

— SENTINELS —

DISCERNING NEW LIFE



LENT 2022

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Welcome

Welcome to this year's Lent Study, entitled *Sentinels: Discerning New Life*. This year's study is a collaboration between Theology House in Christchurch and Anglican Movement (Diocese of Wellington), and wherever you are, we pray that this year you will experience the transforming work of God in your life and community and that together, we will become signposts for God's hope and love.

"What's a sentinel?" we hear some of you ask. In Scripture, we read of sentinels as people stationed on a wall or tower, keeping watch for approaching danger – either over towns, or over fields or vineyards. The prophets of the Old Testament sometimes described themselves as sentinels; listening for the will of God and speaking that out – in warning or encouragement - to God's people.

As Jesus people, we too have the task of being sentinels. As Archdeacon Gendy Thomson notes in Week 4, Jesus regularly reminds us to keep watch and be vigilant, and also that we are the signposts of new life and hope – the lamp on the hill - of God's transformation to the people and places we inhabit.

But how do we discern where that new life is, and what it looks like? How do we, as individuals and as a body, choose life and help others to do the same?

We will hear from Bishop Justin about the need to go through the wilderness or desert as the place where God often does his work of refining and drawing new life out of us in order to equip us for our work as sentinels.

Dr Geoff Troughton shares his perspective on the life of Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel, whose story of trauma and loss moves into social activism through the new life found in friendship, collaboration and prophetic scripture.

Archdeacon David Rowe explores the 'lost art of God conversations' – our need to keep practising how to communicate our role as signposts of hope in a world which so desperately needs to know it is loved.

Diana Langdon shares the new life that emerges when we honour and value the contribution of all generations within our church family; signalling to the world an alternative community in which all are welcome.

Archdeacon Gendy Thomson shares her learning journey around the idea of repentance and its relationship to discerning God's will and living a fruitful life.

And finally we end our Lent journey with a conversation between Archbishop Philip Richardson and Bishop Ellie Sanderson, exploring where they have found new life in cross-cultural spaces.

A sentinel's task is therefore two-fold: there is firstly that practice of watching and noticing. But the watch is no good unless the observations are acted on or passed on. A sentinel is therefore someone with immense courage: a keen observer who can spot opportunity and risk, and work with others to bring transformation.

Who are these miracle people? Through the grace of God in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit, they are us! This Lent, it is our prayer that this study will take you and those in your small groups through a journey.

How to use this guide

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are made to be in community together. Where possible (and bearing Covid-19 restrictions and best practice in mind) we encourage you to do this Lenten journey **in a small group** – with family, friends, your house church – gather and do this journey together. Share hospitality.

As you do this journey, **stay accountable** to each other. Share and discuss each week what God might be saying to you individually and what you might be invited to do about it, and check in with each other next time to see how you got on. You can find a tool to help you do this on the opposite page, or watch the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dODTPgVGNAG>

Pray. With us it is impossible, but not for God. Finish your time praying over what you've learnt and what you've committed to, and pray for each other.

The Kairos Circle

The Kairos Circle is a great tool for your Lent small group, and as a practice for learning to hear from God in everyday life: discerning what God might be saying, and what you are going to do about it. We encourage you to use it prior to prayer as you conclude each session. Have a look at Bishop Ellie's teaching video on the tool at <https://bit.ly/3BI0pgr>, and perhaps play this at your first session.

Here's a visual depiction of the circle on the following page. Feel free to copy this as needed.





Week 1

The Wilderness
Seeing with New Eyes

Bishop Justin Duckworth

Read: Matthew 4:1-11

Many years ago, my friend Rev Martin Robinson and I went on a trip to the United States to attend a conference. We were staying in budget accommodation and our room-mates turned out to be both Catholic monks. We were staying outside of San Francisco way somewhere. One morning, our Catholic friends were all excited: that day they were planning to wag the conference because they wanted to go and see, of all places, the desert. They were just buzzing. And in the evening they came back, absolutely full of energy and joy from their adventure.

It's stuck with me because I don't think most Christians view deserts or wildernesses in that way. I think we try our hardest to get through as fast as possible. We put our foot down. Our heart doesn't long for the desert. And I think that's to the detriment of our faith – that we don't have an appreciation for the geography of liminality, and therefore not just the geography of liminality but also the theology of it.

So, as we begin Week 1 of our Lenten journey, exploring the idea of Christian life as being a sentinel – looking out for new life and sharing that with others – I think it's good to begin with an encouragement not to be afraid of the desert. It's often the most creative and interesting place and where God does the greatest work.

It's also the first thing Jesus does after his public recognition in ministry.

All the temptations that Jesus will face in his next three years, he encounters at the very beginning, as we see in Matthew 4:1-11. That's worth thinking about.

Those temptations are the ones we also face, and speak to the very core of our human identity:

1. **Appetite.**

After fasting for 40 days, Jesus is tempted to turn stones into bread. Here, Jesus was responding to the human fear of lack, or not having enough, and the temptation to place trust in God to supply his needs.

2. **Acceptance.**

Next, Jesus is invited to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, knowing that the angels would catch him up and there would be therefore no public doubt that he indeed was the Son of God. Here Jesus wrestles with the human desire for acceptance, and the fear of rejection.

3. **Approval.**

Finally, Jesus is tempted with power and success – all nations bowing to him, if only he will worship the tempter. Here, Jesus wrestles with the human fear of failure, which manifests in seeking approval from others rather than from God.

And so, in order to be equipped to respond to the challenges that would lie ahead of him, Jesus accepted the invitation to go into the wilderness and deal with these head on.

As a society, we are currently in our own wilderness, grappling with the realities of Covid-19. Sometimes these wildernesses are part of the journey of life that we have no control over. It's fair also to say that sometimes we are invited by God into the wilderness. And other times, we end up going there anyway through the choices that we make. We think of the Israelites spending 40 years in the desert as they struggled to respond to God's call, or the Israelites in exile in Babylon after their repeated invitation to repentance.

However we get there, journeying into the wilderness can ultimately result in a richness that is impossible to find in the every day. As Christians across the globe, we have been asked during this Covid-19 season to review what is really important to us – in our lives and in our churches - as we follow

Jesus. The result has often been a creative burst in which we see the church responding with insight to meet the needs of a hurting world. In our own Province we think of the Get One, Give One campaign, raising money to combat vaccine equality. There are many examples, big and small, across Provinces, Dioceses and mission units or parishes.

And the wilderness is also a place of refining, in which we are forced to appreciate the essentials. There's often nowhere to hide in the wilderness, and we are asked to see with new eyes. I would argue that if you're not living in the wilderness often enough you're not seeing with the eyes God wants you to have.

So, what does actively stepping into the wilderness space look like for us in reality? Often a hallmark of wilderness prayer and the experience of God's refining of our lives is a liminal barrenness and wrestling – time spent wondering where God is, and struggling with doubts and tough questions. This Lent, is there an opportunity to fast, or to spend deeper time in retreat, to really honour your Sabbaths? These are just some ways to step into the desert and take up the invitation to be refined and transformed by God.

One final thing that strikes me – at this baptism, Jesus was baptised and sent into ministry by the wilderness dweller, John, not those from within the established religious leadership. It's worth dwelling on this. Who are the people who are in the wilderness with us? Whose voices from outside our usual spheres do we need to hear?

Once I climbed a hill in Zimbabwe. The very evocative indigenous name of the hill (and apologies that I can't remember it) means 'on a fine day you can see forever'. That's why I love climbing mountains: when you draw apart, life comes into perspective. Similarly in the desert, you can see a long way ahead, with clarity and purity of view.

Let's Discuss

As you look ahead into the journey through Lent, here are some questions to guide you:

- Can you recall a period when you spent time in any metaphorical desert? How did you experience God during this time? How were you changed by this experience?
- Is God inviting you into the wilderness or desert at the moment? What practices will you commit to this Lent, in order to take up this invitation?
- Which of the three temptations Jesus faces is the one that you find yourself most often wrestling with?

Let's Pray

Finish your time in prayer for the things that God has brought to your attention. Pray with each other over the actions that you have committed to in response. You might like to end your time saying this collect together:

Spirit of the living God
who drove Jesus into the wilderness
drive us deeper into the mysteries of God this Lent
so that in our wilderness
we might hear your invitation to new life.

Amen.





Week 2

Signs of Life in Loss

*Geoff is the Programme Director of Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. His most recent book, co-edited with his colleague Dr Philip Fountain, is entitled **Pursuing Peace in Godzone: Christianity and the Peace Tradition in New Zealand**.*

Dr Geoffrey Troughton

Read: Luke 9:28-36

Loss is woven into our humanity. We experience it in many ways. Some of our losses are small, everyday ones, and not so terribly important. Others are more wounding, disorienting, and disruptive. This may be as true of our shared losses as our personal ones.

Our journey into Lent reminds acutely that losses shape and help make us who we are. It also calls us to attend to the possibilities of new life erupting in dark places—even in the wake of horrific loss, even where life has been stolen.

Abraham Joshua Heschel was born in Poland in 1907 into a devout family, the child of two distinguished Hasidic dynasties. He grew up steeped in the study of Torah and the commentaries and debates of the Talmud. From a young age he was considered a genius. Pursuit of a scholarly life was not unforeseeable, then, yet it was not inevitable either. Hasidism emphasises piety and spiritual renewal, and these could have been pursued within the community in other ways that still honoured intellectual gifts.

Devotion and learning led him to high school in Vilna, Lithuania, before a shift to Berlin in 1927 to study at an Orthodox rabbinical seminary and the University of Berlin where he completed his doctoral dissertation just as Hitler was coming to power in late 1932. University regulations required publication of his dissertation before a Ph.D. could be conferred, but this was almost impossible for a Jewish writer in Hitler's Germany. It was delayed for years until Polish patrons intervened.

In 1938, in Frankfurt, he was roused by the Gestapo in the middle of the night and sent with two hours' notice, with other Polish passport holders, to a detention centre on the Polish border. His family eventually secured his release. Soon after, he was invited to the United States to join Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, as part of its president Julian Morgenstern's

efforts to help Jewish intellectuals escape Nazi persecution. He departed six weeks before the German invasion of Poland—though without his family, who lacked visas. His mother and three sisters subsequently perished in the Holocaust, along, as he said, with “almost everyone who knew me as a child”.

Traumatized, Heschel seldom spoke of leaving his family in Europe, and he never returned to Poland or Germany. “I am a brand plucked from the fire in which my people was burned to death”, he later reflected.

Early years in the US were marked by much difficulty, though also joy and playfulness which grew with experience of love and family. His writing became increasingly productive, even if he was not initially widely known outside of Jewish circles. By the 1960s, however, he had become one of the most prominent and influential religious voices in the US—a high-profile social activist, an important public interpreter of Judaism, and a bridge between Christian and Jewish worlds up until his death in 1972. What happened to produce this change?

Two turning points are particularly revealing. One of the biggest influences on his flourishing relationships beyond the Jewish world was friendship with Reinhold Niebuhr. The renowned Protestant theologian wrote a glowing review of Heschel's *Man Is Not Alone* in 1951, which opened a connection that became a close and enduring bond. The friendship meant a great deal to Heschel, who had encountered very different attitudes to Jewish people and their scriptures among theologians in Germany. He was moved by Niebuhr's personal warmth and his feel for the Hebrew Bible. Though not Jewish, here was a person who listened carefully, with understanding—someone Heschel felt understood his work better than anyone else.

Unusually for a Jew from the Hasidic world, Heschel subsequently developed friendships with a broad range of Christians. These included notable leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson, Dorothy Day, the Berrigan brothers, and Thomas Merton. His daughter notes that when he spoke to Christian groups, her father seldom mentioned areas of contention—Jesus and Paul, Christian anti-Semitism, churches' complicity in the Holocaust,

conversion—but engaged with rabbinic ideas just as he would with Jewish groups. Heschel spoke most often about themes such as God, prayer, and humanity. This approach, and his insights, led to significant opportunities to reshape thinking about Jewish people and embody different ways of relating. His input and meetings with Pope Paul VI, for example, were decisive during Vatican II in reshaping Catholic teaching about Jewish and other faiths.

Much of Heschel’s social activism was carried out in collaboration with Christian friends. In 1965, he famously marched with King, and others, from Selma to Montgomery in the cause of civil rights. A critic of the Vietnam War, he was with King again in 1967 when King declared his opposition to the War from the pulpit of Riverside Church in New York. He was the most prominent Jewish figure speaking through these movements for those who were marginalised, vulnerable, and abused.

Yet his daughter Susannah comments that before the 1960s there had been no hint of activism in his writing. It had not been a feature of his spirituality. That decisive shift came not so much through friendships with activists as through reflection on scripture; specifically, on the prophets. It was revising his doctoral dissertation on the prophets for publication in English, in 1962, that most affected him. Articulating his understanding of them and connections between faith, politics, and activism in this work ultimately reconfigured his life.

Heschel’s understanding of the prophets was distinctive. His reading rejected any idea that they were simply communicators of timeless truths and norms, or bearers of certain instructions. Rather, the prophets were primarily transmitters of “divine pathos”; that is, they should be understood above all as mediators of God’s emotion, feeling, and passion. For Heschel, the prophets represented a God who does more than simply command and expect obedience. God possesses intelligence and will, but more importantly is also deeply “moved and affected by what happens in the world” and responsive to it. The prophets were attuned to this pathos and expressed it. The prophet, he said, “suffers in himself harms done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair.”

Prophetic spirituality became for Heschel a model of true spirituality, profoundly shaping understandings of our humanity, how we encounter God, and what we owe to each other.

We must see ourselves, he urged, as “not only an image of God” but a “perpetual concern of God ... a consort, a partner, a factor in the life of God”. We encounter God “within a situation of shared suffering, of shared responsibility.”

Anticipating liberation theology, he believed that shared responsibility entailed a “leap of action” following the prophets in their “bias in favor of the poor”.

Heschel’s story does not permit denial of grief and loss; nor does it provide a template for living with them. Yet in the wake of horrific loss, we do capture glimpses of grace and intimations of hope. We see the peaceable kingdom growing through gifts of friendship, scholarship, and embodiment of the imagination of the ancient prophets—figures with whom Jesus closely identified. It was with the greatest of these prophets that Jesus stood and talked on the Mount of Transfiguration when his glory was made known to his followers.

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Week 3

The Lost Art of God Conversations

David is Archdeacon for Church Growth and Health in the Diocese of Wellington. He is also currently on secondment from being Dean of Wellington Cathedral, to leading the parish of All Saints', Palmerston North. His role involves working with parishes to discern potential growth areas and bring these to fulfilment.

Archdeacon David Rowe

Read: Luke 7:36-50

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennett teases Mr Darcy when he claims to be “ill-qualified to recommend myself to strangers.” Commenting on Mr Darcy’s status, experience and education, she comments that she doesn’t play the piano as well as she would like:

“But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault – because I will not take the trouble of practicing.”

It seems that many of us have lost the art of God conversation, particularly with friends, neighbours, and work colleagues who know little about Jesus. Many of us have ceased to practise.

In this Sunday’s lectionary reading (John 12:1-8), we read of Mary, anointing Jesus’ feet with perfume. Luke’s version of this story gives us different detail. In Luke (Chapter 7: 36-50), the woman anoints Jesus’ feet and dries them with her hair, weeping. She knows, Jesus says, that her sins are forgiven. That’s why she shows Jesus this action of “**great love**”. Her response is one of pure gratitude. Her actions stand in stark contrast to Simon the Pharisee, whose complacency in his faith has allowed his response to Jesus to be dulled by societal expectation and concerns about propriety.

We see a similar thing in John 4:27-31. The woman Jesus met at the well in Sychar is running back to town to tell everyone about Jesus, whilst the regular disciples are worried about food and why Jesus was talking to a woman. We see this throughout the gospels. Jesus wasn’t someone who you could ever be indifferent to: everywhere he went, his words and actions provoked a response – one way or the other. The same is still true. When we too first encounter the living God, we are strong sentinels and signposts for others. Maybe that’s why the church at Ephesus is reminded to “recover your dear early love” (Rev 2: 5 MSG). When you fall in love, you just can’t stop talking

about your new-found obsession. You have stories to tell of their goodness, beauty, talents – and the way that you yourself are transformed. To the worldly-wise and weary, honestly these people are a little embarrassing.

Here is the challenge for each of us as Jesus people – whether we’re new to faith or have been around the houses for a while: if we don’t have those in our churches who have the enthusiasm of new-found faith, our church will likely be in decline. Why? Because new believers are often the reapers of others. If we have known Jesus for a while, are we both nurturing and discipling new believers, and in turn being inspired by their enthusiasm and stories of transformation, and remembering our own first love?

Of course, God is faithful and good and keeps moving; constantly renewing and growing us, and it’s not like we ‘fall in love with Jesus’ and then that’s it. But without the inspiration of new believers, it can be hard to feel encouraged.

However, we can’t leave new believers to be the people who in turn bring new believers to Jesus. We need to be reminded to “not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.” (Romans 12:11). Or, as Elizabeth Bennett reminds us, we need to be continually practicing.

I know a friend in the UK who is just so natural in starting spiritual conversations. We were once in a department store entering a lift. We were laughing about something, and another person stepped in. He said to her, “You wouldn’t believe we worked for the Church of England, would you?” She looked us up and down and said “No”. We laughed... and then he took a couple of minutes between floors to gently introduce her to our faith and invite her to an event he was speaking at. As the doors opened, she thanked him and said she might just come. We parted. As we wandered, I found something I wanted to purchase and took it to the cashier. As I was reaching for my wallet, my friend leaned across my shoulder and said to the cashier, “You wouldn’t believe we worked for the Church of England, would you?” And there followed a very natural conversation about church and faith.

Recently I read some research that suggested that 80% of non-believers would be happy to engage in a spiritual conversation. As Christians, we just need to initiate it – but not force or manipulate it into the conversation we want – it needs to be genuinely natural and enquiring.

Such conversations need to be natural, not manipulated or controlled, and respectful. What we have to talk about is thoughtful, meaningful, and interesting. We just need a bit of confidence to get started. And we are not alone. We can be sure of the promise of God to be with us as we step out in faith and be those sentinels or signposts for those who so need to know that they are loved.

Let's Discuss



Here's a couple of challenges for your week ahead. A chance for you to practice. Do this now and discuss with your group as you go.

- Make a simple list of people you know who are not followers of Jesus
- Start to pray regularly for them each day this week
- Find one of them and ask them: "I heard that 80% of people are willing to have a spiritual conversation? Do you think that's true?". See what you can learn from this conversation. We won't learn anything unless we are willing to practice.

Let's Pray



Finish your time in prayer. Pray with each other over your lists and invite God to work in your heart and in the hearts of the people you have named. You might like to end your time saying this collect together:

Son of God, Son of Man
when we meet you, we are changed.
Help us to tell the stories of our encounter with you
so that others might hear of the love of God
and meet you themselves.
In your name we pray.

Amen.

Okay Boomer

Diana Langdon is the National Children and Families Ministry Enabler for Tikanga Pakeha. She oversees Strandz and spends her days encouraging and equipping the church to be the best place for children. She is passionate about intergenerational communities and whānau on mission. See strandz.org.nz.

Diana Langdon



Read: Luke 15:11-32

In recent times, tensions between younger and older generations have featured all over the media, and poignantly captured in a phrase that became a watchword for intergenerational conflict and frustration: **“Okay Boomer.”** Generational tension may not be new, but this backhanded expression pitched Millennials and Gen Z (anyone born after 1981) against the Baby Boomer generation (those born between 1944-1964). The phrase became popular when a young woman used it in a video she posted to her social media, and gained worldwide attention when New Zealand Green MP Chlöe Swarbrick used the term in a heat-of-the-moment response with an older National parliamentary peer. In 2019, the New York Times announced that “Okay boomer marks the end of friendly generational relations.”

Intergenerational tension can be seen in conversations surrounding housing affordability, tertiary education, climate change, and land reconciliation, just to name a few issues. There is no doubt that each generation experiences very real challenges. However, these sweeping generational stereotypes pitching ‘Millennials vs Boomers’ have a dehumanizing influence, conditioning us to see those younger or older than us as **“other.”** This is in direct contrast to the Jesus we see in the gospels, who seeks always to see the full image of God in each person he counters.

This Sunday, our gospel reading invites us to explore the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. When we look at this well-known story through a wider generational lens, it offers us a picture of intergenerational grace. As Jesus begins the story, we hear how the younger son asks for his inheritance and the father willingly divides up his property between his sons.

While much of the story focusses on the prodigal son going off and wasting his wealth in wild living and living a disconnected life to his family, it can be easy to forget about the older son. He was not present when his brother returned, and missed the news that a party was being held in his honour

– he was out working on the land. We often forget that the older son has also been given his full inheritance (he received it at the same time as the younger son in verse 12) yet his heart grows bitter through duty and familial obedience. Perhaps generational grace is hardest to live out with those closest to you?

The younger son went from living a life of disconnection and independence, to having his family identity reaffirmed (“my son”) by his father when he returns. The image of welcome, celebration, hospitality and joy is intergenerational grace and acceptance in action.

We often describe our church as a whānau on mission, a movement that provides for all generations to worship and share the Good News of the Kingdom together. Embedded in this idea is a theology of accommodation. In response to a loving God who accommodated us in the full humanity of Jesus, we too can accommodate others in the church – those who have less power, knowledge or experience than we do.

As Christian sentinels, we need to protect and care for our intergenerational relationships, offering the grace and forgiveness of the Father. The church is one of the few places in the world where we have multiple generations together, as pre-schoolers worship alongside adults, retirees serve alongside teenagers, students learning alongside children.

As Miriam Swaffield* says “The Kingdom of God is bigger than biology. Every generation has their part to play. The family of God is not a youth group or a retirement home, it’s every nation, every generation, following Jesus.”

What a counter-cultural view on the wholeness of community life, where the church can honour and model these relationships for an individualised world.

In my work with Strandz, I have the privilege of seeing people of faith all across our tikanga exploring and experimenting with these ideas in action. One great example is the Parish of Johnsonville, who have established intergenerational small groups in response to Covid gathering restrictions. With all new things, there is always a process of experimentation and refining, but this is part of what being a sentinel is: keeping watch for the moves of God's Spirit, listening to the cries of the hearts of the people, maintaining an attitude of flexibility and adaptability, and being the prophetic voice for the church at large.

An intergenerational faith community is vital for providing a highly connected and supportive environment to help children and young people form their anchor identity in Christ, where they can discover who they are and whose they are.

In the wise words of Dame Whina Cooper, "Take care of our children. Take care of what they hear, take care of what they see, take care of what they feel. For how the children grow, so will the shape of Aotearoa." Let us have a theology of accommodation, as we intentionally seek to strengthen the intergenerational connections that shape our faith communities here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

* <https://youtu.be/DM3Gznl6po> (The Woodlands United Methodist Church)

Let's Discuss



- Where have you seen intergenerational relationships at their best?
- How has the church been a space where you can be a blessing to other generations?
- What could you do this week to be a blessing to an older or younger generation?
- How can the church be sentinels in protecting and prioritising intergenerational connection?

Let's Pray



Finish your time in prayer for the things that God has brought to your attention. Pray with each other over the actions that you have committed to in response. You might like to end your time saying this collect together:

God our Father
who makes us one in Christ
weave us together in love
so that the gifts you bestow on each generation
might nurture our life together as your family.

Amen.



Week 5

Fruitful Repentance

Gendy is the Archdeacon for Mission and Ministry in the Diocese of Wellington. Her special focus is growing and equipping the leadership and ministry of the un-ordained people of God. Taking the lectionary reading for this coming Sunday, she explores what it means to explore God's invitation to lead into life in the contexts we each find ourselves in as followers of Jesus.

Archdeacon Gendy Thomson

Read: Luke 13:1-19

At first glance this passage is not an easy or palatable one, especially when read with its preceding chapters. Themes of vigilance, interpreting the times, and keeping watch are not comfortable.

Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York in his book *On Priesthood* dedicates a chapter to the role of 'sentinel'. I loved this book, even as a person with a clear call to be an un-ordained leader in God's church. The central premise of Cottrell's book is that the role of the priest is ultimately to model how all of us are to live our lives as disciples of Jesus. So much of what he talks to is the call to be disciples. I found myself regularly saying "Lord, I want to be that disciple; I want to live my life for You in that way." I recommend a read!

Cottrell explores the Old Testament role of sentinel in keeping vigil, guard or watch. For example, in the lives of the prophets – watching and speaking what they see and hear of God in relation to their context. The New Testament too often refers to watching, listening, keeping alert, listening if you have ears, having eyes opened to God and the world around, and communicating this to others.

So what does our scripture passage have for us in relation to the idea of this year's Lent study *Sentinels: Discerning New Life*? I believe a lot. It seems to me timely to observe what is happening in our world: a virus crisis with so much pain, loss of life, and fear. A climate crisis with so much finger-pointing, inaction and fear. Political crises in various countries creating death, separation, and fear. Mental health crises creating so much mental and emotional pain, loss of ability to enjoy and engage in life, hardship of body, mind, and spirit. I could go on, and we can all name crises that are close to home: in our lives, our neighbours' lives, or our community.

Change your mind

In our Luke 13 passage, Jesus has spent some time encouraging his listeners to be vigilant. Now he's calling for a change in heart to live lives that lead to Godly fruitfulness.

In the first part of our reading, people ask Jesus about the appalling deaths that had happened in Galilee. As was the culture of the time (and still can be now), they assumed such deaths indicated those that died deserved it in some way, were "more sinful". These questions may have been to challenge or trick Jesus; they may have been as a response to the call to 'vigilance'; or they may have been from fear. Regardless, Jesus' response was to draw their attention to look at themselves: "Unless you repent, you too will perish".

The word 'repent' is a translation of the Greek word 'metanoia', which in essence means 'to change one's mind'; in this case, to change one's mind to align with the mind of God. In the past I've placed only a negative view on the role of repentance; the "I've obviously sinned and I need to turn around and walk back to God" kind. But instead, living into the idea of changing my mind to align with the mind of God, I experience greater freedom. For example, I might find delight in something, and process it in my 'hanging out time' with God. In thinking on that joy and what God might be saying to me through it, I become even more aware of the loving, delighting, creative character of God, and my awareness of 'what is good' enhances and sustains me.

Godly fruitfulness

Let's now look at the fig-tree parable from this passage. This fig tree was placed strategically in the garden as a food source. In the environment of the time, fig trees often fruited twice a year. So when we read that the owner had come looking for figs for three years, that means six fruiting seasons. I can relate to the frustration. Some years ago, we were given two feijoa plants, building large anticipation for the two feijoa lovers in my family. Despite lots of love and food, they never flowered, and were eventually replaced with one very fruitful tree that is appreciated (and pampered much less than the sterile trees!).

Fruit-bearing is a theme in both Luke and John's gospels; most famously in the analogy of the vine (Jesus) that we need to abide in to bear good fruit (John 15). While these gospels clearly state the importance of bearing fruit, the 'method' of *being fruitful* is essentially to 'repent:' to hear God's word to us and align our thinking to the mind of God - and 'believe:' to live our life in a way that reflects that change of thinking. The fruit itself is God's job and is what naturally happens when we choose to change our mind and live life accordingly. God is responsible for the fruit and we are responsible to be faithful to the life he calls us to live, in the way Jesus teaches us to live it.

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will bear good fruit.” (John 15:5)

This fig tree is worse. It's not bearing bad fruit, but bearing no fruit at all. It is in the vineyard, receiving care and attention, but no fruit has been seen for six seasons. Something is off. Perhaps it has forgotten it's a fig tree?

There is a warning in this passage, a warning summing up the preceding passage: be alert, be on your watch, be attentive to and respond to the times. A light under a basket provides no use; salt that is no longer salty cannot help; a fig tree that produces no fruit cannot multiply or nourish others.

Yet there is also grace in this passage, and a lovely example of discernment in community. The owner is frustrated and wants the fruit of their investment; the gardener intercedes for more time and more nourishment. I wonder what happened a year later?

The purpose of a fig tree is to bear fruit to grow more fig trees, and to multiply. The purpose of us as disciples of Jesus is to do the same. But that can sound daunting, can't it? It can sound so hard that we don't know how to start. And sometimes then we choose not to, and live with the unsatisfied, unfulfilled

element of not experiencing life lived to the full.

What stops us from living into who God created us to be? Is it the temptation to be perfect first time that we stifle even starting? Is it letting seeds of doubt grow in the garden of our life and stifle the goodness? Is it wounds that are festering, that perhaps need surgical attention but the fear of that surgery stunts the courage to go ahead with it? Is it fear of being the only fig tree in a vineyard of grapes?

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

We are called to live a 'repentant' life - choosing not to be anxious, trusting in God's goodness, prioritising time with God over our to-do lists; and believe (and remember that's an action word - in Greek '*pistis*' - which means to 'live out'). We are called to stand strong on our identity first and foremost as a child of God; and live into the unique gifts and call God gives us. When we live our lives like this, it will be demonstrably and visible different to us and to others. We will draw attention. We will be sentinels. God will produce fruit and, like foragers to a flourishing wild fruit tree, people will want to pick the fruit and be nourished from its goodness. We get to be sowers of God's seed of life to those in our orbit.

This life is countercultural to our current climate of anxiety and fear, blame, unhealthy stress and relentless busy-ness (or an unhealthy lack of stress and activity). And it is so needed to bring hope and a future to all God's children: those who know they are, and those who don't.



Week 6

A Conversation Between Archbishop Phillip and Bishop Eleanor

As we finish our Lenten Study journey, this week Archbishop Phillip and Bishop Ellie share a conversation around where new life is found in cross-cultural partnerships and the journey of reconciliation. As you read, we encourage you to look for the threads of hospitality and generosity and think about what this might mean.

**Archbishop Phillip Richardon and
Bishop Eleanor Sanderson**

Bishop Ellie

We are all called into places of cross-cultural partnership in big or small ways. Today we're thinking about how we have died to ourselves and found more life in God through our cross-cultural experiences.

Archbishop Philip

The first cross-cultural experience that I was aware of happened when I was around 13 or 14. The Diocese of Auckland had organised a cross-cultural immersion week for about 6 of us from the City, along with 12 Maori rangatahi from the Kaikohe and Kaitaia pastorates. We went to a marae right up out of Te Rāwhiti which I later had lots of connection with. We came across the car ferry at Opuā and were joined by the six young people from Kaikohe there. One of the kids had never been on the water before. I was frightened and anxious about being there at all, and when I saw her anxiety I realised that at one level we were all really anxious, which in turn gave me a bit more confidence, leading into what ended up being quite a life-changing experience for me, being on that marae for a week.

+Ellie

The place of real change for me happened in the Pacific. First in terms of the travel I did when I was younger, and again when I undertook research with communities around development and spirituality in a participatory methodology where people involved get to shape the research in a real partnership.

On one occasion I went to meet with a woman to have a conversation with her about the work we were doing. I'd met her the night before at evening prayers and as I came to her house she called out to me and started to cry, and took my hands in hers and started to pray with me, saying 'God has placed you in my heart my sister.' Being completely surrounded by her affection and her spirit was life changing for me in that moment when I was so conscious of the challenges and my stumbling in trying to work cross-culturally.

That set the tone for what then happened with the women I researched with in Tanzania, and the sense of being embraced in genuine love and prayer. It took away my nervousness. These women really wanted to love me, and are loving still me, in a God-given way that they're giving testimony to.

++Philip

There is an interesting sense in that story of being embraced and welcomed; that manaaki was also my experience at Te Rāwhiti marae – the way we were welcomed with formality as well as the hospitality and attentiveness to those of us who might be feeling a bit homesick. They really were like nannies to us – our grandmothers and grandfathers - for us. That did really help to transition all of the other confronting things and moderate them through the sheer love and care and ordinariness of that hospitality.

It's a bit of a contrast from when I went to live in South India for a year to go to seminary, aged about 19 or 20. I remember being met at the airport by a couple – I think he was Swedish and she was German. All the way from the airport I was cross-examined by this couple about what attitudes I was bringing with me and was I in some way bringing a colonial attitude. When I got to the seminary I was welcomed wholeheartedly – but it was that initial confrontation – 'what is it that you think you're doing here?' 'Do you think you're bringing something'? It was the first time I'd been challenged in that way about whether I was bringing attitudes of paternalism or privilege and entitlement into a case of very significant poverty in the case of South India.

+Ellie

That challenge is one we need to own and navigate. We have to look at ourselves and our motives and recognise the reconciliation deeply needed in our world because of cultural atrocities. The prayer of humble access comes to mind: 'I am not worthy to eat the crumbs under your table'. It is the prayer that rises from my heart whenever I am in cross-cultural relationships, particularly in the context of the Global South: 'I am not worthy to gather the crumbs from under your table' – that's how I often feel, an expression of deep humble gratitude for the gifts of hospitality I consistently receive.

++Philip

It's interesting regarding that line from the prayer of humble access, which comes from the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (found in Mark 7 and Matthew 15) whose faith challenged the extent of hospitality and broke down cross-cultural barriers.

+Ellie

With your episcopal oversight perspective within our global communion: where do you see life coming forth because of cross-cultural partnerships?

++Phillip

I think in Aotearoa-New Zealand without a doubt our future lives and resides with te ao Maori – our future as Tikanga Pakeha resides there. I think we are moving into an extraordinarily exciting period. The more we can as Pakeha immerse ourselves in that relationship the more we will be formed into the kind of church I think is God's dream for us in Aotearoa. It's not about being incredibly comfortable or familiar – it's about being prepared to enter into that experience of cross-cultural engagement. Archbishop Don often talks about how he longs for a time when our fluency as Pakeha in te ao Maori (and te reo) will be as fulsome as he is required to be in te ao Pakeha.

In our global communion I serve on the Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council with people from across Africa, from Jerusalem, South East Asia, the Americas, and Europe. We are tasked with having to come to consensus about important issues – really listening to other's perspectives. It is incredibly hard work. But it also shows the beauty of a church where we don't have either a segregated or de-centralised model – but a model which says that our unity is in Christ and is reflected in how we gather around a bishop but make our decisions synodically. That requires so much work! In the cross-cultural context I think the Anglican Church is ideally, maybe uniquely, placed to do that work.

Archbishop Justin Welby's practical experience in being a worker for reconciliation is serving us really well as a global church. His emphasis on reconciliation and disagreeing well – how that doesn't have to break us but strengthens us – even differences that feel irreconcilable – can be the basis of relationship, not the breaking of it. That's the leadership of someone who has been formed cross-culturally.

+Ellie

So bringing things to Lent and the journey to Easter, for me the cross-cultural experiences are the ones that Jesus brings to light to me in my own relationship with him. Jesus reconciles the difference between humanity and divinity and brings together heaven and earth. Jesus is that mediator of the new covenant, bringing heaven and earth together within the unity of God. The more cross-cultural experience I have, the more I begin to appreciate the work God does of restoration in coming to be with us. To speak in relation to ++Don's desire for the full partnership – in Jesus we have that example of full partnership; of God leaning into our humanity and in turn inviting us to lean into divinity in its fullness as restored children of God.

+Philip

There is an overwhelming sense of God's generosity – this word could almost be glib until you are faced by the cross and stand where the disciples stood, looking at the cross, recognising the extent of that generosity. In that moment, all of the powers of colonisation in a sense were arrayed around that scene. This tiny backwater of a great Empire; an Aramaic who through radical non-violent love challenged the heart of that Empire – and crucifixion was the consequence. And yet it became the big narrative of God's reconciliation of humanity to God's self. That sense of human and divine being drawn together by the suffering humanity of Christ. Like you, for me it's been the engagement with people of completely different cultural and language contexts from myself that have given me a closer understanding of this.

Let's Discuss



Think of a formative cross-cultural experience that you're willing to share.

- What did you notice about how you responded and how you wanted to respond?
- To what extent did generosity and hospitality play a part in your relationship?
- From that experience, what have you been able to bring into subsequent cross-cultural relationships?
- In the light on the full partnership Jesus' death brings between heaven and earth, what encouragement might God be bringing for you?

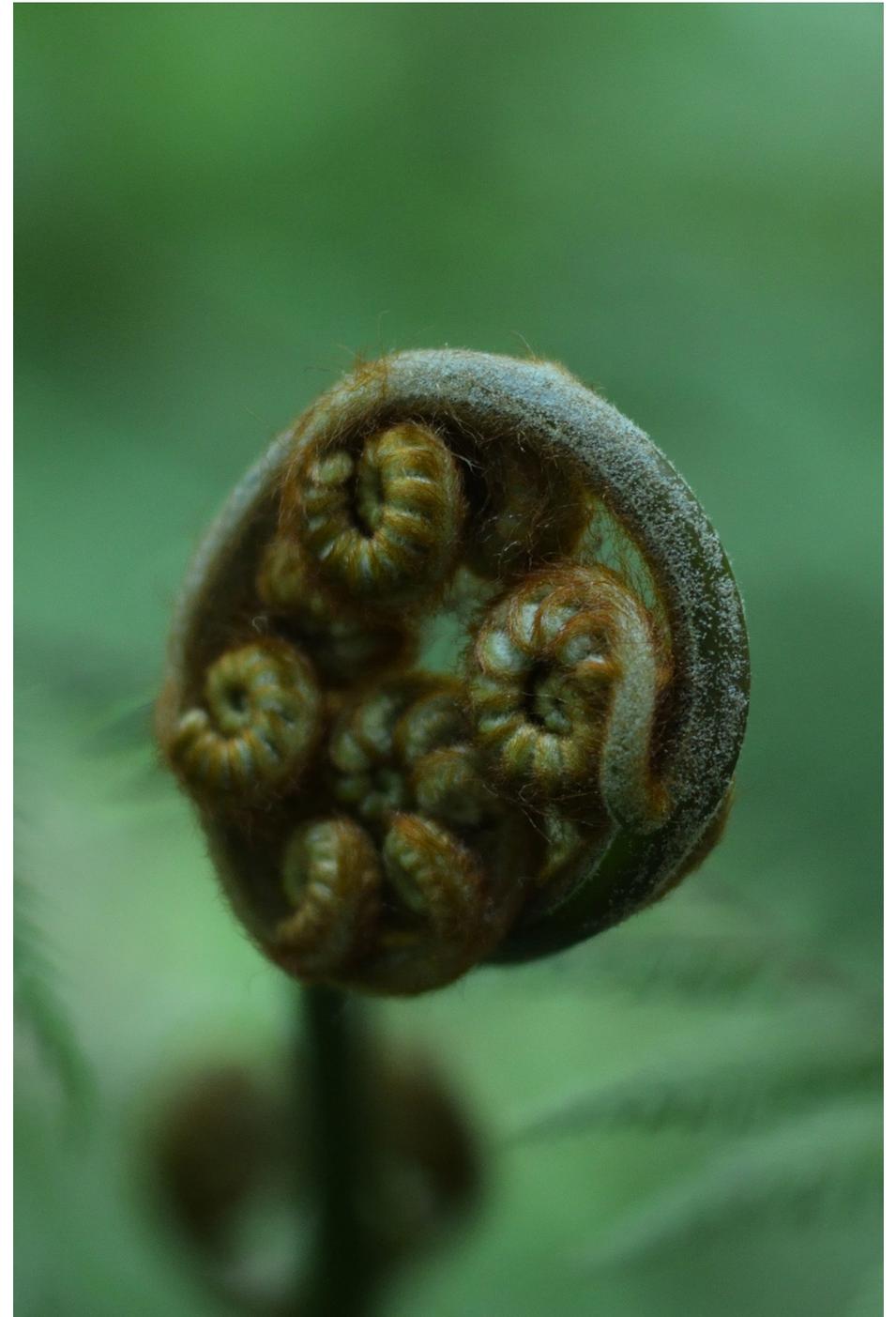
Let's Pray



Here's a poem to finish this week, from the Welsh poet-priest, R. S. Thomas. We encourage you to use this as a basis for closing in prayer.

And this one writes and he knows
being wise: 'Loving
is courage; there is no fear
in love.' I take the beam
from my eye. 'Friend.'
I murmur, 'there is a mote
in yours; I will not
remove it. Here is my heart
to be hurt. Here is my hand
for blaming. I give you
myself. Scribble me
with my faults; reap
my insolvency. Am I not
also in the debt of love?'

Amen.





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