



'Worship at home' March 10th 2024



This is the fourth week of **Lent**, a time of preparation for

Easter. You might like to keep a **prayer space**, with a **candle** and **cross**, set up throughout the duration of Lent for your own prayer and reflection, as you choose to follow the way of Christ.

Opening

During the season of Lent we are invited to reflect more intentionally on our faith and our discipleship. Over the past few weeks the lectionary Scripture readings have reminded us that following Jesus can be challenging.



Following Jesus can be comforting and confronting.

Following Jesus can make us sure and uncertain.

Following Jesus can mean letting go and embracing.

Following Jesus can seem foolish and wise.

Following Jesus demands our all,
when we have nothing to bring.

In following Jesus we may lose our lives,
in order to find the fullness of life eternal.

In today's gospel reading we hear of Jesus' response to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, who came to Jesus in the darkness of night asking questions about what it means to be a disciple. The reply given by Jesus reminds us that we live in the mystery of God's grace, and that when we are called to live sacrificially, it is because Jesus has already done so, in love.

John 3:14-21

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." For God so loved the

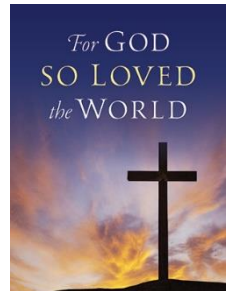
world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world 1

to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light

because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

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John 3:16 is one of the best known and oft-quoted Scripture verses, however it can be interpreted in various ways. The whole conversation seems to leave Nicodemus puzzled and uncertain. Jesus is clear... and offers the same invitation to Nicodemus which he has offered Peter, Andrew, James and John, and which he offers us:



Come and follow me;
Believe in me and trust me;
Know yourself to be loved;
Let this change your life;
Let your deeds show love to all, because all are loved;
Come and find fullness of life...

Read this passage again.

What questions does it raise for you?

What does it say about the world we live in?

What does it say about God?



*This is what love is:
it is not that we have loved God,
but that he loved us and sent his Son
to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.*

1 John 4:10

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God has shown us such abundant love that, even though undeserving, we are brought back into relationship with God: forgiven, and given a new start. This is what we call **grace**. The Greek word for grace is *charis*, meaning *gift*. Grace is the gift of unconditional love that God offers each of us.



Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions -

it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

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Reflection: Even then, grace

Even when we were dead, Paul writes.

Even when we turned away from the One who had created us.

Even when we lived in the grip of what drew our gaze from God.

Even when we were oblivious.

Even when we followed a path fashioned of nothing but our own desires.

Even when we wandered far and wilfully away.

Even when we forgot to look past our own feet

and to see the wonders not of our making.
Even when we failed to stand in awe, to breathe thanks,
to lean into the love that had waited long for us.
Even when, Paul writes.
Even when,
even then:
grace.

~ written by Jan L. Richardson

The Painted Prayerbook. <http://paintedprayerbook.com/>

The gift of grace is that God loves each us. This is not because of anything good we have done: God doesn't love us because we come to worship on Sundays, teach at Sunday School or volunteer for Meals on Wheels. God doesn't love us because we give food to the poor or look out for the lonely. God just loves us, as we are. When we accept Jesus' invitation to come, follow him and find fullness of life, we accept all that entails, including God's grace. We accept that we are loved unconditionally, without judgement or retribution. However, we then accept that we are called to love others unconditionally, without judgement or retribution. This is not always easy.

Prayer

God, you loved this world so much
that you sent your own son, Jesus Christ
to live and die among us,
in order that we might have life.



Forgive us for keeping that abundant life to ourselves,
for jealously hoarding your generous gifts,
for choosing self-interest over compassion and justice.

Teach us what it means to live as children of the light,
generously sharing your abundance
with our brothers and sisters in need. **Amen.**

— Christine Longhurst, posted on the [Canadian Foodgrains Bank](http://CanadianFoodgrainsBank.com) website.

Closing

God loves us so much that he gave his son to bring us into fullness of life. We are then called to love others as God has loved us, unconditionally and sacrificially. May we go in God's Spirit of love and grace and commit ourselves again to following the way of Christ. Amen.