

<p>Feb 18th First Sunday of Lent</p>	<p>Genesis 9: 8-17</p>	<p>The flood and God's covenant with all living creatures and the earth. After the flood, a sign - and a covenant that encompasses every living creature.</p>	<p>Water - the source of both life and destruction, the key to life or death. Baptism - the sign of new life and initiation into the Kingdom.</p>
	<p>Psalm 25: 1-9</p>	<p>Humble trust in God's steadfast love. The cry of the troubled and afflicted.</p>	<p>Water is a powerful symbol, because it is essential to sustain life. But for millions in the world today, lack of access to clean water, its privatization as a commercial asset, drought and flooding are factors that dominate and destroy life. And things are set to get worse as climate change disrupts weather patterns further.</p>
	<p>1 Peter 3:18-22</p>	<p>The place of water and baptism in God's saving purposes.</p>	<p>As Christians, we are bound through the water of baptism to fellow Christians in countries at the sharp end of poverty and injustice. A hard question for all of us as Christians is how closely do we identify with that hurting global body of Christ?</p>
	<p>Mark 1: 9-15</p>	<p>After he is baptized, Jesus faces temptation in the wilderness and announces the good news of the Kingdom of God.</p>	<p>After his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness, the Living Water entering a barren place. The forty days in the desert, mirroring the 40 days of flood, are reflected in the period of Lent.</p> <p>This Lent, can we be living water in desert places? How might we make a Lenten fast in the spirit of Isaiah 58 v6?</p> <p><i>Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?</i></p> <p>For further reflection, stories and resources about water, please see:</p> <p>Voices from the Front Line of Climate Change, an interview with Tagolyn Kabekabe about water challenges facing the South Pacific region.</p> <p>Reflections on the Water of Life from the Anglican Communion Environmental Network</p> <p>Resources for World Water Day</p> <p>Resources for churches from Water Aid</p>

<p>Feb 25th</p> <p>Second Sunday of Lent</p> <p>Fairtrade Fortnight begins tomorrow</p>	<p>Genesis 17: 1-7,15,16</p> <p>Psalms 22:23-31</p> <p>Romans 4: 13-25</p> <p>Mark 8: 31-38</p>	<p>God promises the seemingly impossible to Abraham.</p> <p>Praise for the Lord who has not disregarded the poverty of the poor but has listened to their cry for help (Jerusalem Bible).</p> <p>Abraham's faith: "hoping against hope, he believed..." (v18)</p> <p>Jesus' way will challenge established powers. Following Jesus requires tough choices but is the way to life.</p>	<p>Reversal of expectation, commitment, choices about life and the fact that faith and action go together are themes running through these readings. Following Jesus is costly, yet in God's curious economy giving is receiving and blessing comes in the most unlikely circumstances.</p> <p>The Fairtrade story can echo these themes: an alternative trading system which has the potential to help both producer and consumer, challenges the <i>status quo</i> and which has grown dramatically from the seed of an idea, a hope, to become an established, major reality – a growth achieved by individuals believing, making choices and taking action.</p> <p>Sometimes, "faith is trusting in spite of the evidence and then watching the evidence change." (Jim Wallis, <i>Faith Works - Lessons on Spirituality and Social Action</i>, SPCK, 2000)</p> <p>Fairtrade Fortnight begins tomorrow, one of the annual opportunities to share good news stories of hope and change and to spur people to take further steps for justice and live out their faith in practical ways.</p> <p>For further reflection, stories and resources about Fair Trade, please see:</p> <p>Links to prayers, reflections and readings on Fairtrade: http://www.ccow.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Praying-and-Preaching-about-Fair-Trade.pdf</p> <p>Taking action: http://www.ccow.org.uk/what-we-work-on/fair-trade/fair-trade-church-actions/</p> <p>The Fairtrade Foundation's resources for this year's Fairtrade Fortnight: http://bit.ly/2nJTgJf</p>
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<p>March 4th</p> <p>Third Sunday of Lent</p> <p>Fairtrade Fortnight continues</p>	<p>Exodus 20: 1-17</p> <p>Psalm 19</p> <p>1 Cor 1: 18-25</p> <p>John 2: 13-22</p>	<p>The Ten Commandments: idolatry forbidden, Sabbath rest required and respect for the personhood of others enshrined.</p> <p>The law is meant to bless.</p> <p>Christ turns everything upside down; foolishness and wisdom are not what we thought. God chooses ordinary people to change the world.</p> <p>Jesus furiously drives out the money changers who desecrate what is holy in their pursuit of profit inside God's holy Temple.</p>	<p>The commandments were intended as a source of blessing – guidelines to help us honour the Creator and respect the life and personhood of others.</p> <p>Quite different commandments seem to underlie our modern economic systems, where all too often economic dogma and rationales are pursued regardless of the consequences to poor people. Unfair trade rules and practices rob people of both dignity and livelihood, and the earth is exploited and worked to exhaustion.</p> <p>But there is an alternative. Fairtrade restores dignity and respects both people and the environment. The campaign for trade justice aims to enshrine these principles in better frameworks for trade.</p> <p>In the readings today, Jesus is incensed by a system that places traders' opportunities for profit (perhaps even derived by exploiting the poor as they came to make sacrifices) ahead of the purity of the Temple and its provision for people – especially the Gentile outsiders - to worship.</p> <p>Our anger when we see economic injustice in our world today can signal that something is wrong and act as a spur to corrective action. It's not about seeking personal satisfaction but about redressing the wrongs that afflict our neighbours ... an offshoot of our desire for love and justice to flourish. How can we let it inspire us to do good creatively?</p> <p>In God's upside down kingdom it is ordinary people who are the movers and shakers. Our choices and actions can change the world.</p> <p>For further reflection, stories and resources about Fair Trade, please see:</p> <p>http://www.cow.org.uk/what-we-work-on/fair-trade/ https://www.traidcraft.org.uk/campaign-home http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/Get-Involved/Current-campaigns/Fairtrade-Fortnight http://tjm.org.uk</p>
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<p>March 11th</p> <p>Mothering Sunday</p>	<p>Exodus 2.1-10</p> <p>Psalm 34.11-20</p> <p>2 Cor. 1.3-7</p> <p>or</p> <p>Colossians 3.12-17</p> <p>Luke 2.33-35</p> <p>or</p> <p>John 19.25-27</p>	<p>A Hebrew woman resorts to desperate measures to save her child. Working together – perhaps even with tacit understanding? – powerful and powerless women find a way through an unjust and cruel system to preserve life.</p> <p>Choice: turn away from evil and do good; pursue peace. God's compassion for the crushed.</p> <p>Sharing in each other's suffering, offering the comfort of "the Father of compassion".</p> <p>Wear compassion, kindness and love. Be mindful how you live: "let every detail of your lives – words, actions, whatever – be done in the name of the Master, Jesus" (v17, the Message).</p> <p>"A sword will pierce your soul."</p> <p>Mary's agony, Jesus' providential love.</p>	<p>No flowers or chocolates in these Mothering Sunday readings. Instead, they tell of pain and sacrifice – realities experienced by all mothers to different degrees. Mary's agony is shared by many women today, especially in places where poverty leads to preventable childhood death - through malnutrition, diarrhoea or lack of vaccination. Like Moses' unnamed mother, many women today resort to desperate measures to ensure their child's survival and well-being, whatever the cost to themselves. Selling sex to earn money for food or a child's school fees might be the only option uneducated, powerless women feel they have.</p> <p>But the readings don't only focus on the pain. They also offer clues for alleviating distress in the present and transforming the future.</p> <p>Through their ingenuity and determination the women in the Exodus story preserve the life of Moses - who in time will lead his people out of their oppression. Jesus instigates new relationships of caring, and both epistles emphasise our responsibility to empathise with those who suffer, be compassionate and act thoughtfully.</p> <p>For further reflection on the challenges facing mothers and how they are meeting them, see: http://www.mothersunion.org. The Mothers' Union works in 83 countries offering support, solidarity and fellowship; providing practical programmes; and campaigning for positive change.</p> <p>For further information on maternal and child health, see:</p> <p>https://www.maternityworldwide.org/the-issues/sdgs/ http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/health/</p>
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<p>March 18 Fourth Sunday of Lent</p>	<p>Jeremiah 31: 31-34</p> <p>Psalm 51: 1-13 or Psalm 119: 9- 16</p> <p>Hebrews 5: 5- 10</p> <p>John 12: 20-33</p>	<p>A new relationship between the Lord and his people: God's ways written deep within who people are and God known by all.</p> <p>Teach me wisdom in my secret heart. A pure heart and a steadfast spirit. Whole body attuned to God's law.</p> <p>Jesus...prayed with loud cries and tears.</p> <p>Some Greeks “want to see Jesus,” causing the disciples evident consternation and uncertainty. Jesus expects his disciples to be present wherever he is.</p> <p>“Now my heart is troubled—and what shall I say? Shall I say, ‘Father, do not let this hour come upon me’? But that is why I came—so that I might go through this hour of suffering.”</p>	<p>Whole-hearted commitment, passionate prayer and visible presence mark out God's people.</p> <p>Where is Jesus evident today? Where will those who wish to see Jesus find him?</p> <p>Today, the fifth Sunday of Lent, is the beginning of Passiontide. Jesus has set his face towards Jerusalem and must embark on the long and agonizing road to Calvary. The mood is sombre; even Jesus wrestles as he faces the enormity and cost of his calling.</p> <p>In the mystery of the passion and crucifixion, Jesus will confront spiritual powers of darkness. Jesus speaks of the 'ruler of the world' being driven out. Walter Wink understands this negative use of the word 'world' as 'domination system', where institutions have an idolatrous spiritual ethos, the antithesis of the freedom of God (<i>Engaging the Powers</i>, Fortress Press, 1992). God's plan for salvation works out within not just a personal, but also a political context.</p> <p>As Jesus tells his disciples about what must unfold, he offers them an image of hope: <i>“Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.”</i></p> <p>Where do we need courage to confront oppressive powers or follow in the way of Christ?</p> <p>As we enter Passiontide, perhaps we can once again take to heart the words of Micah 6:8:</p> <p><i>He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?</i></p>
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<p>March 25th</p> <p>Palm Sunday</p> <p>Liturgy of the Palms</p>	<p>Mark 11: 1-11</p> <p>or</p> <p>John 12:12-16</p> <p>Psalm 118: 1-2,19-29</p>	<p>Jesus enters Jerusalem surrounded by crowds waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna - 'God save us!'</p> <p>John's account references Zechariah who prophesies a King who will bring salvation, be gentle, and proclaim peace to the nations (Zech.9v9).</p> <p>Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. God's steadfast love.</p>	<p>In a highly symbolic act, Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, both fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and demonstrating an understanding of kingship utterly at odds with the practice of the day.</p> <p>As do several other New Testament scholars, NT Wright suggests that Jesus enters Jerusalem from the east on a colt, surrounded by people waving branches and praising God in conscious contrast to Pilate, who, as the imperial ruler, would have entered Jerusalem in triumphal procession from the west on a horse, surrounded by military might and fanfare. Thus Jesus dissociates himself from oppressive human power, and instead identifies with the king foretold by Zechariah:</p> <p><i>Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.</i></p> <p>The repeated cry of the people is to 'save us!' - but what do we understand by salvation? What does it look like for the many people in today's world who are calling to be released from oppressive conditions and systems?</p> <p>Today, March 25, is the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade and is also one of the dates used to mark Freedom Sunday (against modern slavery). Perhaps today we might reflect, pray and take action using these resources and sites:</p> <p>Freedom Sunday resource pack and the Freedom Year resource</p> <p>http://www.stophetraffick.org</p> <p>http://www.theclewerinitiative.org</p>
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