

RECONCILE

Lent offers us new beginnings. Brian Fahy suggests that some people are iconic examples of ways in which reconciliation sets us free to hope.



SUNDAY 3 APRIL

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

"The Great Escape"

Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11

They tunnellled out of their prison camp. It was the only way. Barbed wire fences and machine gun posts prevented an overland route. Suitable dress and papers all prepared, under cover of darkness they made their bid for freedom. Most were caught and shot. Freedom so precious, they paid a terrible price.

In the Temple Jesus too finds himself hemmed in. Scribes and pharisees circle him and move in for the kill. A woman in adultery: free her and show contempt for the Law. Condemn her and lose the support of the people. It's a perfect trap. We have you now, wise guy. But traps can be sprung.

Whoever is without sin... Jesus shows that mercy and compassion can spring the traps of anger and hostility. He set Paul free on the road to Damascus. Now Paul forgets the past and races ahead. We are not condemned. Sin no more.

Heavenly Father, in your mercy set us free from the angers and selfish attitudes that imprison us, that we may live in freedom of heart, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY 4 APRIL

The Light of the World

Daniel 13:1-9. 15-17. 19-30. 33-62; John 8:12-20

A famous painting, *The Light of the World* by William Holman Hunt, shows the Lord in the early morning light, holding a lantern and knocking on a door. The door is overgrown and long unopened, and the handle is on the inside. In this way the artist depicts for us the stubborn and closed mind, and the desire of the Lord to enter and fill us with light.

When Jesus came face to face with many of the scribes and pharisees, he found their minds and hearts closed against him.

He calls himself the light of the world, but his opponents find many reasons not to accept him. Light is the most obvious thing in the world. It is plain to see. Indeed, it is by light that we see at all. But darkened minds are closed against the light and its penetration. May the light of Christ shine on us each day.

Father of all, bless us to live in the light of the Lord all the days of our life, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY 5 APRIL

Lifted up

Numbers 21:4-9; John 8:21-30

Being lifted up is a great sign of triumph and a great sign of love. Who remembers lifting a child above their head rejoicing in the life of this "wee one"? I do. Who remembers Nat Lofthouse being lifted up on the shoulders of his teammates when winning the FA Cup in 1958? I do. Who remembers Bobby Moore on the shoulders of the players who won the World Cup of 1966? I do. So, Jesus foretells his own being lifted high, to a prominence and an eminence that will never die, never be forgotten. His enemies sought to annihilate him by fixing him to a cross, but in that moment, they witnessed the truth that Jesus does nothing from himself. He does what pleases God. He is the faithful one. Lifted high, Jesus triumphs over death. Lifted high, Jesus shows his love for all. Let us follow the crucified.

Father, help us to make of our own lives an offering to you, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 6 APRIL

Truth makes free

Daniel 3:14-20. 24-25. 28; John 8:31-42

The Third Reich would last for a thousand years, said Hitler, and at its heart would be the purity of the Aryan race, the master race. The Jews, the children of Abraham, he regarded as a poisonous race that fed off other races. He would destroy it. His murderous mind showed quite clearly that he was no child of God.

Abraham was a man of God and the Jewish people are proud to be called the children of Abraham, but the people who opposed Jesus, in his day, were intent on destroying him and so had become prisoners of sin.

In our own lives we often harbour thoughts and intentions that are destructive of others. We can kill the good name of others by our talk. We can destroy others' peace of mind by our hurtful words and deeds. We are powerful people indeed, but are we free?

Heavenly Father, grant us a humble spirit that rejoices in the goodness of others, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY 7 APRIL

Goodness

Genesis 17:3-9; John 8:51-59

Good people by their simple goodness can be a threat to others. Sophie Scholl in Germany is remembered for her open, honest and brave stance against the Nazis. Inspired by friends and by the writings of John Henry Newman on conscience, she distributed leaflets against the Nazi regime. She was arrested and executed. She was 21 years old.

The opponents of Jesus cannot find anything to use against him. His presence, his teaching and his behaviour is there for all to see. There is nothing that deserves condemnation. He is not a megalomaniac nor self-glorifying. He is not out for himself. But they can't cope with him. His simple goodness is too much for them. At a loss to win any war of words, they pick up stones to throw.

"Such a fine, sunny day and I have to go," said Sophie Scholl as she went to her death. Her spirit forever shines bright.

Heavenly Father, grant us simplicity and courage in our daily lives to witness to you, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY 8 APRIL

Challenge and change

Jeremiah 20:10-13; John 10:31-42

When Stewart was a teenager, Elvis Presley was the only act in town. He loved his voice. He loved his songs. He loved his rock and roll. Then the Beatles came along and Stewart took against them. He did not like them. They were a threat to his already settled world. One day, walking across a common, he found himself humming a lovely tune. He stopped to check what it was he was singing and to his shock it was a Beatles song.

The Jews who objected to Jesus did so because he unsettled their established world. No other reason than that. Jesus did not fit in to their perceived right order and so he would have to go.

When something new comes along we find ourselves disturbed and unsettled at first: when somebody new comes along, even more so. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Father, open our eyes and our heart to receive the word of the Lord ever new into our lives, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

"As I walked out of the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

Nelson Mandela

SATURDAY 9 APRIL

Eve of destruction

Ezekiel 37:21-28; John 11:45-56

"I may not get there with you. But... we, as a people, will get to the promised land." These famous words of Martin Luther King proved prophetic when he was shot dead at a hotel in Memphis just twenty-four hours after uttering them. He was only 39 years old. He had become an agent of change for American society, and many people did not like it and some were prepared to kill in order to stop it.

Jesus in Judea has become a problem to the Jewish authorities and to the religious and political class. The high priest sees that the solution is simple. Just remove him from the equation and all will be well.

The world has not changed. Heavy-handed treatment of many genuine people happens all over the world. People disappear, never to be seen again. "I am not fearing any man," King said. "I just want to do God's will."

Father in heaven, in the midst of a troubled world, deepen our faith and strengthen our trust in you, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

DISCUSSION POINT

This week shows Jesus in conversation and confrontation with the Jewish leaders. He is patient. He is honest and brave in these meetings. How engaged am I in my meetings with others? How do I cope with disagreement? The daily battle is always in conversation. Am I ready for it?

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