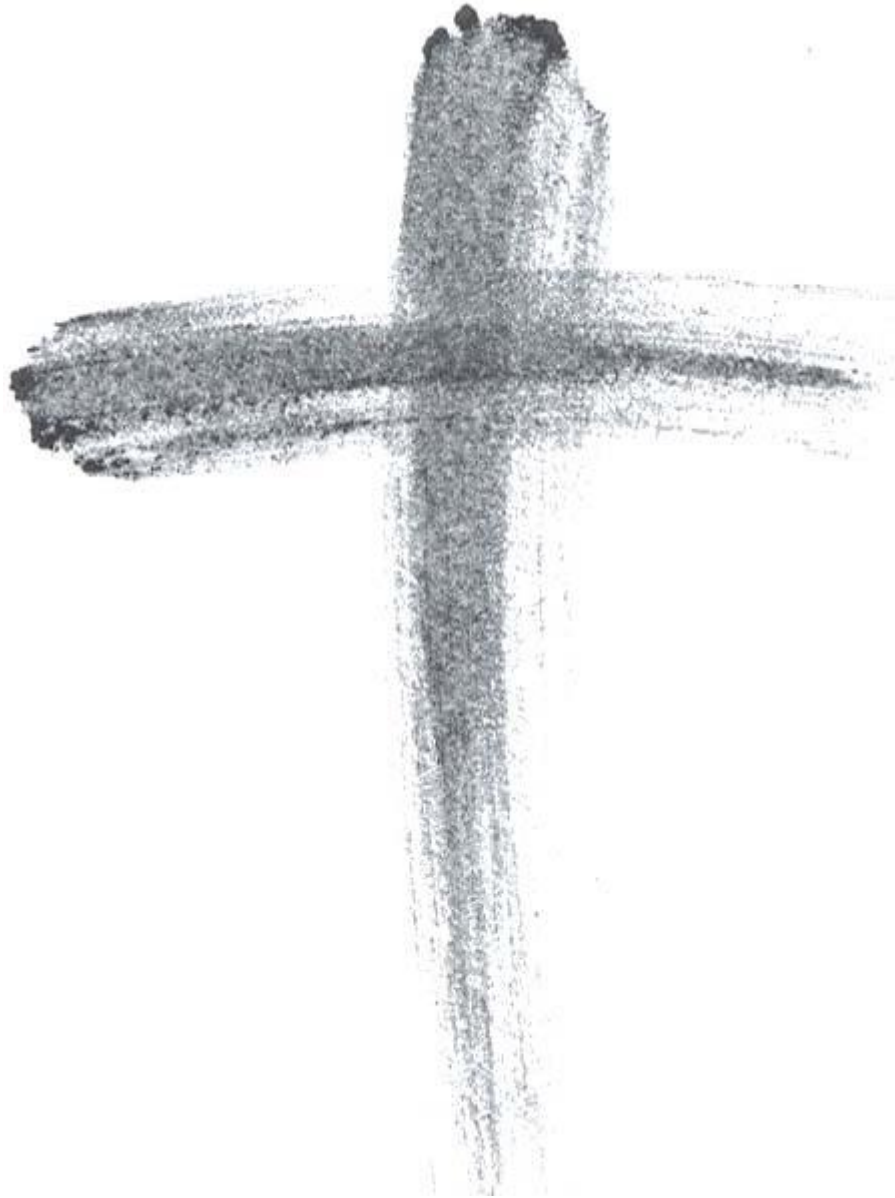


40 days of Lent with St James Parish



Ash Wednesday

Break my heart Lord, for what breaks yours.



2 Chronicles 7:14

“If my people, who are called by name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

When is the night-time not the night-time?

The Scouts absolutely love Shrove Tuesday. More specifically, they love Pancake Day. Pancakes are easy to cook, fun to toss, and there is the chance to heap sugar, honey, jam or Nutella plus maybe some token lemon juice on your plate. Imagine 36 Scouts standing in groups of 6 around a table with a double gas burner frying pancakes. The hall fills with a thin haze of smoke and at the end of the evening you notice the distinct aroma of cooking oil on your clothes as you make your way home.

Pancake Day generally falls in the middle of the Kingston Schools half-term holiday, traditionally also the time for the first major outdoor Scout activity of the year: Spring Camp. We usually go to a campsite in the Hurtwood just south of Shere on the North Downs. There is a special sound and quality of light at this time of year: there are no leaves on the trees, so the sunlight filters and shafts through the bare branches and catches the smoke from the fires as it hangs in the still air.



Anyone who has been camping in February will have enjoyed being woken. At this time of the year sunrise is not too early! It may be cold outside, and the frost may have rendered your tent stiff as a board, but you are warm and snug with your nose just peeping out of your sleeping bag. The air is clean and crisp and you can hear the sound of birdsong in the stillness as the natural world starts its day. But when is the start of day?

On Shrove Tuesday this year the sun will rise at 0712, but the birds will have been singing long before that. This is because the sun sheds light into the world long before its disk rises above the eastern horizon: early morning twilight time. Astronomers define the night as the time when the sun's rays have no effect on your ability to see stars in the sky. On February 16th this year astronomical twilight will begin at 0520. At 0558 you will begin to be able to distinguish vague outlines of buildings and objects (Nautical twilight), and by 0637 you will be able to see without the need for artificial light (Civil twilight). So when is the night-time no longer the night-time?

Maybe Lent is the period of twilight before the sun rises on Easter Day. A time to watch and listen to the wonders of God's creation so as to be renewed, reformed and ready to seize moment, and to enjoy the day.

Peter Morris

PCC Member and Group Scout Leader of 7th Malden (St James) Scout Group

This Lent think about the waters that which threaten to flood your life. And ask God to open the door to his ark of protection and carry you to dry land. Is there an area of life where you need a fresh start? Every time you see a rainbow – remember Noah, his own 40 days, and the promise of grace after hardship.

Noah Part 2.

In the story of Noah's Ark I have always been intrigued that God himself seems transformed by the experience – and moves from judgement and curse back to his original vision of blessing. Starting with Noah he begins to bless again – and open the windows of heaven, not to pour down destruction and rain, but blessing and abundance on those who will listen to his voice and obey his commands.

I'm also struck that you don't have to be perfect to receive God's blessing – almost immediately after getting off the boat Noah gets drunk and lies around naked. He has found the 40 days really hard clearly – and I think he gives us permission to find life hard too. To get it wrong sometimes.

Noah is not exactly the traditional picture of a Saint – but so often God does not choose who we might think is worthy, he doesn't pick goody two shoes (perhaps because Goody two shoes is so busy polishing their own shoes to make themselves look good that they fail to let God's glory shine through them?)

No, God wants ordinary people, drunken Noah types - who will just say yes, even when God asks us to do strange things – like build a huge ark on dry land. God calls people who will listen to their Father in heaven and can ignore the scoffs and taunts of others.

But Noah also gets it right – the most telling part of his character is perhaps that the first thing he does getting off the boat is build an altar. He praises God first in his life.

In a rather touching way, it is actually the smell of the offering that prompts God to promise “Never again.”

This Lent, without demanding perfection, how can we make our lives and our offerings smell sweet to God?

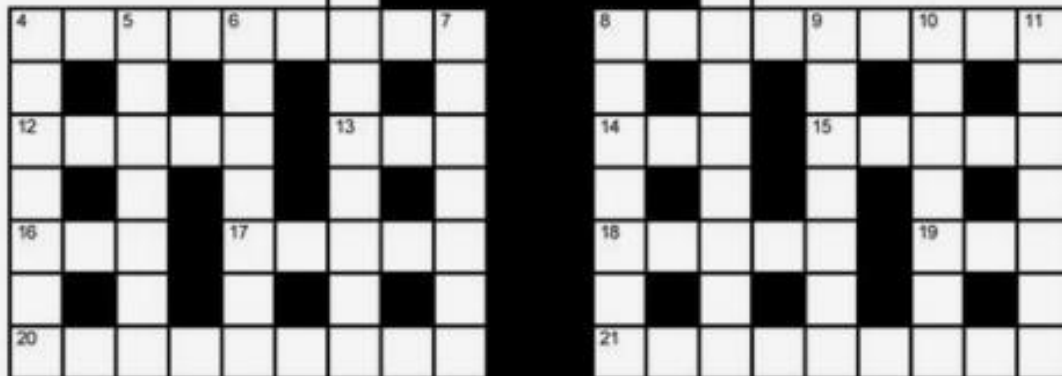
Bible Crossword X

Across

- 1 Donkey (3)
- 2 Jesus' Father (3)
- 4 One of the twelve (9)

Down

- 1 One of God's messengers (5,2,3,4)
- 3 1940s archaeological find (4,3,7)



- 8 Didn't believe in resurrection (9)
- 12 One of David's warriors (5)
- 13 First word of the Lord's Prayer (3)
- 14 New Testament name for Noah (3)
- 15 Wish harm upon (5)
- 16 Hole in the ground (3)
- 17 Adversary (5)
- 18 Saviour (5)
- 19 First woman (3)
- 20 Mother of John the Baptist (9)
- 21 Family of priests (9)
- 22 Third son of Jacob (4)
- 23 Hates (8)
- 26 Assurances (8)
- 30 Endured pain (8)
- 31 Return from the dead (4)
- 32 Intercessor (8)
- 35 Decorating (8)
- 39 Old Testament book of the Bible (4)
- 40 The prince of Rosh, Mesech and Tubal (3)
- 42 A wise insect (3)
- 44 Dwelling place of kings (6)
- Make bigger (8)

- 4 Tread down (7)
- 5 Father of Jonah (7)
- 6 Very salty water bordering Israel (4,3)
- 7 Defensive structures (11)
- 8 Refuges (11)
- 9 Dirty (7)
- 10 Devout (7)
- 11 Pieces of money (7)
- 24 Used to listen (3)
- 25 Used to see (3)
- 26 Positions (5)
- 27 Made available (7)
- 28 Snake (7)
- 29 Destroyed along with Gomorrah (5)
- 33 Finish (3)
- 34 Possess (3)
- 35 King of the Amalekites (4)
- 36 Last letter of the Greek alphabet (5)
- 37 Almost sacrificed by Abraham (5)
- 38 Present (4)
- 41 Unfasten (4)
- 43 Fish traps (4)

<http://biblepuzzles.org.uk>



A Reflection for Lent 2021

Wendy Morris

Parish Safeguarding Officer

The Russian word for the number 40 is 'sorok'. Historically used to describe a certain size of sack because that was the dimension required to accommodate 40 rabbit skins. In many cultures 40 has long been accepted as shorthand to represent a large approximate number - so it may be that those ancient trappers just meant a jolly big bag. Diverse faith traditions also use 40 in significant ways. Prayers in Hinduism and Sikhism consist of 40 couplets and Judaism, Islam and Christianity all use 40 days (nights or years) as generic temporal measures. They too perhaps are adopting a well understood method to tell us that actually it was 'a really long time'.

This use of 40 as a special number in holy scripture has also influenced contemporary language. In 1377 the port of Ragusa (modern day Dubrovnik) passed radical legislation to combat a deadly infection which was spreading across Europe – a kind of 14th century Covid if you will. The Black Death was being spread by rats on ships and with the disease out of control, all sailors were required to isolate for a period of time before entering the city. The length chosen was a biblical 40 days – 'quaranta giorni'. Which is of course where we get the word quarantine.

It seems to me that Lent is a bit like quarantine. A period when we reassess priorities, undisturbed by activities and treats which were previously a comfort and distraction. And this year Lockdown has been a mandatory and extended version, with a dose of isolation thrown in. By Easter 2021, we will have endured over a year of enforced confinement and self-denial. Some of us will have faced the permanent loss of someone close. All of us will have faced

Lent - music for the soul

Lent is my favourite season of the church's year. It was the first such season that I experienced upon joining the choir in early 1965 and I immediately felt an affinity to the haunting music of Lent - with the possible exception of following Fr Butcher around the church singing the (exceedingly long) Litany in a processional figure of eight when the sung response of "Good Lord, deliver us" took on an unintended meaning for me!

To me the music of Lent touches the soul in a way that no other season does. To sing the psalms at Evensong is always an highlight of the week but particularly so during Lent when there seems to be an added poignancy.

However, it is the Lent anthems from the Church Anthem Book learnt as a young chorister that first drew me into church music and will always remain with me as particular favourites. I could list so many but here are just a few: God so loved the world - John Goss

Is it nothing to you? - Frederick Arthur Gore Ouseley

Let thy merciful ears - Thomas Weelkes (attributed Mudd)

O Saviour of the world - both the John Goss version and the one by Giovanni Perluigi Sante da Palestrina

Like the Lent anthems, there are so many Lent hymns to love (particularly those relating to Passiontide). The words are truly wonderful and reach right into the soul. I offer below a verse from each of three hymns by way of examples:

From "When I survey the wondrous Cross":

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

From "My God, I love thee":

"E'en so I love thee, and will love,
And in thy praise will sing,
Solely because thou art my God,
And my eternal King."

Finally, and I think most apposite to a time when we can all sing together again in safety, from my favourite Lent hymn "Glory be to Jesus":

"Lift ye then your voices,
Swell the mighty flood;
Louder still and louder
Praise the precious Blood."

Moses

Moses was transformed by 40 days on Mount Sinai.

Moses obeys God and because he obeys – he gets to come up higher and nearer to God. Obedience brings closeness and intimacy with God – which results in God giving Moses two stones tablets – the ten commandments so others can obey – so that others might rise higher and draw closer too.

“Come up the mountain.....and stay a while.”

Obedience requires we stay a while – we stand – we wait – we don’t rush - we continue to do the right thing until we are told to do something else – often we are required to stay beyond what is comfortable or easy or convenient.

In this pandemic we have had to do a lot of staying – and it has not been easy. But my prayer throughout has been “draw us closer God” – for that is the essence of Covenant – love that commits and goes beyond what is easy – love that stays awhile.

Those whom Moses left behind didn’t understand: and when we are obeying God, getting closer to him, often those left behind will not wait patiently, will not understand either.

The Israelites left behind did not obey God, and in the absence of obedience (and therefore closeness) comes separation and idol worship – turning to what we can touch and see to bring comfort – whether that is an affair, food, drink or drugs or a golden calf. But when we disobey it makes us fools, the comfort is fleeting, temporary and often full of regret.

Only obedience to God can bring us us closer.

In what ways is God calling you to obey to him? In what ways is he asking you to “stay awhile” with him?

Mthr Katie



Easter Word Search

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ANGELS
APOSTLES
BETRAYAL
BLOOD
CALVARY
CROSS
CROWN OF THORNS
CRUCIFIXION
DARKNESS
DEATH
EARTHQUAKE
EASTER
GOLGOTHA
HIGH PRIEST
JESUS CHRIST
JOSEPH
JUDAS ISCARIOT
KING
LAMB

MARY
NAILS
PASSEVER
PIECES OF SILVER
PIERCED
PILATE
RESURRECTION
ROBE
ROMANS
SACRIFICE
SIMON OF CYRENE
SOLDIERS
SON OF GOD
SPEAR
STONE
TEMPLE
THIEVES
THREE DAYS
TOMB

Easter Traditions in Britain

From cheese rolling to welly throwing, some strange, bizarre and eccentric traditions, many dating back centuries, are still taking place around Britain today. Easter is one of those dates in the calendar that is often marked by examples of these in towns and villages up and down the country.

These are just a few examples, which you may or may not have heard of

Bottle Kicking, Leicestershire

Bottle-kicking is an old Leicestershire custom that takes place in the village of Hallaton each Easter Monday. Records of bottle-kicking date to the late 18th century, but the custom is thought to originate much earlier, from before the



Christian era. Each team kicks a bottle towards its village, hoping to cross the far stream before their rivals, and win the barrel of beer for themselves.

Apparently, while the gouging of eyes is forbidden, practically every other dirty fighting trick is allowed, and broken bones are a regular occurrence.

The Nutters Dance, Lancashire

The Britannia Coco-nut Dancers or Nutters are a troupe of Lancastrian clog dancers who perform every Easter in Bacup, dancing 7 miles (11 km) across the town and surrounding areas. The men of Bacup have been blacking up, pulling on skirts and strapping bells to their legs since 1857. This odd parade is led by a whip-wielding man called the "Whiffler" or "Whipper-In", and takes place every Easter Saturday. Its purpose is to drive out evil spirits - and the blackface is meant to protect the dancers from demons.

Simnel Cake

Simnel cake has been eaten since medieval times as both a rich, sweet treat and a symbolic ritual. The fruit cake is topped with eleven marzipan balls to represent the eleven apostles of Christ, minus Judas. Simnel cake is a light fruitcake that is an Easter classic and is often associated with Mother's Day. Traditionally, since at least Medieval times it was eaten on Simnel Sunday Mid-Lent Sunday; the fourth Sunday of Lent, exactly three weeks before Easter Sunday, when the fast is broken.



Egg Jarping, North East England

Egg jarping is a traditional Easter game. In English folk traditions, the game has variously been known as "shackling", "jarping" or "dumping"

The rule of the game is simple. One holds a hard-boiled egg and taps the egg of another participant with one's

own egg intending to break the other's, without breaking one's own. As with any other game, it has been a subject of cheating; eggs with cement, alabaster and even marble cores have been reported.



The egg was a symbol of rebirth, adopted by early Christians as a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

Egg Rolling , Lancashire

Dating back hundreds of years, the tradition of egg rolling as we know it in this country has always taken place around Easter and has always been all about children having fun – first by decorating hard-boiled eggs and then by rolling them down a grassy hill to see whose will go the furthest and survive with the least amount of cracks. And though nowadays most of the decorated eggs are painted or even foil-wrapped chocolate eggs, in days gone by, real eggs were wrapped in onion skins then boiled to give their shells an attractive marbled appearance. These eggs, known as pace eggs, were named after the Latin “Pacha” which means Easter, and were traditionally eaten on Easter Sunday.



Easter Parades, Nationwide

Have you ever wondered where the practice for wearing an Easter bonnet originated?

According to Christian tradition, the fashion for new bonnets came thanks to Easter being known as a time for renewal.

With the fasting of Lent over and people keen to mark the religious occasion, female churchgoers were eager to make and show off their new clothes, including hats.



So this started the tradition of wearing Easter bonnets.

In the UK nowadays, many children build and decorate colourful paper bonnets at school before Easter, then join a local parade through their town or village on Easter Monday to show them off. New clothes at Easter are traditionally considered to be good luck.

Morris Dancing, Nationwide

In many villages across Britain, Morris Dancing is a traditional part of Easter celebrations.

No one knows for certain the origins of Morris Dancing. It is thought it may have its roots in rites celebrating fertility and the coming of Spring. Dancers would blacken their faces with soot so they would not be recognised by the local priest, and would resemble “Moors”. This gave rise to “Moorish Men” or “Moorish dancers” and hence to Morris.

Surprisingly, over time the dances were assimilated by the established church, and by the 1500s Morris was being performed for Easter, Whitsuntide and saint's days. Morris dancing became so much an accepted part of these festivals that churchwarden's accounts showed, in medieval times, that accessories were provided by parish funds –St Lawrence Church Reading, accounts show Morris dancers were given 3d for ale by the parish - a practice which may cause some raised eyebrows at the PCC nowadays!

Jack in the Green, nationwide

The Jack in the Green is a foliage-covered man who leads a troupe of Morris dancers through towns and villages on May day and at Easter. The tradition, which exists across northern Europe in various forms, was considered "bawdy" in Victorian times and died out, but has been revived in many towns in the last 40 years.

Maundy Money, nationwide

Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter, Christians remember as the day of the Last Supper, when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and established the ceremony known as Eucharist. The word Maundy comes from the French "Mande" meaning "command" or "mandate" and is taken from the command given by Christ at the Last Supper, "love one another as I have loved you." In Britain, the Queen takes part in the ceremony of the Royal Maundy, which dates back to Edward I. This involves the distribution of Maundy Money to deserving senior citizens (one man and one woman for each year of the sovereign's age), usually chosen for having done service to their community. They receive ceremonial red and white purses which contain coins made especially for the occasion. The white purse contains one coin for each year of the monarch's reign. The red purse money in place of other gifts that used to be given to the poor.



In the 17th century, and earlier, the King or Queen would wash the feet of the selected poor as a gesture of humility, and in remembrance of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Needless to say this doesn't happen anymore and records show the last monarch to do this was James II.

In 2013, there was a break with tradition and the Queen handed out the Maundy Money in York, and the Pope, instead of the usual foot-washing ceremony, normally performed on lay people in one of Rome's basilicas, actually washed the feet of 12 prisoners in a youth detention centre near Rome.



Hot Cross Buns, nationwide

As well as people across the UK eating Hot Cross Buns on Good Friday there are a few specific traditions that involve the Hot Cross Bun.

Every year at the church of St Bartholmew -the - Great, in Smithfield, London, there is a service, which dates back hundreds of years were 21 widows are given money and Hot Cross Buns after the church service.

There is also an Easter Bun ceremony in a London pub in Bromley-by-Bow. Each sailor adds a bun to the many that hang in commemoration of a poor widow who baked a bun for her only son who never returned from sea.

Pancake Races, nationwide

Pancake races, where participants run while flipping cakes, are held in towns across the UK on Shrove Tuesday (Mardi Gras). Apparently the tradition originated when a housewife from Olney in Buckinghamshire was so late for church that she ran up the street while still carrying her frying pan.



Orange Rolling, Bedfordshire

Rev Iain Mckillop has kindly written Lent Daily Meditations for the church. We have included his pieces for Good Friday and Easter Sunday; but if anyone would like a full copy either posted or emailed please let us know

46/ Good Friday – FORGIVENESS – Mtt.6:12; 18:35; Lk.17:3 Rev Iain Mckillop
“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” [Lk.23:34]

As I discussed in Meditation 43, the idea of Christ’s death as ‘sacrifice’ has permeated Christianity since early days, though some modern theologians are understandably uncomfortable with the interpretation that a loving God could deliberately sacrifice his perfect Son, even for the great good of cleansing humanity and reuniting us with God. Yet somehow, through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, forgiveness was achieved for human beings, which made possible the promise of a new and better life in response to God. The father of the Prodigal Son forgave without the need for sacrifice; he forgave because he loved. ‘*Hesed*’, the Hebrew word for God’s ‘covenant love’, ‘loving-kindness’ and ‘mercy’ recognises that God’s nature is love, and the will for forgiveness is part of the loving character of the divine.

Forgiveness ‘*áphesis*’ in Greek can mean ‘freedom’ / ‘letting someone out of prison’ / ‘setting free’ / ‘releasing from a debt, taxation or an office’ / ‘hurling away’ / ‘pardoning’ / ‘leaving behind the past’. Another linked term ‘*páresis*’ is used more exclusively of the forgiveness given by God or Christ. This form of forgiveness is of course more perfect than the forgiveness that human beings are able to give.

Some people talk of perfect love, like that of God, being ‘unconditional’ but that is not exactly what scripture implies. It sometimes seems that Christians use the term as a form of protection from feeling guilt at letting God down. ‘God loves me/you unconditionally’ can sometimes be used to excuse sin, rather than recognising our need to sincerely repent. There is no excuse for not repenting, or for making reparation for our sins. We understand that a parent has an element of unconditional love for their children, but that does not stop parents recognising their wrongs, wishing that their family would behave better, and doing all they can to bring about the refreshment that can come from true penitence. Love is part of God’s nature and character but God’s love is described as having certain expectations, as does the love of any parent or between partners. The covenants were based on parties making and keeping promises to one another. God provides covenant love and care,

but his people are expected to keep to our covenant promises to follow God's ways, strive for righteousness and relate to God in spirit and in truth. I am not sure if there truly is anything totally 'unconditional' in God's love and forgiveness. 'Unconditional love' is not a phrase to be found anywhere in scripture. But God's love for everything is so perfect that it surely could never allow any imperfect aspect in his forgiveness.

Jesus' gift of his life was the perfect offering of '*hesed*' or '*agapē*'-love. "*Greater love has no-one than this, to give up one's life for one's friends*" [Jn.15:13]. Jesus' self-offering, in some complex way through his death, was the ultimate offering of love and the assurance of forgiveness. We should not take forgiveness for granted. It may be a characteristic of God's love but the message of Good Friday is that our way to forgiveness was painfully and self-sacrificially achieved somehow through Jesus' self-giving.

Forgiveness can do many things. The root meaning of the verb '*aphiēmi*' / '*to forgive*' is to 'send out' or 'send away'. This led to the meaning: 'to remit, forgive and completely cancel debts' [Matt.6:12; 18:27, 32]. It also meant removal of sins [Matt.9:2, 5, 6, 12:31-2] and remission of any punishment or penalty due to sinful behaviour. Forgiveness releases people, brings about cleansing and gives freedom. There is little that feels as clean and freeing as being forgiven something important. It restores a relationship between people, and can turn enmity towards love.

God's love and purity of justice encourages us not to seek revenge [Lev.19:18; Prov.24:29; Rom.12:14, 17-21; 1Thes.5:15; 1Pett.2:23]. Jesus was forgiving. Religious and secular powers were not so forgiving of the truths he was telling; they were intent on self-preservation rather than truth and religious integrity. The Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes and Roman rulers were afraid of Jesus' preaching spiritual truth to the people. The priest Nicodemus appears to have converted to Jesus' way. But following Jesus would have meant amending many of the authorities' practices, which gave them, power, position, finance, dominance and control in society. As far as Caiaphas was concerned, it was "*better that ne man should die for the good of the people than to have the whole nation destroyed*" [Jn.11:50; 18:14]. Probably he was even more intent that their institution should not be disrupted. Similarly, those who cover over abuse today pretend that the cover-up "is for the good of the Church / institution" etc. But a nation, a church, a political party or any institution that is built on lies, false prophecies or unwillingness to ask for forgiveness of sins can never flourish as God intended true Kingdom. Christ came 'for the good of God's people': his birth was "*good news of great joy for all people*" [Lk.2:10].

Yet he brought about the joy of true and eternal life through intense personal suffering.

Jesus' forgiveness at the point of death is the great example to us to try to emulate the love and forgiveness of God. Jesus taught us to *'forgive as you have been forgiven'* [Matt.6:12-15; Lk.6:37]. He taught his disciples that if they forgave the sins of any they would be forgiven [Jn.20:23]. In the 'Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, the steward, having been personally forgiven by the master, failed to forgive those who had debts towards him. Jesus said that when we come to worship or pray, we must first make sure that we have forgiven our neighbour [Mk.11:25]. *"If you forgive others your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you"* [Matt.6:14-15]. However, the act of forgiving is often terribly difficult, often appearing impossible.

I am not sure that it is possible for human beings to forgive in the same ways that God forgives, certainly not as completely as God can do. Nevertheless Jesus encouraged us to *"be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"* [Matt.5:48]. I must admit that there have been five people in my personal history that I have found myself unable to forgive. Each of these was a leading member of their church, each was deliberately duplicitous and knew what they were doing, each badly damaged my health, my future and my psychology. I was far from being the only one who suffered through their abuse of their ministries. The ability to forgive in many such situations feels inconceivable. So Jesus' forgiveness of his persecutors from the Cross: *"Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing"* [Jn.23:34] went way beyond natural human feelings. I wonder if we will ever be able to forgive as God can do. Psychological damage creates mental or situational prisons which grown around people. But that does not mean that we should not try to learn to forgive in the best ways we can, because forgiveness is able to free the one who has been damaged, as well as freeing the abuser.

Our forgiveness should not necessarily be like that of God. We believe that when God forgives our sins are forgotten. But for us remembering people's duplicity can be a protection mechanism. We recognise that the people who have damaged us should not necessarily be trusted. Remembering can strengthen us not to be so easily taken in in the future. While the act of forgiving is important in reuniting and repairing relationships, remembering the sin can strengthen us and make us wiser for the future. It helps us to be *"wise as serpents and innocent as doves"* [Matt.10:16]

Although we believe Jesus to have been the perfect man, I feel certain that even the loving Jesus did not simply easily forgive. If he was like us in most ways, forgiveness may have been an inner struggle. It must have taken strength of will to forgive those who were persecuting and crucifying him. His prayer in Gethsemane was certainly a struggle, which caused *Haematidrosis* or *haematohidrosis, the sweating of blood*. While he asked “*Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*”, they did know in part what they were doing, despite not necessarily knowing the eternal implications of their actions. If someone has knowingly done damage yet refuses to admit or acknowledge their guilt, and continues in their duplicity or abusive behaviour they are culpable. It would be valuable to know how Jesus or St. Paul would guide us to deal with such abuse. Today psychologists might advise the abused to try to ‘park’ the situation, leave it for time to heal, in order to be able to move on to other and positive aspects of our lives to try to alleviate the damage. As Christ’s teaching is so much based on truth, I presume that he would give similar advice. It is difficult to love and forgive another when they so obviously do not love us. ‘Parking’ the situation may help give time and space in which we might develop some understanding of the abuser and help us to develop general love towards flawed human beings. This might be the closest we can get to being able to emulate the love and forgiveness of Christ in such a situation. We are encouraged to ‘love our neighbour’, but perhaps loving someone who has behaved in evil ways is as hard for God as it is for us.

Nevertheless, somehow, amid the horrors of his Passion, Jesus was able to forgive in ways that are so much deeper and more all-encompassing than our abilities to emulate him. God’s forgiveness is a key to all that occurred on the Cross. We do not know how the death of Jesus Christ achieved salvation; it is a mystery hidden in the eternity and truth of God. But somehow we believe that the process of forgiving, cleansing, saving and renewing came about through Jesus. It seems impossible for us to be able to forgive those who do not deserve forgiveness. That is why it is completely wrong for any of us to regard the process of salvation simplistically. But somehow through the Cross we believe that God forgave and saved us for all time.

Good Friday is a day to ‘park’ our desire to understand what was happening spiritually upon the Cross to atone for sin, forgive and release us. Meditation may seek to unravel our thoughts and attempts to reach towards aspects of comprehension of such a mystery. Contemplation by contrast ‘parks’ any frustrations and struggles in understanding and rests in the belief that truth exists somewhere in these mysterious unfathomable actions. Believing that there is truth within the process of salvation leads us to feel free, released, forgiven, clean and able to face life in ways that lead to abundance. We call

and *mlt* - 'to save', 'to escape', 'to achieve safety'. In Classic Greek *rhýomai* was used of 'protection by the gods, leaders, guards, priests or others'. *Sózo* was used with a huge variety of meanings 'rescue or preservation from death, destruction, battle, and the perils of life or evil', 'keeping alive', 'being pardoned', 'protected', 'kept from want', 'safe return', 'keeping a flame alive', 'preserving a memory' or 'something that is treasured'. It was also used of 'wellbeing', 'benefitting', 'keeping good health', 'preserving ones inner being or nature', 'the preservation of the inner health of humanity'. So when the Hebrew Scriptures speak of God 'saving' and the New Testament speaks of being 'saved by Christ', salvation is a far more expansive term than just protection by God in this life and being offered life beyond death.

Both the Greek words *rhýomai* and *sózo* are used with broad intentions throughout scripture. The blessing of 'salvation', as described in the Bible, is a hugely expansive gift. *Sózo* has a connotation of '*to be roomy*', implying the spaciousness of God's care, deliverance, grace and mercy towards us. It includes God's care for the entire cosmos and the spaciousness of what God is leading followers towards. In the Hebrew Scriptures God promised to lead his people into a 'spacious place' [Ex.3:8; Judg.18:10; 2 Sam.22:20; I Chron.4:40; Ps.18:19; 31:8]. The 'spacious place' is interpreted in the New Testament as the enormity of God's truth. Jesus promised his followers '*in my Father's house there are many rooms / mansions*' [Jn.14:2]. In the Hebrew Scriptures salvation is a result of God's broad-spreading mercy [Neh.9:8]; it is part of his nature, not a magical gift. 'Deliverer' [Isa.63:16] is a name of God, as 'Saviour' was used of Jesus [Jn.4:42]. So 'salvation' and 'deliverance' are linked and are also broad and inclusive states to enjoy as gifts.

How we interpret 'being saved' and 'salvation' in scripture often depends on context. Sometimes it means human deliverance [1Sam.11:3] or bringing justice. It is often used to indicate divine help in precarious situations or victory in battle [Zeph.3:17]. In similar variations of meaning, the way that God 'saves us' depends on the context in which we find ourselves.

As the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish religion developed, ideas about what happens to people after death adapted and changed. In early Hebrew theology there seems to have been little concept of life beyond death. The grave and the disintegration of the body were believed to be our end. At that time God's salvation was interpreted to mean protection in personal and national life and preservation from death in battle, accidents and disease. Gradually as belief in an afterlife expanded, first ideas of '*sheol*' as a place of rest for the dead developed. Then belief expanded further to consider that that there could be rewards for righteous life beyond death. This expansion

and the emphasis on rewards for the dead became stronger in the inter-testamental period, particularly after the death of heroes in the Maccabean Revolt. The changing and varied understandings of the meaning of 'salvation' expanded to include rescue from death and the promise of gifts in a life beyond. How could life just stop for people who had defended God's ways; surely there must be rewards for righteousness in life beyond death? Several Hebrew Apocryphal books reflect these changes. In *4 Esdras* those who are saved are judged by their works and evil is eliminated. In the *Ethiopian Enoch* God fulfils all the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures and frees people and the world from sin. Arguments about existence and rewards beyond death divided the Sadducees and Pharisees: the former did not accept the idea of life beyond death, since they could not find it in their canonical scriptures. The Pharisees accepted that there would be some form of existence and rewards after people die. (Jesus was able to wisely goad the two factions in his disputes over the issue, when they tried to trick him with questions [Matt.22:23-45; Mk.12:18-28; Lk.20:27].

In the New Testament salvation includes rescue from extreme danger [Matt.8:25; Mk.15:30; Jn.12:27]. Faith is described as saving people in terms of saving the *whole* person, not just healing physical symptoms [Lk.7:50]. John the Baptist proclaimed '*the remission of sins*' as part of the '*knowledge of salvation*' [Lk.1:77], which was in line with the concept of salvation in Hebrew Scriptures. But he also pointed forward to the coming of a Saviour who would redeem in a more eternal way [Matt.1:21]. Mk.8:35 talks of the saving and losing of life in terms both of the present and of eternity. Lk.13:23 links salvation with entering God's Kingdom. Lk.19:10 makes it clear that salvation is not just looking forward to a future beyond death but finding salvation and being part of the Kingdom in our present lives.

St. Paul took this expansion of the meaning of salvation still further. With his pharisaic training and knowledge of Jewish scripture and tradition he expanded the concept of salvation to include 'being proclaimed just and reconciliation with God' [1Cor.2:15; 5:5; Rom.13:11], 'rescue from judgement' [Rom.5:9; 1Cor.3:15], 'the gift of eternal life', 'redemption and glorification of our bodies' [Rom.8:24; Phil.3:20-21]; 'spiritual gifts in our present life to make us effective parts of Christ's body', and 'our gradual transformation in righteousness into the image of God's Son. [Rom.8:20; Gal.5:5]. In Rom.8:24 Paul assured his readers that when we received Christ's gospel we have already received salvation. This is echoed by the writer of Ephesians who speaks of us being saved by the message of salvation [Eph.1:13], but though we have been saved, the consummation of salvation is still to come in the future [Eph.2:5-7]. Salvation, therefore, like Christ's Kingdom, has past,

present and future dimensions. Salvation may also not just relate to human beings; some scriptures imply that the created 'cosmos' or 'world' will be transformed as part of Christ's saving act [Rom. 8:21; Jn.3:17; 12:47; Rev.21:1].

As the one who brings this about at his Father's will, Christ is called '*Saviour*' /. In the ancient world this had the connotation of a 'rescuer', 'deliverer from perils', 'protector', 'preserver of life', 'physician', 'helper'. In the Hellenistic world and among Egyptian and Seleucid rulers who ruled Palestine prior to the Romans, as well as later Roman Emperors, *sótér* was also used as a royal title, and implied that the ruler was the son of the deity. We have no proof that this divine meaning was understood or implied when the term was used of Jesus, but it is interesting in relation to later development of understanding of his divine nature. '*Sótér*' was used in the Greek translation of Hebrew Scriptures to describe God as Israel's Saviour and 'helper' as well being a title given to God's human helpers - heroes, kings, occasionally used of judges. In Isa.49:6 and Zech.9:9 the Messiah was called *sótér*. God is called Saviour in Lk.1:47, and his coming Son, the Messiah, is given the title 'Saviour' in Lk.2:11, a position Jesus acknowledged in Jn.4:24. In taking his message to the Samaritans and others who were not Jews, Jesus was demonstrating that he was Saviour for Gentiles as well as the Jews: The Samaritan town of the Woman at the well acknowledged: "*...we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.*" [Jn.4:42].

In offering and achieving salvation for us Jesus, was expanding the understanding of the meaning of 'salvation' still further. He was not just offering forgiveness of sins and eternal life: He would bring those who he had redeemed and saved into 'a spacious place' – the Kingdom of God both in the present and future. This includes the expansive meaning of what Jesus was doing in saving, as discussed in paragraphs 3 and 4 above. Cynics sometimes accuse Christians of narrowness of belief, or of placing trust in 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die. But with Christ's message of 'salvation' we are offering to the world a huge gift from God to expand and consummate life now and in the future. How Jesus' death and resurrection actually achieved this remains 'mystery' within the process of God's activity. But the inner spiritual life of the believer is lit by a spark that recognises it to be true.

We believe that we have salvation, though the grace, mercy and love of God. Jesus' resurrection has been thought to be evidence that life exists beyond death, and through Christ we are being called to share this spiritual dimension. We don't need to wait until we die to discover the benefits of salvation. In living abundant Christian lives, we are able, in the present, to begin to enjoy

