

## **LENT AND EASTER**

### **A journey for Seniors**

*They say that growing old is not for softies.  
Neither is the journey that Jesus makes to the cross, death and hell.*

Never before have each of us been able to anticipate living to eighty, ninety or even longer. The thirty or more years of 'later life' that is now most people's experience requires a fresh outlook on life. Those who today are in later life are very much pioneers. However, whilst we might be grateful for this gift of years we are also likely to be alert to, and may be anxious about, what tomorrow might bring.

As we follow Jesus into Jerusalem, to the celebration of the Passover in the upper room and then on to the Mount of Olives, Golgotha, the tomb and hell, we discover our brother, friend and saviour.

In following Jesus through his death and resurrection we may chance upon events and emotions that shed light on our journey into even greater age – and ultimately – death.

For sure this is not a journey for softies. And because it is not a journey for softies it is wise to have some ground rules.

#### **Some ground rules:**

Confidentiality

When talking be alert to others who might also be wanting to contribute

Try not to cut across others

Respect each others experience

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### **Week One: Money Matters**

Opening prayer

Read Mark 14 vv 1 – 14

The events that take place in Bethany illustrate two contrasting approaches to valuable things. It may have proved to be this that was the last straw for Judas. Judas wants to conserve and hold on to valuables, Jesus defends this instance of profligacy.

In these verses whom do you identify with most easily?

One of the underlying themes is our attitude to money. Has your attitude to money and wealth changed during different periods of your life? How would you describe it now?

Judas and perhaps the other disciples felt rejected as a result of being rebuked by Jesus for criticising the woman as extravagant. Older people very often experience rejection. It is a tough emotion to cope with, especially when combined with it is unfair.

How have you learned to manage a sense of rejection in a mature way in your life? What advice would you give to young people who feel they have been ‘dissed’ i.e. rejected / disrespected?

Concluding prayer

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## **Week Two: Strength at the point of weakness**

Opening prayers

Read Luke 22 vv 39-46

This is a highly charged episode. List some of the emotions that are likely to have been current during these events. Have you experienced any of these emotions in your life?

Verse 43 is particularly powerful: “And now there appeared to him an angel from heaven bringing him strength, and in anguish of the spirit he prayed the more urgently.”

This description of what happened to Jesus is like a religious experience. When people feel they are close to the end of their tether – close to breaking point, it is at this moment when a religious experience is most likely to occur.

Roughly two thirds of adults are able to describe an experience when they felt that God was very close to them<sup>1</sup>. Research suggests that religious experience contributes to resilience – bringing strength just as it says in Luke 22 v 43.

Have there been times when you felt that God was particularly close to you? Did this experience ‘bring strength’?

Jesus finds himself alone in the Garden of Gethsemene, he struggles in prayer but his closest supporters couldn’t keep their eyes open and fell asleep. There is something very human about this story – for just like Jesus’ disciples, there will have been times when our actions have fallen short of our best intentions. Regrets – we all have them. Do you think Jesus had regrets? What sort of things do you think Jesus might have regretted in his life?

What sort of things do you regret about your life now – i.e. the things that you regret at this point in your life?

Concluding Prayers

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<sup>1</sup> David Hay (1987) “Exploring Inner Space” London: Mowbray

## Homework in readiness for the next session

### Meditating / Praying with Colour

This approach is based on Sheila Julian Merryweather's book *Colourful Prayer- a new way to pray when words are inadequate*.

Often the process of consciously finding words to express how we are feeling makes us *over think* our emotions, stopping us from truly connecting with how we are feeling. This use of colour removes the process of word selection from praying. As a result it allows you to open up, express and recognise the feelings you are currently experiencing or gain a perspective on the past.

Follow these steps:

1. Relax and prepare for the task at hand
2. The first step to praying or meditating with colour is to create your key of colours with their corresponding feelings. No-one's colour key will be the same as anyone else's as every colour arouses different emotions for each individual. All of us have different memories attached to particular colours therefore using a standard colour key will not suffice for this exercise. So..... take the time to think of a situation or instance when you felt each of the following emotions and sense the colour you think of when you recall this emotion. Do this with each of the emotions listed below.

- O Happy
- O Excited/ Expectant
- O Content/ Peaceful
- O Accomplishment
- O Grateful
- O Sad
- O Angry
- O Lonely
- O Confused
- O Disappointed
- O Frustrated
- O Exhausted

3. The next step is to create your key with the corresponding colour written next to the emotion, for example:



## Week Three: Following Peter

Opening prayer

Read Mark 14 v 12 – Mark 16 v 8; John 18 vv 1 – 27 and Chapters 20 and 21;

In these readings you will find lots of references to Peter. What do you sense were Peter's worst moments? Are there things that befall Peter that you particularly identify with?

It is worth noting that Jesus anticipates how Peter will deny being a follower of Jesus – but nevertheless Jesus keeps faith with Peter. Who are the people whom you feel have kept faith with you – through thick and thin?

Based on the readings above, use the colour key you prepared during the week, to map the emotions that you sense that Peter would have gone through in this intense period. You may find that there are emotions that you sense Peter may have experienced that are not on your colour key, add these as you need to. As a beginning you might want to mark out a circle on your paper. This will just help to remove the expectation that you are to create a drawing of any kind. Then start colouring.....

### Homework for Holy Week

Choose a Gospel and read it from beginning to end.

Using your colour key, follow in the steps of Jesus as they unfold through the Gospel you have read and use colours to express the emotions that you sense Jesus would have experienced throughout his ministry.

You may find you need to use a couple of sheets of paper, and you might want to indicate particular events on your sheets. You may need to take two sessions for this mediation.

Using your colour key take a sheet and think of the events and stages in your own life and begin to use your colour chart to map the emotions associated with them. Do you see colours that are present in your life and Jesus' life, because as well as our Saviour, Jesus is also our brother.

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## **Week Four: Relinquishing ... and putting our hand into the hand of God**

Opening prayer

Read Mathew 27

This is 'a matter of fact account' of Jesus being stripped of all that matters in life: Go through the chapter and note the many things that Jesus has taken from him or he has to let go of (relinquish).

It is possible to see our lives, as likewise, a story of relinquishing, a story of letting go – and sometimes having things taken from us. This stripping is hard and we might find ourselves echoing Jesus' words: "Father, if it be thy will, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but thine be done." Luke 32 v 42

Share with each other some of the fears that intrude and trouble as we experience being stripped.

Research<sup>2</sup> suggests that 'doing business with God' – whether through personal prayer, church going or quietly resting in the presence of God, is strongly linked with psychological wellbeing, adjusting to the limitations of age and retaining a sense of usefulness.

Does your experience and intuition support this research?

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### **Evaluating the four sessions**

What things have you valued?

Have these sessions had an impact on the way in which you have experienced Lent and Holy Week?

What would you suggest might be changed if the series were to be repeated?

These sessions were geared especially for older people. What do you think about this?

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5 of "Bothered and Bewildered" by Ann Morisy (2009) London: Continuum, for detailed references to this research