

Fifth week in **Lent**:

Wednesday 25th March – Lent Reflection: 12:30-1pm & 7:30-8pm

Introduction:

During the penitential season of **'Lent'** Christians are called to strip away all the non-essential and unimportant, through prayer and fasting, that Jesus Christ may become the centre of our life. Lent calls believers to put self-interest aside and engage with inward silence; to meditate upon the depth of God's transforming love and the sacrifice of His Son, who brought awareness of God's love into the world. During the forty days leading up to Easter, Christians are challenged to become aware of all Creation groaning in its sinfulness, and to reflect on their own personal sin. Lent is a period of testing; an inward journey of self-examination, confession and repentance, which is rewarded with the promise of a fresh start, like the promise of Spring after Winter. Lent calls Christians to deny self, reflect on God and discern what He may be saying to, and asking of, each individual to be and to do. This calls for contemplation on God's Word, Will and purpose for us, as *His people* in the world, to engage in righteousness, reveal Truth, serve justice and discover life abundant.

The Lord's Prayer: *all say together*

CD: The Orchestral Tubular Bells **Part 1:**

Matthew 18:1-7 *Who is the Greatest?*

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" ²He called a child, whom He put among them, ³and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁴Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. ⁵Whoever welcomes one such child in My name welcomes Me. ⁶If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in Me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

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Relationship Stumbling Blocks

"I don't get it!" said James. "Neither do I!" said his brother John. "We ask a simple question, 'who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' and Jesus bangs on about stumbling blocks!" "I know", James replied. "And all that about little children beforehand, does He mean they are the stumbling blocks? I know I could be tempted to sin over mine sometimes!" John laughed, "Yes! I know, I've seen you lose it with them many a time, you need to learn a bit of patience!" James was incredulous! "Talk about the pot calling the kettle black", he exclaimed! "Your temper is on a much shorter fuse than mine!" "Oh and you're demonstrating calm patience now are you?" retorted John. "Sarcasm will get you nowhere!" James replied, "Perhaps you're my stumbling block!" "What do you mean by that?" snapped John. "I'm here for you all the time, aren't I? Came with you to see this Jesus, didn't I? Left everything behind to support you, remember!" "Hey!" said James. "Just hang on a minute, I didn't ask you to come, we both decided to follow Jesus. You can't just blame me for anything you don't like; perhaps you're my stumbling block! Thought about that one, have you? You're not so perfect you know!"

“Pack it in you two!” said Thomas, “you’re always arguing with one another, can’t you ever just agree to disagree? I want to hear what Jesus has to say not be distracted by you two arguing the toss all the time.” James and John were taken aback; Thomas was not usually one to get involved. “Have you two thought that you may be acting just like the stumbling blocks Jesus is talking about?” “What do you mean” they said in unison. “You both get on your high horses over things that don’t really matter” Thomas continued. “You end up getting angry with each other and sometimes angry with the rest of us and it’s not pleasant.” James and John hung their heads, “Sorry” they said, again in unison. “Well at least you can apologise in unison!” retorted Thomas, “I guess that’s a start” and he burst out laughing. The two brothers’ looked at each other and couldn’t help but laugh with him. “I guess we need to listen a bit closer to what Jesus says” said James. “I agree” said John. “Good idea” said Thomas.

CD: The Orchestral Tubular Bells **Part 1:** *continued...*

Matthew 18:8-9 *Stumbling Blocks*

⁸“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to be thrown into the hell of fire.”

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Physical Stumbling Blocks

“No, no, no, that can’t be right!” said John, “Cutting off limbs and gouging out eyes, Jesus can’t be serious!” “Yes it’s weird, said James, “and what does He mean about all this eternal hell of fire stuff? “I don’t like the sound of that at all!” John sighed, “Now He seems to be saying that our hands, feet and eyes are the stumbling blocks, so which is it, children or body parts?” But James for once was silent; he was reflecting on what Thomas had said about flaring up too quickly all the time. It had hurt to be pulled up short by a friend but he knew what Thomas said was right. This time he was really going to try hard to think first before exploding! “What’s up with you?” said John, “are you going to answer me or not?” “I’m thinking” said James. “Whoa, that’s a miracle!” replied John, “Does it hurt?” “Why do you always have to criticise?” complained James, “I’m trying to think about what Jesus is saying, I mean *really* take it in.” “Crikey! You are serious aren’t you?” replied John. “Yes I am” James replied angrily “and I would appreciate it if you would help me think this through instead of trying to wind me up!” “All right, all right” said John, “I don’t want to be your stumbling block!” James sighed, “You know John, sometimes you can be so irritating it drives me mad! Try thinking about why Jesus might suggest such drastic action as chopping off parts of our own body. There must be something more to it than that? Think man!” “I’m sorry”, said John, “You’re right, Jesus wouldn’t be saying such things if there wasn’t a very important point to make”. “I am beginning to think that stumbling blocks are temptations to sin” James reflected. “I mean your feet can take you to places you shouldn’t go, right?” “That’s true enough” thought John. James continued, “And your hands can do things they are not meant to, right?” John suddenly had a light bulb moment, “You mean like stealing or something? Yes! I think I’m beginning to understand.” James felt encouraged, “Your eyes are the worst because they can turn your thoughts to sinful things, like looking at a beautiful woman for a bit too long and struggling with lust.”

“Well James you never told me, who is she then, come on confess!” “Huh! As if you don’t know what I’m talking about John!” “Okay, joking aside, yes I do and yes I think You’re right, you are definitely on to something with this train of thought James.” Now it was John that became silent and reflective. “I think there are two sides to this teaching” James continued, “But I’m not quite sure I fully understand yet.” John continued in his own silent thoughts and James fell into silence with him.

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Matthew 18:10-14 *Saving the Lost*

¹⁰“Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of My Father in heaven. ¹¹For the Son of Man came to save the lost. ¹²What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

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Regaining our Balance

Thomas came over to the two brothers and gave them both a nudge. “You’re both unusually quiet, what’s up? I didn’t mean to upset you both earlier; I just wanted you to stop arguing with each other.” James and John looked up from their thoughts and replied together, “It’s not you Thomas.” “Wow! Said Thomas, you’re still talking in unison, I must be good!” and they all laughed. John became serious, “We’ve been thinking about this stumbling block thing, there’s more to this than meets the eye” he said. “Oh, Sorry about the pun, I still have both eyes, just!” James picked up the thought, “children’s angels in heaven seeing the face of God makes me wonder if it’s something to do with innocence? Children do tend to believe what their parents say and accept their authority without question, don’t they?” “Huh! Until they reach teenage, then it’s all change!” retorted John. Thomas thought about that and then slowly replied, “Perhaps Jesus means for us to accept His teaching like a child, you know, as if we believe that He can do anything?” “I used to think that of my dad when I was young”, reflected John, “thought he was invincible I did, looked up to him in everything, never doubted for one minute that he would keep me safe and teach me everything I needed to know.” “Isn’t that what Jesus is talking about?” asked James. “I think you’re right”, said John, “What a parent teaches their child can make or break them simply because they accept whatever they are told. I think Jesus is making this very point, that’s the other side of this.” “What do you mean”, said Thomas, but James jumped in. “Hang on, I think John’s right, it’s not just about us disciplining ourselves to reject sin but also about not saying or doing anything that causes someone else to sin. We must remain innocent like children, accepting the authority of God and *living* what Jesus teaches.” “That’s right!” exclaimed John, that’s the link between children and stumbling blocks, not everyone knows Jesus like we do, some are like children, eager to learn but not yet understanding, so we must be careful how we help them get to know our Lord.” “Yes!” said James all excited, “What we say, what we do, how we behave, will either be a demonstration of God’s love or a stumbling block that damages His children.” “That’s it exactly” said John, “I really do think we have both hit the nail on the head this time, this is how we are meant to live with one another and avoid all the stumbling blocks!”

Thomas had been resigned to the side-lines in silence but now he had a big grin on his face. “Wow!” he exclaimed, “I never thought I would see the day, you two agreeing with each other and actually smiling! You’re both genuinely engaging with each other, all competition gone, neither of you vying for poll position and not a sign of jealousy or anger. I can’t quite believe it, you’re both right!” Again, the two brothers looked at each other... then back at Thomas, and once again they all fell into laughter.

CD: The Orchestral Tubular Bells **Part 1:** *continued...*

FAMILY VALUES ©Janice Morgan-1996 *Based on Romans chapter 12*

The family of God is a family of need,
Who on troubles, traumas and trials must feed,
Daily this life causes boils full of pain to appear,
And cost of the treatment is priced very dear,
But prevention they say is far better than cure,
For that we must study God’s Word, to be sure!

This life’s values and customs must be thrown away,
Our ideals must be changed to live life Jesus’ way,
Transformed into thinking of others above ourselves,
Knowing God, into every deed and thought delves,
With honest appraisal, judge soberly with great care,
Lest our lives, against others, will much worse fare.

God has made each one different and yet all the same,
Our gifts to be used for the other ones claim,
On our own we are crippled and blind, not fully grown,
Together God’s Kingdom to us will be known,
So give thought to God’s family, for God loves us all,
Understanding and patience is our high call.

Let us each bless the other with what each has received,
Then blessings unnumbered we all will conceive,
Of prophecy and teaching encouragement and grace,
Tolerance, forgiveness, these gifts ALL, must face,
With love for each other communication is good,
Building trust in each other as true love should.

So respect family members for each are unique,
God made us and loves us and will to each speak,
Not to all in the same way, or with words all the same,
But to each as each needs to light the true flame
Of God’s Spirit within us, Who affects our new birth,
Through us Jesus’ teaching will fill the whole earth.

Let’s love one another for love is God’s special key,
That opens the door and sets all people free,
Resolve to be humble, sincere and holy in all,
To evil and vengeance we must never fall,
For the master deceiver lies in wait to destroy,
While our Father protects, exposing the ploy.

Be steadfast and patient through suffering and sorrow,
God will set things straight with hope for tomorrow,
If we serve the Lord freely being constant in prayer,
Others will come to God's family to share
The harmony and healing tranquillity of peace,
Till through us, God's children, the world's strivings cease.

CD: The Best Celtic Worship album in the world...ever!

Disc 2: Now When Peace Like A River (*It is well with my soul*)

Resources:

CD: The Orchestral Tubular Bells **Part 1:** Mike Oldfield

CD: The Best Celtic Worship album in the world...ever!

Copies of: x7

Song: Now When Peace Like A River: Words Horatio Spafford (1828-1888)

(It is well with my soul) Music: Stuart Townend & Phil Baggaley