

# **Encountering Jesus**

## **A Lent Course for the Avonside Mission Area**



### **Five Stepping Stones to Living Well**

## Introduction

This course was planned to share some of the Living Well Missional Community's exploration of what it might mean to 'live well' in the different ages and stages of life. At the heart of this is the spiritual encounter by which we can each become the 'living well' of which Jesus speaks in John's Gospel (Ch 4 v 14). We shared and learned together some spiritual disciplines which helped us, and selected five to form the focus of our Lenten reflections – service, silence, sacrament, simplicity and sacrifice.

We had no idea then that the Coronavirus outbreak would allow only two of the scheduled sessions to be held. However we are providing here summaries of what was covered in the first meetings but incorporating additional practical activities to follow at home, and then giving in much fuller form material originally prepared for the other sessions, specially adapted for this purpose.

It is our hope and prayer that this leaflet will be a useful resource for spiritual sustenance and growth when so many of our normal gatherings and services have been restricted. Most of the activities and suggestions can be undertaken alone and are well suited to the present times. There are also readings and pictures to reflect upon.

We can easily find ourselves becoming overwhelmed by rising concern about the impact of the Coronavirus, and while we need to be kept aware of developments and changing advice it will do us good regularly to turn from the news coverage and come to prayer. If we can't find the words, there's advice here for that too.

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We'd love to hear feedback on what you find helpful, so do get in touch through the contact details at the end if you have anything to share. It will help us to assess what has been most useful. If we can then find ways to develop further resources and make them available across the Mission Area in these difficult times, we will do that. Over to you!

*On behalf of the Living Well Missional Community, March 2020*

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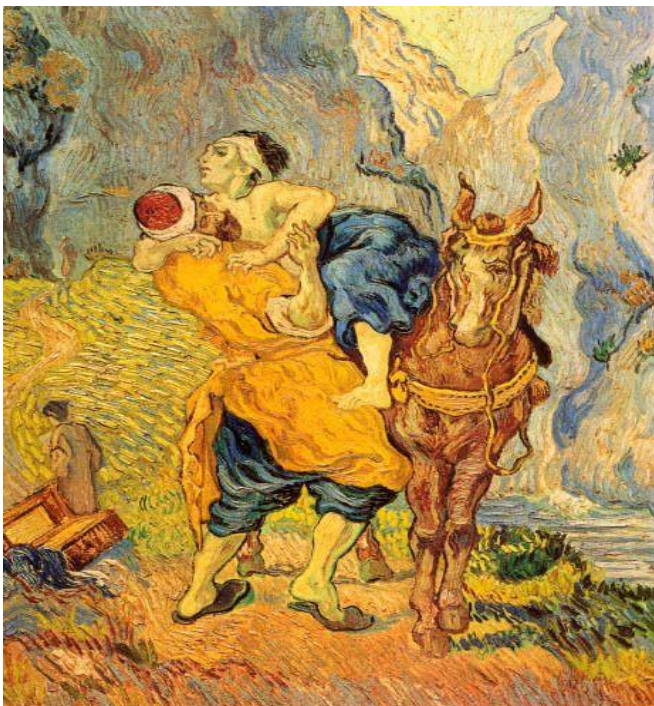
## Service

The first session was presented at St Andrew's church by Jennifer Hall on the theme *Encountering Jesus through Service*

We reflected on Bible passages illustrating the theme of service – the story of the sheep and goats (Matthew Ch 25 vv 31-46) with its emphasis on serving Christ in others, and on the foot washing by Jesus in John's Gospel (Ch 13 vv 1-17). Here Jesus shows himself as one who serves, the example and inspiration of all who will follow him.



The story of the Good Samaritan offered another well-known example of service compassionately offered across social boundaries on the basis of need alone. Paintings on these subjects were shown, and two are reproduced here.



We celebrated some of the organised acts of service within the Area, such as the Foodbank and the work of CAP.

Needs often seem very great and beyond our capacity to help, but we also recognised opportunities to serve others through prayer and in financial support of those with the gifts and skills we might lack, but are so necessary in many difficult situations.

In groups we discussed examples of service from our own lives, and considered the importance of also being willing to receive service from others. Finally, we were challenged to consider some particular act or acts of service we might seek to do in the coming week.

*Some of the suggestions from this session will be difficult to follow during the coronavirus restrictions, but for those who work in essential areas, and those who can safely help people forced into isolation there will be endless opportunities for service.*

*A phone call or a prayer is a service for many. Those of us who are usually somewhat independent can learn to receive service with gratitude and grace.*

*So in one way or another we will all be able to give or receive service of some kind during this period, even if it is much less than normally possible. What we miss now we will learn to appreciate all the more when a normal life returns.*



## **Silence**

The second session was presented at St Mary's, Shirehampton by Simon Potter on *Encountering Jesus through Silence*

It was introduced by readings from Ecclesiastes Ch 3 vv 1-8 (there is a time for everything, including silence, v 7), and Matthew Ch 6 vv 9-13 (the Lord's Prayer). The significance of silence in Christian history was described, and its value for our discipleship. It was recognised as something sharply contrasting with the busy and noisy information-full environment which surrounds us. To step out of that may be hard, but potentially very rewarding. We were invited to see silence not as empty or meaningless, but as something full, connecting us with God and often with others too, active, maybe difficult, but exciting rather than scary.

We were then offered opportunities to explore this creatively in prayer individually at various stations for ourselves, those with deeper needs than we could easily express, and for our world and nation.

On the same themes as the prayer and activities in the church that evening, here are some suggestions for use at home,

1. You might like to pray the Lord's Prayer, leaving a minute's silence between the lines to allow your heart/mind to be led to people/places/situations in need of prayer
2. You might like to kneel down or raise your arms, to allow the movements of your body to express your prayer
3. You might like to light a candle and reflect on Jesus' light in the darkness, especially if you don't know what words to pray
4. You might like to visit a newspaper website and pray through the headlines
5. You might like to express your prayer as a picture rather than words



*The prayers for our world and nation will have a special relevance as we see the heavy burden on those who plan and lead the fight against coronavirus, all who work in healthcare, the isolated, anxious, suffering, and bereaved.*

*Overwhelmed or lost for words? Don't let your sense of emptiness keep you from coming before the Lord; 'we do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans' (Romans Ch8 v.26)*

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The following three sessions could not be delivered as intended, and have been adapted for use at home.

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The third session was to have been presented by Fran Brealey on *Encountering Jesus through Sacrament* and was planned to look at Baptism, Holy Communion, and the role of the senses. It has been revised now to concentrate mainly on the first two.

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## Sacrament

What do we mean by a 'sacramental' action? Perhaps receiving the bread and wine at Holy Communion, seeing the water of baptism being poured on a baby's head, or the placing of a ring on someone's hand in the wedding service. Or maybe some other action which has a spiritual meaning for us: the sign of the cross with oil for healing, or lighting a candle for a loved one, or a handshake offered at the Peace.

Perhaps we find sacraments speak so powerfully to us because they make use of symbols. They allow us to understand spiritual realities through physical objects like wine, water, and hands. We can apprehend these things through our senses; we can see and handle and taste them. That God should meet us in physical objects reminds us that Jesus shared our humanity and became flesh for us.

Sacraments are more than just symbols that represent something else; they are signs – pointing beyond themselves. They speak to us and assure us of God's grace and faithfulness in our lives and in the lives of others. They are ways of encountering Jesus.







We're now facing the prospect of a long period where, among other unwelcome changes to our lives, we are unable to receive bread and the wine together as the people of Christ.

We cannot clasp each other's hands during the Peace; we may have to worship on our own, or watch a service on a screen.

Here are some activities you could do at home.

1. Spend some time looking at a glass or bowl of water. Where might you encounter Jesus right now? Through cleansing? As refreshment? In re-energising? Remember that Jesus is the source of all these.
2. Look for pictures showing water. Choose one that you feel drawn to and spend some time pondering it. How does it challenge or encourage you? How is it a sign of God's grace?
3. When Joshua and the people of Israel had safely crossed over the river Jordan, he set up stones as a reminder of and a witness to God's faithfulness (Joshua Ch 4). Think of where you experience God's faithfulness and spend some time thanking Him. If you are able to, find a stone and place it in or beside the water as a reminder and testimony.
4. Read some of these words from the baptism service and as a member of Christ's church think about the grace of God in your life.



*In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light.*

*To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.*

Take some time to renew the promises made by or for you at your baptism:

I turn to Christ.

I repent of my sins.

I renounce evil.

Dip your fingers in the water and give thanks for the life you have received in Jesus Christ – you might like to trace the sign of the cross with your finger.



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The fourth section was to have been presented by Hazel Trapnell on *Encountering Jesus in Simplicity*. As re-written for this purpose, it draws upon her reflections on the 'social distancing' and isolation which are beginning to affect the lives of so many in our communities. It also has a wider message to us all as concerns about the environment and the real cost of consumerism are brought into sharper focus during the Coronavirus crisis.

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## Simplicity

I turned off the radio. Too much Covid 19! So I went out and wandered across



the Downs and breathed the fresh air. Such a simple thing yet so good. I noticed a primrose and it gladdened my heart. Spring IS here.

Simplicity is the theme of encountering God in living well this week, but we never imagined that we would have simplicity thrust upon us in such a shocking way.

The challenge to me is to use these weeks and months to get rid of STUFF and CLUTTER I don't need. How about you? What can you do? Could you practise one of the following ...?

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*Savouring* .... be thankful for each small mercy, each blessing. Spend a few moments, reflecting on what you could possibly be thankful for today. And do that each day ...

*Stability* ... forcibly grounded? Holidays cancelled? Learn to be content where you are, travelling less, rushing around less. Could you, like a Benedictine, practise stability over the coming weeks and months? What can you enjoy at home?

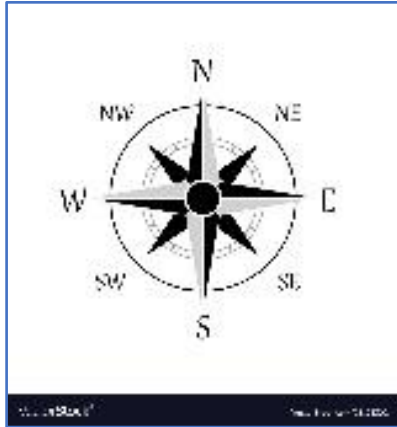
*Slowing down* ... many of us will be forced to slow down. Is this something I could appreciate? Might I practise walking slowly, mindfully, noticing what is around me, listening and looking. Could I do something like bake a loaf of bread this week? And enjoy it? Could I plant something and watch it grow, or make something?

Simplify your desires recognising what is truly important, being glad with having what you need each day?

[Give us this day our daily bread.](#)

With life so uncertain, practise taking one day at a time.





**‘Make it your ambition to live a quiet life and mind your own business’.** 1 Thess Ch 4 vv 11-13. What might this look like? I have often thought about this verse, but have then complicated my life by unworthy ambitions and simply become too busy. I have tended to go off course. But my ‘true North’ IS a quiet life. I will re-set my compass and ask God to keep me on track! I will use the next weeks and months to practise!

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**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** Matt Ch 11 v 29

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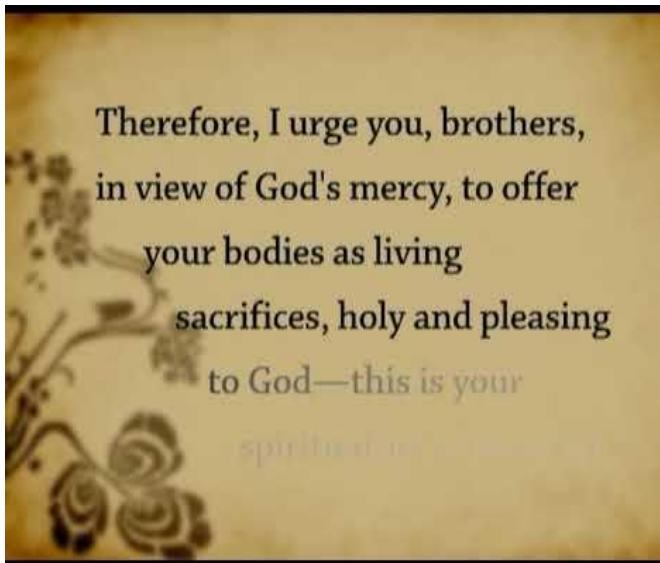
Read Matthew Ch 6 vv 25-34 slowly, two or three times. Chew it over. What is it saying to you? What is God saying to you?

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The final topic, *Encountering Jesus through Sacrifice*, was to have been presented by Usha Devadoss and Wendy Hughes as we approached Easter. Like the last two, this has been substantially revised from its originally intended form, both in length and content.

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## Sacrifice



Romans Ch 12 v 1

At this unprecedented time, we are all making sacrifices in one way or another.

We had planned to consider the spiritual way our lives can be enhanced by making a small positive change.

Perhaps these reflections may help.

**Sacrifice is not always a matter of choice.** However, self-sacrifice by choice is giving up something we want or something we desire for our own good, the greater good, or to help others. At this time, we are all called by the government to make self-sacrifices in the spirit of protecting the NHS and human lives. We may feel the instinct to stockpile, but need to hold it back (consider Jesus's words in Matthew Ch 6 v 26 about the birds of the air again). If we can show sacrifice by going without, it may help others to find a spirit of sacrifice.

**Sacrifice does not have to be total or 100%.** We were going to encourage small changes – 1% is more likely to stick and gradually it may grow.

**To make anything stick, it has to become a habit.** Habits form naturally when we repeat a new behaviour a certain number of times. Conscious choices then

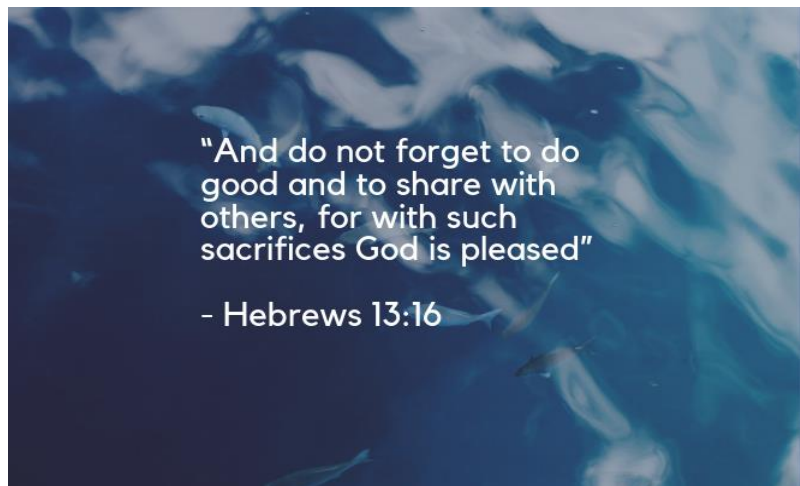
become simpler. As an example, we could create a special prayer routine. Sometime it's easier to remember to pray when we associate it with something else we do on a regular basis. For example, pray every time we clean our teeth, or every time we walk up a flight of steps. Seems silly, but it can make for a very powerful habit.

### **What sacrifices could we consider?**

We had planned prayer stations around the church with some suggestions. Here follow just a very few of them, which we hope will be of value.

#### **A sacrifice of time**

Here we might reconsider the topic of service covered in the first week, especially during this time of crisis. We will be acutely conscious of actions which are impossible at the moment too.



#### **Sacrificial financial giving**

What matters to Jesus is not the quantity, but the generosity with which it is given. 'Many people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins'. Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty put in everything – all she had to live on' (Mark Ch 12 vv 41- 44).

An example of self-sacrifice is when we go without some small treat or luxury (they start as little extras, but how soon we take them for granted!) so we can donate that amount of money to charity.



When we shop let us remember something extra for the foodbank (if you can, check what they currently need).

At this time, we could pray for all those devastated financially by this crisis and consider what we could do to help.

### **Spend time with God**



‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’ (John Ch 3 v 16).

Through giving his life for us, Jesus provided the ultimate demonstration of God’s generosity. Giving is at the centre of God’s character – God gives us life and his giving is renewed every day.

What would help us to sacrifice/give a little time with God?

We could prioritise time by making an appointment - put Him into our phones or on our diaries.

Choosing a time and place that works for us to read the Bible and pray would make it more likely to happen. Then, we could choose a key thing from the Bible that we can work on. The word of God is supposed to change us. Ask God to show one key thing that we can work on applying to our lives that day. This is how we become doers, not just hearers of the word- ‘Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.’ James Ch 1 v 22. Finally, by memorizing scripture we can meditate on it all day long.

What should we include?

Let us pray for all those health workers engaging in great sacrifices at the front line for us. You will be able to think of many others in essential jobs who are under pressure at this time.

## A sacrifice of comfort for the sake of our planet



We had many eco-friendly ideas for small sacrifices, too many to include; but at this time, let us not forget that "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been

made." (John Ch 1 v 3). 'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me' (Leviticus Ch 25 v 23).

## A final prayer

***Lord Jesus, I recognise that I can do nothing to repay you for what you have done for me. But I give myself and all that I have in humble obedience. What I have belongs to you and I ask you to help me be a good steward of all that is yours and joyfully share what you ask me to share and give what you ask me to give.***

***In humble obedience and joyful praise. Amen***

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**This section offers some extra resources for prayer and reflection**

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## **Prayer for a Pandemic**

May we who are merely inconvenienced  
Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors  
Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or paying the bills. May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close

Remember those who have no options.  
May we who have to cancel our trips

Remember those that have no safe place to go.  
May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for a quarantine at home Remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country,  
let us choose love.  
During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,  
Let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbours.

Amen



You might like to meditate on Psalm 46 as we try to quieten our minds among the things which now disturb us:

- <sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.
- <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.
- <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- <sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall;  
God will help her at break of day.

<sup>6</sup> Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;  
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

<sup>8</sup> Come and see what the Lord has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease  
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.

<sup>10</sup> He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."

<sup>11</sup> The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

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### Lord God

You are always with me. You are with me in the day and in the night.  
You are with me when I am happy and when I am sad. You are with me when  
I am healthy and when I am ill. You are with me when I am peaceful and  
when I am anxious. Today I am feeling *(name how you are feeling)* because  
*(reasons you are feeling this way)*.

Help me to remember that you love me  
and are with me in everything today.

Amen

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Please contact Simon Potter with any feedback or responses to this resource:  
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This leaflet is available online from the websites of all the ASMA churches  
and paper copies can be obtained by contacting any of the church offices.