

to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-02-17 06:02 GMT

Lent Course – Holiness

Scripture says, "Be holy, because I am holy."

(Peter's first letter)

In this series of readings, comments and prayers I want to share with you something of the holy nature of God. Across the Church there seem to be many ways in which we approach or address God.

Do we approach with reverence or do we cuddle up? Do we speak to Almighty God or Loving Father?

We can find a range of expressions of service and worship in our churches, both within and across denominations. Do they all treat God as He should be treated, or could some of them lead people astray from a true understating of God?

A difficult question arises from all of this – do I attend a church where God is worshipped the way I like to worship Him or the way He should be worshipped? If the former is the case then I am placing my pleasure higher than His command. But how should God be worshipped, then?

The core word that is used in the Bible to describe God is *holy*. We shall spend around 20 days in the Old Testament and twenty in the New, looking again at what that word means in relation to God. The quality of our Christian lives and worship depend heavily on our understanding of the holiness of God.

Lord God, Holy God, draw me closer to you as I think and pray about the things I will be reading over this Lent season. Open my eyes to understand your holiness so that I might understand even more why Jesus Christ is essential to my salvation. Amen.

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Sharing together

Scripture says, "Be holy, because I am holy."

(Peter's first letter)

I encourage you to meet together with a couple of other people over a cup of tea and a slice of cake so that you can talk together over what you've read over the week before. Can you invite two people to your house? But what to do when we are together? It is really quite simple. I set out a plan below. Do not make it last any longer than it needs to be. Half an hour is fine, as is an hour if you need that much time.

Bring with you the readings, questions and prayers over the previous week or so

Start with refreshments

Read one or more of the readings

Go over any commentaries and questions that were challenging and see if you can answer them together, or at least hear each other's views. If you're stumped by any just email me or ask anyone from the ministry team or whoever might have an answer.

Prayer time. Have a few pieces of paper or Post-its for people to write down whatever they feel would be good to pray about. Put them on the table and select which ones you'd like to read out. Someone picks up the remainder. Read what's written or form a prayer around the words. Use some of the prayers from the week's studies.

Final prayer:

Lord God, you reign above us all and you are holy beyond our understanding. No one may see you and live. We thank you and bless you that you came to us in Jesus, dying and rising for us so that we may dare to call you Father.

Enable us by your Holy Spirit to live a holy life that is in all parts dedicated totally to you. In Jesus' name. Amen

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Day 1

Genesis 2:2-3

By the seventh day God had finished work he had been doing. On the seventh day he stopped the work he had been doing. Then God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as holy, because on that day he stopped all his work of creation.

It's well-nigh impossible to imagine what it was like before Creation. There was no time, and no visible light, as it had not been spoken into being. There was no space until something was created and the space was created for it.

Anyway, at the beginning there was God. No-one else. Nothing else. God in eternal glory. God decides to create man. This is the starting point for considering God's holiness. There was none like Him, there is none like Him and there will be none like Him. That's holiness in a nutshell, though holiness doesn't actually fit into a nutshell.

After seven days God has created the very best and He rests. One day in seven for all eternity is made special. It is a holy day. Jews rest on the seventh day; Christians make Sunday the holy day.

Were there flaws in what God created?

Does the theory of evolution conflict with the holiness of God?

Did God create me for fun, or because He was bored?

Was I created with a need for one day's rest in seven?

Lord God, Holy God, What was six days in making may have been an eternity in planning. You have ordained the seventh day for rest for mankind for all eternity. Teach me to rest in you one day in seven. Amen.

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Day 2

Genesis 6:5-9

The LORD saw how evil humans had become on the earth. All day long their deepest thoughts were nothing but evil. The LORD was sorry that he had made humans on the earth, and he was heartbroken. So he said, "I will wipe off the face of the earth these humans that I created. I will wipe out not only humans, but also domestic animals, crawling animals, and birds. I'm sorry that I made them."

But the LORD was pleased with Noah. This is the account of Noah and his descendants. Noah had God's approval and was a man of integrity among the people of his time. He walked with God.

It is hard to imagine that the Almighty God can actually hurt with heartbreak, but He did, and possibly still does every time someone flouts His laws or rejects His promises. Our Holy God cannot look upon sin it is so contrary to who He is. This is not to say that He ignores it.

The human race must have been pretty squalid for God to react like this. He decides to wipe out everything, without an expressed view of starting again. This could be it for humanity, a failed enterprise.

But God considers Noah. Noah may have been the only one left on earth who walked with God, and he was already 500 years old. God involves him in His rescue plan.

Why didn't God just create obedient humans?

Could God fail?

Why would God remove the birds and animals too?

Is it naïve to believe that Noah really existed?

Lord God, Holy God, your standards are demanding and your response is severe. Yet with those who walk with you there is safety from the storm of your anger. Take me under your wing. Amen.

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Day 3

Exodus 3:1-6

Moses was taking care of the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. As he led the sheep to the far side of the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

The Messenger of the LORD appeared to him there as flames of fire coming out of a bush. Moses looked, and although the bush was on fire, it was not burning up. So he thought, "Why isn't this bush burning up? I must go over there and see this strange sight."

When the LORD saw that Moses had come over to see it, God called to him from the bush, "Moses, Moses!" Moses answered, "Here I am!" God said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals because this place where you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

Moses was warned to keep his distance. Although the burning bush was not being bunt up Moses would most certainly have been consumed by God if he dared to come any closer. There is a distance between God and man that man may not breach. In the same way that God cannot look upon sin, man cannot look upon God. God is holy, and man's unholiness burns painfully in the presence of God.

The ground itself is made holy by the presence of The Holy One. Moses is commanded (not invited) to remove his sandals as a mark of respect. He is unable to look directly at God through fear, and covers his face from the eyes that are gazing at him.

Is our church a holy ground?

Did the bush area remain holy ground once God had left?

Have you felt the burn?

How would you reply if God called to you?

Lord God, Holy God, in your presence people hide their faces in fear. Let me never become so lazy that I lose sight of your holiness or respond to you with less than awe and wonder. Amen.

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Day 4

Exodus 15:6-11

Your right hand, O LORD, wins glory because it is strong. Your right hand, O LORD, smashes your enemies. With your unlimited majesty, you destroyed those who attacked you. You sent out your burning anger. It burned them up like straw.

With a blast from your nostrils, the water piled up. The waves stood up like a dam. The deep water thickened in the middle of the sea. "The enemy said, 'I'll pursue them! I'll catch up with them! I'll divide the loot! I'll take all I want! I'll use my sword! I'll take all they have!'

Your breath blew the sea over them. They sank like lead in the raging water. "Who is like you among the gods, O LORD? Who is like you? You are glorious because of your holiness and awe-inspiring because of your splendour.

You can guess that Moses is happy that the Israelites made it safely through the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army was engulfed. Moses praises God's strength and power over creation, and His action on those who dared to attack Him (not Israel).

Moses then wonders (in the sense of awe and wonder) about God. He describes God as unique among the gods ("unique" by itself would do!) and then combines God's majesty with God's holiness (from the NIV translation as the one above seems to differ a little). So many words, and they could easily blur into one another, but the combination of these words describing God makes for something greater than the parts together.

Does God get angry today?

What other words from your experience would you add to "holy" to describe him?

Do we know any church hymns like this one?

Lord God, Holy God, God of majesty, you reign in power over your enemies and you control both the elemental and the complex. For love of your people you saved them and in your anger destroyed your enemies. There is none like you, and I stand in awe of you. Amen.

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Day 5

Exodus 19:9-13

The LORD said to Moses, "I am coming to you in a storm cloud so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always believe you." Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

So the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people, and tell them they have two days to get ready. They must set themselves apart as holy. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the day after tomorrow.

On that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai as all the people watch. Mark off a boundary around the mountain for the people, and tell them not to go up the mountain or even touch it. Those who touch the mountain must be put to death. No one should touch them. They must be stoned or shot with arrows. No matter whether it's an animal or a person, it must not live.

The people may go up the mountain only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast."

God is preparing Moses to receive the words of the Law. Even the Israelites, who are banned on pain of death from ascending Mount Sinai, must prepare themselves. There's no such thing as casual where God is. They are commanded to set themselves apart. This will take two days of preparation. No repairing tents or shearing sheep for two days, just cleaning your clothes to God's standards.

Holiness for us is about separation, about being on a route or in a place that is devoted to God. Separation may be total for a period of time or it may be an embedded part of everyday life.

The mountain is cordoned off as it will become a holy place when God descends to it. God passes on to the people the task of putting to death anyone or any animal that strays onto the mountain when He is present. God does not share His holiness freely.

Are we too casual with God?

Should we, too, prepare ourselves for when we meet together as Church?

How can we set ourselves apart for holiness?

Is your journey of faith going anywhere?

Lord God, Holy God, Righteous God, the requirements you make of us are necessary to protect us from you. There is no cheap grace. Protect us from our pride, our arrogance, our disobedience and faithlessness. Amen.

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Day 6

Exodus 20:1-11

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of slavery in Egypt.

Never have any other god.

Never make your own carved idols or statues that represent any creature in the sky, on the earth, or in the water. Never worship them or serve them, because I, the LORD your God, am a God who does not tolerate rivals. I punish children for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. But I show mercy to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my commandments.

Never use the name of the LORD your God carelessly. The LORD will make sure that anyone who carelessly uses his name will be punished.

Remember the day of worship by observing it as a holy day. You have six days to do all your work. The seventh day is the day of worship dedicated to the LORD your God. You, your sons, your daughters, your male and female slaves, your cattle, and the foreigners living in your city must never do any work on that day. In six days the LORD made heaven, earth, and the sea, along with everything in them. He didn't work on the seventh day. That's why the LORD blessed the day he stopped his work and set this day apart as holy.

The Ten Commandments came about as a result of God's holiness. The first four commandments are all about who God is and then about how we honour him. Note that they are quite threatening – never do this, never do that; severe punishments, etc.

The controlling human who tells another that they shall have no other friends is working in his or her own interests and without regard for the other. "You shall have no other Gods" is not a statement of small-minded control. It is a directive for living the best life possible. God has to be recognised as the only God. We will never be successful if we attempt to stray away from God.

To worship anything that is not God (commandment 2) is to short-change God. To disrespect his name (3) is to disrespect him. To flout his holiness (4) is to deny his holiness and his very nature.

Are God's commandments short on compassion and love?

Is a statue or painting of a saint, or any object of veneration such as an ornate cross or a holy relic allowed by God?

Have we lost the battle on people uttering the name of Jesus Christ as an expletive?

Whatever happened to the day of rest?

Lord God, Holy God, Only God, Your commandments reflect who you are and how we must relate to You. Reveal to us the sin of pride that prompts us to think that we are equal to You. Amen.

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Day 7

Exodus 28:2-29

Make holy clothes for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honour. Tell all those who have the skill-those to whom I have given this ability-to make Aaron's clothes. These clothes will set him apart as holy when he serves me as priest.

These are the clothes they will make: a breastplate, an ephod and the robe that is worn with it, another specially woven linen robe, the chief priest's turban, and a cloth belt. They will make these holy clothes for your brother Aaron and his sons so that they can serve me as priests. They must use gold, violet, purple, and bright red yarn, and fine linen.

Make the ephod out of fine linen yarn. Creatively work gold, violet, purple, and bright red yarn into the fabric. It will have two shoulder straps attached at the top corners so that it can be fastened...

...Whenever Aaron goes into the holy place, he will be carrying the names of the sons of Israel over his heart as a constant reminder in the LORD'S presence. He must do this by wearing the breastplate for decision-making.

I encourage you to look up and read the whole of this chapter. You might like to attempt sketching the garments from the description you have read, or look them up on the internet:

http://www.bible-history.com/tabernacle/TAB4The_Priestly_Garments.htm

The reason for the precise detail is twofold. Firstly God demands only the best – the finest materials and the finest workmanship for the place where He will meet with Aaron. He has already provided the workmen for the task. Secondly God is protecting Aaron. Should Aaron walk into the presence of God incorrectly dressed then that would be it for Aaron. There will be a reading later on that will show how God's holiness spills into anger when someone attempts to assist him.

Should our clergy dress like Aaron?

What should we wear in the presence of God?

How expensive and ornate should our churches, their fittings and fabric be?

In what in our churches do we give God our very best?

Lord God, Holy God, you have provided all that we need to enable us to give you the best we have. That which we have produced, that which we have earned, that which we have been given; our strength, our intelligence, our skills, our creativity, in large or small measure, all come from you. Help us respond with all that we have and all that we are. Amen.

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Day 8

Exodus 29:1-7

The LORD continued: Now, this is what you must do in order to set Aaron and his sons apart to serve me as priests - take a young bull that has no defects and two rams that have no defects. Use the finest wheat flour, but no yeast, and bake some loaves of bread, some rings of bread made with olive oil, and some wafers brushed with olive oil. Put the bread in a basket, and bring the basket along with the young bull and the two rams.

Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and wash them. Take the clothes, and put them on Aaron-the linen robe, the ephod and the robe that is worn with it, and the breastplate. Use the belt to tie it on him tightly. Put his turban on him, and fasten the holy crown to it. Take the anointing oil, pour it on his head, and anoint him.

Aaron and his sons are being set apart for a role. They are to serve God in the Tabernacle. They have been made holy, consecrated for that purpose. As priests they would do no other work. The nation would support the priests in their work so that they could do what they are called to do.

The priest's holiness is not achieved by having someone sprinkle magic powder on him. Their holiness comes from what they absorb of God's holiness as they carry out their tasks. Their clothing had to be put on over a washed body, and it had to be put on correctly. The priest's life and conduct are constantly under scrutiny by God. They are empty vessels for God's holiness.

Then oil is poured over the head of Aaron, over the turban and the crown and probably down his neck.

If you read on in the chapter, you will see how thorough God's instructions are to Aaron and his sons regarding the slaughter of the bull. I wonder whether the fine robes stayed pristine clean against the wash of blood and gore. The altar was a butcher's slab.

How is God calling people today?

What today is a priestly task?

How do I prepare for worship?

What place does the altar have in our worship?

Lord God, Holy God, You will have no hurried or careless preparation from us when we enter into worship, for if we do not bother, You can not turn up. Challenge my attitude and my approach to worship. Amen.

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Day 9

Exodus 30:22-38

The LORD said to Moses: Take the finest spices: 12 pounds of powdered myrrh; half as much of fragrant cinnamon; 6 pounds of fragrant cane; 12 pounds of cassia-all weighed using the standard weight of the holy place-and 4 quarts of olive oil.

Have a perfumer make these into a holy oil, a fragrant mixture, used only for anointing. This will be the holy oil used for anointing. Use it to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark containing the words of my promise, the table and all the dishes, the lamp stand and all the utensils, the altar for incense, the altar for burnt offerings and all its accessories, and the basin with its stand. In this way you will dedicate them for their holy purpose. Then they will be most holy, and anything that touches them will become holy.

Anoint Aaron and his sons as well. In this way you will set them apart for their holy duties of serving me as priests. Say to the Israelites, 'For generations to come, this will be my holy oil used only for anointing. It must never be poured on the bodies of other people. Never make any perfumed oil using this formula. It is holy, and you must treat it as holy. Whoever prepares a perfume like this or puts it on anyone who is not a priest must be excluded from the people.'

Such detail! God leaves nothing to chance, and specifies the ingredients for creating the anointing oil. He entrusts its creation to a perfumer. The same applies to the incense (read on in the chapter). Only the experts may make the oil.

In order to mark the tent and its artefacts as holy this special formula oil is poured on or daubed onto the artefacts in the Tent of Meeting. Everything is transformed into sacred objects by the anointing. They become most holy (is that holy, holy?) and the holiness will rub off onto anything that touches them. Aaron and his family are to be anointed, too.

God places an embargo on its manufacture and use. No-one else must make it. It must not be used on anything or anyone other than that which God has prescribed.

What does God expect in our church buildings and furnishings?

Do our Church leaders have an anointing for the work God has entrusted to them?

Should we anoint those who serve in our Church? At each service?

In what way does God desire to use my skills?

Lord God, Holy God, God of design and detail, I dedicate myself to You. You have created me with meticulous care. Anoint me for your work. Amen.

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when:2015-02-28 06:02 GMT

Day 10

Exodus 31:12-16

The LORD told Moses to say to the Israelites: Be sure to observe my days of worship. This will be a sign between me and you for generations to come so that you will know that I am the LORD who makes you holy.

Observe the day of worship because it is holy to you. Whoever treats it like any other day must be put to death.

Whoever works on that day must be excluded from the people. You may work for six days, but the seventh day is a day of worship, a day when you don't work. It is holy to the LORD.

Whoever works on that day must be put to death. The Israelites must observe this day of worship, celebrating it for generations to come as a permanent reminder of my promise.

God's last words to Moses on the mountain reinforced the notion of keeping one day holy to God. God places this injunction upon the Israelites as a sign of God's resting on the seventh day. The point of it is that it is holy to the Israelites, a day for remembering the LORD who alone makes his people holy.

While we live in a world that is more complex than that of the Israelites and would prefer to have electricity on and hospital emergency departments open on Sunday there is still a swathe of activity that we could fend off from a day of rest.

It might be argued that our modern work and rest patterns are different. It might be argued that the Israelites laboured all day until sunset looking after sheep, milking, maintaining, farming, trading without much rest time. We have patterns of work covering all hours of the week. Beware, however, of thinking that an hour at our convenience at a Sunday service counts for a day of worship.

Does one day of rest each week apply only to the Jews?

What are my excuses for not resting?

How do I maintain time that is holy to God?

Lord God, Holy God, you only took one day of rest and you want to bless us with one every seven days. Help me to honour you in keeping holy time with you. Amen

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when:2015-03-02 06:02 GMT

Day 11

Exodus 34:4-8

Early the next morning Moses went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, carrying the two stone tablets.

The LORD came down in a cloud and stood there with him and called out his name "the LORD." Then he passed in front of Moses, calling out, "The LORD, the LORD, a compassionate and merciful God, patient, always faithful and ready to forgive. He continues to show his love to thousands of generations, forgiving wrongdoing, disobedience, and sin. He never lets the guilty go unpunished, punishing children and grandchildren for their parents' sins to the third and fourth generation."

Immediately, Moses knelt, bowing with his face touching the ground.

Moses had asked to see God's glory (read Ex 33:18). God had refused for health and safety reasons – Moses' health and safety. However, He placed Moses in a cleft in the rock, covered him, and passed by him. Moses felt the presence of God, and he heard God's (fore)name, the LORD.

But God had not finished saying his name, for he goes on – Compassionate, Faithful, Merciful, Loving, Forgiving, Punishing. His name is His nature. A dog may be named Fido ("faithful") and may well be a faithful dog, but he may also be a brilliant runner; a rabbit may be named Thumper because its tail thumps the ground, but it may also be the best digger around. These names are descriptions of just one aspect of the animal. God's name is who God is. Hear the name, know your God.

Moses might just capture the back view of God after he has passed by, if he only were able to lift his face from the ground. He did not kneel as a mark of respect. He knelt because his knees bent in the presence of God.

Did God need to add the "punishing children" part to his name?

What does the name of Jesus mean to you?

Do the guilty get away with it?

God not include "holy" in his name – any idea why?

LORD God, Holy God, compassionate and merciful God, faithful and forgiving God, words cannot express the majesty of Your name. By Your Holy Spirit enable me to meditate upon that name so that I may grow in understanding Your nature. Amen.

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Day 12

Exodus 34:28-30

Moses was there with the LORD 40 days and 40 nights without food or water. He wrote on the tablets the words of the promise, the ten commandments.

Moses came down from Mount Sinai, carrying the two tablets with God's words on them. His face was shining from speaking with the LORD, but he didn't know it. When Aaron and all the Israelites looked at Moses and saw his face shining, they were afraid to come near him.

While Moses was standing in God's presence he did not spend time looking at himself. He didn't even think about food or drink or body functions or sleep. God was doing business with Moses and in the presence of the Holy One normal physical and biological laws take second place.

All the Israelites were struck with fear at the lingering reflection of God that still radiated from the face of Moses' face. What they saw was only the fading effect on Moses' face. That was enough to fill them with such fear and dread of the holy God of Israel that they, and that would include Aaron, dared not approach Moses.

What mental picture do you have of God on the mountain? Is it big enough?

Where for you is the brightness of God's presence reflected?

Where in our worship do we see the presence of the Lord, the Holy One?

Lord God, Holy God, I hardly come near Your presence, but Moses was there with You for days on end. Bring me closer for longer to You. Amen.

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Day 13

Leviticus 6:25-30

Tell Aaron and his sons: These are the instructions for the offering for sin. The offering for sin must be slaughtered in the LORD'S presence in the same place where the burnt offering is slaughtered.

It is very holy. The priest who makes the offering for sin will eat it in a holy place, in the courtyard of the tent of meeting.

Anything that touches its meat will be holy. If blood gets on someone's clothes, he must wash them in a holy place.

Any piece of pottery in which the offering for sin is cooked must be broken into pieces. Any copper kettle in which the offering for sin is cooked must be scoured and rinsed with water.

Any male among the priests may eat the offering for sin. It is very holy. Any offering for sin must not be eaten if some of the blood was brought into the holy place in the tent of meeting to make peace with the LORD. It must be burned.

The offering for sin described above would take place if the High Priest sinned in any way. God gives it in precise detail because the High Priest's role is crucial, and restoring his role to him demands action to the letter.

The offering, in the form of a sacrificed bull, becomes a holy object and must be treated with care, caution and respect. Sacrifices may normally be cooked and eaten – that's how the priests stayed alive. However, if any of the blood of the sacrifice touched anything else it had to be cleaned or destroyed. Like in a Greek restaurant, the dishes had to be smashed. God's holiness was not to be distributed in any way.

Aaron could take the blood of the animal into the holy place as a peace offering. Blood is the essence of life. The priests knew how well and copiously it flowed - their robes were butchers' aprons. Blood trumps flesh. It's all so gory, yet the act of sacrifice and offering back to God from what he has provided is what God demands as a payment for sin.

God reserves his holiness.

At what point does the offering become holy?

Are our offerings to God holy?

Which is more holy – Christ's body, or his blood?

Lord God, Holy God, all holiness is Yours alone and You share that with whoever you choose. Keep me from ever thinking myself too holy for my own good. Amen.

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Day 14

2 Samuel 6:3-7

David and his men put God's ark on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's home on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were guiding the new cart. They brought it from Abinadab's home, with Ahio walking ahead of the ark.

David and the entire nation of Israel were celebrating in the LORD'S presence with all kinds of instruments made from cypress wood and with lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals.

But when they came to Nacon's threshing floor, the oxen stumbled. So Uzzah reached out for the ark of God and grabbed it. The LORD became angry with Uzzah, so God killed him there for his lack of respect. He died beside the ark of God.

I have been at a service where new bell ropes were dedicated. The priest prayed for God's blessing on the coiled piles of rope sitting on the altar. I am not sure if this gave the ropes any special quality that ended pulling power or longevity into them. After all they were just the ropes you attach to the bells, and large bells are not particularly biblical.

The ark, however, was something else. This was the box, beautifully crafted with fine wood and copious amounts of gold, over which God promised to meet with the High Priest each year. It was being moved to a new place, and the only way to move it was to use the long poles that slipped through the gold rings on the sides of the ark. You did not touch the ark. Remembering how Aaron had to wear his holy fire-retardant robes before he came near God, it comes as no surprise that Uzzah's best intentions were met with the sternest response.

Abinadab was David's brother, so Uzzah was a nephew of David. He was probably a Kohathite, a member of the clan whose task it was to look after the holy items in the tent of meeting.

Was Uzzah unfortunately in the wrong place at the wrong time? Read Numbers 4:4-15

Does making a cartoon of the prophet Mohammed merit a similar punishment?

What sort of holiness do the artefacts in our churches (e.g. altar, cross, flower stands) have?

Is there a case for dressing ourselves in Sunday best?

Lord God, Holy God, Your holiness is not for touching unless You first make the invitation. Forgive my presumptuousness when I have approached You in ways that offend your holiness.

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when:2015-03-06 06:02 GMT

Day 15

2 Samuel 6:16-23

When the ark of the LORD came to the City of David, Saul's daughter Michal looked out of a window and saw King David leaping and dancing in the LORD'S presence, so she despised him.

..

When David returned to bless his family, Saul's daughter Michal came out to meet him. "How dignified Israel's king was today! He was exposing himself before the eyes of the slave girls of his palace staff-like a mindless fool might expose himself!"

David answered Michal, "I didn't dance in front of the slave girls but in front of the LORD. He chose me rather than your father or anyone in your father's house, and he appointed me leader of Israel, the LORD'S people. I will celebrate in the LORD'S presence, and I will degrade myself even more than this.

David is not one to let his royalty and dignitas get in the way of worship. The king of Israel knew all about power, position, honour and respect. These came to him through what he had achieved, and David knew that it was all due to God's hand being upon him.

Saul's daughter had lived in privilege simply by being born a daughter of Saul. She had earned nothing and deserved nothing but she knew that in order to keep what she had she had to maintain and work at her dignified lifestyle and keep the family line intact. She was David's wife. Seeing David cavorting and prancing seemed to her to be the fast way to lose it all.

Read on to find out how God dealt with Michal – an uncomfortably appropriate punishment.

What gets in the way of your worship? What can you do about it?

When did you last bless your family?

How much store do we place on what we have achieved of ourselves?

What sort of worship does God require of us?

Lord God, Holy God, Your servant David was prepared to degrade himself beyond leaping and dancing. Cut the pride of my dignity, turn me towards You alone and release me into true worship. Amen.

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when:2015-03-07 06:02 GMT

Day 16

1 Samuel 1:24-2:2

As soon as Hannah had weaned Samuel, she took him with her. She also brought a three-year-old bull, half a bushel of flour, and a full wineskin. She brought him to the LORD'S house at Shiloh while the boy was still a child. Then the parents butchered the bull and brought the child to Eli. "Sir," Hannah said, "as sure as you live, I'm the woman who stood here next to you and prayed to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD granted my request. In return, I am giving him to the LORD. He will be dedicated to the LORD for his whole life." And they worshipped the LORD there.

Hannah prayed out loud, "My heart finds joy in the LORD. My head is lifted to the LORD. My mouth mocks my enemies. I rejoice because you saved me. There is no one holy like the LORD. There is no one but you, O LORD. There is no Rock like our God... "

Hanna's hosannas, should you care to read on from here, sound like those of another woman who was with child. You know who I mean. Time does not allow me to delve more deeply into that, but open your Bible and take a look and compare. Luke 1:46-55.

This holy God cares for his people, cares for and honours the childless woman who had made a big, big commitment to him. She now honours God by bringing her baby Samuel to the temple. Some baby, too!

God's holiness might be all unto himself, but it is the constant that ensures that God is God is God, wherever and whenever, to whomever.

Why did God honour Samuel as well?

What proportion of your life is dedicated to God?

What should we be praying for in our Churches today, and what are we prepared to give God in return for it?

Lord God, Holy God, there is none like you, for You are mighty and reign over all things. In You I have everything I need. Burn away my selfish desires and replace them with a yearning for your providence and blessing in my life. Amen.

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when:2015-03-09 06:02 GMT

Day 17

Isaiah 6:1-4

In the year King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and lofty throne. The bottom of his robe filled the temple.

Angels were standing above him. Each had six wings: With two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They called to each other and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory." Their voices shook the foundations of the doorposts, and the temple filled with smoke.

Isaiah has a vision of heaven, or perhaps Isaiah is taken to heaven. The Lord God is sitting on a high throne and Isaiah is way down below, looking up. Perhaps God is too high for Isaiah to be able to gaze on his face. Even higher stand the angels who cover their faces and feet in the presence of God. Surrounding Isaiah is the train of God's robe, filling the space of the building.

The angels express God's holiness in the only way they can. They call out "Holy, holy, holy". Counting numbers go 1, 2, 3; square numbers go 1, 4, 9; space numbers go 1, 8, 27. See how the numbers grow quickly. God is the God of a greater dimension still. When the angels repeat the word it magnifies the meaning more than we can imagine, and they then do it again. Ineffable holiness, there is none more holy than the thrice holy God.

He is the LORD.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=No1MfYkcNuU>

No questions today – just enter in to the Holy Place.

Lord God, thrice Holy God, You are beautiful beyond description, too marvellous for words. Too wonderful for comprehension, like nothing ever seen or heard. Who can grasp Your infinite wisdom? Who can fathom the depths of Your love? You are beautiful beyond description, Majesty, enthroned above. I stand in awe of You. Holy God, to whom all praise is due, I stand in awe of You. Amen

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when:2015-03-10 06:02 GMT

Day 18

Isaiah 6:5-8

So I said, "Oh, no! I'm doomed. Every word that passes through my lips is sinful. I live among people with sinful lips. I have seen the king, the LORD of Armies!"

Then one of the angels flew to me. In his hand was a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, "This has touched your lips. Your guilt has been taken away, and your sin has been forgiven."

We're all doomed, doomed, I say. Woe and thrice woe... Dad's Army and Up Pompeii know all about melodrama. Isaiah, however, was not overreacting. Under the searchlight of the LORD there was no elation, no deep joy, no happy clapping. Isaiah saw only the miserable sinner that he was, the wretched state of his pitiful existence, and the inevitability of damnation upon his soul. His accusing tongue condemned him.

Isaiah had not changed – this is how he was. The searing light of God's holiness shone on him and he saw what had previously been hidden, both stuff that Isaiah had kept secret and stuff that he didn't even know about. Isaiah was not pleased to have seen the king, the LORD of hosts. He was in mortal fear.

The angel cauterises the potty mouth. The sin was paid for and forgiven.

What is going to show up on the screen when God's scanner light shines on me?

What baggage do I need to hand over to God?

How do I approach the Sunday prayer of confession? Green channel or red?

Lord God, Holy God, in your presence I see myself as I am. I am not beautiful. Break me, melt me, re-fashion me with a clean heart and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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when:2015-03-11 06:02 GMT

Day 19

Job 40:1-14

God then confronted Job directly: “Now what do you have to say for yourself? Are you going to haul me, the Mighty One, into court and press charges?”

Job answered: “I’m speechless, in awe - words fail me. I should never have opened my mouth! I’ve talked too much, way too much. I’m ready to shut up and listen.”

God addressed Job next from the eye of the storm, and this is what he said: “I have some more questions for you, and I want straight answers. Do you presume to tell me what I’m doing wrong? Are you calling me a sinner so you can be a saint? Do you have an arm like my arm? Can you shout in thunder the way I can? Go ahead, show your stuff.

Let’s see what you’re made of, what you can do. Unleash your outrage. Target the arrogant and lay them flat. Target the arrogant and bring them to their knees. Stop the wicked in their tracks - make mincemeat of them!...

...I’ll gladly step aside and hand things over to you - you can surely save yourself with no help from me! (Message Bible).

The book of Job sounds like something you might read on a miserable day in a power cut in a hotel room. Thank God that there is Leviticus to follow on with in case the power doesn’t come back quickly. (Thank God for the Gideons, too!)

It is actually a beautiful book and it follows all sorts of lines of challenging arguments about who God is. At the end God steps in and reminds Job of His and Job’s respective places. There’s no cosyng up to God nor is there any questioning of God’s authority. God stands apart – he is holy. We may not tread upon his holiness or darken his glory, re-interpret his justice or judge him.

Have you ever accused God or questioned his authority?

Have you ever judged God to be less than what He is?

Have you ever prayed with mouth shut and ears and eyes open?

Lord God, Holy God, I close my mouth in your presence lest I spew out rubbish. I open my heart and pray that you will take residence in me. Amen.

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when:2015-03-12 06:02 GMT

Day 20

Job 42:1-6

Then Job answered the LORD: I know that you can do everything and that your plans are unstoppable.

You said, 'Who is this that belittles my advice without having any knowledge about it?' Yes, I have stated things I didn't understand, things too mysterious for me to know.

You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak. I will ask you, and you will teach me.' I had heard about you with my own ears, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.

That is why I take back what I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show that I am sorry."

After all the suffering that Job had been through he gets a flea in his ear from God, which seems to be a little unfair (but I'm not going to judge God after what I said yesterday).

Job, however, is penitent and he sits himself down in dust and ashes. This is not a penance or a punishment. Job wants to demonstrate positively, not negatively to God that he knows his place in the created order of things. From dust we come and ashes we shall become, but I implore you to read and ponder on Job's wonderful words in chapter 19:25-27

Where's your place in the created order of things?

Does the Sunday confession prayer touch your heart?

Lord God, Holy God, Omnipotent God, your plans are unstoppable. I should rather be riding in your chariot than being trampled by it. Take me alongside You, I pray. Amen

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when:2015-03-13 06:02 GMT

Day 21

Luke 2:21-23

Eight days after his birth, the child was circumcised and named Jesus. This was the name the angel had given him before his mother became pregnant.

After the days required by Moses' Teachings to make a mother clean had passed, Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem. They took Jesus to present him to the Lord. They did exactly what was written in the Lord's Teachings: "Every firstborn boy is to be set apart as holy to the Lord."

And on we go to the New Testament. Did you catch that last sentence above – it can so easily slip past? God had decreed that every first-born male was to be offered back to Him. This was to remind the Israelites that God had killed the first-born males, animal and human, of the Egyptians. From the time the Israelites entered their promised land, first-born male animals were God's, and were returned to God by sacrifice. First-born sons were to be bought back from God by paying a tax to the temple.

Although Joseph and Mary redeemed their son Jesus (Hannah did not), like every other first-born male he was set apart as holy to God. God had his eye on Jesus.

In Christ we are all first-borns, both male and female. We are set apart for his purposes.

How do I live the life of a first-born heir?

What do I owe to God?

How was I redeemed?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, you claim us all as your own in Jesus. Intervene in my life where I set myself apart from You rather than to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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when:2015-03-14 06:02 GMT

Day 22

Mark 1:23-28

At that time there was a man in the synagogue who was controlled by an evil spirit. He shouted, "What do you want with us, Jesus from Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

Jesus ordered the spirit, "Keep quiet, and come out of him!" The evil spirit threw the man into convulsions and came out of him with a loud shriek. Everyone was stunned. They said to each other, "What is this? This is a new teaching that has authority behind it! He gives orders to evil spirits, and they obey him."

The news about him spread quickly throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

This acknowledgement of holiness in Mark's gospel comes from a very strange source – an evil or unclean spirit. The spirit can see just who this Jesus really is – the Holy One of God. Jesus did not have holiness placed on him by association with God or by touching holy things. Jesus is holy because he is God, God in human clothing, God incarnate. The holiness of God caused the unclean spirit in the man to cry out in terror, for that unclean spirit was unable to share the same space as Jesus. The unclean spirit was pleased to be told to scoot.

Jesus had recently spent time in the wilderness and was tempted by Satan, leader of those angels who had turned against God, a powerful enemy who was not bound to earth and human form as Jesus was. Jesus was weak in comparison, but Satan treated Jesus with cautious respect insofar as he crafted his words of temptation perfectly. He did not lie to or try to deceive Jesus. Make stones into bread – you can do it (Jesus could, if he wished). Throw yourself off the temple roof and let angels save you (they would). Worship me and I will give you all the kingdoms of this world as yours (absolutely true – they belonged to Satan, and Satan would have gladly handed them over to Jesus).

Jesus refutes Satan with words from scripture and maintains his honour, his dignity, his holiness.

Why did Jesus silence the unclean spirit?

Why did Jesus let the unclean spirit go?

Who owns the kingdoms of this world today?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, you are the Holy One. As I touch your holiness so may I become holy and know that in Christ you reign over all. Amen.

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when:2015-03-16 06:02 GMT

Day 23

Luke 5:1-8

One day Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee. The people crowded around him as they listened to God's word.

Jesus saw two boats on the shore. The fishermen had stepped out of them and were washing their nets. So Jesus got into the boat that belonged to Simon and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Then Jesus sat down and taught the crowd from the boat.

When he finished speaking, he told Simon, "Take the boat into deep water, and lower your nets to catch some fish." Simon answered, "Teacher, we worked hard all night and caught nothing. But if you say so, I'll lower the nets."

After the men had done this, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to tear. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. Their partners came and filled both boats until the boats nearly sank.

When Simon Peter saw this, he knelt in front of Jesus and said, "Leave me, Lord! I'm a sinful person!"

Why is it when you experience a fresh revelation of Jesus that, rather than feeling closer to him you find yourself even less worthy to be near him? Well, that's holiness for you. Peter's pathetic response was just like Isaiah's.

Jesus worked a gracious miracle. These fishermen had had a bad night. He provides enough fish for both boats. One boat full would have been amazing. Two is holy. Peter, more spiritually aware than he realises, is struck not so much by the abundance of fish, nor the generosity of Jesus, but by the Holy One himself. He is struck by a blow of holiness, holiness so real that it pains him – "Get away from me, Lord".

Why didn't Peter move away himself? Because he couldn't move. Peter fell to his knees in the presence of holiness – he could not stay standing. On his knees before the Holy One Peter saw his own miserable lack of holiness and his need for forgiveness and cleansing.

When did you last take your boat out into deep water?

When did your knees last bend?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, Generous God, reveal your holiness in grace to me, so that while I may be forced to consider how wretched I am in your sight I have the assurance that in Jesus you desire to lift me up. Amen.

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when:2015-03-17 06:02 GMT

Day 24

Mark 14:3-9

Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had suffered from a skin disease. While Jesus was sitting there, a woman went to him. She had a bottle of very expensive perfume made from pure nard. She opened the bottle and poured the perfume on his head.

Some who were there were irritated and said to one another, "Why was the perfume wasted like this? This perfume could have been sold for a high price, and the money could have been given to the poor." So they said some very unkind things to her.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You will always have the poor with you and can help them whenever you want. But you will not always have me with you.

She did what she could. She came to pour perfume on my body before it is placed in a tomb. I can guarantee this truth: Wherever the Good News is spoken in the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

Jesus is the human face of God, and the unapproachable holiness of God becomes approachable in Jesus Christ alone.

The woman came with oil to anoint Jesus. Jesus said it was as preparation for his burial, but it was also a prophetic symbol of Jesus the High Priest, who would by his death enter into the most holy place of the Temple and tear down the dividing curtain.

The human reasoning that argues that the woman's money could have been better spent on the poor is reasoning against God – we know what happened to Job when he reasoned against God.

Does your giving anoint Jesus?

Do you resent the spending of money to honour and anoint Jesus?

Have you ever selected the "worthy" over the holy?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, if I harbour negative feelings about splashing perfume on Jesus or splashing out cash to honour him please enable me to see him as the woman saw him and not as the purse squeezers did. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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when:2015-03-18 06:02 GMT

Day 25

Acts 9:3-8

As Saul was coming near the city of Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

Saul asked, "Who are you, sir?" The person replied, "I'm Jesus, the one you're persecuting. Get up! Go into the city, and you'll be told what you should do."

Meanwhile, the men travelling with him were speechless. They heard the voice but didn't see anyone. Saul was helped up from the ground. When he opened his eyes, he was blind. So his companions led him into Damascus.

Saul was knocked down by light. The holy glory of Jesus Christ had been revealed to him, and he fell to the ground. What else could he do? There's a pattern of falling down emerging here.

Jesus could have stopped Saul at any time, or have destroyed Saul completely, but he chose to use him. Jesus had every right to speak in righteous anger and judgement, but he simply asks Saul why he is doing this. He commissions Saul on the spot. Whom shall I send? You, Saul!

Read on to find out what God has in store for Saul as he tells it to Ananias.

Why would Jesus choose the most zealous Christian-persecutor?

Is there someone who needs to be knocked over by your love?

When did God decide upon selecting Saul?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, from time to time you break out from the heavens and reveal yourself and we are caught in our tracks. Enable us by your Holy Spirit to know you more clearly. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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when:2015-03-19 06:02 GMT

Day 26

Revelation 1:9-18

I am John, your brother... I came under the Spirit's power on the Lord's day. I heard a loud voice behind me like a trumpet, saying, "Write on a scroll what you see, and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

I turned toward the voice which was talking to me, and when I turned, I saw seven gold lamp stands. There was someone like the Son of Man among the lamp stands.

He was wearing a robe that reached his feet. He wore a gold belt around his waist. His head and his hair were white like wool-like snow. His eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like glowing bronze refined in a furnace. His voice was like the sound of raging waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword. His face was like the sun when it shines in all its brightness.

When I saw him, I fell down at his feet like a dead man. Then he laid his right hand on me and said, "Don't be afraid! I am the first and the last, the living one. I was dead, but now I am alive forever. I have the keys of death and hell.

John is given a vision in which many things are revealed to him. The Lord Jesus is revealed to him in a form that seems a little fantastical, but I expect that John is overwhelmed and his eyes can hardly take in what he sees. The description may sound uncomfortable, or even horrific, but it should not be taken in a cold literal sense but rather be seen as a glorious image too wonderful for human contemplation.

Fiery eyes, radiant feet, a voice that encompasses all of nature, a face so bright that you begin to understand why the Israelites took fright at the sight of Moses when he came down from the mountain. The face of the creator of the stars shines like one. And that sword! The word of the Lord is like a two-edged sword that gets to the heart of things – Hebrews 4:12.

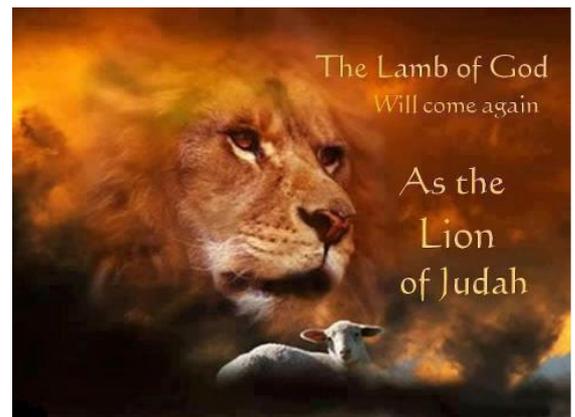
In the presence of holiness John falls down.

How does your image of Jesus compare with this?

How real a picture of Jesus the Nazarene, the middle-eastern Jew, have artists painted?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, give to the young visions and the old dreams that we may see You as You are and not as we frame You from our pictures of haloed babies or a kindly lantern-bearer at the door. Amen.

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when:2015-03-20 06:02 GMT

Day 27

Acts 5:1-11

A man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold some property. They agreed to hold back some of the money they had pledged and turned only part of it over to the apostles.

Peter asked, "Ananias, why did you let Satan fill you with the idea that you could deceive the Holy Spirit? You've held back some of the money you received for the land. While you had the land, it was your own. After it was sold, you could have done as you pleased with the money. So how could you do a thing like this? You didn't lie to people but to God!"

When Ananias heard Peter say this, he dropped dead. Everyone who heard about his death was terrified. Some young men got up, wrapped his body in a sheet, carried him outside, and buried him.

About three hours later Ananias' wife arrived. She didn't know what had happened. So Peter asked her, "Tell me, did you sell the land for that price?" She answered, "Yes, that was the price." Then Peter said to her, "How could you and your husband agree to test the Lord's Spirit? Those who buried your husband are standing at the door, and they will carry you outside for burial." Immediately, she dropped dead in front of Peter. When the young men came back, they found Sapphira dead. So they carried her outside and buried her next to her husband. The whole church and everyone else who heard about what had happened were terrified.

I'd be terrified, too. And Peter, when God's Holy Spirit whispered the truth into his ear. God was angry. These two had brought to God a fraudulent gift. It was less than they said it was. They had short-changed God. They had started well, but then either lost their trust in God's providence or just simply became greedy and decided that God wouldn't miss a bit. After all, it was their gift to God.

It frightens me that Ananias did not even get the chance to confess. Peter confronted him. Remember, all Peter had was a word from God. For all we know, God may have spoken that word as Ananias came to Peter. Peter laid out how Ananias had given God false worship. Ananias hits the floor. Was Peter expecting that? I think not.

Sapphira is already a marked woman as she enters. All those in the room have a bad feeling about this but dare not utter a word. There's something even here about the holiness of God that is tangible. She has the chance to confess to the truth but she chooses to lie.

Dare I trust God to speak to me in the same way as He spoke to Peter?

Is God being short-changed by me?

What about corrupt bankers, dodgy stock traders and greedy landowners?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, God of holy vengeance, protect me from the temptation to give You less than what is due to You. Let my life, my work, all that I am, honour you so that You may honour and bless me. Amen.

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when:2015-03-21 06:02 GMT

Day 28

Luke 23:44-46

Around noon darkness came over the entire land and lasted until three in the afternoon. The sun had stopped shining. The curtain in the temple was split in two.

Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." After he said this, he died.

Luke does not have the drama of Matthew here (do you notice the slight timing difference in Matthew's version – end of Ch 27?) and simply states that the curtain in the temple was torn. This is a turning point, not only for the Gershonite clan of Israel (do you know why? Numbers 4:24) but for mankind. The Holy God, whose presence was experienced by the High Priest alone in the most holy place, now in the Temple; the One who decreed that the Kohathite clan would exclusively look after the holy objects, now bursts out and opens up the most holy place to ordinary man. Why at this point in the Gospel-story? It's why God came to earth in Jesus, that through his death he would pay the price for sin and enable us to approach and stay with the Most High, thrice Holy Lord of all Eternity.

As Jesus' last words fell out of his dying body the price that Holy God demanded in blood sacrifice was paid in full, on the nail, the nail of the cross. The Word became like us to save us, the Final Great High Priest himself became the sacrifice so that we no longer are condemned, but instead have become adopted into God's family.

Considering what Jesus went through for me how much do I still live in the Old Testament where trespasses are paid for by penalties?

How reserved is the sanctuary in our churches?

Father God, Holy God, in Jesus you set us free from the old covenant of sin, blame, disgrace, shame and punishment. Shine your holy light on my innermost being and release me as I release myself into the freedom that is in Jesus Christ. In his name. Amen.

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when:2015-03-23 06:02 GMT

Day 29

Hebrews 10:10-12

We have been set apart as holy because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do by sacrificing his body once and for all.

Every day each priest performed his religious duty. He offered the same type of sacrifice again and again. Yet, these sacrifices could never take away sins.

However, this chief priest made one sacrifice for sins, and this sacrifice lasts forever. Then he received the highest position in heaven.

Sometimes when we read the New Testament letters books (epistles) we can feel that they are a bit theological and discuss matters beyond our understanding. There are certainly some hard bits, but there is nothing in them that we may discard. The passage above says something deep and powerful in just the first sentence. So powerful that it can just go over your head.

The writer is addressing people who were Jews who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. He is using what they were familiar with in the religion they were born into, and shows how things have now changed through Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection in the faith they are born again into.

In Judaism God alone is holy, and certain objects are holy by association. Only a few people are recorded as being holy. Jesus' death was a sacrifice to God. It was a triumph rather than a tragedy. Because of Jesus Christ we may become holy to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Who demanded Jesus' death?

What is the role of priests today?

How is my life set apart for God?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, you want me to be holy and totally dedicated to you. I surrender all that I am in order that I may become part of all that You are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-03-24 06:02 GMT

Day 30

Colossians 3:1-4

Since you were brought back to life with Christ, focus on the things that are above-where Christ holds the highest position. Keep your mind on things above, not on worldly things.

You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Christ is your life. When he appears, then you, too, will appear with him in glory.

In the past, and even now for those who are not in Christ, however hard we tried to live a good life there was no way that it would be worthy of God's standards. The sacrifices made for sin were always made in arrears, so we were always living in sin. Even now if we choose to live outside of Christ we fall back into those ways.

God's holiness makes Him unapproachable, and yet God wants us to be holy people! Strangely enough, holy people cause unholy people to feel uncomfortable.

The writer of this letter is encouraging his friends in the new church at Colossae to live holy lives. He directs their thinking toward higher things. We all know that that's not easy, and we may beat ourselves up about it, too, when we slip. But Paul continues by telling us that for those who accept Jesus Christ as Lord there is new life. We are born again. In order to do that we must first die, or our old life before Christ must die so that we can be born again into him. We are born again into Jesus Christ and so our life is hidden in him.

What does it mean to be in Jesus Christ?

Am I living in a new life?

Will God accept me if I am not born again?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, Your Son Jesus Christ is my life. Show me how to grow and develop in Christ so that I may become more like him. In His name. Amen.

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to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-03-25 06:02 GMT

Day 31

Colossians 3:5-7

Therefore, put to death whatever is worldly in you: your sexual sin, perversion, passion, lust, and greed (which is the same thing as worshiping wealth). It is because of these sins that God's anger comes on those who refuse to obey him. You used to live that kind of sinful life.

Also get rid of your anger, hot tempers, hatred, cursing, obscene language, and all similar sins. Don't lie to each other.

You've got rid of the person you used to be and the life you used to live, and you've become a new person. This new person is continually renewed in knowledge to be like its Creator. Where this happens, there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, uncivilized person, slave, or free person. Instead, Christ is everything and in everything.

If we are in Christ then how is it then that the lures of this wicked world are still attractive and enchanting? Paul suggests that the old life was about sex and money (they didn't have drugs and rock'n'roll then). When he says you used to live that life he's implying that you shouldn't still be living like that now!

Do you ever feel you've failed? Do you ever feel dirty, a cheater, a liar or a sham? Have you ever withheld what belongs to God? Do you think you are the only one who's like that amongst a church of holy people – if you do then that makes two of us.

Even the great St Paul acknowledged the struggle he had with the old life – read the end of Romans 7 and on into chapter 8.

I do not want to excuse sinful behaviour, but rather to say that there is a battle going on and we must recognise and deal with sin in our lives. God has provided the path to forgiveness in Jesus. It's only your pride that blocks your way.

Am I becoming more like my Creator?

What area of my life can I bring before God for Him to work on?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee. Let me understand what that means, as this is an act of will on my part and a preparedness to go the distance with You so that You may sanctify me. In Jesus' name. Amen

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to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-03-26 06:02 GMT

Day 32

Colossians 3:12-15

As holy people whom God has chosen and loved, be sympathetic, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Above all, be loving. This ties everything together perfectly.

Also, let Christ's peace control you. God has called you into this peace by bringing you into one body.

Be thankful.

Sympathy is a human response. Jesus was overcome with emotion at the news of the death of Lazarus. We can run out of sympathy, and a willingness to be kind. Humility is OK if everyone can see you doing it, and gentleness and patience do seem to bottom out as well.

I suppose we can exhaust other people's patience as well, possibly in ways that we don't even realise. Think of every person you've shared something negative about with someone else, and then think of what they might say about you. That's why we need to follow Paul's exhortations.

We are holy people – that's what God has made us to be in Christ. We are chosen and loved.

Why did God put us together in churches?

Have I stopped to consider just how much God loves me?

What has God chosen me for?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, Loving God, I want to see Jesus in the lives of every brother and sister in my church, whatever age. I want them to see Jesus in me. Humiliate my pride, soften my coarseness, and suffer again my impatience until I am to others what You see in me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-03-27 06:02 GMT

Day 33

1 Peter 1:14-15

Because you are children who obey God, don't live the kind of lives you once lived. Once you lived to satisfy your desires because you didn't know any better.

But because the God who called you is holy you must be holy in every aspect of your life. Scripture says, "Be holy, because I am holy."

We do know better, don't we!?

If we are to become like God then we are called to take on holiness of living. Holiness is holiness. God's holiness and the holiness of the holy artefacts in the tent of meeting and the holy sacrifices are all the same. The Holy One of God, recognised by the unclean spirit in the synagogue is the same holiness.

God's anger is temporary. God is not always angry. God's holiness, however, is permanent. God and holiness are inseparable concepts. Holiness is not a part of God – it is how God is. As immutable as his glory, his omnipotence and his everlasting being. God is holy on a Sunday as much as on a Monday.

So we are called to be holy, too - total holiness in all aspects of our life – waking, sleeping, eating, working, resting, playing; alone and with others.

Holiness is not being religious. It's not about reverent behaviour in church when you walk past the altar, or turning east for the Creed – that's religion. Holiness is not about doing – it's about being. If my life is hidden in Christ then it will be like his. The words say "be holy", not "get holy" or "act holy".

How is your life as a child of God evidenced before God?

How is your life as a child of God evidenced before others?

Are there areas of my life where holiness is turned off?

Lord God, Father God, Holy God, You call me to be like You. The holy blood of Jesus was shed for me so that I may be holy. I breathe holiness through all parts of my being. I am holy, because You are holy. Amen.

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to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-03-28 06:02 GMT

Day 34

1 Peter 2:9-10

You are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, people who belong to God. You were chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God, who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Once you were not God's people, but now you are. Once you were not shown mercy, but now you have been shown mercy.

Peter does not say chosen persons, but chosen people. The privilege accorded to the Jews has, through Christ's victory, been passed on to his Church. It is from within the Church that God chooses and uses us.

We are priests because we have been chosen to serve God. There is no longer any need for bloody sacrifice and the most holy place is open to us because the Great High Priest entered and offered his own body as a sacrifice to Father God to pay for the sins of all mankind.

We are a holy nation that is separate from human institutions, and holy to God, who has first call on everything. We act as holy people who stand apart from the sinful ways of the world. We are God's, 24/7.

Peter's words, written to people who have come new to the faith, still apply to all of us. If you were brought up by Christian parents it can be difficult to realise that even you have a past. We are all born into sin and we fall naturally under the Old Covenant and the Law. In Christian families our parents cover us through their own faith, but one day you must make a personal free-will confession of your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

How separate is the church? How involved is the Church?

Are babies innocent of sin?

Does my holiness show?

Am I living in God's marvellous light?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, in Christ Jesus you have brought us into a royal priesthood where we may serve you day and night. Confirm my heart's desire to work and speak and think for thee. Still let me guard the sacred flame, and still stir up the gift in me. Amen.

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when:2015-03-30 06:02 GMT

Day 35

Psalm 96:4-9

The LORD is great! He should be highly praised. He should be feared more than all other gods because all the gods of the nations are idols.

The LORD made the heavens. Splendour and majesty are in his presence. Strength and beauty are in his holy place.

Give to the LORD, you families of the nations. Give to the LORD glory and power. Give to the LORD the glory he deserves. Bring an offering, and come into his courtyards. Worship the LORD in his holy splendour. Tremble in his presence, all the earth!

Read this passage out loud, very loud! Stand with the psalmist in praising our God. This is the God Almighty, the one true God, the Creator of all that is, a God of power. We are called to worship the Holy God, who lives in holy splendour.

New age spirituality sees holiness and spirituality in just about anything. It is a mashup of traditions from all religions and taboos. In essence it's a big box of pick'n'mix. I wonder sometimes whether it finds its way into Christianity, too. There are some very strange practices promoted within the church that purport to be part of Christian spirituality, but are more akin to, I'll say it, heathen religions.

Anyone who becomes attached to a way of worship that they like because it suits them ought to consider whether total abandonment to God in Christ is being addressed. Followers of particular styles, fashions or individuals who displace the true object of worship are being led astray. If your description of worship contains more "I" than "God" then you should be cautious. It may be time to re-think.

Name some idols of this nation.

What is worship?

How does Psalm 96 start?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, to come before You is so frightening that I can easily wrap You up in a fire blanket. I blinker my eyes to that which I want to see and hear only what I want to hear so that I end up worshipping my sinful pride rather than You. Place me naked in your presence with only Jesus to hide in. Amen.

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when:2015-03-31 06:02 GMT

Day 36

Revelation 4:6-8

In front of the throne, there was something like a sea of glass as clear as crystal. In the centre near the throne and around the throne were four living creatures covered with eyes in front and in back.

The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like a young bull, the third had a face like a human, and the fourth was like a flying eagle.

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and were covered with eyes, inside and out. Without stopping day or night they were singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, who is, and who is coming."

Not everyone may be aware that the hymn "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" takes its words from this passage. I encourage you to read the whole chapter and see how well the hymn matches the story. And what a story it is! Strange creatures, rainbows and a sea of glass. Did you realise that this was what you've been singing about all these years?

The song of the four creatures echoes that of the angels who sang in the vision given to Isaiah and are still singing the same song non-stop. The angels have a very small hymnbook, called One Hymn Ancient and a couple of Modern Ones, but they are wonderful songs (see Rev 5:9, 13; 14:3). For those who know the Morning Worship canticle Great and Wonderful, can you guess from which book of the Bible it comes?!

We were praying at the CYM centre before going out on Town Pastor duty. Some of the CYM team were still in the building and one sauntered into the place where we were praying. She was behind my back but I could feel her braking sharply as she realised what we were doing. We told her to carry on and not mind us. We were all doing the Lord's work. We do some funny things around prayer and worship, don't we?

How long will this worship go on for in heaven?

How noisy is heaven?

Which hymns best reflect heavenly worship?

Lord God, Holy, holy, holy God, Father God, as I encounter your presence I fall before you in worship. In Jesus I may rise and come to sit at your feet. Never let me take this gift for granted. Amen.

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to:lent@wtandw.org.uk

when:2015-04-01 06:02 GMT

Day 37

Ephesians 4

17 So I tell you and encourage you in the Lord's name not to live any longer like other people in the world. Their minds are set on worthless things.

23 However, you were taught to have a new attitude. You were also taught to become a new person created to be like God, truly righteous and holy.

So then, get rid of lies. Speak the truth to each other, because we are all members of the same body. Be angry without sinning. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the devil any opportunity to work.

30 Don't give God's Holy Spirit any reason to be upset with you. He has put his seal on you for the day you will be set free from the world of sin. Get rid of your bitterness, hot tempers, anger, loud quarrelling, cursing, and hatred. Be kind to each other, sympathetic, forgiving each other as God has forgiven you through Christ.

In Christ I am a new creation. How many times must I tell myself this before I believe it? Am I still presenting myself before God as unworthy of such a wonderful gift of transformation? Am I still trying to do all this in my strength rather than in his?

Let's go back a step. Christ has made all things new (Rev 21:5). That's what he did - I didn't do that. He did it. Can I believe that? Yes, I can, because it's about him and not me. Christ has completed the task assigned to him by Father God.

Am I in Christ? How do I become "in Christ"? Christ died, and I am invited to die to my old life with him. Can I believe that Christ died for my sins? Can I therefore offload my sins onto him, or do I want to keep hold of them? Is it because I am unworthy? Well, I am unworthy, but the glorious thing is that Christ IS worthy and has already paid for my sins in full. If I die, with my sins, in Christ I may then rise. Did Christ rise? I have to believe that – after all, it is a bit crazy! Can I rise with him? Why not? I rise then, with Christ into a new life like his new life.

If I abide in Christ nothing can harm me. If I abide in Christ I cannot sin. It's win-win.

Am I free from sin?

How well does your church's membership live up to Paul's encouragements?

What relationship does my Church have with Christ?

What makes my new life different?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, I want to abide in Christ. I know that my life's work is not yet done, but in Christ you have given my Church everything we need to complete the task You have set us. Waken your spiritual gifts in us, so that our life as Church may come closer to what You have destined the Church to be.

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when:2015-04-02 06:02 GMT

Day 38

Ephesians 1:1-7

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will. To God's holy and faithful people who are united with Christ in the city of Ephesus. Good will and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are yours!

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer. Before the creation of the world, he chose us through Christ to be holy and perfect in his presence.

Because of his love he had already decided to adopt us through Jesus Christ. He freely chose to do this so that the kindness he had given us in his dear Son would be praised and given glory. Through the blood of his Son, we are set free from our sins. God forgives our failures because of his overflowing kindness.

Thank God for Paul. His natural intellect, his soaking in the traditions of his elders, his experiences, and the insights given to him by God's Holy Spirit (the Holy one who didn't get much of a mention during these 40 days) all come together with his love of long sentences (in jail, too?) to produce the glorious letters he wrote to the Churches he nurtured and loved.

If you have not read any of Paul's letters then don't expect to read them like you might read a novel. They are rich food: swallowing too much too fast will give you spiritual indigestion. (We looked briefly at Paul and Ephesus last year. Look up your old emails.)

In the Old Testament we read about the God of Abraham, Moses and Jacob – his holiness, power, anger, and judgement. Now Paul reveals God as Father through Jesus his Son, our Lord and Saviour. How the scales must have fallen from Saul's eyes as he began to realise that Jehovah God, the Everlasting, the Almighty creator also longed to be known as Father God by the people he had created! How his head must have exploded when he realised that the one whose followers he had been intent on blotting out had just spoken to him personally, not to condemn him but to ask why he was persecuting him.

Now to the point. God chose us to be holy people. He chose us before we were born. He chose us before he created the world. Before the Word had called anything into being I was there in God's plan. Me, you, personally. Don't think for a moment that you were not wanted, not loved, an accident – to think such things is to insult God.

It's Thursday: <http://youtu.be/S7QuZ4wo1X4>

Which is your favourite passage of Paul's writing?

What's God's plan for your life?

Has he got it right?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, you came in Jesus to release us from sin and death. How wonderful, how marvellous is your love. And thank you for Paul. Amen.

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when:2015-04-03 06:02 GMT

Day 39

Ephesians 1:1-7 (again)

From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will. To God's holy and faithful people who are united with Christ in the city of Ephesus. Good will and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are yours!

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ, God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that heaven has to offer. Before the creation of the world, he chose us through Christ to be holy and perfect in his presence.

Because of his love he had already decided to adopt us through Jesus Christ. He freely chose to do this so that the kindness he had given us in his dear Son would be praised and given glory. Through the blood of his Son, we are set free from our sins. God forgives our failures because of his overflowing kindness.

Holy living is not a chore, nor is it a holy extra that we can choose to take up or not take up. God has called us to be holy, just as He is holy, in every aspect of our lives. Before you say that you could not be that holy, think again. Perhaps it is because you think that holy living is impossible – well, it is, if we try to do it by ourselves. That sort of pride and arrogance is also an insult to God. Of course we need God's help and guidance. We need the Lord Jesus beside us and God's Holy Spirit to revitalise us. We need to learn how to be constant in prayer, to read and understand what the Bible says and to live by it. We need to understand and expect that God will honour his promises.

We need to live together as Church, supporting and encouraging each other, ministering to each other and to the world in ways that God has provided through his Holy Spirit's enabling.

Are you ready to walk the holy road?

Good Friday: <http://youtu.be/rgK2OISzqkU> (this is quite harrowing, so be advised.)

What is my inheritance as an adopted child?

What is your next step in your faith?

Is the Bible holy?

Lord God, Holy God, Father God, I want to overflow with love, joy and confidence in you just as Paul did. Sow the words of the bible into my heart and fill me with a yearning to read and learn more of its truth as You reveal it to me. Praise You for my Lord Jesus Christ and for making me holy. Amen.

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when:2015-04-04 06:02 GMT

Day 40

Numbers 6:22-27

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you will bless the Israelites. Say to them:

"The LORD will bless you and watch over you. The LORD will smile on you and be kind to you. The LORD will look on you with favour and give you peace.'

"So whenever they use my name to bless the Israelites, I will bless them."

This blessing is more than the imparting of a nice feeling in the one who receives it. When God blesses, he blesses. This means that the receiver will prosper in all aspects of life – health well-being and longevity, family, work and income, status and influence. God's blessing is not a signal that the service is over.

If you trust God to bless you, He will. Let's appropriate this blessing of God's chosen people to his new royal priesthood and holy nation, to us.

God never sleeps. His angels never rest. All night, all day, angels watching over me, my Lord. Lord God, you watch my rising and my going to sleep. Your angels guard my sleep.

You, Lord, are kind to me and care for me in a way I will never comprehend in this life. Your face smiling is light shining like it did on Moses. Your favour places me ahead in queues, breaks the rules of fairness, honours me beyond that which I deserve.

Your peace, Lord, passes my understanding.

Some YouTube links:

<http://youtu.be/8welVgKX8Qo>

http://youtu.be/DXDGE_IRI0E

<http://youtu.be/cAByUg4DUpU>

Am I blessed?

Say the prayer over all who are dear to you. You are a priest of God, and you may say it.

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