



Diocese of Edinburgh

Lent Course 2023

Faith is a Verb



Introduction

Do we think of the word 'Faith' as a noun or a verb? Perhaps it might be suggested that it is both at the same time.

If we think of faith as a noun we might be encouraged to concentrate on 'what we believe' exploring the creeds, catechisms and theological statements in history and in the present. This would be a search primarily for the cognitive dimension of faith. As vital and necessary as this is, if faith was ONLY this there might be the danger of ending up with a more static faith, a focus on pursuing the 'right' things to believe, and on getting all our theological ducks in a row.

This booklet, on the other hand, concentrates on the view that 'Faith is a Verb' – the title of the course. This is not to reject the other side of the coin, but rather to acknowledge that 'Faith' has an active component; one which is intertwined with how we live out our faith in our daily activities and practices. In writing this course we wished to explore how faith impacts all aspects of life: how we treat others, raise our children, spend money, vote and care for others etc. We wanted to issue the invitation to get out of our theological armchairs and to explore the messiness and complexity of life in the light of our faith, raising and exploring questions and wrestling with what is going on in the world through our eyes of faith. "Faith in Christ was not primarily a matter of doctrinal or intellectual belief, but a way of life, a following, an allegiance." Said of Edward Wilson, in George Seaver, , John Murray, 1935, p104

We hope you enjoy the resources provided in this booklet. Every week passages, activities and questions are given – probably far too much for any one session. We offer you them as suggestions and starting points for you to use as you wish and use appropriately for your context and people. The last week, as it falls in Holy Week, is written to be done as a 'self-study' rather than as a group.

Invitation from Bishop John



Jesus calls us to follow, to travel with him towards life in all its fullness. The journey may be hard at times, we may stumble and lose our way, but the call remains - not to win our own salvation, but to discover with joy the salvation that is already ours through the living, dying and rising of Jesus, who is one with God and whose life we share through the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is for living and life, like faith, is never static. This excellent Lent Course encourages us on our way, not by giving answers, or imparting a block of information, but by inviting us to deepen our sense of what it means, individually and with others, to walk the way of Jesus every day. For whatever our faith leads us to - and the possibilities are infinite - it will always be about bearing the fruit of our allegiance to Christ, pledged in our Baptism promises.

I am so grateful to Sophia, Liz and David for offering us this creative and gently challenging course, so full of ideas and profound insights. May your Belonging, Learning, Listening, Giving and Hoping be a source of joy for you this Lent, and may your reflection on the Dying of Christ, enable you to offer your own fragility and vulnerability into the hands of God, who loves us and longs for us and who is utterly to be trusted,

+John

Belonging

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)



Gathering together

- ▶ What words come to mind when you hear the word 'Belonging'? And its opposite? Write them down so that the whole group can see.

For the first 10 mins – work in silence – with a piece of paper ... write "me" in the centre and then draw a spider diagram of all the different communities / groups to which you belong – family, leisure activities, work.

- ▶ Are there any connecting lines between any of these groups?
- ▶ Where do you feel most at home? Most yourself?
- ▶ Are you different in different groups?
- ▶ Are there groups / communities to which you 'go' and others to which you 'belong'? What's the difference?

Reflecting on Scripture

either

Ruth 1: The story of Ruth is about outsiders coming in, of new community being formed, of “belonging” to different people/ groups.

Naomi tells Ruth and Orpah to return to their own people rather than accompany her to a new land and a people they do not know. Eventually Orpah does leave Naomi, but Ruth now knows she belongs to a different group:

Ruth said,

‘Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!’ (Ruth 1:16-17)

- ▶ What does this story show you about your own ways of belonging? Perhaps to a nation, a group or a family?
- ▶ Do you have experience of ‘changing’ groups – how did it feel?
- ▶ How much is ‘belonging’ an active choice or something that ‘just happens’?

or

The Acts of the Apostles is full of stories of how the early Christian community tried to work out who they were – what it meant to belong to each other and to God.

Acts 2:1-13 – The story of Pentecost

Acts 2:42-47 – as the believers formed a community

Acts 4:32-37 – some of the obligations of being part of a community

Acts 6:1-7 – negotiating change and sharing of responsibility in community

- ▶ Reflect on your attitude to your church / Christian community. Do these stories from the early church have any relevance to you? To what extent are they idealistic or realistic?
- ▶ What is appealing to you about the communities that were being formed, and what do you find disturbing?
- ▶ What might be the lessons as you reflect on your own communities?

Other Resources as we explore for our own lives

Ubuntu:

There was an anthropologist who had been studying the habits and culture of a remote African tribe. He had been working in the village for quite some time and the day before he was to return home, he put together a gift basket filled with delicious fruits from around the region and wrapped it in a ribbon. He placed the basket under a tree and then he gathered up the children in the village.

The man drew a line in the dirt, looked at the children, and said, 'When I tell you to start, run to the tree and whoever gets there first will win the basket of the fruit'.

When he told them to run, they all took each other's hands and ran together to the tree. Then they sat together around the basket and enjoyed their treat as a group.

The anthropologist was shocked. He asked why they would all go together when one of them could have won all the fruit for themselves?

A young girl looked up at him and said, "How can one of us be happy if all the other ones are sad?"

Refugee Shelter – Eileen Egan

"We do not belong here," said a man in a steaming refugee hut, "we are like unwanted weeds on the land."

We asked him to tell us about his village in the hills.

"The air in our hamlet," he said, "is like your mother holding you."
And he would not say any more.

Picture of Flock of Birds in flight

- ▶ Here all the birds 'belong' to the flock – but have you ever watched birds in flight as they constantly reform, as they change position in the group?
- ▶ In what ways does this echo our own action within a community?



Going deeper in discussion

- ▶ What does it mean to belong? Why is it important to belong to a group? What does it feel like 'not to belong'?
- ▶ What does belonging require of us?
- ▶ What is the relationship between belonging and taking responsibility? Can you belong without taking responsibility? What does it mean?
- ▶ What is the difference between belonging to a closed or an open group?
- ▶ What does it mean to belong to a faith tradition? To a church community? Without 'membership' how do people know that they 'belong' to the SEC?
- ▶ How can we ensure that our churches do not become 'echo-chambers' – all being like-minded groups of the same background?
- ▶ How do we actively 'belong'? Is belonging something that just happens? What do you need to make sure community is formed?

Reflecting for Lent

How might your discussion on the theme of Belonging shape your faith

Praying together

Lord we pray for the life of your Church.
Help us to see ourselves as rays from the one sun,
branches of a single tree,
and streams from one river.
May we remain united to you and each other,
because you are the source of our life together,
and may we send out your light
and pour forth your flowing streams over all the earth
drawing our inspiration and joy from you.

after St Cyprian (c200-258)

Living through the Week

- As you go through the week, take your spider diagram with you as you move between your different groups. Consciously reflect on who is outside each group – is this appropriate in this particular setting, or not? What would be required to open each group a bit wider?
- Consider whether there is one person who is not part of the community of church right now, that you could invite and enable to belong – what would that look like?

Learning



"The Magdalene Reading" by Rogier van der Weyden
(one of three surviving fragments of an altarpiece - mid 15th century)

Reviewing the previous week: what can you share from your further exploration during the week?

Gathering together

- What do you notice in this painting? How do you respond to it?
- Mary Magdalene reading a book has been a common subject in art over the centuries. Why do you think that might be?
- What memories or feelings does the word "learning" bring to mind or heart?
- Can you think of a time when you learnt (or at least tried to learn) a new skill, art or ability? How easy or hard was it; how satisfying or frustrating was it?

Reflecting on the Scriptures

"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not take a road leading to gentiles, and do not enter a Samaritan town, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick; raise the dead; cleanse those with a skin disease; cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment." (Matthew 10 v5-8)

- ▶ The disciples had spent time with Jesus, watching how he lived out the gospel but now it was their turn. There is an old Chinese saying: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand." What way/s do you learn best?

"Look at the birds of the air ... consider the lilies of the fields" (Matthew 6 v26 & 28 - you may like to read the whole passage from v25-33.)

- ▶ Jesus invites us to use our senses to notice, reflect and learn. He also invites us to draw lessons from our experience of the natural world - in this case, learning how to trust God's provision. What wisdom from the natural world has been helpful for you?

"Be imitators of me as I imitate Christ". (1 Corinthians 11 v1)

- ▶ Paul realises that sometimes we need role models to learn from. Have there been important role models in your life and faith? What did you learn from them?
- ▶ Who have been the helpful teachers or guides for you in your life and faith?
- ▶ Are there favourite parts of the Bible, or other books, stories or poems, that you turn to for inspiration or guidance?

"Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

(Matthew 14 v28 - you may like to read the whole story from verses 22-33.)

- ▶ Peter was willing to learn by "giving something a go". Although he got frightened, he was willing to fail and often learned by his mistakes. How important have mistakes been in your growth as a Christian?

Living the Questions

A group of priests found their relationships were transformed when they were invited to share together the things about the Christian faith that they had questions or doubts about.

- ▶ Do you find that surprising?
- ▶ Have you found the Church a helpful place for sharing questions?
- ▶ Are there any things that hinder us making the Church a space for open conversations?
- ▶ What questions would you like to ask about our faith?
- ▶ Write three of them down. You may like to share your questions as a group and discuss them together - either now or on another occasion.

"Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." (Rainer Maria Rilke from "Letters to a young poet").

- ▶ What do you think Rilke is trying to say here? Can you connect it to your own experience?

Jesus says that we need to become like children. For children, learning, growing, and changing are all wrapped up together. This is as true for our faith life as for other things, but it's more tricky to see how our faith has grown and changed over the years.

- ▶ Looking back, how much do you think you have learned, grown or changed in your faith?

Going deeper in discussion

Draw a timeline of your life. Mark the decades and any major occasions in your life (homes, relationships, education, careers etc). Then place on it occasions when you have learnt something new about God or your faith, or have seen something different about God in your life.

Reflecting for Lent

How might your discussion on the theme of Learning shape your faith?

Praying together

May we explore together the territory of knowledge;
May we learn together the mysteries of truth;
May we share together the experience of beauty;
May we release in each other the spark of creativity;
May we always remember that you, the author of all knowledge,
yourself Goodness, Truth and Beauty, delight to share all experience
with us.

Kathleen A. Goodacre

Living through the week

Make some time to think about the lessons you have learned about your faith over the course of your life. Then write a compassionate letter to your teenage self about God.

An old saying goes: "Everyday is a messenger from God". Take time at the end of each day to ask yourself what God has been trying to say to you today.

Listening



Reviewing the previous week: what can you share from your further exploration during the week?

Gathering together

Sit in silence together.

- ▶ What can you hear outside the room/inside the room/in your own heads and minds?
- ▶ How does it feel to stop and listen intently?

The skill of good listening is much underrated. Research shows that we listen with only 25% efficiency; and that for the vast majority of the time we only listen in order to reply. In other words as another is speaking, our minds are already working out what to say in return rather than really listening to what is being said. Listening is a skill which can be taught and needs to be encouraged.

Giving it a Go

Split into twos and decide who is going to speak and who is going to listen. Now speak for two minutes on either family or a holiday you have enjoyed. When the time is up the other person has to repeat back what has been said. Now swap over and do the exercise again. (Leader to time the two minutes)

- ▶ How did you find that experience?
- ▶ What does it feel like to be truly listened to?
- ▶ What was difficult about intentional listening?

True listening takes time and effort. True listening is sacrificial – for it means giving up the initiative... letting go of some of our natural inclination to 'control' in order to contribute what interests us... it is a risky business because it means entering another's perspectives without making judgements... it is entering into a two way process which has the opportunity to change us.

- ▶ Who do we listen to? Who listens to us?
- ▶ What is it like not to hear?

The Jewish 'Shema' which is written and often kept next the door of a Jewish home begins: '**Hear O Israel**, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.' (Deut 6:4). The instruction to 'Listen' or 'Hear' appears 278 times in the Bible. In Jeremiah (29:12) God promises restoration to Israel: "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will **hear** you." In John's Gospel (8:47) **Jesus says**: "Whoever is of God **hears** the words of God." In Revelation (3:20) it is said of Jesus: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone **hears** my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." The listening process is two way between God and us.

- ▶ How do you listen to God?
- ▶ What is it like to listen to God?
- ▶ How do you discern what you are hearing is from God or your own ego?

Going deeper in discussion

Vatican II affirmed that the church must listen to and interpret the 'signs of the times' and Jesus despairs that the people around him can read the weather, but not the signs of the times (Matthew 16:2-3).

- ▶ What does it mean to listen to the signs of the times? To the heartbeat of the society around you?
- ▶ Whose voice is not being heard in today's world?
- ▶ Who do we find hard to listen to?
- ▶ What do we hear in our culture when we truly listen?
- ▶ What is the world trying to say to us - both positive and negative - right now?

Praying together

Benedict begins his Rule of Life for his monks with the words: "Listen my child, with the ears of the heart." All prayer is a way of listening to God. St Benedict encouraged his monks to use a method of listening to God called *Lectio Divina*. If you wish try it out in your group, follow the instructions below.

Lectio Divina:

Lectio Divina is a way of reading Scripture, not in an analytical or critical way, but as the living Word of God through which God can speak into our hearts. It's a way to engage God in a conversation and listen for God's words to us.

Follow these stages:

- ▶ Listen to the passage being read.
- ▶ Listen a second time and notice which phrase/words particularly speak to you. Underline them and share them if you wish.
- ▶ Reflect on the phrase – what is it saying to you? How does this phrase relate to your life at the moment?
- ▶ Rest in God, contemplating God's word to you.

Matthew 17: 1 - 8

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

Reflecting for Lent

How might your discussion on the theme of Listening shape your faith?

Praying together

In the silence of the stars,
In the quiet of the hills,
In the heaving of the sea,
 Speak Lord.

In the stillness of this room,
in the calming of my mind,
In the longing of my heart,
 Speak Lord.

In the voice of a friend,
In the chatter of a child,
In the words of a stranger,
 Speak Lord.

In the opening of a book,
In the looking at a film,
In the listening to music,
 Speak Lord

For your servant listens

David Adam

Living through the week

- ▶ Try setting time aside for Lectio Divina at some point this week - here are some passages you may like to start with:
 - Genesis 32: 22 - 31 Jacob wrestles with the angel
 - Jeremiah 1: 4 - 10 Before I formed you in the womb
 - Matthew 5: 14 - 16 You are the Light of the World
 - Mark 10: 46 - 52 Bind Bartimaeus
 - Acts 2: 1 - 13 Pentecost

- ▶ Listen to the news with God's ears. Before you turn on the news, just before you start listening, ask God to open your ears to hear as God does ... what do you hear? both good and bad? as the news finishes and you turn it off, offer it to God.

Looking forward to next week ...
please bring a gift that is special to you.

Giving



Reviewing the previous week: what can you share from your further exploration during the week?

Gathering together

- ▶ Bring and show a gift that is special to you. What does it mean to you and why?

In the film *Babette's Feast*, a French refugee, Babette, is given a home by members of a strict Christian village community in 19th century Denmark. She had been a chef in a high class restaurant in Paris, but now, having fled with nothing, her only "possession" is a lottery ticket.

She is overwhelmed by the kindness of this poor and pious community, who have given her safety and love without question. When her lottery tickets wins her 10,000 francs, she wants to express her gratitude to the community, she asks for permission to cook the community a special meal, the sort she would have served back home. Given their simple, restricted lives, the community fear the sumptuous meal will lead them spiritually astray.

The community sit down to it, and over the course of the meal, the food, smells, warmth, friendship has a wonderfully transforming effect on them all.

After the meal, her hosts expect her to return to France but Babette tells them she has no money left. She has spent everything she had on the meal, every last franc.

- ▶ What does it feel like to give? How do you choose what to give someone?
- ▶ Have you ever received a gift that made a big difference to you? (Maybe a thing, or some money, or a meal, or someone's time, attention or care. or)
- ▶ Why was it so special?

Reflecting on Scripture: God's Gift to us

"For God so loved the world that he gave..." (John 3 v16) In his Gospel, John roots the good news in the most extraordinary act of divine generosity - that God offered his Son to the world, for the sake of the world. This gift was an expression of love, a love that is ultimately beyond our understanding. In one sense, the gift of Jesus marks the start of Christian faith. However this new beginning did not come out of the blue. God is, was and always will be, a god who gives. All creation, every thing and every creature, is a gift of God. Time is a gift. Our life is a gift. Every moment and experience is a gift.

Read 1 Chronicles 29 v 10-14 & 17 (a prayer offered by King David at the completion of the Jerusalem Temple)

"Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ... I know, my God, that you search the heart and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have

freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people who are present here offering freely and joyously to you."

"All things come from you"

- ▶ What gifts of God are you most grateful for? Why do you think God gave them to you?
- ▶ If you could live every day as if it were a gift from God what difference would that make?
- ▶ What stops you being able to do that?

"Of your own do we give you"

The Israelites could only give because they had first received. They then gave things back to God "freely and joyously". They also God gave praise and thanks.

"What you are is God's gift to you, what you
become is your gift to God."

Hans Urs von Balthasar, Prayer

Reflecting on Scripture: Our Gifts

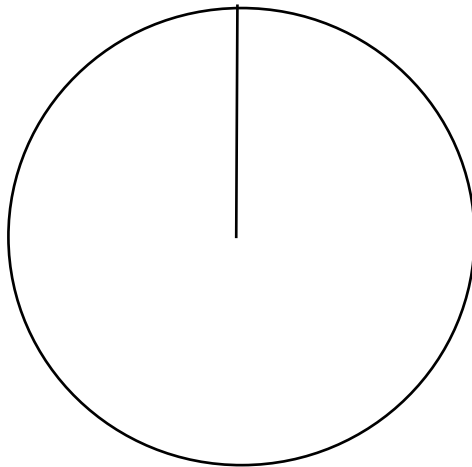
Saying it with Flowers - or Nard: John 12 v1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

In the 20th century there was an advertising slogan: "Say it with flowers". When we give a gift we can be "saying" all sorts of different things. What might some of these be?

- Why do you think Mary did what she did? What was she expressing?
- How do you think she felt as she "gave"? How might Jesus have felt receiving this gift?
- In the next chapter of the gospel, Simon Peter doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet - is it ever difficult to receive a gift? Why is that?
- Can you identify with Judas's reaction at all? Can gifts ever be too extravagant?

Going deeper in discussion



Think about the different ways you already give back to God - your time, money, skills, voluntary work, prayer etc. In this "pie chart", show these different areas of your giving, trying to make the size of each segment reflect the amount or importance of each sort of giving

- ▶ Do you think the proportions have changed during your life? If so how?
- ▶ As we get older we sometimes feel we can't give in the same way as in the past but new ways can open up. Has that been true for you?

Reflecting for Lent

How might your discussion on the theme of Giving shape your faith?

Praying together

Open my eyes that they may see
the deepest needs of people;
move my hands that they may feed the hungry;
touch my heart that it may bring warmth to the despairing;
teach me the generosity that welcomes strangers;
let me share my possessions to clothe the naked;
give me the care that strengthens the sick;
make me share in the quest to set the prisoner free.
In sharing our anxieties and our love,
our poverty and our prosperity,
we partake in your divine presence.

Canaan Banana, Zimbabwe

Living through the week

Try to think of something new you could give this week, or a new person you could give to. Maybe a prayer for someone you don't normally pray for. Or a smile to a stranger. Or a random act of kindness. A charity you could respond to; attention to your house plants or garden; or time to someone who needs it.

Jot down the gifts that come your way this week - in the world around you, in the way people speak to you or treat you, in your own feelings and thoughts.

Hoping

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:24-25)



Despair is the inaction that keeps us down,
Hope is the will to create a better tomorrow.

Reviewing the previous week: what can you share from your further exploration during the week?

Gathering together

- ▶ What is hope – in what ways is it different for 'wishing for ...'?
- ▶ What brings you hope today? What difference to your life does that hope make?

Reflecting on Scripture

In this passage, Jeremiah is speaking to a people far from home, far from their traditional places of worship and faith. They have been captured, killed, abused, humiliated by a foreign power. They are living in a city polluted by other gods, enslaved.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7)

- ▶ What does this passage tell us about hope? About how we hope? And what we do with hope?

Later in the book (32:1-15), Jeremiah receives the prophecy that the land will be destroyed, but as soon as he hears this from God he is given the clear instruction to go and buy a field from his cousin. This appears to be a 'daft' thing to do just before the land will be plundered and devastated:

I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. Then I took the sealed deed of purchase, containing the terms and conditions, and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, in the presence of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, and in the presence of all the Judeans who were sitting in the court of the guard. In their presence I charged Baruch, saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. (Jeremiah 32:1-15)

- ▶ What does this passage tell us about hope? About how we hope? And what we do with hope?
- ▶ How could you hope when there is so much devastation around you?

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

- ▶ Hope in Christ – how can we ensure this is active hope, rather than leaving everything up to God?
- ▶ What does this look like for us in today's world?
- ▶ How do we join in with this hope?

Looking wider: In these quotations – what speaks to you and why?

Guillaume Musso:

You'll stop hurting when you stop hoping.

Coco Chanel:

Don't spend time beating on a wall, hoping to transform it into a door

Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007 movie)

Queen Elizabeth I: Go on, Mr Raleigh. You were - hoping?

Walter Raleigh: At first, its no more than a haze on the horizon. So you watch. You watch. Then, it's a smudge. A shadow on the far water. For a day. For another day. The stain slowly spreads along the horizon, taking

form. Until, on the third day, you let yourself believe.
You dare to whisper the word. Land. Land! Life!
Resurrection! The true adventure - coming out of
the vast unknown. Out of immensity. Into new life.
That - your Majesty - is the New World.

'Anthem' by Leonard Cohen

Written in 1989 in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the student protests in Tiananmen Square:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

Vaclav Havel (former President of the Czech Republic, playwright, poet)

Deep in ourselves we carry hope; if that is not the case there is no hope.

Hope is a quality of the soul, and does not depend on what happens in the world.

Hope is not to foretell or foresee. It is a directedness of the mind, a directedness of the heart, anchored beyond the horizon.

Hope in this deep and powerful meaning is not the same as happiness because all is going well, or readiness to devote yourself to that which has success.

Hope is to work for something because it is good, and not only because it has a chance to succeed.

Hope is not the same as optimism, neither is it a conviction that something will end well.

Rather it is the certainty that something is meaningful, irrespective of the outcome, of the result.

Going deeper in discussion

- ▶ What does it mean to 'choose hope'? In what ways can hope be active?

- ▶ Are there stories that inspire hope in our world today? You might like to reflect on the speed with which nature reclaimed from human habitation during the pandemic restrictions how do we use this in hope rather than as a cosy rosy story to look back on with nostalgia?
- ▶ Do we hope in the future ... or hope in the present? What's the difference?
- ▶ Some would say that the very act of Holy Communion is an act of hope ... what do you think?

Reflecting for Lent

How might your discussion on the theme of Hoping shape your faith?

Praying together

When evil darkens our world, give us light.
 When despair numbs our souls, give us hope.
 When we stumble and fall, lift us up.
 When doubts assail us, give us faith.
 When nothing seems sure, give us trust.
 When ideals fade, give us vision.
 When we lose our way, be our guide!
 That we may find serenity in Your presence, and purpose in doing Your will.

John D Rayner

Living through the week

Desmond Tutu: "Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all the darkness"

- ▶ Notice your conversations this week, especially what you are saying. Do those conversations and your words perpetuate despair? In what ways have you nurtured hope?
- ▶ Jot down what gives you hope this week

Dying

This is our last week of this Lent Course and are aware that many churches won't meet for discussion this week. Therefore this session has been written to enable you to do this yourself during your Holy Week journey.

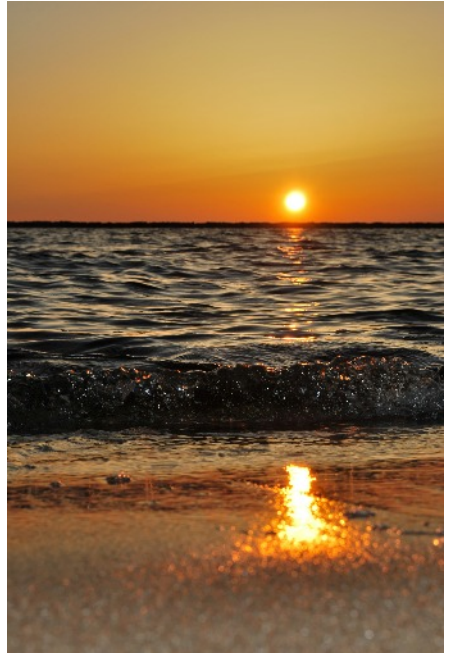
We have travelled reflectively during the past 6 weeks and now we enter Holy Week. We follow the last few days of the life of Jesus of Nazareth as he is tried by the authorities, condemned and eventually crucified as a criminal in all public view.

The image of Jesus on the cross is central to our faith, and yet it is probably, along with the resurrection, one which is full of the deepest mystery.

- ▶ What the cross says to you and means to you?
- ▶ Write now the questions that surround your thinking about the cross. Sit with them now they are written

Death is unavoidable and we live with its reality very close to us. Our family and friends die. Our pets die. Our natural world dies. Death causes us pain and anguish. It is part of life. Every religion in the world talks about death – and that surely should make us realise that there are lessons to be learned through death. Sadly our modern world continues to fight death, to push away its inevitability by any means and do everything in its power to deny death's reality. Even funerals are changing, with often a celebration without the coffin being present and a growing avoidance of facing death's finality.

If we look back in history we have used death to placate and keep 'onside' a distant and often angry deity – even to the extent of sacrificing humans



and then animals in elaborate ceremonies. In later years wars raged in which humankind divided themselves over many differences and desires and in so doing ensconced them firmly on the side of the 'good' boosted by having God on their side, of course... and vilifying the 'other' people so that they felt justified in killing them.

However, the truth is that we all have to die.... not only the once when our earthly body has grown too old to function properly... but continually, daily, if we want to grow in being Christ-like. It is only through these daily deaths that we are transformed and we become more the person God made us to be. Even Jesus had to face this reality and eventually die in order for the Risen Christ to be revealed.

We all have an ego... the part of us which tells us of our importance and centrality of being. It is the part which sets us up in early life and gets us on our way. But it is the part which, as we mature, then needs to die. And we cannot engineer this dying. It has to be done to us – otherwise it just reinforces our ego. It is the surrendering to the Kingdom of God over our own smaller kingdom. It is the letting go of ultimate control and collapsing into the greater presence of God. It is the recognising that you are beloved and cannot make yourself any more or less so by anything you can do.

Ultimately the pattern of dying is to be seen in the cross and it is the way of God. The cross is the pattern of transformation. It is the pattern that connects and shows us that the life God offers is always death transformed. It is the pattern of death and resurrection. We learn to submit to it with trust, because that is what Jesus did.

- ▶ Which part of you needs to 'die'?
- ▶ What prevents you from getting closer to God?
- ▶ Can you think of ways in which we die on a daily basis?
- ▶ How does all of this relate to the cross?

Reflecting on Scripture

Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." *John 12: 24*

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." *Matthew 16: 24 – 25*

Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." *Luke 22: 42*

- ▶ What do you understand by these verses?
- ▶ What do they say to you?
- ▶ How do they relate to your daily life?
- ▶ Why are they such Good News?

Praying ... Night will fall on you - Gideon Haugh - from Rumours of Light

Night will fall on you.
Of course it will.

You will find yourself
wandering the desert of your failures.
You will stand by the deathbed of your dreams,
helpless and afraid.

What hope do we have then?

Beloved, when Spirit wrapped itself
in the Rabbi's flesh, it declared
that we are to have life in all its fullness.
Yet we have forgotten that death
is part of life, that existence grows
from decay.

We have forgotten that night
is an opportunity
to anticipate
another sunrise.

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Diocese of Edinburgh
Scottish Episcopal Church

Scottish Episcopal Church
Diocese of Edinburgh
21a Grosvenor Crescent
Edinburgh
EH12 5EL
Scottish Charity No: SC001214

For further details, please contact: Joanna Morris, Tel: 0131 346 9085
Email: jmorris@dioceseofedinburgh.org

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