

Restless Souls

Lent 1 2022 (27 February - 2 April)



To be human — a citizen of heaven with eternity written in our hearts — is in some sense, to be restless, to be 'on the way'. The things we strive for: contentment, love, belonging, satisfaction, wisdom, and meaning are often found indirectly, when we are on the way somewhere else. When we find ourselves restless... on the move...

From an early age we are drawn to explore, to set out, to shake things up, to do difficult things with tremendous effort. We can't help ourselves. We just want to see. To try. We get uncomfortable, or bored, or uneasy, or agitated. We get restless.

This restlessness is not a design flaw, but an integral part of being human — of being alert and sensitive to the world around us. Restlessness can be a powerful medium for growth, for learning who and what we are. Refusing to complacently accept 'the way things are' can be a vital part of how we experience the transformation and revelation of God's grace.

We are seasonal creatures with complex lives that ebb and flow. There are times of contentment and times of restlessness, and other times when the two mingle: when we find the seeds of contentment in the wilderness, or feel the otherworldly winds of change unsettling us in the midst of an ordinary, commonplace day.

The peace of God surpasses all understanding and can blossom in extreme circumstances where peace seems impossible, bringing rest to the restless and solace to the desolate. God is serious about peace, about rest, about restoration.

But restlessness can be a holy thing too.

What are you restless about this Lent? Where are you finding rest and what is giving you unrest? Restlessness can be a time when God is calling you somewhere new.

God uses our faith, our wisdom, our diligence and our contentedness. But God loves humans and also uses our boredom, distractibility, and fidgeting too — to reveal new ways we are loved and to stir us to action.

We are restless in our pursuit of meaning, and God is restless in pursuit of us.

Each week of the five week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

Restless response (27 Feb)

We can respond to God with our faithfulness, our trust, our diligence, our love and our commitment. But we can also respond with our restlessness, our doubts, and our unease.

God uses it all.

1. **Luke 9: 28-36**
(Transfiguration Sunday)
 2. **Exodus 34: 29-35**
 3. **2 Corinthians 3: 12-4:2**
 4. **Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17**
(Ash Wednesday)
 5. **Psalm 99**
 6. **Isaiah 58: 1-12**
 7. **Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**
1. **Restless Peter.** Peter is getting restless, he wants to do something practical: let's build something! He wasn't totally off track, he would be asked to build something, but not three hooes on a hillside. He would be called to be part of building something much bigger and longer lasting...
 2. **Uncanny... uneasy, unsure.** What must it have felt like to behold the face of Moses, blazing unrelentingly?
 3. **Not losing heart.** We are invited on an ongoing process of transformation, it won't always be *plain sailing/a bed of roses/insert cliché*, but there are reasons for restless souls to be hopeful.
 4. **Rend your hearts not your clothing!** Considering the difference between the two.
 5. **Trembling and quaking.** A cry to the Holy One.
 6. **Restless restorers, restless to serve.** Considering how unliveable and inhospitable our living, working and recreational spaces can be — making us restless and unsatisfied. How can we be restless restorers of these streets?
 7. **Practicing piety.** Piety, like most skills, requires practice. How can we practice our piety without ostentatiously practicing our piousness to gain status with others?

Restless wilderness (6 March)

Sometimes we find ourselves in the wilderness: longing for shelter, for home, for belonging, for meaning. This week we consider learning, forgetting, rediscovering, finding a way, getting lost, leaving, returning and silence.

1. Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

1. **What are the first fruits of your restlessness?** Sometimes our restlessness, our wilderness wandering, can be a time of growth where we learn more about ourselves and our God. Let's take time to take these first fruits to God.

2. Psalm 91

2. **When they call to me, I will answer them.** Reaching out to God in the wilderness.

3. Romans 10: 8b-13

3. **No distinction.** The same Lord is Lord of all.

4. Luke 4: 1-4

4. **You can't chew rocks.** Rejecting stone-bread.

5. Luke 4: 5-8

5. **Serve only God.** Telling the devil he can keep his kingdoms.

6. Luke 4: 9-13

6. **On the pinnacle.** Staying true.

7. 1 Kings 19: 1-15

7. **God was in the silence.**

Restless stars (13 March)

We are restless stars, a galaxy, burning across the sweep of history telling a story between us of a God who will go to the ends of the universe for us.

It's time to shine.

1. Genesis 15: 1-6
1. **We are all stars burning restlessly across the canopy of God's grace.** We are the the stuff of stars and we together tell a multi-storied constellation of God's love for humanity.
2. Psalm 27
2. **A restless cry.** Looking for light, for shelter, for guidance.
3. Philippians 3: 17-4:1
3. **Citizens of heaven.** What does it mean — day by day — to be a citizen of heaven?
4. Luke 13: 31-35
5. **Moon and stars working the nightshift.** God's love endures forever and runs right around the clock, right around the compass, right around the solar system, right around everything.
5. Psalm 136: 1-9
6. **Not one star is missing....** Look up. Each star is present, named, and called out in an intergalactic roll-call. The one who named them... that's who we get our strength from.
6. Isaiah 40: 21-31
7. **Comets ablaze.** We are shooting stars reflecting God's glory in the world as we blaze our trails!
7. Philippians 2: 12-18

Restless longing (20 March)

Our restlessness can tell us important things. It can be a way our bodies can tell us that something isn't sitting right, that something is missing or lacking, or perhaps out of tune, or out of step. We have an urge to move, to change things up, to shake it off. Our restlessness remind us of our needs to find nourishment, rest, balance.

1. Isaiah 55: 1-9
 2. Psalm 63: 1-8
 3. 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13
 4. Psalm 38
 5. Jeremiah 1: 4-10
 6. Matthew 20: 20-28
 7. John 16: 25-33
1. **Restless thirst.** The restless longing of the human heart, thirsty to know and to find fulfilment, can return to refills again and again to God.
 2. **Praise from parched lips.** Sometimes our praise is difficult, complicated — torn from the barren wilderness out of parched lips. But it is valued no less by God.
 3. **Restlessness can be an antidote to complacency...** Our feelings of restlessness and unease can stir us out of complacent lethargy, smugness or laziness. A spirit of restlessness can be a warning to check your balance, to make sure you're standing and not about to fall...
 4. **Raw longing.** The painful urgency of these words come to us from thousands of years ago and leap off the screen.
 5. **Before I formed you, I knew you.** Jeremiah felt inadequate but God could see his potential. And God sees your potential too.
 6. **The restlessness of pushy parents.** Sometimes we aren't just restless for ourselves we are restless on behalf of others who we love. But in wanting the best for them we can lose sight of what is actually best for them. This mother wanted the best for her sons, but she was still playing by the dog-eat-dog rules of the world around her.
 7. **Taking heart, taking courage, taking Jesus.** Jesus doesn't promise a trouble free life, but he does offer an invitation to life in all its abundance, where in him we can find peace and take courage.

Restless love (27 March)

God's love is constant, but it's not static — it's active and moving — because true love is alive. The love we have for a partner, or a friend, or family member is not frozen in time — it is a living and breathing emotion felt and expressed continually. Our imperfect ability to love is an echo of the perfect love of God. The way you love someone and how you express it changes over time to stay alive. If it doesn't it's not love, it's just affection going stale. So love on the magnitude of God's scale with God's faithfulness, isn't frozen in time either. God, like the father in the parable of the two sons, is restless to find us — to come running down the road to enfold us in a loving embrace.

1. Joshua 5: 9-12

1. When the manna runs out. Part of God's expression of love was manna in the wilderness but then it was time to lay down roots and leave the manna behind. Because the manna wasn't the point, the love was the point. How often do we focus on the manna and forget the love?

2. Psalm 32

3. 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

2. A hiding place for the soul. We can find hiding places in God's grace and find belonging too. The younger brother in the parable we will look at later in the week, tried to find hiding places for his soul in wild living but ultimately found a secure hiding place in his father's love.

4. Luke 15: 1-2

5. Luke 15: 11-19

3. Restlessness as birth pangs of something new. You are a new creation — no wonder you feel restless sometimes! You are adjusting and growing and developing.

6. Luke 15: 20-24

4. Welcoming sinners. "Fair enough talking to sinners, but does he have to go *welcoming* them? And food? How come there's food?"

7. Luke 15: 25-32

5. The restless son. Waiting for life to begin, for excitement, to find something outside of himself.

6. The restless father. The father can't wait to receive his son, he runs to meet him. He is urgent: there has to be a feast now, quick!

7. The restless brother. The brother is unsettled, and uncomfortable but unlike his father and brother he is still restless at the end of the story. He's still pacing up and down on the edge of the party. We leave the parable with the cliffhanger, will the restless brother go in, or won't he?