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For Christians, Easter is the key of our faith. Anglicans along with other members of the Christian family, use the season of Lent to prepare, so that they can live into and celebrate the message of the resurrection with joy and meaning.

For many of us it is so easy to take the liturgical seasons for granted. *Easter Journey* seeks to prepare people so that when Easter arrives, people can fully live into the Easter season and Easter message.

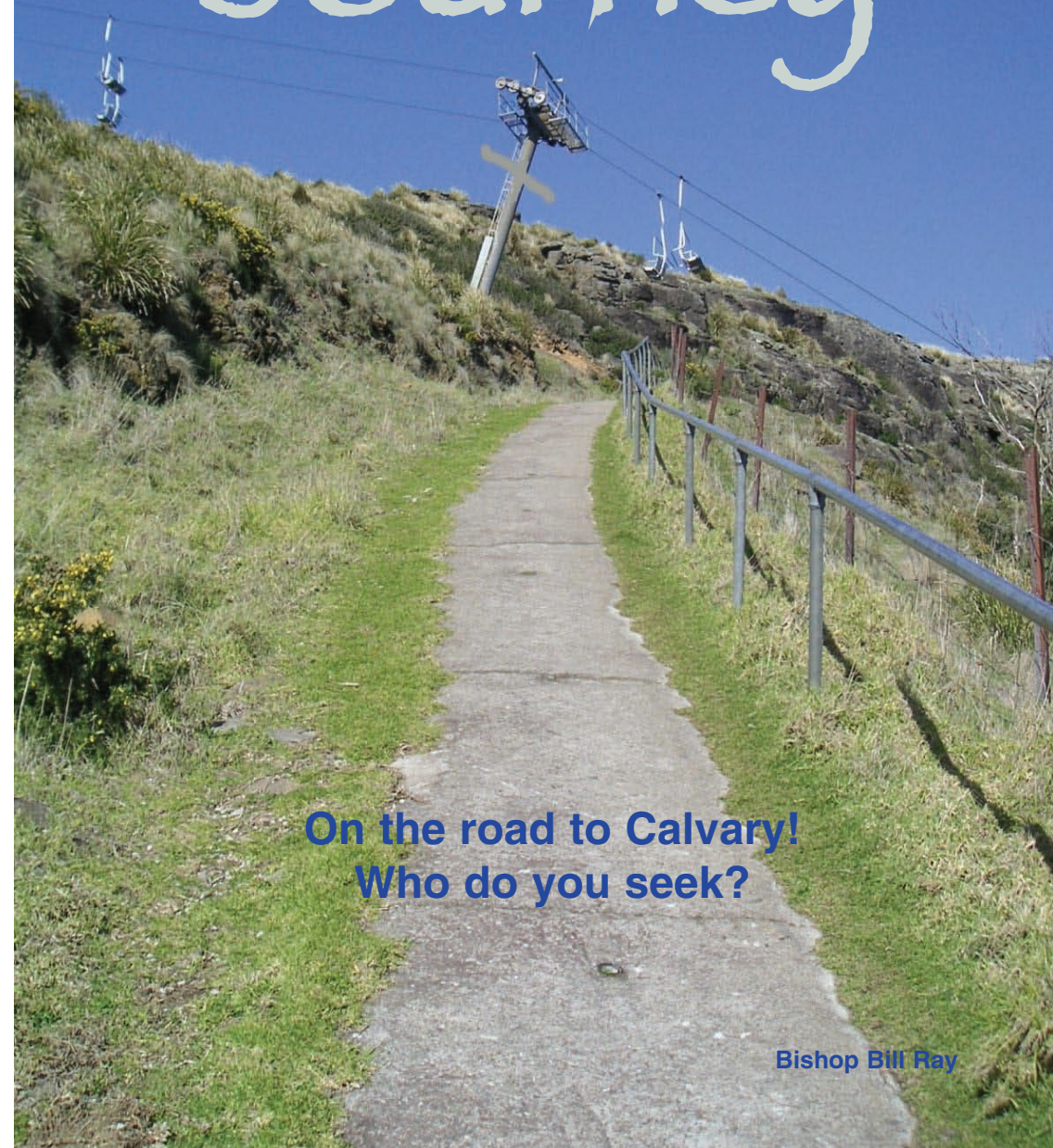
The five studies are based around two questions, “Who do you seek?” and “What do you seek?”

These studies are based on the traditional Lenten Gospels, will assist in the focussing on Christ, the one who died and rose for us so that we have life in all its fullness.

The early Christians were asked the question, “What do you seek?” when they were preparing for baptism. Their reply was “new life in Christ”. For those who are using *Easter Journey*, it is an opportunity for them to renew their faith in Christ as well as seeking to serve Christ more faithfully in our day and age.

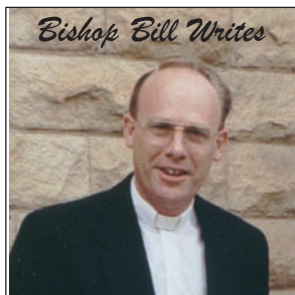
Easter Journey is being written by Bishop Bill Ray, Bishop of North Queensland. The studies are based on the Gospel readings for Year A

Easter Journey



On the road to Calvary!
Who do you seek?

Overview of this Study



Introduction:

What do you seek?

This was the question asked by the early Church of the person seeking baptism.

The response by the baptismal candidate was, "New life in Christ."

In the early Church, it was adults who were baptised and baptisms were generally held at Easter. As a part of their preparation, the catechumens, that is, those seeking baptism studied the traditional Lenten Gospels. (Infant baptism came later in the life of the Church, but more about that in the studies.) In terms of the lectionary readings within our Anglican tradition, the traditional Lenten Readings are used during Year A. Advent 2007 to Christ the King 2008 is Year A

During the last fifteen years or so, some parishes have used the ministry tool of the modern Catechumenate to prepare adults for baptism and/or confirmation. In some places it is called the "Easter Journey", "The Journey" or some other similar title. The modern

Catechumenate is a process that commences with people's questions and seeks to answer them so that people can connect the Biblical story with their lives.

Using this process the same question is asked of adults who are seeking baptism during the Easter season. On the First Sunday in Lent, the doors of the Church are closed. The candidate(s) knocks on the door and the priest asked the candidate(s), "What do you seek?" The reply is "New life in Christ." In some Churches the candidate(s) then write their name in the baptismal register. The candidate is then placed in the midst of the congregation, to highlight they are being received into this community of faith.

For a wide range of reasons some people seek to re-new their faith commitment. (I know from experience this has been a positive faith enriching experience.) They too are asked the same question, when they are outside and knock on the door. However, their reply is, "Renewed life in Christ."

Lent is an occasion for each Christian person to renew their faith in Christ. When I was in Parish ministry it dawned on me that as Parish Priest, I placed before people who were bringing their children for baptism several requirements and I expected the people to try and meet those requirements. However, when it came to the Easter Vigil I

just asked the congregation to renew their baptismal vows without any preparation, not even from the pulpit. That soon changed!

This reality dawned on me, when the then regional bishop said something like, "If you are in the same place spiritually this Easter as you were last Easter, perhaps you need to ask yourself, "Have you cheated God?"

Lent is a time to make sure we are not in the same place as we were last Easter. Lent is a time to renew our faith in Jesus Christ. Lent is that time of the liturgical year when Christians stop and ask themselves, "How can I grow in Christ?" or "How can I live into my baptismal vows so that I serve my Lord and Master more faithfully?"

These studies are based on the traditional Lenten Gospel readings and it is my hope that you will reflect not only on the Biblical passages and where you are with God at present, but seek to truly renew your life in Christ this coming Easter.

It is my prayer that these five studies will enable you to have a holy and meaningful Lent so that you have a joyous and blessed Easter.

+ Bill

Leadership

Your group may have an appointed leader, but leadership is a shared responsibility of all group members. Any group requires T.I.M. First “T” is for Task. The task each week is to reflect on the Gospel passage and ask your self how it applies to your life. This can happen in many ways such as, listening and learning from each other, reflecting on what you have read or heard and just meditating or contemplating. To achieve this, it is important that everyone does the reading both of the Biblical text and the chapter for the week and give some thought to the questions raised.

Every group consists of individuals, the “I”. Each individual has needs. For people to fully participate, it is important opportunities are provided so that the needs of group members can be met. People’s needs vary. Also people’s needs change. Sometimes within the life of the Church it is easy to say this person is like this or that, because we remember from certain times, but we also need to remember that people can and do change. Yes, we all change, and at times God brings about unexpected change in each of us.

“M” is for maintenance. In other words group life has to be maintained, such as, the group keeping to the task, meeting individual needs so that group

members feel that can both contribute as well as take something away that will enable them to grow spiritually and enter more fully into their baptism. Maintaining group life makes sure there is both give and take and that there is an environment that facilitates discussion and sharing of ideas.

In the days when I was leading about fifty youth camps a year and most of them over a weekend, I quickly became aware that you could tell after the Friday evening how the camp would progress.

I believe this insight has assisted me with group ministry. In a short study such as a Lenten study, I do believe the first week is very important. It will set the tone for the remaining four weeks. The first gathering lets people know if this is for them and whether they will benefit. People do not belong to groups out of loyalty anymore, there has to be something in it for them.

As an aside, with some of the past studies some people have asked does it matter if it takes longer to complete. My reply is no. Take as long as you like providing you realise the readings set for the study relate to the weeks of Lent.

First week:

It is my suggestion that during the first session the group attend to such matters as:

- Clarify where you will meet.
- Clarify the day of the week and time of your meeting. (I know sometime times and dates may have to be changed for very good reason, but change does create uncertainty. If people are uncertain it easy to them to say I am not sure and drop out of the life of the group.)
- Clarify if transport is required and plan how this need can best be met.
- Inquire if there are any important milestones or celebrations that group members will be celebrating with during the course of the studies. People like to have important events acknowledged.
- Who will provide supper or morning/afternoon tea for which particular week.
- Discuss the importance of being committed to the group.

What to do before the first session:

- Read Matthew 4:1-11
- If you are able, find out when and where you were baptised and by whom. (You may wish to bring

your baptismal certificate if you have it. Some certificates can tell a story!)

- If you are prepared, share your experiences and insights in regard to baptism.
- How have you understood the role of godparents?
- Have you ever thought about what it means to “live into your baptismal promises”?
- As a parent or as godparent what strategies have you offered young people in regard to facing temptation.
- How have you addressed temptation in your life?

What do you seek? New or renewed life in Christ is the traditional response.

Lent is a time for Christians to renew their faith in Christ, or for seekers to explore faith in Christ. In this first week of Lent we are challenged in regard to temptation. (Over the years I have often wondered if the Church in her wisdom has this as the first Gospel reading for Lent because temptation is a reality we may be tempted to not be serious about our Lenten disciplines!)

We all face temptation. When I commenced in North Queensland I was given a new laptop and the blackberry. (For those who like me are technologically challenged it is a computer and the phone that sends emails!) I am one of those people who read the instructions first. However, I could not understand what I was reading. I kept looking at the phone, at the book and getting nowhere! So I tried this and that and eventually I had to seek help by waiting on the telephone assistance line for what seemed an age! I fell for the temptation of trying to “cut corners” and ended up getting myself in strife.

Reflecting on this, I became aware that there are several parallels in living the Christian life. Because of “busy-ness” we are tempted to cut corners in living out our faith, or try and often do it in our own strength.

It is so easy to attend to our spiritual disciplines and say we have completed them (somewhat piously!) rather than spending time with God and bathing in the presence of God. All time belongs to God, and as Christians we are called to use God’s time so that we come to know God better.

Another temptation is to look back and dwell on a particular moment, rather than moving forward from that moment in faith. I recall Bishop Ralph Wicks, when he was the assistant bishop of Brisbane saying, “Your birthday is important, but it what you do with you life that counts. Your spiritual experiences are important, but it is what you do for Christ from then on that counts.”

In Chapter Three of Matthew, we read that Jesus was affirmed by God when he was baptised in the River Jordan by John the Baptist. As Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and the spirit of God came upon Jesus like a dove and the voice from heaven said, “This is my own dear Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17 NRSV) Then Jesus faced the devil’s challenges. This was an important moment in Jesus’ earthly life. Following this affirmation Jesus was then tested or tempted by the Devil.

Throughout my ministry I have heard many accounts of people

experiencing a “high” or a “mountain top experience”, and then there has been the “plain experience” or life seems “flat”. It is at these times we need to be aware of reality of temptation.

Temptation in its many and various forms is always before us. We may be tempted to do things we know we should not do, or we may be tempted not to do what we should do. So how do you face temptation? How do you face the reality of evil? What should our response to the devil be?

The Gospel for the first Sunday in Lent is very clear about several facts.

First, it is very easy to be tempted because of the position you hold or because of how we understand ourselves. Every baptised person is a child of God. We are Christ’s disciples or learners. We need to know very clearly who we are as God’s and not focus on ourselves. We are called to be God focused.

Second, certain challenges can be very appealing, but we need to ask ourselves, “What is God calling us to do?” We are called to honour God in all that we do. Christianity is not a part of a person’s life among many options; it is a way of life and governs all we do.

Third, in each of the three temptations, Jesus’ response to the devil was to quote from the

Scriptures. It is important that we know the Word of God and that we use the Word of God to address our life’s situations. So we seek to be people who not only know the word of God as text, but we seek to be people who live the Word of God. There is a world of difference between knowing about and knowing. Christians are called to know to know God, to know Christ.

Fourth, the devil tempted our Lord, not once but three times. This is so often the case, temptation will take many or different guises. We need to be on our guard.

Finally, Jesus then clearly stated that we are to worship and serve God alone. Jesus knew his mission and the devil departed. Thus we must strive to be faithful to Christ in all things. We need to be clear about our mission.

The first baptismal promise is, “Do you turn to Christ?” Christianity is way of life, a way of being.

Lent is a time to make sure that we know the Word of God, that we keep our eyes focussed on God and that we stand firm in the faith of Christ. Life and the Christian life are not monochrome. As Christians we seek to make our faith meaningful in all situations of life. For me it is not only as bishop, but as husband, as father and by the time you reads this as a grandfather as well as family member and as a member of the groups we belong to.

Within the Christian life there are “high” moments, and there are also moments that when things are not easy. However, Christ is with in all the changing situations of life.

In living the Christian life we need to be on our guard, we need to be in tune with Christ, because we do not know when we will be tempted.

So what do we seek this Lent? The answer to this question will vary from person to person, but the first week of Lent reminds us that we can be tempted. We seek to make sure we are in tune with Christ through prayer and reading of the Word of God so that we are personally equipped to address temptation.



Welcome and Introduction:



Opening Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made,
and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts,
that we, worthily lamenting our sins,
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may obtain of you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Getting started: (Select from the following)

- Invite each member to share something about themselves – a good thing that has happened to them recently or a worship highlight in the last month.
- Share what your expectations for this Lenten season.
- You may like to share previous Lenten experiences – something that you may like to try again and perhaps something that you will never try again.
- Are you a person who reads the instruction first or are you a person who tries and when things don't work out, turn to the instructions?
- Has your household tried to set up and new T.V. or assemble furniture only to find ourselves frustrated? You may like to share any stories humorous or otherwise.
- Can you recall receiving your first Bible? What do you recall?
- Do you have a favourite Bible? Please share why it is important to you.



Questions for Reflections and Discussion:

(Please make a selection)

1. What were some of your thoughts when you read the Gospel reading (Matthew 4:1-11). What excited you? What challenged you? What disturbed you? What has motivated you and in what way?
2. Invite group members to briefly share any spiritual highs they have enjoyed and the impact they have had on their faith journey.
3. Should the church provide more teaching in regard to the devil and evil? What areas would you like help with and why?
4. What answer would you give to your child or grandchild who asks you, "What is evil?" or "Do you think the Devil is real?"
5. Jesus stood his ground with the Devil. What are some of the challenges you face in standing your ground against evil or activities that are not in keeping the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
6. Jesus quoted from the Scriptures. How important is it for you to know the Bible and being able to quote it? (Some people are put off when people quote all the Scriptures all the time.)
7. What are some of the joys and challenges in serving God even when things do not appear to be heading along smoothly?
8. What does the text, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him" mean to you? What does the text say to us a parish or community of faith?
9. I had a poster that read, "The only Bible some people will read today is you. What message will they receive?" What opportunities does this quote offer you?
10. Bishop Delbridge once said that a text out of context is pretext and unfortunately it is what some preachers base their sermons on! Do you agree this statement and can you offer any examples of this approach?



Closing Prayer:

Almighty God,
 whose Son fasted forty days in the wilderness,
 and was tempted as we are, yet did not sin:
 give us grace to direct our lives in obedience to your will,
 that, as you know our weakness,
 so we may know your power to save;
 through Jesus Christ our Redeemer,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.



Hospitality Suggestions:

- Check to see if anyone has any allergies.
- I suggest the first week the designated leaders provide the refreshments and that they are kept simple.

Some questions to ponder for next week:

Please read John 3:1-17



- The remaining studies are based on John's Gospel. John's Gospel is different to Matthew, Mark and Luke, which are often referred to as the synoptic Gospels, because they give an overview or synoptic of our Lord earthly life and teaching. John's Gospel has no parable and only seven miracles or signs from which John develops what it means to live the Christian life. If possible read John's Gospel in one sitting. What insights did you receive? Do you have any questions you wish to explore?
- Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. Have there been times when you have not wanted others to see or know that you that you are seeking.
- Nicodemus asked Jesus a question, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" How important is it for you to ask questions in regard to your faith understanding and development.