



Solomon Islands
HEALTH CARE

Welcome to the Bible Study:

The traditional practice for the season of Lent, and the core activity of Lent Event, is to 'give something up'. It might not be the first action we think of engaging in, but this discipline of 'giving up' or 'letting go' can actually result in us gaining a glimpse of life in its fullest and most exciting sense. It might not fit with the idea that life is about all we can possess or own, or is about fame and rubbing shoulders with rock stars or celebrities, but it is a way of learning about 'life' as Jesus understood it.

We will draw on some significant passages in Luke, and one in John, the reflections of some of our Lent Event partners, and our own experience. We will ask ourselves what we can learn about Jesus, from whom he spent his time with and shared his meals with, and to whom he offered an invitation into God's new community. What does this say about where we need to be in society and who we need to spend time with, as we follow Jesus?

How To Use This Study

The study uses the lectionary Gospel reading for each of the six Sundays of Lent:

- Study 1:** Luke 4:1-13
Sunday 21 February
- Study 2:** Luke 13:31-35
Sunday 28 February
- Study 3:** Luke 13:1-9
Sunday 7 March
- Study 4:** Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
Sunday 14 March
- Study 5:** John 12:1-8
Sunday 21 March
- Study 6:** Luke 19:28-40
Sunday 28 March

You may choose to use the study material either in the week preceding the Sunday as a form of preparation for worship, or in the week following the Sunday as a way of building upon worship.

The studies are designed for small group discussion. However, if you are unable to meet with others you will still find benefit from individual use of the study. If using the material in a small group, the best use of limited time

will be made by each member working through the material in advance and noting down responses in the spaces provided. It will also be valuable to note any questions or surprises that arise. In this way, you can prepare your mind and heart, so discussion will be deepened by sharing considered responses.

Our Partners

Jesus didn't just do things *for* people, but sat and shared their lives, and did things *with* them to help them heal and live life to the full. The people we are supporting through Lent Event are not just people we help, but people with whom we partner. This year we have asked the people involved in the projects to engage with us by commenting on the biblical passages. We asked them to tell us how they read the passage from their perspective. In this way, we are asking them to challenge the way we read the scriptures, the way we assume that our reading is obvious and normal. We are asking ourselves what it would mean to our faith and reading

of scripture if we were located much closer to those who struggle to live. How does their sense of God's presence challenge our sense of God's presence?

The Pattern of The Studies

- Read the passage and make a brief note about its central message.
- Try to reflect on where you are as you read the passage. Does the central idea in the passage trigger deep feelings? Do you feel attracted to what is being said, or is it something that you find difficult? From what perspective or position do you think you are approaching this passage?
- Read the comments made from our partners in this project. How do they challenge your sense that your view on this passage is 'normal'?
- Read the commentary, which offers another perspective on the passage.
- Ask yourself what you discovered about Jesus, yourself and your following of Jesus, as you listened

to the various voices (your own experience, partners, and the commentary).

- Consider one of the projects, and ask what that says to you about your following of Jesus.

Understanding What The Bible is Saying

- **Step 1: Be aware of what shapes our response to everything, including scripture and Jesus.** How we see the world, how we read the scriptures, and how we act are shaped by who we are, our sense of identity. Who we are is greatly shaped by our place in the world, our relationships and our social location. This sense of location and identity gives us a certain perspective or way of seeing that shapes how we see things, and what we do not see at all (that others do see).
- **Step 2: Listen to the voice of our partner churches and what they say about other perspectives on scripture.** We usually think that the way we see, read and act is 'normal'. We need to listen to the voices

of others to be reminded that ours is just one perspective or way of seeing.

- **Step 3: Consider the passages and ask what they might mean for us.**

Following Jesus – the act of discipleship – is in part about discovering where Jesus is, and where he calls us to be in the world. So the focus of the work we will do on the Bible passages is to see where Jesus is, who he mixes with, who he breaks bread and shares table-fellowship with, who he welcomes into the reign of God, and what this might say about our discipleship.

There is probably more material here than you need for any one study. Different approaches interest different groups, so please pick and choose to fit the amount of time and the interest of your group. However, don't work on only certain sections (e.g., only the commentary) every week. If you are not going to do the whole study, make sure you: (i) read the partners' reflections every week, and (ii) do different parts each week so you are challenged in varying parts of your life.



Sudan
WATER AND EDUCATION

What Shapes Us

Because of our families, experiences, inherited explanations of the world, and place in the world, each of us hears a conversation, reads a book, analyses the news, watches a movie, or listens to music in a very different way. We all know that. Just watch a small group of people comment on a movie that they have just seen, or share what they have seen on the street. Our response is shaped by all that makes us distinctively us.

Some of the things which make us distinctively *us* are gender, age, ethnicity, education, core values of our society, where we live, our religious beliefs, economic circumstances, and the people with whom we usually spend time and who are in our peer groups. For example, if you are a young black woman in Australia your experience of life, the values you hold and the things you hold dear and wish to protect are very different to a middle-aged white Australian male. You notice (and do not notice) different things,

have different amounts of power and control over your own life, and have a different set of values.

Who we are, not only shapes our responses to ordinary things, but also impacts on how we read and understand the Bible. There is no value-free, universal spot from which we can read the Bible and discover its ultimate truth. We always read from a particular place, and with already pre-existing views. Women will read differently to men. Those who are relatively rich and privileged (like us), will read differently to those who are poor. For example, do we see the women in a story or do we ignore or downplay them? Is there any significance in Jesus' care for those who are poor? Do we notice the number of times Jesus has critical things to say about those who are rich? Much of the time we see in the scriptures those things which support our interests and needs, although, fortunately, there can be moments of change and newness.

Is Our Way Of Seeing Things Really 'Normal'?

The way we see and understand things in our family and society becomes quite normal for us.

We come to believe that this is just the way it is.

In these studies, we are challenged to re-assess our sense of 'normal', and to check how we read the scriptures. We have asked our partners in the Lent Event projects to share their perspective on the passages, and so to suggest another way of seeing. You are being asked to consider what it would mean to your faith and reading of scripture if you had a greater sense of solidarity with those who struggle to live. How does their sense of where Jesus was in his world challenge our understanding of Jesus and the passages under consideration?

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*. Introduced by Edwin H. Robertson. Translated by John Bowden (London: Collins, 1996)

Where Jesus Is In The World

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian and pastor who was executed by the Nazis for his part in a plot to kill Hitler. In one of his early works (really a set of lectures to his students) he says that the question of *who* Jesus is cannot be separated from the question of *where* Jesus is in the world.¹

One of the things which is clear in the ministry of Jesus is that people were disturbed by where they found him. He was born in a small town in a stable, found recognition for his ministry in the wilderness rather than the city, mixed with sinners and outcasts, spoke to women, and died as a criminal on a cross. He also suggested that when it is time for us to give an account of our life, the measure will be whether we cared for Jesus who is found among strangers, the poor and hungry, the sick, and the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-46).

So, a central question we will ask in these Lenten studies is: where do we find Jesus in each of the passages, what does this suggest

about him and the Trinitarian God (the one we worship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and what does it suggest about where we should be in the world if we wish to be followers of Jesus?

What My Personal Perspective Is

Let me tell you a bit about myself, partly as an example, and partly because you need to be aware of my perspective (or bias?).

I was born in a country town in NSW, grew up in the church, and became a candidate for the ministry of the church when I was 17. Just before I went to university, I went to Aurukun (an indigenous community in North Queensland), which changed my life by drawing me into a lifelong commitment to a journey with indigenous people. I married, had three children, and after over 25 years of marriage was divorced. I have remarried, and between my wife and I we have six children. Somewhere in my journey – through study, friends, and personal experiences – I developed a commitment

to justice, the equality of all, liberation theology, and God's care for those who are least in our community. I have spent the last 30 years in struggles of all kinds – land rights, support for the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, sexuality and gender equality, peace, gun control, trade union support, the end of apartheid, and justice for the people of Palestine. I read with a belief in God's care for the poor; an understanding that the Bible is concerned for real life, economics and politics, and not just 'spiritual' things; and that conflict is a real part of scripture. I am also a white male, who is ordained and has been for over 30 years, who is 60 years old, and fits too easily into the privileges that come with gender, age, and place in the church. Read what I say with some suspicion, and lots of questions.



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