

Living Freedom Through Recession

October 2020 (4 - 31 October)



During the month of October there are four key stories that can help to shape our thinking and reflections at this time of great uncertainty when many are looking for comfort and security. These stories cover a 40 year period and highlight four seminal moments in the salvation history of the people of Israel as they struggled with identity, hardship, and hope for a brighter future.

They are also stories that can be used to teach us about the nature and purpose of the church today, especially as we seek a new kind of freedom and understanding. Coming out of lockdown we are faced with an unprecedented recession and an uncertainty about how public worship should continue and develop.

The first story opens up a discussion about our attitude to worship and its essential role in maintaining our wellbeing. The second story engages with the temptation to worship false gods and how that eventually affects the health and wellbeing of those around us. The third and fourth story open up our thinking about leadership. How do you know when it is time to depart to make room for a new approach? We will learn from scripture about a leadership that models a godly way of living for the community.

These reflection are written to help us as Christians to be relevant and effective beacons of hope in our communities at a time when so many within the next few months will find themselves unemployed, fearful of illness, and facing financial hardships. This must be the moment for the church to re-engage with the meaning and significance of worship and good leadership so that it is meaningful and engaging for all.

We are unable go back to church as we knew it. Yet surely we are being called to make a new journey, to free ourselves from past traditions and buildings and structures that are no longer relevant to God's mission for his church. The time has come for us to move into a new place of transition and commitment, embarking on a new and exciting faith journey. We hope that the readings this month will open our minds to go on the journey with the hope and assurance that we never travel alone.

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

Worship is the key to freedom (4 Oct)

Understanding the Glory of God. When we encounter the glory of God we cannot stop ourselves from engaging in worship. Worship of God lifts us up into a new mindset and establishes a hunger for justice and righteousness to prevail. Do we have that hunger?

1. Exodus 20: 1-4

2. Psalm 19

3. Isaiah 5: 1-7

4. Psalm 80

5. Philippians 3: 4b-14

6. Matthew 21: 33-46

7. Your choice...

Find a scripture reading to summarise the week of your reflections and say why you chose it.

1. **The first reading starts with God introducing himself to his travelling people** as the God of freedom who has delivered the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt and now has come to journey with them in love, to bring them to a place of communion and friendship with himself, making them into a holy people. The words focus on the importance of worship as a lifestyle for the health and wellbeing of all God's creatures. Worship results in keeping God's commandments.
2. **A wonderful introduction to God's Glory seen in creation itself.** Calvin in his *Institutes of Christian Religion* speaks of how knowledge of God is first drawn from creation itself declaring the Glory of God. Creation draws us to the play of wonder and enquiry. This enquiry is the beginning of worship.
3. **Mistakes.** This reading introduces us to the idea of a perverse humanity that misuses and rejects the gifts of God. We can learn and should learn from our mistakes and the mistakes of others. How sad when we miss the beauty and presence of God in our midst.
4. **Restoration.** This psalm reflects the age old longing of the human heart to be restored to God without true repentance. We want the gifts of God but we don't wish to display the graces. Yet it is only from the graces that the gifts flow. Gifts without graces turn us inward into self adoration and worship.
5. **Our worship can help spur us on towards the goal**, the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
6. **Provision.** In this parable among many lessons is a return to the idea that the richness of God's provision and glory has been overlooked by human selfishness and greed. It calls us to understand the consequences of freedom, grace, communion and love all being rejected.
7. **For this and the following weeks our Daily Worship writer is invited to choose their own reading to conclude the week.** If you are using this material for personal reflection we invite you to likewise choose your own passage to conclude each week on.

When distraction is temptation in recession (11 Oct)

The next story that shapes this week's reflections moves us on from Exodus 20 by 12 chapters. By this time the Hebrew people have grown weary waiting for the leadership of Moses. They are looking for a spiritual experience to satisfy their immediate desire for an instant fix of religion, rather than an encounter with the living God. They are also missing the gods and culture of Egypt. They instruct Aaron to commission the golden calf. This is a story of human nature longing to create gods from our own imaginations. In the end we become self absorbed worshippers. This is the same scenario Jesus faced in the temptation narratives in Luke's Gospel.

1. Exodus 32: 1-8

1. **To whom does true worship belong?** Where are the golden calves in today's churches? When worship of God is hijacked what are the results? It is so easy to be distracted from our main purpose of worshipping the true God.

2. Psalm 106: 1-6, 19- 23

2. **The psalmist reminds God's people how they exchanged the reality of the glory of God for the image of a golden calf.** At the heart of our calling as worshippers is a call to seek and reflect the glory of the living God in the world. What an amazing calling — how sad when we settle for less. When our ambitions are determined not by faith but by the shape of the culture around us. When we reflect the thinking and culture of the day rather than the glory of God's justice and righteousness we diminish all we can be as the people of God.

3. Isaiah 25: 1-9

4. Psalm 23

3. **The prophet relates the glory** that we encounter when we begin to relate the acts of God's goodness and justice. In the end God will wipe away all tears from the faces of those who mourn and remove the disgrace of those who have been treated unjustly. Worship gives us an understanding and expectation of God's plans and in doing so makes us become hopeful. Perhaps reflect on the words of 'Love Divine'.

5. Philippians 4: 1-9

6. Matthew 22: 1-14

4. **Joy and worship.** This psalm counsels us not to give up but to remain convinced of the goodness of God's intentions towards his people. His intension is to right wrongs and remind us that goodness and mercy will follow us even if the road ahead feels overshadowed with doubt and fear. The feasting table and the cup overflowing is the place of joy and worship.

7. Your choice...

Find a scripture reading to summarise the week of your reflections and say why you chose it.

5. **The apostle encourages us to understand that God is not distant but that we can come to him in prayer.** God cares and understands. What should we look at and reflect upon? Here Paul reminds us of the glory of God that can be seen in beautiful things, ideas and people that are admirable. When we think on these things we begin to understand that God is for us. Interesting to think that the song 'My favourite things' touches on this kind of thinking
6. **This parable connects with our key Exodus story, because it highlights the temptation of not really respecting or appreciating what we have.** God had delivered the Hebrews from slavery but that was quickly forgotten in an attempt to go back to worship the Egyptian gods. The parable Jesus tells is of an invitation to celebrate and how it was rejected. It shows how God opens up the invitation to celebrate to all who will come prepared dressed and ready to celebrate.

Focused leadership in recession (18 Oct)

The next story we look at this month invites us to consider the importance of leadership in a community that is in transition. Moses finds himself faced with his own vulnerable thoughts and feelings. He realises he needs to be aware of God's presence in his life if he is going to lead effectively. During this week we will take time to reflect on the call and challenges of leadership especially in today's church as we face economic turmoil and the threat of illness and the break up of church community as we have known it. What kind of leadership is required for today's church rapidly becoming one without walls? In many cases we now lead congregations who no longer meet in person but who are witnesses in their own spheres of influence.

1. Exodus 33: 12-23

1. **Moses recognised he needed the assured presence of God.**

The pillar of the cloud assured him all was well. It was his signifier that God was with him. What could be the confidence-giver to a church leader today facing the challenges of a COVID-19 induced recession?

2. Psalm 99

3. Isaiah 45: 1-7

2. **A reminder that God requires to be approached with reverence.** His power and might are breathtaking. If we approach God with this sense of wonder believing he listens to his servants amazing things can happen. The more our leaders engage in worship of the Almighty the greater confidence they will have to lead the people of God. Leaders set the tone of worship.

4. Psalm 96

5. 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

3. **This passage reminds us that God can choose who he wills to carry out his purposes.** We need to remember that God goes before us. Even in the darkest of days. This passage reminds us that he will even lead us to the buried treasure. What buried spiritual treasures are around in our communities and our lives that God will uncover for us to use and be blessed by?

6. Matthew 22: 15-22

7. Your choice...

Find a scripture reading to summarise the week of your reflections and say why you chose it.

4. **This passage inspires us, especially leaders, to lift our eyes from the struggle and see something of the glory of God.** Verse 8 is particularly touching. It's an invitation to move towards God to give him an offering that reflects the worship of our hearts. It would be interesting to reflect more upon what that offering might be?

5. **This passage reminds us of the importance of Church leaders encouraging our sisters and brothers in the Lord.** Always willing to thank the people of God for their witness and ministry. It is often the role of the leader to reflect back something of God's Glory that is being displayed in the lives of the congregations we serve.

6. **This passage reminds us that leadership requires insight and wisdom.** This is an interesting passage to begin to reflect upon the role of Christian leaders in the midst of a recession and the role of the state. How can we complement each other?

After Recession — What? Leadership that plans ahead (25 Oct)

1. Deuteronomy 34: 1-12

2. Psalm 90: 1-6

3. Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18

4. Psalm 1

5. 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

6. Matthew 22: 34-46

7. Your choice...

Find a scripture reading to summarise the week of your reflections and say why you chose it.

1. **This passage reminds us that often there is a change of leadership required when God is moving a community or a people to do a new thing.** The important lesson to learn from this story is that Moses was willing to accept that he was not the person to lead the people into the new place. This week we reflect on the importance of knowing when it is time to pass the baton to another generation. It is important to understand the bigger picture and to encourage another generation to move into their journey of faith and hope.
2. **A wonderful prayer that can only come from experience and knowledge of God's grace and goodness.** It reminds the leader that they are finite. It reminds the older person to rejoice in the youth they once knew but to accept that there is even beauty to be discovered in the evening of our lives. Part of that beauty is seen in the legacy we leave behind.
3. **These verses of scripture are packed to the brim with practical advice regarding godly living.** Holiness emerges from communion with God. It is the result of divine love changing our hearts and minds. Perhaps holiness should be our watchword as we seek to be salt and light in our communities during the hard times. Verse 15-18 particularly highlight holiness as an activity — an action rather than a theological word to be feared or ridiculed.
4. **This psalm seeks to encourage the believers not to weary** in seeking to live out their lives in a just and honest manner. There is promise that God will watch over and protect those who seek to do what is right.
5. **This text speaks of a leadership that is humble and holy.** Leadership that is about sharing and caring. As we move into a new era of church life surely this is the kind of leadership that is required.
6. **These verses give us a methodology of dealing with those who seek to undermine our calling.** Jesus often answers questions with a question. It is important to know when to engage in debate and when to invite reflection on a question that may bring about deeper reflection and understanding rather than pointless point scoring.