

August: Writing in the Dust Resource Pack

This August at Sanctuary First we are *Writing in the Dust* and revisiting January's theme of **Journalling the Journey**. Did you take up our challenge to journal at the start of the year? How's it going? Taking the time to stop, clear your mind, and write can be an incredibly important tool.

Once, the scribes and the Pharisees tried to catch Jesus out. They wanted to force him to condemn a woman caught in adultery to be stoned to death for her sin. They knew that this maverick's mission, with its countercultural message of siding with the vulnerable and marginalised, would be compromised if he stood next to the powerful and condoned their harsh punishment. They were right, if Jesus told them to go ahead or even picked up a rock himself it would kill his whole project - stone dead. They also knew that if he took the other route and began equivocating and making excuses, being too flexible about ethics, it would compromise his authority and expose him as another well-meaning idealist. Reactionary conservative or bleeding heart liberal? What would Jesus do?

But as they were speaking, Jesus bent down and began writing in the ground. He did not join the other men that were towering over the woman or turn away as you can imagine many others were doing. He knelt down, so the woman was above him, and he began to write. He did not shoot first and ask questions later. His first reaction was to write and we have no idea what those words were that were swirling in the dust. The men kept questioning him and eventually he stood up and said something that surprised everyone. He sidestepped their trap and challenged them saying, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.'

He did not rigidly and unthinkingly enforce the status quo but nor did he make wishy washy excuses and allowances, he did not condone or disregard the adultery. Instead of lowering what they understood to be the ethical standard he raised it impossibly high. None of them were able to see themselves as blameless, not somehow compromised, and so in a position to condemn another. Jesus was saying that in order to condemn, one has to be above reproach, not acting out of jealousy, or anger, or envy, or bitterness, or hurt.

Once they were alone, Jesus, himself above reproach, said that he would not condemn her either. A new understanding of God is glimpsed where we begin to see that in order to make these judgments calls you have to be impossibly good and that God - as well as being impossibly good - is impossibly generous. See John 8: 3-11 to read this encounter in the Bible.

What was he writing in the dust? If only we could read it...

Writing in the dust is a fantastic image and a vivid metaphor. Using your finger to try and bring meaning out of a mound of tiny fragments. Wanting to leave a mark while all the time being aware it could just blow away. This month as we return to the topic of journalling we read the lectionary passages in the light of both personal journalling and famous historical diarists who wrestled with what it meant to be alive, to suffer, to love, to live and then knelt down and wrote in the dust...

Each week contains 7 Bible references. Usually 6 from **Lectionary** + 1 additional reading relating to the sub theme.

Date	Subtheme	Readings	Notes
30 July	God is with us in suffering The Diary of Anne Frank	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis 29:15-28 Psalms 105:1-11, 45b Psalms 128 1 Kings 3:5-12 Psalms 119:129-136 Romans 8:26-39 Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 	<p>God is with us in suffering.</p> <p>Anne Frank's Diaries are an acute example of claustrophobia and suffering.</p> <p>Where is God in this world of pain? Right in the midst of it. God in Jesus knows human suffering and is not remote from pain, but is at the heart of it, experiencing it and helping us to redeem it.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Disappointment Covenant instead of letdown What if your life doesn't look like Psalm 128? Crisis of confidence Oppression When there are no words The glimpse of something different
6 August	Wrestling with God Revelations of Divine Love - Julian of Norwich	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis 32:22-31 Psalms 17:1-7, 15 Isaiah 55:1-5 Psalms 145:8-9, 14-21 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14:13-21 2 Peter 3:8-10 	<p>Using journaling as a way of wrestling with the nature of God. Revelation and identity, mystery and generosity.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Wrestling with God Attend to my cry Thirst Seeing God Anguish Unexpected rest and renewal God's promise
13 August	Everyday life in extraordinary times The Diaries of Samuel Pepys	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 Psalms 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b 1 Kings 19:9-18 Psalms 85:8-13 Romans 10:5-15 Matthew 14:22-33 Acts 2:42-47 	<p>Samuel Pepys' began writing his diary in 1660, it was written over nearly a decade and contained more than a million words. It is an invaluable artefact to historians as it is a detailed, personal account of everyday life in extraordinary times, offering insights into life long ago. One of the important functions of journals is to preserve treasured memories and lessons learned.</p> <p>In the lectionary passages this week we will be looking for everyday life in extraordinary times.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Everyday family tension and trauma Wonderful works and all too real famine The perennial question 'What are you doing here?' Righteousness and peace will kiss How are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? Seasickness, unsteadiness and storm Practical steps in impractical times

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20 August	Transformation The Motorcycle Diaries - Che Guevara	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Genesis 45:1-15 2. Psalm 133 3. Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 4. Psalm 67 5. Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 6. Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28 7. Matthew 8: 1-4 	<p>Journalling as a way of tracking that subtle changes in our life that lead to the great transformations.</p> <p>Che's Guevara's journey around South America as a young man with his friend transformed his outlook on the world - seeing injustice and inequality and yet also the tenacity of the human spirit.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family relationships transformed 2. Friendship transformed 3. Transformations in cultural identity 4. Transforming a nation? 5. Transformation of character 6. Transforming our hearts 7. Transforming leprosy
27 August	New Start Confessions - St Augustine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exodus 1:8-2:10 2. Psalm 124 3. Exodus 1:8-2:10 4. Psalm 124 5. Romans 12:1-8 6. Matthew 16:13-20 7. Acts 9: 1-19 	<p>Augustine has had a colourful life, but in this - basically the first autobiography - Augustine celebrates a fresh start...</p> <p>Themes of escape, new starts, clean slate</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Life born in difficult circumstances (thinking about childbirth in the midst of refugee camps) 2. Escaping adversity 3. Eden out of wilderness 4. Preserved from the wrath of my enemies 5. Discovering a new gift 6. A moment of insight - that starts you on a whole new path 7. 180 degree turn