

Shirley Parish Lent Groups 2022 - Live Lent – Embracing Justice

Session 2 (Readings 10th to 16th March)

1. Welcome everybody to the course

Begin with this prayer:

Loving God, we bring ourselves, our church and our world before you; we ask that you show us, alone and together, how to turn and walk in your ways. Amen

2. Introduction (reminder)

The Lent Groups this year are following the daily *Live Lent – Embracing Justice* readings and themes. The groups will work best if we each commit to using the daily readings and prayers as often as we can. What we talk about in the groups will build on what we have read and thought about in the daily readings.

Each week there will be the opportunity to reflect on the readings from the past week and share any insights or ask any questions. We will also take one or two of the Bible passages and dig a little deeper into them. We will end by posing some questions that we can think about in the week ahead.

3. Summary of the week

We continue the story of Exodus, looking at Pharaoh, who refused to be changed by God; at his daughter who acted out of compassion; and at the nation themselves as they began to realise they had to be changed too. We also thought about the power and benefit of remembering.

The readings then move to looking at the laws and guidelines laid down for the people of Israel, and how they were being called to become a people who lived out justice. We also touched on how Jesus took those laws and showed they went deeper than originally thought.

4. Conversation starter

The Passover festival was an annual act of remembering for the people of Israel. Ask the group to share their own or the church's or the nation's traditions of remembering. How do such traditions help us to live for the future rather than dwell in the past?

5. Bible reading – Deuteronomy 10:12-11:1

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the Lord your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart, and do not be stubborn any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

You shall love the Lord your God, therefore, and keep his charge, his decrees, his ordinances, and his commandments always.

- Read the passage through once
- Keep a few moments' silence
- Read the passage a second time with different voices
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase that strikes them

- Read the passage a third time
- Share together what the words or phrases mentioned might mean, and talk about the questions they might raise.

6. Reflection

As we said last week, the Exodus story goes far deeper than simply taking the nation out of Israel and into a new land. It's a story about the complete transformation of the people to enable them to be the people God wanted them to be.

The Israelites thought they had nothing when they were in Egypt. Yet the Exodus strips them of what was still clinging to them from Egypt. They have to go through 40 years of wandering during which time they are shown what it is like to trust in God and depend on him. They are given the vision of what being the people of God might be. They are given laws and instructions which will enable them to live in harmony and demonstrating the justice that comes from God.

When I am decorating I tend to be one of those people who simply slaps new paint on top of the old. I want a quick fix that looks good from the outside. The problem is, however, that the issues remain. The wood is still rotten; the plasterwork is still damaged. The cosmetic fix will only last a short while until all its failings are exposed.

Restoration and true transformation is hard work and it is time consuming. God needed to strip Israel right back to the bare brick and start again. In these readings through Lent we are thinking about justice – are we ready to accept the challenge of each of us being stripped back for God to transform us?

7. Discussion questions

Ask the group, if they wish, to share stories of when they have been stripped back and transformed or if they would prefer, ask them to quietly reflect on their own experiences.

Jesus speaks a lot about the Kingdom of God, and is clear that the ethics of the Kingdom are at odds with what goes on in the world around us. He tells Nicodemus that he must be born again to enter the Kingdom.

How does the story of the Exodus shed light in what it means to be born again?

Ask each person to reflect on areas in their lives in need of this transformation.

8. Final thoughts

Ask each group member to say one thing they have learned from the session, and one thing they might do as a result..

9. Final prayer

Jesus, Lord of time
Hold us in your eternity

Jesus, image of God
Travel with us the life of faith

Jesus, friend of sinners
Heal the brokenness of our world

Jesus, Lord of tomorrow
Draw us into your future.