

School of Discipleship

Lent 2003



South Yarra Community Baptist Church

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Chapter 1 – The School of Discipleship

Lent is a season of preparation and discipline that begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes at sundown on Holy Saturday. During the forty weekdays and six Sundays in Lent, the church remembers the life and ministry of Jesus and renews its baptismal commitment to follow him in all the business of life. Lent is the traditional time to prepare for baptism, which would normally be performed at the Easter Vigil as the culmination of a process known as the ‘catechumenate’. In early centuries, the catechumenate was a lengthy *School of Discipleship* in



which enquirers and new converts learned how to both believe and practise the Christian faith. During Lent, those already baptised would join with these new converts by *re-enrolling* in the catechumenate, there to hear anew the call to follow Jesus. In this way even seasoned campaigners were given the opportunity to re-visit and deepen their baptismal vows so that their commitment to Christ would remain strong and whole through all the changes that life brings. The Lenten *School of Discipleship* we are now offering at South Yarra is an explicit attempt to recover the riches of these traditions.

In this congregation we shall be entering into the Lenten season in a spirit of discernment. Most of us have been baptised. But each year it is our responsibility to work out the precise manner in which that commitment and calling will become real in the ‘flesh’ of our daily living. During Lent the Church shall be actively calling its members and adherents to work, pray and worship in such a way as to hear and

see what God has in store for us in the year to come—both as individuals and as a whole Church community.

Who is the *School of Discipleship* For?

The South Yarra Church offers the resources of this *School of Discipleship* to anyone who is willing to engage it with a *genuine desire to hear God’s call and respond with a more resolute discipleship*. We expect that this will include:

- Those reaching the culmination of their pre-baptismal preparations;
- Anyone who wishes to explore opportunities for a deeper engagement in the life, prayer and ministry of this congregation;
- All who wish to discover whether God is calling them to join the Covenanting Members of the church in committing themselves to live by the covenant disciplines;
- Everyone who intends to be a Covenanting Member for the coming year.

How the School of Discipleship Unfolds

The whole process has a number of stages and progresses as follows:

1. Sometime in the weeks immediately before the commencement of Lent, the existing Covenanting Members meet together to decide whether, on the basis of their experience, there should be any substantial change to the content of the Covenant. Everyone who has attended worship in the past six months also receives a letter inviting them to enrol in the School of Discipleship.
2. On **Transfiguration Sunday** a copy of this booklet, and the booklet called *Introducing South Yarra Baptist Church* is made available to everyone, especially to those who have indicated their intention to enrol in the School of Discipleship.

3. On the evening of **Ash Wednesday** all who have chosen to participate in the *School* will attend a service of worship in the church. The service will include a rite of penitence, a suitable beginning for all who would turn from the old way of life and embrace the new.
4. On the **First Sunday of Lent** we shall be enrolling the candidates for the *School of Discipleship* as part of the usual Sunday liturgy.
5. Between **Ash Wednesday** and the **Third Sunday of Lent**, all the catechumens will have an individual meeting with one of the Pastors for encouragement, guidance, and counsel in their personal discernment. The Pastors will meet with a Visiting Pastoral Overseer for the same purpose.
6. During Lent the home groups use the materials provided in this booklet for a series of weekly bible studies on themes surrounding the meaning of baptismal life and ministry. Also provided are daily Spiritual Exercises for individual devotion.
7. On the **Fourth Sunday of Lent**, or the day before, a one day retreat will be held for all catechumens. One or more of our Visiting Pastoral Overseers will provide some input at the retreat to encourage, challenge and inspire us in our discernment. There will also be time for quiet prayer and reflection. At some time during the retreat day, everyone will have an individual meeting with one of our Visiting Pastoral Overseers for individual exploration and counsel.
8. Between the **Fourth Sunday of Lent** and **Passion Sunday**, all the catechumens will provide their Pastor with a written summary (using a common outline) of commitments they feel called to make for the coming year, or else they will seek a further meeting with their Pastor to discuss the progress of their personal discernment. On the basis of these written or verbal reports, the Pastors may initiate further meetings with anyone with whom they have concerns about either over-commitment or under-commitment.
9. During the **Easter Vigil** (or, in exceptional circumstances, one of the Sundays of the Easter Season), as well as celebrating the baptism of any

new converts, all the Lenten Catechumens shall also ‘confirm’ or reaffirm their baptismal vows.

10. During the Easter Season, the opportunity will exist for anybody who needs it to seek further time or assistance in completing their discernment process.
11. During the Easter Season, if the Pastors identify any clear trends that would suggest that some aspect of the content of the Covenant should be reconsidered, they will call a meeting of the existing Covenanting Members to that purpose.
12. Towards the end of the Easter Season, a brief congregational meeting will be convened over dinner on a Sunday night to ratify the final content of the Covenant.
13. On the Sunday nearest the **Church Anniversary** the Covenanting Liturgy will be performed during the evening Eucharist.

So there you have it! Now we can move on to the specific resources we are providing to help the *School of Discipleship* happen. Before doing that, however, it is important to note that this is the first time we’ve attempted anything like this as a whole Church community. It is quite likely that we shall discover, as we go along, that some parts of the process don’t really work, or could at least do with some changes or improvements. All of that is to be expected, and we shall be alert to such things so that the *School* can be improved the next time around.

Of course, in the end, whether the *School* does its job or not is ultimately up to you. There is a very real sense in which this booklet, and the other resources offered by the Church, will only be as useful as you allow them to be. In the end we are each responsible to God for our *own* discipleship. Our failures cannot be blamed on others. They are ours alone.

Chapter 2 – Small Group Resources

Week before Lent 1

During the *School* all participants will be part a small group which meets weekly to study the bible, to pray, and to share their Lenten learning with others. Those who already attend one of our regular small groups will continue to do so. Those who do not will be formed into a new small group for the season of Lent alone. Of course, the new group is quite at liberty to continue meeting beyond that time-frame!



The bible studies and spiritual exercises provided in this chapter are designed to assist each group to think and pray its way into the shape and challenge of baptismal faith. It is recommended that each group meeting take the following form:

7.30 pm	Gather and catch up
8.00 pm	Pray, using the form provided by the Church
8.10 pm	Read the Scriptures & reflect upon them using the exercises below
9.15 pm	Pray, completing the form provided for the day
9.30 pm	End

Prayer of the week

Show me your ways, O Lord,
teach me your paths;
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my saviour
and my hope is in you all day long.

Psalm 25. 4, 5

Reading: 1 Peter 3. 18-22

Background. In the ancient Mediterranean world, people believed in a multi-storied universe. Above the sky, or perhaps on the highest and most inaccessible mountain, was where God or the gods lived. Human beings lived on the earth. And below the earth, in some kind of intangible shadow-land, was a region known as Hades. Greeks and Romans believed this was where the souls of the dead went to after they had died. For them it was a neutral place, filled with both good and bad spirits. But Christians and Jews imagined Hades differently. For them, it was a place of suffering and torment. It was the place where the unrighteous went to after they died. And while some Christians believed that the righteous also went to Hades for a time (in a kind of torment-free waiting-room) they expected that all the righteous would eventually be raised to God in heaven. It is this kind of universe which Peter has in mind when he writes his letter. He imagines that what Christ did while he was dead, on Holy Saturday, was journey to the land of Hades and preach to all the tormented spirits, giving them the opportunity to believe and be saved.

Note that Peter reads the Noah's Ark story (Genesis 6-9) as a prefiguring of what occurs to Christians in baptism.

Questions for Discussion.

1. Peter says that baptism ‘saves’ us ‘by the resurrection of Jesus Christ’. What do you think he means by that?
2. If you are willing, share your baptismal story with the group. What does your baptism mean to you now?

A spiritual exercise.

Lent is the season in which the whole church is invited to return to the *School of Discipleship* (or ‘catechumenate’) in which candidates for baptism first learned their faith. It is an opportunity for all of us to *relearn* how Christ claimed us—body, soul and spirit—at our baptism. It is an opportunity to ask God how we ought to *live out* our baptism, in very concrete and specific ways, for the year to come. Spend a few moments now to write down some of the issues of life and faith you would like to work on during this Lenten period. You may like to share some of that with the group.

This Sunday’s worship.

On Sunday we shall be enrolling those who have indicated a willingness to engage in the full Lenten Discernment process in a ‘catechumenate’ or *School of Discipleship*. There are two parts to this liturgy: (1) a call to the renewal of baptismal living; (2) a public promising to spend Lent in a careful listening for God’s call on our lives. As a sign of enrolment, each participant will be given a Lenten bag for the long and difficult journey with Jesus to the Cross. They will be encouraged to travel light, to cast off the sin that hinders and carry only what Christ will give them.

Week before Lent 2

Prayer of the week

Praise you, God of love.
You hear the cries of your afflicted ones,
you reach into our hearts to heal and bless.
Therefore I will fulfil the vows I made to you.
I will love and serve you all my life.
I will never cease from bearing witness
to your loving kindness.

Based on Psalm 22. 23-25, 31

Reading: Romans 4. 13-25

Background. In this passage Paul argues that the covenant we make with God is more like a relationship of mutual faith or trust than a contract with legal clauses. He points out that the covenant with Abraham was like that. God made a promise, and Abraham responded by believing God and behaving as if the promise was already coming to pass. Note how Paul describes the kind of God who initiates the covenant: a ‘God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are’. This is the basis of our hope. What seems impossible to us is possible for God, because God is not one who seems troubled by the apparent non-existence of what is promised.

Questions for discussion.

1. Paul writes ‘[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.’ What does he mean by this?

2. Recall a time in your life when you were surprised by joy, or when God came through when all seemed lost. If you are willing, share that story with the group.

A spiritual exercise.

Baptism is like being married to God. God proposes, and you accept. After the preparations, there is a ceremony in which vows are exchanged. There's a honeymoon period, but then you get down to the nitty-gritty of married life, with all its ups and downs. Several years down the track, after a period of renewal in your relationship, you and God decide to renew your vows to each other at the Easter Vigil at South Yarra Church. What would God want to say to you in this ceremony? What would you want to say to God? Do some writing around that. If you are willing, share some of your thoughts with the group.

This Sunday's worship.

On Sunday we shall be 'handing on the faith' to all who are part of the Lenten Discernment process. The faith will here be symbolised by the giving of a bible, a book of daily prayer, and a copy of the Apostles Creed. The catechumens will be encouraged to read and treasure these gifts, and carry them with them always.

Week before Lent 3

Prayer of the week

Lord,
I am so often blind to own faults
while others can see them very clearly.
Forgive my blindness.
By your mercy,
grant me the courage to be truthful,
that my sins may not rule over me.

Based on Psalm 19. 12, 13

Reading: Exodus 20. 1-17

Background. The Ten Commandments are a short summary of the Law of Moses, or *Torah*, that is so crucially important for the day-to-day practise of the Jewish faith. Christians have always held these precepts in high esteem as well, even though we do not believe that the keeping of *Torah* is able to accomplish our salvation. The Ten Commandments are not simply a list of rules, but also a *theology*, a way of imagining what God is like. Here God is characterized as a liberator from slavery who will bear no rival for Israel's affection.

Questions for discussion.

1. What is it about idols that makes God so angry? What are the idols in your own life?
2. How does one practise the Sabbath law in our own culture and time?
3. How is it possible to honour one's father and mother in a culture in which children regularly depart from the views and lifestyles of their parents?

Week before Lent 4

A spiritual exercise.

Which of the Ten Commandments do you find the most confronting? Write it down, exactly as it appears in the text of Exodus. Say it over to yourself for a minute or so. Now, try to identify what it is in your life which wriggles and squirms so when you hear this commandment uttered. Name that attitude or that practise. Write it down. Now, write the troubling commandment in a more positive form so that, for example, “You shall not murder,” becomes “You shall honour every life”. Does that make a difference to the way you hear this word? Whatever the case, make it your business during the following week to ask God’s mercy and grace in dealing with sin you have named. If you are willing, you might like to share something of this struggle with the group.

This Sunday’s worship.

On Sunday we shall ritualise the first of three ‘scrutinies’ and ‘exorcisms’ for those who are part of the Lenten Discernment process. These are not as scary as they might sound! The ‘scrutinies’ are simply a prayer which gives voice to what we have been doing through the whole Lenten journey, i.e. allowing God to question the way in which we live our lives. Here we pray that God will continue to question and call us, and we ask for mercy and courage to follow Christ more devotedly. The ‘exorcism’ is a symbolic casting out of all that remains in our hearts that is *not* of Christ’s way or will. Again, it gives expression to something that we are all invited to do during Lent: to put aside the deeds of darkness and turn, instead, towards the new life which God has promised.

Prayer of the week

Send forth your word to heal me, Lord,
for I am poor and afflicted in spirit.
Give me a voice to praise you with joy.
Make of my whole life a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Based on Psalm 107. 19-22

Reading: Ephesians 2. 1-10

Background. In this passage the author underlines, in case there is any doubt, that our capacity to live a life which pleases God depends not on the power of our own will or effort, but on God’s gift of mercy in Christ. Here the motivation for living a ‘good’ life is converted. No longer do we work for the good because we are trying to earn ‘brownie points’ with God, but because we are thankful for what God has done for us.

Questions for Discussion.

1. The writer of *Ephesians* says that we receive God’s grace (or gift) through ‘faith’. What *is* faith exactly; and what is faith for *Christians*?
2. Do you ever catch yourself trying to earn ‘brownie points’ with God? How does this show itself in the way you live?

A spiritual exercise.

The Lutheran theologian, Paul Tillich, once wrote that faith is ‘accepting God’s acceptance of us.’ Meditate upon this phrase for a minute or two. Let it seep in. Then compose a little prayer to God,

saying something of how you feel as a result of that meditation. Try to be as honest as you can. Ask God to help you become more open to God's love and care. Perhaps there will be time for some of you to share your prayers with one another.

This Sunday's worship.

On Sunday we shall repeat the prayers of scrutiny and exorcism from last week. We repeat them because repentance is not a once-off occurrence for the Christian, but a vocation and a lifestyle.



Week before Lent 5

Prayer of the Week

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall declare your praise.
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it.
The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51. 15-17

Reading: Hebrews 4.14-5.10

Background. The letter to the Hebrews was written by a disciple of Paul who was concerned to show his congregation of educated Jewish Christians how the coming of Jesus fits into the expectant history of Hebrew prophecy. So Christ is portrayed as a High Priest to end all high priests, as one who offers his *own self* as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people. Still, one does not become such a great figure overnight! This passage is full of poignant images of the way in which Jesus had to *learn, yes learn*, how to obey God. On that basis, we are assured that Jesus knows *exactly* the kinds of struggles we ourselves go through as we seek to put aside our sin and live for God.

Questions for discussion.

1. Verses 8 & 9 imply that Jesus was not always 'perfect,' that he had to learn how to obey God through trial and error, like the rest of us. How does this sit with your view of Jesus?
2. Think of a time when you were most troubled about the imperfection of your Christian discipleship. How did you feel? What did you do to move on?

A spiritual exercise.

The word 'obedience' is not particularly fashionable today. In some circles it is even a no-no for *parents* to enforce the obedience of their children. While most of us would agree that it is right to obey God, we must still deal with the fact that God rarely communicates God's word and will in a form other than that of humanly produced artefacts, e.g. the bible, the liturgy, the arts, the human voice. At the beginning of Christian monasticism, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, it was common for Christians to journey into the desert and place themselves under the authority of an 'Abba' or 'Abbess,' a father or mother in the faith. For the disciple, the voice of this father or mother became, simply, the voice of God.

Do you have a father or mother in the faith? Do you have a spiritual guide, a mentor who is perhaps a little older and wiser, who cares for you and helps you to discern God's will and way? Write down some of the possible candidates. How would you feel about approaching one of them to become a companion in the faith, a kind of spiritual guide? How does one decide who is a suitable spiritual guide and who is not? What are the criteria? Talk about these questions in the group, and then resolve, if you will, to perhaps approach someone in that mentor role (if you have not already).

This Sunday's worship.

On Sunday we shall repeat the prayers of scrutiny and exorcism for a final time.

Week before Passion Sunday

Prayer of the Week

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your mercy deliver me.
Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.

Psalm 31.1-2

Reading: Isaiah 50. 4-9

Background. This is one of the famous "Suffering Servant" passages of Isaiah. The precise identity of the servant is ambiguous. The servant could be the prophet himself, or another prophet to come, or an elaborate personification of the true vocation of Israel. Whatever the case, Christians have always read here a description of the career and suffering of Jesus and his church.

Questions for discussion.

1. Can you identify in this passage some kind of ethic for how Christians are called to behave in a time of persecution?
2. Have you ever felt attacked for being a Christian? If you are willing, tell the story in the group.

A spiritual exercise.

Imagine you were an ordinary Christian villager during the raids of the militias in East Timor immediately following the vote for independence from Indonesia. You are afraid for your life, and with good cause. You

are afraid for your family. Where do you turn for strength and hope? What Christian practices or rituals would you call on to get you through this awful time? Do some writing around these questions, and then share something of your reflections with the group.

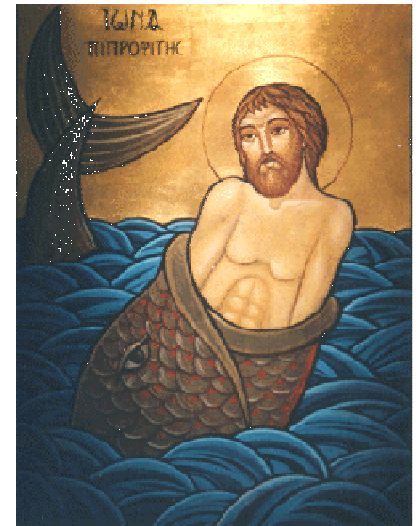
This week's worship.

The week ahead is very important for Christians. "Holy Week," as it is usually called, is that time of year when we remember the last few days of Jesus' life. On Maundy Thursday we remember Jesus' last meal with the disciples. On Great Friday we recall his arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. But in the late evening of Holy Saturday, and continuing on into the early hours of Sunday, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead in a Great Vigil of Easter. As part of this liturgy, those who participated in the Lenten *School of Discipleship* will renew their baptismal vows. But not them alone. Anyone who has been baptised is invited to do the same.

Chapter 3 – Daily Spiritual Exercises

The following Spiritual Exercises are designed for daily use by individuals throughout the Lenten season. They may be used on their own, or in conjunction with one of the orders of daily prayer provided by the Church in *The Guide to Daily Prayer*. In the later case, it is recommended that the exercise is used following the Psalm, at the part where you are invited to observe a period of reflection on the coming day (p 26) or upon the day that is now past (p 44).

Each exercise takes the form of what is traditionally known as the *Lectio Divina* or 'sacred reading'. There are several ways to do this, but we recommend the following process:



(1) Come to quiet

Sit comfortably in a quiet place. Light a candle. Watch the candle-light and repeat the phrase "Come, Lord Jesus, Come" over and over until you feel relaxed in body and quiet within.

(2) Read the text set for the day over, slowly and carefully

Actually, this means reading the text twice. Read it once, all the way through; but then read it again, slowly, until you settle on a particular word or phrase which seems particularly significant for your own life at present.

(3) meditate upon the meaning of the text

What does this word or phrase mean for you? What is God wanting to say? Writing or drawing may help to give shape to your thoughts.

(4) move into a space of contemplation where your mind is emptied in order to listen for God's voice

Gazing at the candle again, chant your word or phrase over for a couple of minutes. Then be quiet and listen for at least five minutes, and longer if it seems right to do so.

Praying in the manner of the *Lectio Divina* will perhaps feel strange if you have never done it before, but by the end of Lent it is likely to have become second nature.

You will note that that certain texts will be referred to during every week of Lent. These are *The Lord's Prayer*, the *Nicene Creed*, and *The Covenant* of the South Yarra Church. The first two represent two of the most important summaries of faith and Christian practise from our tradition. *The Apostles Creed* was originally formulated as a statement of faith to be recited at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The *Covenant* is included for the benefit of all who wish to discern an answer to the question: 'Is God calling me to covenant with others in the church this year?' The full texts can be found in the appendix.

Many of the remaining texts come from the writings of Father Thomas Merton, a Cistercian monk who died in 1968. His writings are regarded by many as the preeminent contemporary re-statement of the classic insights of Christian spirituality.

Daily Texts

March 6 – *Baptismal identity*

. . . baptism gives us a sacramental character, defining our vocation in a very particular way since it tells us that we must become ourselves in Christ. We must achieve our identity in him, with whom we are already sacramentally identified by water and the Holy Spirit.

What does this mean? We must be ourselves by being Christ. For a person, to be is to live. A person only lives as human being when he knows truth and loves what he knows and acts according to what he loves . . . In order to be what we are meant to be we must know Christ, and love him, and do what he did.

Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, p. 134

March 7 – *The False Self*

There is an irreducible opposition between the deep transcendent self that awakens only in contemplation, and the superficial, external self which we commonly identify with the first person singular. We must remember that this superficial "I" is not our real self. It is our "individuality" and our "empirical self" but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God. The "I" that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true "I" that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown "self" whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. The self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 7

March 8 – *Our discovery of God*

Our discovery of God is, in a way, God's discovery of us. We cannot go to heaven to find him because we have no way of knowing where heaven is or what it is. God comes down from heaven and finds us. God looks at us from the depths of his own infinite actuality, which is everywhere, and his seeing us gives us a new being and a new mind in which we also discover God. We only know God insofar as we are known by God, and our contemplation of God is a participation in God's contemplation of himself.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 39

March 10 – *The Nicene Creed, first part*

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.*



March 11 – *Contemplative Prayer*

Contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from him who has no voice, and yet who speaks in everything that is, and who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of his. But we are words that are meant to respond to him, to answer him, to echo him, and even in some way to contain him and signify him. Contemplation is this echo. It is a deep resonance in the innermost centre of our spirit in which our very life loses its separate voice and re-sounds with the majesty and mercy of the Hidden and Living One. He answers himself in us and this answer is divine life, divine creativity, making all things new . . . It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation he answered the question, so that the contemplative is at the same time, question and answer.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 3

March 12 - *The Lord's Prayer, first part*

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.

March 13 – *Desert Spirituality*

We do not go into the desert to escape people but to learn how to find them; we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good . . . the truest solitude is not something outside you, nor an absence of human beings or of sound around you; it is an abyss opening up in the centre of our own soul. And this abyss of interior solitude is a hunger that will never be satisfied with any created thing.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, pp 80, 81

March 14 – *The Covenant, first agreement*

With God's help, we endeavour to worship together each Sunday and on other principal dates in the church calendar, gathering prayerfully around the Eucharist to encounter the Christ who gives himself to us, calls us to follow and nurtures us for the journey.

March 15 – *Finding Oneself*

In order to become myself I must cease to be what I always thought I wanted to be, and in order to find myself I must go out of myself, and in order to live I have to die . . .

People who know nothing of God and whose lives are centred on themselves, imagine that they can only find themselves by asserting their own desires and ambitions and appetites in a struggle with the rest of the world. They try to become real by imposing themselves on other people, by appropriating for themselves some share of the limited supply of created goods and thus emphasising the difference between themselves and the other people who have less than they, or nothing at all.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 47

March 17 – *The Nicene Creed, second part*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, light from light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made, of one being with the Father;
through whom all things were made.*

*For us and for our salvation Christ came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin, Mary,
and became truly human.*

March 18 – *Loving One's Enemy*

Do not be too quick to assume your enemy is a savage just because he or she is *your* enemy. Perhaps they are your enemy because they think you are a savage. Or perhaps they are afraid of you because they feel you are afraid of them. And perhaps if they believed you were capable of loving them they would no longer be your enemy.

Do not be too quick to assume that your enemy is an enemy of God just because he or she is *your* enemy. Perhaps they are your enemy precisely because they can find nothing in you that gives glory to God. Perhaps they fear you because they can find nothing in you of God's love and God's kindness and God's patience and mercy and understanding of the weaknesses of human beings.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 177

March 19 – The Lord’s Prayer, second part

Give us today our daily bread.

March 20 – Love

We are obliged to love one another. We are not strictly bound to “like” one another. Love governs the will: “liking” is a matter of sense and sensibility. Nevertheless, if we really love others it will not be too hard to like them also.

If we wait for some people to become agreeable or attractive before we begin to love them, we will never begin. If we are content to give them a cold impersonal “charity” that is merely a matter of obligation, we will not trouble to try to understand them or to sympathise with them at all. And in that case we will not really love them, because love implies an efficacious will not only to do good to others exteriorly but also to find some good in them to which we can respond.

Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island*, pp 169, 170

March 21 – The Covenant, second agreement

With God’s help, we endeavour to meet together at agreed times each week for activities which include: developing our understanding of the faith; developing our ability to worship; studying the bible together; praying together; and sharing with and encouraging one another in our quest to live our lives in the Spirit of Christ.

March 22 – Spiritual Poverty

Little do we realise the meaning of spiritual poverty, of emptiness, of desolation, of total abandonment in the mystical life. Contemplative experience is not arrived at by the accumulation of grandiose thoughts and visions or by the practise of heroic mortifications. It is not “something you can buy” with any coin, however spiritual it might seem to be. It is a pure Gift of God, and it *has to be* a gift, for that is part of its very essence. It is a gift of which we can never, by any action of ours, make ourselves fully and strictly worthy. Indeed, contemplation itself is not necessarily a sign of worthiness or sanctity at all. It is a sign of the goodness of God, and it enables us to believe more firmly in his goodness, to trust in him more, above all to be more faithful in our friendship with him. All these should normally grow up as the fruits of contemplation. But do not be surprised if contemplation springs out of pure emptiness, in poverty, dereliction and spiritual night.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p 185

March 24 – The Nicene Creed, third part

*Baptised in water by John and filled with the Holy Spirit,
Jesus preached good news to the poor, healed the sick,
raised the dead, received the outcast,
showed mercy to the broken,
and called Israel to revival for the salvation of the nations.*

March 25 – *The middle of the journey*

As soon as someone is fully disposed to be alone with God, she is alone with God wherever she may be—in the country, the monastery, the woods or the city. The lightning flashes from east to west, illuminating the whole horizon and striking where it pleases and at the same instant the infinite liberty of God flashes in the depths of that person's soul, and she is illumined. At that moment she sees that though she seems to be in the middle of her journey, she has already arrived at the end. For the life of grace on earth is the beginning of the life of glory. Although she is a traveller in time, she has opened her eyes, for a moment, in eternity.

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p 96

March 26 – *The Lord's Prayer, third part*

Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin
against us.



March 27 – *On Surrender*

In terms of the Christian journey there is a joyful sacrament, the celebration of which opens doors to the new. It is the sacrament of *metanoia*, of repentance, of reconciliation. In it we are invited to return to God, who is the *all*, beside whom we are nothing. This sounds like the beginnings of a pattern of self-rejection. Not so! Our turning, our conversion away from the pettiness, the sin, the excrement, is a way of affirming that these are lesser realities than the supreme reality of God. Even the sense of our own unworthiness has to be given up. Ironically, it is our self-rejection which is the hardest of all to surrender. By a peculiar twist, the “I” can become proud of being nothing.

Our nothingness before God is far from negative since it is a nothingness which is God-shaped . . . To put it more positively, we are to dwell on the marvellous fact *that* we are, not on *what* we are. Our very existence is cause for wonder. As we ponder on this we shall indeed weep because of the many ways we squander the gift of our being. We shall also laugh when we see that in spite of everything we are loved, known, and accepted . . . Our unworthiness, our self-rejection, our sense of defilement, is burned away by the love of God.

Alan Jones, *Journey into Christ*, pp 55, 56

March 28 – *The Covenant, fourth agreement*

With God's help, we endeavour to devote some time to prayer each day, either alone or with others, and within that time we will use some agreed common patterns of prayer and Scripture reading.

March 29 – A more thoroughgoing conversion

The encounter with the Lord in the inmost recesses of the individual does not exclude but rather calls for a similar encounter in the depths of the wretchedness in which the poor of our countries live . . . The consequences of such a recognition are clear. It becomes necessary for us to examine our own responsibility for the existence of unjust “social mechanisms.” In addition to calling for a personal transformation, the analysis will in many cases mean a break from the social milieu to which we belong. The conversion required will have to be radical enough to bring us into a different world, the world of the poor.

Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from our Own Wells*, p 99

March 31 – The Nicene Creed, fourth part

*For our sake Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day Christ rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures.
Christ ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead,
establishing a reign without end.*

April 1 – Christ the master carpenter

O Christ, the Master Carpenter,
who at the last through wood and nails
purchased our whole salvation;
wield well your tools in the workshop of your world,
so that we, who come rough-hewn to your bench,
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty by your hand.
Amen.

A prayer of the Iona Community in Scotland

April 2 – The Lord’s Prayer, fourth part

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

April 3 – Be content that you are not yet a saint

Be content that you are not yet a saint, even though you realise that the only thing worth living for is sanctity. Then you will be satisfied to let God lead you to sanctity by paths that you cannot understand. You will travel in darkness in which you will no longer be concerned with yourself and no longer compare yourself with other people. Those who have gone by that way have finally found out that sanctity is in everything and that God is all around them. Having given up all desire to compete with other people, they suddenly wake up and find that their joy of God is everywhere, and they are able to exult in the virtues and goodness of others more than ever they could have done in their own.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, pp 59, 60

April 4 – *The Covenant, third and fifth agreements*

With God's help we endeavour to offer welcome and hospitality to anyone who wishes to share in the life of our church, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality or life experience . . .

With God's help we endeavour to be accountable to one another for the integrity with which we live out our prayer and the fidelity of our relationships with Christ, the creation, and other people.

April 5 – *Poverty*

True poverty is that of the beggar who is glad to receive alms from anyone, but especially from God. False poverty is that of a person who pretends to have the self-sufficiency of an angel. True poverty, then, is a receiving and giving of thanks, only keeping what we need to consume. False poverty pretends not to need, pretends not to ask, strives to seek everything and refused gratitude for anything at all.

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p 94

April 7 – *The Nicene Creed, fifth part*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life,
who proceeds from the Father,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who speaks through the prophets and dwells in the saints.*

April 8 – *Enduring the Cross*

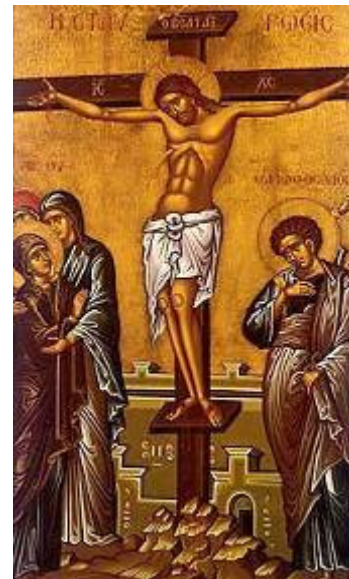
Christ vanquishes evil only by refusing to transmit it, enduring it to the point of running the risk, in “blocking” it, of dying; the just man is precisely he who endures evil without rendering it, suffers without claiming the right to make others suffer, suffers as if he were guilty.

Jean-Luc Marion, *Prolegomena to Charity*, p 9

April 9 – *The Lord's Prayer, last part*

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

April 10 – *Affliction*



He whose soul remains forever turned in the direction of God while the nail pierces it, finds himself nailed onto the centre of the very universe. It is the true centre, it is not in the middle, it is beyond space and time, it is God . . . It is at the intersection of creation and its Creator. This point of intersection is the point of intersection of the branches of the cross.

Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, pp 75, 76

April 11 – *The Covenant, sixth agreement*

With God's help, we endeavour to contribute individually to the finances of our church, pledging ourselves in advance to give at or above a level determined by a formula we have agreed on together (unless otherwise arranged).

April 12 – *Prayer*

Prayer is not escapism. It is not a running away from the brute ugly facts of a situation into an illusory never-never land. Prayer is an acceptance of the reality of evil and suffering and death, while at the same time seeing these penultimate realities in the light of the ultimate and final and most real reality of God's love, victorious over everything which opposes it. And so in prayer we see things as they really are, finally and ultimately from God's point of view, the God for whom past, present and future are all one. That is what enabled Julian of Norwich to say 'All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.' It wasn't a cranky optimism. It was an apprehension that Christ is risen and God reigns.

H.A. Williams, *Becoming What I Am*, p 84

April 14 – *The Nicene Creed, last part*

Within one holy catholic and apostolic Church, we believe; acknowledging one baptism for the forgiveness of sin, looking for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

April 15 – *True Hope*

My hope is in what the eye has never seen. Therefore, let me not trust in visible rewards. My hope is in what the heart of human beings cannot feel. Therefore, let me not trust in the feelings of my heart. My hope is in what the hand of human beings has never touched. Do not let me trust what I can grasp between my fingers. Death will loosen my grasp, and my vain hope will be gone.

Let my trust be in your mercy, not in myself. Let my hope be in your love, not in health, or strength, or ability or human resources. If I trust you, everything else will become, for me, strength, health, and support. Everything will bring me to heaven. If I do not trust you, everything will be my destruction.

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, p 39

April 16 – *The Covenant, seventh and eighth agreements*

With God's help, we endeavour to take on one task each necessary to the ongoing life and ministry of the church, its activities and its property . . .

With God's help, we endeavour to participate fully in the Lenten School of Discipleship as we seek to discern the shape of God's call on each of our lives for the next year.



April 17 – Maundy Thursday

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
Which shall be the darkness of God. As, in a theatre,
The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
With a hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on
 darkness,
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away—
Or as, when an underground train, in the tube, stops too long between
 stations
And the conversation rises and slowly fades into silence
And you see behind every face the mental emptiness deepen
Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about;
Or when, under ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing—
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

T.S. Eliot, from 'East Coker' in *The Four Quartets*.

April 18 – Great Friday

You men there, keep those women back
and God almighty he laid down
on the crossed timber and old Silenus
my offsider looked at me as if to say
nice work for soldiers, your mind's not your own
once you sign that dotted line Ave Caesar
and all that malarkey Imperator Rex

well this Nazarene
didn't make it any easier
really—not like the ones
who kick up a fuss so you can
do your block and take it out on them

Silenus

held the spikes steady and I let fly
with the sledge-hammer, not looking
on the downswing trying hard not to hear
over the women's wailing the bones give way
the iron shocking the dumb wood.

Orders is orders, I said after it was over
nothing personal you understand—we had a
drill-sergeant once thought he was God but he wasn't
a patch on you

then we hauled on the ropes
and he rose in the hot air
like a diver just leaving the springboard, arms spread,
so it seemed
over the whole damned creation
over the big men who must have had it in for him
and the curious ones who'll watch anything if it's free
with only the usual women caring anywhere
and a blind man in tears.

Bruce Dawe, 'And a Good Friday Was Had By All' in *Sometimes Gladness*.

April 19 - Holy Saturday

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

T.S. Eliot, from 'Little Gidding' in *The Four Quartets*.

Appendix

The Apostles' Creed

The origin of the Apostles' Creed is the profession of faith made at baptism.

***I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.***

***I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.***

***I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.***

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.*

The Covenant

Drawn together by the generous and unconditional love of God, present in all creation and made known to us in Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves to God and to one another under the banner of the South Yarra Community Baptist Church. The primary purposes of our gathered life are to join prayerfully with the faithful of every time and place in the worship of God, and to actively seek to further our formation as Christian people, that we may follow Christ in his absolute openness to the Spirit, living as God-bearers in the world and destined for complete union with the God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

Recognizing that any church can only exist where a team of people covenant together, binding themselves to Christ and to one another in seeking to fulfil the purposes of the church, we commit ourselves to being that Covenant Team within this congregation.

We hold in common the belief that in Jesus we have seen both the fullness of God and of human potential and so, acknowledging him as Lord and Christ, we entrust ourselves to him to be formed and guided by his Holy Spirit into the fullness of life and love for which we were created.

As a Covenant Team, we make the following covenant agreements with one another and commit ourselves to seek to live together by them.

With God's help, we endeavour to:

- worship together each Sunday and on other principal dates in the church calendar, gathering prayerfully around the Eucharist to encounter the Christ who gives himself to us, calls us to follow and nurtures us for the journey.
- meet together at agreed times each week for activities which include: developing our understanding of the faith; developing our ability to worship; studying the Bible together; praying together; and sharing with and encouraging one another in our quest to live our lives in the Spirit of Christ.
- offer welcome and hospitality to anyone who wishes to share in the life of our church, regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality or life experience.
- devote some time to prayer each day, either alone or with others, and within that time we will use some agreed common patterns of prayer and Scripture reading.
- be accountable to one another for the integrity with which we live out our prayer and the fidelity of our relationships with Christ, the creation and other people.
- contribute individually to the finances of our church, pledging ourselves in advance to give at or above a level determined by a formula we have agreed on together (unless otherwise arranged).

- take on one task each necessary to the ongoing life and ministry of the church, its activities and its property.
- participate fully in the Lenten School of Discipleship as we seek to discern the shape of God's call on each of our lives for the next year.

We commit ourselves to these common disciplines, depending on the grace of God and of one another, and trusting that through our endeavours to live by them we will together be drawn more fully into the life of God in the world.

Compiled by Garry J. Deverell for the
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