

# Man of Sorrows, People of Hope

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

LENT 2 2021 (7 March - 3 April)



A man of sorrows who inspired a people of hope...

Jesus meets us in our delight and wonder, our boredom and frustration, our longing and restlessness and in our sorrow and shame. Jesus lived a human life among us and felt the sting of rejection, the heartache of disappointment, and the pierce of loss.

Last month, as Lent began, we looked at [The Parable of Social Distancing](#) — how our current safety measures of ‘social distancing’ can be read as a parable of how we have already been increasingly ‘socially distant’ from one another for years, becoming in many ways disconnected from those around us as we focus on our own individual needs.

Jesus becoming one of us was a phenomenal act of social reconciliation that burst into the normal run of history. Divinity met humanity in a theological, political and cultural kaleidoscope.

Jesus’s life contained sorrow, indignity, oppression, slander, violence and suppression and yet it was also beautiful, daring, loving, inspiring, enriching and vibrant. Christ’s life among us is itself a parable. His life — with all its good, its bad and its ugly mattered and had so much worth. It is a story of darkness and light. Struggle and triumph. In the same way that our lives striving and delighting, laughing and weeping matter and have worth. Jesus’s very life tells us that no matter the cost you can’t put a price on love.

In Jesus’s life, death and resurrection is a fulfilment of a story told again and again through the Bible and human history — of God reaching through the thorns and weeds and branches to tell us we are loved and that we can take hope.

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*The following discussion questions are designed to accompany and adapt the monthly theme material (see the [Man of Sorrows, People of Hope Resource Pack](#)) for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.*

**These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all the given questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose, or adapt to what interests your group.**

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Part 1: A man of sorrows...

*Jesus's sojourn among us embodied an ongoing divine message that while sorrow comes and night falls, so too will our hearts fill again and the sun rise.*

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#### Read Exodus 20: 1-17

These ancient commandments offer divine way markers towards hope and away from sorrow. They say — remember who I am, remember who you are, remember to rest. Then they offer a roadmap through the heartbreak inevitable in discordant communities found when intimacy, family, rest, the divine, livelihoods and the value of life break down.

There is so much to unpack in this sequence but as a starter let's consider verse 12 about honouring our mother and father. Who have been the 'alloparents' in your life? (The people who were not your parents but who helped raise you and shape who you have become like other family members, neighbours, teachers, Godparents and more). And in an even wider sense who have been your parents in faith? Perhaps people you have never met but who left a legacy which helped guide and inspire you. How can we give all these different kinds of parents honour?

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#### Read Psalm 19

The vivid image of honey speaks of how in the midst of the hurt of life the sweet (and even antibacterial) rules of God bring balm and comfort.

As a group come up with a range of 'sweet things' you could do tomorrow to live out God's love in your local communities.

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#### Read John 14: 1-7

Jesus knew the role he had to take on, to become truly a man of sorrows and in that sorrow to give us the opportunity to blossom as a people of hope. He was mindful of the pain to come and yet he took heart in the expansive divine love he was fulfilling.

Jesus urges every generation to take heart. 'Taking heart' doesn't mean ignoring, or suppressing or minimising the heartache. We can't wish the pain away. But through taking heart we make a gesture of hope, we stake a claim of ownership on a future promised us where the story of who we are will make sense of where we have come. As Julian of Norwich famously said: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

How can we gently and sensitively encourage one another in these difficult times to take heart?

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### Part 2: Acquainted with grief...

#### Read John 2: 1-12

Jesus was acquainted with grief but he was on first name terms with feasting and friendship and festivity! His public ministry that we hear about in the gospels was only a few years and much of that largely consisted of hanging out with people informally — grabbing a bite, telling stories, travelling. He was not aloof or above the crowd. As we see in this reading he was happy to roll his sleeves up and take a role in the hospitality.

Why does Jesus's mother make a point of telling him about the wine and why does he rebuff her and yet do something about it anyway? Was this totally 'a thing' that Jesus was known to do? Do you think he did similar things at other times in his life?

For a man that knew the sorrow that lay ahead how did he manage to exude such liveliness, humour and enthusiasm?

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#### Read Psalm 126

Sometimes our bittersweet tears can lead to something new. Like unassuming seeds that grow into something wonderful and beautiful to reap.

What are the tears of 2020 that can be planted in 2021 and harvested in the decade ahead? Through all the upheaval and turmoil what can we learn from the heartache of last year and use to work towards a better future?

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#### Read John 16: 16-22

In the first three verses the phrase 'little while' (in NRSVA translation) is used six times!

Our lives are lived in little whiles. Little whiles of coming and going; this thing and then the next. Our days and years have rise and fall, presence and absence, distance and reunion. Jesus reassures us that through pain and difficulty that new life can and will be found. There will be weeping. And then, then there will be rejoicing.

Why do we go through sorrow to get to the joy? Why is life difficult? Why isn't there just a shortcut to joy? — As a group you don't have to come up with definitive answers. These are big questions and you may, like the disciples, just want to repeat and puzzle for a little while...

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### Part 3: The travail...

#### Read Isaiah 53: 3-12

Isaiah 53: 11 in the King James version of the Bible reads: "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." That word 'travail', meaning laborious effort, comes from a latin origin referring to a torture implement (three + stakes). 'Travail' isn't commonly used in contemporary English but the word 'travel' which we use frequently was originally a Middle English variant of travail and had the same meaning. Imagine if our Sunday newspapers had pull out 'Travail' supplements and you could go to a 'Travail Agents' to book some painful effort... It's useful to ponder on the links between travails and travels — in either case we find ourselves ending up somewhere new.

This reading foreshadows the mystery of the incarnation — that Jesus's soul *travelled*, it went through the darkness and into the light on our behalf. It wasn't instantaneous or automatic, it took effort and love and sacrifice. Why did Jesus walk our road and not just 'helicopter' over it? Why go to such extraordinary lengths to experience life on a human scale?

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#### Read 2 Corinthians 8: 1-9

As we have learned again during the pandemic: generosity and wealth aren't linked. Some of the most generous people have been those with the most to lose who have gone over and above to help others. How have you experienced generosity over the past year?

How can we excel in generosity ourselves in the week ahead?

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#### Read Hebrews 9: 11-15

The mind-blowing truth about Jesus is that he travelled our road, he felt our pain, and in so doing brought about our redemption, our joy and our restoration. Jesus cares deeply about us and wants to have a relationship with us.

Imagine going on a walk with Jesus. As a group discuss the different places you would take him. What would you show him along the way?

Then — here's the twist — you can actually go on this walk with Jesus! He lives! Next time you visit that place go alongside Jesus (if it isn't practical to get to that place yourself then take Jesus somewhere else and chat about it anyway, he won't mind) pointing things out as you go.

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### Part 4: Poured out his soul... (Holy Week)

*Each year Holy Week before Easter Sunday depicts the drama of reality, history, blood and bone all coming together in a cosmic culmination: one soul poured out for all — freely.*

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#### Read Psalm 71

As our own lives unfold sometimes all we can do is, as we say in Scotland, 'haud on' (hold on).

Are there any Bible verses or songs or poems (or something else) that help bring you to a place of hope and praise? That help you haud on when you're feeling overwhelmed?

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#### Read 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

What has been your experience of Communion over your life?

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#### Read Hebrews 4: 14-16

We can approach Jesus with boldness. He has identified deeply with our sorrow and our hope and through his travail has given us our tomorrow.

How has your journey been through Lent 2021? Have you learnt, or rediscovered, or grown to appreciate anything new about yourself or about God?

What are your sincere hopes that you want to bring boldly to Jesus this Easter?