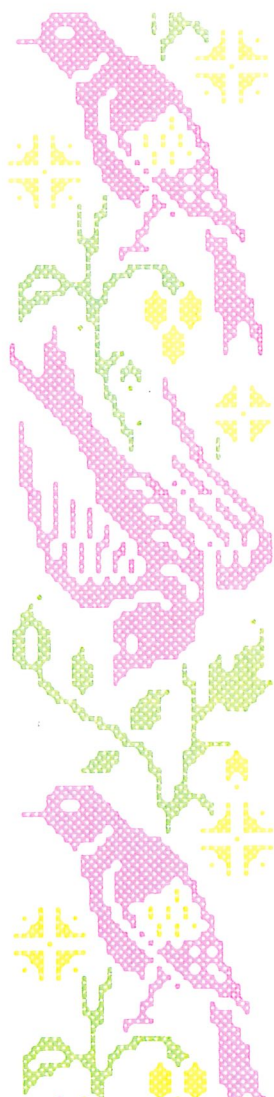


# Lent Week Three

# RETURN

Paul Higginson reminds us that Lent offers us a unique opportunity for rediscovering our path and returning to the Lord who loves us beyond anything we can imagine.



## SUNDAY 20 MARCH

### 3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

*Act with kindness*

**Exodus 3:1-8. 13-15; 1 Corinthians 10:1-6. 10-12; Luke 13:1-9**

Many of us are like the barren fig tree in today's Gospel. We take up space, bask in the sunshine and soak up the rainwater for ourselves, but give nothing back, produce no fruit for others. Followers of Jesus are expected to give generously, to help those in need, to be compassionate and forgiving. These are the fruits of the Spirit. We take heart that Jesus is a patient gardener – he doesn't write us off, he is always ready to give us a second chance. Imagine if we have another year to produce some fruits for Christ. Can we ask him to dig around us, to fertilise us with the Spirit, to encourage us to acts of kindness for others?

**Lord, our little fig tree will one day be no more and its ability to bear fruit will go with it. Let us see what fruit we can produce together in the week ahead. Amen.**

## MONDAY 21 MARCH

*Open your heart*

**2 Kings 5:1-15; Luke 4:24-30**

We can sometimes ignore or take for granted those closest to us. We think we know them inside out and imagine we have nothing new to discover about them. The people of Nazareth had seen Jesus grow up, but in the end were unable to accept his message and would have killed him had he not given them the slip. They couldn't see the love of God even when it was right under their noses.

Spend some time today with those closest to you – take time to appreciate everything they mean to you and let them know that they are loved and cherished.

**Lord give me an open heart to see and appreciate the good in all those I encounter today. Amen.**

## TUESDAY 22 MARCH

*Start the healing process*

**Daniel 3:25. 34-43; Matthew 18:21-35**

It's great to be forgiven – we expect it from others. But we often find it difficult to forgive and sometimes refuse to do it. We hurt ourselves by failing to forgive; it hardens our hearts and makes us bitter and resentful. Whatever you do to someone else, you do to yourself. By loving another you are loving and taking care of yourself, and when you forgive another you forgive yourself.

Everything is circular, everything is connected. As St Paul put it, "As you sow so shall you reap". Corrie ten Boom said, "Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free, only to find out that the prisoner was me".

When we forgive, we can start the healing process, both within ourselves and in the one who has been forgiven. Jesus wants us to forgive unconditionally and to have no limit to our forgiveness (more than seventy-seven times if needs be). We who have been forgiven by God must now extend that grace to each other.

**Lord, if there are people I need to forgive, help me to do it today. Amen.**



## WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH

### *Complete the law of love*

**Deuteronomy 4:1. 5-9;  
Matthew 5:17-19**

Jesus emphasises that he has come to complete and not abolish the Law. Now we know that Jesus disregarded many of the petty rules and regulations, built up by the scribes and pharisees, which were clearly not "the Law". The law that Jesus has come to fulfil is the love of God and our neighbour ("There is no commandment greater than these" – Mark 12:31-32). Moreover, Jesus has come to proclaim that this law of love is not primarily about what we think or believe, but what we do, and specifically about how we love. Without love we are in the words of St Paul, simply "a gong booming or a cymbal clashing". Jesus completes the law of love within himself – he embodies the love of God: he is love incarnate.

**Lord, by placing my trust in you, help me to live out the Law of love in everything I do and say. Amen.**

## THURSDAY 24 MARCH

### *Jump in and see what happens*

**Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23**

Even when Jesus performs a miracle, casting out demons, many onlookers refuse to believe and ask for more signs from heaven.

We will never be able to prove with total certainty that Jesus is the Son of God. All religion is a question of faith – believing in something, or in our case *someone*, when you can't completely prove it. Without faith life loses a little colour and excitement. Faith leads ultimately to hope and joy. Jesus knew this when he said, "Everything is possible for anyone who has faith". Faith opens doors which scepticism closes.

Jesus isn't really trying to prove anything: he just wants us to experience love. That leap of loving faith is always preferable to sitting on the sidelines and waiting for a certainty that doesn't exist. In effect, Jesus is saying to us, "Don't stand at the side of the pool – jump in and see what happens".

**Lord, help me to accept and embrace the gift of faith. Amen.**

## FRIDAY 25 MARCH

### **THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD**

#### *Join the conversation*

**Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38**

When the angel appeared to Mary she had a choice to make and the incarnation of Jesus was dependent on her decision. Her leap of faith, her "yes", brings Jesus into the world and her life, and the lives of all of us, will never be the same again. Her "yes" ushers in great joy (and suffering too, that leads her eventually to the foot of the cross). Just as at the Annunciation, we too are invited to make Christ present in the world. Mary's "yes" encourages us to say our "yes" to Jesus, to bring him to birth in our lives, and to accept the joy and pain that lie in store for each of us. Mary has been there before us and has shown us the way. Before we ever search for God, he seeks us – he starts the conversation and waits for our "yes".

**Lord, help me to say "yes". Amen.**

*"Courage is like love; it must have hope for nourishment."*

**Napoleon Bonaparte**

## SATURDAY 26 MARCH

### *Ask for everything*

**Hosea 5:15 – 6:6; Luke 18:9-14**

Although outwardly religious, the pharisee prays to himself not to God! Imprisoned by his own ego and sense of superiority, he is incapable of an authentic connection with anything beyond himself. If he is to know the God who is loving mercy, then he must recognise his need of that mercy and forgiveness. The tax collector, however, knows he is a sinner: the only person he judges is himself and he begs God for mercy. The outwardly good man is not really good at all – Jesus tells us that whilst the apparent sinner goes home again "at rights with God; the other did not". Proud and self-assured in his own religiosity the pharisee asks God for nothing and in return receives nothing. The tax collector asks for everything and in return he receives everything – the forgiveness of God. He who humbled himself has been exalted.

**Lord, I echo today the perfect prayer of the tax collector: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner". Amen.**

### DISCUSSION POINT

Pause for a moment (on your own or with another) and review the extracts from this last week. Which passage resonates with you the most? Is there a change you need to make in your own life which will draw you closer to Christ and those around you?

*Former classroom teacher Paul Higginson finds that retirement offers even more opportunities to support his parish as a catechist.*