

*Anglican Church
Diocese of Polynesia*



**Lenten Bible Study
Resource
Year C, 2025**

LENTEN BIBLE STUDY SERIES (YEAR C)

Message from the Archbishop

I am most grateful for this Lenten Bible Studies resources prepared to assist our people throughout the diocese in your Lenten Journey in 2025. They serve as tools and materials to be used in the best way for individual, family, parish, and even groups within the parish for Bible Studies, resources for preaching and for personal reflections during the Lenten season.

This is based on the Sunday readings during the 6 Sundays in Lent from the Gospel of Luke and also from the Gospel of John during Passion Sunday. Lenten seasons usually includes some kind of fasting, abstaining from certain kind of food, giving up of some pleasurable activity or even dedicate themselves to almsgiving and also working on one owns prayer life and relationship with God.

This Lenten Studies materials is calling each and everyone of us to return to Basic. It calls us to focus on our relationship with God and try to make it right. Our relationship with others, our relationship with environment and reflecting on God's love to all of us.

I do encourage all our people in the Diocese especially the different groups to willingly engaged with these simple Bible Studies material to help us grow spiritually and flourish in the grace of God in our daily lives. It will make Easter more meaningful to us even though our world is getting very secular.

It is God's gift to God's People.

I am grateful to the work that has been Done by Members of our Diocesan Liturgical Working Group in partnership with the Bishop's Office and St John's the Baptist theological College.

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LENTEN BIBLE STUDY SERIES 2025 (YEAR C)

THEME: GOING BACK TO BASICS

During this Lenten season we are called as the penitent to reexamine our own relationships through prayer, reading and study of the word of God, reflections and meditations, confessions, and repentance with:

1. God,
2. Neighbour,
3. Creation

Going back to basics, is about reviewing those relationships with God, with one another and with the whole of creation, to identifying the basic things about our faith and practices that we often neglect and overlook but are essential for our spiritual growth and maturity. It calls us to find ways to reinforce those basics practices in-order to restore and revitalize our relationships with God, with each other and the whole of creation to flourish.

These resources prepared by the Diocesan Liturgical Committee provide you with the opportunity to pause, reflect and engage deeply with those things that divert our attentions from those basic things and recommit ourselves to them so that they become a “Way of life” for us as individuals, as families, as parishes, and as the whole diocese.

The Questions and the reflections are there to help and guide you prepare for your weekly Bible studies and sermons. It is important when planning your weekly Bible Study that you use the questions in the resources as well as create your own questions that will allow discussions to explore our relationships and how to restore our relationships with God, with one another and with creation.

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Have a Blessed Lenten Season.

1ST WEEK OF LENT

SUNDAY	READINGS	TOPIC
1st Sunday of Lent	Luke 4:1-13	Testing of Jesus in the wilderness

THEME: Knowing ourselves and our relationship with God.

FOCUS: Understanding our identity and our relationship with God is vital. In our moments of vulnerability, it is essential to acknowledge our profound dependence on God.

CONTEXT

Luke 4:1-13 recounts the familiar story of Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. This time, the devil tests God's provision, care, and authority, as well as Jesus' loyalty to God. Additionally, the devil seeks to call into question Jesus' identity. However, Jesus responds using the Scriptures quoting from Deuteronomy 6 and 8 confirming his dependence, loyalty, and commitment to the will of God and his relationship with God.

This event follows Jesus' baptism, in which God declares, "You are my beloved Son; with you, I am well pleased" (3:22). Luke then, continues to trace Jesus' lineage back to David, then to Abraham, and ultimately to Adam. Luke affirms that Jesus is the Messianic King of Israel, destined to bring blessings and salvation not only to the people of Israel and Abraham's descendants but also to Adam and all of humanity.

This passage bridges Jesus' baptism and his genealogy, to the beginning of his Galilean ministry as all part of his preparation to God's mission. Throughout this experience, Jesus remains in the presence of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the Scriptures. He has come to bring freedom to humanity from oppression and captivity, bringing them restoration and flourishing in their lives and relationships (4:18-20).

REFLECTION

Jesus returned after his baptism full of the Holy Spirit and was also led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness (v.1). The repeated mention of the Holy Spirit allows us to understand that Jesus's being led into the wilderness through the Holy Spirit was all part of the divine plan.

Jesus was at the river Jordan for his baptism and why did the Holy Spirit lead him into the wilderness out of all places? The significance of the wilderness, on one hand, was in Jewish thought as a place of meeting with God and of new beginnings. This ideology derived from Israel's forty years in the wilderness, where they were formed into a nation under God. It is a

place of trial and testing however it was a time of closeness to God. A place of fear and where people are transformed. It is a place of miracle-making for Israel where God revealed the Law. The wilderness is silence, a natural symbol of the divine.

On the other hand, the wilderness is a place of hunger and thirst where everyone is vulnerable and at their breaking point. Boundaries are crossed as people compete and scramble to secure their positions, status, and places to satisfy their hunger metaphorically speaking. This is where the devil presents himself to tempt and test individuals' true character, obedience, and relationship to their God, one another, and the greater family of creation.

Jesus' retreat to the wilderness was an occasion for prayer. The wilderness was an appropriate setting for the devil to test Jesus. The devil was uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus being the Son of God, so his testing aimed to disrupt this relationship between the Father (God) and the Son (Jesus).

The test that Jesus went through was mainly to test his Sonship (vv.3, 9) and the devil was trying to lure Jesus to be independent of the Father and create Jesus to rebel against the Father. The first temptation questions God's provision and care. The devil proposes that Jesus' Sonship must mean that God does not want him to starve in the desert, so as the Son of God, he should turn the bread to meet his basic needs under his power without relying on God. However, Jesus responded by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 "One does not live by bread alone" emphasizing that life does not depend on food but relying on God's will (John 4:34) and depending on God's leading. Fully dependent on God is the way to live and flourish.

The second temptation is a test of authority and an invitation to worship the devil and abandon Jesus' loyalty to the Father. The devil allows Jesus to see all the kingdoms in the world and promises him authority over all of them if Jesus will only bow down and worship him. The devil was offering quick access to power letting Jesus excuse himself from all that is before him. The suffering that he will come across in his ministry and the divine plan of God to save humanity. However, Jesus reaffirms to the devil his loyalty to God and that worship and service only belong to God.

The third temptation according to Luke is about the devil testing Jesus' identity as the Son of God. However, Jesus' response "Do not put the Lord your God to the test," (v.12) clearly stated that Jesus does not need to prove himself to the devil of who he is because Jesus knows his own self and his own identity. He is the Son of God in whom God is well pleased.

These tests are a reflection of how Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden resulting in the breaking of relationship. Jesus as the Son of God, a descendant of Abraham and Adam is restoring that broken relationship and putting not just Israel but humanity back into a flourishing and right relationship with God.

Jesus' time in the wilderness was not a detour but a crucial preparation for His ministry. Similarly, we often find ourselves in difficult, challenging circumstances, but instead of seeing these times as a setback, they can be moments where we grow in dependence on God and where our purpose is clarified.

We are reminded in this Lenten journey of the importance of keeping our relationship with God, there is no such thing as a shortcut. Out of obedience despite the challenges of the will of God, Jesus endured and walked the ways in which God had asked him to follow even if he had to walk through the wilderness. The wilderness experiences of life—be it loneliness, failure, or difficult seasons—are opportunities for us to return to God, seek His will, and reaffirm our relationship with Him. It's in those moments of challenge that we are called to remain faithful and loyal to God's purpose for our lives. We need to go back to basics and slowly set ourselves right with our relationship with God by allowing us to be vulnerable and not ashamed to affirm our dependence in God. When we focus on building a relationship with God and pursuing His will—whether through moments of wilderness or through everyday challenges—we begin to see the world and others with a more compassionate and righteous perspective. This leads to true flourishing and fulfillment, not because of our personal gains, but because we are living out our purpose as children of God, empowered by His Spirit.

In response to God's faithfulness to us, we need to return that same loyalty and faithfulness to God. If our relationship is right with God, no doubt we will flourish in all aspects of life.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the temptations that hinder your relationship with God?
2. Why the wilderness? What is a wilderness experience that allows you to get closer to or acknowledge God? Or to question/test your relationship with God?
3. What are the basic principles of trust and loyalty that could direct our relationship with God?

2ND WEEK OF LENT

SUNDAY	READING	TOPIC
2nd Sunday in Lent	Luke 9:28-36	Transfiguration of Jesus

The Themes, Focus and Insights are there to guide your reflections and pose key questions to generate discussions on the topics

THEME: **Getting back down and returning to the Basics.**

After our mountain top experiences, we need to return down the mountain where we need to share or use our mountain top experience to impact the lives of those at the bottom.

FOCUS: Jesus commands the disciples to get back down to the bottom of the mountain after witnessing the transfiguration and the presence of Moses and Elijah. Its about Our relationship with God and where God needs us to be his hands and feet.

KEY POINTS:

- What does the mountain symbolize in the Jewish context?
Why do the disciples want to build a house, tent, dwelling, or tabernacle for Moses, Elijah and Jesus on the mountain?
- Ascending with Jesus to witness his glorification on the mountain is an escape for Peter, James and John from the reality of the world and a safe and comfortable space where they want to remain and bask in the glory and the miraculous and extra-ordinary and divine experience.
- They want to build a “house”, “Tabernacle,” “dwelling place,” “tent” for Elijah, Moses, and Jesus to remain on the mountain apart from the world at the bottom.
What does it mean and what does it imply to build a house, dwelling, shelter, tent or tabernacle for Moses, Elijah and Jesus on the mountain?
- The mountain top as a symbol of God’s eternal kingdom – implies that to be able to reach the mountain and enjoy permanent residence, one needs to go back down to earn their way to the mountain top (Zion) to be present at the great feast hosted at the end of time
- Remaining on the mountain and neglecting to go down is a expression of the Duality between heaven and earth, material and divine, flesh and spirit which condemns the earthly, material and flesh as evil and encourages Gnostic views of ascetism of escaping the

world and living in the spiritual realm – maintaining a spiritual purity on the mountain top without tarnishing their lives with the impurity and evil of the world.

REFLECTIONS

We need to be mindful that the reading begins with “After 8 days.”

What was the event 8 days before?

Jesus was laying the foundation for his disciples and those who want to come and follow Him:

- Saying YES to follow Jesus is to give up the things that they desire and want by denying themselves, turning away from own plans and ambitions, and disowning their future and the expectations of their families and culture to follow Jesus.
- Saying YES is to take up their cross daily – willingly giving up security of place, status, livelihood and family to embrace uncertainty and suffering.
- Follow me – to saying YES to follow Jesus wholeheartedly to share in his suffering and his death.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John to the mountain to understand that his role as the Messiah will involve suffering and death, but this will not be the final outcome of his mission, and that those who follow him will not be immune from suffering, but also face what he had gone through and yet share in the victory of Jesus’ resurrection into new life.

A FULL COMMITMENT TO THE CALL TO BE EQUIPPED FOR MISSION

The question that we may ask is “Why Peter, James and John and not the rest of the twelve?”

- Age wise, they are all represented.
Peter is the oldest and John is the youngest
- They were his closest friends making up his “inner circle” of friends. Therefore, taking them up the mountain to experience his transfiguration is part of revealing to them who he is and preparing them for ministry and leadership in his absence.

As Jesus’ closest friends they have witness miracles of healing, seen Jesus make time to pray, and seen with their own eyes His glory on the mountain. This prepares them for the mission Jesus calls them into. They have observed practices or routines that all who are called to follow Jesus must be aware of and put to practice as a daily part of their life.

Through this lent season we are reminded and called to fully committed our life to the call we are all called to as faithful followers of Jesus.

QUESTIONS

Why did the disciples ask to build three Tabernacle, shelter, or tent on the mountain?

As not knowing what he was asking, they need to return for the work to continue.

In the presence of God, feeling Holy we do not have the patience to reach down to the worldly matters. Separating ourselves from the world is to live on the mountain top. But Jesus requires us to come back down into the valley, the fringes and the margins of society to be the light of Christ in the world. We are called to come back down to care and support those who suffer and are less fortunate.

Are we ready to reach down to the people?

Do we have concern for the marginalized, neglected, poor and those in needs?

How do we reflect our spirituality when we are still here on earth?

Why does Mose and Elijah appear before Jesus on the mountain?

- Moses represents the LAW
- Elijah represents the PROPHET

Moses and Elijah are two key figures from the Old Testament.

Moses led God's people, the Israelites, out of slavery in Egypt. He then met with God on Mount Sinai and gave the people God's laws, the *Ten Commandments*.

Elijah was a prophet, one of God's messengers. He also went to Mount Sinai, where God revealed himself in a gentle whisper.

How can we compare the two with Jesus?

Moses and Elijah appearing and standing beside Jesus symbolises that Jesus is their successor. He overcomes the Law and the role of the prophet. He now bringing a new *covenant* from God for all people. So, when God's voice from heaven said about Jesus "Listen to Him" that indicated that the Law and the Prophets must now give way to Jesus who will replace the old way with the new way. He is the completion of the Law and the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Old Testament in the presence of the future Church leaders. In the gospel, Jesus reminds those following him that "a new commandment I give unto you."

3RD WEEK OF LENT

SUNDAY	READINGS	TOPIC
3rd Sunday of Lent	Luke 13:1-9	Fig Tree not bearing fruit

Repent or Perish

13 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ **I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.** ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

⁸ “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

THEME: Being Resilient and never Giving Up

FOCUS: Exploring our relationships with those we love, serve, care for, supervise, or minister to and our accountability to God and those with authority over us in our different context whether it is the home, church, community or work.

REFLECTION

Our focus for this 3rd week of Lent is on the barren fig tree being given another chance to bear fruit, focusing on theme of being “Resilient, never Giving Up,” and being given second chances or renewed opportunities to improve flourish and bear fruit.

Traditionally, the heading of the gospel for the 3rd Sunday in Lent to “Repent or Perish” often reflects the writer or the editor’s intention to confine us into a single lane of interpretation. This limits our horizons by denying us the freedom to venture into multiple lanes and pathways towards understanding the text.

This week, we will be like the worker in the vineyard and dig around the text, sift through the words, sentences and paragraphs to bring to the surface new layers and alternative meanings that are relevant for our purpose, time and context.

We will approach this Bible Study from two different angles or lanes with the first focusing on Jesus’ instruction to Repent or Perish and how it applies to our contemporary context of climate change and disaster mitigation and preparedness. The second approach will be on the

parable of the barren fig tree with a conclusion which combines the two themes under Bishop's Charge to Review, Reinforce, and Revitalize.

What is Repentance?

The season of Lent reminds us that as penitents we are called to re-examine our lives and our relationships by seeking guidance from the reading and study of the word of God; and through deep reflection, meditation and prayer, humbly confess our sins and calling upon the Spirit of God to restore and transform us from within. In the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 92:12-13 it will allow us to "flourish...like palm trees planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God."

Repentance is defined as:

1. "Turning Away from Sin
2. "Turn towards God, and
3. "Believing in the Gospel

Repent or Perish in the context of Disasters

Jesus in the story of the Galileans who were killed by Herod, and those in Jerusalem who died when the tower at the pool of Siloam fell rebukes the accusation that disaster is directly correlated with committing serious sins. Instead, he teaches that not only those who are victims of disasters, but all people, including those affected and those unaffected need to REPENT or PERISH!

This has profound meaning and direct implications for us and how we do things. The destruction of the CBD in Port Vila in Vanuatu highlights the need to repent or perish by holding empowering relevant authorities to be transparent and accountable in their assessments, monitoring and enforcements of national building codes that will be able to withstand Magnitude 7 earthquakes and Category 5 tropical cyclones.

The school bus carrying children and rolling down the hill at Lakena in Nausori Fiji, causing injury and death highlights the need for repentance by identifying gaps in the system that allow drivers to be given licenses by circumventing the system with bribes without fulfilling all requirements; and the improvement of the monitoring and enforcement of vehicle road worthiness, satisfy all safety regulations for public transports before allowing them on the roads. Our failure to change will mean that more innocent people will perish.

The volcanic eruptions and the tsunamis teach us that we need to repent from being complacent and thinking that it will not happen to us. Hence repentance must involve instilling in hearts and minds the mentality of being prepared and making it a way of life; educating ourselves and our communities to be proactive by mitigating the impacts of these natural disasters and putting in place measures that will improve their chances of survival and prevent them from perishing.

Repenting is admitting that we as human beings have destroyed our intricate relationship with the rest of creation, exploiting it for our own means without acknowledging our interrelatedness, interconnectedness and interdependency. We must recognize that it is our direct actions that cause the increase in frequency and severity of Tropical Cyclones, and Category 5 Cyclones, heavier downpour, frequent flooding, severe droughts and the climate change crisis that threaten our livelihood, our homes and our very existence.

And if we do not repent from our wrongs and restore our relationship with creation, our livelihoods will perish, our homes will perish and our communities and churches will perish.

Being Resilient and never giving up

Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree says a lot about our relationships with God, with one another, with creation and the expectations of others upon us and the ways or the timelines in which those expectations must be fulfilled. Let us first look at the fig tree and why Jesus chose to use a fig tree to emphasize his point.



The fig tree

The fig tree in Jewish culture symbolizes peace, prosperity, wisdom, fertility and health of the nation of Israel. It is a resilient plant which can grow with very minimal nourishment in the desert wherever there is a drip of water.



The image of a fig tree in the desert represents a miracle and an oasis, a shelter and resting and feeding place for birds, animals, insects and a meeting place for human beings. It becomes for the people a symbol of peace, hope, life and vitality with its vibrant green leaves in the desert background – a symbol of flourishing.

The fig tree in this parable also speak about us as disciples of Jesus. We may grow big, strong and green as a sign of flourishing in our faith, and yet. But we must also bear fruit so that the animals, birds and other human beings who find shelter and rest under our shade and fellowship can also be nourished and sustained. If we do not bear fruits then it shows that our focus is for our own personal and selfish flourishing.

We become big fig trees in our families, community and church, but we utilize our talents and gifts from the Holy Spirit for our own personal flourishing without any care to feed those who

find shelter, rest and fellowship under our shade, sphere of authority and responsibilities to provide nourishment for them.

The Gardener and the Vineyard Owner

The gardener is often depicted as Jesus himself, but for our context in our parishes we can consider the gardener to be anyone who is called as a Lay Minister or Ordained to work in the parish as a gardener to tend God's Garden or to look after his flock of sheep. How the gardener cares for the fig's life shows that he understands the potential of the fig tree because he has a personal a direct relationship with him.

The Vineyard owner in the context of today's world may represent a CEO of a Corporation who does not have a direct relationship with the fig tree to know his or her true potential. Therefore, his only concern is about bearing fruit, or the productivity of the person which can contribute to the profitability of the Vineyard or the company. Bearing fruit is a Key Performance Indicator or KPI in the corporate language which each worker must achieve to measure their worth and productivity. Therefore, being barren and not bearing fruit is a waste of space which need to be cut down or laid off.

Many times, in the context of our parish, we settle into routines that become the norm without looking to mix things up and try new approaches to inject new life and so we become fig trees that look green but do not bear fruit.

So what does it mean to dig around the fig for one year to see if it will bear fruit?

Digging around presents an opportunity to go back to the basic...doing what we are called to do, being faithful to our licenses or the vows we have made in our ordinations or inductions. Encourage those who have gifts and talents to offer to the church and walk with them, enabling them and empowering them to use their gifts and talents to enable others to bear fruit.

CONCLUSION

Jesus's call to "**repent or perish**" echoes the charge of Archbishop Sione to "**Review, Reinforce and Revitalize**" the mission and ministry to address the decline in the church by injecting new life that will enable all the baptized to flourish by bear fruit by becoming useful for the kingdom of God.

"Review," "Reinforce", and to "Revitalize" is the way in which we exercise repentance as the whole church to ensure that its mission and ministry continue to flourish and not perish.

Repentance in the language of the Archbishop's Charge calls for:

- Radical self-examination and scrutiny that will provide an inward transformation which convicts the heart and surrenders the mind and human will to be obedient to God's Will.
- It involves a change of direction in how things a done, towards a right way of doing things, or away from the path which leads to sin, disaster and perishing.

- It is about doing the basic little things right so that we deal with the issues that cause us to sin so that we reduce on our vulnerabilities or weaknesses that cause us to sin so that we develop our resilience to overcome the temptation of complacency and negligence in-order to flourish in our daily walk and work with Christ.

This Lenten season provides opportunity for us as individuals, families and the Church to reset by allocating time to return to the basics of our faith in spending time in prayer, reading and studying the Word of God, reflecting and meditating on the Word of God, and to bear the fruits of seeds planted by the Word of God and watered by the Spirit of God to be Christ to the world and the rest of creation.

QUESTIONS BIBLESTUDY

1. What is your traditional understanding of sin?
2. How do you view the relationship between sin and disaster?
 - a. Is disaster and death directly related to committal of serious sin?
 - b. What does Jesus say about sin and tragedies in the reading?
3. What do you understand by Jesus' instruction for all to Repent or Perish:
 - a. in the context of the text?
 - b. in our community context today?
4. Who do you think the different characters in the parable of the barren fig tree represent in your own home, family or parish and WHY?
5. How do you view the story and the resource provided through the lens of the Archbishop's Charge?

4TH WEEK OF LENT

SUNDAY	READING	TOPIC
4th Sunday of Lent	Luke 15:1-3, 11-32	Parable of the Prodigal Son

On this 4th Sunday of Lent, the Gospel reading of today invites us all on a journey to reflect and to locate ourselves in the familiar story told by Jesus known as the **Parable of the Prodigal Son**. (Luke 15: 11-32) This parable is only written by Luke's gospel.

Luke's gospel points to the fact that the purpose of God is seen in the life and work of Jesus. Luke understands that the divine purpose of God is bound up with the LOVE and Mercy of God in Jesus Christ. God's Love is seen as a theme that becomes the Heart of Luke's Gospel. It is the Love of God that shines through the parable, sayings, and the story of Jesus. The essence of that LOVE is the longing of God in Jesus Christ for a lifelong Relationship between the beloved of God and their God in Jesus Christ.

Today's gospel is inviting us to think of God's Love, Relationship with God, and relationship with one another. It is God's perfect love and forgiveness restores full relationship with the lost ones. On this same chapter (15:4 – 7, 8 – 9) there are two stories told by Jesus of the Lost sheep and the lost coin. It is about looking to find what is/has been lost and the celebration of reclaiming or bringing back the lost.

We find also the theme of True repentance and God's Forgiveness.

Lenten season is also about repentance and turning back to God. Restoring our own worth in accordance to God's purpose for us. We are to be Holy, because God is Holy. We are to be attached to God as branches while He is the Vine.

It also suggests the theme of One's own Recognition of one's own sin which brings reconciliation and restoration of broken relationship/s. I invite you all to reflect and identify few other themes that is part of our modern-day experiences.

There are choices in life that may seem good but can be very lonely and allow us to get lost in the world we create. These choices can damage the peace within community and destroy family units and values. It can also violate cultural values and disintegrate relationships, honor and respect that holds these important parts of our life.

How to read the Story of the Prodigal Son in a Bible Study Group

Please read the text (Luke 15: 1-3, 11 – 32) three times.

1. Read the story aloud while you try to listen or if you are in a group, let someone read the story while others listen to the story.
2. Read the story for the second time, and take note who are the Characters in the story and what did each character do in the story?
3. What was unusual in the nature of the story or in the nature of the characters.
4. Lastly, what are the lessons you can learn from each character and what is/are lessons you can learn from the story.

The story of a Man with two sons. The youngest son asked his father to give him his share of the estate. The father then divided his property between his two sons. The younger son got all his share and set off to a distant country and used his wealth the way he wanted. To the father, what is his, belongs to the eldest son, as it is in their culture. A famine struck the whole country and the younger son was in deep need in order to live. He was hungry himself and he would gladly fill himself with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything.

He thought of all the servants working to his father, and how they all have bread to eat, and yet he is eating what the pigs eat and is dying of hunger. He said, I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; tread me like one of your hired hands.”***

The father called for a Robe – the best one- put it on him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Get the fattest calf and kill it, let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found.”

The older brother, hardworking, obedient disapproved of their fathers’ treatment of the son that had decided to leave the family and returned to be treated with dignity. He was angry and refused to join the celebration.

FOR MEDITATION AND FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Repentance is depicted as a powerful desire to return to God, a movement of love and trust. The parable teaches us that returning to God is not only the best decision one can make, but a recognition of our need of God to lighten the burden that we feel guilty of and regret of the decision/s that we have made and it is all wrong. Here, is a strong feeling of conversion. Repentance is not a duty to be fulfilled for the sake of God. It is our acceptance and recognition of our wrong and unworthiness, the feeling of sincerity when confessing our sins with a complete trust in God’s grace. Thus, the younger son declared ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son”. (Luke 15: 21)***

We as a church should engage deeply in exploring a space for public confession of our sins and mistakes and publicly declare our return to God as a way of life but NOT a Lenten practice.

At the end of the parable of today, we see our father stretched out his loving embrace and embracing us, kissing us and rejoicing with us.

In our Prayer Book on page 407 we find these words OF Jesus from the scripture in the Comfortable words:

“There is joy amongst the angels of God over one sinner who repents”.

“Come to me all who are labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest”.

All of heaven rejoices over the return of lost sons and daughters. In our relationships with each other and with God, God yearns for our return. God finds great joy when we finally make that choice and decision to repent and return. We give God great Joy.

The climax of the story of the prodigal son is to see that repentance brings joy and celebration. It is hard to think that this is possible because it is a hard and painful experience to admit our sins and wrongdoing. Sometimes it is hard even to say sorry or to admit we are wrong. We are given the opportunity to know that to God, repentance is a great moment of joy as it marks the return of a son or daughter to the arm of the Father. It also marks the beginning in living of a truer life in constant communion with God.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you see this parable in your own cultural setting?
2. What will be the experiences if this happens in your:
 - a. Family
 - b. Community
 - c. Parish
3. Will there be a celebration if someone in the family, community, parish had taken away something they thought they own, left, spent it all, and then return.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT

SUNDAY	READING	TOPIC
5th Sunday of Lent	John 12:1-8	Mary Anoints Jesus

“The Positive Sweet Smell”

THEME: Our **GIVING** to God

FOCUS: Mary recognized who Jesus was in-order to give her all in the perfume worth a year’s salary to anoint Jesus

The anointing of Jesus can be seen as a transformative act in several profound ways. Both the anointing by Mary of Bethany and the anointing at His burial symbolize key aspects of Jesus' life and mission.



*“Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: **and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.**” (KJV)*

*“Mary came in with a jar of very expensive aromatic oils, anointed and massaged Jesus’ feet, and then wiped them with her hair. **The fragrance of the oils filled the house.**” (MSG)*

*“Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. **The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house.**” (GNT)*

REFLECTION

The sweet smell of the perfume that filled the house during Jesus' anointment by Mary of Bethany carries profound lessons and symbolic meaning

It's fascinating because smells have a unique ability to evoke these memories more intensely than any of our other senses. This happens because our sense of smell is closely linked to the parts of the brain involved in emotion and memory, which is called the 'Proustian Effect' that is named after a French writer Marcel Proust who coined down the term 'involuntary memory or a sudden and vivid memory that is triggered by smell.

Negative Sweet Smell:

Judas Iscariot's reaction to the anointing Jesus is indeed a notable moment in the Gospels. According to the Gospel of John, when Mary of anoints Jesus' feet with a costly perfume, filling the house with its fragrance. Judas Iscariot, however, was triggered by a negative response to this act, saying, "***Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?***"

While Judas's objection might seem to be motivated by concern for the poor, the Gospel clarifies that his true motivation was greed. As the keeper of the disciples' money bag, Judas often helped himself to its contents. His negative response highlights his hypocrisy and self-interest, contrasting sharply with Mary's act of devotion and love.

Jesus responds to Judas by saying, "Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial." This moment underscores the difference between genuine discipleship and superficial allegiance.

Perfume often triggers memories and emotions that have left a significant impression on you. Like the smell of freshly baked cookies might remind you of your grandmother's kitchen, or a particular perfume might transport you back to a special moment in your life. It's fascinating how our brains can store such powerful associations with scents.

Lessons from Mary's Actions

- i. The act of anointing Jesus with expensive perfume demonstrates her deep devotion and willingness to sacrifice something valuable out of love and reverence. It teaches us the importance of giving our best to honour and serve others.
- ii. She recognizes His significance and honours Him. This act shows the importance of recognizing and honouring those who have a meaningful impact on our lives.
- iii. Jesus Himself stated that Mary's anointing was in preparation for His burial (John 12:7). This act foreshadows His impending sacrifice, reminding us of the ultimate love and sacrifice He was about to make.
- iv. The fragrance filling the house symbolizes the far-reaching impact of Jesus' presence and teachings. It reminds us that acts of love, devotion, and faith can have a lasting and transformative influence on those around us.
- v. Mary's act of anointing Jesus with costly perfume also teaches us about generosity and gratitude. It shows that expressions of love and gratitude can be powerful and transformative, both for the giver and the recipient.
- vi. Overall, the event teaches us about love, honour, sacrifice, and the profound impact of our actions when they are rooted in deep faith and devotion.

What does the Perfume teach us about?

Confidence:

The act of applying perfume can symbolize self-care and the desire to present oneself positively. It might reflect your feelings about self-worth or your current state of confidence.

i. **Transformation:**

Both perfume and anointing can signify transformation. This might suggest that you are undergoing or seeking changes in your life, possibly related to how you are perceived by others or how you perceive yourself.

ii. **Connection:**

Perfume can also symbolize attraction and connection with others and can indicate a desire for closeness or intimacy in your relationships.

What does the Alabaster Jar teach us about?

An alabaster jar or bottle holds significant symbolic meaning, especially in biblical contexts. Here are a few key aspects:

- i. An alabaster jar signifies something precious and pure, representing high value and worth.
- ii. This act of pouring out the perfume, which was worth a year's wages, signifies her deep devotion and willingness to sacrifice something precious for Jesus. It symbolizes the act of giving one's best to honour and worship.
- iii. The act of anointing with perfume from the alabaster jar foreshadows His sacrificial death and the love and reverence shown by His followers.
- iv. The opening of the alabaster jar to pour out its contents represents a transformative act. It symbolizes the breaking of oneself or ego to fully give and serve.



The usage of Perfume and sense of Smell

“The fragrance filling the room can be seen as a metaphor for the spreading of love, faith, and devotion”.

i. Christmas:

The gift of myrrh to Jesus on his birthday holds deep symbolic meaning. Myrrh is a resin used in ancient times for medicinal purposes, anointing oil, and embalming. In the context of the nativity story, the Wise Men brought myrrh as one of the three gifts to baby Jesus, along with gold and frankincense.



It's a profound part of the story, adding layers of meaning to the traditional Christmas narrative.

Does this add to your understanding of the symbolism behind the gifts of the Wise Men?

ii. Burial of Jesus:

The use of perfume during the burial of Jesus has significant symbolic and cultural meaning. In the ancient Jewish tradition, anointing the dead with perfumes and spices was a common practice to honour the deceased and mitigate the odours of decomposition. This act also held deeper symbolic implications.

When Jesus was buried, it is recorded that Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight, to anoint His body (John 19:39-40). Myrrh, already mentioned as one of the gifts from the Wise Men at Jesus' birth, reappears here, signifying the full circle of His life and mission. It is often associated with suffering and death, underscoring Jesus' role as the sacrificial lamb.



The Stone of Anointing, where Jesus' body is said to have been anointed before burial in Jerusalem, Israel.

iii. Anointment:

Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with expensive perfume made of pure nard before His crucifixion (John 12:3). Jesus Himself stated that this anointing was to prepare Him for burial

(Matthew 26:12). This act of devotion and preparation highlights the recognition of Jesus' impending death and the reverence for His sacrifice.



These acts of anointing with perfume during His burial reflect both cultural customs and deep theological significance, honoring Jesus in life, death, and beyond. It's a powerful testament to the reverence and love bestowed upon Him by His followers.

The title "Christ" itself means "the Anointed One" (Greek), reflecting Jesus' divine mission and kingship.

Throughout His life, Jesus was anointed multiple times, each with profound symbolic significance:

- i. By the Wise Men: At His birth, the Wise Men brought myrrh, symbolizing His future suffering and death. This anointing foreshadowed His role as the Messiah who would sacrifice Himself for humanity.
- ii. By Mary of Bethany: Before His crucifixion, Mary anointed Jesus with costly perfume from an alabaster jar. This act demonstrated deep devotion and reverence, preparing Him for His burial and highlighting His divine and sacrificial mission.
- iii. At His Burial: Myrrh and aloes were used to anoint Jesus' body after His death, following Jewish burial customs. This final anointing signified honour and respect, marking the end of His earthly life and the beginning of His eternal legacy.

Use of Incense in Anglicanism

The lighting of incense during church services carries rich symbolic meaning and serves several purposes:

- i. Incense is often seen as a symbol of prayers rising to heaven. The fragrant smoke ascending signifies the prayers of the congregation being lifted to God, as reflected in *Psalm 141:2*, "Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."

- ii. The use of incense is also associated with purification and sanctification, a sense of holiness and reverence in the worship space, setting it apart as sacred.
- iii. The presence of incense during the service symbolizes the presence of the divine, and sweet-smelling aroma represents the beauty and mystery of God's presence among the congregation.
- iv. Connection to Tradition: Incense has been used in Christian worship since ancient times, and its use in Anglican liturgy connects worshippers to the historical traditions of the Church.
- v. Creates an atmosphere that helps worshippers focus on the sacred and transcend the ordinary.

In Anglican services, incense may be used during processions, the reading of the Gospel, the consecration of the Eucharist, and other solemn occasions. Its use varies among different Anglican churches, with some incorporating it regularly and others using it only on special occasions.

These anointing acts collectively underscore Jesus' identity as the Anointed One, His divine mission, and the love and devotion of His followers. They reflect the profound impact of His life, death, and resurrection on the world.

QUESTIONS

1. Does this help you understand the significance of incense in our worship?
2. Do you find the symbolic connections between these scents meaningful in your own spiritual journey?
3. Have you ever experienced a moment like this, where a smell brought back a strong/positive/negative memory?

6TH SUNDAY IN LENT (PALM SUNDAY)

SUNDAY	READING	TOPIC
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time	Luke 19:28-40	Jesus enters into Jerusalem

FOCUS: A deeper self-examination of our relationship with God, with others and with the whole of creation

THEME: We are living branches and garments laid on the ground for Jesus to walk on as he enters Jerusalem as the King who comes in peace on the foal of a donkey, riding in victory to his death on Calvary.

CONTEXT OF LUKE 19:28-40

This text describes Jesus' "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem, where he rides a colt (a young donkey) into the city, humbly signifying his kingship, fulfilling a prophecy from Zechariah 9:9, as he approaches the city for the final Passover before his crucifixion; this event is seen as a deliberate act by Jesus to publicly declare himself as the Messiah, even though the people might expect a more martial conquering king, not a peaceful one riding a donkey.

REFLECTION

One Sunday morning, Jesus made his way up to Jerusalem. He went humbly and on foot, and as he got near Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples. He told them to go to the village and as they entered, they would find a colt tied there, which no one had ever ridden. Colt as we all know is a young male donkey. I'm sorry, we are not familiar with donkeys as we don't have them on our islands. But if you have seen horses, they are in the same family. However, they have physical differences. Donkeys have longer, thicker ears than horses. Their hooves are smaller and more upright hooves than horses. Their tails are shorter, tufted tails like cow's tail, while horses have longer tails. Donkeys have longer and stiffer coats that are less waterproof than horses. Their manes are thinner and their backs are flatter than horses. Horses have longer faces than donkeys but donkeys have larger eyes that are set further apart than horses. Lastly, donkeys have wider foreheads than horses.

We may be wondering, why Jesus used a colt that has never been ridden. This is connected to the idea of sacrifices as "unused" animals were used for such sacrifices. Jesus was riding on an "untouched" donkey. It could be that the Lord used only brand-new things on most important events such as he was buried in an unused tomb. It could also be the fulfilment of a prophecy recorded by Zechariah 9:9 which says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Shout aloud, O

daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”.

We may also wonder why Jesus rode on a donkey, and not a horse, or any other animal. But donkeys were lowly animals used mainly by farmers and labourers. They are domesticated animals but very strong in ferrying water, food and crops. Donkeys were used as work animals, not for wealth, power or war. So, donkeys also symbolize peace and stand for meekness and peace. Unlike a horse which symbolizes peace and is a sign of war. Therefore, Jesus showed his followers that he was a king, and his rule would be peaceful and humble and showed his support for the ordinary people. It educates us to live and serve with humility and love as he was against violence for power.

Jesus didn't come as the king everyone expected. The people in and around Jerusalem expected a Messiah that would be the “conquering king”, one that would come with military might throw off the yoke of the Roman Empire, and inaugurate a new, earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. He didn't make his entrance to display the worldly wealth and power he has like the world leaders of today. When a king or a president visits a country or attends a ceremonial context, they arrive in great processions. They arrive in horse-drawn carriages escorted by police, soldiers, bands and guards. Jesus came in a manner that reflected his mission to save and bring peace into the hearts and minds of those who would place their faith and trust in him. **He is the Savior King**, walking among his people.

Anyway, they found the donkey as he had told them. They brought it to Jesus, they threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he rode along people kept throwing their cloaks on the road. As he approached the city the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise him joyfully by saying: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! The people are compelled to shout these praises because of all that they have witnessed at Christ's hands, the miracles, the teachings, the love and power of God embodied in their midst. These are not empty words, they are full of joy and hope, that this heavenly peace and glory is here on earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Their praises are words that strongly echo the praises first proclaimed by another multitude; the angels at Jesus' birth, “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours” (Luke 2:14).

The manner of Jesus' arrival reminds us that he is not just the God of the high and mighty, but the God of the lowly, the needy the oppressed, the downtrodden, the burdened, the despairing and the hurting. He is the God who sees all people, loves all people and came to offer all those who would place their faith and trust in him the hope of forgiveness, redemption and eternal salvation. **He is the humble king**.

Jesus not only reigns over creation; when we focus our hearts and decisions on Him, He also reigns in our minds and lives. Jesus is a king like no other. He came to save us, to humbly dwell among His people, and to care for them. In a world that is often filled with darkness, fear, and despair, we can praise God for our saving, humble, and caring King Jesus.

As reflected in this Lenten season Bible study's theme, we are the living branches and garments laid on the ground for Jesus as He enters Jerusalem on a donkey, the King who comes in peace. We must lay down our lives before Him, just as He laid down His life for us as the unblemished Lamb, sacrificing Himself on the Cross of Calvary to save you and me.

In conclusion, let us reflect on the donkey and his obedience, quietly carrying the load and burden to its destination. He did it for Jesus by taking him to Jerusalem. We can be obedient donkeys to carry the Gospel all over the world. However, during this Lenten season let us re-examine ourselves and try to deepen our relationship with God, with others and the whole creation. Let us be humble and obedient, following what our Diocese has required of us but above all what God requires of us.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we apply the message of Jesus' triumphal entry to our current churches and community context?
2. What does it mean to embrace a "kingdom of peace" in our relationships and communities?
3. How can we obediently do what the Diocese requires from us and continue to actively proclaim Jesus as our King and Saviour, even when it is not popular?

LITURGY for LENTEN SEASON

For all Principal Feast Days and Sundays, the Order of Service must be the "Thanksgiving of the People of God" on Page 404 of the New Zealand Prayer Book.

The Collect for Ash Wednesday shall be used as a Collect for the entire Lenten Season to be read after the Collect of the Day

LENTEN COLLECT

Almighty and merciful God
You hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are penitent
Create in us new and contrite hearts
so that when we turn to you and confess our sins
we may receive your full and perfect forgiveness
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer
Amen.

ASH WEDNESDAY

Sentence of the Day

Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. *Joel 2:13*

Collect of the Day

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you and confess our sins
we may receive your full and perfect forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
Amen.

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

Sentence of the Day

Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him. *Luke 4:8*

Collect of the Day

Hear us, Jesus Christ,
when we ask for help to recognise
temptation,
for honesty to face it,
for strength to resist it
and humility to give God the glory.
Hear this prayer for your love's sake.
Amen.

Lenten Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are
penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you and confess
our sins
we may receive your full and perfect
forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
Amen.

THE 2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

Sentence of the Day

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. *Philippians 3:20*

Collect of the Day

God of life and glory,
your Son was revealed in splendour
before he suffered death upon the cross;
grant that we, beholding his majesty,
may be strengthened to follow him
and be changed into his likeness from
glory to glory;
for he lives and reigns with you and the
Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen.

Lenten Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are
penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you and confess
our sins
we may receive your full and perfect
forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
Amen.

THE 3RD SUNDAY IN LENT

Sentence of the Day

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts, says the Lord. *Isaiah 55:9*

Collect of the Day

God of grace and goodness,
you know that by reason of our frailty
we cannot but fail;
keep us always under your protection
and lead us to all things profitable to
our salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lenten Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are
penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you and confess
our sins
we may receive your full and perfect
forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
Amen.

THE 4TH SUNDAY IN LENT

Sentence of the Day

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and given us the ministry of reconciliation.
2 Corinthians 5:18

Collect of the Day

We praise you God,
that the light of Christ shines in our
darkness
and is never overcome;
show us the way we must go to eternal
day;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Lenten Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are
penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you and confess
our sins
we may receive your full and perfect
forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
Amen.

THE 5TH SUNDAY IN LENT [PASSION SUNDAY]

Sentence of the Day

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Psalm 126:6

Collect of the Day

Jesus,
receive our love and worship.
Show us how to give you what we have,
for nothing is too big or too small
for us to offer, or for you to use;
for you live and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever.

Amen.

Lenten Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are
penitent;
create in us new and contrite hearts,
so that when we turn to you and confess
our sins
we may receive your full and perfect
forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

Amen.

PALM SUNDAY – THE 6TH SUNDAY IN LENT

The focus of the Liturgy for this Sunday is on the Palms and not the Passion.

Sentence of the Day

At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:10-11

Collect of the Day

Jesus, when you rode into Jerusalem
the people waved palms
with shouts of acclamation.
Grant that when the shouting dies
we may still walk beside you even to a cross;
for the glory of your holy name.

Amen.



*Anglican Church
Diocese of Polynesia*



**Lenten Bible Study
Resource
Year C, 2025**