering and death became part of God’s purpose and we will see that the answer concerns us all, very deeply.

Lord, give your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Reflection, Prayer and Discussion:

1. In what way should Christians be going against the stream in present-day society?

2. Following Jesus faithfully is bound to lead to some level of persecution. - Discuss
3. **Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions** – This is one of **the** issues we have to face in our society, and that includes Christians. – Discuss.

Week 6: "Paying the Price"

Jesus threw himself on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me; yet not what I want but what you want." (Mark 14: 35-36).

Jesus died because he remained utterly faithful to the things of God, despite all the opposition that was mounted up against him. But he did not do so without a struggle. He used to say, **"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me"** (John 6:38) but in Gethsemane, this commitment was tested to the uttermost. There Jesus had to wrestle in prayer to maintain his integrity because, like one of us, he did not want to die, and certainly not on a cross. Everything in him was praying with the psalmist, **"O that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest"** (Psalm 55:6). But Jesus did not give in to that temptation because he knew, at the deepest level, that to do so would have been to surrender everything he had stood for. The writer of Hebrews says, **"He learned obedience through what he suffered"** (Hebrews 5:8).

The mystery of God's will is that God uses the hatred, bitterness, pride, wilfulness and hardness of heart of sinful people to fulfil his purposes. Hence he was able to use the sufferings and death of Jesus, horrible as they were, to bring salvation to the world. The supreme irony is that those who thought they were getting rid of Jesus by killing him, were, in reality, fulfilling the Scriptures and unleashing into this world God's life and power as never before. "The old life" with all its false and godless values was now truly under threat.

When Jesus calls us to follow him he asks us to learn obedience to God in a world which is still hostile to his kingship. To take up this challenge is to go against the stream and, as in the case of Jesus, pay the price. What that price will be will vary with each person and, thankfully, in most cases, it will not involve having literally to lay down our lives. But we will face a struggle and it will involve some degree of suffering.

The first part of that struggle has to be with ourselves. Our own nature is inclined towards self-preservation, self-interest and self-pleasing, and we ourselves have been infected by the very values that Jesus spoke against. Money, power, status, selfishness, and pleasing others before we please God, all have the potential to influence our lives and hinder our discipleship. St Paul described this internal conflict as a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit and he gives us some markers to help us distinguish between the two (Galatians 5:16-26). Fortunately, we are not alone

in the struggle because God is at work **in** us. The Christian life is often one of learning to say a bigger and bigger 'Yes' to the Holy Spirit who dwells within. The more we do this, the more God is able to make us effective agents of his Kingdom.

We will always be wounded healers, so our willing acceptance of our imperfections is one of the ways God uses to make us humble and then holy. St Paul expressed it well when he wrote, **"We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us"** (2 Corinthians 4:7). In a later part of the same letter he wrote, **"whenever I am weak, then I am strong"** (2 Cor.12:10) and he told us how he had been assured that God's grace was sufficient for him. As he put it, **"God's power is made perfect in weakness"** (2 Cor.12:10).

God does not wait for us to be perfect before he uses us. If he did, he would have no one to use! Another part of the mystery is that God not only works despite human sinfulness: God actually uses sinful people, like us, so that he can fulfil his purposes. But if God does not wait for us to be perfect, neither can we. Despite the internal struggles we all have, we are not allowed to make them the excuse for failing to be God's servants in God's world. As we allow ourselves to be used, we enter into another dimension of the struggle. As Jesus came up against the world's resistance, so will we, and a number of things can happen. We can be faced with misunderstanding and rejection, even by people who are close to us. We can meet opposition from authorities, especially if the power of our protest begins to make inroads into entrenched positions. In short, we may have to suffer, and this is where another aspect of our Christian discipleship becomes a reality.

In the daily readings for Week 6 there are several extracts from the First Letter of Peter where the writer is preparing his readers to face suffering and teaching them how to deal with it. One of his key points is that Jesus is our example and role model in this area, as in everything else.

Richard Rohr, a famous Roman Catholic Franciscan priest who has a world-wide teaching ministry, says that suffering is what happens to us and is beyond our control. This is helpful because it shows us that suffering is a normal part of everyday life. If you have a car that turns every traffic light red (!) you are experiencing suffering in one of its mildest form, but it still has to be dealt with. If we curse or grow irritated, we are not handling it well. If we use it, even to say a prayer or practise patience, then it can be creative. Suffering is like money: it is what we do with it that makes the difference. You will meet people whom you have gone to cheer up when they are having a hard time and **you** come away cheered up yourself. Others, when they suffer, go in on themselves and become monsters of self-pity. It is not for us to judge such folk but suffering does involve a choice and what we see Jesus doing is offering up his sufferings and his death to God and allowing God to use them for his redemptive purposes.

If we respond positively to this Lent course it may be at the price of our own inconvenience. We may have to forgo our own comfort and our own agenda in order to take up to some of the suggestions that are being made. Our vision is to see God's people rise up and work for change in

society and, in doing so, move beyond the boundaries of their own concerns, personal or ecclesiastical.

There is one last dimension that we must also face. St Paul tells us that **“our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”** (Ephesians 6:12). Evil can sometimes be locked into systems which take us over and Apartheid would be one fairly contemporary example of this. But St Paul seems to be pointing beyond this truth to a reality which is real but also mysterious. Significantly, at the end of World War II, when news about the Holocaust emerged, people asked, “What **got into** a civilised people that they could do such abominable things to others?” Perhaps Paul is pointing to the answer in the text just quoted.

The strongest call in this Lenten programme is to deep prayer, personal and corporate, and to ask that it be the source from which all **action** springs. Only this will deliver us from **activism** where what is done often stems from people’s own initiative, perhaps even from false guilt, and where egotism and the following of our own agenda predominates. One of the signs of this aberration is when people become the victims of the very thing they are resisting. They may oppose hatred, for example, and end up hating those they are opposing. Let love of God be the source from which all action springs and let God be the power by which everything is done. When we are weak, then we are strong, but we need to pray as never before if hearts are to be changed and the victory won.

O God, for as much as without you we are not able to please you: mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For Reflection, Prayer and Discussion:

1. What are the false values that need to be challenged in our society? How should we do this?
2. Does the world that rejects godly values hate the church? If not, why not?
3. The Christian life is learning to say a bigger and bigger ‘YES’ to the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. What do you make of this statement?
4. What do you make of the distinction between **action** and **activism**?

Pledge

Personal Notes

