



The Lord's Prayer

1: Our Father in heaven

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Please begin the session by giving each person a chance to introduce themselves. Some people will know each other well but some may be meeting for the first time.

A challenging ice breaker: Sharing in twos can you, albeit tentatively, describe what you think God is like? What is in your mind or imagination when you pray to him/her? If a stranger asked you what you thought God was like, what would you say? It would then be good if some of your thoughts and ideas could be briefly shared with the whole group.

Please read the following passage from the book of psalms. Here the psalmist is reflecting on the way God has been intimately present in their life. After someone has read the psalm please reflect on it together. The questions following the reading are to help us explore the passage.

Psalm 139:1-18

- ¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
- ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
- ³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

it is so high that I cannot attain it.
⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

- What are your overall impressions of this psalm? What strikes you? What excites you? Is there anything that puzzles or troubles you?

- The psalmist feels that God knows everything about their life. What do you feel when you think that God knows every detail and emotion of your life?
- In verse 7 why might the psalmist want to flee from God's presence?
- How do you respond to the psalmist's thoughts (from verse 13) that God has known us intimately from the very moment of conception and that "in your book were written all the days that were formed for me..."
- In verse 17 the Psalmist struggles to comprehend the scope of God's activity. How do we comprehend the idea that God knows everything?

A little breather: What is the best thing you have done this year?

Our second bible study is perhaps the most well known of all the parables of Jesus and very familiar to most of us. Like all parables, this one may have many different layers of meaning. But what, if anything, do you think it might have to teach us about the nature of God as Father? Please ask someone to read the parable and then the questions following may help to guide your discussion.

Luke 15.1 - end

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am

dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.' " So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate.

'Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound." Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." '

- This may be a very familiar passage to you, but is there anything that has particularly struck you today as you read the parable again?
- What thoughts do you have about the relationships that that the parable portrays?
- Does this parable, for you, have things to say about God as Father and, if so, what are those things?

Closing Prayers

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

2: Hallowed be your name

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Last time we thought about how the Lord's Prayer begins with intimacy. But then we are reminded of the special nature of God – otherness, purity, holiness. God's very name, his very essence is Holy (Hallowed). At the very heart of creation, always on our side, always reaching out to us is the perfect holiness of love.

An opening conversation: Sharing in twos:

- can you think of places you have been which you would describe as **Hallowed or Holy Places?**
- What was it about them that made you feel this?
- What do you think makes a place holy?
- What effect did these places have on you?

It would then be good if some of your thoughts and ideas could be briefly shared with the whole group.

Can you now discuss together:

- What you think it means to be **Holy?**
- What is **holiness?**
- If God's very name, his very essence, is **holy** (hallowed), what do you think this is saying about God?
- Have you ever known anybody, or read about anybody, who you would describe as **holy?**

Please read the following passage from the book of Isaiah. The passage recounts the moment Isaiah is called to be a prophet. After someone has read the passage please reflect on it together. The questions following the reading are to help us explore the passage.

Isaiah 6.1-10

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. ⁵And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’ ⁹And he said, ‘Go and say to this people:

“Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.”

¹⁰ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.’

- What are your overall impressions of this passage? What strikes you? What excites you? Is there anything that puzzles or troubles you?
- In verse 5 what do you make of Isaiah’s reaction *to having seen the King, the LORD of hosts?*
- In verses 6 and 7 what thoughts do you have about the way Isaiah experiences forgiveness?

- As Isaiah is called to become a prophet and to be sent to his people what effect do you think this vision will have on the way he now perceives the world and his society?
- What thoughts do you have about the somewhat puzzling language and ideas in verses 9 – end?

Thinking about our worship: Isaiah’s vision probably took place as part of an act of worship. How do you think our worship of God in the Abbey, or elsewhere, effects the way you think about and act in the world and in your communities? Does it have any effect? Does it make a difference?

A little breather after some pretty big stuff!: Of all the buildings or places you have visited in your life can you think of the one which has been your favourite or most impressive? *(Please don’t overthink this – no one is holding you to this!)*

Our second bible study comes from the first epistle of Peter chapter 2 verses 4 – 10. Please ask someone to read the passage. This may be an unfamiliar passage and can be a little tricky to grasp on first reading and so after the passage is a short guide to help you. There are then some questions to guide your discussion.

1 Peter 2.4-10

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner’, and ‘A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Some thoughts about this passage to help you as you explore it:

The Jewish people looked to the Temple in Jerusalem as the place where the holiness of God could specially be found on earth (the heart of the temple was known as the Holy of Holies and was possibly where Isaiah was when he had his vision). But in John 2.19 Jesus said, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Jesus himself is the new Temple – the place where the fulness of God is truly to be found in the world. And this will be most evident when, after three days, he is raised from the dead. Picking up on this idea Peter, in this passage, describes Jesus as the Cornerstone of this new Temple and that his worshippers are to be like living stones in the Temple, built around him. In other words, Christians, are called to be holy people, who reflect the holiness of God in the world. If people want to understand what a holy God is like, and what he is calling the world to be like, they need to look no further than the Church! The church is called to reveal God's holiness, glory and love to the world – as a royal priesthood and a holy nation!

Some questions for discussion:

- What do you think of Peter's understanding of the role of the Church?
- What are the ways we have lived up to his vision and what are the ways we have failed?

In a few moments of quiet could we each think about: what one thing might we seek to change or do in our own lives which might help to better witness to the holiness of God?

Closing Prayers

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

3: Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven (i)

Welcome and Opening Prayer

This week, and in the next session, we are reflecting on the line in the prayer which has a massive scope and range – that God's Kingdom, God's will, God's ways, would be made manifest and made real on earth as they are in heaven. Wow! It doesn't come much bigger than this!

Some opening conversation: Sharing in twos:

- We often moan that things in our society, or in our world, get worse – “things aren't what they used to be” – but can you think of things that, during your lifetime, have got better? Can you now share your thoughts with the whole group?
- Again, sharing in twos: What are the qualities, or characteristics, of a healthy and life affirming community and can you give any examples of when you have experienced this? Once again, can you share your thoughts with the whole group?
- Again, sharing in twos: What are the things that help, or might help, you to flourish? (*Please don't feel you need to share beyond what is comfortable*). Once again, if you feel able to, can you share your thoughts with the whole group?

Can you now discuss together:

- When you hear the phrase “the Kingdom of God” or “the kingdom of heaven,” what comes to mind? What do you think of? Is it a helpful phrase or is it bewildering?
- Do you have an image, or a feeling, or a picture, or an idea of what the Kingdom of God might be like?

For the rest of our session, we’re going to look at some parables of Jesus where he speaks about the Kingdom. When Jesus taught, he often used stories and images which invite a range of interpretations and ideas. It seemed to infuriate his disciples who often wanted Jesus simply to tell them what to think. But Jesus seems to have used parables in order to invite a range of responses and to stimulate people’s imagination.

As we read through these parables it would be good to allow our different responses to be shared and voiced – by doing this we might find some quite rich ideas emerging. Please tackle each parable separately and don’t worry if you don’t get them all done. Please ask someone to read each parable before discussing it.

For each of the parables these questions might help you?

- What is your reaction to the parable?
- What puzzles or excites you about the parable?
- What does the parable mean (or suggest) **for you**?
- What might the parable be challenging **you to do or think**?

Mark 4. 30 – 32

He also said, ‘With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.’

Matthew 13:44

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:45-46

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Matthew 20:1-16

'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

Matthew 13:33

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

Mark 4:26-29

He also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

Closing Prayers

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

4: Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven (ii)

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Last session we thought about what the Kingdom of God might be like and where we might see it? This week we are continuing to reflect on this line in the prayer, in which the enormity and scope of its yearning is staggering when we think deeply about it: that the beauty and joy of heaven would be seen in our world – transforming, healing and renewing. For a short time this evening, we are invited to think about those people, situations and places where we long to see the healing, transforming love of God at work – and to think about how we might commit ourselves to be part of that Kingdom life.

Some opening conversations: Sharing in twos:

- When you pray, especially when you ask God for something to happen, or to change, what are you expecting God to do? How are you hoping he might act, or expecting him to do?
Can you now share your thoughts with the whole group?
- Again, sharing in twos: Are there times when you thought and felt that a prayer had been answered? Can you share something of the experience and what happened to make you feel the prayer had been answered?
Once again, can you share your thoughts with the whole group?
- Again, sharing in twos: Do you think God has ever used you to be the answer to someone else's prayer?
Once again, if you feel able to, can you share your thoughts with the whole group?

An Activity: *Please ensure everyone has a postcard size card and a pen. You are now invited to reflect quietly and to think of two situations (one local and one national or global) which deeply concern you and where you long to see transformation – the Kingdom of God breaking in. You may have many to choose from but try to think of the ones most important to you (and limit yourself to one in each category). On one side of your card please write your situations on the card: “The situations that concern me are...”*

- In your twos please now share what you chose and what transformation you long to see?
Once again, can you then share your thoughts with the whole group?
- Once again, in your twos, and thinking about the situations you have chosen, can you think of any ways in which God might be calling **you** to help answer **your** prayer/concern?
Can you think about how **you** have, or how **you** might, contribute to making a difference to the situation which concerns you?

Once you have talked about it, if you feel able to, write down that commitment on the back of your card “For God’s Kingdom I will commit to...” (A commitment might be to volunteer, to give money, to commit to social action etc.)

If you feel able to, it would be good to share your **“situations”** and your **“commitments”** with the whole group (but please feel able to pass if you prefer).

Now take a short break to recover!

*You might have gathered by now that the writer of this session thinks that **we** have a pretty big part to play in working with God in answering prayer and in the transforming work of his Kingdom – God needs **us** to play our part! We are going to continue this session with two more*

parables in which Jesus may be longing to instill in his listeners the desire to be people of transformation – Kingdom People! See what you make of them! Please ask someone to read each parable before discussing it.

For each of the parables these questions might help you?

- What is your reaction to the parable?
- What puzzles or excites you about the parable?
- What does the parable mean (or suggest) **for you**?
- What might the parable be challenging **you to do or think**?
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Luke 16.19-31 The Rich Man and Lazarus

‘There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Abraham replied, “They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.” He said, “No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.” He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.” ’

Matthew 25.14-30 The Parable of the Talents

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."

Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

CLOSING PRAYERS

The Lord's Prayer

5: Give us this day our daily bread (i)

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Last session we thought about what the Kingdom of God might be like and we were invited to think about those people, situations and places where we long to see the healing, transforming love of God at work – and to think about how we might commit ourselves to be part of that Kingdom life. This session, and the next, we are reflecting on the petition that we might be given each day our daily bread, a petition which still sits within this broad vision of the Kingdom of God

An ice-breaker for the group:

- What is your favourite food and what is your favourite setting or context for eating food?

Now, chatting in twos can you reflect on the following questions:

- Feeding ourselves is fundamental to life and yet issues around food can be quite complex and challenging. Can you think about the issues that concern you? What are they and how do they affect you?

Please share your thoughts with the whole group.

- Again, sharing in twos: As we hear and discuss issues concerning food, and raise different concerns and ideas, how does it affect the way we think about the petition: Give us this day our daily bread?

Once again, please share your thoughts with the whole group.

- Once more, sharing in twos: What do you think Jesus had in mind when he taught this line in the prayer?

Once again, please share your thoughts with the group.

We are now going to look at three bible passages which speak about food and about providing food? First we are going to look at one of the temptations of Jesus. Please ask someone to read it and then reflect on the passage together. The questions may help to guide your thoughts and discussion.

Matthew 4.1-4, 11

The Temptation of Jesus

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written,

"One does not live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." '

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

- *Jesus has just been baptised and is now in the desert being tempted. Why do you think stones and bread formed one of the three temptations Jesus wrestled with?*
 - What is this temptation about? Is it just about him being hungry or is it more than that?
 - Why do you think it was important for Jesus to resist this temptation?

The next passage is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and is quite a challenging passage. Again, please ask someone to read it and then reflect on the passage together. Once again, the questions may help to guide your thoughts and discussion.

Matthew 6.25-end

Do not worry

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’

- How do you respond to the passage as a whole?
- How do you respond to Jesus telling us not to worry...?
- Jesus will, surely, have been very mindful of poverty and famine so what do you think he is trying to teach us?

James 2.14-17

Faith without Works Is Dead

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

We are only getting a tiny snippet of the Epistle of James here but hopefully we get a sense of his concerns.

- What are your reactions to this passage?
- What kind of community is James encouraging?

CLOSING PRAYERS

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

6: Give us this day our daily bread (ii)

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Last session we thought about bread and food mainly in terms of our physical needs. We thought about issues of justice and generosity and some of the ethical issues that surround food and local and global needs. This week we are thinking about the request for “daily bread” being also, perhaps, about a desire for spiritual sustenance and strengthening. To help us with this we are going to reflect on passages from the Gospel of John, chapter 6.

An ice-breaker for the group:

- What is the biggest (in terms of the number of people attending) meal you have shared in? What was it? What was it for? What was it like?

We are now going to reflect on passages from John 6. These passages begin with John's account of the feeding of the 5000 but then reflect on the nature of who Jesus is. Also, in the background of the passage we have a reflection on the nature and importance of the Eucharist. First, we are going to begin with St John's version of the feeding of the 5000. This may be a very familiar passage to us but try to look at it with fresh eyes and to think about what is going on here and why? The questions after the passage may help to guide your thoughts and discussion.

John 6.1-15

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, 'Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?' He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon

Peter's brother, said to him, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.' So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.'

When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

- What are your overall impressions and thoughts about this passage? What strikes you? What excites you? What puzzles you?
- Why do you think this "sign" or "miracle" takes place? What do you think Jesus is doing here?
- What do you think about the parts that Philip and Andrew play in this amazing incident?
- What strikes you about the quantity and nature of the left-overs?
- What do you think about the reaction of the crowd? Why was Jesus so keen to withdraw to a place by himself?

Having explored the feeding miracle John chapter 6 now reflects on the nature and vital importance, to us, of Jesus himself. The Gospel of John can feel quite daunting, revealing ideas that are rich and deep but often confusing.

As we reflect on this passage it is good to remember that a staple food may be the only food some people eat – no variety, but it still sustains and nourishes them and allows them to have life. It is vital for life. What might it mean to think of Jesus as being like a staple food for us?

In the passage the "manna in the wilderness" refers to the time the people had left the slavery of Egypt, crossed the red sea and found themselves without food in the desert. God miraculously provided the grumbling people with wafer like bread that sustained and nourished them.

The questions at the end of the passage may help to guide your thinking and discussion.

John 6.25-35

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.’ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ So they said to him, ‘What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole?
- Why are the people searching for Jesus and excited to find him?
- What do you think is the “food that endures for eternal life?”
- Why do the people crave a “sign” – after all they have just been thrilled and excited by the feeding of the 5000?
- What is the “true bread from heaven?” When Jesus declares that he is the bread of life, what do you think he means that those who come to him and believe in him will never be hungry or thirsty?
- Do we think of Jesus as being as vital to us as the food we eat?

In the final passage of this session, we are going to look at how the words spoken by Jesus in John 6 pre-empt the Eucharist and invite us to reflect on the Eucharist. As we think about a prayer that asks for “daily bread” we cannot help but be mindful of bread being at the heart of the Eucharist, and the Eucharist being so important to our Christian journey.

Ideas and concepts of “body/flesh” and “blood” have caused the Church no end of trouble over the centuries. And when we think of body and blood we naturally think of physical things like muscles, sinews and platelets! But I don’t think this is how Jesus thought. At the last supper when he said, “This is my body/blood” he didn’t tear off his flesh or cut a vein. He wasn’t speaking literally but metaphorically – these are metaphors! And what would the disciples have understood by Jesus’s words? In Jewish thinking the idea of “body” was a way of saying “the whole of me,” or “my essence”. When Jesus says, “This is my body,” he means this is who I am – my personality, my humanity, my divinity, my dreams, memories and hopes. And the blood was, understandably, thought to be the life force of a person, their energy and vitality. When Jesus says, “This is my blood,” he is saying this is my life, its meaning and drive, given for you. Bread and Wine are metaphors, but metaphors are powerful, and when filled with prayer, faith, meaning and divine intention are a way of enabling us to receive the fullness of Jesus into our lives.

Some of this may seem bewildering to you but hopefully gives some meaning and context as we look at this final passage.

John 6.53 – 59

Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.’ He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

- What are your reactions and reflections on this passage as a whole?
- What do you think is happening at the Eucharist? What do you think about when you receive the bread and wine?
- How important is it for you to receive bread and wine?

Closing Prayers

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

7: Forgive us our sins

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Over the next two sessions we are thinking about sin and forgiveness. These are not easy subjects to explore but do take us to the very heart of our faith. Forgiveness is at the very heart of the prayer because forgiveness was at the centre of Jesus's life and death. Forgiveness is not about ignoring wrongdoing but about restoring good, wholesome and flourishing relationships.

An ice-breaker for the group:

- What is your favourite food treat? And do you ever feel naughty indulging in it?

And now some (pretty heavy!) questions in twos before sharing with the whole group:

- What do you think a sin is and what damage does it do?
- What do you think God thinks about sin?

Many of us find it very hard to forgive ourselves or to believe that God forgives us. In this session we are going to think about one man's journey through sin, judgment, forgiveness and healing. This man was King David, who, despite this terrible episode, was considered the greatest of Israel's kings. Although he lived over 3000 years ago, his sin and journey to forgiveness still has powerful resonance today. We are going to begin with a long passage which tells the story of his terrible sin. The questions at the end may help as you reflect on the passage.

2 Samuel 11

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?' Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.' Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.' As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place

where he knew there were valiant warriors. The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite was killed as well. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting...

So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, 'The men gained an advantage over us, and came out against us in the field; but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall; some of the king's servants are dead; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' David said to the messenger, 'Thus you shall say to Joab, "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another; press your attack on the city, and overthrow it." And encourage him.'

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole?
- What are your thoughts and feelings towards King David?
- What does it make you think about sin and its consequences?

The next passage follows on from the previous story and is a very powerful and compelling part of the whole tragic episode.

The questions that follow may help you to explore it and reflect upon it.

2 Samuel 12.1-10, 13-15a

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the

wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'

David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die.' Then Nathan went to his house.

- How do you respond to this passage?
- What do you think about Nathan and what he does?
 - How hard is it to challenge someone about their sinful actions, especially if they are a powerful person?
 - What do you think of Nathan's tactics as he challenges David?
- How do/would we feel about challenging others if we perceive their actions to be sinful and damaging?
- What does this passage tell us about God's response to sin?

In the book of Samuel, we read of David's desperate prayer to God to spare the life of his child - but the child dies. During this time David must have wrestled with his own guilt and shame and his own deep desire for forgiveness. It is very possible that Psalm 51 is King David's account of what he experienced through this long period of mourning, repentance and reflection. As we now read and reflect on this amazing psalm together we think about the consequences of sin, what God requires of David and the hope and new life that forgiveness brings. Once again, the questions at the end may help to guide your discussion.

Psalm 51:1-17

To the Choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

- What are your impressions of this psalm as a whole?
- What thoughts do you have about David's repentance and what he longs for? What does he want God to do for him?
- What do you think the last verse means? What do you think it meant for David? What do you think it might mean for us?
- *The fact that the psalm has been written indicates that King David experienced forgiveness, albeit through a journey that profoundly changed him. Are we able to accept we are forgiven and what does that feel like for us?*

Closing Prayers

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

8: As we forgive those who sin against us.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

In the last session we looked at asking forgiveness for ourselves. In this session we are going to think about asking forgiveness for those who have hurt us. Both these callings can be tough and challenging but again we remember that forgiveness is at the very heart of the prayer because forgiveness was at the centre of Jesus's life and death. Forgiveness is not about ignoring wrongdoing but about restoring good, wholesome and flourishing relationships.

Some questions in twos before sharing, if you are able to, with the whole group: *These are big questions. Please only share what you feel comfortable sharing. Forgiving others can be one of the biggest challenges a person faces in their life. Some hurts are quite trivial and easy to "brush off" but some are so deep that they change lives forever and how we live with the call to forgive can be very challenging.*

- Why do you think forgiving others and praying for forgiveness is so important to Jesus that he has this at the heart of the prayer he taught?
- What are the challenges we find, or might find, when it comes to forgiving others?
- How easy or difficult do we find the calling to forgive? What should we do if we find forgiving too difficult?

We are going to look at some bible passages now. Some of these are quite challenging in what they are calling us to do and how we are to live. It's good to approach these passages with real honesty and to acknowledge if we find the teaching difficult. But, also, to explore the kind of society and community these passages are encouraging and how we feel about that. The first passage is from St Matthew's Gospel and forms part of Jesus's great sermon on the mount. The questions at the end may help you to reflect on the passage.

Matthew 5.38-48

'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole?
- How do you react to Jesus's teaching about turning the other cheek? Why do you think this was so important to Jesus?
- How do we love our enemies? Can we do it and does it mean we shouldn't resist evil?
- What do you think Jesus is hoping for as he teaches these things, which must have been so hard to hear?

The next passage is also from St Matthew's Gospel. We need to remember that for many people and many cultures it is not forgiveness that is important but vengeance, or at the very least ex-communication. Here Peter is being taught that the calling to forgive is boundless. But what do you make of the parable?

Matthew 18.21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his

possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

- How do you respond to the passage as a whole?
- How do you respond to Jesus telling Peter to forgive 77 times (or, effectively, without limit)?
- What are your responses to the parable? What, if anything, does it teach about our responsibility to be people who forgive?

The next passage is not directly about forgiveness but the call to forgiveness is very much present beneath the surface.

Romans 12.9-end

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty,

give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- How do you respond to this passage and what sort of community do you think St Paul is trying to encourage?
- **Love** and **Bless** are prominent words in this passage but how do we love and bless those who persecute or hurt us?

*The final passage is from St Luke’s Gospel and forms part of his crucifixion narrative. Rather than study this passage please read it and then keep some silence together. During the silence perhaps you can reflect on your journeys to forgiveness. It is important to remember that sometimes forgiveness may seem impossible but, in such cases, perhaps our prayer needs to be “Lord, help me to **begin** to forgive.” In this way we commit ourselves to the journey, and, perhaps, open ourselves to the healing that brings.*

Luke 23.32 - 43

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding Jesus and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

A time for Silence

Closing Prayer

GiFT

The Lord's Prayer

9: Lead us not into temptation.

Welcome and Opening Prayer

This line of the Lord's Prayer can feel a little confusing – why would God tempt us to do things wrong? Why would he ever lead us into temptation? Why would we have to ask him not to tempt us if he is a holy and loving God?

As we will see in our first bible study God would never tempt us in this way. But we can easily allow ourselves to be tempted, and perhaps the prayer is asking God to help us with this – to help us to deal with situations which are very tempting to us but are wrong, and damaging and hurtful to others and to ourselves.

*Or perhaps the line is not speaking about being tempted in the ways we normally think about temptation but is really thinking about being **tested**. As we will see later Jesus was tested in the wilderness as he tried to work out his vocation. What was the right way for him to live and act? Perhaps this line of the prayer is asking God to help us and be with us when **we** are tested about how to live and how to act. Perhaps it is asking God to be gentle with us and to protect us from situations we will find too difficult or where we will make bad choices.*

Some questions in twos before sharing, if you are able to, with the whole group:

- What do you think about what is written in the introduction above? As you have said this prayer over the years, how have you thought about this line in the prayer?
- Do you think God would ever tempt us or test us? Do you think he helps us when we are tempted or tested?
- When you have a big decision to make – especially one that might affect you and others in a significant way – how do you go about making it?

Our first bible passage is from the book of James. In this passage James speaks both of temptation and testing but is clear that temptation to evil would never come from God. He does, nevertheless, see resisting

temptation, and dealing well with testing, as being part of Christian development, and this can feel quite challenging! Please read the passage through and then reflect on it together. As usual the questions at the end may help you.

James 1.2-5,12-18

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

- How do you respond to this passage as a whole? What strikes you or puzzles you?
- How do you react to the thoughts about enduring temptation?
- *The book of James can sometimes feel a bit "blunt" and a bit unforgiving. This passage seems to speak about having to "get it right and then we'll flourish!"* How should we think about the times we get it wrong; when we give in to temptation; when we make mistakes?

In the next passage we are going to reflect on the very well known passage when Jesus is tempted, or tested, at the beginning of his public ministry. After you have read the passage through, please reflect on the

nature of these three testings. Why these three? What is going on? What is Jesus wrestling with? How does he deal with each of these temptations? The further questions at the end may help to guide you discussion.

Luke 4.1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him." '

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you",

and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." ' When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

- What are your reactions to the passage as a whole?
- Why do you think the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness?
- What is significant about the three temptations – why does Jesus wrestle with these three things in particular?
- What does this incident teach about Jesus?
- Are there things in this passage which might help us when we are tested or tempted?

*It is important to remember that at the heart of the Lord's prayer is **forgiveness!** We are all human and we all succumb to temptations and we all let God and each other down in all sorts of ways. But please remember that forgiveness and grace is central to the Christian life and to Jesus' teaching! But in this last passage we are going to reflect on the life-giving joy that comes from a life that makes choices, however inadequately, for living God's way and allowing God to live in us. Please read the passage and then reflect on it together. Once again, the questions at the end may help.*

Galatians 5.16-end

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

- What are your reactions to this passage as a whole?
- *When Paul speaks about the flesh he is thinking about very human desires which are often very easy to give in to and damage community.* What do you think about the two ways of living? Do we live somewhere between the two?
- The fruits of the Spirit are perhaps a reflection of the very qualities of God. How might we invite the Holy Spirit to more fully a part of our lives?

Closing Prayer