Aninals and Angels

Wild &

King's College London Chaplaines

Reflections for Lent: 2024

Introduction

King's College London Chaplaincy

Welcome to the King's College London Chaplaincy's Lent Booklet for 2024. Whether you are a student or member of staff at King's, or a friend of the Chaplaincy from elsewhere, you are invited to journey together through the gospel of Mark this Lent.

What is Lent?

Lent is a period of preparation for Jesus's death and resurrection, centred upon Jesus's time alone, fasting and being tempted in the Wilderness before he started his ministry. In the scriptures, the Wilderness is the place where God's people first crossed into the Promised Land, and the place where God promised to return after the exile. Being there was akin to being ready. Jesus's retreat into the Wilderness would have resonated with the early Christians' longing for a true return from exile. It was the place where God would do new things, and, in doing so, would transform all God's people. This longing for freedom and transformation continues to resonate with us and the world today, making Lent as important as ever.

Traditionally, Lent involved fasting, living simply and dedication to biblical study. Western culture has adopted Lent as a time to give up chocolate, alcohol or similar, and of course there is nothing wrong with this per se (I often give up booze myself!). However, this emphasis can be somewhat distracting away from study of the scriptures. More recently, in the church there has been a shift away from *giving something up*, to encouraging Christians to take up something new instead. This booklet is intended to hopefully help you in both of these respects.

Why Mark?

This booklet is entitled *Wild Animals and Angels* because of the ministry that Jesus *received* in the Wilderness (Mark 1:13). These animals (or *beasts* in some translations) and angels 'waited on him' in his suffering, hunger and temptation; and while we aren't given any indication of what that meant, I like to think of these divinely inspired creatures as tending to his needs and

being his confidants ... perhaps something like the gargoyles in Disney's 1996 film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, if that means anything to you.

Mark's gospel was the first of the four gospels to be written (in about 70AD) and it is the shortest. This means that it sometimes reads as if Jesus is in a hurry, quick to get to the point. The gospel races on, without some of the more nuanced detail of the other three, and isn't always chronological in order. This has meant that the gospel has sometimes been excluded from church worship and even from academic attention, with Mark's writing being dismissed as being a bit ad hoc and even random. However, a closer reading of the gospel, which this booklet is hoping to inspire, will reveal that Mark was paying more attention than we initially give him credit for. There is in fact a deliberate order, with consistent themes and references which you will start to notice.

In reading Mark's gospel, we will meet a motley crew of characters in their encounters with Jesus whose wisdom, or lack of it, is meant to surprise us – including lepers and beggars, the Syrophoenician woman, the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years, Joseph of Arimathea, Simon of Cyrene, and of course the disciples themselves. These characters are intentionally included, and their response to Jesus is intended to inspire us in ours. They have rich insights to teach us, so look out for them.

Structure of the booklet

This booklet is intended to help you with both adopting a prayerful new routine, and with dedication to *lectio divina* (holy reading) in keeping with Lent. It makes its way through (most of) Mark's gospel. Occasionally it is not in chronological order, and is instead ordered to fit with the readings that many churches use in Sunday worship (the lectionary, if you are a church-goer), or other events like Mothering Sunday that happen during Lent. As well as readings from Mark, there are also 9 psalms in the mix. These psalms are all Lenten in feel and usage, and again are often those used on Sundays.

How to use these reflections

You are invited to read a reflection a day for each day of Lent, from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, along with the Bible passage mentioned, so you will want to keep your Bible (or Bible app) to hand. You can of course use any Bible translation, but many of the quotes used here are from the NRSV. If you would like a Bible and don't have one, most of the Chaplaincies have free copies of the New Testament available, so do just ask for one. Each day, you're invited to read the biblical passage slowly, immersing yourself in the reading. If you're familiar with the gospel already, it will be hard to read it with fresh eyes, but I implore you to try as much as is possible. Then, delve into the reflection, and see what you can learn.

Enjoy!

You may disagree with some things that you will read, and you might want to use those times to celebrate the diversity of a church that does not need to always agree, as long as we are in communion together and (as the Bishop of Southwark Christopher Chessun says) we speak well of one another. There is a real diversity of folk represented in this booklet including many different nationalities and denominations of Christianity; and both students and staff from departments as varied as War Studies, Law, Engineering, Mental Health Studies and Student Outcomes. There are King's alumni, bishops, ordained folk from local churches, as well as seven Christian chaplains at King's. The reflections are as diverse as their writers, and included in these pages you will find everything from hymns, icons, poems and prayers, both old and new. Questions asked range from, 'Do we recognise the power we hold over others?' 'What word of God guards your heart?' 'Why would Jesus call these totally unqualified fishermen?' 'How can you be a beacon of hope?' 'How can we be good soil?' 'Who today is hungry?' And, 'Does Jesus call a woman a "dog"?'

I want to thank everyone who participated in this booklet by writing a reflection. You are all Wild Animals and Angels (you can decide which!) and I am looking forward to journeying through this Lenten season with your guidance. And a special thank you to Alicia Mixter (4th year BSc Psychology student) for designing the beautiful cover.

Wishing you all a holy and blessed Lent.

Rev'd Dr Jenny Morgans Chaplain at the Denmark Hill Campus

Wednesday 14th February: Ash Wednesday

Mark 1:9-13 The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus

This dramatic story of Jesus's baptism in a middle eastern river - the ripping open of the skies, the whooshing, winged entrance of the Holy Spirit, a clearly-voiced message from heaven - is unlikely to have a familiar feel in the context of our own lives. Gospel stories such as this surprise us with the startling reality of God's engagement with creation, the divine ever-presence under the surface of all things, momentarily breaking through with clarity of sound and vision in a declaration of love. Imagine the effect on Jesus of that affirmation of his worth. 'You are my Son': my image is reflected deeply in you. You are 'Beloved': utterly held and cherished. 'With you I am well pleased': rest in the knowledge that I delight in you.

This scene may have much in it that feels alien. And yet the message should be familiar. We find it hard to hear, but the arc of the scriptures tells the fundamental truth that we are **all** made in God's image, reflecting that image in the world in our many different and marvellous ways. So the message is for us, too: rest in the knowledge that I delight in you.

The next part of the story is equally strange and yet, when we think about it, oddly familiar. The wilderness, the temptations, the wild beasts, the angels. The scene and the characters may feel alien, but the plot is the plot of our lives. We feel alone, we struggle to know how to live, we are distracted and frightened and bewildered, we must make hard decisions. But God (the angels) waits on us, ever-present, ever-patient, and ever ready to remind us of our worth and our unshakeable identity: **'You** are my child, my beloved; with **you** I am well pleased'.

Rt Rev'd & Rt Hon Dame Sarah Mullally Bishop of London Former Member of Kings College London Council Mark 1:16-20 Jesus Calls the First Disciples

There is a mystery surrounding the calling of the first disciples. Why do these simple fishermen *immediately* decide to leave everything familiar and follow their new rabbi (Jewish teacher) into a life of unknown? And why, among all the options, would Jesus decide to call these totally ungualified fishermen, who weren't clever enough to enter a synagogue school to be taught under a rabbi, and hence had to make their living through fishing? Perhaps it is the gospel of God that Jesus was proclaiming. Gospel means 'good news', and in the cultural mix of Judaism and the Roman empire where these fishermen were living, there were many different gospels circulating. But the good news that Jesus was preaching is something remarkably different to earthly gospels – it is an invitation into a kingdom of Shalom, peace, marked by God's love for us, displayed in the story of redemption and restoration of humanity unfolding in the Scriptures. Maybe it was this kingdom that convinced the fishermen ... or perhaps it was the pure fact that finally a rabbi saw potential in them, turning these fishermen into disciples. In its simplest form, being a disciple means imitating our Teacher. Simon, Andrew, James, and John, in their sudden decision to accept Jesus' invitation, signed up to physically follow their rabbi, eating what he ate, doing what he did. As disciples in 2024, as we look from the calling of the fishermen all the way to the cross, may our beings be reminded of Jesus' invitation into relationship with him, into a life of self-sacrifice, to be transformed and to transform our world into God's design. And so he calls us too, us unqualified in so many ways: 'Follow me, and I will show you the way of my kingdom, a kingdom that heals and restores.'

Liina Chung-Jukko PhD Candidate, Theoretical Particle Physics & Cosmology Group Department of Physics

Friday 16th February

Psalm 51: 1-17 Capparis Spinosa (Capers): A Sestina

Cleanse me with *Capparis spinosa* - so I become pure. Wash me, whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness. Create in me a steadfast spirit. Let the bones that you crushed exalt.

I can no longer exalt at these walls grown over with *Capparis spinosa*. I ache with love for this place and the pain of remaining steadfast. Our children's bones remain though their souls evaporated. My pure delight at their running, jumping, youthful gladness, stolen as the sun sucks water out of snow.

Our homes thrown down over us disintegrated into drifts of snow, our hands bled to retrieve our loved ones. Still, we exalt them to return to us their life's gladness. Where once we lived *Capparis spinosa* will grow I expect so – their bitter leaves will gather up sun pure simple and steadfast.

my call for healing justice is steadfast. as the breath of spring that relieves the earth of snow. Keep the souls of those stolen from us pure, and let their light exalt – us to abjure cruelty and vengeance, let *Capparis spinosa* appear once more on these broken walls. Restore to us your gladness -

to ease our grief and help us find our way to the gladness of spring that we may uphold those lost to us with the steadfast persistence of the *Capparis spinosa* that resists harsh temperatures to flourish on high walls as snow, shining on great mountains exalts, us to endure by reflecting light absolute and pure.

I wait in silence to learn what is pure.
I wait in silence to learn to bring gladness.
I wait in silence to learn to exalt.
I wait in silence to learn to be steadfast.
I wait in silence to learn the transience of snow.
I wait in silence to learn the endurance of *Capparis spinosa*.

I give thanks that I may learn to exalt, and so may experience that which is pure, the bitter flavour and sweet face of *Capparis spinosa*, the gladness of remaining steadfast, while knowing the transience of snow.

> Penelope Quinton PhD Candidate, Global Health & Social Medicine Quaker Elder, Westminster Meeting

Saturday 17th February

Mark 1:40-45 Jesus Cleanses a Leper

I must start with an admission: on first reading, I felt frustrated, even disappointed by Jesus. He had just performed a miracle! He had not only cured the man's sickness but released him from the stigma and discrimination of leprosy! In fact, this stigma remains so strong that even 2000 years later it was renamed to attempt to reduce this! (Hansen's disease, for anyone as fascinated by infectious disease as I am).

Okay, returning to the bible! Jesus performed a miracle, but then immediately declared 'don't tell this to anyone'- what about others suffering? What about spreading the word of Jesus? This didn't sound like the Jesus I know and love! But then I thought more about *why* Jesus said this, why he wanted to remain incognito. I remembered, Jesus a was human, with as much right to privacy as us all. I thought about how I would feel if I shared a secret, and asked for it to remain private, and how I might feel to then discover everyone knew. Especially if it was shared by someone else throwing open the closet doors before I was ready, and that then lead to isolation and loneliness.

Briefly I had forgotten empathy. Perhaps because 2000 years ago seems so distant it can be easy to forget that Jesus was a human being on this earth, and as deserving of empathy as everyone is. A lesson we all might need at times.

I pray for world leaders to remember empathy, and that they are dealing not with numbers, but humans. Humans who deserve safety, healthcare, protection, food and water, love, care, a warm and safe place to live with their loved ones and so much more. I pray for all the people who have forgotten or are struggling to see that they themselves deserve love, care, attention, safety, warmth, nutrition, hydration, empathy and both physical and mental health. Amen.

> Felicity Amberson-Jones MSc Student, Mental Health Studies Member of St John's Church, Waterloo

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 Joy in the Wild

Joy is a deeply mysterious and deeply misunderstood emotion. Like the animals which Jesus encountered in the wilderness, joy is wild. Joy cannot be pinned or attributed to a specific object, time, or place. Like Aslan the lion in CS Lewis's Narnia chronicles, it is not tame, not predictable. The more we search for it, the less we find it. The less we search for it, the more likely we are to encounter it. Joy is the chief sign of grace in our lives, and is always given to us should we remain open to searching for it in unexpected places.

Psalm 118 is a prime example of this tendency to find joy in a surprising place. It is thought that these words were used as a liturgical script at the festival of Passover as the people of God entered the Temple. It proclaimed God's deliverance from Egypt, a place of tyranny and enslavement for the Israelites. Yet, out of this world of bondage came salvation and emancipation; out of darkness came light.

This joy in liberty is most evident in vs. 22: 'the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'. That which was seen as the least likely place for revelation or blessing is now a source of joy. 'This is the Lord's doing', the psalmist sings out. Perhaps joy is the most undervalued of all God's gifts?

Whether you are a person of faith or not, perhaps we can recognise that the chief way to find joy is to stop looking for it. In the wilderness Jesus renounced the pleasure of earthly things and found joy in the company of wild animals. He renounced the consolation of friends and found himself visited by angels.

In what surprising places might you find joy in this day?

Rev'd Jim Craig Chaplain at the Guy's Campus

Monday 19th February

Mark 2:1-12 Jesus Heals a Paralytic Person

This isn't the first healing story in Mark's gospel. Already by this point, Jesus has cured a lot of people with conditions that prevented them from living their lives to the fullest – which is partly why so many people gather at his home, wanting to see, hear, or be near him.

What's different about this story, though, is that this is the first time where Jesus is described as seeing the faith of those who come to him looking for wholeness of body and life. In this case, it's the faith of the friends who bring the paralysed man, not of the man himself – but that doesn't matter. Jesus recognises in these people the desire to bring their friend close to God, and their willingness to do something about it – even to the extent of breaking through the roof of the house! And in receiving from them this gift of faith, Jesus in turn gives the paralysed man the gift of forgiveness of sins and the restoration of health.

It's unlikely that we'll ever need to take a roof apart to get someone close to God (probably ... !). But there are always opportunities for us to help and support people in other ways, day by day, just as there will be times when we ourselves need to rely on the help of others. One of the ways we can do this is to bring people to God in prayer, not just for healing when that is needed, but as part of regularly thanking God for the gift of faith, and for the gift of those around us whom we care about, and who care about us.

And it's also important to ask others to pray for us, too. So during this Lent, is there someone in particular you can pray for, and someone whom you can ask to pray for you?

Dr Clare Dowding Business Manager, Dean's Office & Chaplaincy Licensed Lay Minister (Reader), All Saints' Church Blackheath Warden of Readers, Diocese of Southwark Mark 2:23-28 A Pronouncement About the Sabbath

Where would you say power lies? Perhaps with national lawmakers, the wealthiest 1% or with those who you are closest to.

In today's Lent Reflection we find Jesus in a unilateral power struggle. He is in the fields around his hometown of Capernaum on the Sabbath rest day. Up to this point Jesus' words and actions had been causing a stir, unsettling the law-teaching Pharisees. Jesus not condemning the disciples picking and eating heads of grain is more than fulfilling a desire to satisfy hunger. Jesus is making a statement: his authority is above that of the law given by God of his own religion. He then speaks the language of their shared heritage, reminding the Pharisees that David, who later became King, also ate that which wasn't 'allowed'; the bread offered to God.

Jesus' last statement would have hit everyone between the eyes. The power, he says, is with him as 'Lord even of the Sabbath'. The cosmic powers governing time and creating a seventh day of rest are under Jesus' authority. Just as the wild beasts we read of in Mark 1 'attended to Jesus' rather than attacking him, here we have the Jewish law sitting under the power of Jesus' kingship. Jesus as the author of time does not snatch power, nor does he hold it over others to force obedience. Jesus' power is gentle and demonstrated in the wild beasts submitting and serving, in the picking and eating of grain, in the healing of the sick and, even in his death on a cross. Power owned by Jesus looks different to that in the world.

Lord, this Lent would you lead me to recognise your authority in my life. Please teach me of your gentle power so that I would extend gentleness to others. Amen.

Fiona Foreman College and University Chaplaincy Development Officer Southwark Diocesan Board of Education

Wednesday 21st February

Mark 3:13-19 Jesus Appoints the Twelve

After being born in poverty and growing up in the much-maligned town of Nazareth, perhaps this was the opportunity for Jesus to choose powerful and well-connected people in his Senior Leadership Team. Instead, he chose a ragtag group of twelve who included at least four fishermen, a hated tax collector who worked for the brutal Roman regime, a revolutionary, and most surprisingly, someone who would ultimately betray him leading to his death. Rather than the gospels presenting these disciples as brave leaders, guick learners, or faithful servants, we see that they repeatedly misunderstand Jesus' parables, bicker amongst themselves, or even deny knowing him entirely. I am grateful for their mistakes - if it wasn't for the disciples swatting away the children who wanted to come to Jesus, we may have never heard Jesus say 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these'; if it wasn't for the story of Peter denying Jesus three times we would have never heard about Jesus' tender forgiveness and willingness to reinstate Peter who would later become the 'rock' or foundation of the early Church.

After Jesus was taken up to heaven, who would have thought this ragtag group would survive, let alone spearhead the development of Christianity all whilst under the persecution of the powerful Roman empire. The disciples weren't perfect, we are told there were still disagreements, but they had been transformed. Their example shows us that God can take us imperfect and flawed as we are, and use us in his amazing plan.

> Dr Matthew J Kempton Reader in Neuroimaging Psychiatry Institute of Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience Facilitator of the Denmark Hill Staff Christian Prayer Group

Thursday 22nd February

Mark 3:31-35 The True Kindred of Jesus

How can I comment on this passage without mentioning that today is World Thinking Day and Founders Days for the Girlguiding and Scouting movement across the world. It is a global network of organisations that provide a new family and a home from home for so many. On 22nd February each year, chosen for being the birthday of the founder of the movement, members are encouraged to remember their brothers and sisters in similar associations worldwide. Seated around a campfire, in a meeting hall or halfway up a mountain, they can look around themselves and think 'here are my mother and my brothers' here are my family.

Just as participants in these groups need to guide, encourage and support each other through their tasks, Mark 3:31-35 reminds us that our spiritual family are essential. As new creations being transformed and renewed for God's kingdom, those who walk with us in faith and strengthen our spirit are surely as close and connected a family as those assigned to us by birth. Scripture tells us that angels are messengers sharing good news and helping us to do God's will.

May our inner circle of faithful family help us in this time of fasting to remember our promise to do our best in our walk with Christ, and journey with us to the time of feasting when we celebrate the founder of our faith. Amen.

Shayon Desir Interim Department Manager Department of Mathematics

Friday 23rd February

Psalm 22:23-31 Confidence in God's Faithfulness

The opening verse of this psalm is quoted by Jesus on the cross, as in the moment of death he turns to his scriptures to express his agony: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' But our reading for today comes from later in the psalm, where we find that the mood of this ancient poem has changed. Whilst the first half is a lament from someone in desperate trouble from sickness and enemies, the second half has a more hopeful tone, of renewed confidence in God's faithfulness. This 'turn' of mood is often encountered in the poetry of the psalms, as they make a journey from despair to faith, from hopelessness to hope. It's as if there is a universal truth here that only once the worst of life has been held before God with brutal honesty, only then can the path to a new future be discerned.

The scholar Walter Brueggemann calls this the move from disorientation to reorientation, and the key thing to grasp is that disorientation cannot be rushed. We cannot wish ourselves out of the pain and sorrow of our lives, or as the next psalm (Psalm 23) might put it, we cannot hurry ourselves through the valley of the shadow of death. Sometimes the trauma of abuse we have suffered, or the consequences to ourselves of the sins we have committed, are pains we have to endure. But, says the psalmist, over and over again, in time trauma can give way to healing, and sin can find forgiveness. We cannot rush through Holy Saturday in our desire to get to Easter Sunday, but time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears each of us to our eternal home.

Revd Dr Simon Woodman Baptist Chaplain Minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Church Mark 4:10-20 The Parable of the Sower Explained

In today's passage, Jesus provides insight into the Parable of the Sower to his followers. He shares his wisdom and gives us the opportunity to perceive and understand God. Jesus came so that we might have life in abundance, and this passage seems to relate to how we may pursue this abundant life in our response to God's word (the water of life and the bread of life). If we prepare ourselves as good soil, the fruits of the Holy Spirit can be abundant in and through us. So how can we be more like good soil?

- How can we be more attentive to and open to God's Word so that it doesn't just come and go, so we don't take it for granted or hardly notice it?
- How can we engage with it more completely and meaningfully so that we more fully absorb it? We may have accepted it into our consciousness, but have we allowed and enabled it to embed in our hearts? How can we respond so that we become solidly and deeply grounded in it, and it actually becomes who we are and how we live?
- How can we more regularly be nourished, strengthened, comforted and healed by God's Word, so that our joy and hope in Jesus Christ and are not overshadowed or forgotten by discouragements and distractions?
- How do we maintain our spiritual soil health and fruitfulness through close engagement with God's Word in thought and action? If we are soil rich with God's Word we can be led by the life-giving Holy Spirit to put God's Word it into action.



Try improving your soil health and fruitfulness by meditating using a finger version of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral. Google 'Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth' to find a larger version of this image.

Mia Hadfield-Spoor Chaplaincy Assistant, Strand, St Thomas's and Waterloo Campuses PhD Candidate, Life Course Sciences

Sunday 25th February

Mark 8:31-38 Take Up Your Cross

I can only imagine Peter's feelings when he heard Jesus calling him Satan and telling him to get away from him.

Peter had been following Jesus for some time, being a close disciple of the master. He had just recognized Jesus as the Messiah, when he asked his disciples what they thought he was. And now, he receives this public rebuke from the master, in front of all the disciples. I imagine how I would feel in Peter's place. How would you feel? Confused? Humiliated? Certainly a confusion of feelings that are difficult to understand and process. After all, Peter is human, and would obviously have human concerns!

How to keep in mind the concerns of God? Christ's answer to this question is not easy to digest either: *Take up your cross and follow me*. And keeps going: *For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?* The Greek term used to refer to life, and soul in the translation is $\psi u \chi \eta v$ (*Psichen*). Sometimes it is also translated as *spirit*.

What Jesus asks is not an easy question, but we can say that what he asks of us is simple: Stop being egocentric, narcissistic. Get out of our ego. In the same chapter of Mark's Gospel, moments before this dialogue, Jesus takes the only seven loaves of bread available and shares them. It's simple not to be egocentric, it's simple not to be narcissistic. However, difficult. And Jesus knows this well, which is why he compares it to 'taking up his cross'.

Where in our lives are egocentrism and narcissism revealed? Who today is hungry and asks us to share bread? How do we hear the rebuke of Christ? What in our *Psichen* do we need to lose in order to be saved in Jesus' way?

Dr Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho, SFHEA Reader in Brazilian and Latin American Studies Department of War Studies

Monday 26th February

Mark 4:21-25 A Lamp Under a Bushell

Biblical lamps for use in the home were a relatively simple constriction of a saucer to hold oil and a pinched 'spout' to hold a wick. This is in contrast to the 34kg pure gold ornate lampstand that God commanded to be made in Exodus 25:31, which was to be placed in the tabernacle in the Holy Place and tended to by the priests so it never goes out.



What strikes me about this is that the ornate golden lamp was out of reach to most (apart from the priests) and although beautiful was hidden away inside the tabernacle. The lamp that this passage reminds us of should not stay hidden and should be displayed prominently. This lamp is the ordinary one, made of

clay and in the homes of the people. It reminds me that the holy spirit can inhabit the ordinary – the clay saucer, the ordinary home, the ordinary room. **How can you bring the holy into the ordinary**? The light allows people to work through the darkness. In what ordinary situations (perhaps at work or in your studies) can you **light the way for others**? I'm also reminded that in several places in the Bible we are likened to clay formed by an expert potter (e.g. 2 Cor 4:7) – this ordinary material, not made beautiful or decorative but used to make something necessary and useful. **What are you asking God to make of you**? Some of you reading this might be in prominent positions yourself where the light you bring can spread further and be more visible – like the city on the hill that follows in a later passage. In my research I look at how we can nurture hope in the way that we teach – hope needs a beacon that holds the promise. How can you be a **beacon of hope** with a prominent position to shine light to the world holding the promise of the good news for the ordinary?

> Professor Claire Lucas Deputy Head of Department of Engineering Leader of a 'Post-Deconstruction' House Church

Tuesday 27th February

Mark 4:35-41 Jesus Stills a Storm

My immediate reaction to this story brought me to the second epistle of Peter in which it is said that God does not will 'that any should perish'. This is in harsh contrast to when the storm appears out of nowhere, and the disciples truly believed that they would perish. It appears that at this stage in Christ's ministry they had failed to realise that Christ would not suffer even one of them to perish. This obviously reflects on our own lives and the changes and chances of this fleeting world where we are only ever moments away from a storm (whether actual or metaphorical), and we worry. I have found in my own life that learning to trust in Christ during a storm can be the only way to get through it. This is not because Christ always makes the storm go away, unlike in the passage, but the peace, stillness, and great calm that this passage tells us is the promise of Christ is found elsewhere. I find it when my heart is stilled by the knowledge of Christ's promises to humankind; that none may perish; that if you ask for bread, you will not be given a stone; that to have faith is to not be fearful, but perfect love drives out fear. It is knowing that the love of God is constant; it does not weary, but can be relied upon, even after death. As Julian of Norwich famously said:

'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. For there is a force of love moving through the universe that holds us fast and will never let us go'. Amen.

Patrick Hardy, 3rd Year BA History Student Member of the Church of England

Wednesday 28th February

Mark 5:1-20 Jesus and the 'Demoniac'

The message of the Gospels in one word is 'Liberation'. Jesus proclaims God's forgiveness and brings new life, setting people free from sin and death. The Power of God at work in him breaks the power of evil and overcomes oppression. But this is more than just individual salvation. The healing of the Gerasene Demoniac can be read as being about social and political liberation.

Stories of demons and exorcisms can seem strange to us. Yet even today we speak of being ruled by forces beyond our control. This is especially the case when we talk about politics and economics. For example, political decisions are justified in terms of our being determined by market forces.

Jesus asserts his power over the demon by demanding its name, which is given as 'Legion'. This is revealing, for a legion is a division of Roman soldiers and so, perhaps, the demon is symbolic of Roman military power.

Jesus drives out 'Legion': the Power of God at work in Jesus overcomes even these oppressive forces, and the man is restored to wholeness. Yet this healing is hugely disruptive and the local people do not welcome it, begging Jesus to leave. The man, now free, wishes to go with Jesus but, instead, he is sent home and immediately begins to proclaim what Jesus has done for him.

A political reading of the gospel challenges us to think beyond our usual personal and spiritual interpretations. In a recent interview with an ecologist the question was asked, 'What is the most important thing I can do as an individual to help the environment?' The ecologist replied, 'Stop thinking like an individual.' Reading the gospels as a text of liberation takes us beyond our individual concerns into fresh understandings of God's Kingdom and how it breaks into our world.

Rev'd Peter Babington Priest in Charge, St Mary le Strand Mark 5:21-43 Jesus with a Girl and a Woman

'We are all beggars, this is true.' These are said to be the final words of Martin Luther, conveniently found scribbled on a piece of paper by his deathbed. With today's reading, we might add, 'We're all beggars, broken and bold.'

Here we have a story within a story, each shedding light on the other. We begin with Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, begging Jesus to come and heal his daughter. Then we have 'a woman', unknown, silently begging Jesus to heal her years of bleeding. 'We are all beggars, both broken and bold.' No matter one's status – a well-known leader, an unknown woman – despairing times can fall upon us. Money and prestige do not protect the individual from brokenness, the need to call for help. Rich or poor, we hurt, we need healing, we are broken. Sometimes this brokenness brings us to the point where the situation seems *almost* hopeless. But it is in this approaching hopelessness that boldness may set in. As we see in this unknown woman, the knowledge of Christ and God's power has brought her silently, yet boldly(!), begging for healing, for wholeness.

Both Jairus and this woman are approaching this point of despair, clutching on to the glimmer of hope they see in Jesus. This is what faith sometimes looks like – that edge between hope and despair. Reaching out for something to hang on to. And in those moments when we are surrounded by darkness and the fragility of our human existence, Christ is there right beside us. Because God is not up in some ivory tower - God came to us. Christ became truly human - experienced despair, fear, brokenness. Should we ever forget Christ on the cross, then we truly would be alone.

As we travel through this journey of Lent, we are reminded that God's steadfast love is who God is – ready for us to cling to when all else seems lost. God's love and mercy, renewed every morning, gives birth to hope in the midst of our suffering and loss.

Rev'd Sarah Farrow Chaplain at the St Thomas' & Waterloo Campuses and Vice Dean

Friday 1st March

Psalm 31:9-16 Finding Our Souls

Oscar Wilde is famous for saying that 'there is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about'. The Psalmist seems here to confront two evils of a similar kind. On the one hand, he hears 'the whispering of many' (v.13). Scorn is heaped on him from every side, and he suspects that, behind his back, plots are afoot against him. Yet oddly, at the same time, he laments the fact that he is apparently forgotten and discarded: 'I have passed out of mind like one who is dead' (v.12). Both of these conditions seem acutely distressing to the Psalmist, as they were galling to the playful Wilde. To be the object of others' derision, and to be of no account at all to them. We might be tempted to ask: how can both be true? Aren't they simply contradictory?

Yet the 'self' that is the object of our human hatreds (including our self-hatreds) may often be a construction which simultaneously conceals, or 'forgets', who we really are. In other words, the deep reality of a person can be most 'out of mind' at the very point when that person is most energetically a focus of attack. In Christian tradition, the human soul is the 'who' that we are for God. Not the self that others construct for us. Not even the identity we construct for ourselves. For a lot of the time that deepest 'who' (the soul) can be invisible to us and others, even as our public selves occupy our own and others' (sometimes hostile) attention. We talk about ourselves and forget ourselves at one and the same time. So do others.

Lent is a time to look deeper; to find ourselves (our souls) in the 'shining' of God's steadfast gaze (v.16).

Rev'd Professor Ben Quash Professor of Christianity and the Arts Director of the Centre for Arts and the Sacred at King's (ASK) Department of Theology and Religious Studies

Saturday 2nd March

Mark 6:6b-13 The Mission of the Twelve

When reflecting on this passage, I found myself considering the call to action from the point of view of the disciples. These were people called from their nondescript jobs to leave behind their lives to follow Jesus. He had so much patience for their persistent questions and doubts; when he felt it was the proper time, he 'equipped' them in God's name to heal the sick and drive out spirits.

Two by two they were sent off to various communities. I can feel their excitement, their hesitancies of not feeling 'good enough' or able to live up to the standards of their Master. How relieved they must have felt to have a buddy to lean on! Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, 'Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.' In my own life, I find encouragement when I am connected to other people of faith in this journey and to serve together.

Jesus instructed the disciples to 'Take nothing for the journey...' boiling their ministry down to its simplest form. I imagine Him saying, 'Don't worry about the logistics (because I know what you're like,) just GO.' They had everything they needed. During this season, may we reflect on the calling to love and serve the people in this world; know that God has equipped us with everything we need to spread kindness and point others towards God's grace.

Rachel Checchia Faculty Wellbeing Advisor Institute of Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience Member of a Non-denominational Church

Sunday 3rd March

Psalm 19 The Beauty of Creation

The splendour of the sun, the beauty of the moon, the mystery of the stars—all tell us about God, in a language that everyone on earth understands. But all God's creation reflects His glory and sings his praises. It is 'charged with the grandeur of God' (Gerald Manley Hopkins). Creation points towards the Creator: its fleeting loveliness 'wakens our yearning for happiness that will last forever' (Akathist 'Glory to God for All Things'). It is a beauty that has meaning.

We are part of God's creation too, although sometimes we forget it. We can feel awed and humbled by its beauty and power. God's glory is also reflected in humankind: 'How great you are in all you have created, how great you are in man!' (Akathist, ibid.) 'I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made' (Ps. 139).

We are created to give thanks and praise to God. But it is not a question of having to be surrounded by the beauty of nature. As St John of Kronstadt says, 'neither in the country nor in the forest are to be found life and health and vigour of spirit and body, but with you in the temple and above all during the Liturgy and in your holy and lifegiving Mysteries'. In the Eucharist we give thanks together for everything God has done and will do for us.

Let us give thanks to God for each other: for our family and friends, those with whom we study or work, for beloved people, difficult people, and those we pass in the street. May God transform our every encounter! 'Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!' (Ps. 150:6).

> James Johnson Lay Orthodox Chaplain Member of SS Peter and Paul in Clapham Hansard Reporter in Parliament

Mark 6:14-29 The Death of John the Baptist

We have not seen or heard anything from John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, since chapter 1 of Mark's gospel, so it is a shock to begin this passage with news of his death. Yet, perhaps, this is the point.

The backstory explaining John's unjust execution at the hands of King Herod and the machinations of his wife, Herodias, tragically unfolds before our eyes. Despite Herod's fascination with John and his own recognition that John is a righteous and holy man, Herod must choose between protecting the life of an innocent man and being humiliated in front of his court by going back on his word. John loses his life because Herod will not risk losing his power, at any cost.

Perhaps you might call to mind now those times where you have chosen to protect your own reputation at the expense of someone else. Perhaps you have suffered because someone else was desperate to maintain their power.

As we journey through Lent, let us pause to reflect on the hold 'power' can have over our lives. Do we recognise the power we hold over others? What does it mean to follow the example of John the Baptist who pointed the way to the one who gave away all his power and dignity on a Roman cross so that others may truly live?

Almighty God, who called your servant John the Baptist to be the forerunner of your Son in birth and death: strengthen us by your grace, that, as he suffered for the truth, so we may boldly resist corruption and vice and receive with him the unfading crown of glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

> Laura Elworthy Anglican Ordinand, Cranmer Hall, Durham Chaplaincy Assistant 2021-2022

Mark 6:30-44 The Feeding of the Five Thousand

Some stories are too important not to be told. These are the tales woven into the fabric of our identity that call us back to ourselves when we're at risk of forgetting who we are. For the earliest Christian communities, the miracle we know as *the feeding of the five thousand* is one such story. This is the only miracle which appears in all four gospels and something about this particular memory, an unplanned picnic meal where thousands are fed from five loaves and two fish, has captured the imagination.

A first glance at Mark's version suggests we have reached a pause in the action: a lull in which the disciples can relax and regroup. Jesus says, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' Instead of rest, however, we learn that times of stepping aside are never empty in Mark's gospel. Rather, for Jesus and those first disciples, these become profound moments of encounter and reckoning with God. It doesn't take long for the crowds to catch up and soon the light begins to fade. The disciples decide to manage the situation before darkness falls and suggest sending the crowds away to seek food elsewhere. Jesus' response is this: 'You give them something to eat.' And in what happens next, the disciples learn a little more about the kingdom Jesus proclaims: this kingdom doesn't operate by logic or common sense, but by the overwhelming extravagance of God.

I wonder if in these two statements of Jesus we have all we need for Lent – words to call us back to ourselves when we're overwhelmed, weary, and at risk of forgetting who we are? 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' 'You give them something to eat.' Take a moment, breathe, be silent, expect God – and then go. And, as you go, look around: the kingdom of God may be nearer to us than we believe.

Rev'd Amy Merriman Associate of King's College (AKC) Manager, the Dean's Office Curate, St Barnabas Church Ealing

Wednesday 6th March

Mark 6:45-52 Jesus Walks on Water

For me, these verses speak of the equality and indelible trust that was found in Jesus's followers. Though they battled tempestuous winds and arduous physical exertion - perhaps risking their lives - they continued resolutely in their obedience of Jesus's wish that they should go to Bethsaida. Ultimately, they did not object to this command because their love for Him was unwavering, and His for them also, and so they did as He exhorted with the consolation of His goodness. It reminds me of John and Charles Wesley travelling to preach the gospel in Savannah in 1735. When their ship was almost sunk by unceasing gales, the passengers were soothed by Moravian settlers quietly singing hymns together in the melodic expression of faith so favoured by these Protestant brethren but otherwise alien to the Wesleys. Thus, the development of Methodist hymnody was later instigated, and persists today in vast Wesleyan contributions to hymnals of varying denominations.

Then consider Jesus's decision to climb into the boat with them; thereupon the weather was calmed, and so too His disciples. Jesus did not seek to travel in a ship of great pomp and resplendence. He did not seek to project ideals of self-righteousness over those who had chosen to follow him. Rather, He joined His disciples. He loved them, as He loved others, as He does us. I do not feel that I am presided over by a great, terrifying deity, as with a gathering storm cloud, instilling fear through His own magnitude and power; on the contrary, it feels as though I am embraced by perennial love, upheld by steadfastness of faith and surrounded by an abundance of grace. I think it would be appropriate to conclude with a verse from William Whiting's 1860 hymn, which profoundly echoes Mark in nautical narrative:

O Saviour, whose almighty word, The winds and waves submissive heard, Who walked upon the foaming deep, And calm amid the rage did sleep; O hear us when we cry to Thee, For those in peril on the sea.

> Benjamin Norris 3rd Year BA English student

Thursday 7th March

Mark 7:1-8 Defiled Hands

Why do we give up things for Lent? By this stage in our Lenten journey, we may have a plan, we may be sticking with that plan, and we have probably asked ourselves several times already why we made the plan.

I tend not to make plans. And these days I rarely give stuff up in Lent as I know I am not a very disciplined person. I feel uncomfortable with this passage because it is about discipline – being a disciple, a follower of Jesus – something I am not good at doing at the best of times.

But also, more importantly, it is a short step away from Jesus rightly challenging religious leaders for their over-emphasis on human rules, to anti-Jewish sentiments. Historically such sentiments have been a stepping stone to hatred, cruelty and, ultimately, the holocaust.

But there is good common sense here in the teaching of these religious leaders: washing hands and utensils. It is when such things are an end in themselves rather than a means to an end that they become problematic. And this is where this passage helps and challenges us: one of the dangers of organised religion is that we easily slip from good intentions to strict religiosity that stops us living as God intends.

The question for us here is: in what way are we allowing traditions (not in themselves wrong or flawed, just human creations) to get in the way of us living the life God intends us to live? When we look at our church, our chapel and ourselves, what are we doing that Jesus would look at and say 'this people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me'.

Loving God, help our hearts to draw close to you each day. Amen.

Rev'd Tim Ditchfield College Chaplain

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 God Remains Steadfast

One of my favourite hymns has to be 'Great is thy Faithfulness, O God my Father', which probably harks back to my hymn-singing childhood. It's the kind of hymn that drops spontaneously onto my lips in good times and in bad, and it's surely no surprise that it's so popular at not only weddings but funerals too. There's a comfort in the words, and a truth, too, that whatever situation we find ourselves in, however badly or well we think the world is treating us on any particular day, God remains faithful, remains steadfast, remains – ultimately – there. That's not to pretend that on occasion it doesn't quite feel that way – but it is to say that even when we can't quite bring ourselves to believe it, it's true nonetheless.

The psalms, too, lend themselves perfectly to being remembered and cherished at those kinds of moments. They remain an extraordinary gift to the Church, grounding us in the Jewish origins of our faith and providing poetry of great beauty for us to ponder the vastness of God through so many of the situations in which we find ourselves. Even when we feel less like singing 'songs of joy', and feel instead that we can only cry out to the Lord in our distress, the psalms are our friends, letting us join our voices with the voices of so many who have gone before, who have come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

In this period of Lent and as we examine our own lives in the light of God, let us not forget that – whatever happens, whoever we are, and whoever we claim to be – God remains steadfast, redemptive, and loving. Sometimes all we need to do is say the words to remember how true it is.

> Rev'd Dr Charlie Bell Academic Clinical Fellow Institute of Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience Curate, St John the Divine, Kennington

Mark 7:24-30 Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman

There are many things I find problematic in this passage. Is Jesus refusing to help this woman? As a 1st century Palestinian Jewish man, does Jesus treat this interaction differently to others, as he is speaking to a 1st century Gentile woman. Is he hesitant to help because she is a Gentile? Or because she is a woman? Is he hesitant at all, or is this part of an act? Does Jesus call a woman a 'dog'?

Despite all these questions coming to mind, and my lack of understanding of Jesus in this passage, what intrigued and excited me more, was the behaviour of this woman.

This woman is feisty, she initiates this engagement with Jesus despite their different starting points, and doesn't take *no* for an answer. To the King of Kings she asserts herself, her needs and the needs of her family, and doesn't let it go. She doesn't wait for permission to ask for there to be healing and wholeness for her family.

We know from other passages on the life of Jesus that he cares deeply for those on the edges of society, he shows compassion on those in need, time and time again. But this passage does not pick up on these attributes – and yet she continues to ask, to the point (may I dare say), that she changes the mind of Jesus.

Within this peculiar passage, I have found a role model in this woman. Could I be as feisty as she is in order to appeal to the powers of this world that there might be healing where there is brokenness? Could we all learn from her?

Rev'd Georgia Ashwell Curate, St John's Church, Waterloo

Sunday 10th March: Mothering Sunday

Mark 6:1-6a Jesus's Rejection at Nazareth

As Jesus returns to a familiar place and familiar faces, he steps out of the role that has been carved out for him – a local carpenter – but his message is viewed with disdain and scepticism. Those who gather to hear him cast doubt on his authority under God, and are taken aback by him. Their prejudice and distrust cause them to fail to recognise Jesus as the human manifestation of God on earth and they reject him, obstructing the impact of Jesus' teaching and work in their community at that time.

I am reminded of the relationship between a parent and their teenage child: the teen, naturally, becoming increasingly independent and doubting the relevance of the parent's authority, preferring to spend time with and be influenced by their peers and those trending on social media, testing the boundaries and making mistakes by keeping their own counsel and not asking for help - while the parent sighs, raises their eyebrows and continues to love them unconditionally, recognising their potential and the patience and creativity required to develop it.

Do you recognise the Divine in the ordinary, everyday people that you meet? Are you open to experiencing God, or deepening your knowledge of and relationship with God, but not sure who to follow, what to believe or which way to turn? Doubt is healthy, curiosity and objectivity is crucial - read the Bible AND the commentaries, ask questions of those you trust AND take the time to reflect on the answers offered, pray – but, most importantly, go out into the world with a default setting of love in your heart and your senses fully open to an encounter with God, who might just surprise you.

Creator God – open my senses to recognise your presence in every living being I encounter and inspire me to live a good and holy life. Amen.

Nat Frangos Departmental PA & Resources Officer The Dean's Office

Monday 11th March

Mark 8:14-21 The Pharisees' Yeast

In this Gospel passage the disciples are concerned that they had forgotten the 'bread' that they were meant to bring. Jesus heard their concern and advised them to be mindful about where they try to buy ingredients to make further 'bread'. However, the disciples were still concerned about the lack of bread, which seemed to frustrate Jesus. He reminded them that on previous occasions where loaves were low, he was able to multiply any existing bread to ensure that thousands were fed.

I think Jesus was using the missing bread as a metaphor for anything in our lives that we feel might be missing, and/or in areas where we feel we are not fulfilling society's standards and expectations. As students this may be to do with feelings of inadequacy around our academic work, which can lead us into harmful behaviours. We may also encounter expectations about our conduct in relation to certain characteristics for example, gender, sexuality and immigration status, to name a few.

Jesus, however, has no measured standards for us to meet. He has no expectations and wants us to come as we are. I think the only thing he requires is for us is to have faith in him, trusting that whatever we bring he will multiply and use for good across humanity.

PhD Candidate Institute of Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience

Tuesday 12th March

Mark 8:22-26 Jesus and the Blind Man

'I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.' Most mornings, my commute into King's takes me across London Bridge. During the morning rush hour, approaching from further away, people shrink into dots that stream from one side of the river to the other, like ants. The sight often reminds me of lines from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City, Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many, I had not thought death had undone so many. Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled, And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Real people, all of them, for sure, but all so caught up in the big machinery of the city that they appear to be less than that; and more like a force of nature. A city such as London, and *the* City in particular, can do that to people. It can strip away our awareness of how distinctive and precious every individual person is. The hustle and bustle let us experience other people like an undifferentiated crowd that gets in our way, irritates us, or threatens to overwhelm us. There is a certain blindness at work here, too—and it takes straining, serious straining, to restore our vision to sight. Tellingly, even after the touchingly intimate act of putting saliva on the blind man's eyes, it still takes Jesus two attempts to get them truly opened. Perhaps there is a part of us that would rather not see people all that clearly, that is quite content to let them blur into an undifferentiated mass that we then do not have to engage with. As you wander the streets of London this Lent, look out for how you are looking at those around you: 'Can you see anything?'

Dr Sebastian Matzner Reader in Ancient & Comparative Literature and Literary Theory Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures Candidate for Ordination in the Lutheran Church in Great Britain

Wednesday 13th March

Mark 8:27-30 Peter's Declaration

'Who do they/you say that I am?' Jesus's question to his disciples brings out fascinating answers. For the people, he is Elijah or one of the prophets. For Peter, Jesus is the Messiah – the anointed redeemer. These answers reflect the high expectations that surround Jesus.

The context of such expectations is that of the Roman Empire with its own version of peace, the *Pax Romana*, where prophets like John the Baptist who speak out will be arrested and sought to be silenced – to maintain 'peace'. Therefore, when Jesus asks his followers not to proclaim openly who they think he is, it makes sense. Publicising their understanding of him as one who will speak truth to power would endanger them. Proclaiming Jesus and his work can be risky business. For instance, though Peter confidently proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah in today's text, we see that when Jesus is arrested, Peter denies Jesus (14:66-72). Peter, the rock on whom Jesus would build the Church, is found to be a shaky foundation. The risk was huge. Jesus rightly instructs his followers not to draw too much attention to his transformative work. However, the instruction not to proclaim Jesus's mighty works does not mean that Jesus stops his work of transformation. The transformative work goes on, but without publicity.

The story of Jesus and his followers mirrors the story of Churches and Christian Institutions worldwide whose discipleship draws violence. They live out the life-transformative work of the gospel through health-care, education and poverty-reduction without drawing too much publicity. Like yeast and salt, they facilitate transformation in patient, persistent, powerful yet invisible ways. Today we celebrate such witness today, where proclamation self-effaces itself into life-saving and life-changing action as communities embody Jesus's promise of life in all its abundance in faith, hope and love.

> Rebecca Daniel Lutheran Student Chaplain International Lutheran Student Centre, Euston

Thursday 14th March

Mark 9:2-8 The Transfiguration

Moses ascended Mount Sinai on several occasions to be close to God, whose presence on the mountain was powerfully manifested. Elijah, after hiding in the desert, climbed the same mountain seeking safety in a cave in the Lord's presence. In today's passage, Apostles Peter, James and John ascend Mount Tabor to be alone with Jesus. For Catholic Christians, God is most especially to be found in his Word and in the Eucharist. *Today, I invite us in the words of the Prophet Isaiah to 'seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near'* (Isaiah 55:6).

On Sinai, the Lord formed a covenant between Himself and the people of Israel. He gave to Moses all the ordinances they needed to keep in order to live as a holy nation. Another time, Moses begged God to see His glory, but as no human was able to see the face of God and live, Moses saw only God's back as He passed by. When Moses spoke to God, his face became bright and radiant so the people of Israel became afraid to come close.

The three Apostles received on Tabor a greater gift than Moses and Elijah experienced. They were granted a revelation of the glory of Jesus, but also of the Trinity in the Father's voice, the Son's transfiguration and the Spirit's presence. Though they gazed upon Jesus's countenance with fear, they were given a vision of God radiating light. In the transfigured Christ, they gained a glimpse of His resurrected future which all Christians share in communion with Him.

Peter, James, and John descended Tabor and, after Christ's resurrection, boldly proclaimed to the world that they had beheld the divinity and glory of the only Son of the Father. *How will you respond to what God has given you and perhaps what he has asked you to do in prayer?*

Member of Staff Guy's Campus

Friday 15th March

Psalm 114 The Water of Life

This psalm praises God for saving the Israelites from Egypt and bringing them through the wilderness to the promised land. The Red Sea parted to allow them to escape Egypt (Exodus 14) and the Jordan stopped flowing to allow them to cross into the land (Joshua 3).

But the Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for forty years between those events. It was during this time of struggle that God revealed himself to Moses on Mount Sinai. God's presence was terrifying, accompanied by thunder, lightning and earthquakes (Exodus 19: 16-18). The image of the mountains skipping like rams and the hills like lambs evokes a feeling of playful joy. But in reality it would be terrifying.

The earth must tremble at the presence of God. Yet God is merciful, commanding Moses to strike the rock at Horeb so that it miraculously produced springs of water to save the Israelites from dying of thirst (Exodus 17: 1-7). Christians connected this with the blood and water which flowed from Jesus' side when he was pierced with a spear on the cross (John 19:34). Jesus is the rock from which pours the water of life.

Psalm 114 could be read simply as praising God for saving the Israelites and defeating their enemies. This is problematic at a time when the holy land is still fought over leading to loss of innocent life on both sides. At a deeper level it tells how God enabled the Israelites to persevere, giving them the water of life as they struggled in their journey through an arid desert. Jesus said, 'those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (John 4:14).

Catherine Jenkins PhD Candidate Department of Theology and Religious Studies

Saturday 16th March

Mark 9:14-29 A Boy with a Spirit

I wonder how the boy in this passage would've told the story, how frightening it could've been for him to be stuck in an arguing crowd, becoming the very subject of conversation, but implied to not be part of that conversation himself. I wonder what he would've wanted the most, how he experienced the spirit, how he saw the others in the crowd? How would he have reacted when the disciples were unable to cast out the spirit, or when he saw Jesus' arrival into the crowd?

I can't claim to know any of this, but I do remember how scary it was to be young, dependent, and ill. It reminds me of how often those who are in distress can be hurt by those who think they understand, those who want to prove a point, even those who mean well. And then I see Jesus, who knows everything about the boy and his father and everyone in the crowd and everything that could be known in this universe, but still approaches the boy's father with a desire to hear the story in his own words, starting from asking, 'how long has this been happening to him?'

Lord, help us to not to argue, look away, or panic when we see distress that we cannot understand or heal by our own actions - but to humbly seek to know those around us and to recognise the depth of your mystery. Remind us to eagerly look for you when we are stuck rather than relying on ourselves. Help us to trust you more than we trust ourselves, not only in times of despair, but in every single action we take. Amen.

Carol Jiang Chaplaincy Assistant, Denmark Hill and Guy's Campuses MSc Mental Health Studies Alumnus, 2022-2023

Sunday 17th March

Psalm 119:9-16 What Word of God Guards Your Heart?

Recently, I attended a small workshop with ten youths and four facilitators in their 40s & 50s. Each of us youths had our unique interests and specialities that were celebrated, but we all shared a commonality: a calling for justice. This did not surprise me; of course, we have a calling for justice; that is what the Lord requires of us (Micah 6:8). Our facilitators, however, expressed how refreshing it was to work with youth. I relay this story to paint the scripture for today in the 21st-century context. We were reminded in the workshop that youth often have a spark and passion to 'change the world'.

The question of youth keeping their way pure feels rhetorical because their way is ultimately changed to Your way (God's way). In the passage, 'their way' (Ps 119:9) and 'Your way' (Ps 119:15) are derived from the same Hebrew root 'orach (אַרַח)'. 'Their way' is defined as a mode of living figuratively: a mode of living that is not static or permanent, a way that can be changed. This is where our intention matters; what word of God guards your heart? What word of God do you treasure? What word of God guides you to living God's way (Ps 119:15)?

Returning to the Hebrew, 'Your way (God's way)' is called by God 'the way of justice'. God is a God of Justice, and our way is guided by our call to work for and stand on the side of justice.

'May God bless you with the foolishness to think you can make a difference in this world so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done' Sister Ruth Fox.

> Emma Miriam Rahman Digital Culture and Theology Alumnus, 2020-2024 Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago

Monday 18th March

Mark 9:33-37 Who is the Greatest?

How I start each year has always been very special for me: decluttering my life, getting rid of the old to make way for the new. This year, I included something different. I identified what my priorities for this year would be. Reflecting on the past year made me realise the importance of TIME, so I put an end to everything that added no value to my life, which included people whom I thought were my friends. It was an exercise that was both revelatory and liberating. Even though I ended up with several priorities, I needed more clarity about what I wanted to achieve in 2024. Jeremiah 29:11 came to mind – I felt like God was reminding me of His plans to prosper me; to give me hope and a future. I concluded that I only needed one priority: To Serve God and do His will for my life. Doing life my way only brought pain and regret. But when I aligned my life with His will, I saw His promises starting to manifest in my life.

Lent is a good reminder that serving God is like feeling His gentle kisses on my cheek every day, and I am in awe of who He is in my life. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus teaches us about servanthood and He gives Honour to His Father – the One who sent Him. The Bible tells us that Jesus only did what the Father told Him to do. Having faith like a child requires putting aside our will and trusting God in every area of our lives ... no matter what happens. Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve. The Bible tells us that we were made in God's image – this means that we were created to serve too.

> Jackie Szczerbinski Senior Programme Officer, School of Neuroscience Institute of Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience

Mark 10:13-16 Jesus and the Little Children

Having parents with Confucian and Christian backgrounds, I want to explore the common things of Confucian philosophy and the Gospel of Mark, as both traditions share a same thought: the importance of children and the childlike spirit.

Confucianism places a high value on children for the future of society. Emphasizing the importance of education and guiding them to become a responsible individual. There is a famous phrase from Confucian philosopher about children: 人之初性本善(rén zhī chū, xìng běn shàn). This phrase expresses the Confucian belief that all people are born with a good nature. This good nature is characterized by such qualities as compassion, empathy, and a sense of justice. In this passage, we came across a scene where Jesus welcomes children against the wishes of his disciples. He demands, 'Let the children come to me. Do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to them.' This simple statement is like Confucian teachings. Jesus recognized the goodness and potential of children, qualities that Confucianism also cherishes. Children, in their innocence and openness, possess a childlike spirit that is essential for embracing the kingdom of God.

The children's characters are humility, openness to learning, trust. They are free from judgment, bias, and the burdens of the world. Confucian philosophy encourages us to learn the childlike spirit throughout our lives, to remain open to new knowledge and experiences. Jesus' message invites us to approach God with the same humility and openness as a child, recognizing our need for guidance and love, to support children, ensure their wellbeing and uphold their dignity. Both Confucianism and Jesus' teachings remind us of the importance of humility and the value of the childlike spirit. By learning these qualities, we open ourselves to a better understanding of our place in the world and our relationship with God.

> Dr Helena XH Zhang Pre-Clinical Support Deputy Manager Faculty of Life Sciences & Medicine

Wednesday 20th March

Mark 10:17-31 Jesus and the Rich Man

In these verses we can really see the humility of Jesus. Giving the glory to the father first and then citing from the ten commandments, we can see Jesus's adherence to the law. In following the law, we must first follow God, only then can we follow the law. The man, disappointed with what Jesus said, asks him for what more he can do, and Jesus says he must give up his material wealth and seek real spiritual wealth. Seeing the man's disappointed reaction to this, Jesus speaks about how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. It is not money but rather love of money that corrupts a person and the love of money prevents someone from being truly righteous. Be it giving to the poor or even buying unnecessary things, as the Bible states in Matthew 6:24 'you cannot serve two masters' thus we must always love the father first before anything else. However, shocked at Jesus's proclamation the disciples asked one another who can be saved, and Jesus answered by saying how with God all things are possible. Jesus is telling us that, regardless of how far we stray, if we truly repent, trust in God and wish to change, then truly everything is possible with the Father. Finally, Peter talks about what the disciples have given up for Jesus, and Jesus replies by saying all they will be rewarded. The key here is that the disciples gave up everything not for a reward, but in knowing that it was the right thing to do. If we do good things for the sake of our personal benefit, we lose the goodness of our actions. But, if we do it with a real heart, truly we will find peace.

> Kanchan Palakode Member of the Catholic Society 1st Year LLB Law Student

Thursday 21st March

Mark 10:35-45 James and John

When James and John asked Jesus if they could be promoted above the other 10 disciples, it was clear that they did not realise what their request would require. Jesus explains in verse 40 that to be elevated as his close follower was reserved for those who were prepared to follow his example and live a life of service unto others. This was the preparation, or the cost, of being given status in this way James and John desired. In verses 43-45 Jesus explains:

whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Our greatness as those who are followers of Christ is actualised when we serve. As we serve others around us, it is in this humility that we develop a closeness with Jesus as we become more like him. But what does this look like...?

Encouraging one another and building each other up (1 Thess. 5:11) Loving one another (John 15:12) Praying for one another (James 5:16) Helping and supporting one another (Galatians 6:2) Counselling one another (Proverbs 11:14)

Be encouraged as you consider this as the Bible promises that Christ, through his spirit, will strengthen us and help us to grow in how we serve our families, loved ones, and local communities better.

Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us your son Jesus Christ, the perfect example of living to serve those around us. I pray for humility in our hearts as we consider how we can develop in this area. Amen.

Tamara Kwofie Student Outcomes Manager (Attainment) Pentecostal Christian

Friday 22nd March

Mark 10:46-52 Jesus and Bartimaeus

Don't let others stop you from being vulnerable and crying out to God. Ask and you shall receive. As much as we all have struggles, there is our God to talk to.

Science cannot explain a personal story of how an infertile woman finally at the age of 28 was able to give birth despite not having her period. When we struggle, we are told to keep quiet, or that it is insignificant. But it is God who values and appreciates our downfalls and our pain. We are in pain and cry to God not because we are complaining, but knowing the healer is here and we can finally be broken free from it.

When we have daily struggles or frustrations, I pray that we all say 'have mercy on me' just as the previously blind Bartimaeus did, to give us patience, resilience, control and live another day pushing aside the tiny specks of negativity that can sometimes cloud the entire day.

Lord, I pray that, as we are reminded of the blind man who had faith, that we have the same fire in his heart that knew before he asked out loud that he wanted to see, he was going to get it. I pray that we have faith that is undisturbed, even in modern times where science contradicts and does not believe in miracles. Amen.

> Victoria Chong 3rd Year BA History Student

Saturday 23rd March

Mark 14:1-11 Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Years ago, when travelling in France, a friend gave me a head massage on an overnight coach: not merely to pass the time but to help me relax and get some sleep on the long journey. It worked. It was a generous and intimate experience, and I loved it.

Each of the four gospels has a story of Jesus being anointed by a woman, so it's easy to mix up or merge the details. It can be tricky to see the different themes they offer. In John's gospel (12:1-9), the woman is Mary of Bethany, Lazarus and Martha's sister (not to be confused with Mary of Magdala, who is never named as having anointed Jesus). Mark's version also takes place in Bethany, so the unnamed woman is perhaps also Mary. She anoints Jesus's head, considered a sign of blessing at the time. She uses Himalayan spikenard oil, vastly expensive to this day. She breaks the jar, signalling that she fully intends to use it all. This act was likely a prediction of Christ's death (notice vs. 1-2), but Jesus also points to the act as noble in itself, and thus says that the encounter will always be told 'in memory of her' (vs. 9). As we have followed Mark this Lent, we have consistently seen people respond ineptly to Jesus, demonstrating their lack of understanding. However, there are those few individuals who, like this woman, have recognised God and responded to Jesus with their whole selves.

This woman used *a lot* of oil. I can only imagine that she must have massaged it into Jesus's head. Surely it would have just gone everywhere otherwise, making a mess and a waste. This was an action more powerful than words, displaying her love for God in giving more than she could afford (like the widow in Mark 12:41-44). I wonder how I might respond to Jesus today. Would I offer him a head massage? Or would I be too confused, or perhaps too busy, to even notice him?

Rev'd Dr Jenny Morgans Chaplain at the Denmark Hill Campus

Sunday 24th March: Palm Sunday

Mark 11:1-11 Jesus's Entry to Jerusalem

Jesus's entry into Jerusalem marks the beginning of Holy Week. We cannot escape the fickleness of those tearing branches from the trees and shouting 'hosanna', yet within a few days joining the cry 'crucify him!'

We know that Christ's death will not be the end of the story. But the apostles and crowds that cheered Christ's arrival did not, nor did they know even their own fickleness. Today we are invited to take part with the crowd, to acknowledge that as often as we make our hosannas ring, we too condemn Christ over to the authorities of this world. We can be fickle and faithless even as we strive to be faithful.

In a parable which encapsulates these conflicting realities, Jesus says, 'Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matt. 25:40). And contending for the soul of a violent man, he says to St Paul at the moment of his conversion, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' It is as St Augustine said, 'He who was above would not have said, "Why do you persecute me?" unless He were below also'. So we should 'fear Christ above; recognise Him below. Have Christ above bestowing His bounty, recognise Him here in need. Here He is poor, there He is rich' (Sermon 73).

Let us then follow Christ into Jerusalem and ultimately to the foot of the Cross of betrayal and suffering. For we shall know how much we love him if we can bear to stay there with our brothers and sisters, loving them as Christ has loved us.

'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another' (John 13:34).

Rt Rev'd Christopher Chessun Bishop of Southwark

Monday 25th March

Mark 11:15-19 Jesus in the Temple This reflection is to be read alongside the images on the back page of this booklet.

It is worth reflecting on the words of Christ in this striking passage: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'; recalling the words of the Prophet Isaiah (56:7). Setting apart a place for prayer is an ancient practice, creating a sacred space where the divine may be revealed. Moses entered such a sacred place when he encountered the voice of God at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2). *See Image 1.*

Tradition relates that at the beginning of the story of God's Incarnation in Christ, Mary Jesus's mother was taken to such a sacred place by her parents Joachim and Anna, where she lived during her youth. *See Image 2*. To such a sacred place did Joseph and Mary take the infant Christ, where he was received by Saint Symeon who, on encountering the Divine child, uttered the words recorded by Saint Luke (2:29-32) which we still repeat in prayer today. *See Image 3*.

And in the powerful words of Saint Paul, in another allusion to the Temple, we are exhorted to remember (1 Cor. 6:19): 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?' *See Image 4.*

At King's we are blessed to have two chapels and a number of prayer rooms where our staff and students, from many nations, may experience the joy of prayer.

At the start of Holy Week, may we be granted the opportunity to come to know such sacred places everywhere, and to recognise the sacredness of our own bodies as the temples of the Living God. Amen.

The Very Rev'd Archpriest Alexander Fostiropoulos Orthodox Chaplain Mark 12:28-34 The First Commandment

In reflection, I pondered on the asker and the answerer. The Scribe introduced in vs. 28 asks a question closely related to his profession. I assumed, as his labour was to record the commandments, the question he poses may have been asked by others to him. Assuming the Scribe's expertise, he may have come to an answer by his own knowledge of the word of God; yet he asks Jesus with no hesitation which commandment is the first. When asking for the first commandment, as Jesus later concluded (vs. 31) we are asking *what* is the greatest.

My first time fasting from food, my prayer was to make it to the end of the fast. Over the years, having fasted for a few months each year, my prayers are now dynamic. Yet I have never asked God, which is the first commandment of fasting? Is it to anoint our heads? (Matt. 6:17) Could it be to fast in secret? (Matt. 6:18) Or to fast when all our heart is turned towards the Lord our God? (Joel 2:12). Many of us may be fasting during this Lent period, let us continue to seek God's first commandment in loving God and our neighbour in all things we are well practised in: from prayer and fasting, to the competencies we bring to our workplaces.

The conclusion Jesus made about the Scribe in vs. 34 was in relation to another commandment Jesus gave (Matt. 6:33, Luke 12:31). Just as the Scribe sought the Kingdom of God and Jesus gave more by answering all the questions about the greatest commandments, when we seek God all our questions and more shall be added unto us.

Father God, I pray that we seek you in seriousness: to seek you dangerously and severely, with careful thought and careful action, solemnly and thoughtfully, and most of all sincerely in Jesus's Name, Amen.

Mary Ozurumba Patient and Staff Enhancer, St Thomas's Hospital Non-denominational Christian

Wednesday 27th March

Psalm 22:1-15 Trust Amidst Despair

In Swedish church tradition, the Wednesday of Holy Week is called *Dymmelonsdag*, named for the *dymbils* (pieces of wood) that are used to replace the clappers of church bells during the latter part of Holy Week in order to make a duller sound. This practice is designed to reflect the sombre note of Christ's passion, a note that is also recognisable in this psalm, rich as it is with prophetic references to Christ's death on the cross.

The predominant theme in this psalm is that of loneliness and abandonment by God, something felt even by Christ, who recites the opening verse of this psalm in his final moments on the Cross. On the Wednesday of Holy Week, Christ and the disciples are in Bethany. In Jerusalem, the chief priests plot the downfall of Christ after his betrayal by Judas. In Bethany, the disciples prepare for Passover. Only Christ knows what is coming for him, a burden of knowledge he shoulders alone. Tomorrow, after the Passover feast that marks the last supper, he will go to Gethsemane and pray, asking initially for reprieve from suffering, a moment of humanity and fear and perhaps even doubt before he returns to trust in his father, our father.

And from this, as the psalm continues, we too can learn to trust in the Lord in the darkest of times, when it may seem like there is no one else to trust, when even the bells do not ring. 'You kept me safe,' the speaker says, 'you have been my God.' Though there are moments of despair, the speaker returns always to their trust in God: 'Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help.'

> Grace Weaver Bachelor of Medicine, Batchelor of Surgery (MBBS) Student GKT School of Medical Education

Thursday 28th March: Maundy Thursday

Mark 14:12-25 The Passover

On Maundy Thursday, churches remember the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples before his crucifixion. Jesus had gathered with his disciples in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. During the Last Supper Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples. Each of this taking, blessing, breaking and giving has a special significance:

Taking: Jesus intentionally chose the bread. This was a deliberate act, showing that Jesus had control.

Blessing: Jesus was consecrating the bread, making it holy, so that it became a representation of his body.

Breaking: Jesus symbolized the breaking of his body which he knew was soon to happen.

Giving: Jesus gave the broken bread, telling his disciples to eat it. He wanted them to remember him and the sacrifice that he was about to make.

Down through the ages this act has been repeated during the Eucharist (also known as Holy Communion) in churches around the world, as people gather to participate in the Lord's Supper. During the Eucharist, we are called to remember Jesus. This is a special sort of remembering, an anamnesis, a remembering that extends from the past, to the present and into the future. It is an active participation in the event being remembered. And so, in the Eucharist, we call to mind the sacrifice of Jesus, not just once a year during Easter but throughout the year.

Although the anamnesis takes place during the Eucharist, we can remember Jesus wherever we are and whatever we are doing. It doesn't have to be in a church/chapel or even a chaplaincy room (although the coffee is good!). We can carry the knowledge of Jesus' sacrificial love for us throughout our daily lives.

Rev'd Dr Greta Sawyer School of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Sciences Faculty of Life Sciences and Medicine Associate Vicar at Worth Parish, Crawley

Friday 29th March: Good Friday

Mark 15:21-41 Jesus's Crucifixion

Fairy tales are enduringly attractive, as Walt Disney knew. Fairy tales are beautiful lies. They tell 'once upon a time' stories about miraculous transformations in which the heroes and heroines live 'happily ever after'. Institutions tell fairy tales all the time. Universities tell students that they will give them a great experience, preparing them for a wonderful life and career. Leaders and politicians tell beautiful lies about progress. The world is getting better. Medicine will find cures for everything. War will be eliminated.

Soap operas are also popular, but they are quite different from fairy tales. Here, life lurches from one crisis to another. The best you can hope for is to cope. Some characters are kind and helpful, others are thoughtless or wicked. Neither is guaranteed a good outcome.

The passage from Mark about Jesus's crucifixion is unremittingly bleak. One way to water it down is to pretend that what happened to Jesus was completely unique. But there is nothing unusual about someone innocent being humiliated, tortured and executed by an occupying political power. Jesus seems to suffer not just agony but despair and desolation, crying out from the cross 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' When he dies and the centurion says, 'Truly this man was the Son of God', it sounds like further mockery. Or, we can pretend that because of what happens next, everyone lives happily ever after. Mark does not contain such an ending, and it is better to read the story just as it is.

We have here an honest reminder that cruelty and suffering are real. It is better not to look away. If we kid ourselves that we can remove all the bad things from life, we will probably end up suffering more than if we are realistic. Suffering and death are not the whole story of life, but they are part of the story.

> Professor Linda Woodhead MBE FBA FD Maurice Professor of Moral & Social Theology Head of Department, Theology and Religious Studies Author with Nicholas Harvey of 'Unknowing God' (2022)

Saturday 30th March: Holy Saturday

Mark 15:42-47 The Burial of Jesus

It can sometimes be hard to adjust to the death of a person who meant a lot to us, even if it is a peaceful end to a long and fulfilling life. There may be a variety of often troubling feelings. The wilderness which Jesus once entered was remote from where humans dwelt, a stark and occasionally frightening place, and those who have died are yet more decisively cut off from the everyday world and their loved ones who remain. If someone has died violently, as in Jesus's case, at the hands of state forces and with the backing of religious authorities and community leaders, the loss may be particularly crushing. Merely mourning them may be unsafe.

Yet caring, courage and hope have not been wholly extinguished. What Jesus shared, in deed and word (in line with the teaching of the prophets and going still further) about God's commonwealth of love, justice and peace, where those on the margins are cherished and the last is first, has struck a chord with Joseph of Arimathea. His act of mercy is also one of boldness: he is willing to risk his respectability and security by asking for, and burying, the body.

Meanwhile women who have been among Jesus' most steadfast companions, who were present when he died, continue to watch and witness when he is laid in a tomb.

Loving God, when we feel grief-stricken, abandoned or hopeless, give us strength to hold fast to the way of love, however long the night, until day breaks again. Amen.

Savitri (Savi) Hensman Involvement Co-ordinator Applied Research Collaboration South London Institute of Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience Member of the Church of England

Sunday 31st March: Easter Sunday

Mark 16:1-8 Jesus's Resurrection

It's Easter Day, one of the happiest and holiest days of the Christian year. We may not expect Easter bunnies with baskets full of chocolate eggs, but we do expect some rejoicing and the odd alleluia. And what do we get from Mark? Women fleeing in terror. These were originally the final words of Mark's gospel. Not a triumphant song of joy and hope, not the offer of forgiveness, peace and presence that we find in later gospels. Just this unsettling fearfulness, this very human reaction to the unexpected and the divinely mysterious.

In moments of extreme change, even when the change is most wonderful, we may find fear blocking our access to joy. It is hard for us to trust, especially those of us who have been hurt by disappointed hope and unhealthy relationships. But God calls us to be open to being surprized by joy, to taking the risk of opening our hearts to the possibility of love and life beyond anything that is safe and conceivable.

Beyond and stronger than our fear, beyond and stronger than our lack of hope, is the love of God calling us to resurrection life, a life which is infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

I want to offer you a non-traditional prayer to take into this Eastertide. It is by the Australian cartoonist and writer Michael Leunig, and invites us to be open to this living, loving God who always confounds our expectations:

God give us rain when we expect sun. Give us music when we expect trouble. Give us tears when we expect breakfast. Give us dreams when we expect a storm. Give us a stray dog when we expect congratulations. God play with us, turn us sideways and around. Amen.

> Rev'd Dr Ellen Clark-King Dean





Image 1: Moses the Arch Prophet and the Burning Bush (12th Century icon) Image 2: The Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple (15th Century icon) Image 3: The Presentation of Christ to the Temple (icon written by George Kordis) Image 4: St Paul Preaching at Corinth (icon written by Dmitry Shkolnik)



