

# Len



Going deeper

Prayers and readings – Week 4



THE UNITED PARISH  
Christ Church & St John's

## **Midweek Services**

Lunchtime Devotion & Communion 12 noon St John's  
(A Study of Lamentations)

## **Rural Deanery Services 7.30pm**

Theme : The letters of St Paul

14th March Antrim Parish  
21st March St Patrick's, Park Hill Road, Antrim

## Introduction

Jesus' call to 'Follow me' is an invitation to all kinds of people – men, women, young people and children from every conceivable race, nationality and background. Following Christ doesn't stop with baptism and confirmation, with a conversion experience, or with belonging to a church community. That's just the beginning. And from that point on, it's our responsibility to do all we can to ensure that we grow and deepen our faith, and to encourage the faith of our family and others around us. The period of Lent gives Christians an opportunity to assess our spiritual walk, confessing our shortcomings and making decisions to go forward living a more God-focused life. During this Lent, be encouraged to set aside time each day to come closer to God, reading his Word, and praying for different aspects of the life of our Parish. Each Sunday will be a day where the prayers focus on ourselves.

Grab a booklet each Sunday, or download from the Parish website [www.theunitedparish.org.uk](http://www.theunitedparish.org.uk)

Revd Jonny

## **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> March**

Reading : Mark 6:45-56

### **INTO THE STORMS**

Let's face it, storms are scary things. We have recently seen the devastating effect (maybe not this time in Ballyclare or Ballynure) or Storm Emma and the 'Beast from the East'. Sometimes the storms and trials we face are in our lives; the storms of lost jobs, failed relationships, children out of control or a doctor's diagnosis that stops us in our tracks.

In this storm, Jesus is always nearby. Immediately the disciples cry out, Jesus responds to them. In this passage Jesus is revealing himself to the disciples. Often in the 'storms' of life, God's voice and presence are very clear to us. Such 'storms' can reveal important things about ourselves and God. When storms or trials enter into our life, what is usually our first reaction to them? This reaction usually shows us our true view of God.

### **Daily Collect**

Lord God whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praying for ourselves**

Father of all goodness, forgive those things we have done which have caused you sadness, and those things we should have done that would have brought you joy. In both we have failed ourselves, and you. Bring us back to that place where our journey began, when we said that we would follow the way that you first trod. Lead us to the Cross and meet us there. Amen.

## **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> March**

Reading : Mark 7:1-23

### **THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL**

In the gospels, Jesus often takes the religious authorities to task. He uses them as examples of people who, in trying to keep the law of the Lord, fail to see the whole picture. Whilst the Pharisees pay great attention to ritual, the reality is that showing mercy to parents is ignored.

It is what is in our hearts that will define us, not what we look like on the outside, but how clean we are within. Jesus defines a new law, not easily followed by those who have rulebooks, as love is not measured out by rules but by compassion and mercy. How easy is it just to follow the rules rather than the spirit of the law?

### **Daily Collect**

Lord God whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Pray for this week of 24/7**

Father you declare that if your people, who are called by your name, would humble themselves and pray and seek your face and turn from their wicked ways, then you would hear from heaven, and would forgive their sin and heal their land. In this week when Christians across our town are calling out to you, we pray that you would indeed bring transformation into our community by your Holy Spirit, and that people would see that your Church is truly united under your will.

Amen

## **Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> March**

Reading : John 3:14-21, Ephesians 2:1-10

### **YOU ARE GOD'S MASTERPIECE!**

Think of a great painting such as Michelangelo's ceiling in the Sistine chapel, or Monet's waterlilies. Simple materials of plaster, canvas and paint transformed into something beautiful. These passages begin by noting that the canvas of our lives reveals the need of God's transforming grace, shown in Jesus. The emphasis in John is not so much on length of life, but depth and quality.

Paul in Ephesians makes the same point. Those who possess faith in Christ and receive his salvation by grace will show God's goodness in their lives. We become God's workmanship – his work of art, his masterpiece. God by his Holy Spirit moulds our character and actions so that we become crafted in his image, a work of grace. If we were a painting – what image would we be showing to the world?

### **Daily Collect**

Lord God whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praying for the work within our Youth Fellowship**

*Today Lord, I claim every one of our teenagers into your protection and keeping. I know that you will walk with them as they discover more about living. I pray that you will talk aloud into their minds. I pray by your Holy Spirit that you will lead them, teaching them and shepherding them. Father, I ask in Jesus' name that You would give my teenagers a greater understanding of your purpose in their lives. Fill them with Your Word and keep them from sinning against You. Make them humble and mouldable and teachable. May we be faithful in how we disciple them, recognising that the investment will bless your Church for the future. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March

Reading : Mark 7:24-30

### AGAINST ALL ODDS

What obstacles stand in the way of your goals? It may be you have an unsupportive family, too little money, lack of education, the wrong gender, or any number of things. You convince yourself that if those obstacles were removed you would finally find success. The woman in our reading today was forced to face her obstacles. She was reminded by Jesus of the obstacles that stood in her way; her gender, her ethnicity, her religion. She could have walked away discouraged. However, faith caused her to speak up and to confess her confidence in God's grace for all people. You may feel the odds are against you. Yet, Jesus' death and resurrection has allowed God's grace and love to come overflowing into every part of our life. There is no obstacle that keeps God from loving you. When God is for us, who can stand against us! What obstacle in your life can you surrender to God to allow Him to work on your behalf?

### Daily Collect

Lord God whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Praying for those who are bereaved

Father of all compassion and mercy, today I lift before you (*name each person that comes to mind*) and I also lift to your those wider circle of friends and family. Recognising that they are hurting for many reasons, I ask You to help them through this season of loss. I reach out to You, the Father of compassion and the source of every comfort, asking You to touch them with Your unfailing love and kindness. Be their God who comforts them as they're going through their struggles, and bring them through the tough times ahead. Come alongside them in their pain, and strengthen them so they are people who can share in time the hope that comes in knowing you, the God of all comfort. I pray that one day they be able to help others who face the same struggles. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> March**

Reading : Mark 7:31-37

### **JESUS MEETS US WHERE WE ARE**

This is such an intriguing healing story. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd, puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits, touches the man's tongue and commands the man not to tell anyone what has happened. Why does Jesus do this? The deaf man couldn't hear Jesus until he was healed. So, Jesus communicated in a way the man could understand. I think Jesus gave the man what he needed. Jesus met the man where he was at and communicated in a way that was meaningful.

Jesus does the same for us today, whatever our need. Never underestimate how our compassionate God may step in to meet you where you're at. Are there areas in your life that need Christ's touch?

### **Daily Collect**

Lord God whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praying for the work of Ballyclare Youth for Christ**

Father God, I thank you today for the ministry of Youth for Christ that blesses the Greater Ballyclare area. Thank You Lord at how they are being used to share the gospel of Jesus with a range of young people and we pray that You would draw each one closer to Yourself as they meet together for fellowship, fun and to learn more about You. We pray that you will protect and guide Ricky Mehaffey in his role as co-ordinator. Provide him at this time with the resources and wisdom he needs to lead more of our youth within the town to Christ. Protect those young people whom they mentor, that you would protect them from the enemy who would seek to undermine their trust in you but rather equip each one to look to Jesus rather than to the things of the world. We pray that each Church may support this important ministry through finances and resource. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

## **Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March**

Reading : Mark 8:1-21

### **YOUR FAITH'S WORST ENEMY**

I don't think any of us have escaped the colds and flu over the past months. Isn't it amazing how such a microscopic virus can bring so many down and spread. Such is the disease of unbelief, as told through Jesus' warning about leaven, the Jewish symbol of corruption. Unbelief spreads wildly once it starts. Unbelief was amongst the Pharisees when they continued to ask Jesus for a miraculous sign. Jesus warns us to be careful to guard against contagious unbelief.

Unbelief has many forms today – the focus on do's and don'ts more than on what Christ has done. Only Christ himself working through the Bible, prayer, worship, fellowship, and your service, will keep you immune from infection. Are you in the company of those who seem to hinder your faith?

### **Daily Collect**

Lord God whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praying for our parishioners in Nursing Homes**

Jesus, I ask for comfort and hope for the many parishioners who are in nursing homes. May they feel your presence and know you see them as precious and having your love in their hearts. May they be treated with dignity and respect, even if they do not fully recognise their surroundings. I also pray for the carers who have such a hard job and many times don't receive acknowledgement for what they do. May they know the importance and beauty of their job. Please give them strength when they become tired and when the job becomes very stressful. Finally I pray for those within our pastoral care team who would visit these people. May you give them words to pray that encourage those parishioners, and may our parishioners know the love of our Church family through them. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

## **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March (St Patrick's Day)**

Reading : Mark 8:22-26

### **THE GREAT HEALER?**

Regularly in my role as pastor, I get annoyed when I see people whom I love in our church family becoming ill and suffering. I spend time asking God, "Why?"

In today's passage, it seems that Jesus has to heal a man twice, since the first 'healing' didn't apparently work properly. Medical research has shown, however, that people who have been blind from birth and receive their sight, take time to actually understand what they are seeing. Doctors call this 'Post Blind Syndrome'. Jesus didn't have to heal again, he had to heal the next illness. Father, I apologise for the times when I have doubted your power, because I see my own weakness. Forgive me, Lord, and let me see your power and guidance not once, but always in my life. Amen.

### **Daily Collect**

Almighty God, in your providence you chose your servant Patrick to be the apostle of the Irish people, to bring those who were wandering in darkness and error to the true light and knowledge of your Word: Grant that walking in that light we may come at last to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praying for our involvement with Women's Aid**

Loving God, Father of all, I pray today for the amazing work of Women's Aid in the Newtownabbey & Antrim area. Thank you that they provide a hope and refuge to so many women who are affected by Domestic violence. I pray today for David Brown and Alison Campbell-Smyth who have become Domestic Violence Champions within our parish, that they may raise a greater awareness in us all of the damage that is caused by abusers. May the victims of domestic violence know the safety of our churches, and would you affirm in them that they are made in your image, loved by you. Surround them with people whom they can trust, and encourage them to no longer suffer in silence. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

## **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March**

Reading : Mark 9:1-12

### **DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS IN CHURCH?**

Almost every event in the life of Jesus is portrayed in early Christian art except this one - the Transfiguration. It is a time when heaven reached down and touched the earth. Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and brought them to a mountain. Why did Jesus pick these three men?

Perhaps he needed someone to be with him. He is getting ready to go to Jerusalem to die. The time is drawing closer and he needs a friend. Being a Christian doesn't mean that you can do it alone. I am learning that more and more in my role as Rector. Jesus needed friends and he knows that we need them too. That is why he has given us the CHURCH. Are you a friend to someone who might need your support this week?

### **Daily Collect**

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: Grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross, we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **Praying for ourselves**

Father of all goodness, forgive those things we have done which have caused you sadness, and those things we should have done that would have brought you joy. In both we have failed ourselves, and you. Bring us back to that place where our journey began, when we said that we would follow the way that you first trod. Lead us to the Cross and meet us there. Amen.

