

Daily Readings

Week 1 - Journey into Seeing

Beginning Sunday 1 March with:

Bartimaeus receives his sight
Isaiah 42.5-9; 16-20
Mark 10:46-52

Theme of the week:

People whose spiritual journeys were changed by the encounter with Jesus

Monday 2 March

Seeing salvation
Luke 2:25-32

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; ³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Simeon is an elderly person who is waiting for the culmination of his journey of faith. He knows that he is waiting to meet the Messiah, God's chosen one, but he does not know who the Messiah will be. Many Jewish people of the time thought that God would send a king or a mighty warrior to free them from the Romans. But the Holy Spirit leads Simeon to the temple where Mary and Joseph have brought the baby Jesus and he recognises the helpless *baby* as the one whom God has sent to humankind to bring salvation. Simeon cuddles the baby and gives thanks. His words are used in churches as the 'Nunc Dimittis' usually at evening prayer. Simeon has been privileged to see Jesus with his own eyes and calls him a 'light' for the people Israel who will spread God's truth beyond the Jewish people to all others. Others will see Jesus and in him see salvation. More people too will be changed forever by the encounter with Jesus.

Question for reflection:

How do you think Simeon felt when he saw the baby Jesus?

Tuesday 3 March

Zacchaeus sees Jesus

Luke 19:1-10

¹He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ²A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' ⁶So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' ⁸Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' ⁹Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Zacchaeus was too short to see Jesus in person, and he was being crowded out, but he was determined to set eyes on him and see him for himself. To do that he had to encounter Jesus by securing his own viewpoint, - up a tree. But Jesus looks at him directly and makes eye contact with him, inviting Zacchaeus to ask Jesus into his home and his life. This invitation, from a face-to face encounter with Jesus, changes Zacchaeus' life around. Salvation comes to his house, as he makes reparation for his sins.

Question for reflection:

Why was it so important for Zacchaeus to see Jesus for himself?

Wednesday 4 March

Saul is blinded

Acts 9:1-9

⁹Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ⁵He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' ⁷The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

This is a different kind of encounter and leads not to sight but to blindness. Saul is going the wrong way, his sight is fixed on persecution of Christians and on stamping out the gospel of Jesus. His eyes

are fixed on the wrong goal. God intervenes and he witnesses light from heaven which stops him in his tracks and overwhelms him. In this intense and dramatic encounter with God he hears Jesus and his life is changed forever as he is given not only the truth of the gospel but entrusted with a mission. Yet for three days he can see nothing. When later his physical sight is restored, his spiritual sight will be fixed on Jesus. He is a follower of Christ now.

Question for reflection:

What do you think it was like for Saul/Paul during the three days of his blindness?

Thursday 5 March

Stephen sees the glory of God

Acts 7:54- 8:1

54 When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. 55 But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' 57 But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. 58 Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' 60 Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died. 8¹ And Saul approved of their killing him.

That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Stephen stands at the heart of the persecution of the early Christians. Even in the midst of terrible danger, he tells them of the amazing spiritual vision he can see of Jesus with God. The vision of heaven is too compelling not to be shared, even at the risk of death. The encounter with God's glory and the vision of Jesus sustains Stephen as he is violently killed and enables him to pray for his killers' forgiveness.

Question for reflection:

Why were the persecutors so angry and frightened by Stephen's vision of God and Jesus?

Week 2- Journey into Imagination

Beginning Sunday 8th March with:

Jesus gives a vision of the future

Matthew 24:1-14,30-35

Isaiah 6.1-8

Theme of the week:

The spiritual journey is directed by visions of the future from God

Monday 9 March

The gift of imagination

Genesis 22:15-19

15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶and said, 'By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.' ¹⁹So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

God gives Abraham a vision of the future which will inspire him to go forward. That vision is one of great blessing and increase as Abraham can imagine his children and his people well beyond his own lifetime becoming more and more numerous and passing on God's blessing to all other peoples. The vision requires Abraham to imagine beyond his own life and times and to imagine a future of a holy people.

Question for reflection:

How do you think this vision sustained Abraham during the remainder of his life?

Tuesday 10 March

Imagining the Day of the Lord

Malachi 3:1-6

³See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵ Then I will draw near to you for judgement; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

⁶ For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

The prophet imagines the process of Judgement. In his vision judgement is like refining and purifying precious metal, the impurities are disposed of and the pure remainder will be loved and cherished by God. That means that there will be judgement on those who are sinners, - who have broken the ten commandments and hurt people, those who have treated others badly and refused to help them, those who have ignored or turned away from God. We have to imagine not just what the consequences of our sin are now, but what they mean in the future when we have to account for what we have done with the lives God has given us. That gift of imagination means that we can make good choices about how to live as God wants us to, - if we want to.

Question for reflection:

How do you imagine Judgement?

Wednesday 11 March

Imagining God's glory

Ezekiel 1:1, 4-14, 26-28

¹In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

⁴ As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. ⁵In the middle of it was something like four living creatures. This was their appearance: they were of human form. ⁶Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. ⁷Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. ⁸Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: ⁹their wings touched one another; each of them moved straight ahead, without turning as they moved. ¹⁰As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle; ¹¹such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. ¹²Each moved straight ahead; wherever the spirit would go, they went, without turning as they went. ¹³In the middle of the living creatures there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire. ¹⁴The living creatures darted to and fro, like a flash of lightning.

²⁶ And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form. ²⁷Upwards from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all round; and downwards from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendour all round. ²⁸Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendour all round. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.

When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

The prophet is totally overwhelmed by a vision of God's glory. The vision is amazing, full of detail, brilliance, movement and beauty. His main impression is one of fire, brilliant darting flame, within

which he can make out God's presence, but the vision is so unearthly, he struggles for adequate words to describe it. Afterwards, he is overcome by the vision and falls on his face in amazement. Such a vision raises ordinary human beings from the mundane experiences of life and gives us something we would never forget. When, like Ezekiel, we have powerful spiritual experiences of God, whether they overwhelm us or not, they equip us to attend to God more closely and find out what he wants us to do with our lives.

Question for reflection:

How do you imagine the glory and beauty of God?

Thursday 12 March

Imagining heaven

Revelation 21:1-8

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
'See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' ⁶Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

The writer of Revelation (Apocalypse) describes a vision of the end of time. God makes everything new; everything which has gone before passes away. In this new creation, all the pain and suffering of our own world is gone. All the damage and trouble of our sinful world, - the world we must live in now - is at last removed, as God re-creates a new heaven and a new earth. Even death will not exist any more. Sin cannot exist in this new creation and so those who cling to sin cannot be part of it. In describing this vision through the power of the human imagination, we are offered a picture of our final destiny and again a choice, - to become fit for heaven, as God wishes for us, or to hang on to our sin which will make it impossible for us to inherit this new creation. We need to imagine heaven and to decide whether we want to be one of those receiving the water of life from God, - or not.

Question for reflection:

What do you imagine heaven might be like?

Week 3- Journey into Smell

Beginning Sunday 15th March with

John 12. 1-8

Psalm 51

Theme of the week:

The spiritual understanding of how we connect to others and to God by what we smell

Monday 16 March

The gift of smell

Song of Solomon 1:1-3; 2:10-13

¹The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

²Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!

For your love is better than wine,

³ your anointing oils are fragrant,
your name is perfume poured out;
therefore the maidens love you.

¹⁰My beloved speaks and says to me:

'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;

¹¹for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.

¹²The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtle-dove
is heard in our land.

¹³The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

This biblical love song is filled with the imagery of beautiful scent. Fragrance is associated with loving and being loved and the joy of being in love is reflected in the scent of flowers and fruits. The pleasure of inhaling the scent of the beloved stays in the memory and is associated with intimacy, connection and relationship. So it is that a hint of a person's favourite perfume can instantly bring them to mind. So it is with what we smell in church or in worship, whether smell is of incense, flowers, or coffee from the kitchen. Those experiences can connect us powerfully to God

Question for reflection:

What scents connect you to those you love and to God?

Tuesday 17 March

Using smell

Genesis 27:21-29

²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.' ²²So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' ²³He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He answered, 'I am.' ²⁵Then he said, 'Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.' So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son.' ²⁷So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, 'Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed. ²⁸May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. ²⁹Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Isaac's blindness reveals how important smell is to us in our relationship with others. Smelling Jacob in Esau's clothes, brings Esau immediately into Isaac's mind and he is tricked into thinking that the smell-signature is really of his eldest son. So powerful is the smell-picture that he has no hesitation in blessing the person before him, even though he knows the voice is wrong. The power of smell in the love relationship between Isaac and his sons is too strong to resist.

Question for reflection:

How would you know your loved ones if you just had the sense of smell to go on?

Wednesday 18 March

The smell of death

John 11:38-44

38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Smell plays an important part in this sign of God's power. No one can doubt that Lazarus is really dead because his body is decomposing and people outside his tomb can smell the unmistakable stench of putrefaction. Yet Jesus is able to call Lazarus from the dead, and it is not his rotting body which emerges, but himself made whole. Death and decomposition are facts of life, and we will all die, but God's intention is for us to yet become whole as Lazarus did, through Jesus.

Question for reflection:

What role do you think smell had in testing the faith of the people gathered at the tomb?

Thursday 19 March

The fragrance of Christ
2 Corinthians 2:14-17

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. ¹⁵For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; ¹⁶to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

In this passage Christians are compared to a fragrance of Christ, a distinctive smell and the spread of the gospel is like that fragrance spreading on the air. The scent of Christianity means different things to different people, but it is also pervasive and distinctive as the Christian community grows and begins to flourish.

Question for reflection:

In what way might your Christian life be a distinctive fragrance in the lives of others?

Week 4 - Journey into Touching

Beginning Sunday 22nd March with

Judas kisses Jesus

Mark 14:43-50

Exodus 2.5-10

Theme of the week:

Touch leads spiritually to healing or hurt.

Monday 23 March

The touch of oppression

Isaiah 53:3-6

³He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.

⁶All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

In Isaiah, the servant of God experiences touch as suffering. He is seen to be beaten and wounded, bruised and hurt. His physical injuries and the pain he endures are also painful spiritual experiences: he suffers to spare others. He takes upon himself punishment and pain for sin, so we do not have to experience the same things. How can we imagine what separation from God is like, and what spiritual pain is like if our sin keeps us from being with God? The answer is that we know what physical pain through our touch experiences is like. We hate pain and seek to avoid it, so we should also think about spiritual pain too. So the suffering servant of God reminds us not only to avoid sin and turn to God, but shows us also what Jesus will do for us. He will endure the physical pain of crucifixion and the spiritual pain of feeling forsaken by God, and through this suffering bring healing to everyone who wants to be relieved of sin and its painful consequences.

Question for reflection:

How much would you willingly suffer to save someone you love?

Tuesday 24 March

The gift of touch

Luke 10:30-37

³⁰Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' ³⁷He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Study of this passage usually concentrates on the enemy who helps and cares for the victim as opposed to the 'friends' who ignore his plight and pass him by. But this passage asks us to reflect on the gift of healing touch. The man is hurt, he has been beaten up and left to die. He cannot help himself. The priest and the Levite won't touch him, but the Samaritan does more than just care. He responds with caring and healing touch. He touches and soothes the wounds and bandages them so they will not hurt any more and begin to heal. He lifts the man in his arms to put him on his animal and must have physically supported him all the way to the inn. There, he commits the man to the caring touch of others, paying their wages for nursing. Through this caring and healing touch, the man can be restored. So when Jesus says 'go and do likewise' he tells us not to be one of those who will not touch those who are unfortunate or hurt, but to be healers and carers, offering the touch of care and concern to whoever needs it.

Question for reflection:

How does the experience of loving and healing touch when we are hurt, ill or sad, help us to know more of God's love?

Wednesday 25 March

Touched by the Holy Spirit

(Annunciation) Luke 1:26-35

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was

Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

How can we be touched by God? This passage gives us some important insight into how God touches us and loves us. Mary asks the angel how she is going to become pregnant without a man. The angel tells her that she will conceive her baby by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit can be intimately involved with any human person, can 'indwell' us, touch, focus and direct our lives. When the Holy Spirit is present with us, like this, it has effects in the real world. This spiritual touch, the grace of God, shows us that God is not some distant observer of the world, but completely and lovingly involved with it. The reality of this experience for Mary is the physical body of the baby she conceives and to whom she gives birth. The touch of the Holy Spirit is not a merely supernatural or otherworldly experience but a relationship with God that matters in the real world.

Question for reflection:

Where do you see evidence of the Holy Spirit touching and transforming lives?

Thursday 26 March

A sick woman touches Jesus

Mark 5:25-34

²⁵Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' ²⁹Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. ³⁰Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' ³¹And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' ³²He looked all round to see who had done it. ³³But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. ³⁴He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

This passage tells us something very specific about Jesus and healing by touch. Faith and trust in Jesus as the Son of God is an important element in the healing process. The sick woman does not decide to touch Jesus just on the offchance, but because she realises his touch is *different* from all the other physicians and faith-healers she has come across. To touch Jesus is to come into contact

directly with the loving, healing God. Moreover, Jesus recognises and responds to the touch of faith, even though the woman only just manages to touch his cloak. Jesus is surrounded by touch experiences, as the crowd push, shove and jostle him. But the trusting touch of faith is different and immediately gains a healing response from Jesus. Feeling her touch, Jesus seeks out the sick woman and confirms both her faith and her healing.

Question for reflection:

How do you think the woman felt physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually when she told Jesus what she did?

Week 5 - Journey into Tasting

Beginning Sunday 29th March with

The Last Supper
Mark 14:12-28

Psalm 81

Theme of the week:

Taste teaches us about God's desire to take care of us

Monday 30 March

Tasting God
Psalm 34:1-10

Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.

¹I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

²My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.

³O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

⁹O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.
¹⁰The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

The psalmist uses the imagery of taste and feeding when he wants to make us think of God's goodness towards us. Salvation, being kept safe from enemies, is like being fed because just as God gave his people manna when they were starving, so he will save them from danger. So seeking refuge in God through faith means that we will be fed and will lack nothing. So we can 'taste' and discover the goodness of God towards us. God attends always to our physical and spiritual needs.

Question for reflection:

How can the gift of tasting our food and drink today make us more mindful of God's goodness?

Tuesday 31 March

The gift of taste

Exodus 16:1-3, 13-18, 35

¹⁶The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded: "Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents." ' ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. ³⁵The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

This feeding miracle is powerfully connected to God's care for his chosen people. The Israelites are starving and complaining to Moses that they were physically better off in Egypt where they did not go hungry. Yet the Lord responds by a miracle of mysterious food that the people do not recognise. Moses, their leader, sees this 'manna' is nourishment and the people can gather and eat this food. This is their daily bread, with none being hoarded and no-one going short. Each person has just enough for their needs. So this feeding miracle comes with an insight into God's care for the

creation. Each person has enough. No person profits at another's expense; no one has less than another. God provides for the needs of each person for each day.

Question for reflection:

What do you feel about the way global hunger is addressed today? How can we learn from the Lord's example?

Wednesday 1 April

Tasting the Word

Psalm 119:97-104

⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law!
It is my meditation all day long.
⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is always with me.
⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your decrees are my meditation.
¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
¹⁰² I do not turn away from your ordinances,
for you have taught me.
¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

In several places in scripture, God's word is compared to sweetness, especially the sweetness of honey. God's word to us 'tastes' good. The psalmist uses this image to explain the joy of learning and understanding more about God: just as we enjoy, even crave sweet-tasting things, so we can want more of God's word. The reward of sweetness helps the psalmist to be obedient and to honour the commandments. Following the Lord is not drudgery, but pleasure, like the pleasure of tasting honey.

Question for reflection:

How often do you delight in God's word like the psalmist does?

Thursday 2 April

Effective taste
Matthew 5:13-16

13 '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.

14 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In 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.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Jesus talks about his followers as a distinctive taste. When we taste salt, sour, sweet, bitter and glutamates, we recognise each in a particular way and know what they are. So if that distinctive taste disappears, we won't recognise what we are tasting for what it is. So the disciples need to be a 'taste' among the people, as well as a 'light' for people to recognise. If we just disappear, cover up or blend in, people will not see Christian witness and see Christ working in us.

Question for reflection:

What flavour is your Christian community....?

Week 6 - Journey into Hearing

Beginning Sunday 5th April with

Jesus enters Jerusalem
Luke 19:28-44 Psalm 118. 1; 19-end

Theme of the week:

Learning to hear and pay attention to God's Word prepares us to follow God

Monday 6 April

Hearing the cry of Hosanna
Matthew 21:1-9

21When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately.' ⁴This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,
⁵'Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,
'Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When Jesus came into Jerusalem for the last time he was greeted by cries of jubilation and excitement, shouts of welcome and praise. He is surrounded by adulation and the shouts of expectation and joy. But such excitement and expectation can be a very fickle thing, quickly whipped up but just as quickly turned away.

Question for reflection:

How do you think Jesus felt when he heard the praise and adulation?

Tuesday 7 April

Hearing the cry of betrayal

Matthew 26:40-50

⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' ⁴²Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' ⁴³Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' ⁴⁹At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

Jesus has heard promises from his disciples that they will never leave him and will follow him to death, but in this passage, he hears the sounds of weakness and betrayal. Jesus goes to pray and hopes his disciples will watch and pray with him, united in their focus on the Father. But when Jesus comes back to the disciples, he hears only the breathing sounds of their sleeping. They have already begun to separate from him, leaving him alone with his prayers. Finally, Jesus meets Judas who

betrays him with a friendly greeting and a kiss. These words signal not the solidarity of a friend coming to help, but betrayal and arrest.

Question for reflection:

How do you think Jesus felt when he heard Judas' words?

Wednesday 8 April

Hearing the cry of denial

Matthew 26:69-75

69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' 70 But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.' 71 When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' 72 Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' 73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.' 74 Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man!' At that moment the cock crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

In this passage, what is heard is Peter denying that he was a friend of Jesus. His words separate him from Jesus as he speaks to save himself and leave Jesus to his fate. It is noticeable that he speaks coarsely and roughly, cursing and swearing in an attempt to stop people asking him the question he desperately does not want to be asked. And finally, Peter hears the worst voice of all, - the memory of the gentle voice of Jesus telling him that he will fail the test, and deny his friendship with Jesus.

Question for reflection:

What do you think people hear when you speak about Jesus with others?

Thursday 9 April

Hearing the cry of Crucify

(Maundy Thursday) Matthew 27:20-26

20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21 The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' 22 Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' 23 Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

24 So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' ²⁵Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' ²⁶So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

How does this passage relate to the theme?

As we approach Good Friday, we recall that the crowds who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with cries of joy and praise, are now shouting the very opposite. The crowds are now angry and violent and are screaming for crucifixion. The welcome of life and hope now becomes the curse of death and rejection. So powerful and insistent is the cry of crucifixion that Jesus is handed over to be flogged and sent to his death.

Question for reflection:

How do you think Jesus felt when he heard the cry of 'Crucify'?