

Journeying Together

Fourth Week of Lent: God Loved the World So Much



Welcome everyone and allow them time to “arrive” after busy days.

OPENING RESPONSES

Reader: We gather in the name of the Father

**All: Who loved the world so much
that he gave his only-begotten Son
so that everyone who believes in him
will have eternal life.**

Reader: We gather in the name of the Son

**All: Who loved the world so much
that he came into the world,
not to judge humanity
but to save it.**

Reader: We gather in the name of the Holy Spirit

**All: The fount of love pouring from Father and Son
who leads people to faith in Christ,
to hope in salvation,
and to ever-deeper love of God and of the world.**

Reader: We gather...

**All: (making the Sign of the Cross) in the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

GOSPEL READING – John 3: 14-21

Use these or your own words.

Please listen as the Gospel is read. It can help to close your eyes—or look at the person reading—or the image on the screen – whichever suits you best.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, ‘Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.’

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’

PERSONAL TIME WITH THE GOSPEL

Use these or your own words to take people into a time of personal reflection with the Gospel:

Jesus is having a private meeting with Nicodemus who is a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin who has come to him “by night”. This may be because he is nervous of being seen with Jesus – or simply, that they have come together for an evening meal and are enjoying a conversation afterwards. It follows the pattern many such conversations follow – questions and answers and more questions. With Jesus, though, there is always the desire to bring people closer to God. Pharisees were very law-abiding and holy people – living strictly according to the Law of Moses. One problem that came with that was a tendency to forget that God loves unconditionally and gave the Law so that humans could live together in harmony and develop their potential. Jesus acknowledges that people often prefer the darkness of selfishness and sin but that God’s deepest desire – and his own – is that humanity should know his love for them and choose the light of life.

Think about the Gospel using these prompts to help your reflection:

- Why do you think Nicodemus chose to speak to Jesus in the evening – at night?
- What message is Jesus trying to get across to Nicodemus?
- Why do some people prefer to believe in a God of anger rather than the God of Love Jesus came to teach about?

GROUP REFLECTION

In today’s Gospel, we are given an insight into the basic motivation of God sending Jesus into the world. In the face of so many people choosing to turn away from the light, God’s love endured and with it his desire to show just how great that love was. As we look around the world today, we see very similar situations – but God’s desire to save the world and bring its people to eternal life is undiminished.

Here are some thoughts to help you to reflect together on the Gospel.

- Why do people choose “the dark” rather than the light of faith?
- What does ‘God so loving the world that he sent his only Son’ mean to us?
- What more could God have done to show his love for humanity?

Depending on the size of the group, you might invite people to share any thoughts from their group discussion.

LISTENING TOGETHER

Here are some thoughts drawn from the Gospel. As you listen or read them, make a note of any that strike you – either because they open up a new idea – or because they challenge you – or... any other reason!

- Jesus came into the world to draw all peoples to himself.
- Jesus took people’s doubts and fears seriously – he did not dismiss them or treat them as stupid.
- Jesus met people “where they were” and helped them to move on.
- God loves the world of today every bit as much as he loved the world when he sent Jesus into it.
- God gave his very self so that every human being can have eternal life.
- Human beings have free will – and can choose light and life or darkness and sin.
- The choices humans make do not affect God’s love for them.
- Bad choices take people away from the path God desires for them but do not stop him loving them.
- God’s desire is that humans live in the light and make choices in love and in the truth.

Give time for people to read through the thoughts and to gather their own reflections. Depending on the size of your group, you might do this as one group or divide people into threes or fours. Invite people to share anything from the Gospel reflection or ‘Listening Together’, thoughts that have struck them using the timers if you have them. Remind people about the confidentiality – about not interrupting but listening deeply – and to treat this as time of grace on Holy Ground. Again use very quiet music in the background if this feels helpful.

People might like to share on:

- How does Jesus’ life and work show us the unconditional love and mercy of God?
- What are the consequences of good choices for the person making them – and for those around them? What about the consequences of bad choices?
- How can we help people “on the margins” to know the great love of God through our words and actions?

REFLECTION AND ACTION POINT FOR THE WEEK

Spend a couple of minutes inviting people to share updates on how they got on with their action points last week.

In your journal this week, you are invited to try something called the ‘Examen’. This is a very simple exercise that you can build into your everyday life. Start with a short reminder that God loves you so much that he sent his Son to show you the way to eternal life. Think about the things you have said and done that have been good and positive and drawn you closer to the light of God. Then make a mental note of where you have been tempted towards darkness – to selfishness – to things that have taken you from the path of truth and love. Acknowledge these before God – in humility and trust that God will forgive you and help you to look at a way to put things right or to avoid them tomorrow. Finally, go back to the reminder of God’s love – and recommit yourself to live as a beloved son or daughter, working to be worthy of the eternal life God desires for you.

CLOSING PRAYER

All: O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!

Reader: By the rivers of Babylon
there we sat and wept,
remembering Zion;
on the poplars that grew there
we hung up our harps.

All: O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!

Reader: For it was there that they asked us,
our captors, for songs,
our oppressors, for joy.
'Sing to us,' they said,
'one of Zion's songs.'

All: O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!

Reader: O how could we sing
the song of the Lord
on alien soil?
If I forget you, Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!

All: O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!

Reader: O let my tongue
cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not,
if I prize not Jerusalem
above all my joys!

**All: O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not!
Amen.**