



Theme Resource Pack

Lent 2026

(15 Feb - 4 April)

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)

Format

This theme will run 7 weeks taking us from Transfiguration Sunday and Ash Wednesday all the way to Holy Saturday at the end of Holy week. Over the course of 2026 we are going on a journey that we began in Advent 2025 — of coming round the table with God.

Our themes drawn from Revised Common Lectionary and additional readings shape our Daily Worship, live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! Each week runs Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

Come follow me, cairn by cairn — Revelation (Week 1, 15 February)

Introduction: This week we take our folding table up into the hills as we consider mountaintop experiences with God seeking revelation. 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.

Setting the scene: Communion round a campfire on a hillside by a cairn.

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?

- 1. Matthew 17: 1-9 Christ leads us to revelation.** Like Peter, James and John sometimes Jesus takes us to the mountaintop to see something new, something we couldn't see at sea level. When has Jesus taken you from the 'sea level' of everyday life to a moment of heightened awareness or clarity?
- 2. Exodus 24: 12-18 Camping out with God.** Moses has to 'go there to come back'. He has to camp out with God for a week and *then* for forty days and nights. In yesterday's reading revelation came on a day's hike but here it takes much longer. Do we sometimes metaphorically 'climb back down the mountain' when God would have us wait it out a little longer?
- 3. Psalm 99 Hillside worship!** Hills and mountains have been significant to the human imagination and spirituality since forever. What keeps drawing us upwards? Also, did you know that time actually travels a little bit slower at high altitudes than at sea level? So if one twin lives at sea level and the other at higher altitude — the sister that is up in the clouds will actually be slightly 'younger' than the one getting her toes wet!
- 4. Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 (Ash Wednesday) Have you packed your trumpet?** This Ash Wednesday we think about the prophetic role of mountaintops that allow us to get us up high and signal warning to others far away (picture the scene in *The Lord of the Rings* where the beacons are lit over Rohan/New Zealand).
- 5. 2 Peter 1: 16-21 On the holy mountain, we heard.** 'Mountaintop moments', face to face with Jesus, stay with us. Those times that are elevated over the everyday. What's our testimony of our mountaintop experiences with Jesus?
- 6. Exodus 33: 12-23 A cleft in the rock.** Even in God's majesty there is God's tenderness. Back with Moses, we identify with his desire to not only know but to *feel* God's presence.
- 7. 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 Peaks and troughs and a whole lot of love!** The 'mountaintop experience' with God is not a reward for reaching a pinnacle of achievement. Our faith does not define success the way the world does. Discipleship is not 'utilising transferable skills for targeted outcomes'. It's simply loving God and loving one another. This is a journey full of peaks and troughs, many not of our choosing. But through it all Jesus comes to us face to face, in mountaintop moments, breaking bread with us...

Come follow me, a way through the wilderness — Direction (Week 2, 22 February)

Introduction: This week we take our folding table out into the wilderness whether that be desert, wild moor, raging seas or a commercial wasteland where all real life has been choked out in the name of profit. As we do we follow the waymaker — the truth, the life — Jesus!

Setting the scene: Communion on a rough stone slab, sheltering in a cave in the wilderness.

Seeds to sow: What does the word 'wilderness' mean to you?

1. **John 1: 19-34 Pointing the way** Picture John the Baptist dragging his folding table out into the wilderness, bumping and scraping it over rocks and sand. "Where's that daft lad going with that table?" Often pointing the way of love and truth can get you funny looks!
2. **Matthew 4: 1-11 Wildernesses, places of temptation.** The wilderness can be a place of temptation as we are rootless and anchor-less. Disorientation and need chip away at our sense of self. Jesus speaks to us with the voice of experience as one who knows what it is to face temptation in the desert — and it is his unshakable sense of self and scripture which sustain him. Where do we find our direction out of the wilderness?
3. **Romans 5: 12-19 A waymaker through midlife.** "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'! Into the uncertainty and mortality of midlife comes the waymaker who has ended the rule of death.
4. **John 2: 13-25 Clearing the man-made wilderness in the temple courts.** A wilderness is a place where it's hard for life to grow in harsh conditions and our concrete and glass commercial wildernesses can choke out nature, stamping out life and vibrancy in the name of profit. In order to set up God's table — what tables might need overturned first?
5. **Matthew 4: 18-22 "Come follow me! We'll chart a new kind of sea together!"** These men are used to the challenges of open water; the danger, the uncertainty, the restlessness. Jesus looks at them, a glint in his eye, and says 'Come follow me, there's bigger fish to catch...'
6. **Isaiah 43: 14-21 Making a way in the wilderness.** Our God makes a way in the wilderness and brings streams to wasteland. Are we trusting God to lead us out of wildernesses — to do new things? Or are we wanting to do our own thing, ploughing even deeper in? Are we open to God's direction?
7. **Psalms 63 Thirsting in the desert.** Let us end this week travelling through the wilderness by setting up our folding table and extending bread and wine to all who do earnestly desire it. To all those thirsting in the desert.

Come follow me, on the road with Jesus — Discernment (Week 3, 1 March)

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

Setting the scene: An improvised Eucharist in the cab of a truck in a lay-by as traffic streams past.

Seeds to sow: What is our prayer for those out on the road travelling long distances today?

1. **Genesis 12 :1-4a “Go from your country and your kindred.”** Sometimes Jesus’s invitation to “Come follow me”, calls us like Abram to leave what we know, and who we know. Even if we anticipate blessing; slamming the boot and adjusting the rearview mirror can be bittersweet.
2. **Psalm 121 Keeping our going out and our coming in.** When we journey, we never travel alone, God is with us, watching over us. How can the signs along the motorway remind us of God’s love for us over long journeys?
3. **John 3: 1-17 Born of the Spirit, blowing down the road.** Picture the scene, Nicodemus has asked Jesus to meet him at the motorway services, they’re open 24hrs and it allows him to sneak out in the cover of darkness. Many of us have found ourselves in the wee small hours, pouring our hearts out to Jesus. In verse 8 Jesus says something incredible about those born of the Spirit “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” To this restless midnight soul Jesus says — there’s an open road out there ready to sweep you on an adventure!
4. **Jeremiah 6: 16 ‘One moment, calculating route...’** Sat-navs direct us by telling us where we are in relation to other things — pinpointing our location by timing how long it takes signals to bounce from us out into space and back. Unlike paper maps they also attempt to respond to realtime conditions factoring in multiple data sources from traffic to weather to road maintenance. They make a vivid metaphor for what it is to be a Christian— trying to work out where we are in relation to the world around us. Discerning the way forward involves combining the Bible with prayer and wisdom.
5. **Matthew 7: 13-14 Enter by the narrow gate!** God's road isn't always the easy road. Sometimes it's a half remembered track, overgrown and overshadowed by the new fly-over. But follow it and see where it takes you!
6. **Psalm 16 The Way of Life.** God’s way is the way of life. It’s not always the easy road but it is the good road. Remembering this can be a helpful for discerning the way forward. What path leads to life — to flourishing, vibrancy and rejoicing?
7. **John 14: 1-7 I am the way!** As we meet with Jesus on the highways and the byways, setting up our folding table where we can find shelter, Jesus assures us there is always room at the table — indeed there are many rooms waiting for us. We will not clock up the miles only to see a ‘No vacancy sign’. Simply, Jesus is The Way, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Bible and the wisdom of one another, we discern that way and follow it.

Come follow me to the watering place — Reconciliation (Week 4, 8 March)

Introduction: Jesus leads us to the watering places, the places of restoration and reconciliation. We can picture Jesus sitting at the well, but we can also picture Jesus handing out water bottles to disaster victims. Jesus always leads us to life-giving water. This week let's challenge ourselves by asking what it means to follow 'the water of life' in a world where so many people don't have access to clean running water.

Setting the scene: A table set up with water bottles, bandages and medicine in an emergency relief camp.

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

1. **Exodus 17: 1-7 Water from the rock.** Where do we long for refreshment? And what rocks are we striking?
2. **John 4: 4-26 A watering place.** In this bubble of opportunity that comes from this meeting place, Jesus speaks words of personal, cultural and cosmic reconciliation.
3. **John 4: 27-38 An empty jar and ripe fields.** The Samaritan woman leaves with her jar empty and her head full! Just as Jesus banters with her about water now he banters with his disciples about lunch. Are there times we could be reaping when we're still in a sowing mindset?
4. **John 4: 39-42 Set up the table!** Because of the woman's testimony the Samaritans want him to stay. Picture Jesus telling the disciples to set up the folding table, "We're going to be here a while..." Where is there desire for God and connection but we miss because we rush off to somewhere new?
5. **Romans 5: 1-11 God's love has been poured into our hearts!** The refreshment that comes from God's love poured into us gives us the means to hope, to reconcile, to endure.
6. **Isaiah 55 A universal offer.** The invitation is open to all, all that matters is that we are thirsty. Conscious of our daily need for God we follow Jesus to the watering places where we can listen and we can live.
7. **John 7: 37-39 Let anyone who is thirsty come!** Jesus welcomes us warmly with The Holy Spirit who is poured out in us, through us, and for us!

Come follow me, through the place of confrontation — Peace

(Week 5, 15 March)

Introduction: This week we take our folding table to uncertain places, disputed territories and contested borders. Following Jesus means following the way of peace but that doesn't mean skirting around places of confrontation. In calling, in healing, in discipleship, in peacemaking — Jesus guides us not just around confrontation but also through it.

Setting the scene: A Communion table set up in no man's land between rival sides.

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

1. **1 Samuel 16: 1-13 Fill your horn with oil and set out!** When Jesus calls us to 'Come follow me,' we sometimes feel like Samuel here, nervously filling our horns with oil and setting out on our mission. Here's an interesting one, what are the 'heifers' that God gives us, the pretexts for our missions?
2. **Psalm 23 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.** Verse 5 of this beloved psalm has been a guiding verse for us at Sanctuary First for our whole 'table journey' that began with our Advent theme 'Room at the table' and carries on through Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Pentecost this year. The table we are called to found in the midst of our lives — even in the contested places before our enemies. At this table we are disarmed and our enemies are disarmed.
3. **Ephesians 5: 8-14 Walking in the light - despite the darkness!** In goodness and rightness and truth there is light — even in the midst of darkness a light shines in every good, right and truthful deed. Are we willing to follow Jesus's light not just *around* the darkness but *through* the darkness?
4. **John 9: 1-12 A healing confrontation.** Jesus's act of healing restoring a man to the community that has literally been stepping over him but puts him in confrontation with superstitious thinking and the establishment. It's a way of peace but it will take him through the place of confrontation.
5. **John 9: 13-34 A new way and an old way in tension.** The Pharisees' brutal dismissal of the healed man when they don't get the answer they want speaks volumes. Their rhetorical question reveals their closed minds and arrogance. Are we ourselves willing to listen to the marginalised on the fringes of our society or do we assume they have nothing to teach us?
6. **John 9: 35-41 Spiritual and moral blindness.** Jesus here contrasts an involuntary blindness with a wilful one: a 'vision' that refuses to countenance what it does not want to see.
7. **John 17: 6-26 Jesus's prayer for his disciples and the world** A moving, bittersweet prayer from Jesus as he reflects on the confrontation his disciples will face for following him.

Come follow me, from a field of bones to the place of transformation — Renewal! (Week 6, 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.

Setting the scene: A communion table set up amongst the ashes of ruin and defeat.

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

1. **Ezekiel 37: 1-14 A field of bones.** A vivid picture of transformation that speaks to us bone deep! Our God is capable of incredible transformation and renewal.
2. **Psalms 130 Watching for the morning with others.** As followers of Jesus sometimes the call 'Come follow me' means sitting by those who find themselves watching for the morning.
3. **Romans 8: 6-11 Transformation from the inside out.** The Spirit is not just *with us* but *in us* — under the skin. Even in the midst of our despair the Holy Spirit is right there.
4. **John 11: 1-37 Jesus wept.** Jesus knows despair, knows loss, knows failure, knows sorrow, knows pain, knows bereavement. This incredible story of resurrection does not take shortcuts and avoid sorrow and heartache, but it does find a way through them.
5. **John 11: 38-44 Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.** An incredible gesture, a reversal to foreshadow Christ's own death and return. In John 12 Lazarus is mentioned again in the context of the chief priests considering putting him to death. It may be that Lazarus's post resurrection life was a short one, was this in Jesus's tears too the knowledge that he would lose his friend again?
6. **Job 2 Sitting with one another in the ashes.** In the first instance — for a whole week in fact — Job's three friends don't say anything to him, they just sit with him in the ashes. There is tremendous power in simply being with one another in ash times.
7. **Isaiah 61: 1-3 A crown of beauty instead of ashes.** How are we in our lives treating others with dignity and respect? Wiping away the ashes and adorning their brows with garlands?

Come follow me, stepping through Holy Week — Commitment

(Week 7, 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.

Setting the scene: Our battered folding table being set up once again, in a small upper room in the 1st century.

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

- 1. Matthew 21: 1-11 Come follow me... and my donkey!** You can picture Jesus on a donkey the same way you can picture Jesus on a rickety old bicycle or catching the number 7 bus. Are there times today when we are hailing a limousine, flagging down a private jet, or even a tank for Jesus and he's telling us that's no way to follow him?
- 2. John 12: 1-11 Where you can't follow me, the scent of this perfume will.** Jesus's journey to the cross was ultimately made on his own but while Mary couldn't walk each step by his side, her perfume, her anointing, could follow Jesus through the dark days ahead. Are there times in our lives where Christ goes places we can't and yet we can still make an offering, an anointing?
- 3. John 12: 20-36 Becoming children of the light** Let's reflect especially on verse 26 and consider what it means for God to honour the ones who serve and follow Jesus.
- 4. John 13: 21-32 Not 'if' I follow but 'who' I follow.** Following is core part of our human nature, we can't help it. It's how we grow and develop. When Judas stops following Jesus he doesn't stop following. As we step through Holy Week let's consider who and what we are following. Who and what are we making commitments to?
- 5. John 13: 1-17 (Maundy Thursday) Setting an example.** At this crucial moment in this pivotal week Jesus explicitly calls out this act of direct hands-on service as one his disciples should follow him in doing. What does this example mean to us today?
- 6. John 19: 17-30 (Good Friday) Jesus alone** Our hearts break again for Mary and for Jesus as he goes on alone. As we step through this moment how is the cross continuing to shape our lives?
- 7. John 19: 38-42 (Holy Saturday) Continuing to follow.** 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!