

5. Questions for Matthew 4:1-11

Some of these questions may be helpful

How do you want to channel your energy this Lent?

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

Gracious God,

Thank you for the gift of this day.

Refresh us. Invite us to discover

Your presence, in each person,
in each happening.

Teach us when to speak and when to listen,
when to ponder and when to share.

In moments of challenge and decision
attune our hearts to the whisperings of your
Wisdom.

When we take on ordinary and unnoticed
tasks, help us to feel joy;

When the day goes well may we be happy;

When things are difficult, surprise us with
new possibilities.

When things get too much call us to quiet
moments, restoring your peace and
harmony.

And may our living today show a glimpse
of your Goodness.

P. Bergen CSJ adapted

Acacia

Acacia s.l., known commonly as mimosa, acacia, thorn tree or wattle, is a polyphyletic genus of shrubs and trees belonging to the subfamily Mimosoideae of the family Fabaceae. It was described by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus in 1773 based on the African species *Acacia nilotica*.

Exodus 25:0

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1. Welcome and opening prayer

We thank you God, for the warming of winds.

For daylight hours that grow longer and richer.

We lift up our hearts to you, our God, in this season of lent

that gently sweeps across our sleeping hearts

awakening us to deeper love for you.

May the wind of the Spirit
that drove Jesus into the desert,
into the furnace of prayer,
also guide us with a passion
during this Lenten season
to stir the fire of our faith
in the desert of Lenten love.

May we use this Lenten season
of fresh dreams
to follow your dream with trusting hearts
and open ourselves to your transforming love.

2. Gospel text: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said: 'If you are the Son of God tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

Then the devil took him to the holy city and made him stand on the highest point of the Temple.

'If you are the Son of God', he said, 'throw yourself down for it is written: "he will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you shall not strike your foot against a stone."'

Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."' Then the devil left him and angels came and attended to him.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text for themselves and pick out words or short phrases that strike them and say them out loud.

When everyone has had a chance to say their word/phrase, they can then reflect silently for a moment or two and then briefly say why such a word/phrase struck them - in relation to themselves, or their community or the world.

4. Background Notes for Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew wrote his Gospel in Greek between 70 AD and 89AD for Christians who had been Jews. His gospel is peppered with references to the Jewish scriptures. Jesus has been baptised. The crowd looking on would have seen a man from the North of the country, Galilee. On this person, who in the eyes of the onlookers hasn't much to recommend him, God's favour rests; God affirms him,

calling him 'My darling son.'

Straight after baptism Jesus is drawn to the desert, the hauntingly beautiful but daunting place south of Jerusalem. In the bible the desert features at times of crises. Here it is far from the oppressive actions and orders of occupying Rome and from the bustle and legalism of the temple.

In Matthew's account Jesus experiences what the people of Israel suffered: hunger, thirst, disorientation, danger. But Jesus' trust in God doesn't waver.

He sees through the devil's lies. He refuses to use material resources to serve his own interests. He will not use religion to add to his own power and status, or to numb consciences; he will worship only God. And the kingdom of God that he will announce will not be imposed on anyone. He won't seek fame or celebrity or honour. He will wait on God's power and will not force God's hand.

Following him, the challenge to us is to channel our energies into love and justice - people having shelter, dignity and possibilities for well-being.

He will leave the desert and return north to Galilee, enchanting people with his words. Opening them up to believe in the tenderness of God, values our lives and cherishes our company.



6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

We will walk to the highest peak for you,
O Lord,
We will walk deep down in the valley
We will walk into the joy and the pain
for you, O Lord.
We will walk wherever you ask us to go.

Just please don't ever leave our side.
Stay with us, silently embrace us.

As we light candles and quiet our breath
and the miracle of your flame
May we walk everyday in the fire
of your love
and spread your light in this troubled
world.

Judas Tree

Cercis siliquastrum, commonly known as the Judas tree or Judas-tree, is a small deciduous tree from Southern Europe and Western Asia which is noted for its prolific display of deep pink flowers in spring.
Matthew 27:3

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1. Welcome and opening prayer

God of all time, help us to enter this Lent quietly, thoughtful of who we are to ourselves and to others.
Mindful that our steps make an impact and our words carry power.
May we walk gently,
May we speak only after we have listened well.

Creator of all life, help us to journey forward reverently, aware that you have given every creature and plant, every person and habitat beauty and purpose.

May we regard the world with tenderness.
God of all time, help us to go through this Lent reverently.
May we honour rather than destroy.
Lover of all persons help us live joyfully, willing to laugh and dance and dream, remembering our many gifts with thanks and waiting for blessings yet to come.

May we welcome your lavish love.
May the grace and peace of Christ bless us now and in the days ahead.

Vinita Hampton

2. Gospel text: Matthew 17:1-9

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and

one for Elijah.'

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.'

When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up', he said, 'Don't be afraid.' When they looked up they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the son of man has been raised from the dead.'

3. Quiet time...

*People can read over the text for themselves and pick out words or short phrases that strike them and say them out loud.
When everyone has had a chance to say their word/phrase, they can then reflect silently for a moment or two and then briefly say why such a word/phrase struck them-in relation to themselves, or their community or the world.*

4. Background Notes for Matthew 17:1-9

This story records a unique event which Matthew places 6 days after Peter has expressed belief in Jesus as Son of God and Messiah (Mt 16:13-20). John the Baptist had been caught and beheaded. The net is tightening around Jesus; he knows he will not escape the clutches of his enemies, the Jewish priests and elders.

Matthew, echoing Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, has Jesus lead Peter, James and John up and away from the darkening, fore-boding atmosphere enveloping them; away from busy transactions of temple sacrifices, from quarrels and an upside-down list of priorities. It symbolises a move away from the old way of life to the new.

Moses led people towards economic, political, religious and social freedom. Elijah called people away from the old gods they had started to fear again. For a few moments the truth radiates and spills around Jesus: he is again affirmed as the beloved of God, not merely another great personality, but 'My Son'.

The disciples fall down, fearful, weak, needing Jesus' touch to raise them again.

The transfiguring light sets the seal on Jesus' way of living, despite the impending threat of his death. The story calls us to walk away from death-dealing activities; to walk in the direction of the new beckoning light that started to shine on the mountain.

5. Questions for Matthew 17:1-9

Some of these questions may be helpful

What would it mean to 'walk in the direction of the beckoning light'?



and sorrow, and in our efforts to counter all that diminishes life.

As the bearer of the living water Jesus is the 'Saviour of the world' drawing everyone into a circle of love, pulsating with energy and meaning, on the way to lasting joy and freedom.

NB 'Worshipping in Spirit and in truth' refers to the heart of worship being knowledge and closeness to God, beyond every ritual or special time or place.

5. Questions for John 4: 5-15; 19b-26; 39a; 40-42

Can you recall a time when you felt your faith was: stagnant, shallow, deep, leaping up like a fountain or running wildly like a river in full spate?

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

God of our lives
you are calling us
to follow you into the future
inviting us to new ventures, new challenges,
new ways to care,
new ways to touch the hearts of all.

When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage;
when we worry we are not up to the task,
remind us that you would not call us
if you did not believe in us.

When we get tired
or feel disappointed with the way things
are going,
remind us that you can bring change and hope
out of the most difficult situations.

'The Pattern of our Days' No.47

Aleppo Pine

Pinus halepensis, commonly known as the Aleppo pine, is a pine native to the Mediterranean region. Its range extends from Morocco, Algeria and Spain north to southern France, Italy, Croatia, Montenegro, and Albania, and east to Greece, all over Malta and northern Tunisia, with an outlying population (from which it was first described) in Syria, Lebanon, southern Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and Palestinian territories.

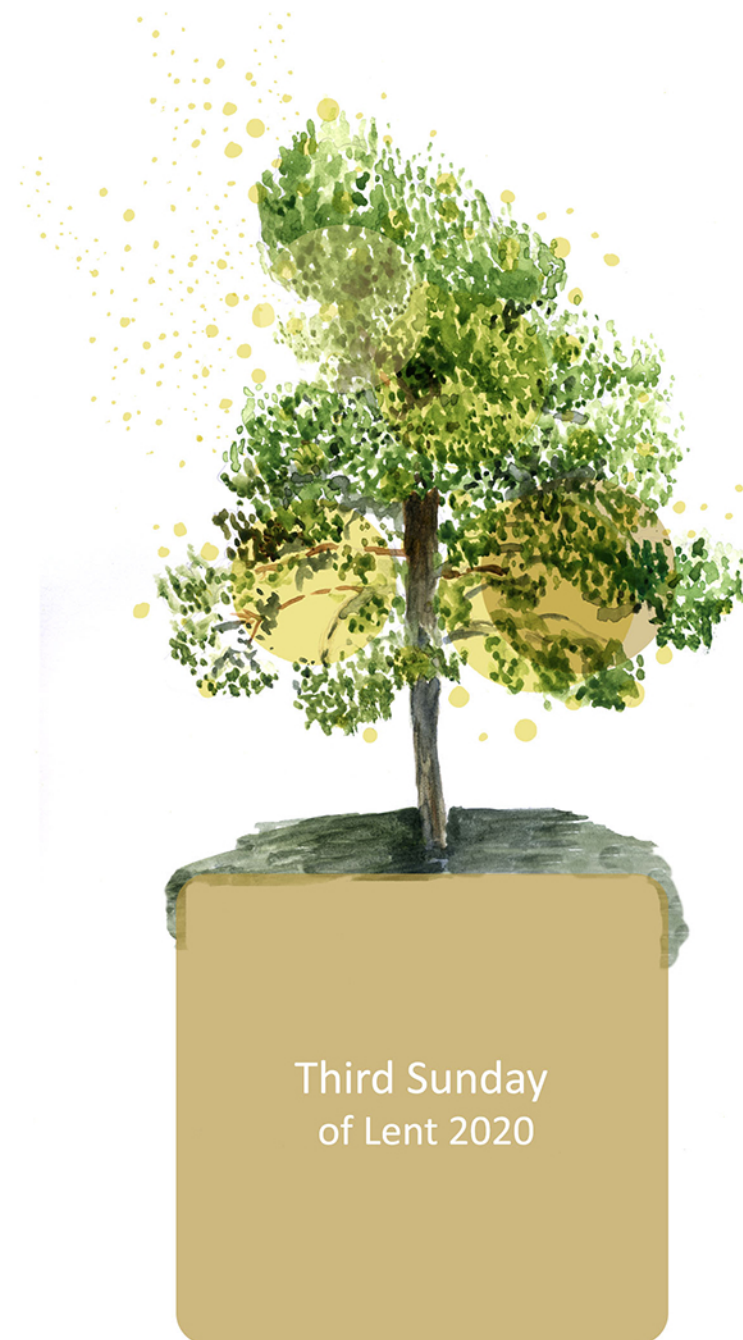
Isaiah 44:14

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Third Sunday
of Lent 2020

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Welcome and opening prayer
God in whom is peace,
we praise you.

We praise the unexpected gift of peace
which steals softly into our frenzied
activity
and gives us still space of tranquillity.

We praise the hard-earned work of peace
which struggles through our anger
and bitterness
to nudge us into forgiveness and new
beginnings.

We praise the shining dream of peace
which beckons and inspires us
to confront violence and injustice
with words of hope and acts of
commitment.

We praise the mysterious peace
which lies beyond our imagination,
our efforts and our dreams,
your gift of peace to a longing world.

Jan Berry

2. Gospel text: John 4: 5-15; 19b-26; 39a; 40-42

They came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into town to buy food). The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How do you ask me for a drink?' (for Jews do not associate with Samaritans). Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink

you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'

'Sir', the woman said, 'You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and livestock?'

Jesus answered: 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'...

(Then she said), 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.' 'Woman,' replied Jesus, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.' The woman said, 'I know that the Messiah' (called Christ) 'is coming. When he comes he will explain everything to us.'

Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you - I am He.' Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony...So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with

them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world'.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text for themselves and pick out words or short phrases that strike them and say them out loud.

When everyone has had a chance to say their word/phrase, they can then reflect silently for a moment or two and then briefly say why such a word/phrase struck them - in relation to themselves, or their community or the world.

4. Background Notes for John 4: 5-15; 19b-26; 39a; 40-42

Very early on the writer of John's gospel puts in three stories emphasising God's immense, compassionate love which is offered to all people and surrounds everyone. The woman belonged to people hated and despised by the Jews who judged them to follow a diluted form of worship, being from mixed race and heretics.

Jacob's well was the life of her community, making it possible to survive in this dry locality. Jesus can't reach the water; she has the upper hand. Jesus asks her for help. In return he offers a gift; shifting from her thirst to a deeper level. The living water he can give has capacity to fulfill her needs beyond anything she could imagine.

It is what all humanity longs for, and drinking from it will open us to new ways of living and being. Walking with God, knowing we are supremely loved, knowing that God's power and compassion surrounds us in our struggles

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

Lord, make us channels of disturbance where there is compliance, let us bring questioning.

Where there is silence, may we bring a voice.

Where there is too much comfort and too little action, grant disruption.

Where there are doors closed and hearts locked, grant the willingness to listen.

Where laws dictate and pain is overlooked...

When tradition speaks louder than need,...

Grant that we may rather do justice rather than talk about it.

Disturb us, O Lord,

to be with as well as for the alienated,

to love the unlovable as well as the lovely.

Lord, make us channels of disturbance.

Pomegranate Tree

The pomegranate is a fruit-bearing deciduous shrub in the family Lythraceae, subfamily Punicoideae, that grows between 5 and 10 m tall. The pomegranate originated in the region extending from Iran to northern India, and has been cultivated since ancient times throughout the Mediterranean region.

Song of Solomon 7:12

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Fourth Sunday
of Lent 2023

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Lord, let us believe, even in the darkest hours
that there is a Love-Energy within us
that makes us blossom;
that we carry within ourselves
our own flowering deep within.
That all our experiences:
of joy, of pain, of choosing freedom over fear,
of letting go of resentment, of refusing to give up,
of staying faithful to our promises, of rejoicing in beauty
are experiences of the Infinite Source of Life.

Let us be quick to find good things to reflect on:
the people who trust and believe in us;
our special memories,
our favourite films or stories
a place to walk with a good friend,
a coffee or tea with someone loved

Adapted from 'The Happiness Habit' p.63-64

2. Gospel text: John 9: 6-9; 13-17; 34-38

As he went along Jesus saw a man blind from birth...he spat on the ground, made some mud with saliva and put it on the man's eyes. 'Go', he said, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam.' So the man went and washed and came home seeing.

The neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, 'Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?' Some claimed that he was. Others said, 'No, he just looks like him.'

But he himself insisted, 'I am the man'...

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. 'He put mud on my eyes', the man replied, 'and I washed and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others asked: 'How can a sinner perform such signs?' So they were divided. Then they turned to the blind man. 'What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' The man replied: 'He is a prophet.' To this they replied, 'You were steeped in sin at birth, how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said: 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'

'Who is he, sir?' the man asked. 'Tell me so that I may believe in him.'

Jesus said, 'You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.'

Then the man said: 'Lord, I believe,' and he worshipped him.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text for themselves and pick out words or short phrases that strike them and say them out loud.

When everyone has had a chance to say their word/phrase, they can then reflect silently for a moment or two and then briefly say why such a word/phrase struck them - in relation to themselves, or their community or the world.

4. Background Notes for John 9:1; 6-9; 13-17; 34-38

Before this incident Jesus has reluctantly left Galilee where he felt safer from the threats of the Jewish authorities. Immediately when he reaches Jerusalem the authorities are on to him. Matthew contrasts Jesus' healing, compassionate action with the Jewish leaders' obsession with laws and their closed minds. Jesus sees the man; notices his loss and is moved straight away to use his energy and healing power to restore his loss.

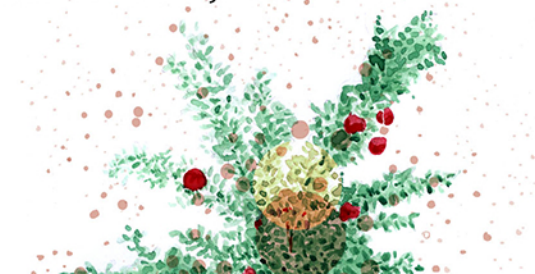
The Pharisees see nothing except that a law has been broken, that Jesus has healed a 'sinner'. So the hunt begins. The Pharisees claim to know and see the truth but they can't see it although it's there before them all the time: in Jesus' presence, Jesus, the 'light of the world'. The light is there but they are blinded by clinging to old attitudes, dead laws, searching for scapegoats, engaging in treachery. The story underlines the need for Jesus' followers being willing to journey towards him, towards the light.

NB Water from Siloam was brought into the Temple during feasts. 'Siloam' means 'sent'

5. Questions for John 9:1; 6-9; 13-17; 34-38

Some of these questions may be helpful

1. Recall a time when someone helped you see a situation differently.



to be at home with God in joy and peace forever.

5. Questions for John 11:1; 3-7; 17; 20-27; 33b-45

Some of these questions may be helpful

6. Prayers

Mentioning people and situations we want to pray for.

7. Closing Prayer

An Easter Prayer
Christ our life,
you are alive in the beauty of the earth
in the rhythm of the seasons
in the mystery of time and space.
ALLELUIA

Christ our life,
you are alive in the tenderness of touch
in the heartbeat of intimacy
in the insights of solitude
ALLELUIA

Christ our life,
You are alive in the creative possibility
of the dullest conversation
the dreariest task
the most threatening event.
ALLELUIA

Christ our life,
you are alive to offer re-creation
to every unhealed hurt
to every deadened place
to every damaged heart.
ALLELUIA

You set before us a great choice
Therefore we choose life.
The dance of resurrection soars and surges
through the whole creation .
It sets gifts of bread and wine upon our table
This is grace, dying we live.
So let us live. ALLELUIA

Kathy Galloway, p. 6
'Talking to the Bones'

Terebinth Tree

Pistacia terebinthus, known commonly as terebinth and turpentine tree, is a species of Pistacia, native to Iran, and the Mediterranean region from the western regions of Morocco, and Portugal to Greece, western and southeast Turkey.
2 Samuel 18:9

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Fifth Sunday
of Lent 2020

1. Welcome and opening prayer

Risen Christ, when darkness overwhelms
may your dawn beckon.

When fear paralyses us
may your touch release us.

When grief torments us
may our peace enfold us.

When memories haunt us
may your presence heal us.

When justice fails us
may your anger ignite us.

When apathy stagnates us
may your challenge renew us.

When courage leaves us
may your spirit inspire us.

When despair grips us
may your hope restore us.

And when death threatens us
may your resurrection light lead us. Amen.

Annabel Shilson

2. Gospel text: John 11:1; 3-7; 17; 20-27; 33b-45

Now a man named Lazarus was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is ill.' When he heard this, Jesus said, 'This illness will not end in death...No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.'

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed two more days and then he said to his disciples, 'Let us go back to Judea'... On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days....When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him. But Mary stayed at home. 'Lord,' said Martha to

Jesus, 'If you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will do whatever you ask.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord', she replied, 'I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'...

When Jesus saw her (Mary) and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' he asked, 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said: 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' Jesus once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 'Take away the stone,' he said. 'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days.'

Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that You have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, Jesus called out in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen. And a cloth around his face. Jesus said to

her, 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go.' Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

3. Quiet time...

People can read over the text for themselves and pick out words or short phrases that strike them and say them out loud.

When everyone has had a chance to say their word/phrase, they can then reflect silently for a moment or two and then briefly say why such a word/phrase struck them- in relation to themselves, or their community or the world.

4. Background Notes for John 11:1; 3-7; 17; 20-27; 33b-45

When the story opens Jesus is in mortal danger. He has escaped arrest and fled to safety from Jerusalem to the far side of the Jordan. The bad news from Martha and Mary filters through. He abandons his safe place to go back into enemy territory- Bethany is only 2 miles from Jerusalem. Despite his friends' warning he goes ahead.

When he meets Martha and Mary and sees their grief he is overcome with weeping, giving a glimpse of the lovely, tender, compassionate face of the God of Life. He commands the stone be rolled away and Lazarus steps out of the tomb, starting to live again, unbound, breathing, seeing, walking freely.

But this gift is only a symbol of what will be the final outcome of our lives. Jesus goes far beyond Mary's hope of life after death (held by the Pharisees at that time). God's dream for us goes through and beyond death: