

Dr Timothy Gaden



Walking Humbly with God

A journey of hope, nourishment, forgiveness, self-knowledge and discipleship

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The Revd Canon Dr Timothy Gaden

There are many summaries of the Christian life. St Paul calls it a process of “dying and rising with Christ” (Rom 6), the Gospel writers sometimes describe it as obeying Jesus’ command to “take up your cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24-26, Luke 9:23) and St John the Evangelist speaks of the Christian life as abiding in Christ as branches abide in a vine (John 15).

But one of the best known and loved summaries comes from the Old Testament, from the prophet Micah who writes:

*He has shown you, O mortal,
what is good.
And what does the Lord require
of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and
to walk humbly with your God.
(Micah 6:8, NIV)*

Three simple things – to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly.

Every Lent is an invitation from God to continue that humble walk. Every Lent we hear the story of the Exodus, the journey of God’s people into freedom from slavery, and we walk again with Jesus on his last

earthly journey toward Jerusalem and the events of his passion, death and resurrection.

To understand the Christian life (your life) as walking humbly with God is to recognise that while we are no longer where we started, we are not at the end of the journey either. We are still on the way, still works in progress. As we act justly and love mercy, God continues to work on us, changing us and shaping us ever more closely into the image of Christ.

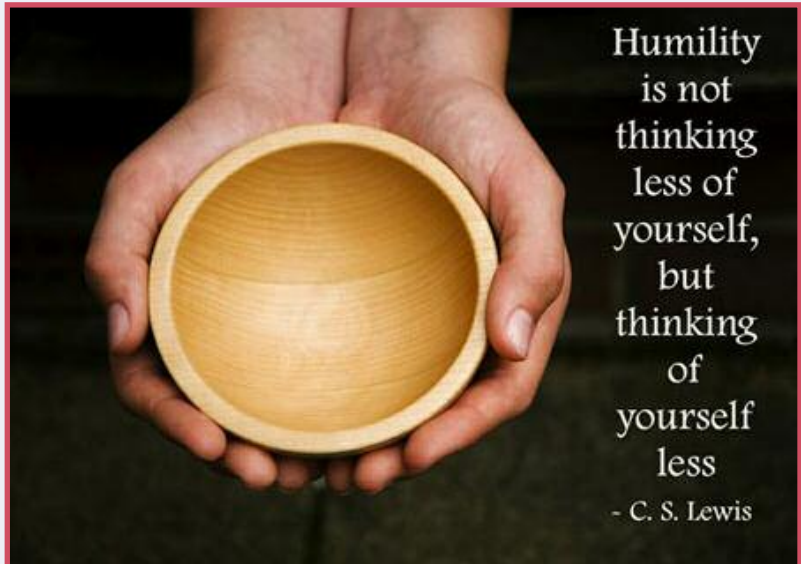
One early church father, Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350-428), understood this verse from Micah to be not only a summary of the Christian life, but another way of summarising Christ’s two great commandments:

Forget about burnt offerings, countless sacrifices and oblations of firstborn, he is saying. If you are concerned to appease the divinity, practice what God ordered you in the beginning through Moses. What in fact is that? To deliver fair judgment and decision in all cases where you have to choose better from worse, to continue giving evidence of all possible love and fellow-feeling to your neighbor, and be ready to put into practice what is pleasing to God in every way. He means, in short, “You will love God with all your heart, all your mind and all your soul, and you will love your neighbor as yourself,” as was said of old through Moses. Do this, he is saying, as something preferable to sacrifices in God’s eyes. (Commentary on Micah 6.6-8).

These studies focus on this theme of walking humbly with God as it emerges in the Lenten readings for Year C of the Revised Common Lectionary, and on the hope needed for the journey, the food God gives to strengthen us along the way, on walking as people who are both forgiving and forgiven, walking as people with an honest knowledge of themselves and as people brave enough to take the test of true discipleship.

Wishing you a holy and a fruitful Lent,

Tim Gaden



Humility
is not
thinking
less of
yourself,
but
thinking
of
yourself
less
- C. S. Lewis

P.S. Any feedback about these studies is very welcome.
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The Rev'd Canon Dr Timothy Gaden
Mother Esther CHN Canon Theologian - Diocese of Ballarat

For the next six weeks, we agree to the following commitment as a group.

ATTENDANCE:

To give priority to group meetings.

PARTICIPATION:

To make every effort to participate fully within the group.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

To keep confidential everything that is shared.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

To accept the challenge to reach the goals we have set ourselves.

ACCESSIBILITY:

To give one another the right to call at any time for spiritual help in time of need.

EVANGELISM:

To make an effort to each encourage one person to join this group.

SPECIFICS

We will meet on(Day of week)

We will meet at(Home/Place)

The meeting will begin at..... and close at

We agree to leave by so as not to over stay our welcome.

GROUND RULES

Refreshments

Baby Sitting

Newcomers.....

Absence.....

I WILL TRY WITH GOD'S HELP TO BE A REGULAR, FAITHFUL, CARING MEMBER OF THIS GROUP.

Names of Group Members

Phone

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Remember: *While it is best to enjoy these studies from week one, you may like to encourage new people to join the group along the way. This may be a way of introducing them to home groups in the parish.*



Today, celebrating the Holy Communion on a boat as a modern day pilgrim on Lake Galilee, 'journeying' in the Holy Land...

In biblical times, people 'journeyed' for days to reach this lake area and the 'journey' was rewarded when people's lives were changed by Jesus.

Life is a Journey - Study 1

We move through life on a journey. We begin in one place. We move to another. We work at one job. We start another. Children are born. New families begin. Children grow and begin their own journeys. Our life's journey is filled with joy and sorrow, love and pain, frustration and peace. But there is another dimension to our life's journey: while all this is going on, we are also on a journey toward God or – as the Old Testament prophet Micah puts it – “walking humbly with God”. The saints and mystics have called this the interior journey. It is our movement toward God, who transcends all of life.

In Lent we celebrate God's yearly call to go out again on a journey. This annual interior journey is meant to unsettle us, lead us forward, break up our daily routine. It is the call from God every year as God's people have done for thousands of years, to relive the journey of Exodus, to understand ourselves as on a journey from slavery into the freedom Christ offers. It is the call to walk with Jesus into the desert at the prompting of the Spirit, there to be tried and tested.

This is a journey with God and toward God as it was for the Israelites and for Jesus. Abraham, ‘the wandering Aramean,’ journeyed into the unknown. We are all wandering Arameans as we travel towards the promised resurrection purchased by him who has gone before us.

In the stories of our lives we can retrace the journeys we have made.

Some old bibles have family trees in the front, which recorded the deaths and births, joys and tragedies of the family. They were milestones in the story of that family's walk with God. We too see a certain pattern of movement in our lives, a journey toward people and away from people, toward God and perhaps away from God. Lent is a time to look at the journey we are making and to see if our goal is well established, the route clearly mapped out.

‘My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt ... (God) delivered us ... bringing us into this land flowing with milk and honey’ (Deut 26:5, 8, 9). This quote from this week's Old Testament reading reminds us that wandering is a hallmark of Israel's life. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob seems never to be satisfied with a settled people. God calls them to be on the move. Even the presence of God among God's people is a symbol on the move, a pillar of fire and a cloud. The localised presence of God was in a portable ark, a lasting memorial to God's presence with God's people as they journey.

The first reading contains one of the most ancient professions of faith found in the Bible. It is a basic Israelite creed, which was used to instruct each generation in the traditional beliefs of the community. The Israelites remembered that, although once they had been oppressed in Egypt, they had been delivered by God into their present land. In ritual and story the Israelites kept alive the memory that God had delivered them from slavery into

freedom. They found in this mighty deed of God a cause for worship, so they brought the first fruits of the soil to the Lord and thanked the Lord for what had been given to them. The memory of the wonderful deeds of God called them to 'make merry over all the good things' that the Lord gave them.

In the second reading Paul says: 'Faith in the heart leads to justification, confession on the lips to salvation.' Faith has both an inner and an outer dimension. The Israelites were called upon to recite publicly their confession of faith. Jesus in the gospel gives striking example of public witness to the true God in the face of the power of evil. It is evident that this kind of witness is possible only when it springs from an interior conviction that is deeply and firmly held.

In the gospel Jesus is led on a desert journey by the Spirit. He is confronted with hunger, powerlessness and complete lack of recognition. He is tempted to put his trust in food, power and acts of daring. But the price of those commodities would be the most distressing state into which a person might fall: living only for yourself. Jesus refuses to pay that price. He opts for a higher goal, a glorious victory purchased at the cost of unswerving service, suffering, and death. Jesus wrestles with the temptations in the desert and emerges from that wilderness submissive to his Father's will.

Jesus makes a threefold confession of faith: "... a threefold confession of faith (Luke 4:4, 8, 12):"

Not on bread alone ...

You shall do homage to the Lord ...

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test ...

This confession of faith plots the future course of Jesus' ministry, leading him on a journey that culminates in the confession he makes before Pontius Pilate and inevitably leads him to the cross.

The Bible is the story of a people on a journey, first Israel, and then the church. It is a story of growth, development, and gradual enlightenment. It is the story of a people in their search for God. It is the story of each Christian who has accepted that story as his or her own and chosen to live out that story in his or her own life today.

My Life Journey

Identify privately times of Exodus (transitions from slavery to freedom), or grumbling in the desert, perhaps times of death and resurrection.

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Let your mind consider imaginatively the Scripture's story, and then return to your own.

Are there significant times in any of the following? If so briefly note them here.

- 'going after false gods'

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- of flood and redemption,

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- of hearing God's commandments anew,

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- or rushing out of the boat like Peter to be with Jesus walking on water, only to sink like a stone and need rescuing (Matthew 14:25-33)?

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Can you see your life in any other bible passages you know? Note them here.

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Introduction and Welcome

In preparation for these studies, you will need a pen and your Bible to this and to each of these studies.

When gathered, group members are invited to share one or more of the following:

- Introduce yourself. If you know each other fairly well, share something that others may not know about you that is of interest.
- Share an expectation that you have for this Lent.
- Share how you prepare for worship.

Then the leader invites each person to describe briefly their expectations of this Lenten Study. Conclude this section with some housekeeping matters:

- Establish if any member has any dietary requirements.
- Who will prepare morning/afternoon tea or supper at each session.
- Clarify when we are meeting and where. And for how long.
- Complete the table of who is attending the group and exchange telephone numbers if people are happy to do so. (See Page 6)



Shared Prayer

(After this prayer has been said together, the leader invites the group to add any additional prayer points they would like to share.)

Your word gives birth to hope, O God,
in all who hear and heed it.

Let the life of your ancient word and Jesus' gospel
take root in our hearts.

May it be the way of our pilgrim journeys to you
as you unfold the story of your grace in our lives.

You are our God of grace and glory
this Lent and forever and ever. Amen.



The leader then invites the group members to imagine their lives as the story of a journey. On opposite page, members to chart significant events, joys or sorrows in their lives.



Readings

A group member reads this week's Old Testament reading (Deut 26:1-11) and Gospel (Luke 4:1-13), either at the start of the discussion, or just before Questions 3 and 4.



Sharing Time

- 1 Life is a journey. Return to your 'my life journey'.
 - Share some reflections about the milestones in the story of your journey.
 - At what points did you stop and take another direction?
 - What influences do you see as important in your journey?
 - Are there any parallels between the story of God's dealings with the Jews and your own life? - Discuss
 - Has the church been a significant influence in your journey? If so, share when and how?

- 2 Literature, films and TV are filled with journey themes. Westerns depict the journey to the promised land, and many children's films, "The Lion King", "Finding Nemo", and "A bug's Life" to name just a few, also tell their story through a journey. Science fiction is always on the way to new discovery.
 - Share some reflections on the ways in which the media present the journey theme.
 - Has your community and or your parish, journeyed from one point to another? Is it on its way, or stuck? - Comment.

- 3 It is a universal human experience that any deeply held belief, if it is to be a real and vital part of one's life, must find some sort of public expression.
 - What is the Israelite's profession of faith in Deut 26:4-10?
 - What does reciting 'that they once were slaves' teach them is important about their lives now?
 - How do we profess and celebrate our faith today?

- 4 Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, where he was tempted.
 - Are there times in your life's journey when you feel you have followed the Spirit and still were tempted, still were not at peace? Share some of these reflections.
 - What kind of support does your local church give to those who are in difficult situations?

- 5 Some people have a feeling that the history of Australia is part of their own personal history.
 - Do you feel that you are different because you belong to this country's history? - Comment.
 - Since the Bible is the story of God's people, largely in a land far away from us, in what way does God help to make that story ours as a Christian community?



Closing prayer

You might like to dim the lighting (if that is possible) to change the environment a bit for the prayer time. Maybe you could turn off the lighting and light a number of candles to give a special atmosphere. *Leader preps a reader to give them opportunity to find and mark 2 Tim 3:12-17 ahead of time in a Bible.*

Leader: The great story of our salvation is found in the Bible.
Let us remember the power of God's Word.

Reader: Read 2 Tim 3:12-17.
Allow some time for silent reflection or invite the group to a time of shared prayer.

Leader:
Your word gives birth to hope, O God,
in all who hear and heed it.
Attune us to your voice, your love.
With all who are to be baptised this Easter,
and with all who will renew their baptism vows again,
guide us in the way of wisdom
and engrave your love in our hearts.
Lead us on our Lenten journey
to the peace and freedom you have promised us.
Teach us to act justly, to love mercy
and to walk humbly with you.
Inspire us in the Holy Spirit of Jesus,
now and forever and ever.

All: Amen

The session can then conclude with the Lord's Prayer and/or a peace greeting.



Shared Supper and bonding time.

Supper suggestions on page 17.

**NEXT
WEEK**

Prepare for next week by going over the upcoming readings
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 Psalm 27 Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:1-9 (or Lk 9:28-36*)

NOTE: These days the Feast of the Transfiguration seems to be the very definition of "a movable feast". In some parishes it is celebrated on 6 August (its traditional date in the Orthodox Church), in some on the last Sunday of Epiphany (following the Lutheran and some other Protestant churches), in some Anglican churches on the Second Sunday in Lent and in some on more than one of these occasions! The option in readings is provided here in case your parish observes the Transfiguration in Lent.