



Objects of Lent

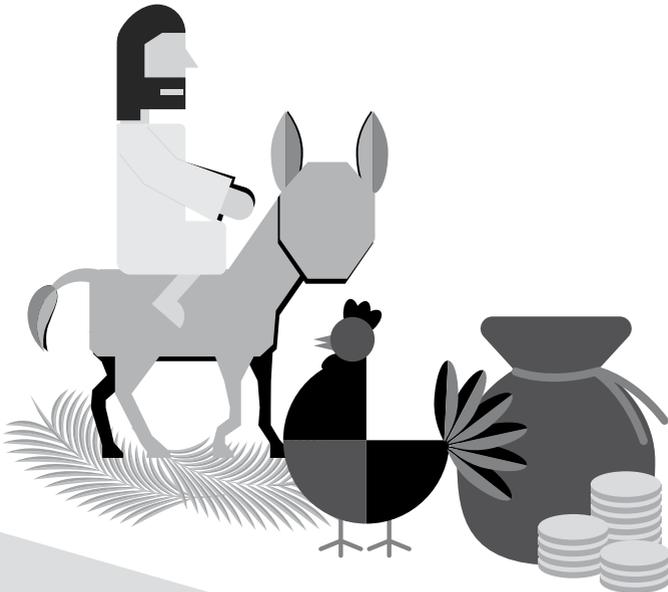
Lenten Devotional Booklet

Objects of Lent

Jesus regularly used objects when teaching, in order to illustrate or emphasize a point. As his disciples encountered some of these same objects in their daily routines, they probably never looked at them in quite the same way again. The simple objects became reminders of what Jesus had taught them. The last weeks of Jesus' earthly life are filled with the mention of many objects that we find in our homes and amongst our daily activities. Meditate on these things as you read each devotion.

The Lenten season begins with Ash Wednesday and goes right through to Easter Sunday – there are 40 days and 6 Sundays. This is a booklet of short devotionals, prayers, Bible readings and an object for each day during the Lenten Season (including Sundays). The Bible Readings that go with each day lead you through different aspects of Lent for you to think about and reflect on.

As you encounter these simple objects, I pray that they may be reminders of Christ's saving love for you.



Contents

The 'Way of Sorrow'	4	Watch & Pray	29
Our Heavenly Mansion	5	Light of Jesus	30
The Victorious Lamb	6	God Sees All	31
God's Angels	7	Washing Hands	32
Fruitful Life?	8	A King's Sceptre	33
Good Times Tenting	9	Freed!	34
A Humble Servant	10	Enduring All	35
Living Stones	11	A Broken Seal	36
Sword of Christ	12	Bridging the Gap	37
A Royal Welcome	13	Robe of Righteousness	38
Carrying Jesus	14	Cleansing Blood	39
Blending in	15	Gambling for Life	40
Remembering	16	Tears of Sorrow	41
A Victory Sign	17	A Grave Beginning	42
The Bread of Life	18	Hosanna!	43
In Memory	19	A Quiet Place	44
Betrayal!	20	The Decision	45
Traitor's Kiss	21	Robe the King	46
Gift of Forgiveness	22	Christ's Cup	47
Price of Jesus	23	Carry the Cross	48
Showing Love	24	Faith or Proof	49
J-O-Y	25	Any Obstacles?	50
Describing Jesus	26	Prayer	51
Connected to Christ	27		
Moments in Prayer	28		

The 'Way of Sorrow'

Ash Wednesday

Object: A road

Read: Luke 23:26-31

*Jesus said: "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life"
Matthew 7:14a (NIV)*

All of us know roads in our neighbourhood named for famous people or landmarks. The path that Jesus walked from Pilate's courtyard to the top of Golgotha's hill also has a name – *Via Dolorosa* – 'way of sorrows'.

Along this path the women and followers of Jesus wept. No doubt many were sad that this Jew they had expected to end their Roman tyranny turned out to be such a disappointment. Others wept that a friend and teacher should end up like this! Still others wept out of compassion, feeling that no human being should have to endure such suffering and disgrace. Some wept that their hope in this Messiah and Saviour who had fulfilled years of promises seemed to be a misplaced hope.

But Jesus himself tells them of the real sorrow of this path. It does not lie in the shame and suffering He endured. The sorrow that lies here is the failure of most of these people to repent and to trust in Jesus, the Messiah. He could do all that He had promised, all that the Scriptures had foretold.

What sorrow do you feel this Lenten season? Are you sorry for all our Saviour had to endure? Do you weep for the physical pain He must have borne? Turn your sorrow to yourself. Sorrow over your sin. Then repent and rejoice, for the way of sorrow gives way to the path of victory through Christ's glorious resurrection for us!

Prayer: *Lord, thank you that You can take a sorrowful situation and make it a cause for deep rejoicing. Forgive me for my sins and fill me with the joy of your resurrection. Amen.*

Our Heavenly Mansion

2nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Object: A Mansion

Read: John 14:1-3

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 23:6 (NIV)

Have you ever been out driving and passed by a very large beautiful home? Sometimes when we see such a house we exclaim, 'What a mansion!' And we also express the desire to see more of it; 'I sure would like to see the inside!'

Once when Jesus was eating with His disciples He described heaven to them as a mansion. He told them He was going back to heaven, just as He had come from heaven; He was going, He told them, to prepare a place for each of them. Then Jesus added His promise that He would come back and take each of His disciples to the heavenly mansion He was getting ready.

Jesus described heaven for us in terms that we could understand. What comforting assurance Jesus gives us when He tells us He will take us there! This heavenly mansion is not one which we will see only from the outside looking in. By the grace of God the Father, we will see this mansion on the inside. We will be guided through this mansion by the Son of the Owner, and we will never leave this mansion, but live in it forever as our home.

Prayer: *Dear Father, give me a longing to be in your heavenly mansion and a happy desire to make it my home. Thank you for paying the price that I can live there forever. Amen.*

The Victorious Lamb

3rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Object: A Lamb

Read: Isaiah 53:4-9

*"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"
Revelation 5:12 (NIV)*

At a great race, maybe the Melbourne Cup, can you imagine a lamb being led around the winners circle and receiving the blue ribbon and cup? A lamb is not usually an animal that we view as winning anything. A lamb is not aggressive, nor is it bold or crafty. A lamb is gentle, loving and unassuming.

Throughout the Lenten season we think of Jesus as the reading from Isaiah described Him, suffering quietly and willingly like a lamb headed for the slaughter. As we near Easter Sunday we think more and more of Jesus as the Victorious Lamb, the Winner, who has conquered sin and death, who has triumphed over Satan and who has won heaven for us.

The best thing about this winning Lamb is that He does not keep His victory only for Himself. He readily and willingly shares His triumph with all who believe in Him as their Lord and Saviour. By this Lamb's victory we too become winners. The sting of death is gone. The winner's crown of eternal life is ours.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord, for letting me share in the prize of your victory from death, eternal life. Amen.*

God's Angels

4th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Object: An Angel

Read: Psalm 91:9-16

*Jesus replied, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"
Matthew 26:53 (NIV)*

Angels played a role in Jesus' life a number of times. Angels announced the news of His birth. Angels ministered to Him as He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. An angel appeared to strengthen Him as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. Angels occupied the empty tomb on Easter morning. Angels appeared to His disciples when He had ascended back to heaven.

As He was taken prisoner in Gethsemane, Jesus asked His disciples, "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" The angels, had Jesus requested them, would have come to protect Him. But Jesus chose to not avoid what He knew lay ahead of Him. "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled?" he asked.

When we are confronted with a difficult situation, when we are plunged headlong into danger, we look for a way of escape. We take comfort knowing that God's angels, His messengers of mercy, are given charge of us to protect us. As we close the day we pray with Luther, "Let your holy angel be with me so that the evil one will have no power over me."

Jesus looked for no escape from His impending danger. He did not seek a way out. He called upon no legions of angels to protect Him. He set His course toward Calvary, and beyond. Now those legions of angels rejoice as people come to faith knowing Jesus' sacrifice.

Prayer: *Thank you God for Your angel's work in Jesus life and in mine. Let your holy angels be with me and protect me from all the evil in the world. Amen.*

Fruitful Life?

1st Sunday during Lent

Object: An Empty Tree

Read: Mark 11:12-14; 20-21 & Luke 13:6-9

"Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit." Mark 11:13a (NIV)

Have you ever been hungry, gone to the biscuit tin or snack jar sure that it was full, reached in expectantly and found nothing? Perhaps you knew that the day before it had been well stocked with goodies. Feelings of disappointment and maybe even anger rise inside of you. What should have been there just wasn't there.

Jesus had some of the same feelings as He hungrily approached a healthy looking fig tree only to find many lush leaves but no fruit. The feeling of disappointment surfaced. After all an empty tree is no help for an empty stomach.

Jesus looks to many so-called Christians and feels the same disappointment as He did with the fig tree. He sees people who profess to be Christians, who belong to a church and from them He expects the fruit of genuine love, care and faith. When he looks closer to see the Christian faith life missing He knows that the faith is weak or dead. What a disappointment!

Check your own life. Does your faith in Jesus produce fruit in your life? Do your works show others the love and joy of Jesus that is in you? If so, praise and thank God that His Holy Spirit has kept your faith alive and fruit-bearing. If fruits of love are missing in your life, turn to God's Word and the Sacraments to revitalize your faith. Pray that God will use you to bring forth good fruit.

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times my lack of fruit has been a disappointment. Fill my life with fruit-bearing that comes from my love for you. Amen.*

Good Times Tenting

5th Day in Lent (Monday)

Object: A tent

Read: Matthew 17:1-9

'Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here... I will put up three shelters..." Matthew 17:4a (NIV)

When we see a tent we usually connect it with fun and enjoyable times. Tents are used to house circus performances; backyard tents of old blankets add fun to a holiday. Getting the family tent out of storage means holiday time is near, or a camping trip is being planned. Tents bring to mind good times.

Peter, James and John had what we might call a good time on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured before them; they saw a spectacular sight. They wanted to put up a tent and stay on the mountain so they could see Jesus in His glory. But Jesus had other plans. He had work for them to do, and they couldn't stay on the mountain forever and still get their work done.

Jesus provides good times for us. Occasionally He gives us a 'mountain top' experience: an inspiring worship service, a breath-taking view of nature, a quiet moment when we are suddenly overwhelmed with thoughts of His love. Moments like these, however, can never be the focus of our attention. We remember that Jesus has work for us to do in building His kingdom, and we must come down from the mountain to do it.

Prayer: *Thank you, Father, for the message of your love and grace which lifts me up and encourages me as I go about your work. Amen.*

A Humble Servant

6th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Object: A Tub & Towel

Read: John 13:1-17

"All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another..."
1 Peter 5:5b (NIV)

Who is the greatest, the restaurant owner or the waiter? Who is the most famous, the trainer or the player? Who is the most learned, the disciple or the teacher? Jesus gives His disciples a lesson on greatness by example. He the Lord and Ruler, the almighty Son of God stoops low to wash the feet of His disciples. What humility! What servanthood! Jesus always teaches that the humble will be exalted. The last will be first. The least will be the greatest.

But how do we qualify for such a role? We can find many opportunities in Christian service to serve our Lord and Master. True, there aren't many calls for footwashers in today's society. There are, however, many lonely who need the humble service of companionship. There are many hungry needing to be fed. There are countless sick and imprisoned who still need reaching by the Gospel message. Are you ready to grab your 'tub & towel'?

Christ reminds us that service for Him is a privilege. He tells us that when we do anything kind for others it is as though we are doing it for Him. We who know Jesus' love for us will want to find new chances to serve others.

Prayer: *Lord, your unselfish service took you all the way to the cross for me. Move me to serve you by serving others. Amen.*

Living Stones

7th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Object: A Pile of Stones

Read: Luke 19:37-40

*"I tell you," Jesus replied, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."
Luke 19:40 (NIV)*

Stones can shout? Really? What is Jesus talking about? Many of those in the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem must have wondered what exactly Jesus meant by this when replying to the Pharisees. Present there were His disciples - not always the quickest to catch on; also curiosity seekers - wanting a glimpse of Jesus or more knowledge about Him; and there were His enemies who wanted only to silence Jesus and the crowd.

God's plan, however, was to have Jesus praised, and there was nothing that would stop that from happening. When Jesus' enemies asked Him to silence the crowd, He responded that it wouldn't work; God would make the stones shout in place of the people. Obviously, God has the power to do just that.

In our time there are still enemies of Jesus who attempt to silence His followers, stop them from singing His praise. They are overpowered, by the strength of God's might. He will have Christ's praise be sung.

St. Peter calls those who follow Christ 'living stones'. As Christ's followers we sometimes sense the presence of His enemies and are tempted to be silent 'stones'. It is then we need to recall that we praise God for His might and His salvation: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." As King He rules over all, even His enemies. Don't leave your praise to the stones! As 'living stones', don't be silent ones, but shout His glory. Stones **can** shout!

Prayer: *Lord, let not only my lips, but also my life be a song of praise to you. Amen.*

Sword of Christ

8th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Object: A Sword

Read: John 18:10-11

"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Ephesians 6:17 (NIV)

Peter was a man who acted on impulse. As the guard attempted to take Jesus prisoner, Peter drew his sword in defence of his Lord. Just as quickly Jesus told Peter to put his sword away, and He healed the injury inflicted. It is clear that Jesus knew the time had come for the events prophesied in Scripture to be fulfilled.

As much as we criticize Peter for his later denial of Jesus, we should give him some credit for this moment of valour. But, in our defence of Jesus, let us be certain we are using the proper weapons. Christ's honour and His kingdom are best defended using the weapons He provides. St. Paul speaks of these in connection with the Christian's armour in Ephesians 6. The sword is the sword of the Spirit. It is identified as being not a metal weapon, but the Word of God. In Hebrews 4:12, the Word is compared to a sharp double-edged sword. This weapon is used both defensively and offensively; as it is with the Word of God.

It is God's Word which preserves and keeps alive the message of Christ's life, His teachings, and His victory over death. It is the Word which testifies to Christ's power, perfection and divinity. It is the Word which convicts men of their sin and leads them to their Saviour. The way to defend Christ is through the sword of the Gospel.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me to use your Word effectively to defend you and to share your Gospel of Good News with others. Amen.*

A Royal Welcome

9th Day in Lent (Friday)

Object: A royal cape & crown

Read: Mark 11:1-10

*"See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
Zechariah 9:9b (NIV)*

'Roll out the red carpet', is a phrase that calls on us to put out our very best. Everything must be ready and there is an air of excitement for someone special to arrive.

So it was also in Jerusalem when Jesus was hailed as the King! It was almost Passover time. It was just the right time in human history. The Scriptures were being fulfilled. The Messiah was entering Jerusalem for the last time. The crowds, who would later shout, 'Crucify Him', had rolled out the red carpet and softened His path with the very clothes from their backs. The shouts seemed to indicate the joy and gladness in recognising that Jesus was truly their King. What happened to these cries of joy in the week ahead? Did these royal subjects forget their King?

A common table grace used before eating begins: 'Come, Lord Jesus...'. Do we really recognise what we are saying? If we welcome our King we must be ready for His constant life and presence with us. Our lives of joy and times of sorrow are strengthened by His presence. Are we also prepared to share in His humiliation, pain and death and after that, His glory?

'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!'

Prayer: *Come, Lord Jesus. You are my King. My life is strengthened in your coming as my Saviour and Lord. Amen.*

Carrying Jesus

10th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Object: A Donkey

Read: Matthew 21:1-11

"See, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." John 12:15b (NIV)

'Donkey' is a card game where you need to find pairs of animals through drawing cards. But there is only one donkey which you try to get rid of because if you have it at the end you have lost the game. Some of you may remember this game and how the 'donkey' was the card you just didn't want. A donkey is not an animal a king would choose to ride. It is portrayed as a slow, not-too-bright, stubborn and unattractive animal.

In Bible times a donkey's life was one of hard work. Yet this is the privileged animal Jesus chose to bear Him as he entered Jerusalem. The events of Jesus' entry were foretold by the prophet Zechariah around 500 years earlier (*Zechariah 9:9*). Even the donkey was mentioned.

Other prophets foretold events where Jesus would go and what He would do. They also foretold how many people would carry the message of Jesus and His love into the hearts of people through God's Word and around the world. The prophets were talking about us!

We are privileged to be able to carry the message of Jesus; telling of His birth, life, death and resurrection to others who need to hear it. What a joy to then see these people acknowledge Jesus as their Lord. How gracious of God that He should choose us, lowly and sinful, to carry the glorious news of His love to others.

Prayer: *Dear Father, make me aware of the opportunities I have to carry your love to others. Amen.*

Blending in

2nd Sunday during Lent

Object: A fire

Read: John 18:15-27

"Peter also was standing with them, warming himself." John 18:18b (NIV)

Warming by a fire seems an innocent action on a cold evening. For Peter it became a chance to blend in, to be a part of the crowd. How comfortable this was when all the worst fears and concerns about Jesus seemed to be coming true. What would happen? How would this affect him? How safe it felt to blend in with soldiers and servants around a fire!

But Peter was not allowed to remain unknown for very long. First a servant girl and then others at the fireside questioned his relationship to Jesus. The fireside comfort promoted bitter curses and denials from Peter that he ever knew his Teacher.

How often have we been tempted to blend in at the 'fireside'? Perhaps for us it was easy not to say our table prayer in a public place or to turn away from the dirty joke. Perhaps our acquaintances or business partners encouraged us to 'blend in by the fireside'. This, too, is a denial every bit as wrong as Simon Peter's.

But as forgiveness flowed for Peter's denial so also today Christ's forgiveness is there for all who have denied Him. Christ comes to us and empowers us so that as His servants we can speak up for Him. We can withstand the temptation to be a part of the group and instead boldly proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord. We can share the difference Christ has made in our lives.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, give me the courage and conviction to stand up for you even when it is difficult. Amen.*

Remembering

11th Day in Lent (Monday)

Object: A Rooster

Read: Mark 14:29-31; 66-72

"Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept." Mark 14:72b (NIV)

What do you use to jog your memory? Perhaps a post-it note on the refrigerator or a reminder text on your phone makes you aware that there is something you need to remember. Jesus used a rooster's crow to remind Peter of his bold statement that he would never leave nor deny his Teacher.

In the courtyard after Peter's cursing denial that he was not Jesus' disciple or even knew Him, it was the rooster's crowing that brought Peter to the realization of what he had done. What a rush of feelings that reminder brought. Shame, sorrow, guilt were all expressed by the tears Peter shed.

Each Christian can daily use many reminders in their life. We all need to be reminded that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour. We need to remember our baptism and the new life and forgiveness that brings. We need to recall the many who do not know Jesus and His command that we share the Good News. What sound or symbol will call you to a renewed commitment to your Lord and Saviour? What things that you see or hear daily remind you that you are a Christian? Maybe one of these will bring someone you meet to know the love and joy we have in being God's child.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to always remember that I am your child and friend. Amen.*

A Victory Sign

12th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Object: Pile of clothes

Read: John 20:1-10

"He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head." John 20:6b-7a (NIV)

What does a pile of clothes say to you? Perhaps it says someone changed in a hurry. Maybe it says laundry day is needed. Maybe the pile of clothes means to pack for a trip away. It may say time for a lecture on neatness and cleanliness of your room.

Peter and John ran to the tomb. John entered first and saw the stack of linen grave clothes. The cloth that had been on Jesus' head was laid apart from the other clothes. Still the sight said nothing to Peter and John. It only increased their fear that the body of their Lord and Saviour had been stolen. It reminded them of unfulfilled promises and shattered dreams. It gave them uneasiness as they thought that even in death the Saviour's enemies would not let Him rest.

What a different feeling those stack of clothes gave after Peter and John's glimpse of the risen Lord. Now the clothes became a sign of victory. They showed a Christ whom death could not conquer and whom the tomb could not hold. He had left the clothes of death behind, for He was truly alive.

Now His victory is ours. The clothes of death cannot hold us in. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, has washed away our sins and given us a robe of righteousness to wear in our heavenly home.

Prayer: *I praise you, dear Jesus, for breaking through the clothes of death and giving me your robe of eternal life. Amen.*

The Bread of Life

13th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Object: Bread

Read: John 6:48-58 & Mark 14:22

Jesus taught: "Give us today our daily bread." Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

Bread is one of the most common foods in our diet and we have it for most meals. It is recognised as one of the basic food groups essential to a well balanced diet. In fact, bread is so common to our eating habits that the term has become synonymous with food itself. 'Give us this day our daily bread' is a prayer which does not ask simply for bread, but for all that is necessary for healthy living.

As bread is so important to our diet to maintain physical health, even more so Christ is essential to our lives to be healthy in spirit. Jesus called Himself the 'Bread of Life'. There is no life in our spirit without a close connection to Christ by faith. Including Christ in our daily life strengthens us for the tasks of the day and keeps our sights fixed on the life to come. Christ, the Bread from Heaven, is essential for eternal life.

Bread comes in many forms and is made from many substances and is one of the most plentiful of all foods. As the 'Bread of Life', Christ offers full salvation to all who believe. Christ is not limited to just a few, nor does He limit His gifts. After all there were 12 basketfuls left over after feeding the 5000. He offers Himself abundantly to all. In Him and through Him is eternal life.

Prayer: *Thank you, Father, for feeding me with the 'Bread of Life'; keep my faith strong in you. Amen.*

In Memory

14th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Object: Bottle of perfume

Read: John 12:1-8 & Mark 14:3-9

Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Mark 14:9 (NIV)

Steve Jobs is remembered for developing the Apple iPhone. Olivia Newton John is known for her music and the movie 'Grease'. Steve Irwin is known for his crocodile capers and wildlife conservation. Many people throughout history have an event or trademark by which they will be remembered.

Mary was known for her love and compassion in anointing Jesus with a very costly perfume. In her love she had unknowingly prepared Jesus for His death; and even more, His rising from the dead. While others scolded her, Jesus realized her kindness and praised her for what she had done. In the Gospel of Mark it even says that what she has done will be told in memory of her. What an amazing tribute! What a way to be remembered: being loving to Love Incarnate – Jesus Christ.

How do you want to be remembered? Will you be thought of as a friend, a grouch, a generous giver, someone you can always count on? Will people know you because of worldly fame or some great feat of heroism? What better way could anyone be remembered than to have others say: 'They really love Jesus. You can see it in how they live and love others'. That would be the epitome of greatness!

Prayer: *Lord, let me be remembered as a faithful servant of yours who lives for you and others. Amen.*

Betrayal!

15th Day in Lent (Friday)

Object: Piece of Bread

Read: John 13:21-30

"Then dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon." John 13:26b (NIV)

As children, Skye and Ruth had written to each other for the last 30 years. Now they were finally to meet each other in person. Although they had exchanged photos, they were still not sure that they would recognise each other. "You'll know me by the red rose I will be carrying," wrote Skye.

Betrayal! Just when Jesus was sharing a very significant meal with his closest friends, He says that one of His friends is going to betray him. Surely not! But who could it be? Jesus then gave them a sign so that they could all recognise who the betrayer would be. *"It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."*

Jesus knew this would happen. Just as He knows that we too at times will betray Him, either in our thoughts, our actions or our words. We don't want to believe that we can or would do this, but it is real and it does happen. How bad we then feel. But, just as quickly Christ forgives us and accepts us back amongst his close friends. Jesus' death and resurrection was also for sinners like you and me, through His love we will always be recognised as His children.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to recognise my sins so that I may use the power of your Holy Spirit to change my life. Amen.*

Traitor's Kiss

16th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Object: Lips

Read: Mark 14:44-46

"Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.'" Matthew 26:48 (NIV)

The double agent has now been discovered. The actions that once seemed friendly and kind are now seen to be part of the plan. The gentle words and loving inquiries are found to be ways to gain information. All confidence is now broken. Disgust and distrust are present everywhere.

Judas comes to Jesus. His kiss, his very presence seemed to show love and concern for Jesus. But all too soon the truth is revealed. The kiss is a betrayal. As the soldiers grab Jesus, we see Judas as the traitor he really is.

Perhaps we think we could never identify ourselves with this action. As we review our lives we see that our lips have made us traitors as well. At times we have used them to share God's Word, speak kind messages, and show true affection. At other times our lips have spoken lies, poured forth hateful words and used dirty language. Our lips have also made us double agents – traitors to the cause of Christ.

But Christ's lips speak the truth to us. They tell us of His forgiveness and life. They call us to turn lip-service into life service. They bring us the power to change our traitorous actions and live lives in keeping with the name Christian. Christ's lips speak only of love and acceptance to you – it's pure GRACE!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, keep my lips and thoughts pure and true to you. Amen.*

Gift of Forgiveness

3rd Sunday during Lent

Object: Rope

Read: Matthew 27:3-5

*"'I have sinned,' Judas said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.'"
Matthew 27:4a (NIV)*

How often have you heard the phrase: 'I've reached the end of my rope'? Perhaps a mother says it after having cleaned up the juice spillage for the third time. Perhaps a father exclaims it after trying to stretch his income to the next pay day. Maybe students might say it after having been given a fourth assignment due for this week.

For Judas the words were literally true. He had sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. He had betrayed Him by a kiss. He had seen Him bound and led away. If he had thought Jesus would miraculously free Himself, these hopes were dashed. Even his statement before the high priests that he had betrayed innocent blood brought nothing but unconcern. What could he do? What was left for him? In hopeless despair, Judas reached the end of his rope and hanged himself.

The despairing Christian need never experience such hopelessness. Christ is still there and always will be. His forgiveness and strength can renew the most deflated soul. Jesus will always comfort and support us even when we feel we are at 'the end of our rope.' The Bible is full of God's constant expression of love for all His children and He is always working for our good. Look to the cross and know the forgiveness that can begin a new life in Christ.

Prayer: *Lord, help me when I feel like giving up. Let me know your love has only good things planned for me. Amen.*

Price of Jesus

17th Day in Lent (Monday)

Object: Coins

Read: Matthew 26:14-16

"[Judas] asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him [Jesus] over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty silver coins."

Matthew 26:15 (NIV)

What's it worth to you? What would you be willing to pay for it? These are common questions in a world where value is judged in dollars and cents.

Judas asked the same sort of question as he prepared to betray his Master, Jesus Christ. The sum of thirty pieces of silver seems small to us when you compare what Jesus had done for him; how He had guided Judas, taught him and loved him to the very end. What was guiding Judas to do this deed? Greed? Envy?

We also make such decisions in our lives. Each time we are tempted to put things before Jesus and the work of His kingdom, we are in a sense deciding just how much He is worth to us. So, what value is Christ to your life? Is He first in your life as your Saviour and your Lord? Are you ready to give up everything to follow Him?

The price of such service to Jesus may be high. It may cost us earthly treasures, friends, job and even our family. Yet nothing can compare with the price Christ paid for us as He poured out His precious blood so that we might live eternally.

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus, help me to see you as my priceless treasure. Amen.*

Showing Love

18th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Object: Jars

Read: John 19:39-40 & Mark 16:1

"Very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb." Luke 24:1b (NIV)

One way to show love is by giving a gift. When a person we love has a birthday, anniversary, or other special day in their life, we buy a present and give it to them. Often we include a card expressing our love for them. These gifts are not earned or expected but freely given because of our love.

Several times in Jesus' life someone gave a gift to give Him. Mary from the town of Bethany wanted to show her love for Jesus by giving Him some expensive perfume (John 12:3). Another woman (Luke 7:37-38) loved Jesus because she knew He had forgiven her all her many sins, and she wanted to show her love by giving Him a gift and anointing Him. Several women went to Jesus' grave early on Easter morning to pour a mixture of spices on His body. Even though He was dead, they thought they still wanted to show their love for Him, and prepare His body for burial.

We don't bring gifts of perfume, spices or ointments to Jesus today. It isn't because we don't love Him. We do love Him, and we use many other ways to show it. We show our love through spending time with Him in prayer and worship; through the giving of our time to help others in need; sharing God's love with others... We know He has forgiven us our many sins and loves us unconditionally.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord, for the chances I have to show my love to you. You have done so much for me. Amen.*

J-O-Y

19th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Object: An Ear

Read: John 18:2-11

"Jesus commanded Peter, 'Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?'" John 18:11 (NIV)

The acronym for **JOY** has been used by a Christian to prioritise their choices for daily living. It reminds us to put **J**esus first, **O**thers second, and **Y**ourself last. If we followed this simple formula throughout our day to day life, our decision-making would be much easier and definitely God-pleasing. It would then also follow that our lives would be full of more **JOY!**

Jesus perfectly followed this simple formula throughout His life. As He thought about His suffering and death He clearly put God's will in the first place. In the above reading Jesus put others before Himself. Even as Peter drew his sword to defend Him, Jesus tells Peter to 'Put your sword away!' In His love and compassion Jesus reaches out and gives His healing touch to the one who had come to capture Him. In doing this Jesus showed that He had the power to be able to save Himself, but rather chose to suffer and die for others.

Christ's love, forgiveness and healing are there for our use in our daily lives. To keep the acronym J-O-Y is to keep God's commandments. Just as He healed the soldier's ear, He is there to help us, heal us, and empower us to put Him first and then remind us of the needs of others.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help me to put your will first as I make choices and decisions for my life. Amen.*

Describing Jesus

20th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Object: A Sign

Read: John 19:19-22

"Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." John 19:19 (NIV)

What sign would you use to describe who Jesus is? Some would maybe write, 'Master, teacher'. Jesus was definitely that! He taught 'as one having authority'. The crowds gathered to hear His sermons, even forgetting the time of day or the call of hunger as they clung to His words.

Others would write the title, 'Prophet'. This is also true. No prophet was mightier than Jesus, who not only spoke God's Word and told of many future happenings, but also fulfilled the prophecies that were spoken throughout the Old Testament about the Messiah who was to come.

Pilate wrote the sign, 'King of the Jews'. The chief priests protested this title, but Pilate told them, "What I have written, I have written." Although the accusers would not accept it, Pilate's words were true. Jesus had come to be the King of His people, to win their heavenly palace for them through His suffering, death and resurrection.

'My Saviour' is another description of Jesus. This is a declaration which expresses the faith we have that comes from the Holy Spirit when He works in our hearts and lives. Heaven is our eternal home because of the victory of Christ's death and resurrection. We are then known as 'Children of the King'.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I thank you that I can call you my Saviour and Lord for you have won eternal life for me. Amen.*

Connected to Christ

21st Day in Lent (Friday)

Object: A Branch

Read: John 15:1-11

*"Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine."
John 15:4a (GNB)*

Moving to the Riverland of South Australia, seeing a branch grafted from a tree or vine to another to have it bear fruit was something new. A branch could be cut off, and through careful pruning and grafting could be attached to a new vine or tree. This can be a process to make the plant disease resistant or stronger.

We are like a branch that has been cut off. Apart from Christ there can be no home for us and eternal death is our future. But, when we are connected or grafted to Christ through our baptism, we are given a new life. We are forgiven, renewed, brought back to life and the blood of Jesus covers all our sins.

The life we have now is not merely an existence with no purpose. Those who are connected to Christ are in the fruit-bearing business. The love and forgiveness our Saviour gives, moves us in new patterns of living and new adventures of service. Our lives have a purpose to bring glory and honour to God and to share the love and the hope we have of eternal life with our Lord and Saviour forever.

Prayer: *Lord, keep me connected to you so that my life can be of service and bear fruit for you. Amen.*

Moments in Prayer

22nd Day in Lent (Saturday)

Object: Praying Hands

Read: Luke 22:39-46

"[Jesus] withdrew about a stone's throw beyond [the disciples], knelt down and prayed..." Luke 22:41 (NIV)

When teaching a child to pray the first thing we say is: 'Fold your hands and bow your head'. One reason is to keep the child focussed on what is being said and not being disturbed by things happening around them. To see someone in this position indicates that a person is talking to their God.

Jesus' disciples too, recognised the position of prayer. Many times at the end of a day, tired from the teaching and crowds, Jesus set time aside and talked with His Heavenly Father. Jesus' disciples knew that these moments strengthened their Lord. One time they even asked, 'Lord teach us to pray.' Jesus did just that in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

At this time, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus felt the pressures of the job before Him. He knew the loneliness, hurt and frustration that were on the path to His Easter Victory. He needed the strength and comfort that only words with His Father could give Him. So Jesus spent moments in prayer and encouraged His disciples to do the same.

We also need to have quiet moments with our Heavenly Father. We need to live in a minute-by-minute prayer relationship that will constantly keep us in touch with our God and the help and strength He can bring to our lives.

Prayer: *Lord, let your will be done in my life. Help me to constantly seek your strength for my life. Amen.*

Watch & Pray

4th Sunday during Lent

Object: An hourglass

Read: Mark 14:32-42

Jesus said to his disciples, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Mark 14:38 (NIV)

'I just don't have time.' 'Time is up!' 'I have no time to do it.' These and similar expressions remind us of the fast pace of today's world. Our jobs demand our time. Our studies and homework take time. Even leisure time is scheduled with meetings, sporting activities, classes, etc. Our time is at a premium!

Jesus' disciples were guilty of poor time management. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked them to watch and pray for just one hour. What a small request. But the days had been hectic and it was late in the evening. Sleep took over and the time was gone. Now there was no more time to spend with Jesus. The soldiers coming with Judas penetrated time with a sharp reality and Jesus was taken away.

How often does Jesus call us to 'watch and pray'? He encourages us to study His Word, spend time in worship, and take time to share His Word in just small ways or by some small acts with family or friends. But time marches on. Do we use or abuse the time God has given us?

Christ came to redeem our time, and with His power our time can be filled with the business He has planned for us. We can find new moments to watch and pray. Every moment of our lives we can serve and give glory to Him.

Prayer: *Lord, I give my time to you and ask you to help me use it to fulfill your purpose. Amen.*

Light of Jesus

23rd Day in Lent (Monday)

Object: A torch

Read: John 18:1-6

"For God... made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NIV)

The soldiers, some officers, the Pharisees, and Judas went searching for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was night, and it was dark. Jesus' enemies were determined not to let Him slip away under the cover of darkness; they took with them their torches and lanterns so they could easily find Him and so He could not get away.

Jesus called Himself the Light of the World (*John 9:5*); yet the enemies of Jesus needed artificial light of lanterns and torches to find the true Light - Jesus. Jesus questioned their actions: *"When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me."* (*Luke 22:53*) The enemies of Jesus knew what they were doing was evil, and they hoped the darkness would hide them.

Actually, darkness was a problem for them; not the darkness around them, but the darkness inside of them. The darkness of their sin of unbelief didn't stop them from finding Jesus, but it did stop them from seeing who He really was. The enemies of Jesus failed to see the light, the light of knowing Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

We have seen the light. We know Jesus is God's Son and what He did for us at Easter. We know His light shines through the darkness of our sin and points to the brightness of God's love and forgiveness. Knowing that brightens up our whole lives!

Prayer: *Dear Father, thank you for sending Jesus, the Light of the World, to take away the darkness of my sin. Amen.*

God Sees All

24th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Object: A Blindfold

Read: Luke 22:63-65

*"Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists and said, 'Prophecy!' And the guards took him and beat him."
Mark 14:65 (NIV)*

There are happy shouts from the children as they change the blindfold from one person to another as they try to pin the tail on the donkey. A squeal of delight issues from a child as he sneaks up behind a friend, covers their eyes and calls out, 'Guess who?'

Imagine the above scenes – rather delightful! But how different is the scene that Jesus found Himself in with the soldiers. They took Him, bound Him, blindfolded Him and then hit Him again and again demanding that Jesus prophesy who hit Him. The air is full of cruelty, hate and unbelief. Jesus though, silently endures this mockery and hate directed at Him.

Some act today as if the blindfold from Jesus' eyes has not yet been removed. They live as though God does not see what's going on. But God is still all-knowing and all-seeing. *"He watches people everywhere and knows what they are doing."* (Psalm 11:4b GNB) For those who disobey God, this thought is rather unsettling. For the Christian, God's sight is joyful and comforting.

God does see. He is there knowing the problems and hurts that happen in life. He is there seeing our needs, our wants, our cares. He is there seeing that we are never given more than we have strength to bear. Thank God that He wears no blindfold. His eyes are turned to His people and His love reaches out to see what is best for them. God's 20-20 vision is one of our greatest blessings!

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for always seeing me and my needs. Amen.*

Washing Hands

25th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Object: Jug & Bowl of Water

Read: Matthew 27:15-24

"[Pilate] took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. 'I am innocent of this man's blood,' he said. 'It is your responsibility!'"
Matthew 27:24b (NIV)

I have heard the phrase: 'I wash my hands of this whole mess.' It is seldom meant literally; rather it is said to convey the feeling of not wanting anything to do with an activity or situation which is not going or turning out the way it was intended. By 'washing our hands' of it, we refuse to accept responsibility towards it and the outcome.

Pilate publically 'washed his hands' of Jesus' death; he didn't want to accept any responsibility for it. He even stated it was not his responsibility any longer. At times we would also prefer to think we were not responsible for Jesus' death. We don't like the feeling of saying it was because of us that He died. And yet it was because of our sins and the sins of all others that Jesus did die. There is no way we can 'wash our hands' of His death.

Actually, there is no reason why we should want to 'wash our hands' of Jesus' death. It was because of our sins and the sins of everyone else that Jesus **chose** to die. He chose to obey His Father and act selflessly to save the human race from eternal death and damnation. It is only by His death that we can have forgiveness and life eternal. Do we really want to 'wash our hands' of this forgiveness and grace?

Prayer: *I thank you, Lord Jesus that you chose not to 'wash your hands' of me but accept the penalty for my sins. Thank you for forgiving me. Amen.*

A King's Sceptre

26th Day in Lent (Thursday)

Object: A Stick

Read: Matthew 27:29

"They [the soldiers] put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him." Matthew 27:29b (NIV)

A stick or staff does not seem to be a very fitting symbol for Jesus to hold to show He was a king. Kings owned sceptres made of gold and rare metals and have swords with jewels and precious stones mounted on them. The King, as one who ruled over all, was worthy of such a costly and valuable sign. Jesus had only a stick from a common plant.

Yet the stick that Jesus was given was in a sense a very fitting symbol of His ruling. He told Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' His rule was not over a nation defined by geographical boundaries. His rule was in the hearts of His people. His power did not come from having many soldiers and horses, powerful weapons, great riches, or having many bow down before Him. His power came from being God Himself. He did not try to enlarge His kingdom by waging war; His kingdom was and is built by a message of peace.

Jesus did not receive His power from others to be king. Jesus was King because He was God, and all power was His because He was God. Yet Jesus laid aside a large part of the power that belonged to Him as He became a man, as He let Himself be captured by His enemies, and put to death. Jesus is now our Heavenly King who rules over everything for eternity.

Prayer: *Thank you Father, for sending Jesus as a King of peace. Keep me always under His rule. Amen.*

Freed!

27th Day in Lent (Friday)

Object: A Whip

Read: John 19:1-3

*"Pilate wanted to please the crowd, so he set Barabbas free for them. Then he had Jesus whipped and handed him over to be crucified."
Mark 15:15 (GNB)*

The whip is an object used to control something or someone. Stockmen use the cracking sound of the whip to guide the cattle where they are needed to go; the strike of a whip prods a race horse to run faster. In the past, people were whipped as a form of punishment for crimes committed and slaves were whipped to be disciplined.

Jesus was whipped by Pilate's soldiers and was treated like a hardened criminal even though He had done no wrong. He was treated as a slave, and yet no one was His master. Jesus went through this suffering and punishment to complete God's plan of salvation for us. He allowed himself to be taken prisoner, to be whipped, mocked and put to death. It was all a part of God's bigger plan to free us from the slavery of sin.

St. Paul reminds us that we are born into the world as slaves to sin. Sin rules over us naturally. The victory of Christ over sin can now set us free from the slavery of sin (*Romans 6:1-11*). When you next see a whip, thank our Heavenly Father that we have been freed by the blood of Jesus. No longer are we a slave to sin, we have been freed to be a servant of Christ.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, make me a loving and willing servant of you. Thank you for freeing me from the bonds of my sin. Amen.*

Enduring All

28th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Object: Crown of Thorns

Read: Mark 15:16-20

"They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head."

Matthew 27:28-29a (NIV)

Netflix has put out a series entitled: 'The Crown'. It is a story surrounding Queen Elizabeth's reign and being crowned at a young age to be Queen of England. Her coronation was performed with pomp and majesty and everything was perfect. Her crown was beautiful, glittering with gold and precious stones and she was robed spectacularly.

How different was Jesus' crowning before He was taken to His cross. He was stripped, whipped, ridiculed, given a robe of mockery and a crown of thorns. This 'crown of thorns' was not a crown that would normally be put on the God of the universe, but it was a crown taken by choice by our Saviour. By choice Jesus showed Himself as humble and He emptied himself of His Godly power to bear the mockery and ridicule of a convicted felon. His crown of thorns pierced His forehead and the whole scene pierces our hearts knowing that He went through all this suffering for us.

Jesus is the greatest King who ever lived. Christ's choice that led to the cross has brought us forgiveness and eternal life. The Crown He chose to wear allows us to live in a Heavenly Mansion with Him forever.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I crown you not with thorns but as Lord of my life. Thank you for suffering for me. Amen.*

A Broken Seal

5th Sunday during Lent

Object: An official seal

Read: Matthew 27:62-66

"So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." Matthew 27:66 (NIV)

Pilate issued orders that his official seal be placed on the rock covering the door of Jesus' tomb. His soldiers and Jesus' enemies were afraid that Jesus' followers would attempt to steal His body and say He had risen and was alive. Now no one could tamper with the door of the tomb and not have it discovered, for the seal would be broken. The door of the tomb had been made secure and no one could get inside.

Really, the enemies of Jesus had the wrong angle on this action. They were concerned that someone from the outside would break into the tomb; not even thinking that Jesus on the inside would 'break out'. And as the glorious Easter accounts tell us, that is exactly what happened. Pilate's soldiers and the governor's seal could not prevent it. By the power that was distinctly His, Christ rose, broke the official seal, burst out of the tomb, and now lives.

The seal was broken and the tomb, no longer secure, stood open. How differently we look at the broken seal and empty tomb. Both are really a part of God's seal upon His promise to us of eternal life. Because Christ rose, we know that we too shall rise and live again. Pilate, unknowingly and unintentionally, provided a great testimony to the truth of the Resurrection when he sealed the tomb! The empty tomb helps us to overcome our fear of death. Pilate's seal is broken; God's seal is intact.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord, for the seal of your love and faithfulness given to me in your resurrection. Amen.*

Bridging the Gap

29th Day in Lent (Monday)

Object: Curtains

Read: Mark 15:37-39

*"The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."
Mark 15:38 (NIV)*

Someone was in trouble. The children had been play fighting with lightsabers in the lounge room, somewhere they weren't allowed to. In their fighting one child caught their foot on mum's new curtains, waiting to be hemmed, and there was a loud ripping sound. Someone was in trouble!

The curtain of the temple ripped in two when Jesus died. This curtain concealed the most holy place in the temple, a place only the high priest was allowed to enter only once each year. It was now torn in two allowing all God's people to enter and be in the presence of God all the time. Jesus, the best high priest, made all the other priests unnecessary. All of God's people could now approach God directly without going through the priests. This was something they had never been able to do before. Jesus had bridged the gap caused by our sinfulness. By His death He had removed people from the 'trouble' of their sins and made them friends with God. Jesus took the sins of all of us to the cross so that we can come and be in the presence of God.

The curtain was torn when Jesus died. We know what that means: someone is **out** of trouble – us!

Prayer: *Thank you God, for the privilege I have of coming to you personally. Amen.*

Robe of Righteousness

30th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Object: A robe

Read: 1 Peter 4:12-19

"I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness..." Isaiah 61:10 (NIV)

What a pitiful scene! Jesus had one of His few earthly possessions taken from Him. Not only that but it was gambled over in His sight by His persecutors. The robe was one piece of cloth without a seam and so was actually worth some money. Jesus had no more need for his earthly robe, but it was sad that the people watching His death could not see the eternal robe that He offered them.

Isaiah speaks of the 'robe of righteousness' with which God has covered each of those who believe in Him. This robe was purchased for all by the perfect life that Christ lived in our place, a life that you and I could never match. This robe of righteousness cannot be stolen, gambled for, or taken by force, but it is given away freely to all. The robe of righteousness, while having no material value, is priceless in terms of eternity. There is no limit of quantity on this robe; anyone who desires can have it. This robe of righteousness can never wear out and it comes with an eternal guarantee. God looks at the bearer of this robe and sees not the sins of the person in it, but the perfect life of Christ instead. He makes all who wear this robe by faith His children and gives them a place in His heavenly home.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me to be thankful for the robe of righteousness that you have given me to wear. What an amazing price you paid for it! Amen.*

Cleansing Blood

31st Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Object: Blood

Read: John 19:28-37

"Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." John 19:34 (NIV)

The loss of blood is usually something to be avoided or stopped. Children are warned not to play with knives or sharp objects because they might cut themselves and a cut would bleed. When someone has a cut, we bandage it to stop the blood from running. We know bleeding is not always harmful because it can 'wash' dirt or other foreign matter from the wound before it stops. The blood that courses through us keeps us alive.

It is not a pretty picture that we call to mind when we think of Jesus on the cross. He bleeds from the wounds in His hands and feet, from the thorns of the crown pressed upon His head, from the cuts of the soldiers' whips. He is weakened by the loss of blood, and has no bandages to stop the flow.

Yet, there is beauty in this picture; there's beauty in the blood of Jesus when each of us sees that He bled and died for us. John writes in his first letter to the church (1 John 1:7), *'The blood of Jesus... cleanses us from all sin.'* We become beautiful in God's sight, beautifully forgiven, when we are washed clean of our sin by the blood of Jesus. The bleeding of no one else has such beautiful results.

Prayer: *My dear Saviour, thank you that you were willing to bleed and die for me. May your blood wash me clean from all my sin. Amen.*

Gambling for Life

32nd Day in Lent (Thursday)

Object: Two Dice

Read: John 19:23-24

"And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get." Mark 15:24 (NIV)

The soldiers who stood at the foot of Jesus' cross, gambled for His clothing. It wasn't unusual for soldiers to do that; the condemned prisoner's clothing belonged to the executioners by common practice. So these four soldiers each took a chance by drawing lots for His seamless robe. Only one of them would win, the others would go away losers.

Down through history this scene has been repeated many times. Hundreds and thousands have 'stood at the foot of Jesus' cross,' taken a chance and come up losers. No, they weren't gambling for Jesus' clothing. They were gambling for something far more valuable – eternal life. So many when confronted by the claims of Christ on their lives have chosen not to believe in Him or His work, but to take their chances instead. They chose to rely on their own goodness or their own 'gods' for the key to eternal life. Unfortunately when anything or anyone is chosen apart from Jesus there can only be losers. Eternal life is far too precious and valuable to gamble for. We place our trust only in Christ. In Him we can take no chances.

Prayer: *Lord, I am confident and trust that my future is certain and secure. Thank you for giving me eternal life with you. Amen.*

Tears of Sorrow

33rd Day in Lent (Friday)

Object: Tears

Read: Luke 23:27-28

"Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.'" Luke 23:28 (NIV)

There are many occasions in our lives that cause us to shed a tear. A child cries when they cut their finger or they skin a knee; our eyes fill with tears when we become the object of ridicule of a cutting remark. We are moved to tears when someone close to us is injured or dies.

Tears come with happy occasions too. Sometimes we laugh so hard, we 'cry'. Our eyes become misty at the reunion of a loved one we haven't seen for a long time. Tears of joy well up as we are moved by music, beautiful scenery, a touching movie, or memories.

There were a number of women in the crowd following Jesus as He made His way to Calvary, weakened by the cruelties He had suffered. They cried. They cried for Jesus. They were moved to compassion, having pity and sorrow for Him and His suffering. Yet, Jesus' word to them indicated their sorrow was misdirected.

At times we feel much like those women in the crowd: sorry for Jesus. Our sorrow, however, needs to be for ourselves and our sinfulness. It was our sins that caused Him to suffer; it is our sinfulness that His suffering has removed. Tears often cleanse the eyes to remove foreign objects so we can see better; the tears of repentance are part of 'seeing' our sinfulness and then being able to look ahead focussing through God's eyes.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to see my sins and change my heart and life. Give me the joy then of your forgiveness. Amen.*

A Grave Beginning

34th Day in Lent (Saturday)

Object: A Grave

Read: Matthew 27:57-61

"Going to Pilate, [Joseph of Arimathea] asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid." Luke 23:52-53 (NIV)

All of us have felt sorrow and compassion for the person who has died on the street, alone and without worldly possessions. Perhaps they do not even have identification leading them to be buried unknown and in an unmarked grave.

While Jesus died in the midst of friends and followers, still our Lord was completely without worldly possessions. His only possessions had been taken and divided by heartless soldiers who cast lots for their ownership. Now even His grave was not His own. He is simply placed in a new-hewn tomb without pomp and ceremony. There are no glorious speeches about His earthly accomplishments or crowds to loudly mourn His passing. Quietly our Saviour is laid to rest. Had this grave been the end there would be little to write about this Teacher from Galilee.

But the borrowed grave can be returned. Jesus needs it no longer. There is no need for crying. There is no need for special ointments and spices. Jesus has conquered that grave. Death no longer holds Him, and the quiet turns to rejoicing.

The Christian looks at Christ's tomb and thinks of their own grave. This grave can also no longer hold us in - the sting of death is gone. Now the grave becomes a beginning as we enter Paradise. The Christian paradox is that in death is life's real beginning.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord for showing me that even when my earthly life ends, I know my heavenly life will begin. Amen.*

Hosanna!

Palm / Passion Sunday

Object: Palm Branch

Read: John 12:12-15

"Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Mark 11:9 (NIV)

The crowds lined the streets. They waved banners that read, 'Welcome Home.' Shouts and congratulations greeted the Olympians returning to Australia with Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals – how excited everyone was for their triumphs!

Crowds lined the streets. Palm branches waved. Coats and palm branches were strewn onto the road. Shouts of 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,' filled the air. The wait was now over. The promised Messiah King had come. The people could now experience His triumph as their King. He would come to save them from their oppression.

Jesus is King, but not how the people wanted nor expected. He came to be the King of Heaven and our Lord and Saviour. Let us sing our praises today with joy and gratitude. We can shout hosannas as we worship Him with lives filled with love and tongues filled with the messages of the greatness of King Jesus' power.

Wave the flag! Shout for joy! Blessed is He who comes to us today in Word and Sacrament. Hosanna in the Highest!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord, for the joy that your presence brings to my life. Amen.*

A Quiet Place

35th Day in Lent (Monday)

Object: A garden

Read: Mark 14:32-42

*"Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'"
Matthew 26:36 (NIV)*

"I just need to be alone!" When things become overwhelming and confusion occurs, many people resort to just wanting to be alone to be able to think the issue through without any outside distractions. Where do you go to be alone? Where do you spend quiet moments with Jesus to study, pray or just to be with Him? Maybe it is in or by your bed, in a garden or a quiet corner somewhere.

Jesus was going through the upset and confusion of the last days and He was struggling to come to terms with all that He had to do. He did know where He had to go for strength and direction. He fell on the ground and spoke with His Heavenly Father. In these most intimate moments He clarified God's will for Him and received strength for the agonising hours of mockery, sorrow, affliction, and death that lay before Him.

Where do you go when the world's problems surround you? Do you fall on your knees and call on your Heavenly Father asking His will and seeking direction? Do you search His Word for His will for your life? Time spent searching God's will and direction is time well spent for harmonizing our will with God's and it brings true peace.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, when I must make decisions in my life, please help me to always seek you for direction. Amen.*

The Decision

36th Day in Lent (Tuesday)

Object: A Judge's chair

Read: Matthew 27:15-19

*"What shall I do then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked.
Matthew 27:22a (NIV)*

Decisions are a part of everyone's life. While some decisions are more important than others; choice of job, spouse, etc, all decisions have some lesser or more profound impact on our lives.

Pontius Pilate made important decisions as governor. It was part of his job. His decisions as governor affected not only his own life but the lives of all those over whom he ruled. The most important decision Pilate was ever confronted with is recorded by Matthew. It could be phrased, "What should I do with this Jesus?" Pilate was obligated to give a judgement concerning Him because Pilate was the governor. It was his job.

"What should I do with this Jesus?" is a question that has not only been placed before people down through history, but it is placed before you today. It is an important question, so be careful how you answer. As Pilate made a judgement about Jesus, so we are also called upon to make the same decision. Did He speak the truth or not? Do we believe His claim to be the Son of God? Or was He simply a rebel as accused?

Pilate made one correct judgement: he knew that Jesus was not guilty of the charges brought against Him. But Pilate did not go far enough in his judgement. With God's grace we can also make a decision when asked what we do with this Jesus. We can answer, 'I believe Him.'

Prayer: *Lord, give me the faith that always looks to you and recognises you as God's Son, my Saviour. Amen.*

Robe the King

37th Day in Lent (Wednesday)

Object: Purple Robe

Read: Matthew 27:27-31

*"And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him."
Mark 17:20 (NIV)*

The soldiers in Pilate's palace were having fun over Jesus. Their fun consisted of making a mockery of Jesus by dressing Him up as a king, putting a royal robe around Him, placing a crown made of thorns on His head and putting a staff in His hand and then bowing and kneeling in front of Him. As they did this, the soldiers hit Him again and again and spat on Him. Then they took the royal robe away.

Today, we also hear people making fun of Jesus; they mock Him, show no love to Him, and carelessly use His name. Even among Christians, there are times when Jesus is stripped of His royal robe. As His children we worship Him, and bring our praises and love to Him. We say that He is the King of our lives, but there are also times when we don't listen and obey Him as King. Our lips call Him King, but our actions take His kingly robe away and put it somewhere else.

Jesus continues to be King even when we don't recognise Him as one. As the King of love, He is always ready to forgive and help us place the royal robe back on His shoulders. Let's put the Kingly robe on the Son of God this week in our words and actions.

Prayer: *Forgive me Lord for taking away your royalty by not listening and obeying you. Give me the power to follow your ways and be your child of love. Amen.*

Christ's Cup

38th Day in Lent (Maundy Thursday)

Object: Communion Cup

Read: Matthew 26:26-29

"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them." Mark 14:23-24 (NIV)

A cup can be used as a sign of victory. The 'winner's cup' belongs to the best team, the fastest runner, the highest scorer. The Melbourne Cup belongs to the fastest horse, the Ashes Cup to the best cricket team and the World Cup to the best soccer team. The 'winner's cup' is the coveted prize for all competing for first place.

It was definitely a different cup that Jesus offered to His disciples on Maundy Thursday, the night of His betrayal. He told them, "This is my blood of the new covenant." Winner's cups are usually filled with flowers or champagne, not blood. Some would think that this cup Jesus offered was really a cup of defeat. From all outward signs it perhaps appeared this way. Yet Jesus pointed beyond His seeming defeat to victory; He pointed to a new celebration with His disciples in His Father's kingdom.

The cup of the new covenant is a winner's cup. By pouring out His blood upon Calvary, by His redeeming death, and by His glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus is proven to be victorious over sin, Satan and death – the winner. Now He shares the winner's cup with us each time we receive it in the Lord's Supper, and He shares the prize with us all – eternal life!

Prayer: *Thank you Lord Jesus, that you have invited me to share your victory of eternal life with you. Amen.*

Carry the Cross

39th Day in Lent (Good Friday)

Object: A Cross

Read: Luke 23:26

"As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross." Matthew 27:32 (NIV)

Jesus, weakened by sleepless nights, beatings and abuse, stumbles. The cross and Jesus fall to the ground. Quickly a stranger is pulled from the surrounding crowd and forced to carry the cross for Him. Perhaps as we imagine this scene sorrow fills our hearts. We realize how fully Jesus suffered for us. We see how this suffering weakened our Lord and Saviour. We think that if we had been there at that time we would gladly have carried Jesus' cross.

Today we are chosen to carry the cross. Not a cross of wood, but rather everything that the cross stands for. As we put Christ first in our lives we must be ready to 'take up His cross and follow Him.' We also may be mocked as we serve Him. Others may try to encourage us to give up on Jesus and follow the world. But those of us who know the love and forgiveness Christ gives will gladly bear His cross. We will proclaim the cross' message of life eternal throughout our daily lives no matter what the cost. We will turn to that cross of Jesus and receive from Him strength and peace throughout life's trials and disappointments. The cross will become our theme throughout life and Jesus' death on that cross is our sure hope in death.

Prayer: *Jesus, help me to proudly carry your cross and tell its message to the world. Amen.*

Faith or Proof

40th Day in Lent (Holy Saturday)

Object: Nails

Read: John 20:24-29

"Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" John 20:27 (NIV)

'Seeing is believing' states an old proverb. 'Believe half of what you see and none of what you hear,' states another. Many people have refused to believe in Christ because the evidence and proof is just too incomplete. People want positive proof, scientifically documented, that Christ is their Saviour and Redeemer from sin.

Thomas was like that. He wanted to see and feel the holes where the nails had pierced Jesus' hands. Only then would he believe the reality that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead.

In His love, Christ submitted to Thomas' unbelief. He held out His hands and invited Thomas to see and feel all the proof he needed. The nail marks were there. Here were the signs that the suffering Christ had borne for doubters of every age. What feelings Thomas must have experienced as he cried out – "My Lord and my God."

Jesus lovingly reminds Thomas, *"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (vs 29b) Today let us take that leap of faith through the Spirit's power. We cannot see or feel the holes those nails made. We have no hard and fast physical evidence available to us. Only through the working of the Spirit and the assurance that He brings through Word and Sacrament can we believe. Faith comes from our heart not our head.

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, help me in my unbelief. When I doubt bring me the assurance that only through Jesus' death and resurrection can I live eternally. Amen.*

Any Obstacles?

Easter Sunday

Object: A large stone

Read: Mark 16:1-4

"... [The women] saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away." Mark 16:4 (NIV)

An obstacle race is a challenging event. Each step brings objects to climb over, go around, or crawl through. Each turn brings a challenge to the racer to set their mind and body against time and obstacles and find ways to move forward.

As they approached the tomb, that first Easter day, Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of Jesus and Salome remembered an obstacle that stood in the way of their task. They were going to anoint Jesus' body, but who would roll away the huge stone that sealed off the opening? Still they kept going. What a surprise to see the obstacle removed. The stone was rolled away. Soon the good news that Jesus was risen removed countless obstacles from their hearts and lives.

Does anything stand in the way of your joy as you prepare to celebrate the Resurrection? Is there a hurt you have not forgiven, a smouldering anger, a damaged relationship you need to mend? Think of Jesus' forgiveness for you. Live it with others. Rejoice! Your personal stone is rolled away! Celebrate the Resurrection with no obstacles to dim your joy. Stony hearts can be as great an obstacle to Easter joy today as the stone-closed tomb might have been for the women that first Easter day. Let us open our hearts to rejoice in our Saviour's Resurrection!

Prayer: *Lord, prepare my heart to be able to receive the joy of your resurrection this Easter day. Amen.*

Prayer

*Lord God,
You loved this world so much,
That you gave your one and only Son,
That we might be called your children too.
Lord, help us to live in the gladness and grace
Of Easter Sunday, everyday.
Let us have hearts of thankfulness
For your sacrifice.
Let us have eyes that look upon
Your grace and rejoice in our salvation.
Help us to walk in that mighty grace
And tell your good news to the world.
In your glory we pray.
Amen.*

In this space add your church details and Holy Week and Easter service times:



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