**Study One:**

An introductory comment:

When using the Lectionary, it is easy for people to just consider the particular Bible passage in question. This approach has its drawbacks, as each Biblical passage has passages before it and following it. While it is ideal to read the whole book, I would encourage you to read at least the chapter before and after as a minimum preparation.

However, with this first study I suggest that as a group leader, you read chapters 1 to 3 of Genesis as preparation.

There are two creation accounts at the start of the book of Genesis. The first is 1:1-2:4(a) which is the priestly account. It has liturgical structure “And God said ……. And God said it was good and it was evening and there was morning the … day”. In this creation account, God created humankind on the sixth day.

The first part of the Genesis reading (2:15-17) as set for the First Sunday of Lent is from the second creation account sometimes referred to as the creation in the garden. The order of creation is different. Man was created first from the dust and then the rest of creation. Man was then placed in the Garden and was given the instructions as per these three verses. Following on from the instructions that God issued to the man, God went on and said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper as his partner.”

The set reading continues in chapter three verses one to seven.

As an aside I often hear people say that these verses are about “original sin”. Nowhere in this passage is the word “sin” used.

As mentioned in the study booklet on page 5 refer to the quote from “Responding in Love”.

Genesis 2:25, states, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”

Then we move into Chapter three. The real issue is, “Who do we listen to God or other voices?” The snake was another voice. The snake spoke in a convincing and appealing way, “You will not die, God knows that your eyes will be open, and you will know good from evil.

The challenge before us today is making sure we listen to the voice of God and not to other voices in our lives. As mentioned in the study booklet, we are reminded that every action has consequences, as the man and woman discovered.

One definition of sin is any thought word or deed that separates us from God. Because the man and women chose to be like God, they separated themselves from God.

As a Bishop I am from time to time, asked to address the matter of conflict and tension in a parish. During a session I was asked to address the matter of Sin, Forgiveness and Repentance on one A4 page. I found it a challenge but I attach it here because it is always relevant.

This discussion raises the personal meaning of the confession (when we say sorry to God) and absolution (the words that God forgives) as it occurs in our worship. Do we take it seriously and live out God’s forgiveness?

 Psalm 32

This Psalm addresses forgiveness and God's guidance.

The first eight verses address God's forgiveness of the past. The opening two verses are two Old Testament beatitudes, "Blessed are those whose/whom ... sin is forgiven".

Forgiveness is regarded as the lifting of burden or covering an ugly sight as well as the concealing of a debt.

The Psalm highlights that there is misery when we refuse to confess our sin (verses 3 & 4).

Verses 4 to 6 - we acknowledge our sin, but in verse seven, the Psalmist reminds us that in being faithful we will make our prayer to God despite our circumstances.

Verse 8 once again picks up the theme that we can hide in God. God will surround us and deliver us.

However, we are to be instructed by God as stated in verse nine. One way is making sure we listen to God, so that will do his will.

Verse ten provide the contrast. We are not to be like a horse or a mule.

Verses 11 and 12: These last two verses, even though they are at the end of the Psalm, are in many ways a good introduction to the Psalm. These verses contains Biblical contrasts, wicked and righteousness; believer and unbeliever, The ungodly will experience tribulation, but mercy is given to the righteous who will rejoice and be glad, because they know the love of God and the joy of forgiveness.

**Topic: Sin, Repentance and Forgiveness**

God has created this wonderful world and human beings are a part of God’s glorious creation. Human beings are created with free will, so that they can respond to the glorious love of God in all facets of life.

However, we do not always respond to God in love, but put ourselves first, thus separating ourselves from God. So, Christians acknowledge their sin. Sin separates us from God. To use the words of some forms of the confession, we acknowledge that we sin either by omission, (what we omitted to do, what we know that we should have done) and by commission (what we did that we should not have done) through our actions, thoughts and words.

Christians, being aware that they are children of God, know that they are to worship and honour God. They are also very aware that they need to use their free will to re-establish their relationship with God. Thus they repent. Christians need to examine their lives against the standards of God. From childhood I have used the two Great Commandments, the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes as examination guidelines. As Christians reflect on their lives using these and other passages of Scripture they know they must repent. That is, first they must say sorry to God. Second, they must say sorry to the person or persons they have wronged. Third and just as importantly, they must seek the grace and mercy of God to overcome that weakness in their lives, so that they can be more Christ like in their Christian walk, (or to use the terminology of the BCP, to amend our lives, that is, so that we can serve God more faithfully.)

As the Absolution that is pronounced at the Eucharist reminds us, it is God who forgives.

***Almighty God,
who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith:
pardon you and set you free from all your sins,
strengthen you in all goodness
and keep you in eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.***

Note, as Christians we turn to God in faith, we know that God freely forgives us all our sins and we seek the strength of God as we move forward.

Just as God forgives we too must forgive. As the Christian family prayer, the Lord’s Prayer states:

***Forgive us our sins
         as we forgive those who sin against us.***

In the Anglican Eucharistic liturgy, we confess our sin, and we hear that God forgives us if we truly repent and turn to God in faith. Then we share The Greeting of Peace together as God’s forgiven people. The Greeting of Peace is an outward expression that we are God’s redeemed people because of the never ending love, grace and mercy of God towards us. Following this, we are strengthened by the sacrament of Holy Communion to go out into the world to be the people of God who show the loving and forgiving nature of Christ in all that we do, think or say.

**Appendix One: Confessions**

Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have strayed from your ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against your holy laws.
We have left undone what we ought to have done,
and we have done what we ought not to have done.
Yet, good Lord, have mercy on us;
restore those who are penitent,
according to your promises declared in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Grant, most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may live godly, righteous and sober lives
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

So let us draw near to God with sincerity and confidence, and pray together,

God of all mercy,
we humbly admit that we need your help.
We have wandered from your way.
We have sinned in thought, word and deed,
and have failed to do what is right.
You alone can save us.
Have mercy on us,
wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others.
Bring forth in us the fruit of your Spirit
that we may live the new life to your glory.
This we ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

Most merciful God,
we humbly admit that we need your help.
We confess that we have wandered from your way:
we have done wrong,
and we have failed to do what is right.
You alone can save us.
Have mercy on us:
wipe out our sins and teach us to forgive others.
Bring forth in us the fruit of the Spirit
that we may live as disciples of Christ.
This we ask in the name of Jesus our Saviour. Amen.

**Appendix Two: Absolutions**

***It is God who forgives. In worship the clergy announces that God forgives if we truly repent.***

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has no pleasure

in the death of sinners, but would rather they should turn

from their wickedness and live. He has given authority to

his ministers to declare to his people who repent, the

forgiveness of sins. God pardons all who truly repent

and believe his holy gospel. And so we ask him to grant us
true repentance, and his holy Spirit,
that what we do now may please him, and
that the rest of our lives may be pure and holy;
so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty God,
who has promised forgiveness to all who turn to him in faith:
pardon you and set you free from all your sins,
strengthen you in all goodness
and keep you in eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God wills that all men should be saved
and in response to his call we acknowledge our sins.
He pardons those who humbly repent and
truly believe the gospel.
Therefore we have peace with God, through Jesus Christ,
to whom be blessing and honour for ever.
Amen.

**Appendix Three - Various Scriptures verses for reflection:**

If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the perfect offering for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

(1 John 1:8&9)

From the Parable of the Prodigal Son:

**18** I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."'

(Luke 15:18-19)

**13** rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

(Joel 2:13)

**2** "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

(Matthew 3:2)

**8** Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

(Matthew 3:8)

**3** Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.

(Luke 17:3)

"Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, **47** and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things.

(Luke 24:46-48)

Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

(Romans 2:4)

**9** The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

(2 Peter 3:9)

Appendix Four: The Lord’s Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,
         hallowed be your Name,
         your kingdom come,
         your will be done
                   on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
**Forgive us our sins
         as we forgive those who sin against us.**
Lead us not into temptation,
         but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
         now and for ever.          Amen.

Note we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others.

Forgiveness is a way of life of the Christian.

**Appendix Five – The Words of the Song – “Therefore the redeemed”**

for personal reflection.

Therefore the redeemed

Of the Lord shall return

And come with singing unto Zion,

And everlasting joy shall be upon their head.

Therefore the redeemed

Of the Lord shall return

And come with singing unto Zion,

And everlasting joy shall be upon their head.

They shall obtain gladness and joy,

And sorrow and mourning

Shall flee away.

Therefore the redeemed

Of the Lord shall return

And come with singing unto Zion,

And everlasting joy shall be upon their head.

Covenant Song – No. 24, Acorn Press, Melbourne, 1982.