

Diocese of Keewatin – Southern Region
Lenten Study 2010
Leader's Guide

Thank you for taking part in this Lenten Study. Here are some suggestions which you may find helpful in facilitating the program.

1. God's word is best learned within the context of a community, the body of Christ. Individually, we are limited as to what God might be saying to us. However, a group is able to see God's revelation and light more thoroughly. Our goal is always to relate God's word to our daily life and to experience the presence of Jesus as the eternal word.
2. Bible study is not a bible class, where one teaches, and the rest listens. Encourage all to participate equally.
3. Encourage participants to tell their own personal stories. Remember the rules of confidentiality when discussing personal issues (that what comes to the group stays with the group) and stick with it.
4. A leader is to lead, not to teach. Remember that we do not have all the answers. A leader is like a tour guide taking the group on a journey of discovery.
5. Encourage people to express their thoughts and feelings on a subject without passing judgement. Be sensitive to the different faith journeys present in the room.
6. Always be flexible. The depth of a study is always more important than the length or "keeping on schedule". Let the spirit move!

First Sunday in Lent – Resisting Temptation

Gospel Reading: Luke 4:1-13

Reflection: *This year, Canada is privileged to be hosting the 21st winter Olympic Games. For many years, athletes have been training for this historic event. Without these years of rigorous discipline, an athlete would never know his or her moment of Olympic glory. So it was for Jesus. Luke reminds us that Jesus frequently went away to a place by himself in order to pray and in so doing, to prepare for the mission that God had called him to complete.*

Preparation: Have someone in the group read the appointed gospel. Take a moment of silence and reflect on the reading. Then have another person read the passage again, possibly using a different bible translation. Now take 5 minutes and ask the following question:

What key words or phrases stayed with me as the gospel was being read?
In this Gospel, what is Jesus saying to me?

Discussion questions:

1. Why do you think we experience temptation?
2. How might a Christian respond to temptation?
3. One of Satan's "big lies" is that evil is in control – "the world belongs to me, and if you worship me it will all be yours". When was the last time you heard the "big lie"?
4. Sometimes we treat God as a "Santa Claus Deity", if I do such and such, then surely God will bring me the gift I seek...."If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; God will protect you". How should Christians respond when God DOES NOT act according to their plans?

Second Sunday in Lent – A Prayer of Passion

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:31-35

Reflection: *Why not assume that the Pharisees came as friends? After all, they were the “puritans” of that day and Jesus being a “good Jew” had much more in common with them than he did with say, “the Sadducees. The reasons why Herod wished to be rid of Jesus are not hard to guess: in Herod’s eyes, Jesus was a troublemaker who might be a focus of revolution. Jesus challenged those in power (i.e. Herod) and called those on the “outside” to come “inside”. Such ideas of reform don’t always sit well with people, like Herod, who have lots to lose!*

Preparation: Have someone in the group read the appointed gospel. Take a moment of silence and reflect on the reading. Then have another person read the passage again, possibly using a different bible translation. Now take 5 minutes and ask the following question:

What key words or phrases stayed with me as the gospel was being read?
In this Gospel, what is Jesus saying to me?

Discussion questions:

1. The repetition, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem” (v34) are reminiscent of the cry, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for you” (2 Sam. 18:33). What do these words tell us about the heart of God?
2. What is it about human nature that prevents the “Herods” of yesterday and today from seeing a new vision, a new dream for a better world?
3. What dream does God have for our church?
4. How do we respond to the “Herods” who are afraid of God’s dream and would rather “stone the prophet” than participate in its fulfilment?

Third Sunday in Lent – The Barren Fig Tree

Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9

Reflection: *“Unless you repent, you will all perish” (v5). These words seem harsh, and they are harsh. Yet Jesus also paints us a picture of a God who abounds in giving “second chances”. The parable of the barren fig tree reminds us that even the most hopeless situation can be transformed by God’s grace and our care.*

Preparation: Have someone in the group read the appointed gospel. Take a moment of silence and reflect on the reading. Then have another person read the passage again, possibly using a different bible translation. Now take 5 minutes and ask the following question:

What key words or phrases stayed with me as the gospel was being read?
In this Gospel, what is Jesus saying to me?

Discussion questions:

1. Jesus called Israel to repentance. Jesus calls our church to repentance. How might we be called to change or seek new direction in our quest to repentance?
2. The parable of the barren fig tree offers the hope of finding a second chance in life. How might that hope become real to our church as we seek renewal and new life in this Lenten season?
3. Luke 13:8 seems to imply that repentance and “second chances” require work on our part. What work needs to be done in order to bear fruit?

Fourth Sunday in Lent – The Prodigal Returns

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Reflection: This parable in Luke 15, often called “The story of the Prodigal Son” is perhaps the greatest story of redemption ever told. There are three main characters: the runaway son who repents; the son who stays at home who resents; and the parent who loves both children. Henri Nouwen said “I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found”. In the solitude and loneliness of that distant land, we now turn to the warmth of that faraway light and begin our journey home.

Preparation: Have someone in the group read the appointed gospel. Take a moment of silence and reflect on the reading. Then have another person read the passage again, possibly using a different bible translation. Now take 5 minutes and ask the following question:

What key words or phrases stayed with me as the gospel was being read?
In this Gospel, what is Jesus saying to me?

Discussion questions:

1. When reading this parable and looking into the mirror, what do we see?
2. What inheritance have we taken and gone off to a distant land, both as individuals and also as a church?
3. “Addiction” Nouwen says, “might be the best word to explain the lostness that so deeply permeates contemporary society”. What is our addiction to “a distant land”?
4. What is it that makes us turn around and return home?

Fifth Sunday in Lent – At the Feet of Jesus

Gospel Reading: John 12:1-8

Reflection: Without doubt, Mary's impulsive anointing of Jesus' feet was a well-meant act of love, and a thing so spontaneous as to be almost involuntary. To Judas looking on, the whole thing seemed such sheer waste. "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (v5) This is an argument with which the church is constantly confronted. Some would say that we have spent far too much time on the betterment of material conditions and on things which don't really matter. Perhaps we can put aside our prejudices against Judas and open ourselves to that important question: How can Mary's act and Judas' question find meaning for us today?

Preparation: Have someone in the group read the appointed gospel. Take a moment of silence and reflect on the reading. Then have another person read the passage again, possibly using a different bible translation. Now take 5 minutes and ask the following question:

What key words or phrases stayed with me as the gospel was being read?
In this Gospel, what is Jesus saying to me?

Discussion questions:

1. Mary empties the ointment onto Jesus' feet. Her action is a metaphor for her own vulnerability and love. It happens in the presence of others. It is open to misinterpretation. It is also prophetic. Is this kind of vulnerability hard for us? Why?
2. Discuss times in your life when you have experienced that overwhelming feeling of love and devotion toward Jesus. How did you respond?
3. The challenge "feed the poor" is ever before us. How can we wrestle with Judas' question today in our own church?

Passion/Palm Sunday – Seeing the Crucifixion with New Eyes

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:1-49

Reflection: Someone once said that the gospels are nothing more than the story of the passion with a long introduction. Today's gospel is about Jesus crucifixion and calls us to reflect not only upon his suffering and death but also our own. As an Easter people, we are privileged to be able to reflect upon this gospel in light of the resurrection. Yet we must resist the temptation to jump too quickly to the empty tomb without spending time at the foot of the cross. It is through the cross and through death that we are born to eternal life.

Preparation: Have someone in the group read the appointed gospel. Take a moment of silence and reflect on the reading. Then have another person read the passage again, possibly using a different bible translation. Now take 5 minutes and ask the following question:

What key words or phrases stayed with me as the gospel was being read?
In this Gospel, what is Jesus saying to me?

Discussion questions:

1. One popular interpretation of the crucifixion speaks of a God who required a “blood sacrifice” in order to offer “forgiveness” for the sins of a fallen humanity. Salvation comes, therefore, through Jesus’ shed blood; he was the lamb who was slain. Paul touched on this in the New Testament, but it was really Augustine (4th century) who picked up on the theme and “ran with it”, making it the basis for religious thought (especially in the western church) ever since. In what ways is this interpretation useful? In what ways is it limiting?
2. Is it possible to understand Jesus’ death in a fresh way without forfeiting our commitment to the Christian faith? If so, what might Jesus’ death mean to us today in the 21st century?