



Trinity

METHODIST CHURCH

Worship the King, Grow the Kingdom



'Hold Fast to Faith'
Sermon Based Curriculum
for Small Groups

26 February – 9 April 2023

Covering Lent and Easter

Greetings to Home Groups

This booklet is laid out so that your gathering as a home group each week will follow the four W's rhythm of Welcome, Worship, Word, Works. I hope this helps you and makes the journey meaningful. The times in brackets are a guideline that should help to keep you on track.

Welcome (10 minutes)

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship (10 minutes)

Use the Psalm for the week. Ask one person to read it slowly and prayerfully. As you listen to it allow this to be a moment of worship, love, devotion, adoration, thanksgiving, and praise.

You can do your prayers of intercession for each other and society at this time, or at the end of the gathering.

Word (60 minutes)

Here I offer some notes on the reading and the theme for the week. You will then do a Bible Study together and discuss the theme and the sermon you heard.

It is up to the group leader to decide whether there is enough time for all the questions – and to select which questions to discuss if there are too many.

Prayer for Trinity

This year we are asking for Home Groups and Classes to pray for specific aspects of Trinity's life. Suggestions for these prayers are given in the notes below.

Shalom,
Brett

Introduction

Sermon series theme: **Lectionary Time: Lent 2023**

Resources:

- **N.T. Wright – Matthew**
- **Word and Worship Year A 2022-2023**
- **<https://sacredise.com/lectionary-resources/>**

In the early church, and especially after the 4th Century in the Christian Era, the forty days of Lent came to be associated with, and even utilised as, a time of spiritual preparation for baptism. New believers would then be instructed and trained to be ready for baptism during the Easter services, which recall the death and the resurrection of Christ. The Lenten period of forty days (plus Sundays) gives us space to reflect on a time of inner strengthening and preparation.

Trinity's Lent journey follows the Lectionary Gospel readings of Matthew and John. Each is a narratively rich story and has many angles and interpretations. Offered below are some interpretations to help guide us as a congregation in this time of fasting, penitence, and growth towards Christ. Allow the story of each to show us how Jesus taught and changed the world around us as well as the ways in which Jesus calls us to live new lives.

There are certainly other resources available for these passages this Lent and over the weeks preachers will interpret the texts and preach on them in nuanced ways, but the important thing to remember is that we are journeying towards the cross. We hope this time of discussion in groups is meaningful and that you journey together in fellowship!

Note on the Psalms for this Lent season: Several of the Psalms in the lectionary this Lent are well known and significant Psalms. While they are not the main focus for the theme of 'Hold Fast to Faith', they do speak about complementary aspects of faith to what the Gospels are speaking of and may add an extra element of insight and growth.

Sunday 26th February – Lent 1

Hold Fast to Faith

"Human beings cannot live on bread alone"

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 32**

Word

Read **Matthew 4:1-11** as a group

1. Read these notes on the passage

"The biblical texts Jesus uses as his key weapons help us to see how this remarkable story fits into Matthew's gospel at this point. They are all taken from the story of Israel in the wilderness. Jesus has come through the waters of baptism, like Israel crossing the red sea. He now had to face, in forty days and nights the equivalent of Israel's forty years in the desert. But where Israel failed again and again, Jesus succeeded. Here at last is a true Israelite, Matthew is saying. He has come to do what God always wanted Israel to do – to bring light to the world."
N.T. Wright

As we enter the time of Lent, the first few days of the fast are beginning and there is a sense of reflecting on faith and belief. In this scripture and as N.T. Wright points out, this was also true for Jesus and those the Gospel of Matthew was aimed at. Gaining perspective on our purpose and our identity in God is important – Jesus came to fulfill Israel's purpose, to bring light to the world and help us do the same.

The Gospel is not there to mute people and create automatons. The full Gospel actually creates necessary questions that need to be worked out and dilemmas for the soul that will lead to growth in each of us and as a community. The Gospel is not there as a set of rules to govern life and create a well running organisational machine, it disrupts the soils of life to bring about newness from underneath.

Because of this, the Gospel is less concerned with past performance or future plans, but rather that each person and community that is touched by Christ's love have a confidence in a loving God. Jesus clung to his confidence in a loving God as he said the words: "Go away, Satan! The scripture says, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'" and then the scripture ends, "Then the Devil left Jesus; and angels came and helped him."

In one of the other Lectionary readings this week, Paul suggests in Romans that rules and requirements (the Law) can help us to get seriously engaged with the need for grace and mercy; but the Law is never an end in itself.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. What does faith mean to you?
- b. Do you have 'confidence in a loving God'? Discuss this.
- c. Do you worry about past performance or future plans? What does the scripture today tell us about this?
- d. How do you feel about Jesus' response to the temptations in the passage?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for...

Trinity's Worship Portfolio

Pray for: Everything relating to five Sunday Services, The Fusion & Vernacular Choirs, Worship Teams, Banner Ministry, Readers, Stewards, Streaming Team, All AV

If you would like to get involved, consider doing the following:

Visit the Fusion Choir practice on Thursday nights.

Visit a Sunday service that is not your 'regular' service and take note of and pray for those serving in the service.

5. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7, Psalm 32, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

Hold Fast to Faith

"...born of water and the Spirit"

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 121**

Word

Read **John 3:1-17** as a group

6. Read these notes on the passage

Lent opens the opportunity of a self-examination of faith, we hope you are giving time and space this Lent season to reflect and pray and dialogue with God about your faith.

One question for many is the question of 'being born again'. This passage of scripture is often cited as the most quoted part of the Bible, but as with all scripture, there is always something new to learn from familiar words. Birth and re-birth are both important aspects of Lent and deserve serious thought and discernment.

Maybe a different way to look at these familiar words and the exchange between Jesus and Nicodemus is not to speak of a 'second' birth, but a 'new' birth. Being already alive, but being born into the way of Christ, taking on new faith and living it in a radical and exciting way. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reminds us that, "Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come."

What is at stake is a radical break with the past and an opening up of a new chapter in the life of someone following the teachings of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

If we 'Hold Fast to Faith' we trust that new birth in the Spirit will result in a spiritual regeneration. Lent is a time of putting aside those things that will hinder us from coming closer to God, accepting the way of the cross and allowing something new to grow from that.

Jesus says elsewhere: "...take on my yoke...", reminding us that faith is an invitation to live God's way, quite literally leaving the old behind and taking on the way of Jesus, trusting that in Jesus is the way, truth, and life.

This is in opposition to the way Nicodemus may have interpreted faith and salvation. Jesus makes it clear that the gift of salvation through faith ensures that it is free and easy to carry, if the gift of salvation were based on law and following rules it would make it a burden. Nicodemus represented the way of law which is why he came to Jesus for clarity.

God is willing and able to do new things in our life, if we draw closer to God through faith this opens up the possibility for us to experience this newness. But, first we must willingly, knowingly, and intentionally draw close!

7. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. How has Lent opened up a space for reflection in your life so far? (as individuals and a congregation)
- b. What areas of new birth are needed in you and our congregations?
- c. Have you heard the phrase 'being born again' used before? In what way and context? How do you understand the phrase?
- d. What do you understand it to mean when Jesus said: 'Take on my yoke'?
- e. Are you willing to draw closer to God this Lent? (This may be a good opportunity to say this in the group and pray for God's strength to see the willingness through)

8. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

9. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for...

Worship as a Christian people in our country, that people from all walks of life and places in our country may find a place to worship God and a congregation to fellowship and grow with.

10. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4:1-5, 13-17, John 3:1-17

Hold Fast to Faith

"Life-giving water"

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 95**

Word

Read **John 4:5-42** as a group

1. Read these notes on the passage

This exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a treasure of insight and grace in the teaching and way of Jesus.

Not only are there many ways in which Jesus reminds us about the way of worship, faith, treating others and grace, but the exchange itself and the fact that it happens between two sets of people who are supposedly unequal sets the backdrop for many interesting places of reflection in Lent.

If we look at the passage, the Samaritan woman keeps coming back to the Judean's claim to greater favour with God than any other people. She makes it clear that she has been treated unfairly because of her birth, gender, many husbands, and now because of her 'unmarried' status. The conversation points to the many ways in which people have let her know that she has 'no place in God's family'.

Jesus' response to her is directly opposite to those voices when he says: "The water that I will give them will become in them a spring which will provide them with life-giving water and give them eternal life." God's family is not limiting, it is the same life-giving water for all! A spring gives water to many, whoever comes to the spring can get the water, all people have a place at the spring. The idea that Jesus' life-giving water will become a spring in them is not only a promise,

but is realised a few sentences later when the Samaritan woman goes to her neighbours and tells them of Jesus and the life-giving water. They hear it from her and her 'spring' gives life and water to them.

One other dynamic to look at is that Jesus is also at the well at midday. By the circumstance of travelling, he is also caught in the blazing heat. Jesus meets her *in* the difficult situation. Also, Jesus has access to the physical well water, but he has no means of collecting it. By contrast the woman has access to the well with the means to collect it.

It is worth reflecting on this dynamic between Jesus and the woman. Many people have suggested that she is without any agency in the story, and her own admonition shows she is in a lowly state in the village, but she does have something to offer Jesus in the conversation – she has a bucket to draw water to give to Jesus. Jesus must rely on her mercy for a drink of water. This reminds us that she is not helpless even though she is disadvantaged in this scene. Jesus used this dynamic to open new ways of grace to her.

Said another way, Jesus and the woman both have access to the living water Jesus is speaking of, the woman has a bucket to collect it (a way to accept it) in the scorching heat and the acceptance leads to a new understanding of Jesus. Jesus gives the living water freely and we must recognise that, like the woman, we must look within ourselves to what our 'bucket' is that will help us accept the living water offered by God.

This is one of the few times in the Gospels that Jesus reveals himself as the Messiah outside of his close friends. It may have been in response to the woman's openness about her identity, but it is worth reflecting on how opening ourselves to Jesus is important!

2. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. Where are there places in our spiritual life where we have access to the well, but we don't have a bucket (metaphorical) to accept it?

- b. What steps do we need to take as a congregation in worship to be vulnerable and open with Jesus?
- c. Have you experienced someone else being a 'spring of living water' for you. Share this with the group.
- d. Have you been open and willing to share with God who you are?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for Trinity's Children & Youth Ministries *Pray for:* Holiday club 27-31 March, All Friday activities (Illuminate for Gr 0-7 & Youth for Gr 8-12), Sunday Morning Children's & Youth Church, Pop-up Play Place in October, Cohesion of families, That young people will come to know Christ and be transformed by God's love.

If you would like to get involved in some way, why not visit Holiday Club (7.30am-1.00pm 27-31 March) or the Friday night and Sunday morning programmes during school terms.

5. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11, [John 4:5-42](#)

Hold Fast to Faith

"I was blind, and now I see"

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 23**

Word

Read **John 9:1-41** as a group

1. Read these notes on the passage

This passage highlights the contrast between light and dark. Lent is a good time to reflect on the places in our lives that we hide away. It is the nature of a fast to bring to light what we usually want to keep hidden behind busyness, noise and 'filling the space'. In this passage, we see Jesus play only a small part in the narrative, but what it opens up for the blind man, his parents and the Pharisees is worth giving time and thought to.

Read the passage again if necessary, but see how Jesus' healing of the man causes many questions, but for the man the resolution to the questions is to see Jesus and experience the miracle of healing. It may be true in our lives as well that an encounter with Jesus raises questions, interrogations and uncertainty (maybe even fear) as it did for the man, but if we keep coming back to Jesus for clarity and insight we will 'see'.

The metaphor in this narrative is also key to understanding the passage: A blind man (living in darkness) is healed and physically given sight (to see the light). The Pharisees spiritually will not see the way of Jesus (living in darkness) while Jesus is offering them the option to see the light, but they refuse.

Seeing through God's eyes enables us to 'Hold Fast to Faith' and see things from a new perspective. Remember though, that the previously-blind man had to adjust to a new perspective, his vision was blurry to begin with and took time to come into focus. He was completely healed, but he had to work towards understanding the healing and making sense of the new ability. Similarly, we are called to adjust to new ways of viewing the world through the eyes of Jesus.

Lent is a time of fasting. Remember that fasting also gives new perspective. Allowing Jesus' healing of the darkness (struggle) to take on new meaning (light) and liberate us from those things that bind us. Lent brings new perspective and we give ourselves over to the journey where at the end we can say, "I was blind, but now I see..."

2. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. How do you relate to the previously-blind man as he openly speaks to the Pharisees of his healing and his words about Jesus?
- b. What darkness needs light in our world? How can the light of Christ shine on it and transform it?
- c. What perspective can Lent (fasting, penitence, alms to the poor) give to dark situations?
- d. Are there areas of faith in your life that are 'blurry' even though you follow Jesus? Discuss these with the group and allow the conversation to, hopefully, help you to find clarity.

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to continue to pray for our Youth and Children's ministries – especially for the final build-up to Holiday Club.

5. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

Hold Fast to Faith

"Do you believe this?"

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 130**

Word

Read **John 11:1-45** as a group

1. Read these notes on the passage

This narrative is a rich story. It is filled with details and specific names and places. It highlights the relationship between Jesus and the family and gives context to the relationship he has with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. It reminds us during Lent that Jesus was also human and found hardship and struggle in life. He also found blessings in friendship and closeness with others.

Importantly, it shows Jesus' emotion and the emotions of others in the story. In Lent we are aware of heightened emotions, not only are we preparing ourselves for the events of Easter weekend, but we are fasting and looking inwards in our lives. There are emotions that may be surprising to us and allowing time to reflect on these, as we see Jesus doing in the story, may be good for us.

One other reminder in the detail of the story is that God does not interact with us at random, nor is God a general 'goodness in the universe' or a 'just a feeling'. God, through Christ, acts within specific contexts in demarcated times with clear purpose (Jesus purposefully arrived two days late) and for specific people. Remind yourself that God acts specifically, in demarcated time and with purpose in your life. Part of the preparation of Lent for Easter is the recognition that we need to take time out (fast) to give specific time and intention to examining faith.

The theme for Lent is 'Hold Fast to Faith' for that exact reason, knowing that God acts in intentional ways in our lives means we have the hope to hold on to faith because God is with us, inviting and guiding us every day.

Lent is a specific and demarcated time. A chosen time of fasting and reflection. A time where we remind ourselves of God's ability to specifically intervene in our lives by removing the 'clutter' and 'noise'. Don't let the time of Lent pass by as an observance only, but give it full and due scope in your life to be a time of demarcated purpose.

When Jesus speaks to Martha, he says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die. Do you believe this?" This is an opportunity to demarcate our belief in Jesus.

When we fully take on board that living in Christ and following the ways of Jesus means we open ourselves to the possibility that living in the Spirit of God and actively working towards the Reign of God in the world allows us to become agents of healing and transformation.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. How do we challenge ourselves and those around us to 'demarcate' space for God in Lent?
- b. Has a deep belief in Jesus permeated the time of Lent for us? What transformation and resurrection would be possible if it did?
- c. How does Lent give us opportunity to be agents of healing and transformation?
- d. Has the theme of 'Hold Fast to Faith' been useful for you in this Lenten period? If so, how? Discuss this with the group.

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for Trinity's Holy Week & Easter Services *Pray for:* A turning and returning to Jesus in the Linden and surrounds area through the message of love and hope from the cross. Pray that Trinity will be a catalyst to many people who are 'blind' to God, coming to faith through our worship, services, programmes and evangelism.

5. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

Sunday 2nd April – Palm Sunday

Hold Fast to Faith

"Untie them and bring them to me"

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

Word

Read **Matthew 21:1-11** as a group

1. Read these notes on the passage

Jesus confronts sin and injustice, that is the basis of the Gospels and Jesus' teaching throughout. He comes into Jerusalem by the back gate, and in contradiction to the pomp and process of kings and conquerors, and he rides a donkey rather than a war horse. Not only does his confrontation of sin and injustice happen in a non-violent way, but the crowds are left no room for misinterpretation. Jesus declares he will not do it by Roman standards, but by God's standards.

This is an important lesson for us, the entry is triumphal, but not because of force and might, but because of humility.

Through the triumphal entry into Jerusalem Jesus proclaims himself the Messiah, but the way he enters Jerusalem in opposition to the way of the Roman empire gives us an opportunity to re-look at how we see the balance of power in our world and the forceful nature in humans. Fasting is the opposite end of the spectrum of force, it lets go in order to gain, it puts itself last and it allows God in.

Faith is an exercise in humility in many ways. We humbly walk with Jesus towards the cross on Easter, we humbly seek understanding in faith and following the teachings of Jesus, we humbly give ourselves in service as part of a church community. Humility is wrapped up in our faith in important ways.

As we prepare for Easter, there is a need to recognise and take ownership of this humility. As Lent comes to an end, there is the recognition of the fasting journey that took patience, sacrifice and a clear sense of God's presence to get through. In the questions below, give time to acknowledge God's presence in your life and this Lent journey.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. Have you experienced humility this Lent season (or share a story of another time you experienced humility)?
- b. Where is there unnecessary force in our world and lives? Is there a different way to approach some of these situations? Make it personal, where is there unnecessary force at play in your actions and life?
- c. What sin and injustice needs to be stood against in our world?

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for Holy Week & Easter Services in the Linden Fraternal of Churches.

Pray for: A true sense of Christian community at this time, despite the hype around Easter bunnies and eggs. Pray that Christ and Christian unity will be a focus of Churches in the area. Pray that many people who have not been to church will go to one of the many churches in our area.

5. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Philippians 2:5-11,
Matthew 21:1-11

Sunday 9th April

Easter Sunday

Welcome

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship

Psalm of the week **Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24**

Word

Read **Matthew 28:1-10** as a group

1. Read these notes on the passage

(A note on the notes below, Easter Sunday is an important Holy day for every believer, as such preachers at Trinity take prayer, time, study, and effort to prepare a sermon that is relevant and meaningful for each congregation at Trinity. Unlike previous weeks in Lent where preachers may have used these notes as a starting or touch-point for their prepared sermon, what follows below will be different to what may be preached on Easter Sunday. Allow the lines below to be an additional message of inspiration for Easter and as a blessing for your discussion as a group)

And so we finally come to the end of the Lent and Easter journey. This is what may be thought of – in some senses at least – as the most important Sunday of the year. If resurrection is just about a miraculous event that happened to Jesus long ago, or if it’s only about something that happens to some people at the end of time, then it has little real value, no matter how fascinating it may be. But, of course, resurrection is about far more than this. It’s the promise of God’s life available to us both now and forever. And it’s the call for us to follow Christ by becoming life-givers and agents of resurrection in our families, communities and our world. What a glorious and miraculous challenge!

May the empty tomb be more than an event for us as we worship this year, and may our worship lead us into a real and transforming encounter with God’s irrepressible life!

It is crucial that Easter Sunday is not allowed to become just an interesting academic exercise. In every community, and in every life, we struggle with both life and death. The beauty of resurrection is that death is not so much opposed or destroyed as transformed and absorbed into life.

And so, as we celebrate resurrection this Sunday, we are also called to live resurrection in our own lives. This means that God is challenging us to face the death within us – the self-centredness, apathy, destructiveness and cynicism that keep us and others from life – and allow it to be transformed into life.

It also means that we be prepared to bring life to others wherever we can through our compassion, hospitality, listening, giving, friendship, involvement and advocacy. When we become aware of how our actions bring life or death to others, we find ourselves making different choices. If our use of energy robs the planet of life, we will gratefully seek to be more responsible and careful. If our choice of products or our tendency to consume more than we need leaves others in poverty, or leads to people not receiving fair pay for their work or products, we will shop more compassionately.

And if simple acts like voting, signing petitions (like those from Avaaz.com) or engaging our local government officials can help to make our communities more just and peaceful, we have brought life to others. Then, flowing from these works, we can speak – with actions having backed up our words – of the eternal life that can be experienced through Christ.

2. Questions and notes related to the passage

- a. Were you moved to turn again to Christ this Easter?
- b. What do the cross and the empty tomb mean to you? Can you tell the group in a few words the significance of them for you?
- c. How should we respond to the world around us in light of the Easter message? Be as practical in the answer as you can.
- d. Spend some time working out ways to keep each other accountable for ways in which we need to respond to the world around us in light of Easter.

3. Engaging with Trinity Sermons

- a. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
- b. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

4. Close in Prayer for Trinity

This week we ask you to pray for the Pastoral Care Portfolio

Pray for: White Flower delivery, Intercessory prayer ministry, Seniors Ministry, Proactive care

If you would like to get involved in some way, consider the following: volunteer to accompany one flower delivery or other practical care ministry – eg. Dropping off meals, Be prayed for on a Sunday and chat to the prayer steward about this ministry, Attend The Well service, Volunteer to lift a senior to Seniors Tea, or volunteer to bake for Seniors tea or serve, Attend one of the talks / workshops held throughout the year, Offer your skills to lead a relevant talk.

5. This Week's Lectionary Readings for Daily Reading

Jeremiah 31:1-6, Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24, Colossians 3:1-4,
Matthew 28:1-10