



Rising to the Call

7 BIG Questions

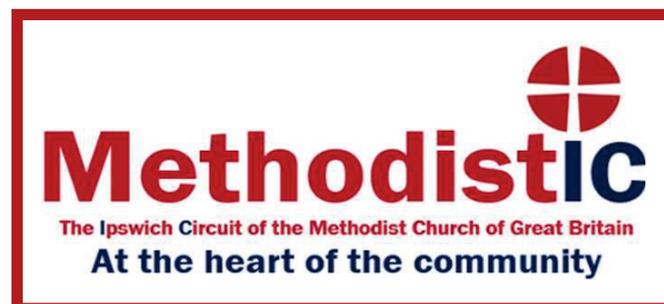
Rising to the Call

7 Big Questions

LENT STUDY GUIDE

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Ipswich Methodist Circuit





Rising to the Call is a study about the challenges and joy of discipleship with a focus towards Climate Justice.

When Jesus was baptised by John, God assured him of his blessing, and the Spirit drove him into the wilderness, prayerfully to seek out how to fulfil his calling. Jesus wrestled with choices of how to bring God’s loving justice to life in the world for all time. After two years of our wilderness experience of Covid we have the opportunity, this Lent, to refocus our discipleship: bringing renewal and fresh purpose to the church and communities we serve. We too must wrestle prayerfully with today’s big questions of justice to find God’s chosen way for us. How can we bring sustainable justice for the climate and a justice of harmony and cohesion to society?

Each week, the study group is invited to explore a big question whose foundation is in that week’s gospel reading from the Year C lectionary. This guide suggests a number of ways to reflect more widely and leads the group to find practical responses that individuals and the whole group may wish to adopt.

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You can download a free electronic copy of this course at:

methodistic.org.uk/rising

If you use this course, please drop us a note to let us know by email to

climate@methodistic.org.uk

Climate Justice

In the nine weeks leading up to COP26 in 2021, the Ipswich Methodist Circuit had a nine-week Climate Action campaign. You can find those climate resources at

methodistic.org.uk/climate-action

Learn, Speak Out, Act and Inspire Hope

The climate crisis presents us with the most important agenda humanity has ever faced. It is a daunting challenge. Whatever the horror surrounding the pandemic, it has taught us two important things: we cannot treat global issues as someone else's problem, and that apparently impossible things are achievable when they are given the priority they need. We are called to be good stewards of God's creation, and in so doing to side with the most vulnerable.

People find it hard to comprehend, and even harder to understand what we might do individually. That is why as individuals and as groups, we need to commit ourselves to **learning** about the issues so that we are less daunted by the unknown. We can put that learning to good use by **speaking out** and taking **action** which makes a difference. The Ipswich Circuit of the Methodist Church has committed itself to respond to this challenge, so that we provide inspiring, compelling, passionate leadership to break the log-jam of fear, split the mammoth task into understandable, bite-sized pieces. By doing this together with God, our aim is to **inspire hope**, whatever the challenge.



Our climate pledge:

We believe in climate justice.
We commit ourselves to listen and learn from stories around the world,
to speak out and act for climate justice and
to be ambassadors of hope for creation's richness.

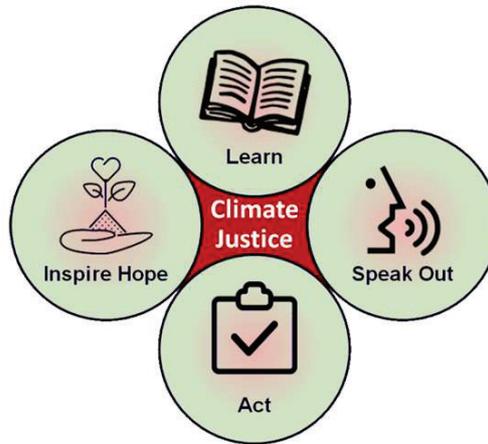
Eco Church

Our District, the East Anglia Methodist District, is aiming to become an Eco District and encouraging churches to become Eco Churches. Eco Church is A Rocha UK's award scheme for churches in England and Wales who want to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God's earth. There is a questionnaire that covers the following areas of church life: Worship and teaching; Management of church buildings; Management of church land; Community and global engagement; Lifestyle. You may find some of the ideas here useful as you use this study guide. Their website is: **ecochurch.arocha.org.uk**.

Lenten Practices

What Lenten discipline will you have this year? What will you let go or fast from? What will you cultivate or feast upon? As we think about climate action and other social justice issues, what will you challenge yourself to do?

Some ideas to consider:



- Learn about 9 important climate topics from our website or read one of our recommended books about the climate
methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/learn/
- Pick some easy or hard actions from our *ways to be green* or *150 ideas* or from the *Eco Church survey*
methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/act/ or ecochurch.arocha.org.uk
- Choose some ways to speak out to politicians or by joining the campaigns of concerned groups
methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/speak/
- Become inspired or inspire hope in others
methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/hope/

How to use the Lent Prayer Calendar on the next page:

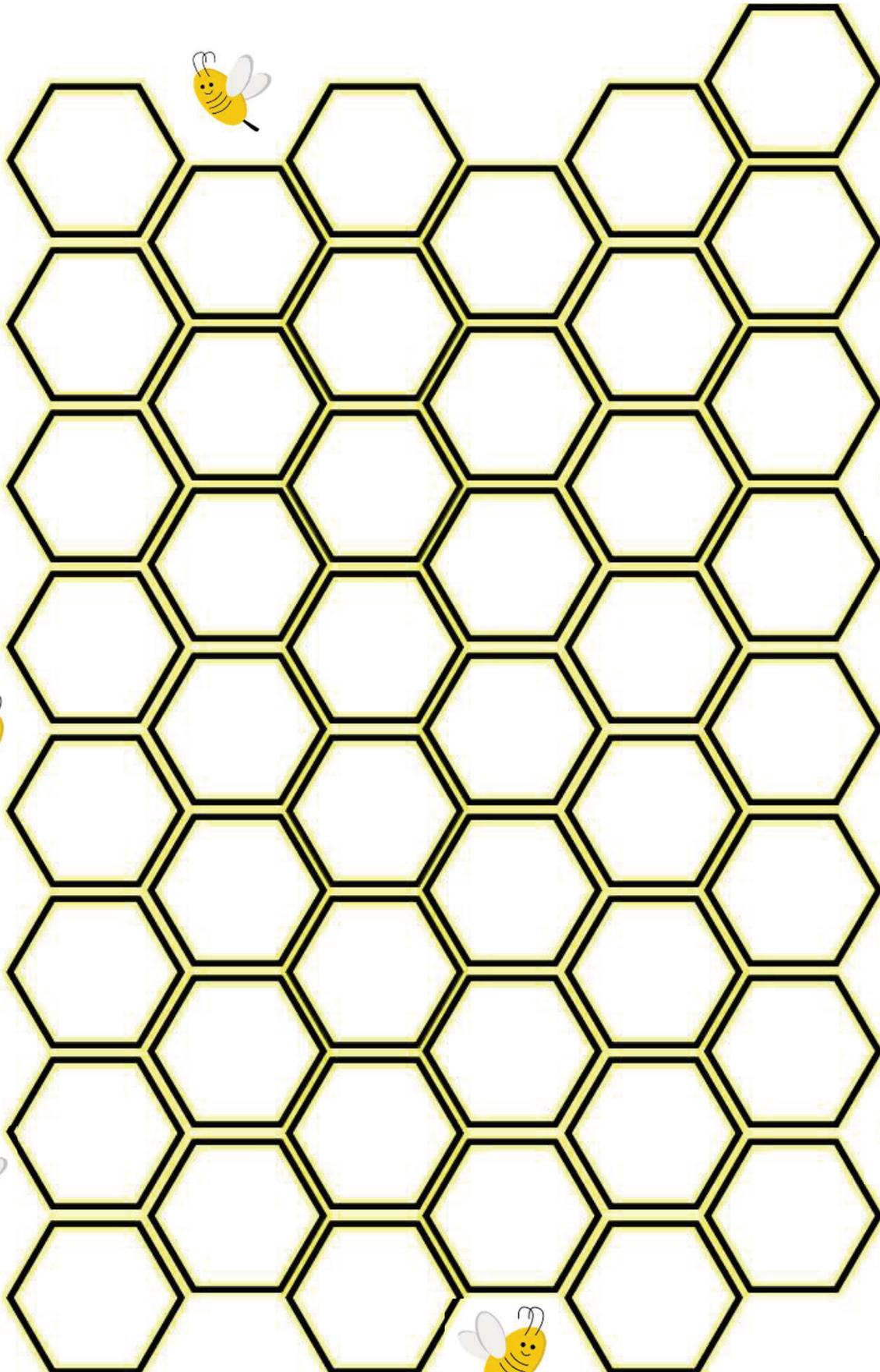
Using a prayer calendar is a simple, daily, and playful but serious practice for praying our way through Lent. Each day, choose a word to ponder or a person to pray for. Write the word or name in one of the spaces with a pen and draw or doodle around it. Add colour with coloured pencils or markers. Returning to the calendar each day establishes a special time to be present to God and to listen. Think of each mark of the pen or stroke of colour as a small non-verbal prayer. The goal of the doodling and drawing is not to make a beautiful work of art (though it often does), but to create a visual prayer. Drawing/doodling invites the body into the prayer, gives the eyes and hand something to do, and helps to focus attention on the word or person. Praying on the calendar is a visual and kinaesthetic Lenten discipline. The accumulation of words or peoples' names on the calendar creates an emerging tapestry of your spiritual journey.

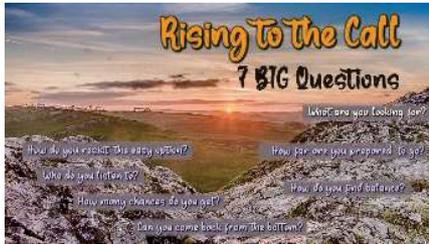
(Idea & description from prayingincolor.com)

A larger single page A4 template of the prayer calendar is available for people to download and print locally, should they wish at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

Lent Prayer Calendar

Colour your prayers for the 40 days of Lent plus Sundays (46 days)
from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday
(2nd March – 16th April, 2022)





INTRODUCTORY SESSION

Week of Ash Wednesday
(28th February – 4th March)

Prayer

God of all Creation, of grace and love, we come to you at the beginning of this Lenten journey as we seek to turn away from our sin and be faithful to the gospel. In the words of the Psalmist, we ask you to create in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within us; restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us a willing spirit. May our journey be a holy one and our discussion be rich and transformational. Amen.

Scripture Reading:

Lectionary Year C Ash Wednesday reading: Joel 2:1-2a,12-13 – *time for repentance*

Reflection

- Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance by all Christians. Nowadays, we focus on our relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something and to take up something and give of ourselves for others.
- Our Catholic siblings summarise Lent as a time to **fast, pray, give**. There is a good short video that you might watch here: bustedhalo.com/video/watch-lent-3-minutes.
- As we begin Lent with a call to **re-pentance**, which means to turn around, let us think about this in terms of **re-cognizing**. Cognition is to learn, to see, to discover, to perceive. So, what do you need to **re-learn, to re-see, to re-discover, to re-perceive** in this Lenten season? In what ways do you need to **re-turn** your heart and mind towards the earth and its inhabitants?
- Part of the *Methodist Way of Life* is to challenge injustice. Methodists have a long history of challenging injustice and campaigning for change that stretches back over the past four centuries. Sometimes it is best to support existing campaigns, and sometimes we need to initiate change. Over the centuries Methodists have seen their calling as working for fairness and respect. Changing people's attitudes is as important as challenging systems. John Wesley not only sought to help the poor, he also challenged perceptions of the poor. Our discipleship is centered in the identity of Jesus Christ and his witness of redemptive justice in the world. So, what is it about the work of justice that we are being called to open our eyes and see? To **re-learn**? To **re-discover**?
- For our Lenten journey this year, we will be asking some hard questions about discipleship and inviting you to think about climate justice. Come with us on this journey of repentance and renewal and pray that God will change your heart. What do you need give up and turn away from and what are you being called to turn towards

as you become ever more faithful to the gospel? Our 7 Big Questions are all phrased using the word 'you' as we each need to personally wrestle with and answer these questions. Having answered them personally though, we then need to ask the same questions of our local church, our families, our neighbourhood, our town, our country and the world.

- The picture that we have used to illustrate this guide shows a rock in the foreground. Like this rock, which is not level, our faith journey sometimes needs us to go downward and spend some time in the valley before turning around and rising upward. And the valley is where we will **re-cognize** that which we no longer need to carry with us and pare it away and then identify and pick up that which is positive and helpful. We have been in a valley now for two years through this pandemic – now is the time to **re-assess** and **re-perceive** as we begin to rise.
- *If you have not already done so, read the Lenten Practices section starting on page 4.*
- Each week of the study will be talking about a different aspect of Climate Justice, so you may find additional things that you want to give up or take up as the weeks progress.

Questions to answer

- *Share a time in your faith journey when you were transformed.*
- *What do you need to turn away from?*
- *What are you initially going to give up for Lent?*
- *What are you initially going to take up for Lent?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

Acts 2:43-47 – *Life among the believers*

Reflection

- We are not on this faith journey alone. The early disciples met together and took care of one another and shared together. Throughout the pandemic, we have had to find different ways to be in community with one another. As restrictions begin to ease, perhaps you are meeting in person, or perhaps you are gathering online. Wherever you are gathering, offer your support and help to each other and hold one another accountable. And if you are using this guide on your own, then perhaps you can find a friend who is willing to pray with, and for you, and listen to some of your thoughts as you go through this study.
- Each week we will look at the assigned gospel reading for the previous Sunday as we discuss the week's Big Question. Although these scripture passages were not written about climate justice, the Big Questions can be applied to our discipleship in general and to issues of justice. Most weeks there will be an additional scripture that we will also reflect upon.
- The study covers these challenging and refreshing questions:

1. **How do you resist the easy option?** – sometimes we are called to overlook the simple and easy answer and take a much more difficult and demanding course of action – but the cry for justice will always push us to go further;
2. **Who do you listen to?** – we are constantly bombarded with messages – both truths and hoaxes, and we have to balance the value of experience, with the need for fresh ideas – sometimes we need courage to relinquish our tight grip and hand over the reins;
3. **How many chances do you get?** – “we are running out of time” is a constant refrain across all forms of injustice, but too often the response appears to be “wait and see” – we need both forgiveness and persistence;
4. **Can you come back from the bottom?** – repentance requires us to confront the wrong in our lives – like all addictions, the hardest choice is owning whatever we need to change – without that ownership our downward spiral will continue, so how can we take ownership and begin our recovery and repentance?
5. **How do you find balance?** – very few of our options to bring an end to injustice involve clear cut decisions between right and wrong – sometimes we can choose which brings the greater good, at others our choice is between several injustices, and we have to choose the path of least harm and live with the consequence of that choice;
6. **How far are you prepared to go?** – the battle for justice will take each one of us to the edge of our comfort zone and stretch us well beyond that– how and where do we find the courage and support to bear the pain;
7. **What are you looking for?** – Easter is a story of transformational new beginnings, with new rules, new experiences, and new opportunities – are you ready to reset and rewrite your vision, or are you still trying to recreate the pre-Covid world?

Questions to answer

- *How are you going to hold one another accountable? What methods work best for you?*
- *Which question excites or intrigues you the most?*

Climate Justice

You can learn more about climate justice and ways to learn, speak out, act and inspire hope from our circuit climate resources at methodistic.org.uk/climate-action.

In the lead up to COP-26 in November 2021, our circuit spent 9 weeks looking at climate justice. One of the personal realisations that came from that time for Joan was that some of the actions that we need to take for the environment cost more, whether buying goods locally or investing in heat pumps, and that if we make decisions based solely on cost and convenience, then the climate will suffer. There is a need for those with sufficient income to be the early adopters so that prices will eventually drop for all. Is that a way for you to **give** this Lent?

- *Share with the group where you are on your climate justice journey and your hopes and fears.*
- *What might you spend more on this Lent so that you can live more sustainably?*
- *Share a fun way that you have done one of these six 're'-words to help to address the problems of overconsumption and waste: **re-fuse, re-duce, re-use, re-pair, re-purpose, re-cycle.***
- *Do you know how much of your food at home is LOAF: Locally grown, Organic, Animal friendly, Fairtrade? Is this important to you? Why or why not?*
- *How much do you know about your personal carbon footprint and why it is important?*

[You can find more details here:

methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/learn/week-2-net-zero/

and you can find a tool to help you analyse your own footprint here:

www.carbonfootprint.com/measure.html.]

Commitment to Action

- Make a commitment to decide upon a Lent Discipline.
- Make a commitment to listen and learn from stories around the world, to speak out and act for climate justice and to be ambassadors of hope for creation's richness.
- Be prepared to share next week something that you have learned about the reality of climate injustice for those from other cultures.

[Example: Rev. James Bhagwan from Fiji spoke in October 2021 at an event at Museum Street Methodist Church about the effects of climate change on the Pacific Islands. You can watch a recording here:

[methodistic.org.uk/rev-james-bhagwan-presentation.](http://methodistic.org.uk/rev-james-bhagwan-presentation)]

Prayerful Activity

Give everyone a piece of paper and have them write down something they would like to repent of as we enter Lent. Place the papers (without reading them) in a glass bowl and burn the papers until they are reduced to ash. Ask people in silent prayer to remember Christ's grace and forgiveness is for them. Have each person dip their thumb or a finger in the ashes and mark a cross on their forehead or wrist, as a sign of their commitment to be free of this burden. Afterwards, scatter the remaining ashes in a garden.

Hymn

Read Singing the Faith 371 – *Breathe on me Spirit of Jesus* (Tina Pownall)

Prayer

It is by your love that we are called to be your people in this place. It is by your Spirit that we are given the power of discernment and filled with a hunger to find the meaning and purpose in our calling. It is by the example and saving grace of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, that we are led to seek real justice. It is only as we support, encourage and guide each other on this journey of faith, that we will discover new ways to put our trust fully in your care, O Lord our God. Amen.



QUESTION 1

How do you resist the easy option?

Week between 1st & 2nd Sundays in Lent

7th – 11th March, 2022

Opening Prayer

God of all wisdom, we come to this study group, bringing our hopes and our dreams, and also our baggage. Help us cast off those things which become barriers to our progress in a journey which we know may be painful or costly. May your Spirit sustain us as we build trust in each other, so that we can support and encourage each other to continue our journey even if it feels easier to fall away. Help us to gain confidence as we make those changes which are easy, and embolden us to rise to each new challenge placed before us, so that we may be beacons of lasting, transformative change, to bring real justice and relief to a hurting world. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Based on the commitment you made last week, share with the group a story from another country/culture from which you have learnt something new about the reality of climate injustice.

Scripture Reading

Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: Luke 4:1-13 – *Jesus is tempted and chooses his way*

Reflection

A video sermon given by Rev. Joan Pell on Sun 6th March is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

- In this scripture, Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days being tempted by the devil. We are told of three temptations, and in each case Jesus resisted. It would have been much easier for him to give in and do what the devil wanted.
- Jesus was hungry and the devil pointed out the stones lying on the ground and told Jesus to prove that Jesus was the Son of God by turning the stones into bread. We are to understand from this scripture that Jesus had the power to do this but chose not to do so. Jesus resisted the easy option even when he was hungry and exhausted and his capacity to think clearly must have been diminished. He clung to the thought that he needed more than just bread to sustain him.
- Another perspective is that Jesus saw all the stones in front of him and was tempted to turn them instantly into enough bread to feed himself and the world temporarily. By not being tempted or going for the easy solution, he was not only denying himself this food, but also others.
- As we think about climate justice or any form of social justice, the solutions are complicated. Many of the easy answers that are dangled in front of us are either not sustainable or are insufficient in the long term. It is easy to throw our hands up and say that there is nothing we can do, or to pick the simpler tasks that fit easily into our lives and hardly inconvenience us.

- Many decisions we need to make are not clear cut between one strong positive and one negative - those are easy decisions which we could see as the low hanging fruit, but these easy decisions rarely have a big and lasting impact. The much more difficult decisions are where we are faced with no obviously good outcome, and we must choose the course which creates the least harm.
- As we write this, there is a Europe-wide panic about the economic impact of rising energy prices, and suddenly all the headlines are about the need to subsidise energy costs to protect the poor. Suddenly, political leaders have forgotten the need to accelerate our shift away from reliance on gas by switching to renewable energy. The low hanging fruit for the politicians is to get the energy crisis off the daily news, and the quickest solution may prove the worst. The sustainable solutions are more difficult – support for better insulation, more efficient heaters, switch to renewable energy supplies.
- The challenge that we hear in our scripture and question today is how not to be satisfied with doing the simple things, although they may still need to be done, but to also do the harder things that will lead to long-term transformation. Was Jesus able to resist the easy option because he drew strength from the scriptures, and he thought about how his actions would not achieve the desired long-term goal?

Questions to answer

- *How do we move away from just 'picking the low-hanging fruit' to doing some of the more challenging things?*
- *When did you regret taking the easy option?*
- *When have you taken the hard option?*
- *How did you find the power to resist the easy option?*
- *How do we as a church resist the easy option?*
- *Is it easier to make a decision to deny yourself than it is to make a decision that denies others?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

John 6:1-15 – *The Feeding of the 5000*

Reflection

This is another story about bread that has us thinking about the easy and the hard things.

- You can think of the boy as bringing a little contribution of 5 loaves and 2 fish. And that contribution inspired others to follow suit with their own small contributions and enabled a miracle to occur.
- Or you can think of the boy giving his all. Children do not have much of their own, and this boy gave away everything he had for lunch. He was not going to be able to go and buy another lunch and his mother would not have been happy with him arriving home and asking for a second lunch. By the boy giving his all, Jesus was able to work a miracle.

- In this version of the story, it was Andrew who was receptive and looking and noticed the importance of the boy. Andrew could have missed him. We must keep our eyes and ears open to find and help each other.
- I wonder if the boy after giving his lunch to Andrew kept quiet, or did he run excitedly back to his friends and tell them what he had done? At the end of the day, when he went back home and talked about Jesus' miracle, did he share that it was his loaves and fish that gave Jesus something to work with? Sometimes we need the stories of the actions of others to be told so that we ourselves become inspired.
- This is a story that is in all four gospels, but each gospel tells it in a slightly different way. We are not all going to understand everything in the same way or notice the same things. Our responses will each be different, and that is okay.
- Whatever we learn from the different interpretations of this story, we must not underestimate the significance of the first move. Until the boy came forward with his small offering, there was no prospect of feeding the crowd. When facing difficult problems, finding a way to begin moving is more important than finding the right way – that successful first step will inspire others.
- Finding the second step is just as important, before the joy and momentum of the first step wanes. It has been said that the person that finds the second step is the most important – they are the ones who give everyone else permission to jump in themselves.

Questions to answer

- *How can your actions be done in a way that inspires?*
- *We tend to do things quietly; when is right to brag or toot your own horn?*
- *What new first step can you take, that will inspire others around you?*
- *How ready are you to be the one to take the second step?*
- *What are others doing that you are missing?*
- *What would giving your everything look like for you?*

Climate Justice

In Lent, we often think about food – both in terms of fasting and in giving up particular items of food. As we do so, the hunger pains from fasting, or the yearning pains from giving up a favourite food, are supposed to make us pause for thought, spend time in prayer and so grow closer to God.

One of the prominent messages about climate change is the encouragement to reduce our reliance on meat and dairy consumption. Animal farming makes inefficient use of land, releases disproportionate amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and reinforces economic inequity between rich and poor nations. This argument can be full of emotion and when it is characterised as all or nothing, the starkness of the message can become a barrier too far for some. Reducing might be the first step.

There's lots of things to learn and ways to act and speak out on our website at methodistic.org.uk/climate-action .

This week as you focus on climate justice, ponder the topics of Food and Waste. Ask these questions about a) food and b) waste:

- *What would be an easy thing for you to do?*
- *What would be a hard thing for you to do?*
- *What will you commit to do this week (or throughout Lent) and how can the group help you to meet this commitment?*
- *What can you encourage your church to do?*

Commitment to Action

- Contract to help each other to take a more difficult route and to stick to the chosen commitments.
- Before the next session, keep your eyes and ears open for a climate justice opportunity where you personally observe someone's positive behaviour. Seize it if you wish but come back next week and discuss what you saw.

Prayerful Activity

Have each person take a rock and write a word or a symbol on the rock to indicate the commitment they will make this week to the earth. Lead the group in a meditative prayer: *Close your eyes and hold the rock in your hand. Feel the weight; is it heavy or light? What else do you notice? Pray in silence for a while. <silence>. Now ask God to help you keep your commitments and to discern when to resist the easy option and then to give you the strength to do so. <silence>. When you are ready, open your eyes.* Invite them to take the rock home and place it somewhere that they will see it.

Hymn

Read Singing the Faith 660 – *Called by Christ to be disciples (Martin Leckebusch)*

Closing Prayer

We thank you Lord for the choices placed before us: for the wisdom you have shared with us, and the support we have gained from each other, as you have spoken to us in this time. In your Spirit, may we rise to the challenges you have placed in our hearts, and be inspired by hope that springs from you alone, so that we may fulfil our calling to be ambassadors for justice throughout your glorious creation. Amen.



QUESTION 2

Who do you listen to?

Week between 2nd & 3rd Sundays in Lent
14th – 18th March, 2022

Opening Prayer

Loving God, we gather here in your name, as part of our spiritual journey of Lenten preparation. We come, baring our humanity, with all our worries and fears, and with our selfishness and waywardness. On our Lenten journey, we seek your guidance to direct us in ways of justice and peace, to bring us to repentance and restoration.

In our study this week, we ask especially that you will guide our discernment and enable us to choose the right voice to hear and obey. As you spoke to the disciples on Mount Transfiguration, help us hear your words – This is My Son – Listen to Him! Amen.

Opening Discussion

Last week you were asked to keep your eyes and ears open for a climate justice opportunity where you personally observed someone's positive behaviour. What did you see? What did you do? How has it inspired you or changed you? Does anyone else have any ideas of how (s)he could respond?

Scripture Reading:

Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: Luke 13:31-35 – *Jesus ignores a warning of his danger*

Reflection

A video sermon given by David Welbourn on Sun 13th March is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

Like many short extracts from the bible, this passage makes more sense when viewed in the context of the surrounding stories.

- Some churches will have marked this Sunday as Transfiguration Sunday with the alternative reading from (Luke 9:28-43). The lectionary places this significant event on two alternative dates. Each of the synoptic gospels treats this as the second turning point in Jesus' ministry when he receives a second blessing and affirmation from God in the presence of his closest disciples. From this point onwards he starts the journey towards Jerusalem with its inevitable outcome.
- The lectionary passage we have chosen (Luke 13:31-35), comes towards the end of three chapters in which Jesus and the disciples are successfully establishing a healing and teaching ministry, serving the community and the number of his active followers is growing - in chapter 10 he sends out the 72. This success is accompanied by several encounters in which he is questioned and challenged.
- Taken one by one, each story may just be an innocent enquiry from someone seeking to understand more of Jesus teaching, but taken together, one after another, we are presented with a constant drip feed of opposition which occasionally becomes

outright confrontation. Jesus must have felt the cumulative effect in just the same way as minority groups are further marginalised when bombarded with microaggressions.

- By the time we reach the passage for today's study, Jesus is given a clear warning by a group of pharisees that he should leave town or face the consequences. If this were an isolated story, we may see it as friendly advice, but surrounded as it is by growing antagonism, it has all the hallmarks of a threat from the script of an old Western or Spy film.
- Jesus responds to the warning by sending an equally confrontational message back. He is not afraid of Herod and his purpose is not to be swayed. Herod (Antipas) is notorious as a crafty and ruthless ruler. To be trusted less than a fox allowed into a hen house. As the protector of God's people, Jesus himself will gather the brood under his wing and protect them from the fox – no matter what the consequence. Just as John the Baptist had been unafraid to call out the evil of Herod, so too Jesus would be unmoved.
- Jesus is not deterred by the threats made by his growing number of enemies, nor is he clinging to the power of his mission – he recognises that he will need to move onto something new and this mission is his to lead for today and tomorrow, but after that, he has to be ready to hand it over to a new generation who will take his work into the next phase.

Questions to answer

- *When you think about how you feel about the Pharisees' warning, would you feel differently if you only read the short lectionary passage without looking at its context?*
- *How can you use that feeling to strengthen your resolve against deniers of climate justice?*
- *How important was God's affirmation to Jesus at the transfiguration in helping him to remain steadfast?*
- *Where can you find similar assurance and confirmation for your purpose?*
- *When you are bombarded with different advice, what helps you to choose who to listen to and which advice to believe and trust?*
- *Are you preparing to let go so that you can move on and others step in when the time is right?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

Acts 20:22-24 and 21:3-14– *Should Paul go to Jerusalem?*

Reflection

Here we read two passages in which Paul, like Jesus is journeying towards Jerusalem at the risk of his own safety.

- Paul is journeying through Europe and Asia Minor, both to preach and teach about salvation offered through Jesus, but also to collect relief moneys from the wealthier communities to take to the impoverished people in Jerusalem.
- In the first passage, Paul calls the elders and friends to him to prepare them for his departure. He reminds them what is required from spiritual leaders and encourages them to maintain the good work, as he hands responsibility on to them. He is not one to rest on the successes achieved, but nor is he prepared to leave the community without adequate preparation for the continuation of the work.
- Paul is clear that he needs to return to Jerusalem. The Spirit has made him fully aware of the extent of the danger he faces, but nevertheless is driving him to undertake that journey despite the threat to his life.
- The second passage poses a problem, because it appears that the Spirit was now trying to prevent Paul from undertaking the perilous journey, contradicting the earlier guidance given to Paul. The context makes it clear that their concern was more for Paul's safety, than for the poor in Jerusalem, whose needs Paul was seeking to relieve.
- Doing the right thing by way of social or climate justice is not without cost. Like Paul, we must be prepared to pay that cost if we truly stand for justice. Inevitably, we will be tempted to avoid that sacrifice. Sometimes, that temptation will come through the microaggressions and the constant bombardment seeking to convince us that we are misguided in our fight for justice. At other times, that temptation may come from friends and allies who want to protect us from the painful consequences, even though they support our aims. The temptation to find a cheaper and less painful way is easily dressed up as the right thing to do, and much easier to surrender to.

Questions to answer

- *When have you faced conflicting messages about how to do the right thing?*
- *What helped you to choose your course of action?*
- *In this situation, who do you trust most and why?*
- *Where else could you have looked for support in your decisions?*
- *Who is looking to you for support in their difficult discernment?*

Climate Justice

Opportunities to stand for justice may not be clearcut between right and wrong. Instead, you might need to find ways to do least harm between bad options. It is important to consider the conflicting messages very carefully. There is an important body of opinion that many climate positive initiatives are misguided greenwashing – salving consciences rather than doing good. Carbon offsetting is often denounced for this reason, because it gained a reputation as a way of (rich) people avoiding having to change their extravagant lifestyles. On the other hand, properly managed carbon offsetting is an important part of a portfolio of climate action. Supporting schemes that will protect forests, and investing in well-husbanded trees, mangroves, kelp forests, and sustaining wetlands are vital to sequester more carbon. Many offset schemes also involve providing employment, investing in community development, building renewable energy sources, training in

better agricultural methods and providing fresh water. Investing in schemes like this is an essential action alongside, not instead of making lifestyle changes.

Commitment to Action

- Learn more about carbon offsetting and how to tell the difference between schemes whose purpose is to support greenwashing, and those genuinely committed to climate justice.

You can find more information and advice at methodistic.org.uk/climate-action/.

- As well as giving something up for Lent, make a sacrificial investment this Lent in some form of climate positive action.
- If you are able, make a permanent or regular significant investment

Prayerful Activity

Materials required: Three post-it notes (or similar) per person.

Give each person three post-it notes. Tell them: *On one of your post-it notes, write down the list of places where you get your information. On the second note, write down whose voices you are not listening to whose perspective might be valuable. On the third note, write down the names of those who you need to persuade to listen to you.*

Then invite people into silent prayer to reflect upon those names and what God wants them to hear.

Encourage them to take their notes home and stick them in a location where they can see and ponder them.

Hymn

Read Singing the Faith 713 – *Show me how to stand for justice (Martin Leckebusch)*

Closing Prayer

Speak to us Lord, in words loud and clear. Guide us to the way of truth, the way of justice for your creation and all your people. Help us to accept that your way may be costly, but that your Spirit will enrich us beyond measure, when we accept its price. Amen.



QUESTION 3

How many chances do you get?

Week between 3rd & 4th Sundays in Lent

21st – 25^h March, 2022

Opening Prayer

Forgiving God, as you hung in torment on the cross, you prayed that your tormentors might be forgiven, because they didn't understand what they were doing. As we gather again to study your way for us, and the urgent need for justice, we are aware of our need for your repeated forgiveness. We cannot claim to be ignorant of the consequences of our actions, but our knowledge fails to overcome our wilful nature. We need both your forgiveness and your renewal. Make yourself known to us in this time together and fill us with your strength to live up to the hope and trust you place in us. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Last week you were challenged to learn more about how to make some form of commitment or investment towards positive climate action and were invited to seek out a way of making a one-off sacrificial change. Did you find a way to respond, and how did you feel about it?

Scripture Reading:

Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: Luke 13:1-9 – *victims aren't to blame*

Reflection

A video sermon given by Rev. Joan Pell on Sun 20th March is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

- A common assumption among the people of Israel was that those who experienced pain and affliction were being punished by God for their sins. Here Jesus clearly rejects that view as he talks about the innocent Galileans killed by Pilate and those killed when the Tower of Siloam collapsed.
- Jesus challenged the belief that the victims of disasters were to blame. Even today, there are examples where groups would rather lay blame on the victims instead of acknowledging the failings in society that need to be addressed. Women's support groups frequently claim that the victims are further victimised when they are blamed for inviting that abuse.
- Many communities face similar disasters to those Jesus points to. Today, for example, we see areas such as Fijian villages under water due to climate change, and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are facing farmland becoming substantially drier. The most severe climate damage is falling on those who did not create the problem. Those in the richer countries who created the problem often get away scot-free.
- The industrial revolution that began in the UK, is recognised as the starting point for climate change. We might like to think that we personally bear no responsibility, but we owe much of our economic prosperity and our global voice to the benefits that

have followed from that early leadership. We are heirs of that legacy, and must accept responsibility for its negative consequences as well as credit for the good.

- As racial injustice has hit the headlines in recent years, there has been much talk of *decolonisation* and cancel culture. Some favour decolonisation – the owning up to historical actions which would not be acceptable today and continue to hurt affected groups. Others object to a *cancel culture*, claiming that we should remain proud of our past. The case is equally strong, and equally controversial, for Britain to take responsibility for the lasting impact of the industrial revolution by providing strong leadership for climate justice. The pattern of plundering of the earth's resources without second thought, begun in the industrial revolution, still continues unabated.
- Why did the people come to Jesus to tell him about the Galileans? Were they coming to moan, or because they wanted answers, or because they wanted him to do something and delegate their own responsibility? Our responsibility is to never stop trying.
- Jesus goes on to talk about a fig tree that has not been bearing fruit. The landowner wants to cut the fig tree down, but the gardener asks for one more year to tend and nurture it. The gardener is going to get some manure and give the fig tree some extra special care. It is never too late for us to change our ways or to try something else. There is always another chance.

Questions to answer

- *What do you want from Jesus?*
- *Are you hoping Jesus has a magic wand?!*
- *Are you trying to absolve yourself and delegate your responsibility to Jesus?*
- *Are you ready to take part in an act of communal repentance?*
- *What is the manure that you need?*
- *Are you unknowingly condemning anyone that is caught up in a crisis?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

Matthew 18:21-22 – *How often should I forgive?*

Reflection

- Jesus does not place a limit on forgiveness. God's grace is always available to us when we get things wrong. It is easy to misrepresent Jesus' message that we must keep-on forgiving, as if there is no consequence to our mistakes, however wilful. To be forgiven, we have to own our faults and mistakes. We must intend to avoid repeating them, even if we do not have the willpower to avoid slipping back.
- Even when we have been forgiven, we will still have to live with the consequences of our behaviour. Note that the gardener doesn't just say – give the fig-tree another chance. He takes positive steps to improve the likelihood of success. We should follow that example each time we receive forgiveness, and make sure we commit to additional positive actions and behaviours.

- When faced with difficult decisions, there is always a temptation to “kick it into the long grass”, where it is at least partially hidden from view. Just because it is less visible doesn’t mean it loses importance or urgency.
- Another common, but unhelpful way to justify putting the problem aside, intending to come back to it later is to argue that you need time to find a better solution. Whilst this may be true in some cases, it is just as likely to become less tractable to solve before it is too late. The options available to us become harder the longer it takes us to repent and change our ways. Every missed opportunity demands more action.

Questions to answer

- *Share a time when you admitted that you needed God’s grace and forgiveness.*
- *Are you ready to repent?*
- *If you are repenting and asking for forgiveness, what are you going to do differently? How can the group help?*
- *What important problem have you kicked into the long grass recently, and can the group help you to address it now, without waiting any longer?*
- *What could you pick up from the long grass to take joint responsibility for?*

Climate Justice

In question 2 (who do we listen to?), we looked at carbon offsetting, which some groups argue is bad for the environment, as it is only used as an excuse for people to salve their conscience by greenwashing. In most walks of life, it is possible to turn a good idea into a bad one, by abusing it. Sometimes good can come from a bad idea as well.

The demand for climate justice has an expiry date on it, and the wealthy and powerful have continued to fritter that time away – usually with excuses, often kicking decisions into the long grass, sometimes adopting a version of greenwashing, and in the case of some powerful groups, spinning a whole set of untruths and myths to reinforce the case for denial. Every excuse, every new conspiracy theory, every act of procrastination, every greenwashing pretence is another need for forgiveness. How many chances do we get? How often do we need forgiving?

The later we wait before taking meaningful action, the harder the task. In question 1 (how do you resist the easy option?), we noted the valuable example set by the second person to take up a cause – they become the catalyst encouraging a third and a fourth to join. This takes on even more meaning when the task is to retrieve something from the long grass and start work on what others have avoided.

One of the hardest tasks to bring to climate justice is persuading everyone to start taking action now, not tomorrow. It is vital to start making a difference, even if that first step only provides a temporary fix. It is then just as important to help people take the second and third steps and move from the low hanging fruit to the difficult stuff.

There is a real argument that persuading everyone to switch to electric cars is a bad thing, because it allows people to keep ignoring the better solution, which would reduce the amount of travel, reduce the huge use of precious resources in building private vehicles only for them to sit unused for more than 95% of the time. Switching to electric

vehicles is just kicking the real problem into the long grass. We need more public transport, more focus on building stronger local communities to reduce unnecessary travel. We need better attitudes to shared instead of individual ownership – pooling could easily reduce the number of vehicles required to a third or a quarter of current demand. Yet, electric cars are still an important stepping stone as part of the solution.

How many chances do we get to do the right thing? Sometimes the ideal thing can appear impossible, because the first step is just too hard for anyone to risk it. If the right thing is to mobilise people into action, then taking small steps, even when they are in the wrong direction can help us reach the goal before it is too late, provided we keep taking steps, each time tackling a little but more of the big picture. There is a saying: *“perfection is the enemy of the good”*.

We need to look intensely at our own behaviours and decisions. Think about some indulgence you enjoy but are still holding onto. Think about those occasions when you convince yourself that you are doing more than your share. Think about some action you are already taking and try to find a way to encourage others to take up the same action.

- *Are you ready to repent?*

Commitment to Action

- In the lectionary passage from Joel set for Ash Wednesday, that we discussed in the introductory meeting, we talked about repentance. Joel’s call was for the whole community and not just individuals to return to God, after locusts devastated the harvest and the land was left in crisis. As the nation originating the industrial revolution, from which all the negative consequences are coming home to roost, we are the beneficiaries even if we were not alive at the time. There is a need to draw together for communal repentance. Find some way for your group to make a public confession, owning up to your share in responsibility.

Prayerful Activity:

Materials required: A large bag packed with heavy items that is hard to lift off the ground.

Ask for a volunteer to pick up the heavy bag. If there is room, have them carry it around the room, otherwise just have them stand holding the bag. Do not let anyone help them and all eyes should be on that person. Sit in silence until the person with the bag can hold the bag no longer. Then pray for those who are bearing the weight of climate change due to no fault of their own.

Hymn

Read Singing the faith 419 – *Almighty God, we come to make confession* (Christopher Ellis)

Prayer

Dear Lord, you have shown yourself to be a God of infinite patience – a God who bears no grudge, a God who weeps over pain and suffering, and a God who shows the power of love by sharing our pain. As we feel shame at the way we are quick to deny responsibility for the injustices of the world, swift to point the finger of blame elsewhere, and slow to forgive, may we use this time of repentance to learn how to become more like you in all that we do and say. In your power, may we encourage and support each other to follow your example. Amen.



QUESTION 4

Can you come back from the bottom?
Week between 4th & 5th Sundays in Lent
28th March – 1st April, 2022

Opening Prayer

Creator God, your world is a beautiful and wonderful creation. As we learn more about its fragility and vulnerability, we are ashamed that we have done so little to value it, to respect it or to protect it. Fill us with the courage and hope to own the way we have contributed to its damage, whether knowingly or unknowingly, and to change our ways. May we continue to learn more, to renew our commitment to positive action, and to support each other in honouring that commitment. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Last week you were encouraged to take joint responsibility for injustice in the world – a world in which you continue to enjoy the privilege handed down through generations. As you have wrestled with that acknowledgement, what have you found hardest to own?

Scripture Reading:

Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 – *Parable of the Prodigal Son*

Reflection

A video sermon given by David Welbourn on Sun 27th March is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

The parable of the prodigal son as told by Jesus is all too familiar, but just how much can we stretch the parable to teach us truths we need to learn today? Once again, we are helped in our discovery, when we look at the wider context.

- The lectionary reading begins with verses introducing the context in which Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son. The Pharisees are grumbling about him spending time with people they deem beneath their standing. Jesus teaches them that a leaders' duty is to seek what is lost and celebrate when it is restored.
- The lectionary skips over two of the stories. The widow loses a precious symbol of her marriage and is overjoyed when it is found. Her joy at being able to savour all those special memories means she is prepared to spend far more than its price to celebrate. The shepherd is prepared to risk the safety of the 99 to seek out the one that is marginalised and vulnerable because it has accidentally strayed away.
- Turning to the story of the prodigal son, we notice an immediate difference. This is not about seeking something *accidentally* lost. This is a story about a father holding onto hope despite the wilful action of the younger son, threatening to destroy all hope. It tells of clinging to hope long after its fulfilment seems unlikely, and when most people would have long since abandoned hope. It tells too of the brother's resentment: he was not prepared to hold onto hope, instead holding a grudge and refusing to forgive.
- It also tells of a life destroyed by selfishness and greed. This is the story of the prodigal, unsatisfied with the routine and comfort of a loving stable world.

Unappreciative of, and deaf and blind to the true value of that nurture and care. Instead hooked on the promise of adventure: full of his own self-importance. Willing to trade the security of his family, for a dream.

- The prodigal is drawn by the promise of adventure, but this quickly turns into self-indulgence and excess as he finds that his power and wealth give him pride of place, surrounded by fawning and superficial friendships. Eventually, he becomes addicted to the high of the attention bought with his power and wealth. That addiction drives him ever downwards, and as his wealth vanishes, so do his groupies.
- No matter how deeply the junkie sinks into the gutter, even the bottom feels out of reach. No room for respect. No room for remorse. No room for worth. No hope.
- The only way back from addiction is that moment of acceptance and ownership of the single truth: he alone is responsible for the dire circumstances to which he has fallen. No-one is to blame for his addiction to power and wealth and adventure other than himself. Only by facing the root-cause of his demise, can he rediscover a hope. A hope for reconciliation and forgiveness.
- The prodigal reached the bottom of his fall at that moment he was able to declare – “I am not worthy”, when he truly understood the value of what he gave away in his quest for adventure. His way back from the bottom had begun.
- In that admission, the prodigal owned his circumstances, gained courage, and set off home. The father’s undiminished hope was rewarded, and the brother’s festering resentment broke free of his restraint.

Questions to answer

- *How was the prodigal finally able to recognise he had no further to go?*
- *Could the prodigal have faced up to reality without sinking so low?*
- *When/where/how could he have been helped?*
- *How much courage did it take to return home in humiliation?*
- *What hopes are you keeping alive, like the father did?*
- *Are you harbouring any resentment, and what help do you need to let go?*

An alternative telling of the parable

Two brothers live in an idyllic world. They are rich beyond measure – they have everything they could ever want. They are part of a loving family: loved beyond anything that can be described by words alone. They live in a place of sheer beauty and wonder, surrounded by everything they need in abundance.

This is a tale of what happens when those brothers see the world differently.

- Every day the elder brother knows that deep satisfaction that his life is interwoven with nature. He is at one with it and will go to any length to preserve that balance.
- In contrast, the younger brother is not at ease. Something is gnawing away deep inside. Is it jealousy? Is it greed? Could it be a void forming deep in the soul? That emptiness becomes a yearning for something new, different, challenging, exciting.

- As the younger brother, he carries no responsibility to ensure his world is nurtured and tended so that it can flourish. That responsibility fell to his older brother whose life is ordered by his connection to the land. He understands its beauty and fragility. They are not equals – there is an injustice in the distribution of power and meaning.
- As unrest eats away at the younger brother, he ceases to value the riches of his life. What he once saw as good fortune turns into his rightful entitlement. He **deserves** everything and he has the right to do with it exactly as he wishes. He no longer sees the world as a vulnerable thing to cherish and tend. It is the means to support his lust for adventure and pleasure. What purpose is served by caring for anything or anyone?
- The stability and nurture of his loving family environment begins to be a barrier to his selfish fulfilment. He bargains with his parents to be free. *“Mother earth”, he says, “allow me to take what I am owed – I deserve my inheritance. I can wait no longer before using it to bring me pleasure. I will seek out new adventures and excitement.”*
- He uses his vast wealth to get whatever he wants, wherever he goes. His craving for adventure is no longer sufficient - he is hooked on power. He learns to plunder and exploit resources everywhere he goes, discovering new untapped and apparently limitless excitement. His addiction grows. His arrogance grows. The destruction he leaves in his wake grows. He is desensitised to the havoc he creates.
- Eventually, his thrill becomes more and more distant. He can no longer attain that next high. His wealth is largely gone – his status is gone – his pleasure is gone. He has spent so long driven by his abusive and selfish nature, that all he has left are a deep indifference and an empty heart where empathy should be. He is alone in the world he has made barren. Alone with his self-destruction and the growing ache of guilt.
- Hopelessness, despair and anguish become his new bedfellows. His memories of the beauty and care of Mother earth; the joy of a family; everything is dimming. Deeper and deeper he falls. Each day threatens to be the last. His hunger for adrenalin and excitement turns into starvation. Any scraps will stave off the pangs and pain of hunger. Tears refuse to squeeze from his dried and shrunken eyes.
- From the depths of rock bottom, finally in a moment of consciousness amidst his delirium he sees a vision of the beauty of his home before he abandoned it. Before his wanton acts set its destruction in motion. As the events of his life whirl through his semi-consciousness, he finally sees that he is responsible, not just for his fate, but the death and destruction raging all around him.
- In his unfocused, blurred vision hovering between death and life, his eyes alight upon a seedling growing out of the barren, parched desert land. Summoning his wilting strength, weeping dry tears through the depth of his remorse – he whispers – *“Mother Earth. I see now, that I am responsible for all this destruction, in my greed, and my blindness, and my self-interest. Am I too late? Will you forgive me? Can you forgive me, if I return home? I no longer deserve to return as your son, but, mother earth, is there still enough time to serve you and save you? May I be allowed as your servant to care for you as you once cared for me?”*
- Mother earth is waiting, full of hope and promise, as the younger son finally finds the courage to admit the truth. His love for nature is rekindled and he promises to reform.

- His elder brother is ANGRY. His connection to nature and his dutiful response has never diminished. That duty has taken its toll though. Every year, the taint of death and destruction has made his task harder. His own spirit has become drained by fighting to stop the advance of the desert – the ferocity of the wildfires, the fury of the storms and floods. He has aged beyond his years. It is hard to hold onto hope amid the devastation. Every year, he has heard promises and commitments from the powerful to change their ways, and every year the raping of the earth has intensified. How can he believe and trust anything his scheming brother says?

Questions to answer

- *Can you see yourself in the shoes of the younger brother?*
- *Who or what do you see in the elder brother?*
- *Should the elder brother be willing to forgive, and what will it take for him to be ready to forgive?*
- *Just as the father in the original held onto hope beyond any reasonable expectation, what enables Mother Earth to hold onto hope?*

Climate Justice

We are addicted to energy and levels of consumption the earth cannot sustain. We are addicted to the privilege of a wealthy nation, and its accompanying lifestyle.

However strongly we feel about climate justice, we behave as addicts, in denial over our addiction, tied into our behaviours by our cravings, and unwilling or incapable of acting as we know we should, without the support of a self-help therapy group. We need to treat the fight for climate justice just as we would seek to recover from any addiction.

Commitment to Action

Find something in your lifestyle which is part of your addiction causing climate damage. Reflect how you would adapt lessons from treatment of addictions to change your ways.

Prayerful Activity:

Materials required: Hand-held mirror(s)

Break into small groups; give each group a mirror. Take turns to hold and look into the mirror. Have everyone in the group say to the person holding the mirror: *You are a precious and beloved child of God* and then add a positive affirmation about the person.

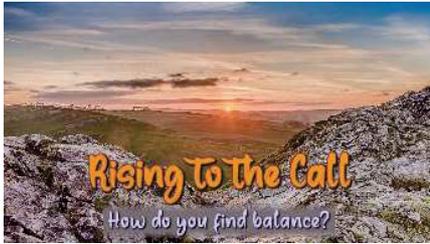
Hymn Lyrics

Read Singing the Faith 727 – *God in his love for us lent us this planet (Fred Pratt Green)*

Prayer

As we join together in supporting each other to confront our addiction to the causes of climate disruption, we remind ourselves that we are committed to climate justice, and the cost we must bear.

We commit ourselves to listen and learn from stories around the world, to speak out and act for climate justice and to be ambassadors of hope for creation's richness. Amen.



QUESTION 5

How do you find balance?

Week between 5th & 6th Sundays in Lent
4th – 8th April, 2022

Opening Prayer

As we meet to learn together, we recognise that there is strength in our diversity, as we seek truth and renew our commitment to justice. There are times when we need to make space to honour and glorify you in quiet adoration and contemplation. There are times when we honour you by our actions and our deeds. There are times when we honour you in the way we support, care, nurture and encourage each other through dark moments, and there are times when we honour you through our loud proclamations. May your spirit guide us to find balance in all that we do, and to give you your rightful honour in each moment. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Last week, you were encouraged to view our response to your world through the lens of addiction. It takes courage and determination to own an addiction and begin recovery. Is anyone willing to share how they have responded to that challenge?

Additional Scripture Reading:

Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: John 12:1-8 – *Grumbling when Jesus is honoured*

Reflection

A video sermon given by Rev. Joan Pell on Sun 3rd April is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

- Mary anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume. The nard would have cost a year's wages for a labourer and was a very extravagant gesture on Mary's part. Mary was motivated by generosity and a desire to anoint Jesus before his death. We do know that Jesus did not criticize Mary's actions and defended her when Judas and others complained.
- Mary was a close friend of Jesus, and we learn more of her from the occasion recorded by Luke (10:38-42) when Jesus is staying with her and her sister Martha. Mary spends her time sitting at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching, whilst Martha works hard preparing the meal. Just like Judas, Martha grumbles at Mary's behaviour, spending too much time listening to Jesus when there is more productive work to be done.
- It has been suggested that Mary was the only one of Jesus' followers who understood the real meaning when he repeatedly told them that he would suffer and die. Where all the others had responded by denying that such a thing could happen, Mary had accepted the full implications of what he was saying and felt the need to pour out her love in this extravagant gesture. This explanation is supported by Jesus' own words when he defended her actions.
- Judas sees Mary's actions as being wrong. The nard could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. It was a missed opportunity. And yet, the gospel writer

John tells us that there is an unstated self-interest here because Judas himself was stealing from the money collected for the poor.

- When is it right to be wastefully extravagant? As you walk around British cities and towns you will see so many big church buildings that have been built over the centuries. Could that money and time not have been given to the poor? And now, we continue to spend money maintaining those buildings. Can we still justify it today? How about sending people into space?
- It is easier to choose when there is an obvious good answer and a bad answer. But how do we choose between two good things?
- Does it matter which good you choose? Is it better to choose something than not choose at all? We can get stuck in analysing all the options and never taking any action. Perhaps it is better to set off in wrong direction and easier to turn when going even though you might go a longer way. An ocean supertanker, for example, is easy to turn with the smallest rudder, once it is moving, but impossible when stationary.
- Both Matthew (26:6-16) and Mark (14:3-11) include a similar event which also took place in Bethany, but they describe it taking place at the home of Simon the leper. They imply that the woman who anointing Jesus is a stranger. It seems unlikely that two such similar events took place, though as Mary (according to John) was a close friend of Jesus and the disciples, it is equally strange that they did not name the woman, but are clear about whose house they were in. Their version is significant, because both tell how Judas immediately ran straight to the chief priests offering to betray Jesus. Was this just a hot-headed moment for Judas when he thought Jesus was betraying the cause he himself was so passionate about, or, as some scholars suggest, was Judas trying to force Jesus' hand into action?
- When we look at any social movement for change, even though there may be a common overall aim, problems can arise when subgroups prioritise different actions or behaviours along the way. The group can fragment, and even lead to infighting between different factions who can't agree a single approach. Usually, it is the zealots and those holding particularly extremist views that create break aways, if a compromise or balanced position doesn't appear to be producing their desired aim quickly enough. Was this what Judas was doing when he promised to find a suitable moment for the authorities to arrest Jesus quietly?

Questions to answer

- *How do we judge the balance point?*
- *Is extravagance always wrong? How do you feel about the extravagance of others? How do you justify your own?*
- *Can you recognise instances when you have strongly disagreed with the direction others have taken, even though you were working towards a shared cause?*
- *How did you feel about the struggle whether to stay or leave?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

Matthew 12:9-14 – *Jesus heals the man with a withered hand*

Reflection

- This is one of several occasions when Jesus confronts the way people were being harmed when rules were being strictly enforced. There was no leeway for common sense or compassion to take account of individual context. They could relax the rule that said “do no work on the sabbath” to allow care to be given to animals, but used it against Jesus for healing someone to relieve them of their burden and suffering.
- Jesus pointed out that the sabbath was a day set aside and dedicated to God, so how did it make sense to withhold something that could bring wholeness in a physical sense as well as a spiritual one. Obeying the rule had become the end point, rather than keeping the end point of achieving the purpose the rule was set up for.
- We frequently encounter the need to keep checking that we have an appropriate balance in life, so that we always focus on the intended outcome rather than blindly follow rules which may have been correct when written but is now outdated.
- This passage, among others, shows us that Jesus was not bound by rigid interpretation but sought to bring scripture to life in whatever situation people found themselves. Matthew 7:29 tells us that the people were amazed “because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”
- When we seek to find the right path on our faith journey, the Methodist Way teaches us that there are four distinct aspects of our faith journey: worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism. Wesley’s teaching points to four different sources of insight that we must hold in balance: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. As science opens up new frontiers of understanding, reason will teach us new things, our traditions adapt and as we experience new situations which surprise us, we must wrestle in faith to gain new understanding.

Questions to answer

- *When have you found yourself doing something that no longer makes sense, simply because you have always done it that way?*
- *How well balanced is your life between Worship, Learning & Caring, Service, and Evangelism?*
- *How often do you keep wrestling with traditional interpretation of your bible readings to allow reason and experience to illuminate your understanding?*

Climate Justice

The same choices occur as we consider climate justice. We can be caught up with excessive analysis and waiting for the perfect solution and take no action.

For us all to eat more sustainably, we are being encouraged to buy local food so that we minimize eating food that is transported over long distances. However, the poorer areas of the world need the richer countries to buy their produce in order for them to make a living and feed their own families, and that food will need to be transported long distances. As drought occurs and sea level rises due to global warming impact, then this will be even more essential for the poorer nations. Striking a balance is not easy. Will we realize later that we got it wrong?

Many laws and tax incentives were designed to encourage strong economic growth and maintain that country's advantage in a highly competitive world where economics was the only major driving force recognised by world leaders. Many of those now embed behaviours which are bad for the climate, but governments are slow and often unwilling to rock the boat because of upsetting those who benefit most from the current arrangement. Setting out your demand for politicians and business leaders to change those outdated laws is a vital part of the campaign for climate justice.

One recent example illustrates how absurd rules can become. It is estimated that over 2m tonnes of carbon dioxide will be released unnecessarily on ghost flights. With fewer passenger flights because of the pandemic, airlines fear losing their lucrative landing slots at major airports because of the practice "use it or lose it". To make sure they don't "lose it" airlines prefer to fly empty planes so that their prime landing slots are protected. Over 100 000 such flights are expected across Europe this winter.

- *When have you not taken action because you could not figure out what the best solution was?*
- *Are you afraid of doing the wrong thing?*
- *What would it feel like to you to take some action even knowing that it might not be the best action?*
- *What laws need urgent reform, and have you voiced your support for change?*

Commitment to Action

Commit to doing one new thing that you have previously been undecided about and ask the group to hold you accountable.

Commit to one petition/lobby letter each month to change outdated rules.

Prayerful Activity:

Materials needed: Three pieces of wool about 30 cm each in length.

Tie the pieces of wool together at one end. Divide into pairs. One person holds the wool at the knot and the other one plaits the wool. Then switch roles. As you make the plait, either imagine one strand is God, one is the earth, and one is you; and reflect on the balance of those relationships in your life and what God might be telling you. Or imagine a situation where you are struggling to find balance and pray for some spiritual discernment as you plait the wool.

Hymn Lyrics

Read Singing the Faith 383 – *Holy Spirit, gift bestower* (Church Hymnary, 4th Edition)

Prayer

Reconciling and redeeming God. In a world where views are increasingly polarised, we pray for all who seek to reconcile and unite. We pray that your spirit may bring comfort and challenge in equal measure, empowering all those who seek to bridge the gap between conflicting views so that the world may harness the strength and joy of human ingenuity and creativity to protect your world in all its glory. Amen.



QUESTION 6

How far are you prepared to go?

Holy Week

11th – 15th April, 2022

Opening Prayer

Holy Lord, as we meet in this Holiest of Weeks, we look to the strength of Jesus who continued holding out hope for your people, knowing how challenging and painful that was to prove. As we approach the low of Good Friday, we are privileged to know that the High of Easter Day is coming. Grant us the strength and trust in your love, that we may maintain our commitment to justice, wherever that takes us. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Last week you asked for help to commit to one thing about which you were undecided. How well have you succeeded and what have you found hardest? What have you learned that will help you stretch even further beyond your comfort? How might your experience enable you to support others to stretch?

Scripture Reading:

Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: Luke 19:28-40 (or 46) – *Jesus makes his position clear*

Reflection

A video sermon given by David Welbourn on Sun 10th April is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

This week, we hold in balance the triumphal entry with the roller-coaster that is Holy Week. The first part of the study focuses on the triumphal entry and the parallels we can draw to events in 2022.

- The story of the triumphal entry is frequently told as if it is the only happening in town that day. Imagine the last day on the Tour de France cycle race. The race was actually settled yesterday, so declaring the race winner becomes a mere formality. All the contenders ride up the Champs Elysees having a big party, rather than racing. This quaint picture is nothing like the circumstances of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem.
- Put yourself in the shoes of the authorities. Passover always proved difficult to police. The ruthlessness of Roman occupation barely tolerated the customs of a rebellious people, who insisted on an annual pilgrimage to honour their God. There was the unpredictable tyranny of a vassal king who relied on the brutal force of Rome to protect him from his own people who despised him. Religious leaders put their effort into protecting their own power base: that meant avoiding any disruption that would attract the Emperor's attention to the instability in this troublesome place.
- Rumour had it, there was yet another big march planned – was it a Roman show of force, faced with another rumour of an insurrection march hiding in broad daylight amid the vast crowds of pilgrims descending on the city?
- Throw into this mix, an itinerant preacher from Galilee who has been wooing the crowds with authoritative teaching. Casting doubts on some of the orthodoxy taught

by the religious authorities. Even performing miraculous healing and refusing to take any notice of the increasing unsubtle threats thrown at him by the Pharisees. Some of the crowds even had the audacity to call him the Messiah, a heresy he should have, but had never denounced.

- Jesus goes out of his way with detailed planning behind his arrangements, so that he is making a clearly prepared, bold statement as he joins the parade into the city. The crowd, hopeful of being freed from their oppressor expect their Messiah to ride a stallion, a symbol of power, to challenge and overthrow the enemy. So, Jesus chooses the opposite: a colt, a young animal, previously unriden, totally unsuited to carrying anyone of authority, let alone in a noisy, fervent, jostling crowd hoping to rise in foment. Jesus rides this ungainly, unpredictable, skittish, and afraid creature, as he leads a peaceful demonstration into a city expecting a violent uprising. He wins the hearts and minds of a rowdy people out to mark their holy festival, and even more hatred and fear from his enemies.
- The crowd shout out in words of the psalmist and mirror the behaviour of the people as they pray for salvation (Psalm 118).
- Instead of riding into the city to take it by storm, he pauses and weeps. Instead of overthrowing the occupying army, he overthrows the tables of those who profit at the expense of the pilgrims. He denounces the clamour of commerce that has replaced the contemplation of prayer in the temple

Questions to answer

- *Is it helpful to treat the palm procession as if it were a demonstration march or parade?*
- *Are you disturbed to see Jesus as one of the organisers of a protest march – if so, what makes you uncomfortable about it?*
- *There are many demonstrations and protest marches calling for justice – what are you prepared to stand for?*
- *Protest marches inevitably attract opposition and campaigns are becoming increasingly polarised – how far are you prepared to go?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

Part of the Year C Passion lectionary: Luke 23:15-34 – *Jesus sentenced and crucified*

Reflection

- This passage begins part way through the passion story. Jesus has been humiliated, beaten, and tortured. They have been unable to break Jesus. Only the toughest and most violent individuals ever withstand being broken when faced with the brutality unleashed on him. As Jesus remains calm and passive showing such unwavering strength, it is Pilate, the man responsible for maintaining order on behalf of Rome, who is clearly intimidated by the indomitable spirit of the man before him.
- Although Pilate is intimidated by Jesus, he is incapable of dispensing the justice for which he is responsible – instead he bows to the pressure of the Jewish leaders,

knowing how much he relies on their co-operation to keep any local unrest below the radar – something he needs to do to keep his own position.

- Pilate, despite all his weakness, refuses to bow totally to the Jewish leaders' self-interest. He risks everything by insisting the sign on Jesus' cross bears the inscription – "*King of the Jews*". Pilate has his insurance policy, in case there is any truth in the unlikely story.
- In contrast, the Jewish leaders demonstrate just how corrupt and desperate they are to keep their stranglehold on power. They choose to release a murdering criminal into the community, knowing his brutal presence will help keep the people in fear. They had too much at stake to spare Jesus, who offered the people real hope. When they make this trade-off to ensure they hold onto their own power and privilege, how far have the priests fallen from their calling?
- On the way to the agony of the cross, Jesus weeps again, bewailing the city's missed opportunity, just as he did in the lectionary passage for question 2. As he is hung in pain, he asks forgiveness for the folly and ignorance of humanity.

Questions to answer

- *How far is Pilate prepared to go when he is confronted by a love he fails to understand?*
- *How far are the priests prepared to go, in their fight to protect their own privilege and power?*
- *How far are you prepared to go, in your forgiveness of others?*
- *How far are you prepared to go to stand up for justice?*

Climate Justice

Jesus went out of his way in his carefully planned actions to show that he was prepared to lead by example, and challenge expectations. When he reflected on all the chances the city had to seek real peace, he wept over the failings, but still spent his last few days teaching and offering hope of justice and restoration. He went out of his way to show that making space for peaceful prayer is more important than profit. When he quietly allowed the lies, corruption, and brutality to be thrown at him, he refused to respond with anything but love.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the first UN meeting to recognise the threat of climate change, but the powerful still sow seeds of denial. At COP26, the self-interest of some prevented the course of justice being agreed, even knowing that evidence showed how wrong they were. Alok Sharma (conference chair) was forced, much to his dismay, to bow to pressure from the most influential, just as Pilate had to give way to the self-interest of the priests. Jesus never stopped forgiving the foolishness of the misguided people. He never stopped fighting for real justice.

Climate justice demands we keep standing for what is right, we never throw in the towel, we refuse to hold grudges for the past, keep on forgiving and hold hope alive.

When we contrast the motives and behaviours of groups of people (e.g.: the Pharisees), it is too easy for us to condemn a whole group of people, when it is the unhealthy behaviours and motivations which we should be challenging. History is full of examples where individual poor behaviours have been used to justify wholesale stereotyping and stigmatising. The fight for climate justice is full of opportunity to fall into this trap

- *How far are you willing to leave your comfort zone behind to demonstrate your commitment to climate justice?*
- *What help do you need from whom to stretch your comfort zone further?*
- *How should we support leaders placed in a no-win situation?*
- *How do we avoid stigmatising and stereotyping whole groups in difficult situations?*

Commitment to Action

Reflect on the changes that you have made during Lent and decide how to make that positive change permanent. Agree what additional steps you can take to deepen your commitment to climate justice.

Choose a partner within the group to hold each other to account and support each other to keep your promises.

Prayerful Activity:

OPTION 1 - Materials required: Paper & pens

Give each person a piece of paper & a pen. Draw around your hand and write your name on the hand and a word or two about what you would like prayer for. Distribute the hands around the room so that each person receives a hand that is not their own. Place your hand on the paper hand and pray silently for that person. Switch papers again, until everyone has been prayed for several times.

OPTION 2 - Large bowl, jug(s) of warm water, liquid soap & paper towels

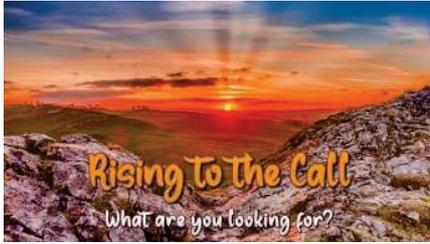
Have the leader wash the hands of someone in the group as follows: pour water over their hands so the water lands in the bowl, add some soap to their hands, use your hands to gently wash their hands, pour water from the jug over their hands to rinse off the soap, then dry their hands with a paper towel(s). Then the person whose hands has just been washed will wash the next persons hands. Continue until the last person washes the leader's hands.

Hymn Lyrics

Read Singing the Faith 662 – *Have you heard God's voice?* (Jacqueline G. Jones)

Prayer

Almighty God, you are our strength and our sustainer. You are the source of our inspiration and guide along our journey. Be with us Lord, as we follow in your path through this Holy Week. May we be blest and empowered by your Spirit to be beacons of hope even in the darkest hours. Amen.



BONUS SESSION – QUESTION 7

What are you looking for?

After Easter

After 17th April, 2022

Opening Prayer

Risen Christ. We are grateful that you have walked with us on this Lenten journey of repentance and renewal of our commitment to justice. As we conclude this series, may our discipleship continue be true to the inspiration with which you have filled us. May we be filled with the spirit of the risen Christ, and echo the response of John, who, at the moment he stooped into the empty tomb was able to proclaim that “he saw and believed”. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Now Lent is over, how has your life changed? What has God stirred in you? What are you going to do now as result of that transformation?

Scripture Reading:

The Lectionary Year C Gospel Reading: John 20:1-18 – *Rising: a loud and clear call!*

Reflection

A video sermon given by Rev. Joan Pell on Sun 17th April is optionally available at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

- When Mary encounters the risen Christ, she does not recognise him. He asks her, *Who (or whom) are you looking for?* Jesus was dead, so Mary was not expecting to see him; she was there to prepare his body for burial with spices and ointments according to Jewish customs. It takes him calling her by name before she recognises him.
- Easter is a story of transformation. Resurrection comes in many forms, and most likely not in the way that we are expecting. We have our own ideas as to what the future holds, but that might not be God’s story for us. *What are you looking for?*
- Each of the characters in our story had a different reaction on Easter morning.
- Two disciples ran together to the tomb. One is Peter, the other is not given a name although many think that it was John. John peeps into the tomb and holds back, whereas Peter goes right on in to see for himself what has happened. Then John looks in the empty tombs and immediately believed, without seeing the risen Christ.
- Mary clings to the gardener whom she has recognised, but Jesus tells her not to hold on, as he must move onward. It is easy to hold onto our vision of life as it was before, but we are called to a new journey with new beginnings, with new rules, new experiences, and new opportunities.

Questions to answer

- *Do you have a predetermined idea of what you are looking for? Could God be doing something else?*

- *Are you ready to reset and rewrite your vision, or are you still trying to recreate the pre-Covid world? What do you need to leave behind?*

Additional Scripture Reading:

Isaiah 43:18-19 – *I am about to do a new thing*

Reflection

- In this reading, God is about to do a new thing. It is beginning to happen - *can you not perceive it?* We are also told to not remember the things of old. The new thing will be different. It is not going to be what we imagined; it is what we could not see.
- When we are in the midst of trials it is hard to see that there is even a way forward. But one day we will suddenly realise that a new thing is happening and has been unfolding behind the scenes. It is not what we expected, but God is there, and it is beautiful.
- Our photograph for this sermon series and study was taken by David in the Peak District from the top of Thorpe Cloud. In today's version of the picture, we can see the full colours of the sunrise, and it is stunning. Hold onto that image as a metaphor for resurrection, for the transformation that is coming as surely as the sun rises every morning.
- On a recent visit to Derbyshire, Joan climbed Thorpe Cloud in the daytime on a cloudy day with the sun high in the sky. It is a steep climb with the mountain top about 250 feet higher than the road and car park. The view from the top is stunning, a 360-degree view. The surprise at the top was that as Joan looked eastwards, she could see some wind turbines on the horizon to the right of the trees. When she later checked the photograph, she realized that they are only visible in the sunrise picture if you know that they are there. Hidden away from what we can easily see, God is working. Sometimes we need to look hard to see the places where God is at work.
- At sunrise, when David had the mountain to himself, it was silent except for the bird song; in the middle of the day Joan encountered several couples and a large group of young adults and it was noisy with lots of cheerful conversation, including words of encouragement from one group to another. Two very different mountain top experiences, one a solo experience and one a communal experience.
- On this day we celebrate that Christ has risen. He now lives forever to challenge and change our messy lives and to transform us and the world into a place where God is known and seen. We too are charged to rise to the call and carry that message of beauty, hope and life to the world.

Questions to answer

- *Are you expecting a hopeful sign or bemoaning what is happening?*
- *Are there places where you can see a glimmer of hope that what you are praying for will unfold into something transformative?*
- *How are you being transformed?*

Climate Justice

Will we solve the climate crisis? Is resurrection coming? It is easy to become discouraged. *But what are we looking for?*

If we open our eyes, we will see all sorts of change around us. Hope can be found in new inventions that are being rolled out, in the numbers of people speaking up for change, in the work of business, charities and activists, in changes being made to laws and regulations. Hope is there in each small action that is taken and in those big actions. Hope is there as minds are changed and in acts of repentance and in those giving up their addictions and in lifestyle changes. Hope is there as we rise to the call.

- *Where have you found hope for climate justice?*
- *Where do you find hope in what your local church is doing?*
- *How are you now called to bring hope as you go forward?*
- *What are you looking for?*

Commitment to Action

- Review the commitment that you decided upon in the previous session.

Prayerful Activity:

Materials required: Seeds, (non-peat) potting soil, compostable cups, water.

Have the group plant some seeds – do not tell them what type of seeds they are. Use a non-peat based potting soil and a recyclable container such a used compostable cup or a toilet roll tube. Give any instructions as to the amount of light needed and the watering regime.

Take your planted seeds home and enjoy watching the seeds grow and the surprise of what they grow into. Now, in a moment of silence, imagine the plant that your seed will grow into. Pray for the seeds that have been planted in you during Lent and ask God to do a new thing in your life. Give thanks for shoots and blooms that you can already see.

Hymn Lyrics

Read Singing the Faith 296 – *Christ has risen while earth slumbers* (John L. Bell & Graham Maule)

Prayer

O God of Resurrection hope, with shouts of acclamation we proclaim that Christ is risen; Christ is risen, indeed. We give thanks that you are about to do a new thing. Help us to look for it and to recognise it and not cling to our former ideas. Thank you for this discipleship journey that we have been on through Lent and for the renewing of our minds and hearts and help us to keep the commitments that we have made. Transform our lives as we go from here as witnesses of what we have seen and heard. May we carry a message of beauty, hope and life to the world. Amen.

Notes for Group Leaders

This seven-week course begins with an Introductory Session in the week of Ash Wednesday, followed by six sessions to answer the first six questions concluding in Holy Week. There is some bonus material for those wishing to discuss the seventh big question after Easter. The circuit online worship services during Lent and on Easter Sunday will also be based on this theme. The sermon from those services will be available separately as a video for any group who wants to use it as a part of each week's study.

Although the Year C gospel scripture passages were not written about climate justice, the Big Questions can be applied to our discipleship in general and to issues of justice. Most weeks have an additional scripture for also reflecting upon.

Each week's lesson is designed to last about 90 minutes. All the material you need is in this book, but there is some additional material that you might find useful, including the associated sermons at methodistic.org.uk/rising. Each week's reflection includes a note pointing you at the correct sermon, should you choose to use either the video or scripted text.

The goal of this study is to seek to reenergize and renew a sense of purpose in the church having faced a wilderness experience where we now need to rise and find new ways to move forward with Easter hope. In the autumn of 2021 leading up to COP-26, the authors of this study (David Welbourn and Joan Pell) learned a lot about Climate Justice and came to the realisation that Climate Justice and Social Justice are inseparable. We have chosen to focus on Climate Justice, but you could substitute Social Justice questions if you wish at any point.

Each week follows a similar pattern which can be broken into 6 sections:

- **Introduction:** opening prayer and opportunity to feedback last week's commitments;
- **1st reflection:** reading of the lectionary passage, reflection and questions arising;
- **2nd reflection:** reading and reflecting on a related passage, and further questions;
- **justice reflection:** considering an issue of justice arising from the scriptures;
- **commitment:** a challenge to practical action by individuals, supported by the group;
- **prayerful meditation:** a guided prayer experience, reading a hymn and closing prayer.

Experienced study group leaders will be familiar with the need to adapt the timing, but we suggest that sessions are set for about 90 minutes, though you may choose to extend that if you choose to use the video sermon. We are aiming for about 10 minutes each for the first and last two sections, and 20 minutes each for the three reflections

The Opening Discussion each week follows up on and reinforces the commitments made in the previous week. This will need to be a very brief sample and will require careful timing but may provide rich discussion if you link the study with a refreshment break. You might ask only one person to share their experience or split into smaller groups of 2 or 3. People may be more comfortable sharing sensitively in pairs or small groups.

Things Group Leaders will need

Every Week:	Bible and hymnal for each person
Intro Session:	Ceramic/glass bowl, paper, pens, matches
Qu 1:	Rocks (one per person) and a permanent marker
Qu 2:	Post-It Notes (or similar)
Qu 3:	A large bag packed with heavy items
Qu 4:	Hand-held mirror(s)
Qu 5:	A ball of wool – each person needs three 30 cm pieces
Qu 6:	Paper & pens OR large bowl, jug(s) of water, soap & paper towels
Qu 7:	Seeds, (non-peat) potting soil, compostable cups, water

Note on Intro Session activity

This activity involves setting papers on fire. Please watch out for any smoke detectors – you might want to take the bowl outside to burn the papers! If you burn them inside, then carefully position the bowl so that any high flames do not catch anything else alight – consider having some water, a wet cloth or a fire extinguisher to hand.

Note on Question 6 activity

Two options are provided for this session. The hand washing option is similar to a Maundy Thursday foot washing, but people are likely to feel more comfortable with a handwashing; it is however still a very intimate occasion, so judge the comfort level of your group as to whether to use this option. You might need to subdivide the group as necessary. COVID concerns may also make this not a good option for your group.

Additional help for Group Leaders

As we have prepared this study, we have challenged each other in some areas where our train of thought may be less accessible to group members than we intend, and diverse groups meeting in different contexts may respond differently to our nuancing. Where we have recognised these difficulties, group leaders may find the additional explanation here helpful in drawing the most out of group discussions. Keep an eye on the website for additional help at methodistic.org.uk/rising.

Note on microaggressions: (question 2)

The term microaggression is used particularly in the context of racial justice, the systemic discrimination of minorities, and the controversial topic of white privilege. It refers to the constant drip feeding of derogatory messages, comments and slurs, that stigmatise and marginalise cultural groups. Generally, the privileged are unaware of the way this reinforces their superiority, but the recipients are highly aware. At worst, such slights and behaviours are employed deliberately by extremist groups, and recipients can be blighted by loss of ambition, esteem and/or self-worth. In question 2, we use this term deliberately to emphasise that the constant drip feed of rejection and repetitive challenges faced by Jesus amplifies the negative impact of each encounter. Marginalised groups today might readily value the idea that Jesus was subjected to this experience too, welcoming the opportunity to share that experience with the group.

This study for Lent 2022 was inspired by the Ipswich Methodist Circuit 9-week Climate Action Initiative that was offered in the run up to COP26 in 2021. You can find those climate resources at

methodistic.org.uk/climate-action

This guide and the associated sermons were written by David Welbourn and Joan Pell.

David Welbourn is a local preacher in the Ipswich Circuit. As a scientist and engineer, he celebrates human curiosity and creativity as some of the greatest gifts at the heart of God's creation. He constantly wrestles with the conflicting complexities and demands of bringing justice to a damaged world. His aim is to bring both challenge and hopefulness to discipleship. He is the primary author of the Climate Action materials on the Ipswich circuit website.



Rev. Joan Pell is British by birth but lived for over 20 years in the USA. She is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church and was appointed to churches in Northern California. Since 2019, she has been serving in the Ipswich Methodist Circuit as a minister with 'recognised and regarded status' in Full Connexion with the Methodist Church in Britain.



Join us online for worship on Easter Day at Ipswich Methodist Circuit as we consider the final *Rising to the Call* question: *What are you looking for?*

methodistic.org.uk/rising



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