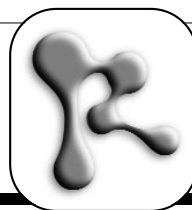


WORSHIP



BIBLE NOTES

The final journey begins. In today's readings we see:

- Christ's love for the city.
- The cost of Christ's love for his people.

The Gospel John 12.20-33

Jesus has arrived at the end of one journey - his ministry to the people of Galilee. Now the last journey of his earthly life is about to begin. It will take him to Golgotha - and a cross.

John introduces Jesus' teaching by the request of some Greeks to meet Jesus. They represent the Gentiles, a significant part of the Church's mission when John was writing. The Good News is not only for the Jewish people.

The events leading to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion are about to begin. Jesus' thoughts focus on his death. Pain and suffering have to be faced. He wants to plead with God to save him from the agony. Yet this is the very reason why 'his hour has come'.

When Jesus is lifted up on the cross, evil will be overruled and God will be glorified. The awful news of sin and judgement will become the good news of salvation. Forgiveness and eternal life will bring deliverance to all. Christ's death is inescapable if this is to happen. A single grain of wheat falls into the ground and, 'dying', produces a harvest of many grains. This is the path, not only for Christ, but for his disciples also. Those who follow him must walk in the light and shun the darkness.

The Old Testament Jeremiah 31.31-34

This prophecy is set in the context of the hope that Israel will be delivered from exile and restored to its own land. The old covenant has been jeopardised because the people have disobeyed God. There is a journey to be made which will lead the people to forgiveness and a renewing of

the covenant. God's law will be deeply etched on their hearts and a new life awaits them at the end of the journey.

Jeremiah was thinking primarily of his own nation in relation to this promise. The young Church saw the life, death and resurrection of Christ as the fulfilment of this promise.

The Epistle Hebrews 5.5-10

The writer of Hebrews sees Jesus as the one appointed to intercede for us with God. He is compared to the priests who offered sacrifices for the people's sins (in the tradition of Melchizedek, Psalm 110.4). Christ did not take this priesthood upon himself, but was appointed by God who called him 'my son'.

Christ is qualified for this role because he understands human weakness. He knows what it means to resist temptation. He knew the depths of suffering in the garden of Gethsemane. He learned what is involved in being obedient to God's will. Through his death and resurrection, he became the source of salvation for all who obey him. He is the great intercessor and mediator of God's grace and mercy.



SET THE SCENE

Arrange some stalks of dried wheat in golden light around a cross and/or place a sculpture of a classical Greek head alongside. Alternatively, project pictures of the Venus de Milo and a crucifix with golden wheat fields in the background. Or arrange a set of Russian dolls around the cross.



PRAY

Eternal God,
from everlasting to everlasting,
you are God.
Gentle as the night, sure as the dawn, you
are God.
In season and beyond time, you are God.
Before we were born and after we are
gone, you are God.
Now and forever, you are God
and worthy to be praised.

Amen.

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Living God,
in you
faith is sure and steadfast,
hope springs eternal
and love lasts forever.

Forgive and refresh us
with the faith,
that though our sins are like scarlet,
they shall be white as snow.

Comfort and encourage us
with the hope
that though tears may fill the night,
joy comes in the morning.

Assure and affirm us
with the love,
that though we appear to have nothing,
yet we possess everything.

In you
we find faith, hope and love,
and we offer our prayer
in the name and Spirit of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

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Use the Covenant Service Prayer from
the *Methodist Worship Book* in either the
traditional or modern version
(pages 287-290).

More prayers for today may be found on
the web site www.rootsontheweb.com



SHARE THE WORD

Everlasting

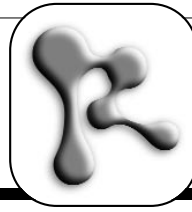
- When something is really good we want it to last forever. Scientists dream of discovering the secret of eternal motion or boundless energy. Lovers cling to each other, wanting their passion to burn intensely forever. Our favourite clothes wear out too quickly. We're always replacing batteries, so advertising campaigns stress their 'everlasting' properties. Some see heaven as an everlasting life of bliss, while for others endless hymn singing is a nightmare.
- We consider it a tragedy if someone dies while still young. Yet insects have lifespans of just days, and some trees live for hundreds of years. There is a natural life cycle for each species. Why then do we want longer life? Do we want to preserve our existence because it's programmed into our genes? Is it because life is so good we don't want to lose it? Or because we are afraid of what might come after death?
- Death often appears as the ultimate enemy. Yet life is full of endings - days end, flowers fade, cloth wears out, relationships break down. Some endings are happy endings. Many children's stories end with 'They all lived happily ever after.' A happy ending, when good succeeds and evil is defeated, lifts our spirits. Perhaps that's why many would like life to end happily. But there are real fears that the world could end in nuclear explosion or biological warfare. Most likely the universe will simply run down into disorder.
- One ending we often try to avoid thinking about is our own death. Death can be sudden and like that it is both a shock and a painful tragedy. But we will all die. Is our only hope that there will be more life afterwards? Or is our hope that our lives have an end, a purpose - that life is of value and of significance? We will all draw our last breath, but will our lives have a lasting effect? What will be the end that we have lived for? Christian Aid has a slogan, 'We believe in life before death'. That is a purpose worth living and dying for.

Riddles and paradoxes

- What is it that you take out down and put up out? (*Answer: An umbrella.*) What is it you have only if you give it away? How can you save and spend in the same act (and this is not about discounts)?
- A song says, 'Love is something if you give it away.' It is a common idea that if you give then you have less. Service is thought of as exhausting. Work is hard. Yet many people will say that they gain enormously from the time and effort they spend in helping others. It is said that a gift brings three blessings - to the one who receives, to the one who gives, and to God.
- It is hard to believe that all wealthy people are unhappy and all poor people are content. Yet some found the peace that formerly escaped them when they gave away their wealth and embraced

poverty. Francis of Assisi is one among many who set an example of following Jesus through rejecting wealth and accepting poverty.

- St Paul writes, 'We are treated as impostors, and yet are true, as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and yet see - we are alive; as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, yet possessing everything' 2 Corinthians 6.8-10.
- There are some who find that they are most alive when they risk death. Christians testify that life means most when it is given in love.



BE CREATIVE

- Play a panel game based on *Family Fortunes*. Have two teams of about four people in each. Ask 'What will last the longest?' Team members suggest an item of food which would rank high in a consumer survey as having long-lasting qualities (excluding tinned, bottled or frozen food). If they correctly identify one of those in a pre-prepared list they gain points. If they fail to identify more than three, the opposing team has the chance to complete the list. Answers might include: potatoes, figs, salt, sugar, rice, honey ... Hold a second round with the opposite team starting first, using the same question, but using living creatures, and thinking about those that might avoid extinction. Answers might include: ants, bacteria, lichen, human beings, turtles... What are the things that last forever?

- Play an endurance game. Invite contestants to hold something heavy, like a large book in each hand, with arms outstretched for as long as they can, or stand on one leg for as long as they can.
- Retell the story of Babushka (see the web site for details). Use a set of Babushka dolls to show how sometimes you can give away and still keep something. Give each doll to someone until you reach the last and smallest doll; when it is given away there is nothing left.
- Play a game of riddles. Examples: What increases the more you share it with others? Joy. What is broken when you name it? Silence. What is it that you must keep after giving it to someone else? Your word.



MUSIC

As the bride is to her chosen (Re+S)

Believe not those who say (He+P)

Domine Deus (BBP)

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory (Re+S)

Firmly I believe and truly (Traditional)

From heaven you came, helpless babe (Traditional)

Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart (BPW, He+P, Re+S)

Grain of wheat (SFNM)

Here is love (Source)

How deep the Father's love for us (Source)

Jesus, good above all other (Traditional)

Love is something if you give it away (see *Alleluia, Ae+C Black, 1980*)

Our God, our help in ages past (Traditional)

Son of the Lord most high (Traditional)

Tree of life and awesome mystery (CG)

RESOURCES



There are loads of riddles to choose from on

www.justriddlesandmore.com

W. H. Auden, 'Funeral Blues' in *Tell Me The Truth About Love*, Faber and Faber, 1998, ISBN 0571195938.

The story of Babushka appears on the web site www.rootsontheweb.com