

# Lent and Easter 2026

Let go, and be open

## Worship Resource Pack

Lent is a season of invitation. It calls us to loosen our grip on what holds us back – habits, assumptions, fears – and to open ourselves to the transforming presence of God. Each week in this worship pack, we explore a different mindset shift: letting go of something that limits us, and becoming open to something that brings life. This journey is not linear or easy. It echoes the experience of the disciples who again and again had to let go of what was familiar in order to follow Jesus more deeply. As the Revd Dr Roger Walton writes:

**“And in this relationship they [the disciples] kept having to return to that very first experience of leaving things behind. Mark tells that Simon and Andrew ‘left everything’ to follow. But this was only the beginning. The symbolic leaving behind of boats and nets is met again and again in their experience of travelling with Jesus. They have to leave places where they have been popular (Mark 6:45) or had divine illumination (9:8), and exchange territories of relative safety for places of danger (10:32). Most of all they **have to let go of established ideas that have formed their world view up to this point:** that the wealthy were blessed by God; that greatness lies in power over others; that men rather than women and children were the ones to show the way to God; that victory would never involve humiliation and suffering. All these notions would be challenged along the way, and the disciples would be invited over and over again to let go and follow.”**

Roger Walton, *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups* (SCM Press, London, 2014), p. 14.

Each outline in this pack provides a range of ideas as a flexible ‘menu’ to help you shape a service that fits your unique context, whether you’re meeting in a chapel, school assembly, chaplaincy hub, care home, or elsewhere. Feel free to select what suits best – there’s no need to use everything provided.

## Theme and scripture

---

Passages are drawn from the lectionary and quoted from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition of the Bible.

## Songs and hymns

---

Some song suggestions that match the theme. All song numbers given refer to *Singing the Faith*.

## Opening liturgy

---

Includes words for reflection and an object to place around a Lenten cross. The complete liturgy is available as a separate PDF on the [Methodist Church website](#), ideal for printing and distributing.

## Background notes

---

Brief contextual notes for each service, connecting the theme with selected Bible passages.

## Questions

---

These can serve as sermon points or discussion prompts, encouraging the congregation to explore their faith. They also work well in small group settings. You might find this [guidance on facilitating conversation](#) in worship helpful.

## Practical activities

---

Intergenerational activities to engage all ages and make your service interactive. With a few adjustments, these activities can also be used with online groups.

## Spiritual practice

---

Each week includes a simple, accessible practice designed to help individuals embody the theme – letting go of what hinders and opening up to God's presence in everyday life.

## Prayer ideas

---

Creative options for incorporating prayer into the service.

## The good news to get across

---

A central message for newcomers. Repeat it often to make it memorable!

## Ways people can respond


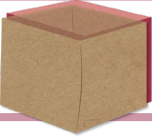






---

Simple, accessible ways for individuals to respond personally to the message.

## Prayer of blessing

---

A closing blessing to end the service with encouragement and grace.

| Date                   | Weekly theme  | Old Testament          | New Testament     | Object  |
|------------------------|---|------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Lent 1: 22 February    | Let go of idols,<br>make room for God               | Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7 | Matthew 4:1–11    |    |
| Lent 2: 1 March        | Let go of the form,<br>embrace the spirit           | Genesis 12:1–4a        | John 3:1–17       |    |
| Lent 3: 8 March        | Let go of scarcity,<br>embrace abundance            | Exodus 17:1–7          | John 4:5–42       |    |
| Lent 4: 15 March       | Let go of appearances,<br>and embrace what's inside | 1 Samuel 16:1–13       | John 9:1–41       |    |
| Lent 5: 22 March       | Let go of despair,<br>embrace 'respair'             | Ezekiel 37:1–14        | John 11:1–45      |   |
| Palm Sunday: 29 March  | Let go of violence,<br>embrace gentleness           | Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29   | Matthew 21:1–11   |  |
| Good Friday: 3 April   | Let go of certainty,<br>embrace mystery             | Psalm 22               | John 18:1 – 19:42 |  |
| Easter Sunday: 5 April | Let go of fear,<br>embrace joy                      | Jeremiah 31:1–6        | Matthew 28:1–10   |  |

Sunday 22 February 2026

# Lent 1

## Let go of idols, make room for God

### Bible readings

**Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7**

Adam and Eve are tempted to grasp autonomy by eating forbidden fruit, leading to shame and separation from God.

**Matthew 4:1–11**

Jesus resists three temptations in the wilderness, choosing trust in God over power, spectacle and self-reliance.

### Songs and hymns

- 235** Christ our Redeemer knew temptation's hour
- 236** Forty days and forty nights
- 237** Jesus, tempted in the desert
- 238** Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
- 240** When we are tested and wrestle alone
- 254** Seek ye first the kingdom of God
- 287** When I survey the wondrous cross
- 465** Guide me, O thou great Jehovah
- 545** Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

### Opening liturgy

**Voice 1:**

We place this fake plant at the foot of the cross.

It looks alive, but it isn't.

**Voice 2:**

We name the things we trust that cannot really give life:

success, image, control, comfort.

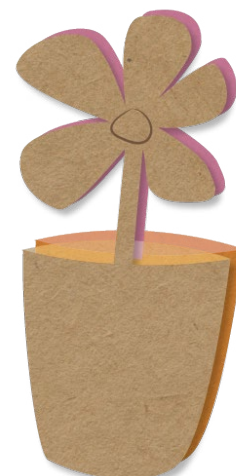
**Voice 3:**

And we let them go.

To make space for what is real, rooted and alive in God.

**All:**

**O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey, help us let go of what is false, and grow in what is true. Amen.**



**Object: a fake plant.**

Please don't buy a new one, though!  
Place this near a cross at the front of the worship space.

## Background notes

Lent begins with a confrontation between loyalty and illusion. In both Genesis and Matthew, we see the human temptation to replace God with something lesser – something that promises control, comfort or power, but ultimately cannot sustain us. These are idols: not just statues or false gods, but anything we elevate above God in our hearts, our choices, or our trust.

In Genesis 3, the serpent tempts the humans with the promise of being ‘like God’. The fruit becomes an idol: a symbol of autonomy, knowledge and control. But the result is shame and separation. The humans grasp at divinity and lose intimacy with God.

In Matthew 4, Jesus is also tempted: to turn stones into bread, to test God’s protection, to seize worldly power. Each temptation is an invitation to idolatry: to trust something other than God for identity, security or success. But Jesus resists.

In their commentary on Matthew, WD Davies and Dale Allison note that the gospel writer’s account is shaped by reflection on Deuteronomy. He quotes from Deuteronomy 6–8, the same passages that reflect on Israel’s own wilderness testing. Jesus, like Israel, passes through water (baptism) and enters the wilderness. His 40 days echo Israel’s 40 years. He is hungry, tested and tempted but unlike Israel, he does not turn to idols. He clings to God.<sup>1</sup>

Henri Nouwen writes that the core temptation is always this: to treat God as less than God: to replace God with relevance, spectacle or power. Lent invites us to name these idols – the things we rely on instead of God – and to let them go.<sup>2</sup>

## Questions for discussion

1. What are some ‘idols’ – visible or hidden – that we are tempted to trust more than God? (Examples might be success, control, approval, comfort, etc.)
2. How do the temptations Jesus faced mirror the pressures we experience in our own lives?
3. What helps you stay grounded in God’s truth when you feel tested or tempted?

## Spiritual practice

### The ‘true and false’ journal

Keep a small notebook or notes app where you record two things each day:

- One false message you noticed (eg ‘I have to be perfect to be loved’).
- One true message from God (eg ‘You are my beloved’). You might want to ask some friends for ideas, or look at the things that Jesus said in the gospels.

End each entry in your journal with a short prayer: *“God, help me let go of the false and hold fast to what is true.”*

1 WD Davies and Dale C Allison, *Matthew* (Bloomsbury, London, 2004), p. 50.

2 Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (Darton, Longmann & Todd, London, 1989).

**Why it helps:**

This practice helps us discern the difference between the world's messages and God's voice. It trains us to reject the idols of performance, perfectionism and fear, and embrace our true selves in God.

**Practical activity****Clay 'idol' and heart swap**

**Materials:** air-dry clay, wooden boards or reusable mats or newspaper.

**Activity:** Use air-dry clay to shape small 'idols' (eg coins, phones, trophies). Then from another piece of clay create a heart shape to represent God's love.

**Reflection:** Invite participants to symbolically 'swap' the idol for the heart and place the idol around the fake plant near the cross.

**Prayer idea****Breath prayer**

Invite participants to take slow breaths together.

**Inhale** slowly, thinking: "You alone are God."

**Exhale** slowly, thinking: "I let go of control."

Repeat for one minute in silence.

**The good news to get across****God alone is enough.**

We are often tempted to place our trust in things that promise security, success or control – but they cannot sustain us. Jesus shows us a different way: to let go of false promises and embrace the living God who is faithful, present and trustworthy. In the wilderness, in our weakness, **God is enough.**

**Ways people can respond**

Ask people to pray that God might reveal something that is an idol for them: something they're tempted to trust more than God. Ask them to write the temptations on a card shaped like a leaf or a flower, and place them by the fake plant near to the cross. These are invitations to God to replace temptations in our lives with something genuine.

Collect up the cards at the end of the service and destroy them to preserve people's confidentiality.

**Prayer of blessing**

*May the God who is enough, draw your soul away from false promises and into truth. May you walk lightly this Lenten season, trusting the one who sustains you. Amen.*

Sunday 1 March 2026

# Lent 2

## Let go of the form, embrace the spirit

### Bible readings

#### Genesis 12:1–4a

God calls Abram to leave his homeland and trust in a promise, beginning a journey of faith without a clear destination.

#### John 3:1–17

Jesus tells Nicodemus that spiritual rebirth comes through the Spirit, not through human effort or religious status.

### Songs and hymns

- 372 Come down, O Love divine
- 376 Crashing waters at creation
- 383 Holy Spirit, gift bestower
- 389 Like the murmur of the dove's song
- 391 O breath of life, come sweeping through us
- 393 She sits like a bird
- 394 Spirit of God, unseen as the wind
- 397 The Spirit lives to set us free
- 400 Wind of God, dynamic Spirit

### Opening liturgy

#### Voice 1:

We place this box at the foot of the cross.  
Strong. Rigid. Inflexible.

#### Voice 2:

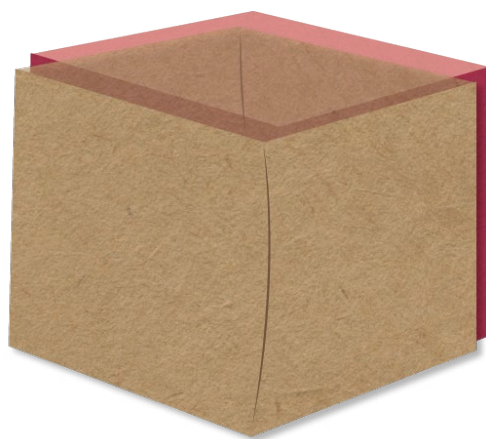
We are aware of the ways we try to contain  
you, God,  
in rules, in routines, in what feels safe.

#### Voice 3:

But your Spirit moves where it will.  
Unseen. Unexpected. Free.

#### All:

**O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey,  
break open our boxes, and breathe your  
Spirit through us. Amen.**



**Object: a rigid, sturdy box,  
made of wood or metal.**

Place it near a cross at the front  
of the worship space.

## Background notes

This week's readings invite us into a journey of trust and transformation, that moves us beyond the safety of structure and into the mystery of the Spirit.

In Genesis 12, God calls Abram to leave everything familiar: his land, his family, his identity. There's no roadmap, no detailed plan – just a promise and a command: "Go". And Abram goes. Bill T Arnold notes the stark simplicity of "So Abram went" (12:4), a radical act of obedience that contrasts sharply with the way Adam and Eve talk and rationalise what's happened to them. Abram's response is stripped of hesitation, revealing a faith that trusts God's Spirit over continuity.<sup>3</sup>

In John 3, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. Night can be a symbol of fear, secrecy and perhaps spiritual searching. Nicodemus is a man of 'form': a Pharisee, a teacher, someone steeped in religious structure. But Jesus speaks of the Spirit – of a power that transcends biology, of wind that blows where it will. Theologian David Ford describes this moment as an opening into mystery: a God who is free, who overflows our categories, who cannot be harnessed or predicted. The Spirit, like the wind, is unseen yet effective: it moves us in new directions, springing endless surprises.<sup>4</sup>

Author Rob Bell explores this tension between form and spirits in *Everything Is Spiritual*. He writes that forms – rituals, words and structures – are essential, but they are not the goal. They are the scaffolding, not the substance. He compares it to learning to ride a bike. At first, you rely on instructions – 'keep pedalling, steer...' – but eventually, something shifts. "Those words have become flesh." The form becomes embodied. The spirit animates the structure.<sup>5</sup>

This week invites us to loosen our grip on what is fixed and familiar, and to trust the unpredictable movement of the Spirit. Whether we are stepping into new territory like Abram, or wrestling with questions like Nicodemus, we are called to open ourselves to transformation that doesn't follow a formula. The Spirit may surprise us in unexpected places: in conversation, in silence, in change. Lent is a time to notice those moments, and to respond – not with fear, but with faith that God is present and active, even when the path ahead is unclear.

## Questions for discussion

1. Where in your faith life do you feel stuck in form – engaging with the Church's rituals, words and structures, without sensing the Spirit?
2. What does it mean to 'trust the wind of the Spirit' – to be open to movement, mystery and surprise?
3. How might Abram's simple obedience – "so Abram went" – inspire us to respond to God's call, even when the destination is unclear?

3 Bill T Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009), p. 130–131.

4 David Ford, *The Gospel of John* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2021), p. 88–89.

5 Rob Bell, *Everything is Spiritual* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2020).

## Spiritual practice

### Be open to the unexpected

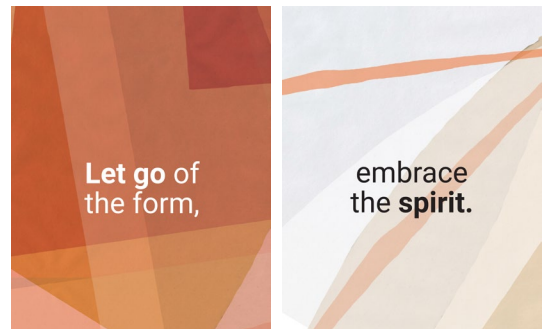
Set aside time each day to be open to unexpected moments. Begin with a moment of quiet openness. You might say: "Spirit of life, move freely. Help me notice what matters." Or simply pause, breathe and invite a sense of awareness and presence.

Whether you're at home, at work, online, or in conversation, stay attentive to surprising encounters: a message, a moment of beauty, a person who crosses your path. Let go of control and allow the Spirit to guide your attention.

If you're feeling brave (and if you're able), take a question with you as you go about your day. Carry it into the streets or the spaces you move through, and see how God might answer through the people you meet, the things you notice, or the moments that catch your eye. Jot down your thoughts or take photos as a way of paying attention.

### Why it helps:

This practice mirrors Abram's journey and Jesus' invitation to Nicodemus. We are invited to step into mystery, trusting the Spirit's movement, and embracing the possibility of surprise. It helps us loosen our grip on structure and become more attentive to the Spirit's presence in the everyday.



## Practical activity

### Wind mobiles

**Materials:** twigs, string/wool, paper/card, hole punch, scissors, pens.

**Activity:** Make paper shapes (eg doves, spirals, clouds) and use them to create mobiles using sticks and string. Hang the mobiles up where they can catch the breeze.

**Reflection:** Watch them flutter in the wind, symbolising openness to the Spirit.

## Prayer idea

### Wind listening prayer

Sit quietly and listen for any movement of wind or sound. Pray: "Spirit, blow where you will. Help me notice." People might like to move to a window or door where they can watch the wind blowing through leaves.

## The good news to get across

**God's Spirit is not confined by structure.**

God moves freely, surprises us, and invites us into a living, breathing relationship.

## Ways people can respond

Ask people to pray that God might highlight something that is too rigid for them: maybe an ideology, or a rule that excludes people, or a tradition they are maintaining which doesn't fit in the current season of their life. They should write it on a card and place it in the box near to the cross as an invitation to God to replace this with something new that the Spirit will lead them into.

Collect the cards up at the end of the service and destroy them to preserve people's confidentiality.

## Prayer of blessing

*May the Spirit who moves like the wind stir your soul today.*

*May you be open to mystery, surprise and the gentle breath of God. **Amen.***

Sunday 8 March 2026

# Lent 3

## Let go of scarcity, embrace abundance

### Bible readings

#### Exodus 17:1–7

God provides water from a rock for the thirsty Israelites, revealing divine presence and provision in the wilderness.

#### John 4:5–42

Jesus offers 'living water' to a Samaritan woman, transforming her identity and empowering her as a witness to God's presence.

### Songs and hymns

- 51 Great is thy faithfulness
- 61 Our God is a great big God
- 386 In the beginning was darkness and nothing
- 441 As water to the thirsty
- 544 As the deer pants for the water

Oceans of kindness (website only)  
[methodist.org.uk/for-churches/  
resources/hymns/oceans-of-  
kindness-website-only/](http://methodist.org.uk/for-churches/resources/hymns/oceans-of-kindness-website-only/)

### Opening liturgy

#### Voice 1:

We place this jug at the foot of the cross.  
It's a small vessel for measuring, limiting,  
holding back.

#### Voice 2:

We've been shaped by scarcity; by the  
myth there's not enough to go around.

#### Voice 3:

But God's love overflows.  
More than we can measure. More than  
we can hold.

#### All:

**O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey,  
fill us with your living water, and teach us  
to overflow with love. Amen.**



**Object: a measuring jug.**

Place it at the foot of the cross.

### Background notes

This week's readings invite us to move from a mindset of scarcity – where resources are limited, survival is uncertain and hope is fragile – into a deeper trust in God's abundant provision of grace.

In the introduction to his study guide *Gospel of John*, David Ford writes:

**“[God] is full of grace and truth, and from his abundance, we have all received grace. His purpose is to offer us life, and John’s Gospel aims to draw readers into this boundless, everlasting love. The love between Jesus and his Father, the very love that brought the universe into existence. I believe the purpose of John’s Gospel is to draw readers into that superabundant love of God, which is new and everlasting life.”<sup>6</sup>**

A scarcity mindset is rooted in fear that there isn’t enough: not enough time, money, energy, influence or love. It leads to competition, hoarding, anxiety and a reluctance to take risks. In contrast, an abundance mindset is grounded in trust: trust in God’s provision, generosity and the overflowing grace that characterises the kingdom of God.

For disciples of Jesus, shifting from scarcity to abundance is not just a psychological adjustment; it’s a theological and spiritual transformation. When churches or individuals operate from a scarcity mindset, they become inward-looking, risk-averse and protective. This stifles creativity, mission and growth. An abundance mindset, on the other hand, empowers disciples to step out in faith, share resources and embrace bold visions for justice, hospitality and transformation.

In Exodus 17, the Israelites are in the wilderness, thirsty and afraid. Their cries are not just for water, but for reassurance: “Is the Lord among us or not?” The wilderness is a place of chaos and disorder, where lifelessness seems to dominate. Yet God responds with creative generosity. Water flows from the rock; not just to quench thirst, but to reveal God’s presence and power. As Terence Fretheim explains in his book *Exodus*, this is more than survival; it is an act of re-creation, a glimpse of God’s original intention for life even in the harshest places. The wilderness may be dry, but it is not without potential. God’s Spirit activates what is hidden, bringing life where none seemed possible.<sup>7</sup>

In John 4, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. She comes for water, but Jesus offers ‘living water’ – a source that will never run dry. The contrast is striking: the well is a place of repetitive effort and is governed by traditions; the living water is internal, overflowing and free. She no longer needs to return to the same place, bound by shame or history. Worship, too, is reimagined: it’s no longer tied to a mountain or temple, but opened to the Spirit and truth.

The Samaritan woman’s transformation is radical. She leaves behind her water jar – a symbol of scarcity – and becomes a messenger of abundance.<sup>8</sup> Like the disciples who left their fishing nets, she steps into a new identity, overflowing with purpose and joy. Her story reminds us that abundance is not about having more. It’s about being filled with the life of God and sharing it freely.

6 David Ford, *Gospel of John: A four-week study guide for you and your church* (LWPT, London, 2024).

7 Terence E Fretheim, *Exodus* (Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY, 1991), p. 188–191.

8 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1966), p. 173.

## Questions for discussion

1. Where in your life do you feel stuck in a mindset of scarcity – emotionally, spiritually or practically?
2. How does Jesus' offer of 'living water' challenge the idea that we must work hard to earn God's presence or grace?
3. How might you, like the woman at the well, leave behind something that once defined you and step into a new identity rooted in abundance?

## Spiritual practice

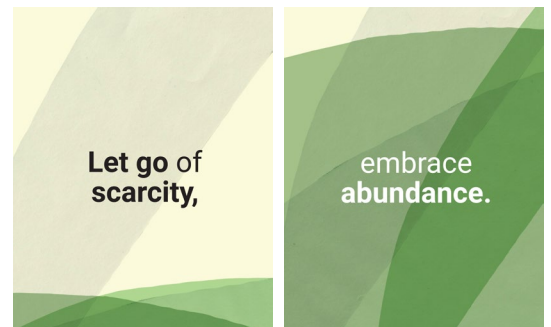
### Spring photos

This week, if you are able to, take time each day to go outside and look for signs of spring. Or close your eyes and imagine: snowdrops, daffodils, buds on trees, lambs in the fields, birdsong, or longer daylight hours. Take a photo of something that catches your attention as a sign of life and abundance.

At the end of the week, look back over your photos. What do they reveal about God's generosity? What surprised you? What lifted your spirit?

### Why it helps:

This practice helps shift our focus from what feels lacking to what is already growing. Spring is a natural metaphor for abundance. It's not flashy or excessive, but quiet, steady and full of promise. By paying attention to the world around us, we train our hearts to notice God's provision and presence, even in small things.



## Practical activity

### 'God's abundance overflows' cups

**Materials:** paper cups or small terracotta pots, washable markers, a jug of water, a large bowl or basin.

**Activity:** Each person decorates a reusable paper cup or small plant pot with words or images of blessings they've received.

**Reflection:** Pouring water into their cup until it overflows into a shared bowl, each person reflects on how their personal abundance can bless others.

## Prayer idea

### Cup overflow prayer

Pray: "Let your grace overflow in me."

Pour water into a cup until it overflows into a bowl for a few minutes. Invite people to open their hearts to God as they sit quietly, listening to the sound of the water.

## The good news to get across

### God's grace is abundant and overflowing.

We are not defined by what we lack, but by the generous love of God that meets us where we are and fills us with life.

## Ways people can respond

Give each person a small glass with a little water in it; a communion glass works well. Invite them to come forward and pour their water into a large measuring jug placed near the cross. This simple act becomes a symbol of opening up to God's overflowing abundance. After everyone has poured their water, pause and invite reflection. Encourage a few people to share their thoughts aloud if they feel comfortable.

## Prayer of blessing

*May the God of overflowing grace fill your soul today.*

*May you drink deeply from the well of life and share its joy with others. **Amen.***

Sunday 15 March 2026

# Lent 4

Let go of appearances,  
embrace what's inside

## Bible readings

### 1 Samuel 16:1–13

God chooses David, Jesse's youngest son, to be king.

### John 9:1–41

Jesus heals a man born blind, challenging assumptions about sin and blame.

## Songs and hymns

- 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell
- 493 Come, Lord, to our souls come down
- 611 Brother, sister, let me serve you
- 652 Lord, we come to ask your healing
- 678 Come, all who look to Christ today
- 687 One human family God has made
- 689 Summoned by the God who made us

## Opening liturgy

### Voice 1:

We place this clipboard at the foot of the cross. A symbol of checklists, assessments and assumptions.

### Voice 2:

We acknowledge the checklists we carry – spoken or unspoken – that shape how we see others.

### Voice 3:

But you, God, see the heart.  
You see the whole person.  
You see us with love.

### All:

**O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey, help us to see as you see, and love as you love. Amen.**



**Object: a clipboard.**

Place it at the foot of the cross.

## Background notes

This week's lectionary readings invite us to reflect on how we perceive others, and how easily we can misjudge what God is doing based on outward appearances. The mindset shift at the heart of these texts is simple but profound: we need to move from judging people by appearances to recognising dignity.

In John 9, the disciples begin with a question that reflects a common assumption: "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" The man's blindness is seen as a sign of moral failure. Meanwhile, the Pharisees appear to be righteous. But Jesus disrupts this framework. He sees the man not as a sinner to be blamed, but as someone through whom God's works will be revealed. As the story unfolds, the man grows in spiritual awareness and courage, while the Pharisees resist the truth. The one who was dismissed becomes a witness to grace; the ones who were revered are revealed to be spiritually closed.

In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel is sent to anoint a new king. He is drawn to Eliab, who looks the part: tall, strong, kingly. But God intervenes: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (v. 7)

David, the youngest and least likely, is chosen. The text notes that David has 'beautiful eyes' – a detail that may hint at his capacity to perceive, to be sensitive to God's call. His outward beauty is not the reason for his selection, but perhaps a poetic echo of his inner attentiveness.

Together, these readings challenge us to reconsider how we 'see' others. Who do we overlook because they don't fit our expectations? Who do we elevate because they appear successful, holy or powerful? Lent is a season of reorientation, a time to ask God to help us see with compassion, to recognise the dignity in every person and to be sensitive to the presence of God in unexpected places.

## Questions for discussion

1. Where in your life are you tempted to judge others by outward appearance – their status, behaviour or background – rather than looking for the image of God within them?
2. How does Jesus' response to the man born blind challenge our assumptions about who is 'worthy' or 'holy'?
3. When have you felt overlooked, dismissed or misunderstood – and what helped you feel truly seen and valued? How might that experience shape the way you recognise dignity in others?

## Spiritual practice

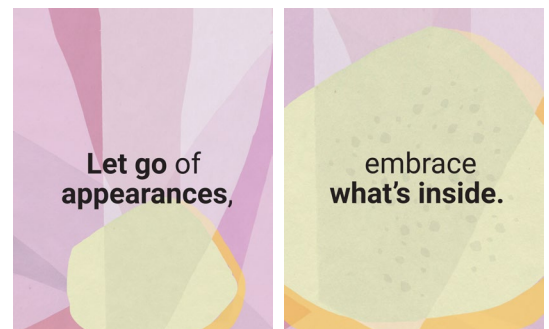
### Dignity spotting

Consciously spend time each day noticing and affirming the dignity of someone you might usually overlook, or be judgemental towards. For example, you could:

- Have a brief conversation with someone you usually pass by.
- Write a note of encouragement or thanks to someone whose work is often unseen.
- Spend a moment in silent prayer for someone you find difficult to understand.

### Why it helps:

This practice gently retrains our attention. It moves us from surface-level judgements to deeper recognition of the image of God in others. It invites us to 'see with the heart', as God does.



## Practical activity

### Mirror frames of dignity

**Materials:** cardboard, mirrors (or foil), pens, stickers, fabric scraps.

**Activity:** Make cardboard frames around small mirrors (or pieces of foil). Decorate the frames with affirming words and symbols. Invite participants to hold their framed mirror and look into it.

**Reflection:** Think about seeing others (and ourselves) as God sees us.

## Prayer idea

### Heart drawing prayer

Draw a heart and write inside it the name of someone you find hard to understand. Pray for them silently.

## The good news to get across

### God sees the heart.

Every person carries the image of God within them, and we are invited to look beyond appearances and assumptions to recognise the dignity in others, and in ourselves. And God sees your heart, and loves you through and through, more than you will ever realise.

## Ways people can respond

Invite participants to write on a piece of card a judgement or assumption they find themselves making about others; something that irritates them, such as lateness, rudeness or impatience.

Ask a few volunteers to share what they've written. Then invite others to suggest possible reasons behind those behaviours. For example, someone who is routinely late might be juggling more responsibilities than they can manage, or someone who seems impatient might be feeling overwhelmed or unheard. Please facilitate this carefully so that people are safe.

Gather all the cards and bring them to the front. Clip them to the clipboard placed near the cross as a symbolic act of letting go of judgement and choosing to see others with compassion.

Collect up the cards at the end of the service and destroy them to preserve people's confidentiality.

## Prayer of blessing

*May the God who sees the heart open your soul to compassion.  
May you recognise dignity in every face, including your own. **Amen.***

Sunday 22 March 2026

# Lent 5

Let go of despair,  
embrace 'respair'

## Bible readings

### Ezekiel 37:1–14

God breathes life into a valley of dry bones, promising restoration and hope to a despairing people.

### John 11:1–45

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, showing that God's power brings life, even in the midst of grief and loss.

## Songs and hymns

- 345 And can it be that I should gain
- 357 Jesus – the name high over all
- 399 When deep despair casts out all light
- 443 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love
- 627 Everyone needs compassion
- 628 Faithful One, so unchanging
- 629 God of my faith, I offer you my doubt
- 630 How long, O Lord, will you forget
- 631 I lift my eyes up to the mountains
- 636 O love that wilt not let me go

## Opening liturgy

### Voice 1:

We place this bin at the foot of the cross.  
A place for what's broken, unwanted,  
discarded.

### Voice 2:

We remember what we've labelled as  
rubbish – broken things, broken stories –  
and wonder if they might still hold life.

### Voice 3:

But you are the God of restoration.  
You bring beauty from the broken.

### All:

**O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey,  
breathe life into what feels lost and raise  
us with your hope. Amen.**



**Object: a rubbish bin**

## Background notes

This week's Bible readings speak to times when life feels hopeless and show us that God offers real hope – hope that is strong and deeply rooted in God's life-giving presence.

Language expert Susie Dent points out that English often leans towards negative words. She notes that some positive words have almost disappeared. One example is the word linked to 'despair'. Its opposite is rare, but it exists:

**"...one English word surely stands above all others from the corners of the dictionary. I mention it all the time, because I'm determined to bring it back. Or bring it anywhere in fact, for it never really enjoyed more than a day in the sun. 'Respair' has just one record next to it in the Oxford English Dictionary, from 1525, but its definition is sublime. Respair is fresh hope; a recovery from despair."**<sup>9</sup>

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet is led into a valley of dry bones: a stark image of death, defeat and hopelessness. The people cry out, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost." Yet God commands Ezekiel to prophesy life: breath enters the bones, and they stand in a vast multitude. This is not just a metaphor for resurrection, but a promise of restoration for a people who feel cut off and forgotten.

In John 11, Mary and Martha confront Jesus with their grief: "Lord, if you had been here..." Lazarus has died, and the community is mourning. Jesus does not rush past their pain – he weeps with them. But then he calls Lazarus out of the tomb, unbinding him and restoring him to life. This affirms God's power to bring life even when all seems lost.

This shift from despair to respair is not about ignoring suffering or rushing to resolution. It's about trusting that God is present in the valley, in the tomb, in the waiting – and that God's Spirit still breathes life into what feels dead.

## Questions for discussion

1. Where in your life or community do you feel like you're standing in a valley of dry bones: places that feel lifeless, stuck or forgotten?
2. When have you experienced a sense of 'respair' or hope returning after a time of despair? What helped you recognise it?
3. What does it mean to speak life – to be someone who helps others breathe again, hope again, live again?

<sup>9</sup> Susie Dent, *From respair to cacklefart – the joy of reclaiming long-lost positive words* [theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/26/respair-cacklefart-positive-words-english-language](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/26/respair-cacklefart-positive-words-english-language)

## Spiritual practice

### The 'respair shop'

This week, embrace your inner Bagpuss! The classic children's TV programme of the 1970s was about a shop whose owner found lost and broken objects, mended them, and put them in the shop window for people to find them. Choose one thing that's broken, messy, or neglected: a torn item of clothing, a cluttered drawer, a squeaky hinge, a forgotten corner of your home.

Take time to fix it, clean it, or bring it back to life. As you do, reflect on these questions: What in me might also need repair? What hope could be restored through this act? You don't need to do it perfectly. The point is care, attention and the belief that restoration is possible – even in small things.

### Why it helps:

Repairing something physical can be a gentle way to reconnect with the possibility of emotional or spiritual healing. It's a practical reminder that brokenness is not the end of the story, and that hope, like repair-work, begins with noticing and tending.



## Practical activity

### Bandage blossoms

**Materials:** fabric scraps, twigs or card, pens, glue or string.

**Activity:** Use strips of fabric (eg old sheets or bandages) and twist and shape them into simple flower forms. Attach the flowers to twigs or recycled card stems. Write words of hope or life on a leaf or petal.

**Reflection:** Invite each person to hold their flower and silently name something they hope will be restored. You can keep the flowers and display them as a 'garden of resurrection' around the cross on Easter Sunday.

## Prayer idea

### Bandage unwrapping prayer

Unwrap a strip of cloth slowly while praying: "Unbind me, God, from despair. Wrap me in hope."

## The good news to get across

### God calls us into 'respair'.

Even when everything feels lost, God is still breathing life into what seems dead. Resurrection is not just a future hope – it begins now, in the places we thought were beyond repair. God meets us in our despair and gently calls us into 'respair': fresh hope, renewed life and the promise that we are never alone.

## Ways people can respond

Invite participants to recall what they named earlier when they were doing the bandage unwrapping prayer – something that leads them to despair or feels lifeless. Their strips of cloth represent Lazarus' bandages, the things that bind us and hold us back.

As a symbolic act of release, invite each person to bring their strip of cloth to the front and place it in the bin near the cross. This gesture represents letting go of despair and making space for God's restoring breath of life – for 'respair'.

You might also challenge people to teach one person the new word 'respair' and tell them how they learned it!

## Prayer of blessing

*May the God who breathes life into dry bones restore your soul today.  
May hope rise again in you, fresh and fierce. **Amen.***

Sunday 29 March 2026

# Palm Sunday

Let go of violence, embrace gentleness

## Bible readings

### Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29

A psalm of thanksgiving celebrates God's enduring love and the opening of the gates of righteousness.

### Matthew 21:1–11

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling prophecy and revealing a gentle, non-violent vision of kingship.

## Songs and hymns

- 45 Earth's creator, everyday God
- 64 Praise is rising, eyes are turning to you
- 262 All glory, laud, and honour
- 263 Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
- 264 Make way, make way, for Christ the King
- 265 Ride on, ride on in majesty!
- 277 My song is love unknown

## Opening liturgy

### Voice 1:

We place this coat at the foot of the cross.  
A symbol of power, protection and pride.

### Voice 2:

We recall the day when coats and palm leaves became a royal carpet, an act of honour for the Prince of Peace.

### Voice 3:

You came riding on a donkey, not a warhorse.  
Not with force, but with peace.

### All:

O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey, clothe us in gentleness and teach us the way of peace. Amen.



**Object: a jacket or coat, maybe army-style**

## Background notes

Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week: a moment of celebration, tension and deep theological contrast. At the heart of this day is a confrontation between two radically different visions of power: one rooted in violence and domination, the other in gentleness and vulnerability.

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding a donkey, not a warhorse. This is no incidental detail. In their commentary on Matthew's Gospel, WD Davies and Dale C Allison note the donkey is a symbol of peace, not conquest. Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9, but notably omits the word 'victorious'. Theologian Eduard Schweizer points out that this omission shifts the emphasis: Jesus is not a triumphant warrior, but a gentle king.

Douglas Hare highlights that Matthew chose to follow the Septuagint Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible in his choice of the word *praus* – 'gentle' – rather than 'humble'. This distinction matters. Gentleness is not weakness; it is strength under control, power reimagined.<sup>10</sup> Jesus arrives vulnerable, unarmed, prepared to live – and die – by his own teaching: "Do not resist one who is evil." (Matthew 5:39). He embodies the Sermon on the Mount in public, political space.

This entry stands in stark contrast to another procession happening that same week: Pontius Pilate's arrival. As John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg describe in *The Last Week*, Pilate entered Jerusalem from the west, leading a military parade: there were horses, chariots, soldiers and weapons. It was a display of imperial power meant to inspire fear and obedience. Rome's authority would not be questioned.

Jesus enters from the east, with no army, no weapons, no threat. His procession is a counter-narrative: a public act of resistance against violence, domination and fear. The crowd may not fully understand, but they sense something different. They shout "Hosanna!" It's a cry for salvation, not conquest.<sup>11</sup>

Psalm 118, often used in royal processions, is reimagined here. The gates of righteousness are opened not for a warrior, but for one who comes in the name of the Lord: gentle, vulnerable and true. The psalm's refrain, "His steadfast love endures forever", becomes a lens through which we see Jesus' entry: not as a show of force, but as a declaration of divine love.

## Questions for discussion

1. How does Jesus' choice to enter Jerusalem on a donkey challenge our assumptions about leadership and power?
2. What does gentleness look like in your life, and where is it hardest to practice?
3. How do the two processions – Pilate's and Jesus' – reflect competing visions of authority in our world today?

10 Douglas RA Hare, *Matthew* (Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY, 1993), p. 238.

11 Marcus J Borg, John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem* (SPCK Publishing, London, 2008), chapter 1.

## Spiritual practices

This week there are two options to choose from.

### 1. Acts of Gentle Strength

Each day this week, choose one small action that expresses gentleness in a world that often prizes force or control.

Examples:

- Speak kindly to someone who seems stressed.
- Pause before replying to a difficult message; choose words that calm rather than escalate.
- Offer practical help to someone who needs it (carrying bags, opening a door, listening without interrupting).
- Notice moments of gentleness around you – write them down or take photos.

At the end of the week, reflect:

- How did these acts feel? Did they change the atmosphere around you?
- Where did you notice gentleness as a quiet form of strength?

#### Why it helps:

These small acts train us to embody Jesus' way of peace in everyday life. They remind us that gentleness is not weakness but a quiet strength that can transform relationships and environments.

### 2. The Holy Week Journal

Each day of Holy Week, take a few minutes to read a section from Matthew's Gospel. Then think back to the different spiritual practices that you have explored in this series.

#### Monday

Matthew 21:12–16

Jesus disrupts the Temple, making space for something deeper.

Think back to week two's practice of noticing unexpected moments and signs of Spirit. Imagine you were following this discipline and happened to be present in the Temple at the moment that Jesus entered and turned over the tables. Do you think you would see his disruptive action as a surprising work of God, challenging the established fixed form of religion and opening the way to something different?

#### Tuesday

Matthew 21:18–22

Jesus curses the barren fig tree and speaks of faith that bears fruit.

Think back to week three's practice of noticing signs of spring and abundance. Imagine you were following this discipline and walked past the fig tree just before Jesus arrived.

# Palm Sunday

Would you have seen its barrenness as a warning against scarcity thinking? How might Jesus' words challenge you to trust in unseen abundance, even when things look lifeless?

## Wednesday

Matthew 26:14–16

Judas makes a decision that others will judge – but what led him there?

Think back to week four's practice of affirming dignity in those we might overlook or misjudge. Imagine you were present when Judas approached the chief priests. Would you have seen only betrayal, or would you have wondered what pain or confusion led him there? How does this moment invite you to look deeper before judging?

## Thursday

Matthew 26:26–30

Jesus shares bread and wine, offering hope in the face of betrayal.

Think back to week five's 'repair shop' practice – repairing something broken or neglected. Imagine you were at the table with Jesus, holding a cup in your hands. Would you have seen this meal as a quiet act of restoration? How does this moment speak to the possibility of hope even when things feel fragile?

## Friday

Matthew 27:27–31

Jesus endures cruelty without retaliation.

Think back to the Palm Sunday service. People were excited and happy when Jesus came into Jerusalem. Today's Bible reading feels very different. Why do you think that is?

## Saturday

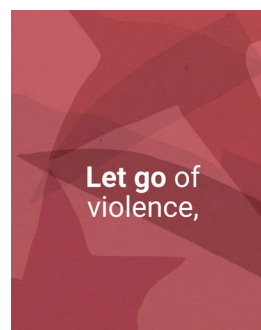
Matthew 27:57–61

Jesus is laid in the tomb. Silence and waiting begin.

Think back to week one's 'true and false' journal practice. Imagine you were one of the women watching the tomb being sealed. What false messages might have crept in – about endings, failure or absence? What truths might still be waiting to rise, quietly, in the silence?

### Why it helps:

This practice helps us explore the story of Holy Week with fresh eyes. By linking each day's reading to earlier Lenten practices, it deepens reflection and shows how Jesus' journey invites us to live with openness, hope and gentleness.



## Practical activity

### Donkey puppets

**Materials:** card, wooden sticks or pegs, glue, pens.

**Activity:** Make simple donkey puppets using card and wooden sticks or pegs. Decorate with gentle colours and add a short prayer or message of peace. Use them in a simple retelling of the Palm Sunday story.

**Reflection:** “What does it mean to follow the way of peace?” Participants can respond with a word, gesture or silence.

## Prayer idea

### Hosanna whisper prayer

Whisper ‘Hosanna’ three times, each time imagining it as a cry for peace, not power.

## The good news to get across

### Jesus shows us a different kind of power.

Jesus’ power is one rooted in gentleness, vulnerability and love. In a world of domination, we are called to follow the way of peace.

## Ways people can respond

Invite people to write down on a card a situation or emotion where they feel tempted to respond with force or control. Place the cards on the coat at the front near the cross as a prayer to choose gentleness and peace.

Collect up the cards at the end of the service and destroy them to preserve people’s confidentiality.

## Prayer of blessing

*May the gentle King guide your soul in peace today. May your strength be clothed in kindness, and your steps follow the way of love. **Amen.***

Friday 3 April 2026

# Good Friday

Let go of certainty, embrace mystery

## Bible reading

### Psalm 22

Psalm 22 expresses deep anguish and abandonment, yet moves towards trust and praise, revealing a raw and honest journey through suffering into hope.

### John 18:1 – 19:42

Jesus is betrayed, tried, crucified and buried.

## Songs and hymns

- 273 Here hangs a man discarded
- 277 My song is love unknown
- 278 O Love divine, what have you done!
- 279 O precious sight, my Saviour stands
- 280 O sacred head, sore wounded
- 285 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
- 287 When I survey the wondrous cross
- 291 'Why has God forsaken me?'

## Opening liturgy

### Voice 1:

We drape this black cloth across the cross.  
A sign of sorrow. A sign of silence.

### Voice 2:

The sky darkens. The earth trembles.  
Love is crucified.

### Voice 3:

And still, we wait.  
Still, we trust.

### All:

O Lord our God, on this Lenten journey,  
hold us in the shadow of the cross. Amen.



Object: a black cloth draped over the arms of the cross.

## Background notes

John's story of Jesus' death is full of contrasts. Jesus seems weak yet strong, quiet yet speaking, suffering yet still in charge. The story doesn't give easy answers. Instead, it invites us to pause and stay with the mystery, rather than trying to explain it.

**"Who are you looking for?"** (John 18:4). Jesus begins with a question. Even in arrest, he invites reflection. The question echoes through the whole Passion: what kind of Messiah are we seeking?

**"Here is your son... Here is your mother"** (19:26–27). In the midst of agony, Jesus creates new relationships. Mystery becomes intimacy. The Cross becomes a place of community.

**"It is finished"** (19:30). These final words are not a cry of despair, but a declaration of completion. Yet what is 'finished' remains open to interpretation. Is it suffering? Is it the mission? Is it the beginning of something new?

**"They laid Jesus there"** (19:42). The story ends not with resolution, but with burial. The tomb is closed. The silence begins. And yet, even here, mystery holds space for hope.

Good Friday invites us to let go of easy answers. It asks us to sit with the unresolved, the painful, the sacred unknown. In the shadow of the Cross, we are not asked to understand – only to stay.

## Questions for discussion

A discussion may not be appropriate for this service, but if you feel it is helpful here are some questions.

1. What does it mean to follow a saviour who suffers?
2. Where do we see crucifixion – injustice, violence, abandonment – in our world today?
3. How does Jesus' silence speak to us when we feel overwhelmed or unheard?

## Spiritual practice

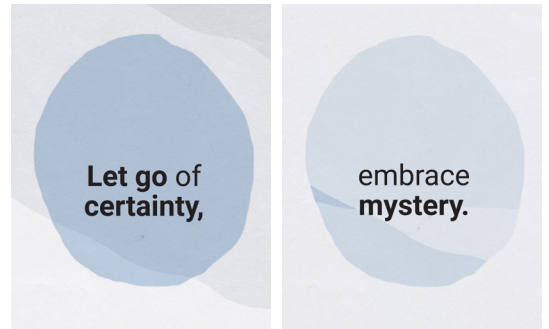
### 24/7 Sign of joy

This week, carry something that reminds you of Easter joy – like a painted stone, a flower, or a toy chick. Let it be a physical reminder that fear and sadness have turned into hope and new life. When you feel worried, tired, or weighed down, hold the object and pause. Ask: "How can I live with joy today, like Jesus brings?"

At the end of the week, reflect. Did carrying this sign of joy change how you felt? Where did you notice hope breaking through?

## Why it helps:

Embodied practices engage our senses and help us stay grounded. Carrying a sign of joy is a gentle nudge towards hope and celebration, especially in moments when fear or doubt creep in.



## Practical activity

### Tear and mend

**Materials:** fabric scraps, glue or child-safe needles and thread, backing cloth.

**Activity:** Tear small pieces of fabric (children may need adult help). Then stitch or glue them onto a larger cloth to form a heart or cross. Each piece represents something broken that God can mend.

**Reflection:** Consider how Good Friday is about brokenness, and the hope of restoration.

## Prayer idea

The service for Good Friday in *The Methodist Worship Book* (p. 255ff, or [click here](#)) contains appropriate prayers.

## The good news to get across

### God is with us in everything.

God does not always answer with clarity. Sometimes, God answers with presence. On the Cross, Jesus enters the deepest mystery of suffering and love. Even when we cannot make sense of it, we are not alone. The good news is not that we understand everything, but that God is with us in everything.

## Ways people can respond

Invite people to come forward and place a strip of cloth or a stone at the foot of the cross with no words or explanation. It's a gesture of trust and willingness to go where God goes.

## Prayer of blessing

*May the God who did not turn away from suffering hold your soul today. May you rest in the mystery, and wait in hope. Amen.*

Sunday 5 April 2026

# Easter Sunday

Let go of fear, embrace joy

## Bible readings

### Jeremiah 31:1–6

God promises restoration and joy to a scattered people, declaring everlasting love and celebration with music and dancing.

### Matthew 28:1–10

The risen Jesus meets the women at the tomb, transforming fear into joy and sending them out with good news.

## Songs and hymns

|     |   |     |   |
|-----|---|-----|---|
| 148 | Come, let us with our Lord arise          | 306 | Now the green blade rises from the buried grain |
| 293 | All heaven declares                       | 309 | See, what a morning, gloriously bright          |
| 296 | Christ has risen while earth slumbers     | 310 | Sing a song, sing a joyful song                 |
| 298 | Christ the Lord is risen today; Alleluia! | 313 | Thine be the glory                              |
| 304 | Jesus is risen, alleluia!                 | 314 | This joyful Eastertide                          |

## Opening liturgy

### Voice 1:

We place this living plant beside the fake one. What was fake is now outshone by what is real.

### Voice 2:

We scatter these eggs – symbols of joy, of life, of surprise.  
There is enough for everyone.

### Voice 3:

Christ is risen.  
Love has the last word.

### All:

**O Lord our God, our Lenten journey is complete.**

**Let joy take root. Let life burst forth. Alleluia! Amen.**



### Object: A real plant with flowers.

Place it near the fake one from week one (do not remove the fake plant). Arrange chocolate mini eggs around it, making sure there are enough for everyone (and some tasty alternatives for people who can't eat chocolate).

## Background notes

Easter morning begins in fear. The women come to the tomb expecting death, not life. The guards are paralysed by fear (v. 4), and even the women – faithful and courageous – leave the tomb with “fear and great joy” (v. 8). But into this fear, the angel speaks: “Do not be afraid” (v. 5). And then Jesus himself repeats it: “Do not be afraid” (v. 10). The resurrection does not erase fear instantly, but it transforms it. Fear is not the end of the story. Joy breaks in.

This week’s mindset shift invites us to move from fear – of death, of change, of uncertainty – into the joy of resurrection. It’s not a shallow happiness, but a deep, defiant joy rooted in the reality that Christ is risen and nothing – not even death – can separate us from God’s love.

Matthew 28:1–10 is rich with movement. The stone is rolled away, the angel descends, the women run, Jesus meets them on the road. Resurrection is not static: it sends us out. The women become the first apostles, entrusted with the message of life. Their fear is not dismissed, but held within a greater joy.

Jeremiah 31:1–6 offers a prophetic echo of this joy. The people who survived the sword are promised restoration. God’s love is described as “everlasting”, and the people will once again dance, plant vineyards and shout for joy. This is not just personal comfort: it’s communal renewal. The resurrection is not only about Jesus’ victory over death, but about the restoration of all things. Joy is not a private feeling; it’s a shared celebration of God’s faithfulness.

## Questions for discussion

*These questions could bring up painful memories for some people. You might want to look again at the [guidance on leading sensitive conversations in worship](#).*

1. Where in your life are you holding onto fear – fear of change, loss, failure, or the unknown?
2. The women left the tomb with both fear and joy. Can you think of a time when joy and fear coexisted in your life? What helped you move towards joy?
3. What might it look like to live as someone sent by the risen Christ – with courage, hope and joy?

## Practical activities

### Joy bunting

**Materials:** fabric or recycled card, string, scissors, pens

**Activity:** Cut triangle or flag shapes from fabric scraps or card. Decorate each flag with joyful words, colours or symbols (eg the sun, flowers, bunnies!). String them together to create a communal Easter bunting to hang in the worship space.

**Reflection:** Christ is risen today, may our bunting express abundant joy!

## Prayer idea

### Joy map

Provide a simple large map of your local area or draw one together. Invite participants to place a sticker, dot, or symbol on places where joy is needed – homes, schools, hospitals, streets. Pray: “God of resurrection, let joy rise up in these places. Use us to carry it.”

## The good news to get across

### Christ is risen – and fear does not have the final word.

The resurrection of Jesus is not just a past event; it’s a present reality. It means that even in the face of fear, grief or uncertainty, God is at work bringing life, joy and hope. The risen Christ meets us where we are and sends us out with courage and purpose.

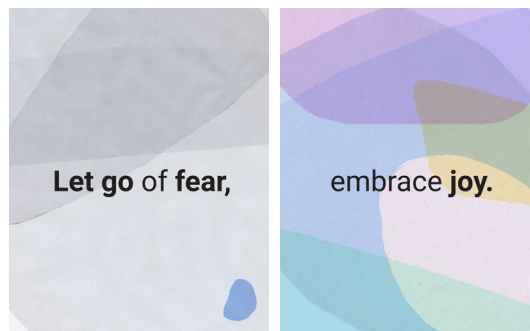
## Ways people can respond

Ask people to come to the front and take a chocolate mini egg. Remind them as they eat it, to enjoy it and to allow the sense of joy to remain with them always.

## Prayer of blessing

*May the risen Christ fill your soul with joy today.*

*May you live as one who has seen the empty tomb and cannot keep the good news to yourself. **Amen. Alleluia!***



Find global stories of letting go and liberation in the **Easter Offering 2026** act of worship.

Use any time in response to the new life of the Resurrection.

Donations go to global Church Partners supported by the **World Mission Fund** of the Methodist Church.

Bible quotations from New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021

If you would like to request this resource in an alternative format, please contact us to discuss your needs at [publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk)

© Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes 2026  
The Methodist Church, registered charity no. 1132208