

# Daily Devotions

1<sup>st</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018



Titles of Jesus

## Introduction

This booklet consists of the readings, reflections and prayers sent out by the URC each day by email. We have a team of 120 writers reflecting different places and perspectives in the URC.

For the next two weeks we will be exploring some of the titles of Jesus used in the Bible. The readings will be very short but on each day a writer will explore the meaning of the various titles - King of the Jews, Son of David, Son of God, Lamb of God, Rabbi, Light of the World etc.

On Sundays we are working through the Psalms as translated in the Free Church of Scotland's new Psalter, Sing Psalms.

If you would like to receive the Daily Devotions by email please go to [devotions.urb.org.uk](http://devotions.urb.org.uk) and sign up for them.

*Andy Braunston  
Co-ordinator, Daily Devotions from the URC*

Jesus is still our greatest role model for life, so we need to be close to him, our rabbi, to benefit from his teaching, care, challenge and encouragement. We do this through regular prayer, Bible study, time spent with him and living out of his values in the world. We also need people around us who inspire us in our faith and life. We should also take notice of those that may be looking to us as their rabbi. So the questions I put for reflection today are, "Who are our rabbis?" and "Who are we rabbis to?"

**Prayer**

Our Rabbi,  
 We pray today for those who have the responsibility of modelling their lives to others,  
 give them wisdom and grace and help them to be good rabbis and for ourselves we ask,  
 that you teach us your ways of truth, love and grace  
 That we might live them out in your world,  
 So that others might choose to follow you as their rabbi.  
 To your praise and glory and in your name we ask  
 Amen.

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**Sunday 1st April Easter Sunday**

*The Rev'd Martin Knight  
Minister at St Paul's URC, South Croydon*

*Psalm 41*

1 Blessed is the one who cares for those in need;  
The LORD delivers him in times of strife.

2 The LORD will surely bless him in the land;  
He will protect him and preserve his life.

He will not hand him over to his foes  
That they may satisfy their evil will.

3 The LORD will on his sickbed give him help,  
And he will raise him up when he is ill.

4 I said, "Be merciful to me, O LORD;  
Heal me, because against you I have sinned."

5 My enemies with malice say of me,  
"When will he die—his name come to an end?"

6 They visit me with falsehood in their hearts  
And then go out and spread their wicked lies.

7 Against me all my foes are whispering;  
The worst of fates for me their minds devise.

8 They say, "A vile disease has struck him down;  
He never will get up and leave his bed."

9 My closest friend has turned his back on me—

**Saturday 14th April Titles of Jesus - Rabbi/Rabboni/Teacher**

*The Rev'd Stuart Nixon is a pioneer minister in Salford.*

*Reading: St John 20:16*

Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).

*Reflection*

I currently spend a lot of time around schools and education. My role is based in a secondary school, I am a governor of a local primary school and my wife is a teacher. The one thing I have noticed in all these areas is that being a teacher is more than just pouring knowledge from one brain into another. Instead it involves understanding the young people and caring for them as unique individuals and not just educational units with exams to pass. For many teachers this has them being the only positive adult role model that the young people might see. These teachers are rabbis. They don't just pass on information they also positively model their lives, their actions and words in such a way that the young people want to be more like them or at least notice a difference in them that makes them think.

First century rabbis were similar, they had followers, and the followers often wanted to be so close to the rabbi so that the dust from the rabbi's feet would cover them. Rabbi's were often followed by the brightest and best of the local villages. Jesus model was different, he chose the ordinary to be his followers and as we see in Mary's response, she was part of that following.

on which he was condemned, implying treason against the Emperor.

The description given to him as an infant by foreigners, and the title used by foreigners in mockery as they condemned and killed him: King of the Jews. But as the prologue to John's Gospel puts it, "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." Whatever the Magi really expected, whatever Pilate and his soldiers really meant, it was they and not his own people who hailed Jesus as King.

In so many ways this was a feature of his ministry; Jesus was recognised and accepted by those whom the respectable establishment despised and rejected – women, foreigners, the sick and those whose work rendered them unclean.

How hard it is for us, with our churches perceived as part of respectable society, to make Jesus known to the kind of people who responded to him so positively during his earthly ministry. So many in Britain are fascinated by our royal family but are less interested in the true King. As we seek to proclaim Jesus as the Saviour of all, may more and more accept his sovereignty in our lives.

#### *Prayer*

Jesus, our true King,  
may we accept you as the sovereign power for our lives;  
may our lives show your power working in and through us;  
may our work, witness and worship lead others to turn to you  
as their Saviour and King. Amen

My trusted friend, with whom I shared my bread.

10 But you, O LORD, be merciful to me  
And raise me up their malice to repay.  
11 I know that you are pleased with me, O LORD;  
For over me my foe does not hold sway.

12 In my integrity you hold me fast;  
Before you I will constantly remain.  
13 O praise the LORD, the God of Israel,  
For ever and for evermore! Amen.

#### *Reflection*

'Being raised' seems like a good theme for today.

Christ is risen – He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Having read Psalm 41 we cannot but have noticed the shared story that gave ancient words to the gospel writers, as they sought to name the experience of Christ's Passion.

Blessed is the one who cares for those in need.  
The Lord will...preserve his life.  
My enemies say of me, "when will he die"...they will visit me  
with falsehood.  
The worst of fates for me their minds devise.  
My closest friend has turned his back on me...with whom I  
shared bread.  
But you, O Lord, be merciful to me and raise me up their  
malice to repay.

Psalm 41 illuminated for the Gospel writers the suffering of Jesus and the root of his glory. His way, the way of life, is to be found here: 'Blessed is the one who cares for those in need'.

It's not a popular or easy way to live, we know that. It can lead to us being mocked, betrayed by friends, and crucified in one of a thousand ways, but it is His beatitude:

Standing alongside refugees. Giving a voice to the voiceless poor. Protesting benefit cuts Nagging your MP Dining with those on the edge Openly listening to different political opinions or religious beliefs.

This Psalm restores our strength as we walk his way; sometimes through the cross-strewn dark. The crucified one is raised – a living example that the light is never overcome.

As we live the life of Jesus today, be assured that the one(s) crucified as they care for those in need, are raised up. The humble are exalted. Suffering and glory belong together. Christ is risen – He is risen indeed!

### *Prayer*

Living God,  
raise you people we pray:  
may the way of the cross teach us resilient strength  
may the empty tomb restore us with hopeful joy  
and may Easter celebration be seen on our faces and through our hands this day. Amen

may beam forth from our yielded, committed lives,  
to you who is the one true Light of the World.  
Through Him who said "Let there be light",  
and to this day floods our lives with His light and love. AMEN.

### **Friday 13th April      Titles of Jesus - King of the Jews**

*The Revd Julian Macro, Retired Minister, member of Verwood URC*

*Reading: St Matthew 2: 1-2 & 27:37*

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage.' .... Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

### *Reflection*

So much to ponder: early in the life of Jesus some strange foreign astrologers (whose trade has no credence today but was taken seriously by some people then) asked Herod, the Roman imposed King, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews."

At the end of his life the Roman execution squad mocked Jesus, "Hail, King of the Jews" using the form (but not the content) of the salutation of the Emperor; Pilate arranged that Jesus died with the label, "King of the Jews." This was in fact the charge

would be if we could actually live like this, never going through experiences which perhaps we would call dark.

The wonder of our faith, and trust in Jesus, is of course the fact that despite/in spite of such experiences which life forces upon us we can still live in the light, because our Saviour is that light. What comfort there is to be found in Scripture as we read that we can walk in the light, and are encouraged to do so, rather than clinging to the works of darkness, as was our former life before we walked in the light of Jesus.

Jesus Himself boldly says that those who walk in the dark don't know where they are going (John 12:34), a fact that seems so clear in its meaning, but can be something which we might not always have lived true to.

With such assurance, with such positivity how can we but feel challenged by the words which our Saviour said about us being the light of the world? Living in the light, in the reflection of His light, day by day is wonderful but it also places upon us the responsibility of not marring that light by the way in which we live. Let us walk in His light and enjoy the sunshine He alone can bring us!

Prayer

Lord of all light, with whom there is no darkness.  
Help us to walk in the light as your nature is the light.  
May we not cling to the works of darkness,  
but instead become cleaner,  
clearer windows through which your Light

Monday 2nd April

Titles of Jesus - Emmanuel

*The Rev'd Angela Rigby is minister at Christ Church URC in Tonbridge and St Johns Hill URC in Sevenoaks.*

Reading: St Matthew 1:23

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

*Reflection*

In Heathrow airport, there is a poster of Admiral Lord Nelson's statue in Trafalgar Square taken from an unusual perspective. The photo focusses on his face and his bicorne hat. At a glance, I thought it was Napoleon, but then recognised Nelson – due to context (London airport) and prior experience (I've been to Trafalgar Square).

Matthew declares Jesus as Isaiah's Emmanuel, meaning "God with us", encouraging us to see Jesus from a particular perspective. Matthew helps us to recognise that this close-up perspective of God found in Jesus is indeed the God revealed in the Torah, by reminding us of the context (Isaiah's writings) and of their previous experience (the God who is always "with" Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Joshua, etc).

In Isaiah 7, Emmanuel was the sign Ahaz daren't ask for, but God provided anyway. Emmanuel would be a sign that King Ahaz didn't need to be afraid of the plots of two neighbouring nations. God would be faithful and be "with" them in these anxious times.

Throughout the gospel of Matthew, Jesus as “God with us” is a very down-to-earth God. And at the end of the gospel, Jesus makes that extraordinary promise – “I am with you always.....” (Matthew 28:20). Emmanuel isn’t going anywhere. The closeness and involvement in our lives that he showed as he walked the earth isn’t going to stop just because the practicalities of how it looked had changed. And seen through the lens of Isaiah’s promise, whatever anxiety the early disciples of Jesus may have had, the clear message was – God was with them.

If it was true in 735 BC and then again in 33 AD, then is there any reason for us to believe it isn’t true today? And always?

#### *Prayer*

Faithful God, sometimes we are anxious about doing things the way Jesus taught. “Walking the way, living the life of Jesus today” is not always easy. Sometimes you call us to walk in a direction we’ve never walked before. Sometimes you call us to walk in a direction that is different from seemingly everyone else. Help us to stand, to keep walking with humility the path you have called us to walk. Help us to recognise that you are walking with us. Thank you, God. Amen

any act that we have done but by His selfless sacrifice on the cross. We are not merely forgiven but we are transformed into something different by our acceptance of Him and His death.

#### *Prayer*

Loving God I thank you for the transforming and renewing power of your son Jesus.

I pray that I will live my life in a fresh and new way that honours you and shows that I have been justified and renewed by Jesus. I pray that I will enjoy the life that you have given me through Jesus your Son

Amen

#### **Thursday 12th April Titles of Jesus - Light of the World**

*Verena Walder is a lay preacher and member of Tabernacle URC in Mumbles.*

*Reading: St John 8:12*

Jesus said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

#### *Reflection*

What can one say about such a statement which is so fundamental to our faith? Jesus spoke often about the light but here He very definitely states that HE is the light and if we walk with Him we shall never walk in darkness. How wonderful it



first He did not let temptation lead Him into sin, but remained sinless throughout His life.

Adam sinned against God and all his descendants are tainted by that disobedience and yet can find justification, not through any act of their own, but by the selfless obedience of Jesus who allows us to be justified by faith in Him.

It is interesting to consider what Paul could have meant by "justification." Paul was familiar with Jewish law and court system. Unlike courts today there was no prosecutor or defence lawyer. The accuser and defendant both gave their statements to a judge who would then decide who was right and that person would be justified. If the defendant was justified it was like an acquittal in modern law.

Paul writes to the Galatians (2:16) "yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ."

It is good to know that we are not justified by some legal loophole that lets a guilty person go free but we are truly justified and correctly free to worship God without our past sinful nature coming between us and God. We are not simply changed we are renewed; 2 Corinthians 5:17 "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

We may sometimes feel worthless or helpless but we should always remember that we have been changed by Jesus, not by

Tuesday 3rd April

Titles of Jesus - Christ/Messiah

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is Minister of Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton URCs in the Synod of Scotland.*

*Reading: St Mark 8: 27 - 33*

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

*Reflection*

We lose some of the radicalness of the Jewish title Messiah. It means, as the Greek translation Christ means, "anointed one." By the time of the New Testament Jewish people believed the Messiah would be a political leader who would end the Roman occupation. The Temple authorities were always on the lookout for anyone who was named, or claimed to be, Messiah - after all

revolutions lead to repression and the political space carved out by the leaders would have been quickly ended. No wonder Jesus tells Peter, and the others, “sternly” not to tell others.

Interestingly, Peter understands the implication of the title - but Jesus seems to reject that understanding. Jesus warns that he must suffer and die - and rise again. Clearly Peter missed the rising again bit. What use is a Messiah who dies? Peter tries to set Jesus straight and gets called Satan for his pains - remember from our series on Job Satan is envisioned as as a tempter. Jesus sees Peter’s attempt to get him to see sense as tempting.

Much as I warm to the idea of religious leaders overthrowing corrupt dictators I am reminded of the words of Paul VI who struggled with the part that political liberation - as Peter thought the Messiah would lead - with the task of evangelism: *...the Church has the firm conviction that all temporal liberation, all political liberation- even if it endeavours to find its justification in such or such a page of the Old or New Testament...even if it pretends to be today's theology- carries within itself the germ of its own negation and fails to reach the ideal that it proposes for itself whenever its profound motives are not those of justice in charity, whenever its zeal lacks a truly spiritual dimension and whenever its final goal is not salvation and happiness in God.\**

Liberation will only come through Jesus, our Messiah, the one who doesn’t self destruct unlike all our human ideologies.

*\* Paul VI Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelism in the Modern World) n35 8th December 1975*

## *Prayer*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,  
grant us peace.

## **Wednesday 11th April Titles of Jesus - Second/New Adam**

*John Collings is a lay preacher and member of Rutherglen URC*

*Reading: Romans 5:18-21*

Therefore, just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## *Reflection*

Jesus was the second Adam as, like the first Adam He entered the world free from sin. Jesus was the New Adam as, unlike the

an altar server I'd not only hear the phrase "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us" at every Sunday mass I attended but also at the weekday masses where I'd serve during the school holidays. The liturgical sequence, is used in many churches before the distribution of Holy Communion. We have it in Rejoice and Sing at 14, 15 and 16 and it's in the Church of Scotland's Church Hymnary 4 at 653. For me, therefore, it's a title I associate with the reception of Holy Communion.

The editor of John's Gospel probably associated the title with Jesus' sacrificial death. Mute as lamb before its shearers Jesus didn't argue with Pilate, or Herod, and accepted all that was to follow. Calvin argued that before all eternity Jesus chose to offer himself for our sins and so this title has something to do with his death on the Cross.

In Revelation, however, there are 29 references to a Lion like Lamb that is slain but stands. The writer here clearly is associating the Lamb with the resurrected Christ.

So this title has layers of meaning - Jesus who accepted his unjust trial, torture and death knowing that in doing so he broke the power of evil; the risen Christ who defeated death and sin; the Christ who gathers us to himself in bread and wine when we share in Communion together.

*Prayer*

Messiah,  
help me to struggle to against injustice,  
to put a spoke in the wheel of those  
great machines of evil,  
but to remember,  
in doing so,  
to keep close to you,  
that I don't rely on my own strength,  
ideas or politics,  
but yours.  
Amen.

Wednesday 4th April

Titles of Jesus - Lord

*The Revd Michael Hopkins is Minister of Farnham and Elstead  
URCs, Surrey, and Clerk of the General Assembly.*

*Reading Romans 10:9-13*

Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

### *Reflection*

I grew up with the word Lord being commonly used as a means of addressing God. One day I heard a radical Methodist minister say that he thought Lord was an inappropriate way to address God, because lords and ladies were an old fashioned thing we would be better off without, and they didn't connect with ordinary people. One might also observe that Lord is another male noun used to address God, of which there is no shortage. Yet, despite all of that, Lord is a term used over 700 times in the New Testament, and came so naturally to the apostles, as it tripped off their tongues throughout the record of their Acts. So, despite its acknowledged shortcomings, I still feel there's a place for addressing Jesus as "Lord".

### *Prayer*

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner

Silence

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner

Silence

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner

Silence

...and repeat as often as you dare...

was not remote. Like the shepherd king of history, he valued every sheep in the flock.

David means "beloved". No better pedigree. We are all children of a loving God, and if loved, then sharers of that love in our day, our time, our place.

### *Prayer*

Loving God,  
our demented world cries out for your love and peace,  
enable us to respond warmly to cries for help;  
may we grow more loving because we have engaged  
with others, be they friends or strangers;  
and may Jesus' humility and openness be our guide  
every day. Amen.

**Tuesday 10th April    Titles of Jesus - Lamb of God**

*The Rev'd Andy Braunston is the minister of Barrhead,  
Shawlands and Stewarton URCs in the Synod of Scotland.*

*Reading - John 1: 29*

The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him and declared,  
'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'

### *Reflection*

I learnt this title of Jesus very early on in my life as a Christian - probably before I associated it with this Scriptural passage. As

Monday 9th April

Titles of Jesus - Son of David

*The Rev'd David Jenkins is a retired minister in Marple, Cheshire*

*Reading: St Matthew 15:22*

Just then, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting: "Have mercy, Lord, Son of David, my daughter is tormented by a demon".

*Reflection*

Jesus never sought titles. Perhaps his own name "Jesus" was enough. He was a rescuer, a restorer, a releaser. Once you have a title you are pigeon-holed, boxed, imprisoned. Simply to be identified as a child of God is the highest of all callings. When it came to titles, it was other people who seemed to want to shower them on Jesus. They even put titles over his cross.

Luke and Matthew, in their birth stories, made sure the world knows that Jesus was from David's royal line. The birth narratives centred on Bethlehem, David's home. When Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time he is greeted as a royal visitor with palms and hosannas. How the Jewish people longed for a king. It had been a thousand years.

When a Canaanite woman plucked up the courage to bring her heartfelt need to Jesus, she attracted his attention by shouting out the title "Son of David". The disciples wanted to turn her away. Jesus said "No". Then the fun began. Unafraid, she took him on in conversation. Jesus was impressed. This Son of David

Thursday 5th April

Titles of Jesus - The Word

*The Revd John A Young is a retired minister of the Synod of Scotland and a member of Giffnock URC*

*Reading: St John 1: 1-18*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being, in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

## *Reflection*

I am not the first to observe that the drama of many films and soaps is poor substitute for the face to face drama of two persons fully engaged in dialogue. The 'Face to Face' dialogues (originally broadcast 1959-62, then 1989-98) demonstrated the dramatic power of the interview. Likewise, in plays, the soliloquy engages in dialogue of the interior kind, with the audience drawn in; also the best poetry.

With the Prologue as one partner in the dialogue, and the other the reader, we too can be drawn into the drama of God's salvation. Of course not all may choose to be fully engaged, but those who are find how God chose to act in history.

The Prologue's opening, then as now, strikes a chord of recognition: the beginning of Genesis - where God's creative word (not a dialogue, but the means by which dialogue can grow) brings into being all that is. John's use of 'Logos' ('Word') is a stroke of missionary genius for it is understood in the pervasive Greek culture and the Hebrew one, each with distinctive resonances. Communication established, John reveals that the Word he is speaking of is not an impersonal creative force, nor a principle of existence, but a flesh and blood person who embodies God. This human being, God's gift to us, is graceful, the source of light, life and fulfilment to all who place their lives in his care. 'The Father's only Son' - this is who incarnate Word is. Later on in John chapter 1 we learn his personal name.

liberates us from the crippling fear that faith and depression must never dialogue with each other? Psalm 42 models for us an honest conversation, where telling it like it is - even if seemingly into thin air - begins to quench our thirsting for the living God.

Woodhouse suggests verse 9 has special power. 'Deep speaks to deep' intimates an enticing prospect that when we are at our lowest, we may be more open to the one who is the ground of our being. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'when I am weak then I am strong.' Is it that when we are at our worst, we have no defences left to erect between ourselves and God, and thus can gradually come to know again God's reliably resurrected love, so broad and long, so high and deep?

Our generation's readiness to be real about mental health lends to Psalm 42 a new power to speak to us and for us. May that auger well for the equilibrium of society and the resilience of our faith.

## *Prayer*

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise God,  
my help and my God.

## *Reflection*

After all the liturgical hijinks of Easter it is little wonder that today is called Low Sunday. Not all of us can remain forever on that peak of celebration.

In truth, feeling 'low' is an understatement for more and more people. Stress, depression and mental torment are significant and life-shaping for many. Experts think this may be accounted for by a greater willingness to speak of mental ill-health, by the world feeling more bewildering and tense, and by the far-reaching effects of this decade's financial austerity.

Today's Psalm feels so appropriate, for it finds the Psalmist at a pretty low ebb. She feels far from God: she yearns, she longs, she thirsts. She is so depressed that she's unable to speak to God; the question, 'how long will this go on?' is asked 'of no-one in particular and of anyone willing to listen', as Patrick Woodhouse puts it. Somehow, though, crying out in that way seems helpful. Just acknowledging the hell she is in sparks some memories – ancient encounters with God found in the history books, anecdotes of God's light dispelling her own previous shadowlands. Those reminiscences nudge her thoughts toward God's loving kindness. 'Yes', she seems to say, 'there was a time when God was my Rock.' Then, the black dog re-appears. 'Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?' Yet the memories are enough to prompt the realisation that trusting in God might be hard but it's her best hope.

If depression is part of life for us, or of the lives of our intimates, it may be we specially appreciate this Psalm. Could it be that it

Writing some 60 years after Christ's resurrection, John was acutely aware of the rejection Jesus suffered. But some did accept and believe in him, meriting the description 'children of God'. We are ever in their debt.

Our work is to communicate through words and actions what is readily understood about our faith. Those who are open to dialogue will respond. The work of God in them, and us, has started.

## *Prayer*

Gracious God  
let the wonder of your love  
come afresh to us.  
Open up our closed  
and selfish lives  
to the light and life  
you offer us  
through Jesus Christ.  
May your Spirit so work in us  
that we too may incarnate  
your gospel. Amen

Friday 6th April

Titles of Jesus - Son of God

*The Rev'd Peter Meek is the Moderator of the East Midlands Synod.*

*Reading: Mark 1:11*

"And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased".

*Reflection*

Mark wants us to know very clearly, and immediately, why he is writing his Gospel which begins with a declaration that Jesus is the Son of God and, within a few lines, recounts Jesus' baptism. The stories in Matthew and Luke are almost identical.

The question of Jesus' identity has always been paramount, because from it flows the authority to say and do what he did. Mark explores Jesus' authority, as well, in chapter 1, and this is no coincidence.

This declaration is political dynamite. It was a threat to Rome; only Caesar was declared " Son of God' and a threat to the political truce between Jewish religious authorities and Rome. Some have written that this was probably not the theological threat to Judaism many have supposed. The idea that the threat is mainly political carries merit even if, sometimes, the accusations against Jesus are dressed up in theological language. How often in church life we use "other issues" to act as the charger for what we really want to say?

6 My soul within me is depressed;  
I therefore will recall you still  
From Jordan's land, from Hermon's heights  
And from the top of Mizar hill.

7 Deep calls to deep, as with a roar  
Your waterfalls cascading roll.  
Your waves and breakers fall on me;  
They overwhelm my very soul.

8 By day the LORD directs his love;  
His song remains with me at night—  
A prayer to him who is my God,  
My only source of life and light.

9 This I will say to God my Rock,  
"Why have you so forgotten me?  
Why must I go about in grief,  
Downtrodden by the enemy?"

10 My bones in mortal agony  
Are groaning, while my en'mies say,  
"Wherever is this God of yours?"  
They scoff at me throughout the day.

11 Why are you downcast, O my soul?  
Why are you so disturbed in me?  
Trust God, for I will praise him yet;  
My Saviour and my God is he.



Sunday 8th April

*The Revd Nigel Uden is a minister in Cambridge*

*Reading: Psalm 42*

1 As pants the deer for flowing streams,  
So longs my soul, O God, for you.

2 I thirst for God, the living God;  
When can I meet with God anew?

3 My tears have been my constant food  
Both in the night and in the day,  
While all day long insistently,  
“Where is this God of yours?” they say.

4 As I pour out my soul in grief,  
These things I do remember still:  
How with the multitude I went  
Up to God’s house on Zion hill.

In their procession I would lead  
As we approached with cheerful song  
And shouts of joy and thankfulness,  
Rejoicing with the festive throng.

5 Why are you downcast, O my soul?  
Why are you so disturbed in me?  
Trust God, for I will praise him yet;  
My Saviour and my God is he.

How precious it is to us that God has, and does, walk amongst us; that God has lived our life and understands all we go through. How precious it is to us that a life lived Walking the Way that is Jesus, is never, ever a wasted life but the most fruitful and meaningful way to live, because Jesus is the Son of God.

What a difference God can make in our world through us as we walk alongside both those who don’t go to Church and those who do. Our confidence in Jesus can give us the confidence to hear God speaking to us through women at wells whose life styles don’t match our idea of “rightness” and through that preacher we don’t get on with but faithfully listen to.

That Jesus is the Son of God, declared by the Voice from Heaven, makes all the difference to the world, all is changed since that day.

*Prayer*

Jesus Son of God and Son of Mary,  
enlighten my heart today,  
enlighten your world today.  
May we know the joy of walking with you  
all the days of our lives.  
As I plant my feet in your footsteps,  
may I make a difference in the world for your sake.  
Amen

Saturday 7th April

Titles of Jesus - Son of Man

*The Rev'd Nick Jones is minister of Heswall URC & St. George's URC, Thornton Hough.*

*Reading: Revelation 1.12-13*

Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest.

*Reflection*

Sometimes the small words matter in how we understand a section of scripture. Some translations of Revelation 1.13 refer to 'one like a Son of Man', while others say 'one like THE Son of Man.' This small change makes a surprising difference, and takes us to the heart of what this curious phrase means.

It first appears in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Ezekiel, the titular prophet is addressed by God as 'Son of man', which could alternatively be translated as 'human' - making a distinction between God and humanity. Then in the book of Daniel there's an apocalyptic vision of 'one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.'

Then things are different in the New Testament. The phrase has acquired a definite article - 'the Son of Man' - and is mainly used by Jesus to refer to himself. Is this telling us that Jesus is human, or that he is the Messiah? Somehow, used in a slightly different

way, the same short phrase can mean both of these things – reminding of the paradox of Jesus being the Word made flesh.

In T.S. Eliot's long and sometimes perplexing poem there's a reference back to Ezekiel. A narrator addresses an unknown character as 'Son of man', and says they cannot answer a question because they 'know only a heap of broken images'. Sometimes when we struggle with the Bible this is how we might feel; we only have a heap of images that we can't fit together. Yet scripture gives us the language to begin to talk about God, however imperfectly. God can even speak to us in the gap between 'a' and 'the', and in one short phrase we see the two natures of Jesus brought together.

*Prayer*

Lord Jesus,  
we praise you as 'a son of man',  
a human being who lived with us  
and shared our sorrows and our joys.  
Yet we praise you too as 'the son of man',  
our redeemer who died and rose again for us,  
the son of God, the light of the world,  
and we ask for that light to guide us  
when it seems we see only broken images.  
Amen.