

Pandemic Times

Issue 50

Sunday 7 March 2021

Inside this issue:

From Lucy 1

Reading
guide 2

Prayer
guide 2

Sermon
notes 3

Church
details 4

Thoughts from Lucy



Church family,

This Lent we have been thinking about Jesus in the wilderness. Away from his friends and family, hungry and thirsty and facing mental torment as the Devil tempted him. We also encounter other wilderness experiences in the Bible. Noah found himself in 'lockdown' on the ark for eleven months. Elijah fled into the wilderness, filled with despair and desperation, waiting to hear from God. It feels to me that our past year of lockdown has been our own wilderness experience. A wilderness experience can be frightening, frustrating and lonely. It can also be an opportunity for contemplation, and to deepen our relationship with God.

I am sure like me you have found yourself sustained by your faith, Bible reading and prayer during this period. I have found great solace in the book of Ecclesiastes. Here King Solomon talks about the seasons of life- times to refrain from embracing, times to mourn and times to heal. It's a reminder that seasons of pain do not last forever. I've also found myself drawn to the book of Leviticus (not something people say very often!). Leviticus is actually an amazing book full of practical advice on how to live as a Holy community. In Chapter 25 God explains that the land must have time to lay fallow and have its own sabbath. It's this fallow period that allows the soil to replenish its nutrients so that in the season of growth the crops can meet their full potential. If we use our wilderness time wisely,

we too should be able to emerge stronger, wiser, and closer to God.

Our wilderness season coincides with a time of immense time of change for our church. We have a wonderful new pastor and for the next few months we're focusing on listening to God in order to hear His vision and plans for our future. This is very much a season of prayer. Sometimes I feel like I am in a prayer rut. My prayers can feel like a list of ailments and problems that I want God to solve. I have to remind myself that prayer is not just about me talking to God but allowing space to listen, and that the answers may not come straight away. That is why I am so pleased that Pastor Mick is introducing us to some fresh ways to pray. Our first exercise was a prayer walk and we will be introduced to other exercises in the coming weeks.

It was very interesting on Wednesday night to meet on Zoom and hear some of your reflections from your prayer walk. It was so exciting to hear that God had put on many of our hearts the same issues and themes. It can be nerve-racking to share our spiritual experiences with others, but it is so important. God really does work with us individually and corporately. When we find we are hearing the same things it means the Holy Spirit is really moving in our community.

It is my fervent prayer for all of us that although we are physically apart the bonds between us strengthen, that we grow closer to God and emerge into a season of regeneration, growth and joy. We read in Psalm 100 we can shout for joy because we are God's people, and He is with us. Whatever we are going through "the Lord is good and his love endures forever" (Ps. 101:5).

Peace,

Lucy



Daily Reading and Prayer Guide

Date	Reading	Pray for
Monday 8th March	Mark chapter 9 verses 30 to 50	Jack and Leah Bolton
Tuesday 9th March	Mark chapter 10 verses 1 to 31	Robert Bond and Annette
Wednesday 10th March	Mark chapter 10 verses 32 to 52	Bob and Eveline Branan
Thursday 11th March	Mark chapter 11	Ruth Copeland-Holtz
Friday 12th March	Mark chapter 12 verses 1-27	Josh, Molly, Miley Rose, Jonah and Ezra Jenkinson
Saturday 13th March	Catch up	Katie and Scott Cameron
Sunday 14th March	Mark chapter 12	Isobel Cave and Family

Special Prayer Requests

- * We continue to pray for Brenda following the death of her husband, Keith. Pray that funeral plans in these challenging days would come together.
- * Pray for Mick's dad as he looks to recommence chemotherapy again in the coming weeks.
- * Continue to remember Jon, John, Isobel, Claire S, Bill E, who all have ongoing health issues.
- * Ask God to continue to speak to us in this season of listening. Pray that we would have 'ears to hear.'



Sermon Notes

Series: Encounters on the Road to the Cross (3)

Luke chapter 15

Today our journey on the road to the cross brings us to a famous story/parable told by Jesus. It has famously gone by two titles: **‘The Lost Son’** and, perhaps more popularly, **‘The Prodigal Son.’** Now I don’t often give my sermons titles but if I were to give today’s message a name it would be this, **“who is ‘lost,’ and who is the ‘prodigal?’”** Because those are the two questions I want us to consider as we reflect on this famous passage.

You might think that there is a pretty obvious answer to those questions as you hear the story. Surely the terms ‘lost’ and ‘prodigal’ refer to the actions, and the consequences of said actions, of the son who disrespected his father and his family by demanding his share of the estate early (literally wishing his father dead), and went on to use this on **wild and shameful living which resulted in what often comes from such actions: a pit, rock bottom, shame.** And you’d be correct in this. That is most definitely a lesson to be taken from this story. When fulfilment is sought from such things – ‘wild living’ is the description given but I’m sure we can use our imaginations – it very rarely, indeed ultimately never, lives up to what it promised at the outset. And so with his tail between his legs this lost son goes home.

This gives us hope doesn’t it? **I wonder if you have ever prayed for a ‘prodigal.’** Perhaps you are praying for one right now. Someone you love who was once part of the family of God but has since wandered off. They have declared that they are no longer part of the community of faith and better off alone. I know I am. And this story gives us hope that **there is a way back – what a beautiful truth!**

Now, if that’s how you’ve answered those questions - who is ‘lost’ and who is the ‘prodigal?’ – then, like I said you would be correct. But what if there’s more to this than first meets the eye? I like to think that there is always more in the Scriptures. They do, after all, point to an infinite God so there must be infinite revelation in them, right? You see, the story doesn’t end with this previously discussed son being lost. He is declared to have been ‘found,’ by the Father and because of this there is reason to celebrate, eat, have a banquet – much like the one we discussed last week. But, just like last week, not everyone has taken their place at in the celebrations. Not everyone is excited at the return of the previously lost son. His elder brother, having declared himself as nothing but faithful, and as such, can’t celebrate the return of someone who has lived so recklessly, and so he excludes himself. **Remember this: All are welcome, the only ones excluded are the ones who exclude themselves?** So I ask again, who is lost in this story?

Let me remind you of the message of our series so far – the Good News of the Gospel is this, ‘the outsiders are now being welcomed in!’ **But, it appears that not everyone is happy with this.** Jesus ‘audience’ as he tells this story is a mixture of tax collectors and sinners (outsiders) and Pharisees (insiders), and this story would have been a mixture of good news to sinners, but also a warning to the Pharisees; and perhaps a warning to us today. **Don’t lose sight of the beauty of the truth of**

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At Brooklands, we are big enough to be part of a world-wide denomination, yet small enough to invite you to make our church your home. Please visit our website and contact us if you would like to get in touch or need more information on any of our events.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, we are holding weekly services on our YouTube channel, starting at 10:30 am each Sunday.

We look forward to welcoming you to our fellowship!

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Kingdom of God. The Good news of the Gospel is this: the outsiders are to be welcomed in. This means all are welcome, and, again, the only ones excluded are the ones who exclude themselves. So one last time: **who is really lost here?** It has been said before that perhaps a better title for this story is **the parable of the two lost sons.**

And so what of the second part of my question? Who, in this story, is the 'prodigal?' Well the word prodigal, if you look it up in the dictionary, means to **spend freely or recklessly or to give on a lavish scale.** And again this description is often given to the son who lived wildly. He spent his whole inheritance in what appears to have been a short space of time – reckless, lavish, prodigal, right?

But what of another prodigal in the story? What if I was to suggest that there was an even more 'prodigal' individual than the wild living son? What about the **Father?** Think about it. This Father has been hurt and shamed by his son. In Biblical times the family name was carried on by the children and the actions of the children, culturally, would have been attributed to the Father. A culture of honour and shame, if you like. In fact this son's actions were so serious that according to the Law, and you can read this in Deuteronomy 21:18ff, **the father was entitled (commanded, perhaps) to have his son publically executed by stoning him to death with the other elders in the town.** The son would have known this and was hoping for grace from his father: 'please accept me as a hired servant.'

And the son does receive grace. **Boy, does the son receive grace!** Far from having his son executed, the father runs to him, an action unbecoming of an elderly gentleman due to its involving the undignified action of lifting one's garments. He runs to him and embraces him, and celebrates his return. **If this is not lavish, free, prodigal, then I don't know what is.**