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Repent - and Change

by Helen Parry

‘He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’ Luke 1:16-17

‘Repent’, cried John the Baptist, ‘for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’ (Matthew 3:2). And to the crowds who came out to be baptised by him, he said: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’ (Luke 3:7).

These words of denunciation, together with John’s dress and rugged way of life, may conjure up for us a picture of a hell-fire preacher, manipulating his hearers with threats of destruction. His message was, certainly, one of repentance; but his main theme was change more than judgment. He was not only calling the Jews corporately to national acts of penitence, but was also seeking to show individuals that their own lives contributed to the collective sin.

So when they asked him, ‘What should we do then?’, he gave simple and practical answers: ‘Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the

same’ (Luke 3:11); ‘Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay’ (Luke 3:14).

Indeed, in the prophecy of John’s birth, spoken by the angel in the temple to Zechariah, John was described as one who would ‘turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous’ (Luke 1:17). So, the tax collectors and the soldiers were to express their repentance by their changed behaviour at work; others were to embody it by a changed attitude to their possessions.

Those who had turned away from God were to change direction and

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Services

Sundays

11.00am Sung Eucharist

"Sunday Supplement" the children's activity takes place every Sunday in the sacristy during the service

Weekday Services

Said Eucharist

Tuesday 7.30pm

Wednesday 9.30am

Friday 7.30am

Saints' & Holy Days

Wednesday 1st March Ash Wednesday

9.30am Mass with Imposition of Ashes

7.30pm Sung Mass with Imposition of Ashes

Sundays in Lent

11.00am Parish Mass

4.00pm Evensong and Devotions

Clergy Day off: Fr. Guy is off duty on Monday but don't hesitate to call him in emergencies.

The Vicar is usually available in the Vicarage, 85 Dartmouth Park Road, from 8:00pm until 9:00pm on Tuesdays for the purpose of interviews, arranging Baptisms, reading of Banns and Weddings etc. he is also available to hear confessions then or by appointment.

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return to righteous paths. And those with broken relationships were to seek reconciliation – within their families, and beyond. It was through the change in the hearts and lives of individuals that the nation was to be prepared for the coming of the Lord.

Has the world ever been in greater need of reconciliation than today? From broken families with abused or neglected children to nations reducing each other's cities to rubble, the Church must be in the thick of things, living in unity, reaching out in love and urging – with a prophetic voice like John's – the repentance that leads to change.

Helen Parry is LICC's Lecturer in Globalisation & Christian Lifestyle On SILENCE – the film

On SILENCE ± the film

Christians like success stories. They will be distressed by Martin Scorsese's latest film, 'Silence'. Based on a Japanese novel, it mirrors the actual persecution of Christians in that country in the 17th Century, when the total eradication of the Christian faith was official policy.

The story focuses on two young Portuguese Jesuits who smuggled themselves into Japan, to track down an earlier missionary who reportedly had abandoned his faith. On the way they ministered to 'hidden Christians' congregating in secret. Their lives were in constant danger. When they were finally caught they were forced to watch as Japanese Christians who refused to apostatise were tortured and killed. They themselves were faced with a terrible dilemma: if they renounced the faith, the indigenous Christians would be released. All they had to do was to tread on a symbol of Christ to

signify their apostasy.

A sub-plot concerned Kichijiro, a Christian who, repeatedly threatened with torture or death, trod on the Christ-figure over and over again. Each time he sought and was granted, absolution. It became routine - almost a joke. By contrast, most of the Christians stayed loyal to their Lord and paid the price.

One of the Jesuit priests died in a futile attempt to rescue a drowning Christian. The other, Sebastião, lived on, to be tormented by the offer: give up your faith, tread on Christ and thus end the torture of your friends. It got worse. The long-lost missionary he had come to find, was produced by the persecutors: he had not only renounced Christ, but was actively engaged in debunking Christianity in favour of Buddhism. After an age of agonising, Sebastião finally did the same.

The film, and the historical persecution of Christians which prompted it, present dilemmas for Christians. There is a hint that the Japanese authorities were in part resisting what they saw as a Portuguese takeover. And it's true that mediaeval missionaries often failed to distinguish the Gospel from their own nationalism. Japanese Christians today rightly resist any suggestion that Christianity is a Western import.

More acutely, how should a Christian behave under torture? Kichijiro gave in. Repeatedly he sought forgiveness, to continue as a 'failed' Christian. Sebastião, by contrast, finally capitulated and renounced the faith altogether.

The film gives the false impression that to be a true Christian, you have to overcome impossible challenges or will be discarded as sub-standard. In doing so it misses the point, for Christ came to save those who cannot save themselves.

THE WAY I SEE IT ± the strange rise of 'Post-Truth'

The strange phrase 'Post-truth' emerged, the media tell us, as 'the Word' of 2016. But as Post-truth, put crudely, is the assumption that nothing we read, see or hear is reliably factual, we may presumably take that claim, too, as unproven.

Thirty years working in the media convinced me, long ago, that quite a lot of what passes for 'news' is in fact either fiction or highly decorated fact. Try looking at the newspaper headlines this morning, and then read the story below them carefully. Very frequently the eye-catching headline ('Fish

and chips postpones dementia') is only true in the sense that someone has said it. The full story (in a responsible paper) finally sets it in context. It's based on a small piece of research by a group of students in California and professional medical sources have ridiculed the suggestion.

Post-truth takes us further, however. It implies that the 'truth' is less important than the impression. This apparently follows from the dominating influence, certainly with people under 50, of the 'social media' - Facebook, Twitter and so on. A great deal of what people

post there, to be read often by a huge number of people, is simply fabrication. It is read and passed on not because people think it is true, but because it is interesting, amusing or shocking. Somehow it then becomes part of the social climate. 'Have you seen the post in Twitter about the lady who sent her dog to school instead of her daughter?'

Post-truth is a menace because it devalues the currency of debate, distorts our decision-making and in the end turns us all into sceptics. Whatever happened to the 'honest truth'?

Church renewal gains momentum with £9 million for new projects

Underlining its commitment to renewing the Church across England, over £9.1million has been awarded by the Archbishops' Council to seven dioceses for projects from East London to Worcestershire and Sussex to Liverpool.

The grants are part of the strategic development funding stream that began in 2014 and from which 20 dioceses have now benefitted. The funding is a core element of Renewal and Reform, the Church of England's initiative to promote growth in the church in every community in England.

The largest award of £2.5 million goes to the Diocese of Birmingham working with younger people in proclaiming the Christian faith in Birmingham's diverse multi-cultural contexts. The plan is by 2022 to plant 15 new churches, revitalise 15 existing church communities, encourage 15 new fresh expressions of Church, make over a 1000 new disciples, train up to 1000 missional leaders and increase ordained vocations by more than 50%.

Funding of £750,000 goes to the Diocese of Worcester to recruit up to ten children and young people's mission enablers to support and train parishes.

The Diocese of Chelmsford has been awarded £2 million to support the planting of churches in vast new housing areas in its first four strategic mission priority areas, together with a new congregation in Forest Gate.

Other dioceses that have received

awards include: Bristol (£950,000 to develop three existing parish churches to become the 'resource churches' for specific Mission Areas); Chichester (£825, 000 to continue the diocese's on-going programme of church planting); Leicester (£1million funding for developing leadership and vocations amongst Black, Asian and other Minority Ethnic Christians in order to grow new and existing congregations amongst people from those backgrounds); and Liverpool (£1m to develop a low-cost model to multiply congregations to complement conventional church planting).

Nagging doesn't work

Nagging your spouse or children to do something can be a very frustrating experience – mainly because it rarely works. Now an exhaustive study into how you can get people to do things has found a more powerful way: if you can 'trigger' someone's emotional response, they are well on their way to taking action.

Thus the more any particular 'goal' resonates with you at an emotional level, the more likely you are to do it. For example, psychologists at the research group Mindlab found that when it comes to saving money, people are most motivated to do so by their desire to buy a house, do home improvements, prepare for retirement, and take holidays. Perhaps not surprisingly, saving just to support one's children ranked close to the bottom for emotional appeal.

Digging out the treasures of Nimrud and Nineveh

The British archaeologist, traveller, author and politician Sir Austen Henry Layard was born in Paris 200 years ago, on 5 March 1817. He is perhaps best known for excavating the ancient Mesopotamian cities of Nimrud and Nineveh, and especially for discovering the ruins of the library of the great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal.

The library was perhaps most significant of his discoveries: what survived of it after more than 2500 years revealed what had been a sophisticated recording system. The subjects etched in the 30,000 or so clay tablets covered history and government, religion and magic, geography, science, poetry and even classified government materials.

The most famous cuneiform text caused a sensation when its content was first read. This was the 11th Tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which contains a story with remarkable similarities to the biblical description of Noah's Flood in Genesis.

Sir Austen sent back to England – sometimes with great difficulty – the amazing specimens which now form the greater part of the collection of Assyrian antiquities in the British Museum. He believed that the Syriac Christian communities living throughout the Near East were descended from the ancient Assyrians.

Sir Austen, who was of Huguenot descent, later served in Parliament. He became a privy councillor in 1868 and was ambassador at Istanbul between 1877 and 1880. He was knighted in 1878 and died in London in 1894.

“Dear Friends...”

From the Vicars Desk

How will you use this Lent? Despite the inevitable association with giving things up we really should be taking things up! So this Lent we have two opportunities for all of us to do just that. The first is our Lent Course entitled “Faith Pictures”.

What is Faith Pictures?

Faith Pictures is a short course designed to help Christians talk naturally to friends, neighbours and colleagues about what they believe. The heart of the course is about helping people to identify a single picture or image that embodies something of their faith. This is because the kinds of communication which best stick in the mind are concrete and rooted in story. The course aims to be accessible and light-hearted, without jargon or inflexible methods. It has a number of emphases not always found in faith-sharing courses. These include the avoidance of one-size-fits-all models and the importance of honesty and listening. Each session contains a short video and encourages discussion in pairs and as a whole group.

• Who is it for?

It is mainly aimed at small groups meeting in a home setting. It is for people of any Christian tradition and none. It has been designed to appeal particularly to people who would normally run a mile from courses on faith-sharing!

• How long does it last?

It is a six-session course with each session lasting just over an hour.

• Does it include Bible study and theology?

An essential aspect of Faith Pictures is that it is accessible. It is unapologetic about being a first step in helping a wide variety of people think about sharing their faith. It aims to appeal to people who may find in-depth Bible study and theology of mission daunting. The team behind Faith Pictures hope that many people will want to go deeper in Bible study and theology as a result of doing the course.

• What about issues where Christians disagree?

Faith Pictures is deliberately limited in scope: it is a simple tool to help people talk naturally to others about their faith. There are some issues on which Christians come to different conclusions – about details of belief and how faith is lived out in the world of today – but these are beyond the scope of the course.

• Who is behind Faith Pictures?

Faith Pictures is produced by Church Army, a mission community of people who are transforming lives and local communities. Its members are committed to sharing the Christian faith through words and action in a variety of contexts across the British Isles and Ireland. Church Army is part of the Anglican church, but works across many denominations and inter-agency projects. Faith Pictures is not tied to any denomination or tradition.

So how about you joining in this Lent? The sessions will take place

in the Vicarage on Wednesday evenings at 8.00pm, when I look forward to the lounge being packed out!

The second opportunity to do something extra is that we shall be having Evensong and Devotions at 4.00pm each Sunday. It will be a time of quiet worship with a sermon followed by Benediction. The service will be said apart from some hymns. A number of folk have commented in the past that they miss Sunday evening worship so here is the chance for just that.

Many of you will have seen on TV or in the newspapers the reports of the General Synod of the Church and its discussion last week of the Bishops Report on Marriage in the church. Sadly the Bishops were very conservative in the proposals, simply acknowledging that the church had in the past failed and of the need for the Church to repent of the homophobic attitudes it has sometimes failed to rebuke and affirm the need to stand against homophobia wherever and whenever it is to be found.

After a very passionate debate where many conflicting views were expressed it was the clergy who had the courage to vote down the report saying that it didn't go nearly far enough. As voting was by houses, Bishops, clergy and laity and it failed in one house the whole report was rejected and the Bishops now have to think again, which is just what seventeen retired bishops had proposed in an open letter just days before the debate!

Your Parish Priest

Friday Focus

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 4 verses 2-3

Friday Focus is published bi-monthly through 2017 as a resource for churches preparing for HOPE 2018 and a year of mission together, in words and action, to make Jesus known.

Free versions of this bi-monthly Prayer Focus are available to download: colour, black & white, large print from www.hopetogether.org.uk/pray

A subscription to Prayer magazine (bi-monthly) contains Friday Focus as a pull-out prayer resource. Order by phone: 0330 332 6257 or online: www.prayermagazine.com

March 3 Teach me your ways - Lent

Psalm 25: 1, 2, 4

Walk into any book shop at an airport or station and you will discover a wide range of books offering advice on how to be a better person. The Psalms provide us with some ancient and well-attested wisdom. We are invited to put our trust in God and ask him to be our teacher, for all of life. And this is what we are called to model to the world.

Lord, conscious of all the sources of advice that available to me, help me this day to put my trust in you. Show me what it means to be your child and how I should model this

to those in my neighbourhood. Thank you that you are wholly committed to my wellbeing. Your ways are loving and faithful. Amen.

Paul Wooley, Bible Society

March 10 Becoming welcoming churches

Acts 2: 46-47

In Acts we are told the church enjoyed the favour of all the people. What reputation does your church have – Austere? Cliquey? Unreal? Judgemental? Or is it seen as warm and welcoming to everyone in your community? Is it a place that shows God's goodness? God's mercy is wonderful – it can reach anyone – let it fill our hearts.

Lord, fill our church with mercy. May it be a home for the prodigals; a sanctuary for the lonely, the angry, and the outcast. You loved the tax collectors, prostitutes and Roman officers. You let the children come when the disciples blocked them. Help us see people with your loving eyes. Make us bringers of mercy, goodness and kindness. Amen.

Steve Botham, World Prayer Centre

March 17 Let's get talking

1 Peter 3:15

Are we prepared, alert and ready to talk about Jesus? Are we living in a way that stirs people to ask us for the reason for the hope that we have? Together as God's people, today and every day we have God-given opportunities to share our faith. How can we live intentionally to make the most of every opportunity?

Lord, thank you that out of your great love for us, you sent your son,

Jesus, who in turns sends us. Help us look for opportunities today to share our faith, using our words to communicate the greatest love story ever known. Open our eyes to these opportunities, that we may give the reason for the hope that we have.

Phil Timson, HOPE Youth Director

March 24 Pray for Five: our neighbours

Matthew 22:39

Loving your neighbours begins with sacrificing time to pray for them. Bringing five neighbours before God regularly, praying for them to become Christians, will lead to people getting to know Jesus for themselves. Neighbourhood Prayer Network can testify that this has already happened on a number of streets across the UK. Will you join many others praying for their neighbours?

Father, we pray for (five names of neighbours), to have a life transforming encounter with you and to come to know you personally. Present opportunities for us to get to know our neighbours and to help them in times of need. Help us to live sacrificial lives, filled with love, that will point people towards you. Amen.

Rebekah Brettle, Neighbourhood Prayer Network

March 31 Unity in prayer and mission

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

The Apostle Paul refers to himself and his brothers and sisters in Christ as 'co-workers' with God. If the business of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ is a task, then the team to accomplish that task is the Church, and if that team doesn't pull together, then the job won't get done. Today, we pray for *concluded on page 11*

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall ± how do you see yourself this Lent?

Somebody asked a Christian friend why he was eating doughnuts, when he had given them up for Lent! He answered, 'At the bakers I told God, that if He wanted me to buy doughnuts, He should provide a parking space in front. On the eighth time around, there it was!' Rather than seeing Lent simply as a time to give things up, let's use it intentionally for self-examination, reading Scripture, penitence, fasting and prayer.

At Jesus' baptism, God's voice says, 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' (Luke 3:22). The Holy Spirit then leads

Jesus into the wilderness, where we find Him coming to terms with who He is. Satan's temptations challenge Jesus in key three areas of His identity: social action, political power, and religious identity (Luke 4: 1-13). It is as though Jesus looked into the mirror at Himself to discern what kind of Saviour He would be.

We can also think of Lent as an opportunity to hold a mirror up to ourselves and ask the question, 'who am I? It is a season of honest encounter with who we are, what we've done, and the world in which we live. How will you keep

Lent period of 40 days running up to Easter? What will you see when you hold up the mirror to yourself? Alongside taking time to read Scripture, study a Christian book and pray with fasting, why not give up texting for Lent and simply talk on the phone; commit ourselves to just working 40 hours a week or spend five minutes each day in silence!

Whatever we do, Lent is a season for self-reflection, as we put ourselves in a position to receive afresh the forgiveness and healing that God offers.

Nehemiah: God's Word for His People

Nehemiah's work in Jerusalem was not simply rebuilding the city walls. As Governor, he was also tasked with rebuilding the people of God. At the heart of the city was a renewed relationship with God, founded on the word of God:

'Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon...and all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.' (Nehemiah 8: 2,3).

In order for the people to understand, the Levites explained the law, 'giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.' (8). The people responded first with weeping and then celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, as they remembered how God provided for them in the wilderness. As a result, they found 'the joy of the Lord' was their strength (8:10).

This story demonstrates that when God's people listen attentively, understand clearly, and respond obediently to God's word through Scripture, it will make a difference to how they live for God. It will also result in a renewed understanding of what it means to be the people of God today. It reminds us, too, that God wants to address the whole community through His word: both men and women, as well as children and young people. Where are the opportunities for this to happen within our family and church life?

'The Bible is a high explosive. But it works in strange ways and no living man can tell all know how that book, in its journey through the world, has startled the individual soul in 10,000 different places into a new life, a new world, a new belief, a new conception, a new faith.' (Stanley Baldwin).

Favourite names for your dog and cat

When Crufts opens this month, it will be attended by thousands of dogs with very long, posh names. But back home, it seems we now prefer baby names to the more traditional names for our pets.

Thus, if you have a dog, you are more likely to call it Ben or Poppy, rather than Prince or Blackie. And if you have a cat, you are more likely to favour Bob or Bella, rather than Smudge or Mittens. You can't go wrong with Charlie, Poppy and Sam – they now appear in the top ten names for both dogs and cats.

Meanwhile, Jeremy Corbyn admits he has not given his cat any name at all. Instead, he greets it each day with a simple 'Buenos dias, El Gato'. (El Gato is Spanish for 'The Cat'.) The cat's views on this are not known.

Margaret Clitherow ± brave British martyr

Some of the bravest, and certainly the most numerous, of British martyrs died for their faith at the hands of other Christians. The 16th Century was a specially brutal era of religious intolerance when there was open conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Each claimed they had the key to truth and those who disagreed were heretics.

At one time during the reign of Elizabeth 1 the Roman Catholic Mass was outlawed and priests were in constant danger of being captured and executed. It was even an offence to give shelter to a priest in one's home. Margaret Clitherow was born in York into a protestant family. She married a prosperous butcher and leading citizen.

However Margaret converted to Catholicism, being much influenced in her thinking by a Catholic friend, and like many converts became especially zealous in her practice. In 1577 she was imprisoned for refusing to worship as a member of the Church of England. It was then an offence not to attend the established church on a Sunday. Her husband, thought not himself a Catholic, is said to have paid her fine.

Then she began to shelter fugitive priests in a secret room in her house in the city's Shambles. But her home was raided and Margaret was arrested, tried and sentenced to death in a particularly horrible way.

On March 25 1586 , at the toll-booth, she was stretched on the ground where she was pressed to death by having heavy weights placed on her. It took her an agonising fifteen minutes to die. When told her fate she said to a friend, 'I feel the weakness of my flesh which is troubled at this news, but my spirit rejoices greatly. For the love of God, pray for me and ask all good people to do likewise.'

Though Margaret had transgressed the law of the land, it is said that Queen Elizabeth was horrified when she heard that a woman had been executed in this manner. Margaret Clitherow was canonised in 1970 as one of The Forty Martyrs and today is often referred to as 'The Pearl of York'.

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Christians in northern Nigeria at risk of being 'wiped out'

Christian leaders and human rights campaigners in Nigeria have issued joint warnings of systematic attacks aimed at wiping out the Christian presence in northern Nigeria.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) accuses security forces of 'turning a blind eye' to attacks by heavily armed groups of Muslim Fulani. Release International says thousands of Christians are dying, and calls for effective security.

Armed Fulani herdsmen have been carrying out widespread attacks against Christian villages in the north. Their tactic has been to fire

shots in the air at night, then kill villagers as they try to run from their homes.

CAN believes the attacks are orchestrated by Islamic jihadis to cleanse Christian tribes from the north, where Muslims are in a majority and sharia (Islamic law) has been imposed. Catholic bishops have described the herdsmen as Boko Haram by another name.

The Anglican Archbishop of Jos, the Rt Rev Benjamin Kwashi, warns that northern Nigeria could be heading for famine and could splinter into rival armed militia groups. 'Killer herdsmen have driv-

en people from their farms, they cannot harvest. Nobody seems to care at all. The current system of governance in Nigeria does not give Christians any hope in Nigeria, beyond their trust in God.'

Archbishop Kwashi calls on the Nigerian government to maintain justice for all its citizens, Muslim and Christian alike, and to urgently step up security to stop the violence in the north.

Release has launched an appeal to support Christians in Nigeria. Details at: <http://www.releaseinternational.org/donate-to-release/nigeria-appeal-oct...>

God's plan for Ageing:

Most seniors don't get enough exercise so in his wisdom God arranged that they become forgetful and have to search for their glasses, keys etc, thus doing more walking. And God looked down and saw that it was good.

Then God saw another need. In his wisdom he made seniors lose coordination so they would drop things, requiring them to bend, reach & stretch. And God looked down and saw that it was good.

Then God considered the function of bladders and decided seniors would have additional calls of nature requiring more trips to the bathroom, thus providing more exercise. God looked down and saw that it was good.

So if you find as you age, you are getting up and down more, remember it's God's will. It is all in your best interest even though you

mutter under your breath.

Nine Important Facts To Remember As We Grow Older:

#9 Death is the number 1 killer in the world.

#8 Life is sexually transmitted.

#7 Good health is merely the slowest possible rate at which one can die.

#6 Men have 2 motivations: Hunger and Hanky Panky, and they can't tell them apart. If you see a gleam in his eyes, make him a sandwich.

#5 Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach a person to use the Internet and they won't bother you for weeks, months, maybe years.

#4 Health nuts are going to feel stupid some day, lying in the hospital, dying of nothing.

#3 All of us could take a lesson from the weather. It pays no attention to criticism.

#2 In the 60's, people took acid to make the world weird. Now the

world is weird, and people take Prozac to make it normal.

#1 Life is like a jar of jalapeno peppers. What you do today may be a burning issue tomorrow.

Don't ignore this message. This is your only warning.

How God works

A grandmother was taking her young grandson for a walk in the park. The daffodils were in bloom, and it was a beautiful Spring day. Wanting to encourage her grandson's spiritual understanding of the world, she said: "Doesn't it look like an artist painted this scenery? Did you know God did all this?"

Her grandson replied: "Oh yes, and God did it left handed, too." In astonishment, the grandmother asked what he meant. "Well, he must have done," said her grandson, "because we learned at Sunday School last week that Jesus sits on God's right hand."

God in the Arts ± Samson's tragedy

'Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves': that is how John Milton expresses the tragedy of Samson's life in his poem 'Samson Agonistes.' There is an irony in his blindness and powerlessness, for Samson means 'sunshine.' As we read the story in Judges 13-17, he was called to be God's agent in bringing the dawn of a new day to the Israelites and freedom from the Philistines. But he breaks his vows as a Nazirite, and leads a life of sex and violence: the stuff of film and opera, of art and poetry.

Then he falls in love with Delilah, who uses her feminine wiles and intelligence to find out the secret of his strength. That moment is depicted in this painting of 1537 by the German artist, Lucas Cranach the Younger. We see Samson clad in armour, but barefoot – a sign of vulnerability for Delilah is ready to cut off his hair and so deprive him of his power, symbolised by the jawbone of an earlier victory.



The Philistines wait in the background, ready to capture him, while the partridges and fruitful trees are signs of temptation. The artist is telling us how easy it is to turn away from God's purpose, and the sleeping Samson is once again oblivious to that calling.

The book of Judges tells us how the tragedy unfolds: the Philistines imprison him and set him to grind corn. Called to bring light to Israel, Samson has been blinded.

The world is a dark place for him, but then at the Philistines' festival celebrations he remembers his God. With renewed strength he brings down the temple and the people within it. That is why we find Samson's name in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. It is a reminder that we can all only too easily make a mess of life and God's calling, but God can still use us and work through us to bring new life and hope.

Thomas the Tank Engine

A reluctant author who created characters loved by millions of children died 20 years ago this month, on 21st March 1997, aged 85.

The Rev Wilbert V Awdry is best known as the writer of Thomas the Tank Engine and 25 other railway books, which at the time of his death had sold an estimated 50 million copies. They have also given birth to toys, games, videos and a television film series.

He invented the stories initially to tell his son Christopher when he was ill with measles, and had to be

persuaded by his wife Margaret to get them published.

Mr Awdry, who was made an OBE shortly before his death, was a clergyman who ministered in Hampshire, Wiltshire, Birmingham and Cambridgeshire. He was also a pacifist who once lost his curacy as a result. He was always interested in railways, having been fascinated as a child in Wiltshire by listening to steam trains ascending the grade into the nearby Box Tunnel.

The Fat Controller in the stories is sometimes thought to be a God-like figure, but he was intended

as a satire on bureaucracy. For Mr Awdry, the morality of the stories was clearly Christian, and analogies between the Christian faith and the ways of the railway were obvious: the engines are meant to stay on the right track, and they pay the price if they go off the rails. But they are always forgiven, and never scrapped.

Asked how he hoped to be remembered, he said he would like his epitaph to say that "he helped people see God in the ordinary things of life, and he made children laugh".

Hymns and Readings

1st March Ash Wednesday

Readings Joel 2:1-2 & 12-17

Psalm 51

2 Corinthians 5: 20b-6:10

Matthew 6: 1-6 & 16-21

Hymns 67 Forty days and forty nights
425 O love how deep how broad how high
70 Lord Jesus think on me
76 Take up thy cross

Sidesperson: Bill Saunders

Readers: Nicky Pittam, Joe McKenzie

Intercessions: Carol Kenning

5th March Lent 1

Readings Genesis 2: 15-17 & 3: 1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5: 12-19

Matthew 4: 1-11

Hymns 67 Forty days and forty nights
64 Be thou my guardian
393 Lead us heavenly Father
420 O Jesus I have promised

Sidesperson: Elizabeth Oyedemi

Readers: Mark Williams, Bill Saunders

Intercessions: Lucy Boyd

12th March Lent 2

Readings Genesis 12: 1-4

Psalm 121

Romans 4: 1-5 & 13-17

John 3: 1-17

Hymns 434 Oft in danger oft on woe
Will you come and follow me
485 Thy hand O God hast guided
364 God is love let heaven adore him

Sidesperson: Monica Sarpong

Readers: Jenny Kauntze, Rob Nesbitt

19th March Lent 3

Readings Exodus 17: 1-7

Psalm 95

Romans 5: 1-11

John 4: 5-42

Hymns 349 Come let us join our cheerful songs
73 My God I love thee
376 I heard the voice of Jesus say
368 Guide me O thou great redeemer

Sidesperson: Mark Williams

Readers: Carol Kenning, Lucy Boyd

Intercessions: Nicky Pittam

26th March Lent 4 Mothering Sunday

Readings Exodus 2: 1-10

Psalm 127

Colossians 3: 12-17

Luke 2: 33-35

Hymns 186 Tell out my soul
God of Eve and God of Mary
Our father God in heaven
413 Now thank we all our God

Sidesperson: Nick Bethune

Readers: Denise Sealy, Mark Williams

Intercessions: Ian MacGregor

100 Club Winners

Draw for January 2017

1st prize: Tigerlilly (Co Dr Deys)

2nd prize: Nick Bethune

3rd prize: Maureen Paddock

4th prize: Eileen (Co The Boston)

Congratulations to you all and thanks for your support each month.

If you would like to purchase a number in this monthly draw please do make enquiries of the Mr Mark Williams.

the Church across the British Isles, that we will work together with great effectiveness to complete the task of sharing Jesus with every man, woman and child in this land.

Father God, pour out your Spirit on this wonderfully diverse task-force that is your Church. Where our strength is failing, energise us; where distractions are taking our minds off the work in hand, refocus us; where communication has broken down, reconnect us; and fit us to work together to complete this sacred task of making Jesus known. Amen.

Lyndall Bywater, Salvation Army

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For your prayers

PRAYER CALENDAR FOR MONTH OF MARCH 2017

5th Kingswear Road
12th Laurier Road
19th Lissenden Gardens
26th Mortimer Terrace

12th 2nd Sunday of Lent
17th St Patrick
18th St Cyril of Jerusalem
19th 3rd Sunday of Lent
25th The Annunciation
26th 4th Sunday of Lent
(Mothering Sunday)

SAINTS & HOLY DAYS

1st Ash Wednesday
2nd St Chad
5th 1st Sunday of Lent
7th St Pepetua, Felicity and companions