

Good Friday Pilgrimage 2024

Churn Valley Benefice

Rendcomb
North Cerney
Bagendon
Baunton
Stratton



Our meditations this year are based on the “priestly” prayer of Christ, as set out in the Gospel of John, chapter 17. They complement our Benefice Lent Course which examined the “Upper Room Discourse” as recorded by John in chapters 13 to 16.

Each of our meditations begins with a piece of reflective music and a few verses from John 17. The Reflection that follows will not be read aloud, but is included for private reading and contemplation if desired, along with the “Thoughts and Questions”. The second piece of devotional music will be played to allow time for personal reflection. A relevant prayer follows, which may be said aloud by all.

Our Reflections come from the book “Table in the Wilderness” by Nee To-sheng, or Watchman Nee as he preferred to be called. Nee became a Christian in mainland China in 1920 at the age of seventeen and began writing in the same year. In 1952 he was imprisoned for his faith; he remained in prison until his death in 1972. His words remain an abundant source of spiritual revelation, challenge and comfort to Christians throughout the world. The “Thoughts and Questions” are taken from the writings of Jeff Lucas and David Winter.

Our devotional music this year is drawn from a variety of composers from the Baroque and Renaissance periods. They include Handel, Johann Bach, Johann Sebastian Bach, Thomas Tallis, John Sheppard, Orlande de Lassus, Heinrich Biber and Manuel de Zumaya. Some of the pieces will be familiar, others less so.

The images in this guide come from a number of sources, freely available on the internet, but primarily from www.heartlight.org.

*The version of the Bible used for the Scripture readings is the
New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised)*

St Peter, Rendcomb

Reflective music

G F Handel *“Behold the Lamb of God” (Messiah)*

Orlande de Lassus: *“Kyrie” (Mass “Susanne un jour”)*

*Lord, have mercy,
Christ, have mercy,
Lord, have mercy.*

Reading John 17, 1 - 5



Reflection

This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou did'st send, even Jesus Christ. John 17. 3.

Men rejected Christ, not on the grounds of what He did but of who He was, and they are invited to believe in what He is and who He is, and not, first of all, in what He has done. “He who hath the Son hath the life.” The appreciation of His work must come, but the main question is whether or not you have the Son, and not, first of all, whether or not you understand the whole plan of salvation. The first condition of salvation is not knowledge, but meeting Christ.

There are people who you may feel were saved by the wrong scriptures! They were spoken to through verses that do not seem to point the way of salvation, and you almost feel they could not be saved on that basis! I used to wish that those whom I led to the Lord would be saved on the basis of a verse like John 3.16, but I have come to see that all that is needed for the initial step is that there should be a personal touch with God. It does not matter, therefore, which scripture God elects to use for that first vital step.

Thoughts and Questions

The process by which we come to “know” God and Jesus Christ is one that often puzzles people. In ordinary human relationships, how do we set about getting to know someone? What must bring to the process? And what, in the end, are its rewards?

Although we would, rightly, be reluctant to pray for our own glorification, it is encouraging to think that whenever we complete a work that God has given us to do, there is “glory”. A prayer attributed to Francis Drake recognises this: “It is not the beginning of the work, but the continuing of the same until it be thoroughly finished, that yieldeth the true glory”.

The quotation “Do not judge, lest you be judged” is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. Right judgement, at all levels, is vital; our society would unravel without it. But it was the propensity of the Pharisees to pass *corrupt* judgements that earned them such a stinging series of rebukes from Jesus. They dragged the woman caught in adultery before Jesus, but where was the participating man? We all should exercise (just) judgement, but should not be judgemental. We can also be tempted to tiptoe around “compulsively offended” people to avoid violating their personal sensibilities. But perhaps we would better serve the “offence addict” if we shared the idea that some maturity and grace on their part would be in order.



Prayer

Loving God, I am beginning to realize how much you love us. Your son, Jesus, was humble and obedient. He fulfilled your will for Him by becoming human and suffering with us and for us. I ask you for the desire to become more humble so that my own life might also bear witness to you. But above all I want to deepen my knowledge of you and relationship with you. Amen

All Saints, North Cerney

Reflective music

J S Bach: “Befiehi du deine Wege”, (St Matthew Passion)

*Commend your ways and all that weighs heavy
on your heart to the truest care
of him who rules the heavens.
He who gives the clouds,
air and winds their courses, path and orbit
will also find ways where you too can walk*

*Biber: “Christ on the Mount of Olives”.
(Mystery Sonata No. 6)*

Reading John 17, 6 - 12



Reflection

*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me.
Matthew 26. 39.*

Since it was to do the will of God He came, we may feel it strange that the Lord Jesus should have prayed this prayer. Yet it brings to light an important distinction. Evidently it was possible for Him to pray that the cup might be removed from Him, while it was certainly unthinkable that He should ask to be excused from doing the Father’s will. The cup is, so to say, secondary to that will. It represents the thing through which the divine will finds expression—in this case the death of the cross. The Lord Jesus was wholly taken up, not with His passion as such, but with the design it fulfilled. He drank the cup because it was His Father’s will, not because it was the cup.

For Jesus “the cup” was something He shrank from; for us it more often represents something we would hold on to. Our great danger may be to hold dogmatically to some “thing” associated with the divine plan for us. Every cup, however divinely appointed, should be held to very loosely. It is not that which claims us supremely, but the present will of our Father.



Thoughts and Questions

Words are precious things that can heal or destroy, and spread truth or falsehood, love or hate. How can we, in our day, cherish “the words” that Jesus passed on to his first followers? And in that process, how important is it to recognise that in some fundamental way the truth that they convey “comes from God”?

What does it mean to belong to the Church, which the New Testament calls the “body of Christ”? Does it just mean some kind of minimal attachment, with occasional or even regular attendance at worship? Or does it mean the kind of “belonging” of which Jesus spoke in this prayer, a relationship rooted in dependence and love, as life-changing in its way as marriage, in which a man and a woman pledge themselves to “belong” to each other?

I have noticed that God seems to find weakness quite irresistible. When we are right at the end of our rope, it is then that He seems to delight in showing up.

Prayer

Loving Father, in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus went through a time of great darkness and weariness. Yet while knowing the cup that had been prepared for Him and accepting your will, His prayer was for His disciples and those who would follow afterwards, that they would know you. Help us to trust you fully, whatever you bring to our lives, so that the world may see your love and your glory through us. Amen.

St Margaret, Bagendon

Reflective music

J S Bach: "In meines Herzens Grunde", (St John Passion)

*May your name and cross alone be written on my heart;
Shining there always to make me rejoice.
When I am in need, console me
With the picture of you so patiently enduring death.*

Thomas Tallis: "If ye love me"



*If ye love me, keep my commandments,
and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you
another comforter, that he may 'bide with you
forever, e'en the spirit of truth.*

Reading John 17, 1 - 5



Reflection

For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. John 17. 19.

One thing is certain, that while there is anything between you and your Lord you can only weaken others. You cannot uplift them. When they are low, you will bring them lower. When they feel heavy, your coming will only add to their heaviness. Instead of being an asset in the fellowship of God's people you will contribute nothing, but rather detract from its strength.

But if all is clear between you and Him the reverse is true. Your very presence can be a benediction, bringing freshness to those who are jaded and adding life to the whole worship of the saints, to their prayers and to their praises. Maintain a vital touch with God yourself, and you may well be used to restore that same vital touch with Him to those who may seem to have lost it.

Thoughts and Questions

Sometimes the Church has become so like the world, in its desire to “identify” with it, that it has been hard to see any difference between them. And sometimes the Church has been so “heavenly minded” that it has been no use on earth. In practical ways, how can the paradox be resolved?

Where is my own “apostolic ministry” to be exercised? How do I respond to the call to follow Christ’s example and carry the love of God into a suspicious and sometimes hostile world? And what would it mean for me to “sanctify” myself for this task?



Sometimes parenting is about an inappropriate coralling of our children in an attempt to turn out little facsimiles of us. Incredibly, we can be guilty of demanding conformity of God himself. Church can be about a frantic attempt to make God fit our box. We who are made in *his* image desperately try to make him in *ours*.



Prayer

Father, the light of Your love surrounds those who walk in the light. But You make Your light shine brightest when we are surrounded by darkness. We do not blend into the darkness but instead the light of Your love shines brightly, so that those walking in darkness can see the way to repentance through our changed lives. Even as we are able to see God in the face of Christ, may the world see Christ in the face of believers all over this world. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

St Mary Magdalene, Baunton

Reflective music

Johann Bach: “Weint nicht um meinen Tod”

*Do not weep over my death,
For in gladsome victory I have now gone beyond
Fear, misery, terror and trouble.
In the wounds of Christ I have found my greatest comfort.
Do not weep over my death.*

*That which first wounded me
Has now become my joy. For amidst the angelic host
My Jesus delights me.
He now will grant me his grace and will heal with joy
That which first wounded me.*

John Sheppard: “In manus tuas III”

*Into your hands, Lord, I entrust my spirit; you have
redeemed me Lord, who are the God of truth. I
entrust my spirit.*

Reading John 17, 20 - 23 - 5



Reflection

*That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee,
that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou
did'st send me. John 17. 21.*

It is “through the Church” that the wisdom of God is manifested to spiritual powers. It is “together” that we become a habitation of God through the Spirit. Because God’s children today do not function together as the Body, they have become as a leaking vessel. Shatter a glass tumbler and what happens? Each piece may perhaps hold a little water, but it is as nothing compared with what the unbroken tumbler held.

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So it is in spiritual things. The individual receives in but two dimensions, as it were; the Church in three. Ten thousand Christians are one thing; ten thousand members of Christ are quite another. From His fullness the Head has much more to give; but to contain it we must return to the one vessel, the one Body.



Thoughts and Questions

In my own home, in my own church, is there a loving unity of heart and mind? If not, what steps could I take to co-operate with God in answering the prayer of Jesus “that they may all be one”?

Have I ever experienced that reality of Christian love which has such converting power? If I have, let me give thanks. If I have not yet done so, may I start by asking whether I am loved by the Father and the Son and to what extent I recognise that same love in my fellow Christians?

Life, even the Christian life, is not a gallop from one thrill to another – there are boring bits. Jesus has washed my sins away, but I still have to wash the car. Grinning with gritted teeth doesn’t work when tragedy knocks on your door. Jesus didn’t flash a cheesy smile and head-butt a tambourine in Gethsemane. He struggled, wept, ached and argued – and stayed faithful to his Father’s will. He was open about his pain, begging his sleepy friends to watch in prayer with him. Reality – not unending ecstasy – is required.

Prayer

Loving Father, your Son demonstrated the marks of true love through humble service to his disciples. Help us develop the the willingness and give us the strength to follow His example. Help us not only to be ready to serve, but also give us a gracious willingness to be served by others, remembering how Christ served us. Amen.

St Peter, Stratton

Reflective music

J S Bach “Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen”,
“Ich will hier bei der stehen” (*St Matthew Passion*)

*Beloved Jesus, what wrong have you done that they
have pronounced so harsh a sentence on you?
Of what are you guilty? Into what sinful ways have
you fallen?*



*I mean to stand beside you here
Do not despise me for it.
I shall not leave you
Even if your heart breaks
When your heart stops beating
In the last throes of death
Then I shall hold you
In my arms and lap.*

Manuel de Zumaya *Lamentations of Jeremiah* 3, 22 - 23, 30

*Through the LORD's mercies
we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.*



*For the Lord will not cast off forever.
Though He causes grief,
Yet He will show compassion
According to the multitude of His mercies.
For He does not afflict willingly,
Nor grieve the children of men.*



Reading John 17, 24 - 26

Reflection

*The second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the
word, how that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice,
thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.
Mark 14. 72.*

We may think we are as good as Peter—possibly even a little better, for he was tempted and fell. Yes, but was he not better in his fall than many who never do so?

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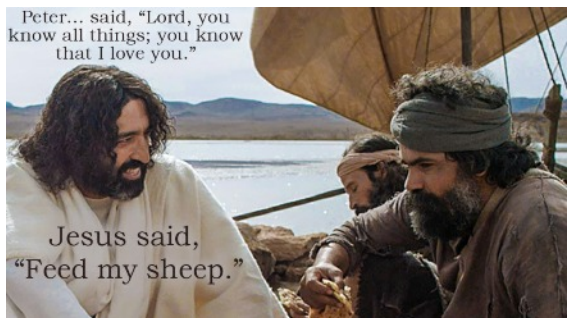
He denied—but he was not insensitive. He called to mind the Lord’s word; and when he thought thereon, *he wept*. The Christian to whom God’s word has no power to appeal is a poor Christian, unworthy of the name. For His word is His instrument of cleansing and renewal. If we only realize this and let it do its work, though we may indeed fail, we shall not long remain unaware that we have done so.

Thoughts and Questions

Does heaven ever figure in my conscious thoughts? Does the promise of seeing Christ’s glory mean anything to me in the ordinary rush and pressure of life? Is this because it is literally beyond comprehension? Or because it simply sounds too good to be true?

Is it possible to draw a link between the washing of the disciples’ feet, and the prayer that the world would eventually be won by the unity and love of the followers of Jesus?

One consistent factor stands out in the many altar-calls of my youth; the assumption that God would only ever have words of critique and complaint to shout at me. Having just finished a lengthy study of the Seven Churches in Revelation, I was stunned to discover that to two of them, Jesus had *no* word of rebuke at all – only commendation and a verbal pat on the back. Why are we more at home with the threat of judgement, but struggle with the idea that God might want to tell us that we are doing all right?



Prayer

My Lord, your son has suffered so much. I was born with so many faults and my nature is so full of weakness, and yet your son Jesus has died on the cross, for me. I know your grace has the power to cleanse me of my many sins and to make me more like your Son. Thank you for your goodness and love for me. I ask you, Father, to watch over me, always, and help me to fulfil the tasks you have set me, through the power of Jesus’ resurrection. Amen