



Preparation for Lent- Matthew 5: 21 - 37:

By Andrew Gardner, Union Chapel Heritage and Outreach Worker

Let us look at what could be seen as negative in this passage, and turn the negatives into positives. Rather than anger and vengeance, in seeking reconciliation with sometimes hard truths.

My late friend Ken was very dear to me, and a good friend to people in Canonbury, a father-figure to some. Stern when he needed to be stern, he was great fun when fun was needed. He served loyally in the Royal Navy, and his feeling of care for those under his command served him later in civilian life.

Ken was not a religious man, but carried all the traits and qualities that people of faith should aspire to: kindness, generosity, loyalty, honesty. Even when honesty was painful to him, and seemingly unfriendly, even angry; as he spoke, what had to be said was said, home truths sometimes, there would always afterwards be a drink standing on the table or on the bar: there – it's said now, and the air is clear.

The passage is about examining the spirit of the law, not the letter of it, and of being reconciled before anger escalates out of hand. That if we have offended each other, to seek to forgive, or to mend the damage before we attend the altar. 1st century courts would not have handed out the punishments described here; rather they show how dangerously thoughts and feelings fester if we fail to address them. If we offend God, we must seek our peace with God, and as Lent approaches this is an appropriate time to do so. Many Victorian philanthropists believed in salvation through good works, but Matthew's account shows that the importance and value also in faith and prayer. In the same way, observant Jews have the ten Days of Awe in the Autumn, between Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah as a time for introspection and reflection on the sins of the past year, before the book of names is closed for the year to come.

Lent will be a time for us to seek our peace not only with God but with each other. Matthew writes of violent reconciliation, but this is to emphasise its urgency. The longer we leave it, the harder it is. As much as we might pray for intercession for those times when we have offended each other, only we can truly and honestly talk to each other about it. Before we take our troubles to the altar.



Lentern Prayer

By Andrew Gardner, Union Chapel Heritage and Outreach Worker

Gracious God,

Lent is a time to question ourselves,
To doubt ourselves,
To find ourselves questioning Your Word.
We look at terrible things,
From the Flood to tsunami,
And from tyrants ancient to modern.
We often find Your world difficult.

Let us consider also the small things,
The events that make someone's day.
The woman who gives up her seat for an old man;
The young man who carries a push-chair up the stairs.
The nod to a stranger who looks unhappy,
And has had no eye-contact all day.

Let us start with the small things,
And encourage them,
That they may grow.

AMEN

A Lenten Song

By a church adherent

To seek what is beyond a thick, black horizon
Is to step into bleakness and darkness
Away from lawlessness and towards freedom
Towards the empty Cross
Where once, each metal nail was firmly placed
Into the flesh of our soon to be, worldly yet perfect, Saviour

To place at the foot of the Cross, sorrow in evil and hope in hopelessness
Is to be embalmed by calm and peace
Beyond anything that can be grasped
Waiting, yet again to witness the events leading to the empty tomb



Where bandages of brokenness lie discarded
Here, the presence of a risen King is found

Kneeling, gazing, wandering together across Holy plains of pain
Is to find a sacred journey that salves and saves
Far from sin to a renewal of mind, body and spirit for all
Gathering before the Crucifixion scene
Where Christ's body, was pinned, flayed and left as a rag
All hope is found, re-found and freely given

Dreaming dreams beyond belief for greater equality and justice in all parts of the
world
Here, before a simple structure
All can receive daily inspiration and salvation in Christ alone
Beyond the depths of human imagination, invisible becomes visible

Crying cries of anguish voiced and unvoiced for acts of abuse and cruelty hidden
from view
Here, before two crossed wooden bars
All can be comforted and strengthened by a gentle King
Beyond the experience of human feeling, unloved becomes loved

Speaking songs of lament for a world, too worldly, depleted in spirit and grace
Here, in the midst of apparent nothingness
All can discover and learn a Saviours' wisdom
Beyond the grasp of human knowledge, impossible becomes possible

In waiting, all can become mindful of the love and hurt we share with one another in
our journey
In waiting, all can change the motion of both heart and mind to the timeless rhythm
of the Trinity

At the foot of the Cross, an empty wooden Cross
Exists a vast stretch of eternity awaiting all
It is here all can become a body through the risen body of a Saviour
Once born a babe to be raised as a human witness, then beaten, crowned, slain and
born again
It is here at the foot of an empty Cross, an empty wooden Cross
Christ is calling:

To gather all in hope and hopelessness
To gather all in security and fear
To gather all in glory and shame



To gather all in peace and turmoil
To gather all in song and silence
To gather all in poverty and wealth
To gather all in hunger and plenty
To gather all in gentleness and anger
To gather all in unity and discord

And yet disciples still gather, again and again and again
To raise a shared, soulful mourning song and celebrate a risen Christ throughout the world
To witness again a miracle death and a miracle rebirth of a world, re-founded upon merciful love
The Easter miracle of resurrection
To pray once again for all to celebrate eternal unity, love and peace given by a risen King
Hearing comes with stopping to hear
To allow a Lenten time to meet the motion of our minds in the presence of God
To reconnect and bear witness to the eternal beginnings of pain and love of the whole earth

AMEN