



## **Come Follow Me Bible Study — *simple forming version***



**“Come follow me,” Jesus says.**

**Join us as we rediscover Christ’s unmistakable love this Lent!**

**Welcome to this free simple format PDF for Sanctuary First’s Lent Bible Study for 2026. It provides weekly open-ended studies for small community groups over 7 weeks, from the week that begins with Transfiguration Sunday on 15 February, throughout Lent and into Holy Week that ends on Holy Saturday 4 April.**

**We are currently developing additional multimedia resources and an enhanced booklet which you will be able to pre-order in printed form shortly from Sanctus Media, or download for free as a PDF. In order to help group leaders begin organising we were keen to get a straightforward version out quickly and it is also easier to home print in this format.**

**You will notice that we have provided a breadth of questions for this theme to enable to pursue what it means to follow Jesus in a variety of ways. As a group leader you are encouraged to feel free to prioritise the questions that feel most relevant for your group. Included in this booklet is a section on running a Connect Group if you haven’t led one before.**

**Thanks for reading and look out for much more coming soon!**



## Welcome to Connect!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and life, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun. We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

## What is involved?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! (We would love to hear how you get on with this!) We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

## Resources

This booklet includes a meditation to reflect upon. You will find a page on how to run a Connect Group, to walk you through the steps if this is your first time. Each week has an online corresponding page in both our app and on the website where you can get the questions and videos.

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on the Sanctuary First **website** and **app**.



## Theme Introduction

“Come follow me,” Jesus says.

Join us for our Lent theme about what it means to follow Jesus when the going gets tough. What is it like to be a Christian when the way forward seems unclear, where there are few signs illuminating the way and the wilderness seems to stretch on and on? What does following Jesus mean when we're daunted, overwhelmed, exhausted or lost?

It means unmistakable love!

It means the way, the truth and the life! It means living water and the bread that will fill you, the peace that lasts, the transformation that sticks. It means fuel for the journey — it means the table that goes with you! For as it turns out Christ's table has folding legs and a carry handle, it is meant to be portable.

Over Lent we are on the move with Jesus as we focus on John's immersive gospel and the stunning encounters which defined Jesus' message and mandate for the world. Here is the Word, the Water, the Way, the Truth and the Life — leaping off the screen and into our lives.

We will be exploring revelation, direction, discernment, reconciliation, peace, renewal and personal commitment.

Week by week we reflect on our response to Jesus's invitation “Come follow me”; when we are on the climb struggling to the mountaintop, when we are trudging through wilderness, when we are on the long and winding road, when we reach the watering place, when we find ourselves in the place of confrontation, when we sit in the field of ash and bone longing for transformation, and during the eternal timelessness of Holy Week.

And as we travel we take our folding table with us. We will break bread amongst cairns in our hillside camp. We will take the elements to a cave in the wilderness to shelter *from the elements*. We improvise the Eucharist in a truck cab in a lay-by near the motorway services. Communion takes places amongst the water bottles in a camp set up for disaster relief. A table is set before our enemies in no man's land. A morsel of bread and a sip of wine even amongst the ashes of defeat promise transformation. And finally the table is set in a small upper room...

### Weekly overview

- Come follow me, cairn by cairn (Revelation)
- Come follow me, a way through the wilderness (Direction)
- Come follow me, on the road with Jesus (Discernment)
- Come follow me to the watering place (Reconciliation)!
- Come follow me, through the place of confrontation (Peace)
- Come follow me, from a field of bones to the place of transformation (Renewal)
- Come follow me, stepping through Holy Week (Commitment)

*Thanks to James Cathcart and Albert Bogle for developing this material.*



## Running A Connect Group

Follow the Spirit and do what works for your group!

Our Connect material is intended to be flexible and you are encouraged to adapt it to suit your needs and where the Holy Spirit takes you. Below is a completely optional rough outline of how we envision the material could be used in a 90 or 60 minute weekly session. As a leader you are free to shake things up (either as you prepare, or on the fly) responding to the discussion as it unfolds. Our experience of small groups is often the fascinating stuff happens 'off topic' when a group has gone on a tangent and ended up somewhere new. Go as the Spirit leads you and don't feel like you have to cover every reading or topic in each session.

If you are a pre-existing group/community you may have already have a format that works for you. Perhaps you always begin with a song, maybe you read a short liturgy aloud, share a meal together, have an informal catch up before diving into the reading, break for tea and coffee in middle and so on. If so that's great, just weave our material into that.

### Optional outline for running a session:

1. Welcome — introducing yourself as the group leader and asking others to do the same, you could share briefly what interests you/draws you to the theme this month/week
2. Brief summary of the overall theme and Sanctuary First/and or specific organisation running individual group
3. An opening prayer, inviting God to travel with us as we explore the Bible
4. Introducing the theme of the week — reading the theme introduction aloud and/or tailoring to your group context, allow space for comments and initial impressions if any
5. Point to videos, podcasts, Daily Worship etc on the Sanctuary First site that links in (there is a short video to accompany each week in the Connect section)
6. Share the Seed to Sow for the week and perhaps return to it at the end of the discussion
7. For each section begin by inviting someone to read the Bible text aloud. Then the leader begins the discussion, reading the prompts out to the group and then throws it over to them to respond. (As a leader you may wish to adapt/expand/edit, for instance only focusing on two readings etc or changing the order, or expanding reading ranges etc). The discussion prompts are designed to go in a number of directions. It can be helpful to ask general questions about what stood out for people in the reading, what questions, insights or personal responses do they have to the text? And then you can link those responses to the topics in the material.
8. A closing prayer led by the leader or the group leaving space for intercessory prayer as the group develops and gets to know one another
9. Telling people about the next session's topic and pointing them to Connect resources on the Sanctuary First website.



## Week 1: **Come follow me, cairn by cairn — Revelation**

*Week beginning Sunday 15 February.*

### **Introduction:**

This week we take our folding table up into the hills as we consider mountaintop experiences with God seeking revelation. These are literal and metaphorical moments where we climb to experience something new of God. You could picture this week as a small cairn made of 7 stones stacked together, signs left by the generations that went before and added to by us walking now.

### **Seeds to sow:**

Where do you go when you want to 'be' with God? Are there 'metaphorical mountaintops', meaningful places where you go to pray or to simply spend time with God?

### **Part 1 The Mountaintop — Matthew 17: 1–9**

This encounter reveals Jesus' divine nature and the continuity of God's plan through the Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). Perhaps choose one or two to discuss?

- In verse 2, Jesus' face shines like the sun. When you think about "following Jesus," do you more often picture the humble carpenter on the road, or the radiant Lord of Glory? How does seeing his glory change how you hear his teachings?
- Peter's immediate reaction is to build shelters—to stay in the moment of awe. In your own spiritual life, do you find it harder to experience the "mountaintop" moments, or harder to leave them behind to go back down into the valley?
- The Father's voice says, "This is my Son... Listen to him!" As we begin Lent, what is one specific "noise" or distraction you can silence so that you can better hear the voice of the Son?

### **Part 2 The Call to Repentance — Joel 1:1–2, 12–17**

Joel speaks to a community in crisis, using the imagery of a failed harvest to describe spiritual desolation. These questions bridge the gap between outward ritual and inward reality.

- Joel asks the elders if anything like this has happened in their days or their ancestors' days. On this Ash Wednesday, what are the "barren places", the places of desolation, in our current world or community that make a call to repentance feel urgent rather than just traditional?
- Verse 12 notes that "surely the people's joy is withered away" along with the crops. How does a disconnect from God lead to a "withering" of joy in our lives, and how might the disciplines of Lent (prayer, fasting, almsgiving) help irrigate that dry ground?



- Joel calls for a fast and a gathering at the house of the Lord. Why is it important that we start Lent *together* as a community, rather than just as a private, individual New Year's resolution?

### **Part 3 Seeking God's Face — Exodus 33: 12–23**

This intimate dialogue between Moses and God reveals a God who is both terrifyingly holy and deeply personal.

- Moses asks God, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways." Do you find it easy or difficult to believe that God is truly "pleased" with you as you start this journey? How does knowing you have "found favour" change your motivation for following Him?
- Moses insists he won't move unless God's Presence goes with them. As you look at the "wilderness" of the forty days ahead from the vantage point of this mountaintop what does "The Presence" look like to you? Is it a feeling, a scripture, a person, or a practice?
- God hides Moses in the cleft of the rock and covers him with His hand for Moses' own protection. Where in your life do you feel God's "hand" protecting you from things you aren't yet ready to face? How does this reveal His compassion?





## Week 2: **Come follow me, a way through the wilderness** — **Direction**

*Week beginning Sunday 22 February.*

### **Introduction:**

This week we explore finding a 'way through' the wilderness when the path feels lost. We take our folding table out into the wilderness whether that be desert, wild moor, raging seas or a commercial wasteland where real life has been choked out in the name of profit. As we do we follow the way-maker — the truth, the life — Jesus!

### **Seeds to sow:**

What does the word 'wilderness' mean to you?

### **Part 1 The Voice in the Wild — John 1: 19–34**

John the Baptist identifies himself not by his name, but by his location and his purpose. He is the "voice crying out in the wilderness."

- When the authorities ask John "Who are you?", he defines himself solely in relation to Jesus. In the "wilderness" moments of your own life — when titles or roles are stripped away — how do you describe who you are?
- John tells the crowd, "Among you stands one you do not know." Why is it often harder to recognise Jesus when he is standing right next to us in the ordinary "wilderness" than when we are looking for him in a miracle?
- John points to Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." If we imagine this stone table in the wilderness, how does the image of the Lamb change the way we view our own hardships and burdens?

### **Part 2 The Way-Maker — Romans 5: 12–19**

"Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark / For the straightforward pathway had been lost..." are the famous words that begin Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It describes the beginning of a fantastical journey but it also resonates with the much more mundane: 'midlife crisis' and apprehension about mortality.

Paul explores how one man (Adam) brought us into the "dark forest," and how one man (Jesus) carves the way out. This is the theology of the "Straightforward Pathway" being restored.

- Paul describes a world where "death exercised dominion." Have you ever felt like you were wandering in Dante's "dark forest," where the path was lost not by your choice, but simply because of the broken state of the world?
- Verse 17 speaks of the "abundance of grace" and the "free gift of righteousness." At a rough stone table, we usually expect meagre rations. How does the "abundance" Paul describes change your expectations of what God provides in the middle of a



spiritual desert?

- Just as one turning point can lead us into the woods, one act of obedience (Jesus on the cross) leads us out. What is one "small act of obedience" you feel called to this week that might help clear a path for yourself or someone else?

### **Part 3 Charting a New Sea — Matthew 4: 18–22**

Jesus calls the first disciples away from the familiar waters of Galilee to "chart a new kind of sea."

- *The Immediate Leave-Taking:* Peter and Andrew leave their nets *immediately*. What are the "nets" (habits, securities, or fears) that keep you tethered to the shore, preventing you from following Jesus into deeper, unknown waters?
- *Leaving the Father:* James and John leave not just their nets, but their father in the boat. Following Jesus often requires us to reorder our most important relationships. What has been the most challenging "goodbye" you've had to say in order to keep your "yes" to God?
- *The New Vocation:* Jesus doesn't tell them to stop being who they are; he tells them he will make them "fishers of people." How is God currently taking your natural gifts and 're-charting' them for a new purpose in this Lenten season?





## Week 3: **Come follow me, on the road with Jesus — Discernment**

*Week beginning Sunday 1 March.*

### **Introduction:**

This week we take our folding table on the road! We worship God and take communion in motorway services, lay-bys, car parks, hotels and hostels — as we do reflecting on what it means to travel with Christ mile by mile.

### **Seeds to sow:**

What is our prayer for those out on the road travelling long distances today?

### **Part 1 The Divine Guardrail — Psalm 121**

This is the "Traveler's Psalm." It promises that God isn't just at the destination but is actively "keeping" the traveller in the transition.

- The Psalmist lifts their eyes to the hills. When you are "parked" in a lay-by of life—exhausted or just pausing — where do you instinctively look for help? Is it toward your own resources, or toward the "Maker of heaven and earth"?
- The promise is that God will not let your foot slip and does not sleep. In the 'day in and day out' grind of work and commute, how does it change your stress level to know that the safety of your soul doesn't depend solely on your own alertness?
- God keeps your "going out and coming in." Think of your front door. How can you make the simple act of leaving your house and returning to it a daily prayer of trust in this promise?

### **Part 2 Blowing Down the Road — John 3:1–17**

Nicodemus comes by night, looking for a map, but Jesus gives him the Wind. Like a beatnik poet seeking "it," Nicodemus is told that the Spirit is wild and unpredictable.

- Jesus says the Spirit blows where it chooses; you hear the sound but don't know where it comes from or where it goes. Does your spiritual life feel more like a predictable train track or like the "blowing wind"? Which of those makes you more uncomfortable?
- The "How" vs. the "Who": Nicodemus keeps asking "How can these things be?" (verse 9). When we are on the road with Jesus, we often want to know the step-by-step mechanics of the journey. Why does Jesus pivot from the "how" of rebirth to the "who" of God's love for the world (verse 16)?
- Born of the Spirit: To be "born again" (or born from above) implies a total restart. If the Spirit were to "blow you down the road" toward a completely new direction this Lent, what is the one thing you'd be most afraid to leave behind?



### Part 3 Finding the 'Good Way' — Jeremiah 6:16 & John 14:1–6

Jeremiah tells us to stand at the crossroads and look for the "ancient paths," while Jesus tells us that He is the Way.

- Standing at the Crossroads: Jeremiah 6:16 tells us to "ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is." In an age of constant "newness" and GPS-recalculating, what "ancient" spiritual practice (like silence, Sabbath, or fasting) helps you find rest for your soul?
- The Way vs. The Map: In John 14, Thomas is confused about the destination. Jesus doesn't give him a set of directions; He says, "I am the way." How does your journey change when you stop looking for a "map" of your life and start looking for a "Person" to walk with?
- The Troubled Heart: Jesus begins this "Way" discourse by saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." Looking at the road ahead of you this month, what is troubling your heart? How does the "Good Way" of Jeremiah lead you back to the "Place" Jesus is preparing for you?



## Week 4: **Come follow me to the watering place — Reconciliation**

*Week beginning Sunday 8 March.*

### **Introduction:**

Jesus leads us to the watering places, the places of restoration and reconciliation. This week, the "stone table" is no longer dry. We find it stocked with water, like a hydration station at the midpoint of a marathon or a relief tent in the wake of a storm. We begin looking at Exodus 17, where the thirst of the people meets the provision of God.

### **Seeds to sow:**

What can we do to help widen the access to safe drinking water for all?

### **Part 1 The Nature of the Journey: Athletes or Victims? — Exodus 17:1-7**

In Exodus 17, the Israelites are "camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink." Their reaction defines their spiritual posture.

- When the thirst sets in, the people "quarrel" with Moses and "test" the Lord. Do you see the Israelites as spiritual athletes who are simply hitting a "wall" in their endurance, or as victims of circumstance who have forgotten they are being led by a Deliverer? How do you view your own struggles—as training or as a tragedy?
- The "Why" of the Wilderness: The people ask, *"Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"* (verse 3). Why is it our first instinct to view a temporary "dry spell" as a death sentence rather than a stage of the journey?
- They long for the water of Egypt — the very place of their slavery. In your own Lenten journey, what "familiar waters" (old habits or comforts) are you tempted to return to when the road with Jesus gets parched and difficult?

### **Part 2 Respite and Reconciliation: The Table of Bottled Water — John 4: 1-26**

Imagine that stone table now covered in clear, life-giving water, set up for people who are exhausted and "running on empty." Could it even become a well of reconciliation...

- Respite is a temporary rest that gives strength for the next leg of the race. Are you allowing it to be a 'watering place' where your soul is actually being refilled? Discuss the importance of taking time to rest and reflect and receive spiritual refreshment.
- Notice how Jesus asks for a drink from the woman drawing water. Notice how he placed himself to receive rather than to give, and then how he used that encounter to offer the woman the water of life that she was longing to have. Is there a pattern here from which we can learn? In sharing our vulnerability do you think we can open up opportunities to offer to others the reason for the hope that lies within us? (See 1 Peter 3:15)



- See how Jesus uses the 'Water of Life; as the catalyst to bring about reconciliation between Jews and Samaritans, but notice how he opens it up to reconciliation between all peoples. Why do you think the metaphor of spiritual water still works in today's context of 'running on empty'?

### **Part 3 Streams of Water — An invitation John 7: 39-42**

In this passage Jesus is referencing Isaiah 55 where the prophet calls on thirsty souls to receive the water of life. Here Jesus offers himself as that very water of which the prophet speaks. Notice how he describes the water as the Spirit.

- How do you respond to this text? Do you see it as a personal invitation to receive Christ?
- If you are a believer, can you share with others what it means to you to be aware of "the streams of living water" that Jesus said will flow from you?
- Discuss with others the significance of the metaphor "Streams of water".



## Week 5: Come follow me, through the place of confrontation — Peace

*Week beginning Sunday 15 March.*

### Introduction:

This week, the journey takes us into the "Place of Confrontation." The table is no longer in a peaceful wilderness or a roadside lay-by; it is set in No Man's Land. This is the contested, disputed territory where we face our fears, our critics, and the systems that seek to define us.

### Seeds to sow:

How can we support the work of peacemakers around the world and in our local communities?

### Part 1 The Table in the Crossfire — Psalm 23

In the ancient world, to eat at someone's table was to be under their protection. To have a table prepared "in the presence of enemies" is a radical claim of safety in the midst of conflict.

- The table isn't set *after* the battle is over, but right in the middle of it. Who or what are the "enemies" currently watching you? (Is it a person, an inner critic, or a systemic injustice?) How does it feel to "feast" while they are still present?
- The Anointed Head: In the presence of those who might wish us harm, God "anoints our head with oil" —a sign of being chosen and honoured. How does Jesus' presence at this table help you reclaim your dignity when the world tries to shame or diminish you?
- The Psalm ends with goodness and mercy "following" (literally *pursuing*) us. On this Lenten road, do you feel more "pursued" by your problems or by God's relentless love?

### Part 2 Breaking the Lens — John 9: 1–41

Here, Jesus encounters a man blind from birth. He immediately confronts the "superstitious thinking" of the disciples who want to assign blame rather than offer healing.

- The Trap of "Why": The disciples ask whose sin caused the blindness—the man's or his parents'. When you face a "wilderness" or a hardship, do you find yourself looking for someone to blame? How does Jesus' refusal to play the blame game change your perspective on suffering?
- Jesus uses the dust of the earth (clay) to bring sight. This is a "messy" healing. Why do you think Jesus often uses the very things we find "dirty" or "ordinary" to open our eyes to the truth?



- After the healing, the neighbours don't even recognise the man. When Jesus changes your "vision" or heals a part of your life, how do you handle the people who prefer the "old version" of you or who refuse to believe you've changed?

### **Part 3 The Prayer for the Frontlines — John 17: 6–26**

Known as the "High Priestly Prayer," this is Jesus' final briefing for his disciples before the ultimate confrontation of Holy Week. He knows exactly what they are about to face.

- Jesus prays for his disciples to be protected while staying *in* the world. How does it change your 'commute' or your 'workday' to know that Jesus isn't asking God to take you out of the hard places, but to keep you holy while you are in them?
- Jesus says he "protected them and kept them safe by the name you gave me." What does it mean to you to carry the "Name" of Jesus into a place of confrontation? Is it a weapon, a shield, or a quiet comfort?
- In verse 20, Jesus prays specifically for *those who will believe through their message*—that includes us. How does it feel to realise that Jesus was thinking of your specific struggles and your specific 'No Man's Land' over 2,000 years ago?



## Week 6: **Come follow me, from a field of bones to the place of transformation — Renewal!**

*Week beginning Sunday 22 March.*

### **Introduction:**

Sometimes on our journey with Christ we find ourselves breaking bread and sheltering with one another in the ashes of ruin, the fields of devastation, the valleys of sorrow. Part of our calling as Christians is to accompany one another through these times — offering an ear, a shoulder, someone to sit with. Your ear can be Christ's ear listening to the cries. Your shoulder can be Christ's shoulder, bearing the weight for a little while. Your table can be a place where the seeds of transformation are glimpsed and the hope of tomorrow becomes believable.

### **Seeds to sow:**

Where do you long to see transformation and renewal in the world?

### **Part 1: Quests in the Valley of Bones — Ezekiel 37:1–14**

In this passage, God doesn't just act; He engages Ezekiel in a dialogue. These quests focus on the power of the "Prophetic Question" to shift our perspective from despair to hope.

- Read verses 1–3. God asks Ezekiel, "*Can these bones live?*" and Ezekiel responds, "*Sovereign Lord, you alone know.*" The Mission: Identify a "valley" in your community or personal life that looks completely dry and beyond repair. Instead of asking "How do we fix this?", practice asking God, "What do You see here that I don't?" Record how shifting the question from *logistics* to *vision* changes your level of hope.
- Read verses 4–10. Notice that the transformation happens in stages: first structure (bones/sinews), then spirit (breath). Discuss why God commanded Ezekiel to *prophesy to the breath* rather than God simply doing it alone. Find one area where you have the "structure" ready (a project, a relationship, a ministry) but lack the "breath." What specific question can you ask God to invite His Spirit into that structure?
- Read verses 11–14. The bones represent a people saying, "*Our hope is gone.*" Search the text for the "Why." Why does God bring them out of their graves? (See verse 13). Your quest is to flip a "Why is this happening to me?" question into a "How will this show me who the Lord is?" question.

### **Part 2: Transformation from the Inside Out — Romans 8: 6–11**

Paul's letter to the Romans emphasises that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives *in* us. This is not a cosmetic change, but a cellular one.

- Paul contrasts the "mind governed by the flesh" with the "mind governed by the Spirit." If our transformation starts from the inside out — how does God use our





thoughts and imagination to encounter his peace?

- Verse 11 says the Spirit "lives in you." If we truly believed our bodies were the current residence of the Resurrection Power, how would that change the way we treat our internal 'brokenness' or 'dry bones'?
- Why must the Spirit first address our "spirit" (verse 10) before giving life to our "mortal bodies" (verse 11)? Can a person have an outward transformation without an inward one, and is that sustainable in the Kingdom of God?

### **Part 3: The Significance of Lazarus — John 11: 1-44**

The raising of Lazarus is the "Seventh Sign" in John's Gospel—the final crescendo before Holy Week. It serves as both a literal miracle and a powerful metaphor for Kingdom life.

- Jesus calls Lazarus out of a cave with a stone rolled against it. Theologically, how does this miracle serve as a "rehearsal" for Jesus' own resurrection, and what does it tell us about Jesus' authority over the "finality" of the law and death?
- Jesus performs the miracle, but He commands the community to "*Take off the grave clothes and let him go*" (verse 44). Practically speaking, why does Jesus involve the community in the "unbinding" process?
- Jesus intentionally stayed where he was for two days before going to Lazarus (verse 6). In the economy of the Kingdom, how do we reconcile the "practical" pain of God's silence with the "theological" truth that His delays are often for a greater manifestation of His glory?



## Week 7: **Come follow me, stepping through Holy Week — Commitment**

*Week beginning Sunday 29 March.*

### **Introduction:**

As we come to the end of Lent we take our folding tables with us as we step through Holy Week. We are stepping through both in the sense of retreading Christ's journey but also in the sense of stepping 'through' to the other side of what Holy Week means for us personally. What commitment are we making? The events of this week resonate throughout time and space. We are changed as we cross over once again, following Jesus into the rest of our lives. When we take Communion here and now we are connected to that small upper room 2,000 years ago.

### **Seeds to sow:**

What have you discovered or rediscovered about God over Lent this year and as you step through Holy Week?

### **Part 1 Come follow me... and my donkey! — Matthew 21: 1-11**

You can picture Jesus on a wee donkey the same way you can picture Jesus on a rickety old bicycle or catching the number 7 bus. This moment of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem is a highly symbolic of servant leadership and is a reference to Zechariah 9 where the King coming on a donkey is contrasted with the disbanded chariots and warhorses.

- The humility and even comedy of riding a donkey shows a King completely relaxed and comfortable with who he is. No show of force or motorcade is necessary, he is even able to ironically send up the whole solemnity of the occasion on a braying, swaying donkey. How can this passage inspire us to be at ease with who we are as Christians, with a sense of self-awareness and even fun? Why is humour so important even in the midst of great challenges including sorrow?
- Perhaps there are there times today when followers of Jesus are summoning shiny new limousines for Christ, flagging down private jets, or even a tank for him and Jesus is telling them that's no way to follow him! In Jesus's example a leader finds something practical that's near to hand (the donkey!) and repurposes it for God's kingdom. What are the practical things near to hand — old vehicles, shopfronts, tables and chairs — that are in our communities that could be repurposed for God's kingdom? Can you share examples of how you have seen this work in practice?
- It seems remarkable to our 21st century ears to imagine people taking off their cloaks and throwing them on the road for the donkey to walk over but there seems to be a spontaneous festival spirit in the air, a desire to do something with anything to hand to mark Jesus's coming. Think of the spontaneous flowers being thrown in the road for Princess Diana's funeral cortege. How could we use ordinary things to liven up the way for Jesus this Holy Week and Easter? Are there things we could put in our windows, our gardens, our churches and community places that show us publicly welcoming Jesus?



## Part 2 The scent that follows Jesus — John 12: 1-11

In John 12, we witness a transition from the public miracle of Lazarus to a private moment of intimacy and preparation. This "Gift Table" is not spread with food, but with a costly, fragrant offering that fills the entire house. The humility of Jesus is striking here; the one who would soon wash the disciples' feet first allows his own feet to be washed with tears and perfume.

Mary of Bethany appears three times in the Gospels, and every time, she is at the feet of Jesus. She represents a "theology of presence"—the ability to recognise the sacredness of the moment while others are distracted by logistics or politics.

- Mary acts while others are talking. She seems to sense what the disciples refuse to hear—that Jesus is actually going to die. How does Mary's "listening heart" allow her to offer Jesus exactly what he needs in this moment? What does this teach us about the importance of spiritual intuition over religious "busyness"?
- We often focus on Jesus as the Giver, but here he is the Receiver. It takes immense humility for the Son of God to allow a woman to let down her hair — a scandalous act in that culture — and perform a task usually reserved for the lowest servant. Why is it often harder for us to *receive* a radical act of grace than it is to *give* one? By accepting Mary's extravagant gift, how is Jesus modelling a "vulnerable humility" that we must adopt if we are to let Him wash us during Holy Week?
- Judas frames his objection as a concern for the poor ("*This perfume could have been sold...*"), creating a false choice between devotion to God and service to the vulnerable. Jesus' response — "*The poor you will always have with you*" — is not a dismissal of poverty, but a quote from Deuteronomy 15:11, which actually commands open-handedness. Question 3: Judas argues for "efficiency," while Mary argues for "extravagance." In our own lives of faith, how do we distinguish between "sensible stewardship" and "stinginess of spirit"? Is it possible that radical acts of beauty and devotion to God actually fuel our capacity to care for the poor, rather than distracting from it?

## Part 3 Continuing to follow — John 19: 38-42

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus continue to follow Jesus, even after his death, taking care of his body. In their sorrow and trauma they do what they can for their Lord. But even in that very moment Jesus is making a way in the wilderness, a way once and for all, a way for all of us! A place we all can follow!

- It is notable that Nicodemus (the man who came to Jesus under the cover of darkness in week 3) breaks cover to join Joseph in officially receiving Jesus's remains. As we relive the story of Lent every year let's take a moment to pause here as Jesus's followers courageously continue to follow Jesus in this dark time and under persecution. Let's also ask, what contemporary examples of bravery and



courage from fellow disciples inspire you? Let's remember them in our group in prayer.

- This whole theme we have been exploring how Jesus makes a way through difficult and hard times, through wilderness and conflict, sorrow and confusion — drought and desert. Here as Jesus falls silent he is making the most incredible way for us — through death, for eternal reconciliation. What words come to mind when you think about this incredible way-making journey Jesus undertakes?
- Finally, as we prepare to step through to the other side of Holy Week into the season of Easter — how has this journey from the cairn, the stone table in the desert, the motorway services, no man's land, the field of ash and the quiet upper room — shaped how you think about what it means to follow God even through the dark and difficult times?