

# Diocese of Edinburgh Lent Course 2025



Christ has no body now  
but yours

# Introduction

Welcome to the 2025 Lent Course prepared for the Diocese of Edinburgh. It has been so encouraging over the last few years, to discover ways in which across the diocese we are reflecting with similar material as we grow in faith and discipleship.

This year we invite you to reflect on two key prayers of our tradition - "Christ has no body but yours" - attributed to Teresa of Avila; and God be in my head from the Sarum Primer. These two prayers build on the central Christian theme of the Church - us - as the Body of Christ. As we reflected, we were aware that through the body - and the imagery of God's body - we could explore something of the characteristics of God and of the invitation to follow and work with God each day.

Christianity is an incarnate faith, we bless and serve through our bodies - we live our faith through our bodies. We follow Christ, often without big gestures, but through small every day moments of grace. In our bodies we experience our frailties and infirmities, and we often struggle to 'love' our bodies, as we live in a culture which emphasises certain 'good' bodies or 'beauty'. However, it is through our bodies that we show love, that we build community, that we experience changing health and aging, and it is our bodies and their development that teach us dependency both in childhood and in old age. Together, as the church, we are formed into the Body of Christ - each of us using the bodies we have been given, which are then transformed into God's Body together.

Although clearly God does not have a body in a literal sense, we follow a God who so values and loves the human body that God came to us as a human. The imagery of being human relies on imagery of God's body and in Scripture we can discover how God in Jesus used his body.

Through Lent the discussion will help you to take these prayers to heart and perhaps to hear where your next steps in discipleship may be. We also hope that through it you may come to love and value this amazing resource that God has given you - with all its 'imperfections' and grow in understanding about how God is calling you to serve with this body.

### **Warning:**

There is far too much material here for any group. As a leader please choose what suits your group from the different resources for each week. The booklet is available in Word document if you want to fine tune it for your own setting.

How to use this course:

- Each week we have included a loose structure:
  - ❑ Introduction
  - ❑ Opening Discussion and / or Activity
  - ❑ The body of God
  - ❑ Scripture
  - ❑ Our own bodies
  - ❑ Conclusion
- You will probably want to include at least one part of each section, but that really depends on your own group. Pick and choose. You might like to conclude each session with either or both of the prayers chosen for the course.
- Sometimes the passages from the Bible would be too great to include in this booklet, so there may be weeks when you wish to use your own Bible. If you don't have access to one, the NRSV is available on [oremus.org](http://oremus.org) .
- We have continued to include a Holy Week option as we have heard of some wonderful and imaginative ways of using it through Holy Week. This includes as part of Daily Prayer, as a short Evening Compline, as well as for normal discussion and for private reflection. However, it is simply offered in case it helps your own journey.

Liz O’Ryan, David Paton-Williams, Sophia Marriage

# Invitation from Bishop John

Whenever I hear these words of St Teresa, I am left wondering. Christ's activity is not, surely cannot be, limited to human activity, for we are finite, temporary beings, hampered at the very least by dullness of mind and flawed intentions.



Yet, here is a saint who understood very well the transcendence of God, telling us that Incarnation matters.

That God's grace, embodied in the physical person of Jesus, is incarnate still in the physical persons who make up the Church, the Body of Christ. We share this human identity, collectively we are made in God's image, yet our very bodiliness also implies a remarkable diversity, as our genes and hormones, our physiology and psychology, our lives and values shape for each of us quite different characters, aptitudes, hopes and dreams.

St Teresa was a mystic, a mysticism that found physical, bodily expression. She understood that, however far God is beyond us and above us, our only means of knowing God is always mediated through our physical senses and lived experience. However profound a believer's mystical vision, Teresa urges us to beware of being (as various people have put it) so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use.

Thank you, Liz, Sophia and David, for this latest study course. Whether it is used during Lent or at some other time, I pray that it will help us to deepen our sense of how we, in our bodily fullness, may know God's blessing and share that blessing with others.

+John

# The Prayers

Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
yours are the eyes with which he looks  
with compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to  
do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he  
blesses all the world.  
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,  
yours are the eyes, you are his body.  
Christ has no body now but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
yours are the eyes with which he looks  
compassion on this world.  
Christ has no body now on earth but  
yours.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)

God be in my head,  
And in my understanding;  
God be in mine eyes,  
And in my looking;  
God be in my mouth,  
And in my speaking;  
God be in my heart,  
And in my thinking;  
God be at mine end,  
And at my departing.

Sarum Primer, 1558

## Tip

Sometimes singing our prayers helps us to slow down and pray in a new and different way.

You might like to listen to the following settings of these two prayers:

- **David Ogden:** Christ has no body now but yours
- **Walford Davies:** God be in my head

# Yours are the Hands



## Introduction

The oldest images of hands on cave walls and on rocks are in Indonesia dating back c40,000 years. The ones pictured here are a little younger, found in Arizona, in the Canyon de Chelly, but they are typical of the hand images found all over the world. The people who made these marks did so in a variety of ways: using their hand as a stencil and spraying paint from their mouths or through a reed... or painting round their hand with simple brushes... or by simply painting their hand and placing it on the rock to make their mark.

- Just imagine the people who lived so long ago and whose hands you can still see. Why do you think they made painted images of their hands? What might they be trying to convey?

## Opening Activity

Choose one or more of these activities:

- Look at your own hands, back and front, closely and carefully, when they are still and as they move – share what you notice
- Go round the room and share the many different activities we use our hands for during one day – perhaps make two lists of the good things and not so good we can do with our hands
- Draw round your hands on paper or card, cut it out. Save your hand shape for the end of the session on which you can write a prayer of thanks to God for your hands
- Discuss how it might impact your life if you had no hands, or your hands are not as dexterous as they once were?

## The Hand of God:



The hand of blessing with its two forefingers together often symbolises the presence of God the Father in images of the Trinity. God's hand can sometimes be seen at the top of paintings depicting events in Jesus' life. The picture on the right here is from Michelangelo's painting on the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel depicting the moment of God's power in creating Adam.

- In what ways do you think that an image of a hand is a good one (or not) to represent God the Father?
- We often talk about 'the hand of God' to talk about unexplained natural events. What do you understand by the phrase?
- Where might we see the hand of God in our daily lives?
- In Eastern Orthodox both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are referred to as 'The Two Hands of God'. What do you feel about this idea?

## Scripture

**God as the potter:** Isaiah 64:8 and 45:9  
"But now, O Lord, you are our Father;  
we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
we are all the work of your hand."

"Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots!  
Does the clay say to him who forms it,  
'What are you making?' or 'Your work  
has no handles'?"



- How does the idea of God being the potter and we being the clay strike you? Is it a helpful image for you?
- What do you feel about being moulded by God?
- How does this image inform our faith?
- Where do you see God's hand upon your life?
- Do you have any sense of God still forming you? What part do we play in this process?

### **Hands in the New Testament:**

And Jesus took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them. (Mark 10:16)

After saying this, Jesus spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means "Sent"). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. (John 9: 6 - 7)

When Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but that rather a riot was beginning, he took water, and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves. (Matthew 27:24-26)

Jesus took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha kum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. (Mark 5: 41 - 42)

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23: 46)

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." (John 20:27)

So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:3)



- Look at some of or all of these verses. Discuss how hands are being used.
- What do the verses tell us about God?
- How might you feel if Jesus put his hands on you?

## Our own hands:

- We hold power in our own hands – in what ways do we use our hands and that power for good or for ill?
- Who has powerful hands in today's world, for good or ill?
- How might we use the power in our hands more effectively?
- What is the interaction between our hands and God's?

## Hands in worship

- Collect all the ways we use our hands in worship? What do the actions mean?
- Which actions are particularly meaningful for you and why?



## Conclusion

**Activity:** Choose one or more of the following:

- Write a reflective prayer in the cut out shape of a hand, voicing some of your thoughts to God that have arisen from the session
- Using air drying/home made clay make something and share with the group your thoughts behind it

1 cup of baking soda

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup of cornstarch

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup of water

Mix together over a warm heat. Do not overcook! You can make it different colours using food colouring – or people can paint it after it is dried in 3 – 5 days.

**Pray:** Read or sing this hymn together:

Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,  
healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,  
washing tired feet and saving those who fall;  
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you;  
make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do;  
let me watch you, Jesus, till I'm gentle too,  
till my hands are kind hands, quick to work for you.

**Reflecting for Lent**

God be in my hands ... and in my touching

*God has no body, no hands, but yours.*

*What does that mean in light of today's discussion?*

# Yours are the Eyes

## Introduction

Eyes are amazing things. For sighted people they are one of the main ways we engage with the world. We receive so much information through them. We use them to navigate in and investigate the world. We use them to give attention to people and things - showing the value we place upon them. They also express emotion - when we cry, when our eyes "light up", when we look fiercely or tenderly at someone. They are often called the window on the soul.

Eyes are so dominant in many of us that we have connected seeing with other ways of understanding ourselves, life and the world - we speak of "hindsight", "foresight" and "insight". However for almost all of us, our eyes gradually weaken or fail, bringing difficulty and distress. We can feel cut off, unsafe finding our way, much harder to judge distances etc.

We say that "seeing is believing" (thinking of St Thomas), but our eyes can deceive or confuse us. Seeing is so much more than passively looking. It is about actively seeking to understand. Jesus warned that there would be people who would look but not perceive.

## Opening Discussion

We speak of certain ancient monuments as the "seven wonders of the world". (Maybe listen to Louis Armstrong's "What a wonderful world") Make a list of what, for you, are the wonders of the world we live in. Share your lists with each other.

- What things might make it harder, or easier, for us to see the wonders around us?

## Opening Activity: Painting by Peter Bruegel the Elder



- Looking. Take a quick look at the image - What is it a picture of?
- Looking long. Spend time with the picture - What do you notice? What questions do you have?
- Looking deep: What feelings or memories does this image evoke? Why do you think Bruegel might have wanted to paint this picture?

## The Eye of God



Both of these are images of "the Eye of God" - a nebula (where stars are formed out in space) and a painting on the side of a church, watching over a congregation or a village.

- What positive or negative feelings do they evoke in you?
- In our liturgy we pray to the One from whom no secrets are hidden. Think about that for a moment. How do you feel about that?

We use the words "see" and "sight" in different ways - ("I never thought I would see the day...") - or as parts of longer words (eg "short-sighted"). Reflect together on some of these and on the subtly, different meanings they may have.

- Have you ever known someone who was profoundly blind? How do you think that shaped their life and experience? Do you think they saw it as a handicap or as part of their God-given identity?

## **Scripture**

### **Old Testament: Exodus 3 v1-10**

- Note the different ways that "seeing" is mentioned or implied in this story (eg for Moses; for God).
- Moses turned aside to see something wonderful. He had noticed something and then had "insight", to realise something special was going on. Have you noticed something rather wonderful recently (however small or ordinary it might seem)?

### **New Testament: Jesus and seeing**

Jesus "saw" so much in his life and ministry. He saw the Spirit come down like a dove. He saw people's deepest needs and their hardness of heart. He saw his disciples' potential as well as their capacity for blocking children or striving to be the greatest. He will also have seen the beauty of Galilee and the bustle and squalor of Jerusalem. Ultimately he "saw" rejection, suffering and death on a cross.

### **Mark 10 v46-52**

Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar,

was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

- Those who are born blind may come to "see" their lack of sight as something they would not wish to have "cured". However, Bartimaeus had lost his sight and wanted it back, saying: "Let me see again." How have problems with your sight affected you? What would you miss most if you could not see at all?
- We also speak of "spiritual blindness", where sin prevents us from "seeing" God, ourselves, others or the world clearly. The Bartimaeus story implies that he gained spiritual sight as well, following Jesus "on the way". We sometimes sing the hymn Amazing Grace, with the words: "I was blind but now I see". Can you relate to these words? In what ways has faith in God helped you to "see" more clearly, more deeply?
- Jesus says to Bartimaeus "What do you want me to do for you?" Spend some time thinking about how you would answer that question, in the light of your discussion. You may like to offer your response silently or aloud in prayer together, now or at the end of the session.

### **John 20 v1-10**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he

did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

**Note:** In this passage, John uses three different Greek words for "saw". Although they overlap in meaning, to some extent they have different emphases. In verse 1 and 5, Mary and the other disciple "saw" (blepei) the opened tomb and the linen wrappings in the tomb. They merely saw these things with their eyes. In verse 6, Peter "saw" (theorei) the linen wrappings and the cloth. He gazed, he beheld - seeing deeply, beginning to wonder. Finally, in verse 8 the other disciple "saw" (eiden) and believed. He perceived with his mind, he discerned something of the truth behind these mysterious events. The penny dropped.

As Christians we are called to see with our eyes, making ourselves aware of things and people around us.

We are also called to see deeply and to wonder - to ask deep questions of ourselves and others. And we are called to perceive the meaning of things, to try to discern truth. Although John's story suggests there may be a gradual process here, all of these ways of "seeing" seem to be important.

- Think about your own faith journey - has one of these been more important to you than the others?

In another story in Mark's gospel (chapter 8 v22-26), Jesus heals a blind man but his sight only comes back gradually: "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking."

- Have you gained spiritual sight suddenly or gradually? What has helped or hindered that?

## **Our own eyes**

- In what ways do you find that the belonging to the church help you to see things - life, situations, yourself - more deeply?

- How can we learn to see ourselves, others, the world, the news etc as clearly as possible?
- How might we be changed if we did that?
- What, if anything, is stopping that happening?

God saw the suffering of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. Unlike some of the characters in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, God did not look away but responds. God had also seen the wonderful potential of Moses to do something about it.

- Are there people or needs in your congregation, your local community, or in our society that you think we may not be really noticing?
- In the story, God sees and then acts. Can you think of times when you saw something - someone suffering or something wrong - and were moved to act? Can you think of times when you saw something and didn't act? What do you think may have made the difference?

Someone once said: "You cannot erase the pictures on the walls of the mind". In other words, once we have seen something, we can't "unsee" it.

- With TV, newspapers, film and the internet bringing us so many images - which may be violent, cruel, pornographic etc - how do you cope with the difficult things you might see around you?

## **Eyes in worship**

In one of the SEC's eucharistic prayers (7), we say, "Your Spirit lives in us so that we can look at the world through your eyes."

- What do you think it might mean to "look at the world through God's eyes"?

In Puritan worship, all images and decoration are stripped away to ensure no distraction and to emphasise our emptiness before God, the simplicity of worship. In many continental Catholic and Orthodox churches, there are myriad sights – rich colours, murals, statues and ornate processions and rituals.

- Think about churches you have visited, and services you have attended – how have the different sights (decoration as well as ritual, vestments etc), changed the way you worshipped, and what you received from God?



## Conclusion

### Prayer

Write a short "TSP" prayer about seeing. (T - thanks, S - sorry, P - please)  
If you are happy to, share your prayers together.

### This week

- Try to spend time seeing or noticing wonders around you. Look up!
- Try, also, to notice when you look away from difficult stories in the news. In the light of this session, reflect on whether this is appropriate or not as you try to balance protecting yourself with engagement in the world.
- What would you like to see this week?

### **Reflecting for Lent**

God be in my eyes ... and in my seeing

*God has no body, no eyes, but yours.*

*What does that mean in light of today's discussion*

# Yours are the Feet

## Introduction



### Did you know?

- Feet are complex, comprising of 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than 100 muscles, tendons, and ligaments.
- Feet have more nerve endings per square centimetre than any other part of the body.
- The skin on your feet is thicker than any other body part.
- Feet have roughly 250,000 sweat glands, producing about half a pint of moisture a

day. (No wonder they can get smelly!)

- Toenails grow more slowly than fingernails, about 1 mm per month compared to fingernails growing about three times as fast.

## Discussion

- Do you like feet.... your feet? Why or why not?
- Discuss all the actions and strain we might put our feet through during a day.
- What is it like to have sore feet or damaged feet?
- Do you visit a chiropodist/podiatrist?
- How does it feel when you have your feet massaged?
- Do you like your feet being touched?

## God's feet

In Genesis 3: 8 God is described as '**walking**' in the Garden in the cool of the evening.

When King David wanted to build the Temple he described it as being a place for the '**footstool**' of God. (1 Chron 28: 2)

When God describes the glory of the Temple to Ezekiel (43: 7) God says: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and **the place of the soles of**

**my feet**, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever”

And in the time of Isaiah (66:1), before the Temple was rebuilt, God said: ‘Heaven is my throne, and **the earth is my footstool**’.

On Jesus’ last evening with His disciples He ‘poured water into a basin and began to **wash his disciples’ feet**, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.’ (John 13: 5)



- What might these references tell us about God?
- Where do you see God still walking this earth?
- Where are the footstools of God today?
- How do you see God’s footprints in your life, or in the lives of others?
- Whose feet would Jesus wash today?
- Whose feet would you find difficult to wash?

## Scripture

### Old Testament

#### Holy Ground: Exodus 3: 1 - 5

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”



- When do you take off your shoes?
- What difference does it make to go barefoot or without shoes in the house or elsewhere?
- Why do you think God asks Moses to remove his shoes?
- What does it mean to 'stand on holy ground'?
- What or where is holy ground for you? Is some ground more holy than others?
- Moses took off his sandals before he spoke with God; what do you do to prepare to speak with God?
- Is it hard for you to see your daily life as a place of God's presence and revelation?

### **A pilgrim people: Exodus 12: 1- 5**

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;

I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

- What do you think Abram might have felt as he set out, not knowing exactly where he was going?
- Who are the people who today walk the earth?
- Where might God be asking you to go at this time?
- In what ways is Abram's journey like our own journey of faith?
- What might you need to leave behind?
- What do you feel you need to take with you as you journey forward?
- What might make you stumble and fall?

## New Testament

John 1:43: The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

Rabbis who taught the Torah were well respected members of the community. When they were first starting out one of their tasks was to gather around them a group of disciples. Often bright students would apply to a rabbi to be their disciple. The rabbi would interview them and decide whether the student had the understanding and potential to be able to follow them closely. Then if the rabbi liked what he saw and heard, he would invite the student to 'Follow me'. Thereafter wherever the rabbi went, so did the disciple. Whatever the rabbi did, the student was expected to do too. (cf Peter jumping out of the boat to walk on water like Jesus? Matthew 14:22-33). In fact in the Mishnah, one of the early sages, Yose Ben Yosezer said disciples, 'Cover yourself with the dust of your rabbi's feet'. In other words the disciple had to be so close to his rabbi, metaphorically and literally, he would, by the end of the day, be covered in his rabbi's feet dust, so close would his actions be to that of his rabbi. The disciple's main desire would be to replicate his rabbi's life. This is a picture of true discipleship.

1 John 2:6: Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 Peter 2:21: For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

The Greek word for 'steps' is *ichnos*, which also has the meaning of footsteps – precisely like the footprints we leave in the sand. Peter's words here encourage us to place our feet exactly where Jesus placed his.... stepping in His very footprints, replicating His life in ours and following His actions in every circumstance we face.

- What is your reaction to what has just been read?
- How do you feel about walking so closely with Jesus you are covered in the dust of His feet?

- In what ways is it difficult to walk in Jesus' footsteps?
- How would you encourage others to walk in Jesus' footsteps?

## Our own feet

### Feet in worship:



- How do we use our feet in worship?
- Does your church wash feet on Maundy Thursday? How does it feel?
- Does your church engage in processional activities during the year?
- Why are we so many of us reluctant to dance in worship?

## Conclusion

### Activity: Choose one or more of the following:

- Wash each other's feet (you might want to play music in the background)
- Draw round your foot on a piece of paper and cut it out. Write a prayer or your response to what has been said in the session on it. Display them.
- Prayer walk: Take a short walk outside together... and every few steps stop and encourage an individual to say a prayer out loud inspired by something you can see. Finish by giving thanks to God

### Reflecting for Lent

God be in my feet ... and in my journeying

*God has no body, no feet, but yours.*

*What does that mean in light of today's discussion*

# Yours is the Voice



## Introduction

Our Voice is integral to our identity. We experience this in our accents, the words we use, the tones and intonation of our voice. All of these contribute to how we use our voice, how we express ourselves and how others receive what we say. Our voice can make others jump to

conclusions about where we were brought up and what kind of education we have.

Losing our voice, perhaps through strokes or through memory loss, can be very debilitating. It is so linked to our identity, our intelligence, our understanding, that those who lose their voice are often treated as though they have no understanding, memory or intelligence. Our participation in society is really difficult when we can't express what is inside us, and people treat us very differently if we struggle to find the words or phrases.

In many ways we all have this experience to a certain degree when we find ourselves not speaking the language of those around us. We can feel stupid, disempowered and isolated.

There are professionals who offer voice coaching. This is primarily to strengthen the voice and to make it clearer when doing public speaking. Many of us have watched the coaching of Elisa Dolittle in *My Fair Lady* and it is said that when Margaret Thatcher became prime-minister she had voice coaching, to ensure that her high pitched voice came down so that she could be taken more seriously. If we're honest with ourselves, the tone and intonation of someone's voice either warms us to trust and like them, or turns us away – there are even some voices or accents that we may find impossible to listen to.

## Activity

Go round the group, saying the phrase "I went shopping last week and I bought ten bananas and a milkshake".

Each person says this in a different way: factually, in a lying fashion, angrily, sadly, happily, surprised, anxious, fearful, tired, sadly, excitedly, surprised.

- You might like to do this without saying what emotion you're portraying – can your friends guess?
- How similar were these moods? How easy was it to convey the meaning, the mood, the emotion?

## Discussion

The voice is experienced in words. It is from the voice, the tongue, that we can praise God or curse our brothers and sisters (James 3). As James makes clear, taming the tongue, controlling the words that come out of our mouth, is extremely difficult.

Here are two quotations from our primary school days:

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me

Or

Boys flying kites haul in their white winged birds  
You can't do it that way when you're flying words  
Words once expressed may sometimes fall back dead,  
But God himself can't kill them once they're said

- What is your reaction to each of these? Do you agree with either, neither, both?

## The Voice of God

### How does God use God's voice?

Here we will look at five different ways that God's voice is heard in Scripture – you might like to think of other ways as a group, as you draw on your own experience and knowledge of the Bible. In your discussion, you could simply 'mention' some of these examples, and discuss one or two in depth depending on your group.



## To Create

### Genesis 1:1-3

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.

### Psalm 29:3-9

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;  
the God of glory thunders;  
the Lord is upon the mighty waters.  
The voice of the Lord is a powerful voice;  
the voice of the Lord is a voice of splendour.  
The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees;  
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon,  
and makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.  
The voice of the Lord  
splits the flames of fire;  
the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.  
The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe  
and strips the forests bare.

In these two passages, God's voice has power – power to create everything that is, power to sustain everything.

- What is your reaction to these passages? What do they 'mean' for you?

Psalm 19 takes it one step further, where all of creation echoes God's voice ... uses their voice to sing praise, to declare the greatness of God.

- In what ways does creation's voice echo God's voice?
- What does it mean for all creation to sing with praise?

## To Name

There are many times in the Old Testament when God speaks. Sometimes God's voice calls out what is there, names it. For instance in the naming of Isaac (he laughs), the changing of names from Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel. In Genesis 2:19-20, God shares this important job of naming with Adam.

Names – what we are “called” is also critical to our identity. People can call our name in anger, in love, in challenge, in joy. Not using a person's name can be a way of belittling them.

Isaiah 43:1

But now thus says the Lord,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.

In the New Testament we see this naming extended – Simon becomes Peter, Saul becomes Paul. A new name – a new “calling” – signifies and marks a big step in life.

For much of Christian history, baptism has also been called Christening – making us “christed”. And like a novice entering the religious life, we are ‘given’ our name in Christ.

- Why do you have your name? Who chose it? Is it a family name? Does it mean anything?
- Do you think it makes any difference what we are named?
- If you have changed your name at any point in your life, what did that feel like?
- What does it feel like to be named by God?
- What's in a name? Juliet says “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” – do you think this is true?
- How do you feel about your name? And about other names people may call you (for example, Mum, Dad, Granny, Grandad, Auntie etc)

## **To Form Relationship and Partnership**

God's voice is also used to form relationship and share the work of the Kingdom. When we have a 'name' we can be personally called not just by our friends, but also by God - it is intimate and personal.

In 1 Samuel 3 and Isaiah 6, we hear God speaking to people to give them a special message. God's voice being used to bring to life a human voice for a particular purpose.

In Isaiah 6, Isaiah realises that like those around him he has unclean lips, for his voice to be used by God he needs to be cleansed.

In Genesis 18, we hear Abraham talking with God, and bargaining for the people of Sodom. The conversation is just as we would have with our fellow human beings.

- What does it mean that God is speaking? What is your experience?
- How does God form relationship with you?
- What do you think it means to have unclean lips?
- What does it mean to have clean lips?

## **To Bless**

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' (Genesis 12:2-3)

In Genesis 12, we have another example of the normal 'chat' between God and Abram. Here is an example of God blessing Abram and his descendants, and giving the promises that will undergird the whole history of the People of God.

- What do you think this (and other stories of God's blessing) have felt like?
- How do you know yourself blessed by God? By others?
- What is the role of words / the voice in blessing?

## **To Challenge**

There are many examples of God challenging the People of Israel. Most of these are God's voice being heard through the voices of others, especially the prophets.

However, in Job 38-41, we hear God's voice to Job. After all the 'talking' from Job's friends, trying to reason, explain, comfort, cajole Job throughout the book, Job rants at God asking for explanations, and God speaks.

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:1)

The four chapters are full of questions – the great mysteries of life, the vastness of God's wisdom and knowledge.

In the middle Job says "I lay my hand on my mouth" (40:4) and at the end, he submits to God "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you." (42:3&5)

- How do you experience God speaking words of challenge to your understanding?
- Can you think of occasions when you have had to endure other people talking about things they don't know about? What about occasions when you have spoken without knowledge?

## **New Testament:**

Many of these themes continue to be echoed in the New Testament, God (through Jesus) creating – peace and reconciliation, new community, understanding (in the parables), blessing, challenging and forming relationships.

We hear God's voice at Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-12) and on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17). We hear Jesus' side of the conversations of prayer in the Farewell Discourses of John.

Jesus heals with his voice (eg Jairus' daughter in Mark 5 and from afar the centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5-13), he rebukes with harsh words

(Matthew 12:34-35). He shows himself as Lord over creation (Mark 4:35-41). He jokes and tells stories, he calls Lazarus out from the grave (John 11:38-44) and cries as he feels abandoned by God on the cross (Matthew 27:46). He calls to people to follow (Luke 5).

## **Our own Voice**

Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh. (James 3:2-12)

Looking back at your journey through Scripture and God's Voice, now consider how you use your own voice. Some of these questions may help:

- How does this passage make you feel?
- How easy do you find it to control your tongue?
- Where can you hear the Voice of God today?
- Which of the uses of God's voice above do you think you could use in your daily lives? Did you do that today? If yes, how, if no, why not?
- How easy do you find it to articulate your faith or what's important to you?

- There is a Yiddish expression “from your mouth to God’s ears” – in other words may what you ask of God / say, be heard by God. How do you talk to God? How does God speak to you?
- How can you turn gossip into caring prayer?
- What examples can you give of ‘blessing’ and ‘cursing’ with your voice?
- What happens when we don’t have the language to convey how we feel?
- Which voices are most prevalent in society today? In your church, in your family? Are they voices that mirror the Voice of God?
- What the voices on social media?
- Who are the voiceless in Scotland, in your community, in the world?
- How do we use our voice for them? How can our voice be used to empower not to remove whatever power they have left?
- When do we / others choose not to speak? Are there subjects we choose not to talk to?

## **Voice in worship**

Worship transforms us, changing the way we live and how we view life’s challenges. That is as true for the voices we use and hear during worship. Thomas Long (Testimony 2004) argues that worship can give us the vocabulary for life, a place to shape our words and phrases so that we unite our worship and our daily living.

Think through the worship service at your church, the greeting and gathering, the confession and absolution, the words of Scripture and reflection, affirmation of faith, intercessory prayer and offering peace, offering to God and thanksgiving. Think about what all these words offer you and those you serve during the week.

- How do you use your voice in worship?
- How do you feel when there are congregational responses in the liturgy and when there are no responses and the minister leads everything?
- What about how we use our voice in music?
- What are the differences between using our voice to address God and each other in worship?
- Are all voices heard in worship or are there some that are missing?

## Conclusion

### Reflection

- Can you remember any words you spoke today – in what ways did they show who you really are?
- Did any of them give the 'wrong' impression – something you'd like to be, but are not yet, or something you're embarrassed about / try to hide from?
- Did any of them mention God – how / what did it say about faith/ was it a swear word?
- Read through the lyrics to this Fischy Music song – can you list when you built up today and when you tore down?

Fischy Music verse 1 and chorus

Every word you say, (wo-oh)  
Every game you play, (wo-oh)  
Every silly face, (wo-oh)  
Every single place, (wo-oh)  
You can build up,  
Or you can tear down.  
Build up one another,  
Build up your sisters and brothers,  
Build up one another,  
Build up!

Fischy Music

### Closing activity

Spend 10 minutes writing a 'new' blessing ... perhaps one to be said as you / your loved ones leave the house each morning, or one that you will say (silently) to your colleagues as they go home at the end of work?

#### Reflecting for Lent

God be in my voice.... and in my speaking

*God has no body, no voice, but yours.*

*What does that mean in light of today's discussion*

# Yours are the Ears

## Introduction

### Discussion

*Either*

Listen to a piece of music or a poem. (An evocative example could be the beginning of *Under Milk Wood* read by Richard Burton). Let your mind, imagination or heart go where it likes in response.

- If you are happy to do so, share your responses with the group.

*OR*

Imagine you are asked to pick your Desert Island Discs:

- What might some of them be?
- Why do you think music is so important to us?

## Introductory Thoughts

This is the phone which received the first call to the Samaritans.

In 1935, a fourteen-year old girl took her life because she had begun her periods and thought she had caught a sexually transmitted disease. A young curate in the Church of England, Chad Varah, took her funeral, and was so affected by her suffering and death that he vowed to encourage sex education and to help those who were contemplating suicide. When he

became rector of St Stephen's Walbrook, London in 1953 he founded The Samaritans in the church crypt. Its aim was to "befriend the suicidal and despairing". The telephone received its first call on the 2nd November 1953. Over the last 71 years, volunteers have answered more than 134 million calls. The Samaritans bears witness to the power of confidential, non-judgemental listening.





- Can you think of an occasion when you were helped in some way by someone listening to you?
- Why do you think being listened to well can be so helpful?
- We talk not just about listening but "being (or not being) heard". What does that phrase mean to you and why is it important?

## Scripture

### The Story of Hagar (read this aloud)

The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.' The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.' So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, 'Do not let me look on the death of the child.' And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.' Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. (Genesis 21:8-19)

- How do you respond to hearing this story?

This story involves both seeing and hearing. They are both important ways in which we experience and learn about the world. God hears the voice of

the boy, just as God hears the cry of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, (Exodus 3) as we read earlier in the course.

- What relevance might stories like these have for us, in how we interact with the people and issues around us?
- Who might be crying out in our church, community, society, world. Are they being heard? Who are they heard by? In what ways do we prevent their cries reaching our ears? What could we as the church do about that?

### **Hearing in the Psalms**

In Psalm 51 v8, the psalmist writes: "Let me hear of joy and gladness".

- What sounds bring you joy? Have you heard any news recently that brought you joy? What would you like to hear?

In Psalm 143 v8, we read: "Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning."

- What sounds do you wake up to?
- What kind of different sounds do people around the world wake up to today?
- How might those sounds affect them?

The Psalms often speak of God listening, inclining his ear - ie leaning in to pay attention - to someone's prayer, for example: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry" - Psalm 40 v1. However, on many occasions, the psalmist beseeches God to hear, for example: "To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me" (Psalm 28 v1). These pleas suggest that the writer knows that there may be times when God doesn't seem to hear our prayer.

- Can you recall times when God didn't seem to be listening? Have you been able to make sense of them in any way? If so how?
- Psalm 94:9 says "He who planted the ear, does he not hear?" What might it mean to listen with God's ears? What difference would it make?

## Jesus and Hearing

We think of Jesus as a great teacher but he also listened. He was frequently in discussion or debate with his followers, people in the crowd and his opponents. And he often asked questions. All of these will have required careful listening.

### Matthew 13 v13-15

The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

'You will indeed listen but never understand,  
and you will indeed look but never perceive.

For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes,  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and hear with their ears

and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.'

- Here Jesus is quoting from the prophet Isaiah, who returned to this theme time and again - that there is a two way link between our hearing and our hearts.
- In a positive sense, what we hear - people, stories, music, the sounds of nature - can move us deeply, bringing delight, sympathy or sorrow. You may like to share examples of times when this has been true for you.

On the other hand - as Isaiah and Jesus warn - we may let our hearts grow "dull" or "hard", making us less inclined or able to hear God or others. Or, if we stop listening to God, or the people and stories around us, then our hearts may begin to harden.

- Does this sort of connection make sense to you?
- If so, what might help us to guard against this danger?
- Why might we, or others, be tempted to stop listening - to others or to God?
- What impact does it have if we do this?
- What might help us to listen again?

## Our own ears

### A Listening Church?

In the build up to the Second World War, the German theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote this:

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon no longer be listening to God either; he will soon be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too.

- How do you respond to this passage. Do you think it has anything to say to the church in our day?

At the end of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus says: "Let anyone with ears listen!"

- What might it mean for the church to be a listening community? Who would we be listening to, about what? What difference would it make to us? What actions might it prompt us to take?
- What might we listen to if we listened with God's ears?

Read this hymn (or sing it if you know the tune) (CH4 No 606)

Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders  
unmistakable and clear;  
mighty signs to prove your presence,  
overcoming doubt and fear

Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers,  
still and small and scarcely heard;  
only those who want to listen  
catch the all-important word.

Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,  
through our loud and noisy day:  
we can know and trust you better  
when we quietly wait and pray.

Lord, you love to speak in Scripture:  
words that summon from the page,  
shown and taught us by your Spirit  
with fresh light for every age.

Lord, you always speak in Jesus,  
always new yet still the same;  
teach us now more of our Saviour;  
make our lives display his Name.

© Christopher Idle/Jubilate Hymns Ltd

- How do you hear God? Are there other ways to hear God?
- In what ways does this hymn connect with your own experience?

### **Ears in Worship**

Think of all the sounds - and silence - in our worship:

- What are the sounds of worship?
- How do silence or words help or hinder you?
- Have you ever experienced a silent Eucharist?
- What would a service be like if I was deaf? How would we do worship if we were all deaf?
- Are there words in the liturgy that you hear that particularly speak to you?

### **Conclusion**

Some people are born unable to hear, most of us have reduced hearing as we get older, young children can hear very high sounds, and this lessens as we move through life.

Like the loss of sight, many people who are profoundly deaf from an early age, may come to the point of seeing their deafness as integral to their identity and wouldn't wish to be healed of it. Others long for it to return or be improved.

Evelyn Glennie started losing her hearing at eight and became profoundly deaf. Yet she became a world class percussionist who "heard" the music through the whole of her body rather than just her ears.

On *Strictly Come Dancing*, Rose Ayling-Ellis danced despite being deaf. At one point the music went silent so the "audience" could "hear" something of her experience. (You may like to watch this online in the group.)

- What might we learn from those who have 'lost' their hearing, or those who have never 'heard' with their physical ears?
- What do we miss when we can't hear? What would you miss most if your hearing went completely?

We are often surrounded by sound, so much of which - like traffic, radio, television - is now made by human technology. Some people in the street are constantly listening to music through an ear-piece.

- What is the balance between sound and silence in your life? Are you happy with it? If not, what might you do about it?
- Is there someone (or something) who you feel drawn to listen to this week?

### **Reflecting for Lent**

God be in my ears and in my hearing

***God has no body, no ears, but yours.***

***What does that mean in light of today's discussion?***

# Holy Week

This week spend some time in imaginative prayer with Jesus as you walk through some of the stories of the week. In Holy Week, Jesus is at his most human, and very often it is through His human body that he blesses, and reaches out to people. As we stand at the foot of the cross on Friday, it is the battered bruised body we see in front of us ... a body that will be transformed, but continue to bear the scars on Sunday.

Each day, consider what Jesus is doing in the passage. We have chosen a variety of passages which lead us to reflect on how Jesus is using his body. Either spend time focusing closely on one passage, or step back and reflect wider using the stories and images for the day as you move on a pathway to exploring how Christ used his body during the week and what it might mean for you to be Christ's body today.

## **Monday: Christ has no ears now but yours**

Luke 19:29-44 – Christ hears the crowds as he enters  
Jerusalem

Matthew 27: 11-26 – Christ hears the crowds as he stands  
before Pilate

Areas for reflection or discussion:

- What does Jesus hear? And what is not heard?
- The difference between those who are heard and those who are silenced (The Pharisees try to silence people ... and Jesus is silent – what he is hearing in his silence?)
- How does Jesus respond to what he is hearing?
- Where do you hear these sounds in the world today? What is your response?
- As you walk through Holy Week, what are the sounds that God wants you to respond to? Where does God want you to 'open your ears'?

## **Tuesday: Christ has no feet now but yours**

John 12:1-8 - Jesus has his feet anointed by Mary  
John 19:16-17 - Jesus walks to Golgotha carrying his cross

### Areas for reflection or discussion

- What is happening to Jesus' feet in these moments? How do you think his feet feel?
- Think about the contrast between what happens to his feet when anointed, and when walking to the cross and being nailed to the cross.
- Where are the sore feet today which need anointing? What is your response?
- As you walk through Holy Week, where do you think God wants your feet to be used, what path are you treading? Who might be anointing your feet? What does it mean to you to be the feet of Christ?

## **Wednesday: Christ has no hands now but yours**

Luke 22:14-23 – Jesus breaks bread  
John 13:1-11 – Jesus uses his hands to wash his disciples' feet  
Luke 22:39-46 – Jesus prays and shakes his disciples awake  
Luke 23:32-33 – Jesus hands are nailed to the cross

### Areas for reflection or discussion

- Picture Jesus' hands in the story you have chosen. How are they being used?
- Some of these stories also include other people's hands – the disciples receiving the bread, or saying stop to Jesus washing their feet, the soldiers using their hands to nail the prisoners to the cross. Reflect on the interactions between people through hands.
- Where are people using their hands for blessing or for harm today? What is your response?
- As you walk through Holy Week, how does God want you to use your hands, what would it look like to be Christ's hands today?



## Thursday: Christ has no eyes now, but yours

Luke 22:54-62 – Christ looks at Peter

John 19:25-28 – Christ looks at John and Mary

Areas for reflection or discussion

- What does Jesus look at? What does he see? What is the difference between looking and seeing here? How does he respond?
- In both cases, Jesus is in pain, what is that look? With what emotion or judgement does he look?
- How do we look on others today? How do we look at others when we are suffering or in pain?
- How does God look at you today? How do you feel about that?
- As you walk through Holy Week, where do you think God wants you to look and how does he want you to see? Where would Christ be looking today? And where can you be the eyes of Christ as you respond?

## Friday: Christ has no voice now but yours

Jesus is silent before Pilate ... but on the cross, we have a record of him using his voice to cry out. Many have spoken of how these 7 last sayings contain the whole gospel, with some of these cries, he speaks to God, and in others to humans, in others, it seems he's talking to himself, or witnessing to others. Some communicate his needs and others speak of his helplessness.

**"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do":**

(Luke 23:34)

**"Today, you will be with me in paradise":** (Luke 23:43)

**"Behold your son: behold your mother":** (John 19:26-27)

**"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?":** (Matthew 27:46)

**"I thirst":** (John 19:28)

**"It is finished":** (John 19:30)

**"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit":** (Luke 23:46)

## Areas for reflection or discussion

- Choose one or two of the sayings. What is Jesus saying? Why? What's in each phrase?
- Which of these phrases speaks to you?
- As you reflect on the saying you have chosen, how is the voice used – (to God, to others) and what for? Does this speak to how you use your voice?
- Have you ever cried out any of these sentiments?
- How do these words from the cross speak to the world's situations today?
- As you walk through Holy Week, where and how do you think God wants you to use your voice? Where does he want you to be silent and where speak? How can you be the voice of Christ as you respond to Jesus on the cross?

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