

SURPRISED BY GENEROSITY



A 7 Week Lent Course Exploring the Theme of Generosity

Particularly Suitable For Mid-Week Meetings and Groups

INTRODUCTION

'Surprised by Generosity' was originally developed by Diocese of Exeter as their Lent resource for 2022. This version, adapted with Exeter's permission, can be used in any year.

The course was developed by Exeter's Mission Resources Advisor Brigit Kiyaga and written by contributors from across the Diocese of Exeter, including author and speaker Dave Hopwood (davehopwood.com)

This seven-week course looks at God's generosity to us and our call to live generously in return. It is based on the Gospel of Luke and features a series of videos, and a small group study guide. The original Exeter course also included sermon notes and hymn choice suggestions based on the Sunday Bible readings for Lent 2022. These are not included here but the full course is available from the [Generosity Learning Hub](#). (You'll need to set up a user name and password but the course is free to download. Go to "Courses" tab then select the "Surprised By Generosity" course.)

During the seven weeks those on your course, which could be a Church mid-week group or indeed any group of people who wish to explore generosity together, are invited to engage with this resource and explore how this message of generosity speaks to you today.

If you decide to offer the course, the Generous Giving Team at the Diocese of Newcastle would really appreciate your feedback as to how it goes and the extent to which it develops and deepens your understanding of our calling to be a generous people.



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PREPARING FOR EACH SESSION

Prayerfully watch the video and look at the Bible reading in advance, and prepare to lead the discussion, using the questions and discussion points provided for each week.

Ask those joining the course to bring a notebook or paper and a pen with them, as some weeks they will be invited to jot down their thoughts. Have some pens and paper available in case anyone forgets. Stress that when people are asked to write some thoughts down, that is for their own personal reflection and they will not be asked or expected to share those thoughts with the group later, unless they want to.

During the discussion time, try to ensure no one person is allowed to dominate the conversation. Gently prompt those who might be more reticent to speak to share their thoughts, but don't place anyone under pressure to speak if they don't want to.

If possible, ask three different people from the group to a) read the Bible reading (text included in the notes), b) read the reflection, and c) close in prayer. Give these people the reading and reflection texts in advance so they can look through before-hand.

Consider refreshments and how to make a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Some people may be abstaining from certain foods during Lent so buns and cakes may not necessarily be a good idea. Simple refreshments like soup and a roll might be more appropriate.

Prior to each week, check the technology and make sure you can move seamlessly into playing the video without a significant disruptive break. For an in-person course, think about the layout of chairs in the room so that everyone can see the screen.

If you are running the course online, you may find the notes on the next page for showing a video over a zoom call helpful.

A suggested timeline for each session is as follows but this can be adapted to fit your own individual circumstances. In particular, the time for the discussion slots will vary according to the size of your group – the more people – the longer the time required.

- Welcome, serving refreshments, making sure everyone feels at home (10 minutes)
- The opening prayer (1 minute)
- Introductory activity or discussion (10 minutes)
- Introduce then play the video which is 3 - 5.5 minutes long (6 minutes)
- The Bible reading from Luke's gospel (2 minutes)
- Reading the reflection (3 minutes)
- The discussion (25 minutes)
- The closing prayer (1 minute)

However, some weeks might require more time so we suggest you advertise the course as taking up to 90 minutes.

Hints For Playing The Video When Running The Course Over Zoom

- Before the zoom call starts, click on the link to start playing the video, then as soon as it starts playing, immediately press "pause".
- At the bottom right of the screen, select 2nd to right icon (Exit Full Screen)
- At the top right of the screen, select middle icon (restore down)
- When you are ready to start the call, select the Zoom icon and start in the normal way.
- During the call, when the time comes to play the video:
 - a) Mute yourself
 - b) Select Screen Share
 - c) Tick both boxes bottom right "Share sound" and "Optimise video output"
 - d) Select the window which has the video playing (but paused)
 - e) Select share screen
 - f) On Video – select PLAY icon
 - g) Select "full screen"
- When the video finishes, press "escape" to come out of full screen mode, then go back to your zoom window, click "stop sharing screen" and unmute yourself, to continue the discussion.

THE GIFT OF GOD

SESSION ONE



Prayer

Dear Lord, at the start of this course we ask for your guidance and help as we engage with your surprising generosity

Activity / Ice Breaker

Ask people if they can share an example of where they have experienced God's generosity unexpectedly.

Introduce The Video:

Explain that this video is called "The Gift of God", and it features The Rt. Rev'd Jackie Searle, Bishop of Crediton (in Exeter Diocese) reflecting on Luke 2 and its importance during Lent, and sharing how she has experienced God's generosity unexpectedly in her own life

Watch Video 1: [The Gift of God](#) (Duration 4 minutes 8 seconds)

Read Luke 2: 1-7 (NIV)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them

Reflections

Sometimes God is generous to us in unexpected ways, so unexpected that we may miss what is going on. We often expect him to operate in particular ways and places. When a young couple shuffled into the noisy, bustling temple complex with a tiny baby in their arms most people were too busy doing the work of God to take any notice. Joseph was just a poor carpenter, Mary just another young woman, neither of them looked at all as if they might be carrying God's powerful plan of salvation in their arms. But two people did notice, Simeon and Anna. They had been waiting, looking, hoping for this day. And because of their way of life they were tuned in when Jesus arrived. Years later (in Luke chapter 8) when Jesus was leading an expectant crowd to the house of wealthy, respected Jairus, he stopped them all dead when he felt someone snag his sleeve.

The crowd were confused, wanting to get to the action at Jairus's place, but the action was here, now. Jesus was waiting for the moment he could lift up a broken person, rejected by everyone because of her weakness. That day he brought the gift of new life twice, to Jairus's daughter certainly, but first of all to an unnamed, unpopular woman who took a risk in a crowd. Earlier in Luke 2 we read of the unexpected story of Christmas. Angels announcing the gift of God to shepherds who were not really rated as worth much. And those shepherds were so keen to see the baby they went rushing away from their sheep. God's generosity drew enthusiasm from them and a willingness to find out more. Later Jesus would describe himself as a shepherd who had come looking for us. Philippians chapter 2 describes all that he gave up in his quest to find us – leaving the glory of heaven and walking a road which would ultimately lead to total sacrifice. When he was tempted in the desert he quotes from Deuteronomy; Men shall not live on bread alone. His words can truly sustain us.

Questions and Discussion Points

1. Share stories of times where you have experienced the generosity of your church family.
2. Bishop Jackie mentioned that during Lent it is common practise to 'give up' something. What might you give up, or perhaps take up this Lent?
3. The woman who touched Jesus' cloak took a risk in asking for help; offering help can feel risky too. Taking a step into the unknown forces us to rely on God not ourselves. What risk can you take this Lent to be a blessing to your (church) community?
4. What might you do this Lent to share God's unexpected generosity with those around you?

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for the generous gift of your Son Jesus Christ, who came to live among us and died for us. Thank you for your generosity that speaks to us every single day. Help us, as we step into your footprint to be(come) generous too, so the world might see your love through us.

CATCHING FISH

SESSION TWO



Prayer

Dear Lord, as we engage with the verses from Luke 5, may our eyes be opened to your provision in our lives and our hearts be filled with thankfulness.

Activity / Ice Breaker

Ask people to spend a few minutes in private prayer, bringing their concerns of today to God and opening our heart to what he wants to say in response. People might find it helpful to write down their thoughts in a notebook or on a some paper to reflect on later in their own time. Finish the time with some open prayer in which anyone who wishes to can pray and ask for God's provision for any need they are facing.

Introduce The Video

Explain that this video is called "Catching Fish" and includes Brigit Kiyaga and Dave Hopwood discussing how God's generosity often comes through others.


Watch Video 2: [Catching Fish](#) (Duration 3 minutes 52 seconds)

Read Luke 5: 1-11 (NIV)

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Reflections

These fishermen were poor, struggling to feed their families and somehow get by. This wasted, disappointing night did not leave these guys in a good state. So when a teacher called Jesus wandered up and showed them where to get a bumper catch of fish this was a revelation on various levels. Firstly, how does a teacher of religion know more about fishing than a fisherman? And if he knew there was this rich catch down there, why not keep it for himself? Jesus was not well off. The surplus was so great, much of this catch could be sold. Why give away all this money? First and foremost Jesus was demonstrating his generous lifestyle. He didn't just talk the talk, he walked it. He lived differently, with open hands. Willing to share his life with others. But there was a deeper purpose behind this, he was about to invite these fishermen, Peter, James, Andrew and John, to leave their jobs for a while and learn a new trade. So this massive catch of fish would provide for them and their families whilst they were away from their day jobs. Jesus was practically minded. He knew what life was like for these men and their families. They needed to eat, and pay their rent and taxes. He'd grown up in that same ordinary lifestyle, after all. They would never forget his generosity, and would be reminded of it again on another morning in John chapter 21, after another soul-destroying night.



On that day Jesus was about to ask them to leave fishing again, this time to start the church. So he gave them another bumper catch. And these incidents would shape them, and draw them towards a life of generosity and care for others. We can be tempted to think that being a Christian is first and foremost about a spiritual life, but Jesus was totally grounded in reality. He knew all about the stresses and pressures of this world, and forged a new way of living.

Questions and Discussion Points

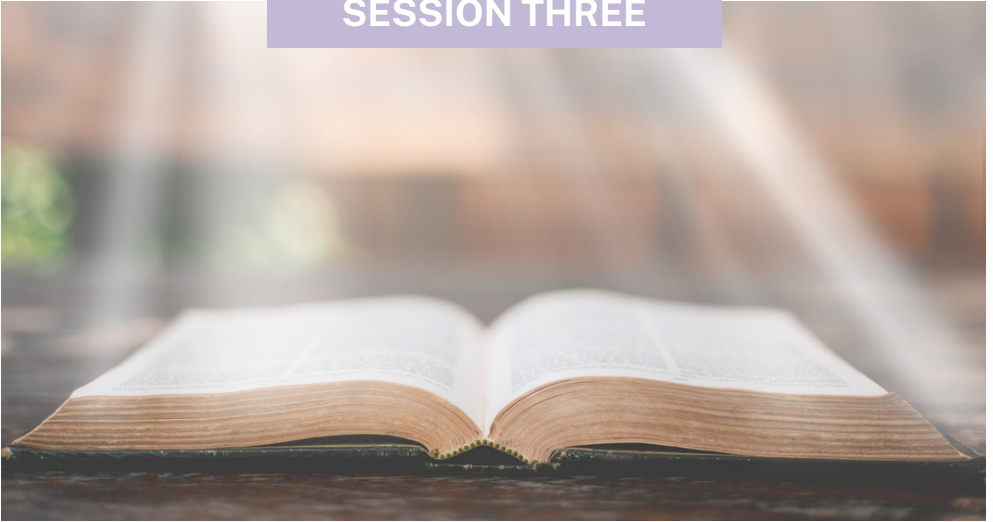
1. How might we discern the difference between need & want?
2. In the video Brigit mentioned how God answered a very specific prayer. Where have you experienced an answer to a prayer?
3. What is God's provision to you today, write your answer down on a piece of paper.
4. In the video Dave mentioned that God often uses us to bring his provision to the community in which we are placed. How might this be relevant to you today?
5. How might the understanding of God's provision speak to us in our church communities?

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord we thank you for your provision to us, each and every day. We pray that we may be the ones sharing this with those around this and count it a privilege to do so

OUR DAILY BREAD

SESSION THREE



Prayer

Dear Lord, would you guide our minds and hearts today as we reflect on your daily provisions for us, in the practical and in the spiritual.

Activity / Ice Breaker

Ask people to take a moment to reflect on their needs, and write down their thoughts in a notebook or on a piece of paper to keep and come back to later in their own time.

Introduce The Video:

Explain that this video is called “Our Daily Bread” and Dave Hopwood Brigit Kiyaga tell a story about Betsy and Corrie Ten Boon from the 2nd World War.

Watch Video 3: [Our Daily Bread](#) (Duration 2 minutes 55 seconds)

Read Luke 11: 1-13 (NIV)

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need." So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Reflections

There is perhaps a sense of trust and humility about our saying the Lord's prayer. The phrase 'daily bread' refers not only to bread, or even food, but all that we need. It reminds us that we are dependant and vulnerable. There are many stories in the Bible about people being fed by God. The Israelites received vital manna in Exodus 16, as they crossed the desert. Elijah was fed by ravens in 1 Kings 17, in a time of drought. Later in that chapter, when a poor widow used all her food to feed Elijah she found that her limited supply of flour and oil never ran out. Her selfless generosity led to unexpected resources. As she went on sharing kindness, so she was fed herself. Jesus refused to make bread for himself when tempted to do so, but not long after he fed a huge crowd of people with not only bread, but fish too. And then he promised those people that he would be living bread for them. Perhaps the request for daily bread not only means physical food, but the presence of the Living Bread as well. Jesus is with us through each day's ups and downs. This prayer also reminds us we are a part of a global faith. About 2 billion others will say the Lord's prayer today around the world. This is not an individualistic faith. But one shared. Just as we share bread. An invitation and expectation that we will, unlike the fig tree, produce good, lasting fruit.

With this in mind, here is a short reflective reading.

*He took bread and wine and said eat and drink and remember
 Remember the man who made bread and wine for others
 Remember the man who poured himself out
 He took bread and wine and said eat and drink and remember
 Remember the man, his life, death and new life
 His compassion, laughter, courage, vulnerability, integrity, hope, tears and honesty
 He took bread and wine and said eat and drink and remember
 Remember the stories he told and the people he met
 The unlikely friends he made and the generous welcome he gave
 He took bread and wine and said eat and drink and remember
 Remember the fresh start, the new life, the chance to start again
 Remember the invitation, remember the reason, remember and look forward
 He took bread and wine and said eat and drink and remember.*

Questions and Discussion Points

1. Listening to Corrie & Betsie's story of God's provision in a concentration camp from the video, what stood out for you?
2. God's provision to us is not only in the physical, how have you experienced his presence with you?
3. Reflecting on today's passage and readings, how might God be providing for you and your needs? How is he speaking into the needs you identified in and around the loaves of bread?
4. How can we be proactive in sharing the blessing of His presence with those around us? How might we produce good and lasting fruit?

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for your goodness to us. Thank you for your guidance for us, as we learn to pray and remember your gift to us.

THE RICH FOOL

SESSION FOUR



Prayer

Dear Lord, open our hearts and our minds to the richness of your generosity

Activity / Ice Breaker

Ask if anyone is willing to share what are some of the things that are holding us back in our discipleship journey, particularly with regard to generosity?

Introduce The Video

In this video, called “The Rich Fool”, Ciru Clemence shares her reflections on Giving


Watch Video 4: [The Rich Fool](#) (Duration 4 minutes 40 seconds)

Read Luke 12: 13-21 (NIV)

Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus replied, “Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’” Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’” “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Reflections

In Luke 12 Jesus told a story about a rich man, who was twice blessed by God. He had been given loads of money, and he had been given bumper crops. Those listening to the story would have been green with envy. This man was clearly one of God’s chosen. And yet Jesus wrongfoots everyone by telling them this man was a fool! He wouldn’t share what he had been given. His attitude had overtaken him and separated him from others. We are told he spoke to himself – he didn’t go to anyone in his community for guidance and wisdom. Perhaps he had bought so much land that he had no one nearby to go to for advice! His money had built walls between him and others. In another part of Luke we are told about another rich man. A tax collector Zacchaeus. He’s famous for having climbed a tree, but what’s more astonishing is that when Jesus blessed him with a new start, Zacchaeus then blessed the whole town with a new start! He gave the people refunds. Luke also highlights the precious and vital generosity of those on the margins. The poor widow in Luke 21 (widows had very little in Jesus’ day) who placed her small gift in the temple treasury, gave way more than those who had so much they would barely notice their donation. Luke also describes the shepherds who came to see the newborn Jesus. They didn’t have the gold or incense of the wise men, but they had time and they could give that. Another incredible example of generosity we see in Luke 15, where the father welcomes the son who had left the house.



Dave Hopwood writes “I was inspired by Antanas Mockus, the Mayor of Bogota who changed his city with the power of encouragement. He handed out thumbs-up cards for citizens to pass on to those they saw being kind. I sometimes hand out encouragement cards when I speak, which say, ‘Well done, I really like what you did there.’ Since starting to do this I have been so encouraged myself by the stories of those who have handed these cards out to friends and strangers when they have seen them do good and kind things for others. One lady saw a dad patiently caring for his young children as they waited for a bus. She handed him a card to say, ‘Well done.’

In Jesus’s day generosity was recognised as worship. Giving was not just part of a meeting, but a way of life. When we bless God with our generosity to others, we are often blessed ourselves’ If you have ever had a sense of wellbeing after helping someone, I believe that is the presence of God within us saying, ‘Well done.’ ”

Questions and Discussion Points

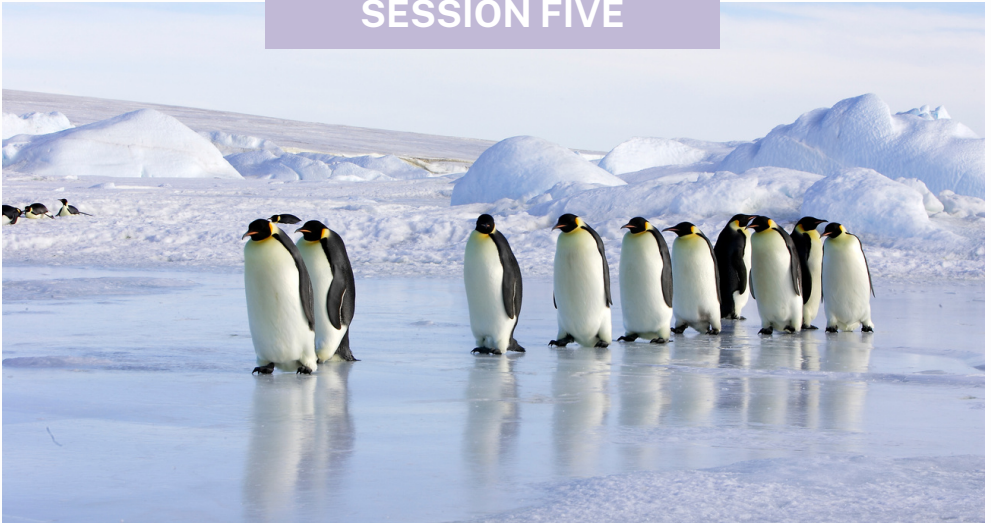
1. In which way does the story of Luke 12 speak to you today?
2. Ciru mentioned; giving is for everybody. What are some of the ways in which people have chosen to give to your church?
3. Dave mentioned in his reflection that giving is ‘a way of life’, what are your thoughts?
4. Take a moment to review your giving of time, talents and resources and ask God to inform any new decisions you may take here.

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, please reveal to us when there are things in our lives that are holding us back in our call to follow you and your ways.

THE PENGUIN

SESSION FIVE



Prayer

Dear Lord, you are familiar with our worries and concerns. Will you help us today as we refocus our concern back to you.

Activity / Ice Breaker

Gently ask people to share, if they feel able, what they are most worried about today. For those who do not wish to share publicly might want to write their thoughts down in their notebook, or on some paper.

Introduce The Video:

In this video, which is called “The Penguin”, Dave Hopwood reflects on a time he brought his financial worries before God, taking inspiration from a story about King Hezekiah

Watch Video 5: [The Penguin](#) (Duration 2 minutes 32 seconds)

Read Luke 12: 22-33 (NIV)

Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Reflections

In this reading, Jesus encourages his followers not to worry about material things, but instead to focus on the kingdom of God. Not easy to do! We live in a world of material things. Christian activist Shane Claiborne says that we are all addicted to money, unable to survive without it. Jesus once said – ‘Where your treasure is there your heart will be too.’ (Matthew 6: 21). Here Jesus encourages us to keep refocussing our concerns back on God. The following reading was written after reflecting on Jesus’ words in Matthew Chapter 6.

‘Don’t worry...’ we are told.

If only.

But Jesus tells us more, offers us something else.

Go and find something green, he suggests.

Something that flies, or sings, or blossoms.

Something that drifts in the breeze.

Something that moves a little slowly.

Consider the robins, the skies, the worms, the daisies.

Birds do of course come a cropper,

And fall from the skies (Jesus tells us this),

And the grass withers and flowers fade...

But in going outside, or looking through glass,

To these things of creation,

To things, bigger, smaller, brighter, quirkier...

We lift our minds for a time,

Take them from our worries,

From the mess and chaos and uncertainty,

And offer them to our creator.

Jesus isn’t just saying,

‘Don’t think of the elephant in the room,’

But rather... ‘Ooh look! There’s a penguin!’

Offering us something else to fill our thoughts,

Something to help us focus our minds again

on him.

It seems that Jesus is not just saying think about the flowers or the birds, but rather go and look at them or something else in nature, as a way of reminding ourselves that everything is under God. We are part of a bigger picture. The writer sometimes give out jigsaw pieces to folk when speaking in church services, a physical reminder that we are all a unique and vital part of a bigger picture that God is putting together in this world. (Think about how it feels to finish a 1000 piece jigsaw only to find a couple of pieces missing. You and I are those vital pieces.)

Another reason for taking a moment to look at the beauty in creation, is that it reminds us how generous God is, and how precious is his world. Just think how popular David Attenborough's documentaries are. People are mesmerised by the size and wonder and detail in creation. The Psalms are full of invitations to pause in our days and reflect, a way of focussing back on God and calming our minds. 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,' Psalm 24 tells us, surely a reminder of the bigger picture. The writers of the Bible frequently remind us to think on the Creator and his view of things. The famous line from Psalm 46 verse 10 advises us to simply still ourselves from time to time, and know again the presence of God. Perhaps Mary had captured some of this when she decided to anoint Jesus' feet. She had experienced the incredible work Jesus had done in her life and had managed to see beyond the here and now.

Questions and Discussion Points

1. Which material things do you most worry about?
2. Have you known a time when focussing on God has helped with your worries?
3. How might looking for a 'penguin' help you to re-centre yourself on God's generosity?
4. How might you capture some of Mary's generosity, as she anointed Jesus' feet?

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for your invitation to 'not to worry'. Help us as we navigate our way through our life and its up and downs and fill us with your Spirit who will lead us in all wisdom.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

SESSION SIX



Prayer

Lord, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving as we reflect on the sacrifice that you made for us on the cross.

Activity / Ice Breaker

Ask people to briefly share how does the cross speak to them today – perhaps a sentence or couple of sentences each.

Introduce The Video

In this video, called “The Power Of The Cross”, Dawn Long discusses growing up in South Africa and her memories of Nelson Mandela, sharing how his forgiveness of others reflects the example Jesus gave us.

Watch Video 6: [The Power of The Cross](#) (Duration 5 minutes 22 seconds)

Read Luke 23: 26-43 (NIV)

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then 'they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' "For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Reflections

The transformation and meaning and love expressed in the death of Jesus on a Roman cross cannot be summed up in a few words, indeed, it could be said it cannot be expressed in all the words in all the world at all. We can only catch glimpses of this universe-changing expression of God's love. On the way to the cross Jesus encounters various people. Pilate finds no fault with him and says so. He meets King Herod who sees Jesus as little more than a miracle performing novelty, but Jesus will not merely perform to satisfy his ego. When he does do miracles, it is because he cares for those in need. He then meets a group of local women who weep over this desperate situation, and the corrupt powers who control their lives. And he shares in their pain. And lastly, he meets a criminal close to death and suffering alongside him.

In all of these encounters Jesus acts with courage, restraint and generosity. He never responds with anger or bitterness or attempts to justify himself. He responds to each person with attention and care, even though he is in great pain. His most telling conversation is perhaps with the criminal dying beside him. The man actually offers Jesus encouragement, recognising that this is not the end for this man from Nazareth, he is not merely a carpenter wrongly condemned, but a king with an eternal future, and this criminal can see that and asks for help. And so Jesus turns to him, gives him his full attention and offers him what he offers us all, a new start, a clean slate, and the promise of a whole new life.

Questions and Discussion Points

1. When listening to Dawn's story; what stood out for you?
2. In which way does the passage we read today speak to you?
3. What does this 'promise of a whole new life' look like for you today?
4. How can you be attentive to the people (and their needs) around you?

Closing Prayer

Lord, our hearts are filled with thanksgiving as we reflect on the sacrifice that you made for us on the cross.

ALWAYS EASTER

SESSION SEVEN



Prayer

Dear Lord, in our final session today we ask that our hearts will be filled with awe and wonder for what you have done for us.

Activity / Ice Breaker

Ask people what words come to mind for them when we think of the resurrection?

Introduce The Video

In this video, called “Always Easter”, Rev'd Steve Jones explains why Luke 24 is such a key part of the story of the resurrection and how it gives us the courage and confidence to know God will provide in life and ministry.

Watch Video 7: [Always Easter](#) (Duration 5 minutes 21 seconds)

Read Luke 24: 1-12 (NIV)

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' " Then they remembered his words. When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Reflections

How can we ever put into words the experience of that first resurrection dawn? How can we ever glimpse it? Describe it? Imagine it? How can we tap into the experience of those first disciples, that group of faithful women, risking arrest by the hostile Roman authorities as they went to honour and protect the body of Jesus. Think how dark life must have seemed, how down they must have felt. Probably they had slept very little that weekend. All their dreams lay in ruins. They must have wondered what the last three years had been about. And then... as they trudged through the gloom, under the debilitating weight of disappointment... one of them stops dead. And the others bump into her. And then then they all jump as one of them drops an embalming jar and the sound echoes around them. They stare wide-eyed at the tomb. There, but no longer sealed. Gaping open. Which means what? His body has been stolen? Taken by the Romans? They run and find the wrapping carefully folded. Who would do that? Remove his body and then carefully fold the cloth like that? What does it mean? Well... it means there's a gardener outside, a smile a mile wide about to break across his lips. And as one of the woman sits outside the tomb crying he steps closer and can barely contain his joy and excitement. He longs for the moment when they will see him and know. Everything has changed! The generous God is back, the man with open hands and a heart the size of a planet, is here now. And they can all start again.

The early Christians may not have spoken too much of the death of Jesus on a cross, they were still living with the horror and demeaning scourge of crucifixion, but they spoke a lot about the resurrection. This was the heart of new life. The great gift from the king of all kindness. The one who gave up his place in heaven so he could bring his glory to this earth, fill a tomb with so much of his life that it couldn't hold him in. In chapter 28, Matthew describes an earthquake taking place at the time of the resurrection. Jesus was literally shaking the foundations of the universe as he bust out of the grave. Nothing would be the same. This short poem by Dave Hopwood draws on the moment Mary met Jesus back from the dead, and he spoke to her by name.

Gardens of Resurrection

*Mary met you face to Face,
voice to Voice,
name to Name,
In that garden of Resurrection.
Now it's as if we catch
Subtle glimpses of you,
Divine shadows,
Sketchy outlines,
Signs of movement.
Through the trees,
Amongst the undergrowth,*

*Across crowded streets,
In the middle of the buzz,
And the business,
And the busyness,
Of our daily living.
Right here, each day.
Resurrected, present, with us,
Sometimes unnoticed and unknown,
But here,
In life's ordinary gardens of Resurrection,
Waiting quietly to be spotted.*

Questions and Discussion Points

1. What would your response have been, faced by the empty tomb?
2. Rev. Steve shares about the impact the resurrection has had on his life; can you identify?
3. How might the resurrection inform your generosity?
4. What has surprised you the most about God's generosity whilst doing this course? Where have you been invited to become more generous?

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for guiding and leading us through these sessions where we have reflected and wondered. We ask for your blessings as we continue to follow you in the midst of life's complexity. May we never stop to wonder on the vastness of your generosity to us.