

World Vision



It takes a world
to end violence against children

Journey to Easter

Stories of Hope for Lent

GOOD NEWS
BIBLE



World Vision
Bible Society of Uganda

Pastor Toolkit

We've created this Pastor Toolkit to support and strengthen your church's experience through this Lenten season. These tools provide a variety of ideas for engaging your congregation, from simply sharing a 2-minute story to integrating Journey to Easter into your sermon.

Included in the Toolkit, you'll find:

- Summaries of each week's theme, story and verses
- Videos, bulletin inserts and powerpoint slides to accompany each week's story
- Simple ways to engage your church
- Talking points for each week incorporating scriptures from the Revised Common Lectionary

Journey to Easter and all of the resources have been created with our [Theological Narrative](#) at the heart of it.

This theological framework has been created with our key church partners—World Evangelical Alliance, Anglican Alliance, Micah Global, Caritas In Veritate and World Council of Churches—for the *It takes a world to end violence against children* campaign.

This narrative reflects on how Jesus survived the threat of violence as an infant by becoming a refugee. We know later Jesus was arrested, beaten and crucified on a cross for us. We are reminded that as the Church we are called to protect the innocent, especially the children. To stand against injustice and violence upon them through prayer, advocacy, defending their rights and taking direct action. God's Word calls the Church to be the voice of the child when they have been silenced, to act for them when they are powerless, and to work for communities which will protect and care for them.

Read the Theological Narrative: www.bit.ly/theological-narrative

Through His ministry, death and resurrection, Jesus has shown us how we are to live: to love God and to come alongside those most in need. With your group we hope this guide helps you to prepare your hearts for Easter, by finding Christ and yourselves in these stories.

Thank you for joining us on this Journey to Easter!

Designed by: Imani Anderson
Written by: John Baxter-Brown
Cover photos by: Jon Warren



World Vision International is a Christian humanitarian organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.



World Vision's campaign, It takes a world to end violence against children, is igniting movements of people committed to keeping children safe from harm. Its name reflects the fact that no one person, group or organisation can solve this problem alone. Find out more at wvi.org/ittakesaworld.

The first week of Journey to Easter, starting on Ash Wednesday (14 February) or the Sunday before Ash Wednesday (11 February), we focus on recognising the brokenness in the world and in our own lives.

- Brokenness and our need for God's justice, love and redemption is clearly visible throughout the world today. Nearly half of the world's population lives on less than \$2.50 a day. More than one billion children are living in poverty, making them more vulnerable to issues of violence, abuse and exploitation; of hunger, disease and hopelessness.
- Throughout Jesus' life and ministry in the Gospels, we see Him responding to the world's brokenness. In John 15, Jesus calls us to be that love that the world needs: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."
- In Matthew 25:35-40, Jesus calls us to care for the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and unclothed, the sick and imprisoned, and tells His followers: "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week's sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church's weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video introducing Journey to Easter.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and encourage families and small groups to participate in Journey to Easter.

Invitation to Share:

Invite a member of your congregation or someone from the community to share how they are caring for "the least of these".

Sermon Notes & Talking Points

Overview

- Lent is a period in which we look forward to re-telling and reliving the Easter story. We have a message of Good News to tell the world! But we as Christians need to be living it for it to be credible. Lent is, therefore, a time to prepare ourselves not only to hear again 'the old, old story of Jesus and His love,' but also to be the Good News in our families, communities and places of work.
- The church sets readings for Lent in the Lectionary. These readings are followed by many Christians throughout the world, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans and many others. The readings set for Ash Wednesday includes Isaiah 58:1-12 (which is the basis for this week's small group reflection), and Matt. 6:1-6, 16-21.

Jesus' Teaching About Acts of Piety

Matthew builds his Gospel around five major discourses or sections of Jesus' teaching. These are: the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5-8), the missionary discourse (ch. 10), the parables of the kingdom (13: 1-53), teaching about mutual accountability (ch. 18), and, in chs. 23-25, teaching about living in the end times. Jesus expects his disciples, including us today, "to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19).

Christians are to be the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and the light of the world (v14). We are to "let our light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to our Father in heaven" (v16). Shining is an act of witness such that people can see God in and through us.

But we are to be like the moon rather than the sun. The moon only reflects the light of the sun. It does not create light. We are to reflect the light and love of God. We are not to draw attention to ourselves, "to be seen by others"

but rather our acts of piety—alms-giving, praying and fasting—are to be done “in secret” (see Matt. 6:4, 6, 18) where God sees, and others do not. But our service for the thirsty, hungry, the sick, the stranger, those in prison and the naked, and others who are vulnerable and marginalised: these are to be done in public for God's greater glory.

Jesus' Teaching About Reward

Jesus taught that the disciples will be rewarded by God our Father; “who sees in secret” (v1, 4, 6, 18). This reward is not perishable, we are not to “store up for yourselves treasure on earth” (v19), but “in heaven.” Our hearts are to be focused towards heaven, towards the treasure of an eternal reward (vv. 19-21). The reward is intended to help protect our hearts, our souls, and to help motivate us towards living lives that reflect God's goodness and love.

Thus, we as Christians are called to:

- **Perform acts of public and social service** that people may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven
- **Proclaim the Good News in word and deed** as the salt of the earth and the light of the world
- **Protect our hearts** so that our Father who sees in secret will reward us

Week One:

“I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink...”

This week in Journey to Easter, we focus on thirst and clean water by following Naomi’s story in Kenya and looking at how Jesus responded to the woman at the well in John 4.

- Over two billion people don’t have access to safe drinking water in their homes. For millions, this means walking long distances to get water. The task is often the responsibility of women and girls, and they may spend up to six hours of their day fetching water.
- In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. Despite social norms that frowned upon Jews interacting with Samaritans, Jesus reaches out to the woman. His response to her is both kind and compassionate, showing that He cares for her and knows her heart intimately, despite the negative stigma at that time being a woman and a Samaritan.
- In this week’s small group resource, families and small groups will experience John 4 through the eyes of a young mother, Naomi, as she makes her daily strenuous journey to get water in Kenya. Naomi’s town received the gift of a well, giving clean water to 2,000 people in her community, helping Naomi’s family to be healthier and thrive.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week’s sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church’s weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video of Naomi’s story with your congregation.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and remind families and small groups to participate in this week’s story.

Invitation to Share:

Invite a member of your congregation or someone from the community to share how they are addressing the issue of thirst or clean water in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by the experience from Ash Wednesday.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points:

Overview

- The small groups have been exploring the global issue of water, considering the story of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-14) and the significance of physical and spiritual water.
- The Gospel reading in the Lectionary is Mark 1:9-15, the story of Jesus’ baptism as told by St. Mark. It is a short reading but introduces some important themes which have significance for on-going Christian living.
- It is a strongly Trinitarian reading, making explicit mention of Jesus, of God and of the Spirit. The Spirit descends like a dove and drives Jesus into the wilderness. God the Father speaks from heaven, and His Kingdom “has come near.” Jesus is God’s Beloved Son, waited on by angels and yet placed firmly in history: He is from Nazareth of Galilee, baptized by John in the Jordan. His public ministry starts after John was arrested.
- The central theme of Jesus’ ministry was proclaiming the Good News of God, that God’s Kingdom has come near.

A Baptism of Repentance for the Forgiveness of Sins

John the Baptist was a radical and popular prophet in the wilderness and people were enraptured by him. Many were baptized by him in the Jordan. They confessed their sins and were baptized as a sign of their repentance. Mark’s Gospels offers few details, but Matthew highlights John’s fierce criticism of the Pharisees (a “brood of vipers”) (Matt. 3:7-10), and Luke adds some of John’s teaching about appropriate behaviour of those baptized (Luke 3:10-15). The

emphasis is clear: there is a call to repent of ungodly behaviour, the promise of forgiveness of sins and an expectation to live a righteous life thereafter. But there is a stronger emphasis within all four Gospels: John points towards Jesus. He is more powerful than John (Mk. 1:7), who is unworthy to even undo Jesus' sandals. John's baptism is of water, but Jesus “will baptise you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 1:8).

You are My Beloved Son

Jesus was baptised by John. It was clearly a powerful experience for Him. All four Gospels record it: the Spirit descended upon Jesus and God spoke words of affirmation over Him. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the baptism being followed by the temptations of Jesus. This suggests that these experiences were foundational for Jesus' ministry: His own sense of vocation was publicly acknowledged, He received the Holy Spirit, and overcame temptation. Then He began His public ministry and teaching, deliverance, and healing.

Living Water

Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman of ‘a spring water welling up to eternal life.’ This is a reference to the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in the believer, who brings spiritual life into our souls, awakening us to the knowledge and experience of God's presence with us and approval of us, and a heart of compassion that leads to a desire to serve our fellow humans in Jesus' name. The Spirit is the source of spiritual vitality and power. Water symbolises both the washing away of sin (in baptism) and the need for the indwelling of the Spirit (‘a spring of water’) as we follow Christ in serving in the eternal Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God

Jesus picks up the theme of repentance in verse 15. He announces that the Kingdom of God has come near and the appropriate response from His listeners is to repent and to believe in the Good News of God. The rest of the Gospel illustrates what the Good News looks like: Jesus calls people to follow Him; He heals sickness and disease; He forgives sin; He casts out demons; He teaches people about how they are to respond to God and treat each other; He talks about the nature of the kingdom of God; He tells His disciples that they are to continue doing these things in His name after He has gone. But He also shows them what following God looks like—it will often include suffering and persecution. He experienced extreme suffering on the cross, and Mark spends about two thirds of his Gospel on the first two years of Jesus' ministry, and about one third on the last few weeks of Jesus' life. Clearly, for Mark, Holy Week and the resurrection were of vital significance.

Thus, we as Christians are called by God to live:

- **In obedience** to our baptismal commitments
- **By faith** in God and in the power of the Spirit
- **A life of service**, especially to those in most need of experiencing the Kingdom of God

Week Two: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...”

This week in Journey to Easter, we focus on hunger by following Reward’s story in Zambia and looking at how Jesus fed the hungry in John 6.

- Although the world produces more than enough food for everyone, 815 million people face hunger on a daily basis—nearly 1 in every 9 people. The added stress communities and families face from hunger puts children at a higher risk of experiencing violence, early marriage, exploitation and domestic abuse.
- In John 6, we see an incredible story where Jesus multiplies the gift from a small boy in the audience to feed a crowd of 5,000 people. Around the world, Jesus continues to use His people to feed the hungry, providing both food for today and for tomorrow.
- In this week’s small group resource, families and small groups are invited to experience John 6 through the eyes of Reward, a young Zambian boy whose family didn’t have enough food but experienced the generosity of his community through the gift of goats.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week’s sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church’s weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video of Reward’s story with your congregation.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and remind families and small groups to participate in this week’s story.

Invitation to Share:

Invite someone from the congregation or your community to share about how they are addressing the issue of hunger in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by Naomi’s story and the experience from the previous week.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points:

Overview

- The Lectionary readings focus on readings about God’s promises (Covenant), but also includes Psalm 22. It is from this psalm that Jesus quotes as He hung on the cross on the first Good Friday: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’
- The psalm is a reflection upon the reliability of God even in the midst of human suffering—in those times when God appears to be so far away that we may feel forsaken.
- Yet God remains faithful even in the hardest of times. Lent provides us with an opportunity in which we can consider not only our own suffering but also that of Christ Himself.
- In particular we can reflect Psalm 22:26 in which we are told that the poor shall eat and be satisfied.

Looking Back at God’s faithfulness

Read Psalm 22 and note how frequently the author, David, recalled past events which showed God’s faithfulness. This happened at a community level: the ‘ancestors’ trusted in God who delivered them; cried out to Him and were saved (v4). This remembrance is also personal: David reflects on his birth and infancy (vv9-10) and his adult life (v21b). Likewise, we can look back in our own lives to those occasions when God has delivered us or helped us. But we can also look back to the Cross, recalling Jesus’ words in v1, and reminding ourselves that God raised Jesus to life on Easter Sunday – and in the same way we can trust that God acted on our behalf on that first Easter, and will do so again.

Week Two: **“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...”**

Suffering is Not Minimised

David is very clear about his current situation: he feels forsaken by God (v1), he is not sleeping well (v2), he is despised and scorned by others (v6), mocked (v7), surrounded by bulls (v12) and dogs (v16), lying in the dust of death broken and shriveled and naked (vv14-18). Jesus was being quite deliberate when He quoted from this psalm, one that talks of His own ancestor's pain whilst He, Himself, was in agony on the Cross. This Lenten period is a time to reflect on the sufferings of Christ, betrayed and forsaken, wrongly accused, abandoned by His friends who deny Him and dying the death of a criminal by crucifixion.

This Lenten period is also a time to think of the sufferings of people throughout the world, and especially of those who are hungry.

Looking Forward to God's Deliverance

The psalm is, however, a psalm of hope. David looks forward with anticipation. He will tell of God's rescue (v22), praise God (v22), pay his vows (v25), he will serve God and live for Him (v29). David sees beyond his present suffering, as Christ saw beyond the Cross to the Resurrection, and we are called likewise. We are called to fear God and praise Him (v23), to worship Him (v27), serve Him (v30) and proclaim His deliverance (v30).

Serving in the Light of God's Goodness

In the same way that David was to serve God so is the Church to serve Him in today's world. In the same way that Jesus ministered to people's physical and spiritual hunger in the feeding of the five thousand in John 6 (which the small groups have considered this week), so is the Church to care for the physical and spiritual needs of our communities and the world. We can recall the faithfulness, and goodness of God, and above all, the love of God: He cared for the hungry crowd, He cares for us and He so loved the world that He gave His only son (John 3:16). This love should compel us to serve and care. It is a huge task—but dominion belongs to the Lord, and He rules over the nations (v28).

Thus, we as Christians are called to:

- **Remember** God's faithfulness in the past
- **Realise** the depth of suffering that exists (sometimes) in our lives, and (always) in the world
- **Retell** the story of Jesus through verbal proclamation and serving our communities, motivated by the love of God.

Week Three: “I was sick and you looked after me...”

This week in Journey to Easter, we focus on sickness and isolation by following Josephine’s story in Uganda and looking at how Jesus calls us to care for our neighbour in Luke 10.

- Getting sick is a feeling we have all experienced and known, but those who have malaria, HIV or other chronic illnesses often experience stigma or isolation from their communities, fearing for their safety on top of managing their physical pain. More than 36 million people around the world live with HIV, of which, 2 million are children.
- In Luke 10, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. The story is not just about caring for those closest to us, but also about crossing over societal barriers and seeing all people as our neighbours, deserving of care and love.
- In this week’s small group resource, we will experience the story of the Good Samaritan through the eyes of Josephine, a 63-year-old grandmother who has lost three daughters due to HIV and AIDS. She struggles to care for her 13 children and grandchildren, but Josephine’s local pastor saw their need and the local church has found ways to care for and support their family.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week’s sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church’s weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video of Josephine’s story with your congregation.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and remind families and small groups to participate in this week’s story.

Invitation to Share:

Invite a member of your congregation or someone from the community to share how they are addressing the issue of sickness, stigma and isolation in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by Reward’s story and the experience from the previous week.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points:

Overview

- The Lectionary offers the reading of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 as an Old Testament reading. This is a summary of the law as given by God to Moses.
- The law has been shortened to just two commandments of equal merit: love God and love your neighbour (see Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18, 34; and see also Mark 12:30-31 and Matt. 22:36-40).
- Fulfilling the law is first and foremost about love and not about rules and regulations. No-one can keep the law without love.
- Often in Jesus’ teaching love is shown in action—in this parable it is through showing mercy to the injured man. The same principle of showing mercy applies in all cases of human sickness and suffering.

Loving God

It can be easy to adopt an attitude that sees the Christian faith only about rules and regulations. We can become legalistic, strict and judgmental. Often such an approach to faith becomes excluding of people who, for whatever reason, cannot keep the rules that are imposed. God can be reduced to merely a judge. But Jesus called people back to a more positive approach—that of love. God is love, we are told throughout the Scriptures, and calls to us out of His love. He sent His only son so that, through faith in Him, we can have eternal life (see John 3:16). In fact, John’s Gospel and epistles are full of references to God’s love. Our response is to love God (1 John 4: 19), and, Jesus tells us, ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments’ (Jn. 14:15; see also 15: 9, 10, 12-17). We are to keep Jesus’

Week Three: “I was sick and you looked after me...”

commandments out of love, not fear, for perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

Loving Neighbour

In the parable we see that love is expressed in showing mercy to our neighbours, even our enemies. Jesus is quite clear: Go and do likewise, He told the expert in the law. As John puts it, the commandment we have from Him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also (1 John 4:21). In the main text for these Lent reflections, the story of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25, we see that what we do ‘to one of the least of these...you did it to me’ (Matt. 25: 40). Loving our neighbour in deed and word is the ultimate evidence of our love for God.

Loving Self

The expert in the law quoted from Leviticus, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ For some people this is extremely hard, for they have a low self-image. Life experiences may have taught them to believe that they are not lovable. People may have sinned against them, or they may have sinned themselves, leaving them with deep-rooted feelings of inadequacy or shame. But Jesus came preaching and demonstrating the Good News—that He loves all people. He was—and is—the friend of tax collectors and sinners. There is no-one He does not love; no-one for whom He did not die. Therefore part of the Christian journey is learning to love one’s self, to fully appreciate that we are lovable because God loves us—and failure to love ourselves is actually a failure to take God at His word. Coming to appreciate the depth of God’s love for us is truly life-changing, for when we know we are truly loved we become able to truly love God and our neighbours as ourselves.

Thus, as Christians we are called:

- **To love God** with all that we are and have, and flowing out of this love is a life of obedience and service.
- **To love our neighbours** as an expression of our love for God and our service, even when it costs us time, money or energy.
- **To love ourselves** as we are loved by God, leading to a deeper love of God and service in the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Week Four: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”

This week in Journey to Easter, we focus on the stranger and refugee by following Shaima’s journey from Syria to Jordan and looking at how Jesus encourages us to welcome the marginalised in Luke 14.

- The conflict in Syria has been ongoing for seven long years, stealing the childhood of millions of children, affecting their long-term physical and mental health. More than five million people have been forced to leave their homes and flee the country, the majority being women and children.
- In Luke 14, Jesus tells the parable of the great banquet, encouraging us to welcome “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind...”. Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus is often seen welcoming and caring for the stranger and those in the margins of society. God continues to use His Church today to welcome to the stranger and refugee.
- In this week’s small group resource, we will experience Luke 14 through the eyes of Shaima, a 12-year old girl. She and her family make the perilous trip from their home in Syria to a refugee camp in Jordan, and are slowly healing and hoping for a better future.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week’s sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church’s weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video of Shaima’s story with your congregation.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and remind families and small groups to participate in this week’s story.

Invitation to Share:

Invite a member of your congregation or someone from the community to share how they are addressing the refugee crisis in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by Josephine’s story and the experience from the previous week.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points:

Overview

- The Lectionary offers Psalm 107 as a reading. This psalm tells of “those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and the west, from the north and from the south” (107:2,3).
- The psalm tells the story of those fleeing from trouble and it is striking how relevant the psalm is when considered against the current background of mass migration, so much of it driven by war and violence.

Desert Wastes (Psalm 107:4)

The people struggle through desert wastes trying to find a safe inhabited town, but struggle with hunger and thirst, with loss of hope and loss of direction. This is a description of millions of refugees today.

Darkness and Gloom (Psalm 107:10)

Those trapped in prisons and chains, desperate to flee to freedom but bound by oppressive captors, their hearts bowed down with no-one to help.

This is a description of millions of Syrians, caught in the midst of a violent and bloody civil war, at the mercy of violent groups—which is singularly lacking.

Sick and Afflicted (Psalm 107:17)

The people face sickness, being near the gates of death, facing destruction, incapable of eating.

Week Four: ***“I was a stranger and you welcomed me...”***

Again, people in Syria, and elsewhere in areas of conflict, who face sickness lack the necessary medical facilities, facing destruction from illness or violence.

In Ships (Psalm 107:23)

Fleeing violence, facing the ravages of storms, tossed this way and that, at their wits end, with no other options. They seek a safe haven, but risk falling prey to human traffickers.

Yet again, the psalm tells the story of many hundreds of thousands of refugees who have sought to flee by boat, across the Mediterranean Sea into Europe. Many thousands die each year while attempting this crossing.

God Acts and Expects Us to Do the Same

The psalm tells of God’s activity and the people’s response. The story Jesus told reveals something of God’s heart for such people—and that He expects us to welcome the stranger, offering them hospitality and caring for their needs.

Thus, as Christians, God calls us

- **To be hospitable** to the least, the last and the lost.
- **To be welcoming** to the stranger, and especially the refugees who are among the most vulnerable people on earth.
- **To be His agents**, acting on His behalf, expressing His empathy for human suffering and pursuing peace and justice for all.

This week we focus on clothing and education by following Latha’s story in India and looking at how Jesus emphasised the importance of children in Matthew 18.

- Throughout history, children were often considered second-class citizens. Still, in many parts of the world, the needs of children are secondary to their parents. Each year, 1.7 billion children experience violence. Around the world, far too many children are not free to enjoy childhood. 58 million primary-school-age children are not enrolled in school; 53 percent of these are girls.
- In Matthew 18, Jesus reveals who the greatest in the Kingdom of God are: little children. He reminds us of our responsibility to clothe children with safety and love. By revealing His heart for the preciousness of children, Jesus encourages us that whoever welcomes a child in His name, also welcomes Him.
- In this week’s small group resource, we will step into a story of one of God’s precious children, 13-year-old Latha and her family who live in India. After her mother became sick, she was taken out of school and had to work in a matchstick factory, until the gift of a school uniform changed Latha’s life.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week’s sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church’s weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video of Latha’s story with your congregation.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and remind families and small groups to participate in this week’s story.

Invitation to Share:

Invite someone from the congregation or your community to share about how they are addressing the issue of clothing and access to education in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by Shaima’s story and the experience from the previous week.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points:

Overview

- In the small group study, we are considering the needs of children more broadly than simply clothing. For example, Latha’s story—about her need a school uniform—represents her need for an empowering education.
- Children (and young people) are among the world’s most vulnerable people and need special consideration, not least because Jesus held them in such high regard, telling His disciples to emulate them.
- However, despite the high regard in which Jesus held them, children have significant needs, and Jesus gives stern warnings about what might happen to us if we cause them to stumble.
- The Lectionary reading is advice to young people from Psalm 119.

A Friendly Welcome

Jesus welcomed children (see Matt. 19:13-15); so much so that in this story from Matthew (18:1-6) He places the child in the midst of the disciples and tells them to become like the child. The child is the model to which the disciples should aspire. The child has characteristics which Jesus hopes the disciples can imitate—it is a useful exercise to consider what such characteristics might be. Often people think of things like the child’s dependence upon parents (and, therefore, our need to depend upon God); the simple trust that children usually have in their parents (and so we should simply trust our Father) – what others can you think of?

We should welcome children, and try and meet their various needs, because Jesus says we should. But also because,

Week Five: “I needed clothes and you clothed me...”

in some mysterious way, welcoming children is equated by Jesus with welcoming Him! There is a spiritual discipline here, but one which we should practise—that of learning to see Christ in the child, in the thirsty, the hungry, the sick, the stranger, the unclothed and needy, and in the prisoner. There is an old saying (often attributed to a Church Father), that if we cannot find Christ in the beggar at the church door then we will not be able to find Him in the communion cup. This is a mystery but a wonderful one!

A Formative Word

The reading from the psalms consists of advice for young people—and older people too, of course. The focus is upon empowering young people to develop their spiritual life in a wholesome—‘pure’—way that will please God and benefit them. Children and young people have a responsibility for their own spiritual formation. Consider the actions that they (and we) are to take: to guard; seek; treasure, declare, delight, meditate and remember God's Word; watch. These are both attitudes of the mind and heart, and deliberate actions to do. Some of the words carry an emotional commitment (‘my whole heart,’ ‘delight’). Following Jesus is not simply an intellectual exercise, but engages the mind and heart. Of course, there is more to spiritual formation than this—but it is a good start!

A Fierce Warning

Jesus gives clear warnings about the fate that will befall those who cause ‘one of these little ones’ to stumble. It is salutatory to look at the parallel passages and their surrounding context (Mark 9: 34-37 and v 42; Luke 9: 46-48). Jesus’ teaching is fierce. He is protective of children, and his disciples more generally, and does not want any to stumble—and woe to those that cause them to stumble. Jesus’ expectation of his followers is very high, and his sternest warnings are kept for religious leaders who fail to care for those in their care. This applies not only to deliberately causing a ‘little one’ to stumble, but also by failing to protect and provide for those in our care.

Thus, as Christians, God calls us:

- **To show dignity and care** to children, by providing for their needs and upholding their rights.
- **To share His formative word** with children and each other.
- **To acknowledge His fierce warnings** and live our lives appropriately, by taking on our responsibility to protect children from harm.

Week Six: **“I was in prison and you came to visit me...”**

This week in Journey to Easter, we focus on slavery and child labour by following Joel’s story in Peru and looking at how Jesus declares freedom for the captive in Luke 4.

- It is hard to imagine that slavery still exists today, but around the world, more than 85 million children are enslaved. Where poverty is widespread, children are especially at risk of being forced into labour, having to work to feed themselves or their families. There are an estimated 152 million child labourers worldwide.
- In Luke 4, Jesus stands up in the synagogue in Nazareth, reading from the writings of Isaiah: “He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners...”. Through the Scriptures and Jesus’ life and words, we see God’s desire for justice and the ways He uses His people to bring freedom.
- In this week’s small group resource, families and small groups are invited to experience the story of Joel, a boy in Peru who was forced to work since the young age of three. Through child sponsorship, Joel’s family and community received support allowing him to focus on school, and ultimately become an advocate for the rights of other children.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week’s sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church’s weekly bulletin.
- Share the short video of Joel’s story with your congregation.
- After the video, use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer and remind families and small groups to participate in this week’s story.

Invitation to Share:

Invite a member of your congregation or someone from the community to share how they are addressing the issue of slavery and child labour in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by Latha’s story and the experience from the previous week.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points:

Overview

- In this final week of Lent we look at those in prison and the oppressed, especially considering Joel, a child in Peru in forced labour.
- Military occupation, poor socio-economic contexts and corrupt or inept political leadership all contribute to oppressive conditions. The reading from the psalm catches a little of what people caught up in such situations may experience.
- The solution, however, can never be only changing the external situation: ultimately it is in trusting God that we can find freedom from all oppression, including the oppression of sin, shame and guilt. However, changing the external situation can also lead to people finding faith in Jesus.
- The reading from the Lectionary offers an insight into how people, caught up in oppressive situations, might feel.

Prison and Oppression

In Matthew 25:36 Jesus had real prisoners in mind, but the same principles apply whether we are thinking of criminals, debtors, addicts, or simply those trapped in some form of sin; likewise, the same principles apply to those in oppressive contexts. According to what is sometimes called the ‘Jesus Manifesto’ in Luke 4, Jesus is as concerned for such people as He is about anyone else. Their life choices may well have been wrong, and such people may also have been the victims of other people’s wrongdoing—but Jesus loves them even so. He longs that they might be free from

Week Six: **“I was in prison and you came to visit me...”**

the chains of oppression and sin. In Joel's case this is also true. He is a victim of his circumstances but Jesus does not want those circumstances to continue. He longs for freedom for all: freedom from oppression, addiction, sin etc. The psalmist also longs for freedom from oppression and suffering: consider the phrases he uses in describing his context and how he feels. Yet the psalmist has hope in God. How can we, as Christians, bring genuine hope to people?

Poverty and Opportunity

Poverty and oppression often have a close association. Poor people usually are the ones who suffer most in terms of oppression and limited life choices. Throughout His ministry Jesus showed a bias to the poor – not to the exclusion of the wealthier people, but a preference for the least, the last and the lost. He spent time with them; talked with them; fed them; taught them; healed them; delivered them from demons, etc. He taught his disciples to do the same. His teaching is as relevant today as it was then. The existence of the poor offers opportunity for the Christian community to continue Jesus' work of working for the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Proclamation and Obedience

The ministry of Jesus is replete with stories and examples of Jesus preaching and teaching, and caring for the sick, hungry, and downtrodden. Jesus referred to His work as ushering in the Kingdom of God. He calls us to do the same. In the book of Acts and in the various New Testament letters we see the early church following Jesus' command to 'go and do likewise'. We can fall into two equal and opposite errors. Some Christians emphasise proclamation above all else: our ministry, they say, is to save souls. But that is only a part of the Good News. On the other hand some Christians are committed to the social dimensions of the Gospel—but again that is only part of the Gospel. The passage from Luke highlights both dimensions: proclamation and social engagement with people and society.

The challenge for us, as individual Christians as well as through our congregations and wider Churches, is how do we share the Good News in our words and through our works.

Thus, as Christians, God calls us:

- **To work with prisoners and the oppressed.**
- **To work to alleviate poverty** and take the opportunities such contexts present us with, and
- **To proclaim the Good News** and obey Jesus in working with and for the least, the last and the lost.

This week we celebrate the Resurrection on Easter Sunday!

- The small group resource concludes this week by celebrating new life and looking at the story of the Resurrection. In Luke 24, we see how the disciples are changed by the Resurrection and how this began the spread of the Church.
- This week, we ask individuals, small groups and churches to consider the impact in their lives over the past six weeks and how that change will continue moving forward.

Below are ways you can engage this with your congregation, whether it be by setting aside a few minutes of your worship service or through your message in this week's sermon:

The 2-Minute Take: find resources at www.bit.ly/journeytoeaster-toolkit

- Print out and include the insert with your church's weekly bulletin.
- Use the powerpoint slide to lead your congregation in prayer.

Invitation to Share:

Invite a member of your congregation or someone from the community to share how they are caring for "the least of these" in your local community or on a global scale. Invite a member of your congregation to share how they were impacted by Joel's story and the experience from the previous week.

Sermon Notes & Talking Points

Overview

- The small groups' first reflection was based on Isaiah 58:6-11, a reading about the type of fast that God approves. A Lectionary passage from Easter Sunday is also from Isaiah, but this time about a feast.
- Isaiah is looking forwards with hope towards the ultimate fulfilment of God's plan for this world, but the passage is set against a background of war and destruction.
- The text should be read in the context of Isaiah 25:1-10.
- This week the small groups have looked at Luke 24:13-49, also a Lectionary reading for Easter Sunday.
- Both texts have some common themes: they reflect back at what God has done and then look forwards to what God will do in the future; food plays an important role; Jerusalem is the setting; other nations are mentioned.

What God Did

The Isaiah text mentions the 'wonderful things' God has done (Is. 25:1), including the stilling of 'the song of the ruthless [nations]' (v3, 5). The events in the Gospel reading are the immediate events of the past few days—of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus, and the mysterious events of Easter morning (Luke 24:18-24). But in both cases the events of the past show God's faithfulness (Is. 25:1) and God's plan which is outlined 'in Moses and all the prophets' (Luke 24:27), including the necessity of the Messiah's suffering (Luke 24:26). History—our personal stories and the biblical narrative—shows evidence of God's 'faithful and sure' plans, even in the midst of the suffering and violence we see in the world.

What God Will Do

Isaiah looks forward to God's feast, sometimes called The Messianic Banquet. It is an image of God's ultimate intention for the world, one in which God will destroy 'the shroud that is cast over all peoples,' when 'death is swallowed up forever,' and 'God will wipe away the tears from all faces' (Is. 25:7, 8; see also Rev. 21:1-4, esp. v4). Both Isaiah and Jesus shared this vision of God's ultimate purpose, which John also saw in his Revelations. There will indeed be an end to suffering, to violence, to thirst, hunger, sickness, loneliness, naked and need, crime and punishment—and indeed, an end to death itself!

Our Task in God's Plan

But in the meantime, God has appointed a task to His followers. Jesus made this clear (Luke 24: 47-49). We have been exploring some of this in the small groups and these sermon ideas—ways in which we, as followers of Jesus, can be engaged with God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in spreading the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The only question remains: *will you take up your part in God's plan? Will you, through word and service, participate in God's plan?*

World Vision 

Journey to
Easter

Stories of Hope for Lent

**Thank you for joining us
on this Journey to Easter!**

We hope your Lenten and Easter
seasons have been blessed
through this experience.



It takes a world
to end violence against children