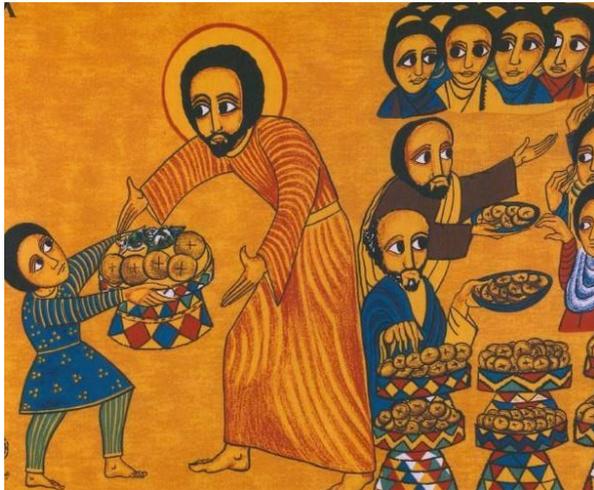


enough is enough

living generously in a world of need and plenty



Scene X of the Misereor "Hunger Cloth" by Alemayehu Bizuneh
from "Imaging the Word" (United Church Press)

Lent 2020

St Mark's Broomhill and Broomhall
and the Sheffield Manor Parish

To download a copy please visit
<https://stmarkssheffield.co.uk/whats-on/lent-course-2020/>

Introduction

This course is designed to help us think about what it means to live lives characterised by generosity and giving. We will do this by looking at and thinking about some people whom we meet in the Bible – a poor widow and profligate friend; a despised outsider who defies conventions; a vertically challenged tax collector; a widow and her daughter in law, returning economic migrants; a young woman responding to the most extraordinary calling from God.

Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan writer, says: You and I don't "deserve" anything, *anything*. It's *all* a gift. But until we begin to live in the kingdom of God instead of the kingdoms of this world, we [will] think ... exactly like the world. We like the world of seemingly logical equations. Basically, to understand the Gospel in its purity and in its transformative power, *we have to stop counting, measuring, and weighing*. We have to stop saying "I deserve" and deciding who does not deserve. None of us "deserve"! Can we do that? It's pretty hard ... unless we've experienced infinite mercy and realize that *it's all a gift*.

These five sessions have been written by different members of our churches, and are therefore all slightly different in style. One thing, however, that is common to them all is that they will allow us to read the Bible in different ways, to get inside the stories in scripture, in imaginative, prayerful, questioning ways. We hope this will appeal to and excite you.

Session One

Generous people: giving from the heart

In this session we will be looking at the generosity of two people we meet in the gospel account.

They are quite different.

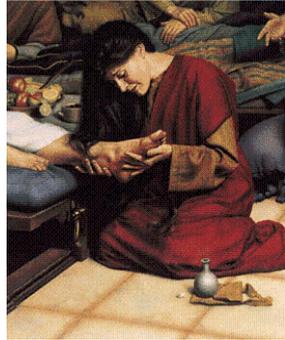


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Each session starts with a short time of prayer

A *The widow and her mite.*

Read Luke 21. 1-4

Background

The Temple was central to Jewish worship, despite the rise of the local synagogue (and males over the age of 20 were required to pay the temple tax towards its upkeep). Jesus has a lot to say about the temple, and quite a lot of action centres on it one way and another. This incident plays out against all this. Luke has told us that Jesus has been teaching in the Temple (chapter 20), and immediately before this little episode he has been warning people off the scribes who 'love to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers.' Then he looks up...

For discussion

- How do you feel when you read this story?
- How does the widow's generosity impact on ours?
- What do we think is enough for us to live on? And how does our answer to that affect how much we are willing to give?

B The woman with the alabaster jar of ointment.

Read John 12. 1-8

Background.

There are actually entirely different accounts of this incident in the gospels. As well as in our text for this session, there is also Luke 7. 36-50; Mark 14. 3-9; Matthew 26.6-13.

In John, Mark and Matthew this happens at Bethany (though in different houses) during the lead up to the passion. Only John and Luke mention the extravagant gesture of the woman wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. And only John names her – Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus.

In John's account, the extraordinary thing is that Mary anointed Jesus' *feet*. The normal action would have been to anoint his head. What does Jesus make of this? What do we make of it? Is the action frivolous, luxurious, extravagant or prophetic?

John alone names Judas as the person who makes the remark about waste, linking it to his dodgy dealings with the common purse. Mark and Matthew don't name anyone – just those standing around, or the disciples (doubtless aghast). Luke doesn't have any of this side of things in his narrative.

In Luke the incident occurs at a much earlier point in Jesus' ministry, in the house of a Pharisee called Simon. Here the emphasis is much more on hospitality and forgiveness. Though we have to avoid the too easy identification of Luke's woman with Mary Magdalene. There is no textual evidence for this, but it has become a common identification within Christianity, part and parcel of the general tendency to cast women either as the Virgin Mary or as prostitutes, in itself something we ought to be resisting and countering.

The line about the poor, especially when taken in isolation, can sound somewhat callous, or become an excuse for inaction. But read within the context of the whole of John's narrative, it takes on a different meaning: the impending *absence* of Jesus is stressed (though tempered by the promise of the Paraclete) repeatedly in the next few chapters – the conversations we call the Farewell Discourses. This impermanence is here contrasted with the continual presence of the poor, not as a statement of uncaring social attitudes, but of potentially devastating fact.

*

In order to enter into this story, we will use an imaginative approach.

A member of the group reads the passage out loud slowly.

Then the facilitator asks the following questions, allowing at least a minute between each one.

Where are you in this scene?

What does that suggest about you?

What is your reaction to Mary's action?

What does that suggest about you?

What is your reaction to what Jesus says?

What does that suggest about you?

What difference has entering into the scene so vividly made to you?

How will that difference affect your behaviour?

At the end, you are invited to share in groups of three

- How did you feel about studying the bible in this way?
- What got to you most sharply?
- How has this story led you to think of ways in which your attitudes or actions might change?

Then you are invited to share the final response with the rest of the group – this should be done anonymously.

What have you learned about generosity?

Finally

What are you going to take away from this session?

Closing worship.



Sieger Köder, Il figliol prodigo

Session Two

Generosity in giving and receiving

This session extends our theme of generosity as we are invited to consider generosity in receiving as well as giving; that is, truly mirroring the economy of God. We are going to consider two parables, and Luke's framing of them, to help us to explore this theme.

Each session starts with a short time of prayer

Introduction

Why use parables? Parables invite engagement and questions; they offer many layers of meaning and potential interpretations. The two we are looking at today offer perspectives on giving and receiving in different ways and contexts.

As we begin, we might want to note that in both chapters 14 and 15, Luke portrays Jesus as engaging in conversation with representatives of the Law, Pharisees and Scribes, and being overheard by others – dinner guests in chapter 14 and tax collectors and sinners in chapter 15. They provide the framework for both stories and it's good to remember that they too are listening.

First reading: Luke 15.1-2, 11-end.

We will read this as a script for several voices. Copies will be available at the session.

There are many names for this parable, most commonly known as 'The Parable of the Prodigal Son'; it is also titled 'The Father and His Two Sons' and 'The Lost Son', to name but two more

examples. These variations reflect the changing focus in the story itself and the potential for multiple interpretations. We all bring our own experiences and past understanding of this story as we hear it again together today.

Comment

This parable is often interpreted as being a relatively straightforward 'example parable', with the father figure, representing God, extending forgiveness to the younger son, a repentant sinner. However it is a moot point as to whether the younger son is really penitent or simply being astute, knowing he can always come home. The father, meanwhile, could also be regarded as 'prodigal' because he divides up the family's wealth - and he does seem uncaring in the way he treats the older brother. The latter is often seen to represent the judgemental Pharisees, but note how his complaint would seem to be justified. So perhaps this is a much more complex story of family relationships than it is often presented.

For discussion

- Which character(s) do you most identify with in this parable, if any?
- If this is a familiar story to you, have you always identified with the same character, or has it varied? How and why might you have come to those understandings?
- This parable is the last in a set of three, following two others about people who have lost something - a sheep and a coin respectively. Who or what might have been lost in this story – and who might have done the losing?
- Conversely, who in this story has been given something by another - and what did they receive?
- Have you ever experienced anything like this? How does that affect your response, and what you can receive today?

Second reading: Luke 14. 15-24

We will again read this as a dramatized script.

Comment

In chapter 14 Luke has created a scenario around a meal to connect together various episodes to do with status, theme and honour, telling us something about the rules of giving in certain situations or communities. It seems that people maintained social status through reciprocal acts of hospitality towards people of equal standing and wealth – very much a *quid pro quo* to build relationships and networks. *Plus ça change...*

After being refused by his peers, the master in the parable appears to reject the social class to which he has belonged - and also the system in which he was complicit - by extending invitations to those who would never be able to repay him.

For discussion

- Which character(s) do you most identify with in this parable, if any?
- If this is a familiar story to you, have you always identified with the same character, or has it varied. How and why might you have come to those understandings?
- This parable is also the last in a set of three, following two others about humility and hospitality in social settings. The dynamics of giving and receiving are more obvious than in the parable of the lost son, however. Nevertheless it is still worth asking who in this story has been given something by another - and what did they receive?
- Have you ever experienced anything like this? How does that affect your response, and what can you receive today?

A contemporary scenario

Jim is a 24 year-old graduate, employed as a trainee professional for the past three years. He moved to a new city to find this job. He has found a welcoming church and has joined a group for those in their twenties and thirties, run by the curate and a couple in their fifties, Dave and Melanie. As he has little financial help from family he is living in a shared house, paying a market rate for his room. He has enough from his monthly salary to cover his rent, his food and energy bills, and his travel costs, but he is unlikely to be able to save much in the near future. It will be a few years before he has any chance of earning enough to consider purchasing his own property, or even rent his own flat, and he is resigned to sharing a house with 3 others in order to afford to stay solvent. He has a student loan debt, but he is not earning enough to have to make any repayments yet – and again that may be a few years down the line.

Since he joined to church he has been invited to Dave and Melanie's house for Sunday lunch on a few occasions; they are a wealthy couple who offer hospitality to a number of new people in the church. Jim has welcomed this hospitality, but has started to feel a little guilty. He feels a sense of obligation to return the hospitality in some way, but he feels stymied. He has not got the facilities to do so, and he cannot afford to take anyone out for a meal at a restaurant.

Dave and Melanie have invited Jim to lunch again next week.

For discussion

- How might we interpret Dave and Melanie's actions?
- Where does Jim's guilt come from?
- How might he respond to the latest invitation?
- Do you recognise this scenario - have you ever experienced anything like this?
- How did it make you feel, and what did you do?
- What does this scenario tell us anything about the nature of giving and receiving in relationship to others?

In his blog Richard Rohr contrasts two economies or worldviews when he writes:

The first economy is capitalism, which is based on quid pro quo, reward and punishment thinking, and a retributive notion of justice. This much service or this much product requires this much payment or this much reward. It soon becomes the entire frame for all of life, our fundamental relationships... basic self-image .. and a faulty foundation for our relationship with God. This system of exchange seems reasonable to almost everybody today. And if we're honest, it makes sense to us, too. It just seems fair. The only trouble is, Jesus doesn't believe it at all, and he's supposed to be our spiritual teacher. This might just be at the heart of what we mean by real conversion to the Gospel worldview, although few seem to have recognized this.

What Jesus presents., I'm going to call a gift economy. The only way we can do the great turnaround and understand this is if we've lived through at least one experience of being given to without earning. It's called forgiveness, unconditional love, and mercy. If we've never experienced unearned, undeserved love, we will stay in the capitalist worldview.

You and I don't "deserve" anything, anything. It's all a gift. But until we begin to live in the kingdom of God instead of the kingdoms of this world, we think, as most Christians do, exactly like the world. We like the world of seemingly logical equations. Basically, to understand the Gospel in its purity and in its transformative power, we have to stop counting, measuring, and weighing. We have to stop saying "I deserve" and deciding who does not deserve. None of us "deserve"! Can we do that? It's pretty hard . . . unless we've experienced infinite mercy and realize that it's all a gift.

Does this change your reading of the parables and the contemporary scenario in any way?

To consider as we close

Richard Rohr also writes

As long as we operate inside any scarcity model, there will never be enough God or grace to go around. Jesus came to undo our notions of scarcity and tip us over into a worldview of absolute abundance. The Gospel reveals a divine world of infinity, a worldview of enough and more than enough. The Christian word for this undeserved abundance is "grace." It is a major mental and heart conversion to move from a scarcity model to an abundance model and to live with an attitude of gratitude.

Finally

What are you going to take away from this session?

Closing worship

Session Three

Confronting the challenge of generosity: re-setting priorities

In this session we will be exploring the meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus

Each session starts with a short time of prayer.

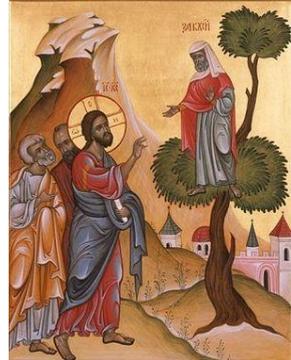


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Introduction

We know very little about Zacchaeus. He's not mentioned anywhere else in the whole New Testament - just in this passage in Luke's Gospel. All we know is that he was very short in stature, curious to see what was going on when Jesus was passing through Jericho, and a chief tax collector who was extremely unpopular with the general public.

However, his unpopularity went far beyond that of the stereotypical Inland Revenue bureaucrat.

Tax collectors worked on behalf of the hated occupying power – the Roman government. They made their money by charging extortionate rates over and above the necessary and were seen as traitors to their faith and community. They were despised as the worst sort of “sinner” in the eyes of good, decent, law-abiding Jews.

Yet Zacchaeus the outcast finds that his curiosity leads to a life-changing encounter with Jesus who accepts him as he is. As a response, he completely re-assesses his priorities and changes his behaviour.

The Zacchaeus story in context

The encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus takes place within the context of Jesus' and his disciples' final journey to Jerusalem, to which 15 of the 24 chapters in Luke's gospel are devoted. From the start Jesus makes it clear that this will be the climax of his mission, and that it will involve opposition and sacrifice. The whole narrative consists of teaching, encounters and incidents modelling what God's kingdom is about, and the demands of embodying it not just for himself but for his followers on the journey too.

All of the themes above run throughout the narrative, and several relate to the story of Zacchaeus.

- Zacchaeus is a despised outsider with no particular need expressed for Jesus ministry. He's just nosy (and short). Jesus notices his nosiness and immediately treats him as an insider, to the hostility of the respectable citizens of Jericho.
- Zacchaeus is clearly so delighted at being asked to host him and touched by this unexpected generosity of spirit that he has some sort of a lightbulb moment that challenges not just how he's been behaving but his whole attitude to his wealth.
- Aside from making good his murky financial past, he now sees his possessions as gifts for sharing. Generosity experienced breeds generosity outpoured and, adding insult to injury to the good and righteous citizens of Jericho, Jesus pronounces Zacchaeus to be a true descendant of Abraham.

We shall consider the passage in depth, share reflections, and explore what the passage might say to us in terms of how we prioritise and make decisions about giving, both personally and collectively as a church, including the challenges and limits of the call to generosity.

Exploring the passage itself (Luke 19. 1-10)

There will be a few minutes for the group to read through the passage silently, then aloud.

- Anything particularly striking / remarkable / odd?
- Where do you see generosity being offered?
- How do you think Zacchaeus felt when Jesus invited himself to his home?
- What values fed Zacchaeus' actions before and after his encounter?
- What do you think prompted Zacchaeus' change of direction / priorities?
- What challenges might Zacchaeus have faced after Jesus had left for Jerusalem?

Exploring the meaning / resonance with our experience

- Do you identify with anyone(s) in the story, or anything in any part of it?
- Have you ever received generosity (of any sort) that has challenged or changed your attitudes and / or actions? Or made you sit up and think, or want to do something different or differently?
- Generosity offered as a response to generosity received – what are the limits?
- Is generosity about giving or sharing?
- What challenges do we face as individuals in expressing the level of generosity demonstrated in this passage?
- Is the sort of radical change in priorities that Zacchaeus undertook remotely practical for us or compatible with our understanding of a reasonable approach to giving?

Wider implications for ourselves and society

- As individuals, what do we understand by “giving”? What aspects of life does it cover?
- What would we include in a strategy for generous giving as a church?
- How do we already prioritise and decide on what and how we give – both individually and collectively as a church?
- Do you see any parallels in society today with the values and re-prioritising seen in this encounter?
- What systems / values / attitudes / actions in society are at variance with those expressed in this passage?
- What role might we have as Christians individually & collectively in influencing change?

In conclusion:

- Has the Zacchaeus story changed your understanding of generosity as the well-spring of giving?
- Has our understanding of giving as a whole changed, been challenged, or reinforced?
- Any attitudes or actions you might want to question / change?

Finally

What are you going to take away from this session?

Closing worship.



Untitled (Ruth & Naomi) by Adi Nes

Session Four

Generous Giving: Hospitality

In this session we will be exploring hospitality as a form of giving generously in the book of Ruth.

Each session starts with a short time of prayer.

Introduction – the original liturgical setting

In the Jewish tradition, the book of Ruth is read in its entirety annually on the holiday of Shavot (Pentecost) alongside Exodus 19 and 20 when Moses encounters YHWH on top of Mount Sinai and receives the 10 commandments.

This liturgical setting is important. The Exodus reading is magnificent, full of epic change, with a landscape to match. It is a cacophony of noise and the voice of God. In the book of Ruth, it's a very different environment and Ruth is unusual for many reasons. There is no overt theology or doctrine, and God isn't an active *character* (as God often is in the Hebrew Bible). It does not promote religious ritual or law, and its main characters are women.

This story is told by women which carries an important message of national wellbeing and survival into an ordinary domestic setting. It expresses an intense silence about the death of men and the way nationalism impacts upon women who are caught up in war. There is no doubt that women found

ways to speak their messages of truth, through coded language and words, deception, and as in Ruth, through silence (or a combination of all three). Indeed, something of this can be seen early in Exodus where 'it is not only the midwives, but all the women in Exodus who shrewdly defy the Pharaoh's edict and lay the groundwork for the liberation of the people of Israel' (Renita Weems).

The liturgical setting itself 'connects the struggles of ordinary people and their lives into the great ground-shaking events of Sinai. It thus preserves the significance of the common experience of regular people in the face of great world-making events and dares us to find ways of making personal what could otherwise be overwhelming.' (Corrymeela, 2018)

In the text, we see kindness and hospitality from an unlikely source, Boaz, and the transformation of life when we find a secure home. The community in Ruth is also transformed as it overcomes its suspicion towards a stranger from Moab. In doing so, the community reaches a new understanding of itself and welcomes someone into kinship who would otherwise be excluded.

The book of Ruth enables us to look at generous giving through hospitality in a new light, for it challenges us to something else, something better.

Take a moment to think about all this background and talk to someone else in the group about how you think it affects the way we shall listen to the story of Ruth and Naomi.

How we will read the text

In order to explore how this text can help us when looking at different kinds of generous giving, we will use a more detailed version of Ignatian imaginative prayer that was first used as a method of reading in week one. This allows us to explore our feelings towards the text through prayer, listening to parts and words we may not have come across before alongside encountering God through storytelling. We will listen to parts of chapters two and three, but first here is a brief summary of the first chapter:

Naomi loses both her sons and husband whilst in the land of Moab and decides to return home to Bethlehem and her own people. Her two daughters-in-law seek to return with her, but they are Moabites, why would they want to move to a foreign country? One, Orpah, decides to return home, but Ruth insists on continuing with Naomi...

Imaginative Exploration of the text of Ruth chapters 2 and 3

The story is read aloud 3 times. Before each reading, you will be told what to look out for as you listen. Following the last reading, there will be several minutes of silence allowing you to continue in the story in your minds, hearts, and spirits - until the leader ends the exercise with "Amen." Then we will share with each other what happened as we engaged imaginatively and prayerfully with the story.

First reading instructions

Listen to the story for the broad strokes:

- where and when does it take place
- who is there
- what happens?

Read through the passage slowly. Pause 1-2 minutes.

Second reading instructions

Listen for more details:

- who are the major players?
- who else is there?
- what are they doing?
- how do they interact?
- what is the setting like?
- what time of day is it?
- what is the mood, the atmosphere?

Read the passage slowly. Pause 1-2 minutes.

Third reading instructions

Notice more detail and begin to feel yourself in that place, in that story.

- who are you or what are you? You may be an inanimate object, an animal, part of the scenery; you may be a person or thing that is not specially mentioned in the printed story, but that you sense as you hear it read.
- what are you doing, thinking, feeling or what is being done to or with you if you are inanimate?
- what are the sounds, the smells, and the other details about the location that you notice?
- what are the emotions and the undertones that you notice?

Read the passage slowly.

When the third reading ends, let the story continue to unfold within you, in your imagination, mind and heart, as the person/object you are, until you hear the leader say “Amen” and ask you to slowly leave where you’ve been and return to this time and place.

Sharing

Share in twos and threes what happened for you in the story - who or what you were and what happened and how you felt. It may be not much of anything, it may seem strange or silly, it may be quite dramatic or powerful for you. Whatever happens is what you say – there is no right and no wrong answer.

Then briefly share some of the highlights with the rest of the group.

For discussion

- How does it feel to enter into prayer and biblical study in this way?
- Have there been times when being on the receiving end of hospitality has been transformative? What in particular triggered that sense of transformation?
- What have you learned about hospitality and generosity through this story?
- How do you feel about the actions of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz?
- Has this session encouraged you to adopt different behaviour regarding generosity and hospitality?

Finally

What are you going to take away from this session?

Closing worship.

Session Five

Living for God and Neighbour

In this session we will be exploring Mary's speaking out for God's justice, filling the hungry with good things, sending the rich away empty.



Ben Wildflower

Each session starts with a short time of prayer.

Mary (I) (an excerpt)

Luke 1:26-38

The angel speaks to Mary:

I knew what was being asked.
I said, 'Why me?'
God shrugged.
I had two questions.
 'Will they hate me?'
 'Will they hate the child?'
God wept. I stared.
'Will you do it?' she asked.
I gave the answer I knew I'd regret.

Mary (II)

Luke 1:46 – 55

And on that day when I sang – that day I met Elisabeth –
I sang of how my body was full of God,
and my spirit rejoiced in the Spirit and all her works,
for she was with me in my poverty and in my riches.

And I sang of how, even if I am nothing to the power-brokers,
if to them I am just a woman, just a child,
the Wild Justice of God had blessed me and holy is her name.

And I sang, and I sang, of her mercy – of how her mercy
will be lavished on those who dare
to rejoice in her awesome love,
who dare to oppose the mighty and greedy,
from everlasting to everlasting.

For she has shown the courage of women
and the toughness of mothers
and scattered the arrogant and overbearing.
She has upturned the thrones of the powerful
and exalted the nobodies;
she has fed the starving
and has shown her fury towards the mean and selfish.
She has remembered her people who walked in the desert,
she has remembered our ancestors,
according to her promises to Sarah and Hagar,
Ruth and Naomi, Deborah and Jael
and their descendants for ever.

From 'A Star-filled Grace' by Rachel Mann (adapted)

Comment

Virgin Mother, Second Eve, Theotokos, Queen of Heaven, Woman of Valour, Mater Dolorosa, Mediatrix, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mariyam, Black Madonna, Mary of Nazareth: all of these portrayals and more have been applied to Mary over the centuries. Yet, despite Mary's considerable presence in the history of interpretation, she plays a relatively small part in the New Testament itself. Of all the accounts, Luke's infancy narrative is most often mined for information about Mary, since Luke presents the story from Mary's point of view and includes details such as Mary's Song, known in tradition as the Magnificat.

There is a plethora of portraits in Mary's long interpretative history: she is virgin and mother, warrior and weeper, mediator and model, oppressor and oppressed. She is cast as both black and white, rich and poor, heroic and humble, powerful and powerless. Medieval theologians preached on God's decision to indwell in Mary: her consent to this decision made the incarnation, and therefore redemption, possible. We are familiar with images of Mary, struck with grief at the death of her son.

Both feminist and liberation theologians have 'reclaimed' her: Mary, urged by God to imagine a new way to live. The angel is explicit; it is Mary's grace that has attracted God's attention. And what is this grace? It is what Luke shows us in her conversation and her actions – courage, boldness, grit, ringing convictions about justice. Grief foreshadowed?

And yet a 'yes' ...

Many women in biblical stories appear in domestic settings. But with Mary the stories we hear tell of adventure, of letting go, travelling on journeys that involve an element of danger. Her 'Song', delivered fairly publicly, reads like a political manifesto. She is the subject, not the object, of her own life. She said 'yes'

to God, in the knowledge that she was setting in motion a train of events that might mean shame, rejection, isolation, and possibly even stoning, as well as hurt to those she loved. Mary, wanted by God, according to the angel, for her bold, independent, adventurous spirit, decides to bear a holy child – for a bold agenda: to bring the mighty down from their thrones; to fill the hungry with good things.

What is her message to us today?

How we will read the text.

We will be using the approach of Lectio Divina ('Holy Reading') – *reading, meditating (or pondering), praying, contemplating, action.*

The goal of lectio divina is, quite simply, prayer. The primary purpose of the text is not Bible study, but for the text to become transparent, to give way to the loving embrace of the God who originally inspired and who is present, waiting, within the text. It is a method which can be used for non-Biblical texts, too. It is a contemplative practice, calling us to stillness. But we shall also be using it as a starting point for discussion and response.

A candle will be lit as a focal point, and everyone will be given a note card and pen.

Reading

Voice 1 will read the texts out aloud – slowly and carefully. Those listening may wish to close their eyes; sit comfortably but attentively.

The text is seen, heard, and even in a sense 'tasted' as words are formed on tongue and lips. Allowing you to be touched, to be formed by it. Encouraging us to take in a word or verse, to repeat it inwardly.

This is followed by a pause/silence – about 2 mins.

Meditating or Pondering

Voice 2 will read the texts out aloud – slowly and carefully.
Followed by a 2 minute pause/silence.

When we ponder the word, we also read it with our life's experience and let our life's experience be read by it in turn. This will take us to the core of our being. The word touches our heart, and we let our hearts go out in love.

- What word or phrase stands out for you?
You may want to note this down and place your card next to the candle, saying the word/phrase out aloud.

Allow the word of God to descend from your head to your heart.

Praying leading to Contemplation

Voice 3 will read the texts out aloud – slowly and carefully.

In peace and confidence, we let ourselves be drawn into the stillness – the eloquent silence of contemplation: *the simple gaze of love towards Jesus, 'pure contemplation lies in receiving' (St John of the Cross).*

Action – Areas for sharing and discussion

Please only share what you feel able to.

- Listen to the heart of stillness: do you have a sense that God will inspire you with what God wants you to do?
- What does “surrender to God's will” mean to you? Is this something you ever think or pray about? What is your response to the word ‘surrender’ – what feelings does this word evoke?

- How does Mary's witness and Wild Justice resonate with you, your life, your choices?
- Can you recount an experience of 'giving unconditionally'? What did this feel like?

These questions are reflection and discussion starters from the Church Urban Fund's 'Jesus Money Set': there are no right or wrong answers:

- When you were growing up, what did you learn about giving money?
- Does having less money make you closer to God or trust God more?
- Does money make you feel more secure?
- How often do you worry about money?
- What was the best money you have ever spent (and the worst)?
- What does our spending and saving say about our faith in God and our priorities?
- When does saving become hoarding?
- When was the last time you were challenged about how much you give?

Finally

Two questions

- What are you going to take away from this session?
- What are you going to take away from the whole experience of these sessions?

Closing worship.

Opening and closing prayer/worship

Opening

O God,
you have made us creatures of this earth,
hungry and thirsty and needy,
that you might satisfy all our longings
with your abundant love.
Satisfy the hunger of our bodies
for food and shelter, health and human touch.
Satisfy the hunger of our spirits
for dignity and freedom
in giving and receiving.
Satisfy the hunger of our minds
to understand our world,
the reasons for its pain,
the ways we are connected to each other.
Satisfy the hunger of our hearts
that all who share this loving earth with us
shall share our satisfaction.
And satisfy the hunger of our hands
to help us make it so
through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Janet Morley

Closing

Lord, isn't your creation wasteful?
Fruits never equal
the seedling's abundance.
Springs scatter water.
The sun gives out
enormous light.
May your bounty teach me
greatness of heart.
May your magnificence
stop me being mean.
Seeing you a prodigal
and open-handed giver,
let me give unstintingly
like God's own.

Dom Helder Camara

God, you heap your love upon us
like a mother providing for her family's needs.
embracing her children with tenderness.

Forgive us
when, like spoilt children,
we treat your generosity as our right,
or hug it possessively to ourselves.

Give us enough trust to live secure in your love
and to share it freely with others
in open-handed confidence
that your grace will never run out.

Jan Berry

Freely we have received:
Freely we give.
Go in the peace of Christ
Thanks be to God.