

THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Redeemed into God's family
Adopted as God's children
The beautiful restoration of God's people
In and through the Messiah and the Spirit
As One, Holy and Apostolic Church

Being a cross-shaped family
Devoted to each other
Imitating Christ's humility
Being forgiven and forgiving others
Living in love
Serving one another

The Restored People of God – A Cross-Shaped Family

Introduction and Overview

Welcome to a new term in which we journey deeper into what it means to be **God's restored people** - a family redeemed, renewed, shaped by the cross, and living in anticipation of the coming kingdom. Building on all we learned at the BIG WEEKEND, my hope is that this series will invite us to see the church not simply as a community of faith, but as the people through whom God is fulfilling his long-promised work of restoration in the world.

At the heart of this series is a simple but significant truth:

In the Messiah, the church becomes the renewed, expanded family of Abraham—God's long-awaited plan to restore Israel and bless the nations.

Not a replacement for Israel, but its fulfilment. Not a new story, but the continuation and climax of the old one.

Drawing on the work of theologians such as **Paul Sloan, Jason Staples, and Michael Gorman**, we will explore both the **identity** God gives his people and the **life** he calls us to live together - one grounded in the cross, shaped by the Spirit, and moving towards the hope of God's future.

TWO ARCS – ONE STORY

1. THE THEOLOGICAL ARC: Becoming God's Restored and Redeemed People

(Epiphany → Start of Lent)

The first half of term grounds us in the big biblical story. From Isaiah's promises to Abraham's call, from Sinai to the early church, we see how God forms a people for his name - and how Jesus brings that story to its fulfilment.

Ephesians guides us as we explore how Gentiles have been brought into Israel's story, becoming:

- **adopted children** (Eph 1),
- **one new humanity** (Eph 2),
- **a holy and distinct people** (Eph 4),
- **an apostolic, Spirit-empowered community** (Eph 6).

These weeks highlight:

- How God's covenant promises now fulfilled in Christ
- How our identity is rooted in grace, not achievement
- How in Christ we are a people being shaped into a temple, a body, and a family
- How as a community we are called not only to belong but to be sent

Our teaching focus:

- Our membership in God's people flows from being "in Christ."
- Unity, holiness, and mission grow out of that foundation.
- The church is the renewed and expanded Israel—God's restored people for the blessing of the world.

2. THE PRACTICAL ARC: Living the Cross-Shaped Life Together

(Lent → Easter)

As Lent begins, the emphasis shifts from *who we are* to *how we live*.

Lent is our season to pause, reflect, return, and realign our shared life around the cross.

Here the central theme is **communion**:

- **Communion with Christ**
Participation in his life, his death, and his risen power.
- **Communion with one another**
A shared life—devotion, forgiveness, love, service—not merely shared beliefs.
- **Communion in mission**
Together becoming a sign of God's coming kingdom.

Following Michael Gorman's vision of **cruciformity**, we will explore how the cross shapes a whole community:

- **Devotion and belonging** | Acts 2; Romans 12
- **Christlike humility** | Philippians 2; John 13
- **Forgiveness and reconciliation** | Colossians 3; Matthew 18
- **Love as action** | 1 Corinthians 13; John 15
- **Service and honour** | Romans 12; 1 Peter 4

These practices form us into being a **cross-shaped family** - a people whose shared life reflects God's future now.

Our teaching focus:

- Spiritual transformation is communal.
- Christian growth is participatory—we practice the gospel together.
- Lent and Easter are God's rhythms for returning, deepening, and re-entering mission.

THE JOURNEY TO EASTER

The final weeks guide us through:

- **Palm Sunday** – the misunderstood King who comes in humility
- **Maundy Thursday** – the meal of covenant and communion
- **Good Friday** – the self-giving love at the centre of our life together
- **Easter Day** – the resurrection that sends us out in witness, like Mary Magdalene

My hope is that the whole series leads us to this:

God restores a people through the Messiah, shapes them by the cross, unites them in communion, and sends them as witnesses of the age to come.

May God bless us together as we grow deeper together in our community life
Richard

THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE - A REDEEMED FAMILY

Isaiah 61:10–62:5 | Galatians 3:23–25; 4:4–7

As we begin this new series, our readings draw us into the sweeping biblical promise of God's restoration. Isaiah offers a vision of a transformed people - clothed in righteousness, crowned with God's delight, renamed, renewed, and restored. Israel, once desolate, is now called "My Delight Is in Her"; the people once forsaken are now the joyful bride, the family in whom God rejoices. It is a picture of covenant love rekindled and identity restored.

Paul takes this promise and shows how it finds its fulfilment "in the fullness of time." In Galatians he reminds us that the law prepared God's people for the coming of Christ, but now, through the Son's redeeming work and the gift of the Spirit, Jew and Gentile alike are welcomed into the family promised to Abraham. No longer slaves but children, no longer outsiders but heirs, we are adopted into God's restored people and empowered to cry, "Abba, Father."

Together, these readings invite us to begin our term with joy: to see ourselves as the renewed family God has always intended - a people shaped not by our past or performance, but by His covenant grace. As we stand at the turn of the year, we remember that God's great work of restoration has already begun, and that we - by sheer gift - belong to His redeemed family.

THE RESTORATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE - REDEEMED INTO GOD'S FAMILY

Isaiah 61:10-62:5

¹⁰ I delight greatly in the Lord;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness,
as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
¹¹ For as the soil makes the young plant come up
and a garden causes seeds to grow,
so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness
and praise spring up before all nations.

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her vindication shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.
² The nations will see your vindication,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.
³ You will be a crown of splendour in the Lord's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
⁴ No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.
But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;
for the Lord will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.
⁵ As a young man marries a young woman,
so will your Builder marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.

Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7

²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

NEW YEAR BEGINNINGS | ADOPTED AS CHILDREN INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD

Ephesians 1:1–14 | John 1:10–18

As we step into a new year, our readings invite us to reflect on the wonder of our adoption into God's family. In Ephesians, Paul opens with a breathtaking vision of God's eternal plan: before the foundation of the world, we were chosen, redeemed, and sealed by the Spirit. Through Christ, we are lavished with every spiritual blessing - chosen, forgiven, and claimed as God's children. This is not a distant promise but a present reality: we live as those who have been called into the fullness of God's love and purpose.

John's Gospel reminds us of the Word made flesh, dwelling among us, revealing God's glory, grace, and truth. In Christ, humanity and divinity meet, and in Him, we see God's invitation extended to all - light overcoming darkness, grace for all who receive Him. Through Jesus, we are not only adopted as God's children, but we are invited into communion with Him, living out our belonging in relationship with the Father, the Son, and one another.

Together, these passages encourage us as a church to begin the year grounded in our identity: secure in God's love, embraced by His Spirit, and called to live as His children. This week is a reminder that being part of God's family is both a gift to celebrate and a calling to live faithfully, joyfully, and with hope in the year ahead.

Ephesians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,
To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace **8** that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, **9** he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10** to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, **12** in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. **13** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

John 1:10-18

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, 'This is the one I spoke about when I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."') ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

THE BEAUTIFUL RESTORATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Genesis 12:1–3 & Exodus 19:3–6 | Ephesians 2:1–10

This week, our readings take us back to the roots of God's redemptive plan, reminding us that we are part of a story far greater than ourselves. In Genesis, God calls Abraham to step into the unknown, promising blessing, purpose, and a people through whom all nations will be blessed. Exodus shows God shaping Israel as a treasured and holy people, set apart for His purposes. Together, these Old Testament passages remind us that God has always intended a people marked by covenant, relationship, and mission.

Paul's words in Ephesians help us see how this story reaches its fulfilment in Christ. Once dead in our sins, we have been made alive in Him, saved by grace, and raised into new life. God's restoration is not simply personal - it is communal. In Christ, Jew and Gentile, all humanity, is brought together into a single, reconciled people, forming a new humanity empowered by the Spirit to live in God's purposes.

As we reflect on these readings, we are invited to marvel at God's faithfulness and plan: He does not abandon His promises but brings them to fruition in Christ. This week, we can celebrate that we are part of God's beautiful restoration - a people redeemed, reconciled, and called to reflect His holiness and blessing in the world.

THE BEAUTIFUL RESTORATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Genesis 12:1-3

12 The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

² 'I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.'

Exodus 19:3-6

³ Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, 'This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴ "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'

Ephesians 2:1-10

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ 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. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

IN AND BY THE MESSIAH AND SPIRIT

Ephesians 2:11–22 | John 15:1–17

This week, we focus on the ongoing work of God in bringing Jew and Gentile together into a single, unified people through Christ and His Spirit. In Ephesians, Paul reminds us that we were once “far off,” separated from God and from one another, but in Christ, the dividing walls are broken down. By His blood, we are reconciled to God and to each other, forming one holy temple - a dwelling place for the Spirit. This is not abstract theology; it is the reality in which we are called to live each day.

Jesus’ words in John 15 echo and deepen this vision. We are invited to abide in Him, like branches in a vine, receiving life and bearing fruit. Abiding in Christ means being nourished, empowered, and shaped by Him, enabling us to love one another as He loves us. It is through this union with the Messiah and the Spirit that we are equipped to participate in God’s redemptive work, living in holiness, unity, and mutual care.

As we reflect this week, let us consider: how does being rooted in Christ and connected through the Spirit shape our life together as a community? How do our relationships reflect the reconciliation and new life that God has brought through Jesus? This is an invitation not only to marvel at the work God has done but to live it out, cultivating a people who are united, Spirit-filled, and Christ-centred.

Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (which is done in the body by human hands) – ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

John 15:1-17

15 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

⁹ 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: love each other.

ONE - UNITED AND GROWING

Ephesians 4:1–7, 11–13 | John 17:20–26

This week, our focus is on unity and growth within the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4, Paul exhorts us to live in a manner worthy of our calling, emphasizing humility, gentleness, patience, and love. The Spirit has given gifts to equip the church - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers - not for individual prestige but to build up the whole body until we all reach maturity in Christ. The goal is clear: a community growing together in knowledge, character, and Christlikeness, reflecting the fullness of God.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 provides the heavenly vision for this unity. He prays not only for His disciples but for all who will believe in Him, asking that we may be one, just as He is one with the Father. Our unity is meant to be visible, a sign to the world of God's love and the reality of the kingdom breaking in. It is both gift and calling: a gift of the Spirit and a responsibility to live out our interconnectedness in everyday life.

As we consider these passages, we are invited to reflect on our part in the life of the church. How do we contribute to growth and unity? Are we using our gifts to strengthen others? How can our community more clearly embody the love, peace, and shared purpose that Christ desires for His people? This week encourages us to live intentionally as one body, rejoicing in our diversity while pursuing maturity together.

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

John 17:20-26

²⁰ My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – ²³ I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ 'Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.'

HOLY - SET APART

Ephesians 4:17–24 | 1 Peter 2:4–5, 9–12

This week we turn to the theme of holiness - being set apart as God's people. In Ephesians 4, Paul challenges us to leave behind the futility of our former ways and to embrace the new life offered in Christ. He calls us to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Holiness is not merely moral perfection; it is a transformation of our identity and desires, rooted in God's Spirit and lived out in relationship with others.

Peter complements this vision by reminding us that we are living stones, being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. We are called to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, proclaim His excellence, and reflect His character in the world. Our distinctiveness as God's people is not for separation alone but for mission: to show the world what God is like and to live in ways that draw others to Him.

This week invites us to examine how our lives reflect the holiness of God. Where do we conform to the patterns of the world, and where do we embrace the new life in Christ? How can we cultivate spiritual disciplines, relationships, and practices that demonstrate our set-apartness in practical, loving ways? Holiness, lived together, shapes the character of the church and witnesses to the power of God's restorative work in our midst.

Ephesians 4:17-24

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-12

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

APOSTOLIC - SENT WITH THE GOSPEL

Ephesians 6:10–20 | Acts 1:1–8

This week our focus is on being an apostolic people - sent with the gospel into the world. Paul's words in Ephesians 6 remind us that our mission is not undertaken in our own strength, but in the power of God. We are equipped with the full armor of God, enabling us to stand firm, proclaim the truth, and live faithfully in the face of challenges. Mission and discipleship are inseparable: as we grow in holiness and unity, we are also called to witness and to share God's restorative work with others.

The passage from Acts 1 captures the promise and the purpose of our sending. Jesus commissions His followers to be witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," empowered by the Spirit. This is a reminder that the Spirit equips us to participate in God's mission, carrying forward the story of restoration begun in Christ. Our apostolic identity is both a calling and a responsibility: we are part of a community sent together, bearing the gospel in word and deed.

This week invites reflection on our own participation in God's mission. How are we using the gifts and opportunities God has given us to witness to His kingdom? How does being part of a local, restored, cross-shaped family empower us to live faithfully and courageously in the world? We are sent not as isolated individuals, but as a community shaped by the Spirit, equipped for service, and committed to the proclamation of the gospel in word and deed.

APOSTOLIC - SENT WITH THE GOSPEL

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Acts 1:1-8

¹ In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

⁶ Then they gathered round him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'

⁷ He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

CRUCIFORMITY - A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY

James 2:14–17 | 1 John 3:1, 11, 16–18, 4:11–21

This Sunday we begin our Lenten journey by exploring what it means to live as a cross-shaped family. The passages this week invite us to reflect on the practical expression of our faith as a community that loves, cares, and bears one another's burdens.

James reminds us that faith without action is dead. Our belief in Christ is meant to shape our daily living and how we relate to each other. In a restored family, faith is inseparable from love and service - our devotion to one another must be tangible, visible, and sacrificial.

1 John beautifully complements this, emphasizing God's love as the model and motive for our communal life. We are called to love one another because God first loved us; the cross demonstrates the depth of that love. Practically, this means we care for the vulnerable, share generously, forgive freely, and act courageously to support each other. Our lives, like Christ's, are meant to intersect with the needs of others in ways that reflect the Spirit's work in us.

As we enter Lent, this week sets the tone for the season: a call to repentance, renewal, and renewed participation in the life of the family of God. It asks us to examine not only our personal devotion but also our communal responsibilities. How can we, as a cross-shaped family, embody the love, humility, and self-giving of Christ in our everyday relationships and community life?

James 2:14-17

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

1 John 3:1, 11, 16-18, 4:11-21

¹See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! ¹¹For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

¹⁶This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

THE RIGHT KIND OF FAST

Isaiah 58:1–9a | Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, calling us into a season of reflection, repentance, and renewed devotion. The passages this week remind us that God's desire is not for outward displays of piety alone, but for hearts that are transformed and lives that actively embody justice, mercy, and love.

Isaiah speaks to a community tempted to perform rituals while neglecting the vulnerable and oppressed. True fasting, God says, is not merely abstaining from food but breaking the bonds of injustice, sharing with those in need, and caring for the marginalized. Lent invites us to consider how our practices - individually and together - reflect our calling as a cross-shaped family, bearing one another's burdens and supporting each other in Christlike love.

Jesus reinforces this in Matthew, highlighting the inwardness of devotion. He calls us to a life of sincerity, where acts of prayer, fasting, and generosity flow from a heart devoted to God and others, not from a desire for recognition. As a family of God, our Lenten discipline is therefore both personal and communal: it is an opportunity to examine how we live together, serve one another, and participate in Christ's life and mission.

This week, we are invited to enter Lent with honesty and humility, embracing practices that shape us into a community that loves deeply, serves faithfully, and reflects God's restorative purposes for the world.

ASH WEDNESDAY | THE RIGHT KIND OF FASTING

Isaiah 58:1-9

58 'Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

² For day after day they seek me out;

they seem eager to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that does what is right

and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.

³ "Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it?"

Why have we humbled ourselves,

and you have not noticed?"

'Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please

and exploit all your workers.

⁴ Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife,

and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today

and expect your voice to be heard on high.

⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,

only a day for people to humble themselves?

Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed

and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?

Is that what you call a fast,

a day acceptable to the Lord?

⁶ 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –

when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn,

and your healing will quickly appear;

then your righteousness will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

⁹ Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

you will cry for help, and he will say: here am I.

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

6 'Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² 'So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁵ 'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁶ 'When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

¹⁹ 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY: DEVOTED TO EACH OTHER

Romans 12:3–10a | Acts 2:42–47

As we move into the first full week of Lent, our focus turns to what it means to live as a community deeply devoted to one another. Both Romans and Acts offer timeless guidance on the posture of love, service, and shared life that characterizes God's restored people.

Paul, in Romans, reminds us that devotion begins with humility and self-awareness. Each member of the body has a role to play, and each contribution matters. Our gifts and abilities are entrusted to us not for personal acclaim but for the flourishing of the community. Love must be sincere, honouring others above ourselves, and actively seeking the good of those around us.

Acts provides a vivid picture of the early church living this out in practice. The believers devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. They shared resources generously, cared for one another's needs, and experienced life together with joy and gratitude. This was not merely a collection of individuals, but a family formed by the Spirit, living out the cross-shaped life in tangible ways.

This week, we are invited to consider our own devotion within the church: How do we support and care for each other? How do we use our gifts to build up the body? And how do we cultivate a rhythm of shared life that reflects the love, humility, and generosity of Christ? Devotion is the foundation of a cross-shaped family - a family that carries each other, rejoices together, and witnesses to God's restorative purposes in the world.

Romans 12:3-10

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. ⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY: IMITATING CHRIST'S HUMILITY

Philippians 2:1–11 | John 13:1–5, 12–17, 34–35

This week we reflect on the heart of cruciform living: imitating Christ's humility. Both Paul's letter to the Philippians and John's Gospel offer profound insights into what it means to embody the self-giving love of Jesus within the life of the community.

Paul exhorts the Philippians to adopt the mindset of Christ: humility, selflessness, and obedience - even to the point of death on a cross. Our calling as God's people is not to seek status, honor, or personal advantage, but to live in mutual love and service. Humility is active, expressed in our willingness to put others' needs before our own and to participate in life together in a spirit of unity and gentleness.

John's Gospel provides the concrete example of Jesus at the Last Supper. Washing the disciples' feet, he models the servant leadership that defines God's family. Humility is not abstract - it is practical, relational, and transformative. Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved us shows that the cross-shaped life is lived in deeds as much as in attitudes. Service becomes both expression and evidence of participation in Christ's own life.

As a church community, we are invited this week to consider: How can we serve each other sacrificially? Where might we practice humility in our relationships, our leadership, and our daily interactions? Imitating Christ's humility transforms our life together, making visible the cross-shaped love that defines God's restored family.

Philippians 2:1-11

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

John 13:1-5, 12-17, 34-35

13 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. ¹³ 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

³⁴ 'A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY: FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING

Colossians 3:12–17 | Matthew 18:21–35

This week, our focus is on the centrality of forgiveness in the life of God's restored family. Both Paul and Jesus remind us that living as a cross-shaped community means embodying grace, mercy, and reconciliation in our relationships.

In Colossians, Paul calls the church to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Above all, he urges us to forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven us. Forgiveness is not optional for those who belong to God's family; it is the mechanism through which unity, peace, and mutual flourishing are maintained. Living in forgiveness makes space for love to grow and reflects the character of Christ within the community.

Matthew's parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates the cost of failing to extend grace to others. God's forgiveness is freely given, and as participants in Christ, we are called to mirror that forgiveness in our interactions. The parable challenges us to examine where resentment, anger, or pride may hinder our communal life and calls us to a radical openness to reconciliation.

This week, consider: Are there relationships within your family, church, or community where forgiveness is needed? How might you take concrete steps to restore peace, reflect God's mercy, and participate in the life of the cross-shaped family? Through practicing forgiveness, we live out our identity in Christ and bear witness to the reconciling power of God's kingdom.

BEING A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY | BEING FORGIVEN AND FORGIVING OTHERS

Colossians 3:12-17

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'

²² Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

²³ 'Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.'

²⁶ 'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." ²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.'

²⁸ 'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.'

²⁹ 'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

³⁰ 'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.'

³² 'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.'

³⁵ 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY: LOVE IN ACTION

1 Corinthians 13 | John 15:9–17

As we reach this pivotal point in our Lent series, we pause to reflect on the heartbeat of a cross-shaped family: **love**. After exploring what it means to belong, to be devoted, to imitate Christ's humility, and to forgive one another, we now see all these practices converge in the call to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 remind us that love is not merely an emotion or a feeling, but the defining reality of the Christian life. It is patient, kind, and self-giving. It is the lens through which all our relationships are to be viewed, shaping every word we speak, every act of service, and every interaction within our community. Love binds together the other virtues - humility, forgiveness, devotion, and service - giving coherence and life to our participation in the cross-shaped way of Jesus.

John 15:9–17 echoes this, grounding our love in the example of Christ's self-giving. Jesus commands his disciples to remain in his love and to love one another sacrificially. Our participation in Christ's life is not abstract; it is expressed in tangible acts of care, encouragement, and mutual support. In this way, the family of God becomes a visible sign of the kingdom - a community marked not by privilege or power but by faithful, cross-shaped love.

This week, as we reflect on these passages, we are invited to ask ourselves: How does my life reflect Christ's love to those around me? How can our church family embody this love more fully in our daily interactions? Lent calls us to examine our hearts, not in isolation, but together, as a family striving to live out the gospel in concrete, practical ways. Love is not simply the goal; it is the **way** we live as God's restored people.

BEING A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY | LIVING IN LOVE

1 Corinthians 13

13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

John 15:9-17

⁹ 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: love each other.

A CROSS-SHAPED FAMILY: SERVING ONE ANOTHER

Romans 12:10b–15 | 1 Peter 4:7–11

As we continue our journey through Lent, this week we focus on **service**, the natural outworking of our love and devotion in a cross-shaped family. Belonging to God's restored people is not just about identity or personal growth; it calls us to **mutual care, practical support, and active ministry** toward one another.

Romans 12 exhorts us to "honour one another above yourselves" and to "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Service within the community is deeply **relational**, recognizing the joys and burdens of others as our own. Importantly, serving is a posture of **humility**, a willingness to place others above ourselves. In the Greek, the word often translated as "servant" (δοῦλος, *doulos*) carries the sense of a **slave**, someone wholly committed to the good of another. True service in the church involves this same self-giving, honoring the needs of others as higher than our own.

1 Peter 4:7–11 complements this by reminding us that each member of the body has a gift to offer, and that through these gifts we are to serve one another faithfully. Service is not optional or secondary; it is central to the life of the church. By speaking, serving, and loving with the resources God has given us, we build up the body, sustain one another in trials, and demonstrate to the world the reality of God's kingdom at work among us.

As we reflect this week, consider: How is your gift or presence used to support others in our church family? How can we, as a community, cultivate a culture where each person's contribution is recognized, encouraged, and multiplied? Lent calls us to **participate in one another's lives with humility and honour**, not just as a duty, but as a joyful expression of belonging in the cross-shaped family of God.

Romans 12:10-15

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

PALM SUNDAY | THE KING WHO COMES IN HUMILITY

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29 | Matthew 21:1-11

As we approach Holy Week, our attention turns from the patterns of living in community to the **life and mission of Jesus himself**. Palm Sunday offers a window into the **expectation of Israel** in Jesus' time – a people longing for restoration, a king to deliver them, and the hope of God's kingdom fulfilled. Yet Matthew reminds us that while the crowds welcome Jesus with shouts of "Hosanna," the full reality of his kingship is hidden in humility.

Jesus enters Jerusalem **not as a conquering warrior but on a donkey**, embodying the paradox of God's kingdom: strength revealed in weakness, victory in self-emptying. Psalm 118 echoes this tension: a cry for salvation, a recognition that the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. In this narrative, we see **apocalyptic hope** intertwined with human misunderstanding – the people hunger for God's promise, yet they do not yet recognize how it comes.

As we reflect this Palm Sunday, we are invited to **watch and wonder**: the King comes to his own, yet his own do not receive him. This is the posture that shapes our cross-shaped family: a call to **humility, attentiveness, and recognition of God's ways** even when they subvert human expectations. The story of Jesus' entry sets the tone for the week to come, inviting us to walk with him in **obedience, self-giving, and sacrificial love**, anticipating the full revelation of God's kingdom at Easter.

PALM SUNDAY | THE ARRIVAL OF THE KING

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

¹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever.

² Let Israel say: 'His love endures for ever.'

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

²³ the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴ The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ Lord, save us! Lord, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

²⁷ The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever.

Matthew 21:1-11

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.'

⁴ This took place to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ 'Say to Daughter Zion, "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'

¹¹ The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'

MAUNDY THURSDAY – THE GOOD NEWS OF THE FINAL MEAL

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14 | 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

On Maundy Thursday, we gather around the table with Jesus and his disciples, entering into the first **communion-shaped moment** of Holy Week. The meal is more than ritual; it is an invitation to **participate in Christ's life, death, and love**, and to experience what it means to belong to his restored family.

Through the bread and cup, we are drawn into the story of self-giving: Jesus offers himself for his people and calls us to **imitate him in our communal life**. Here, participation is tangible: union with Christ, union with one another, and union in mission. This meal models the cross-shaped life – a life of service, humility, and sacrificial love – and reminds us that the family of God is called to live in this **mutual devotion and care**, empowered by his Spirit.

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ² 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³ Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. ⁴ If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbour, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.

¹¹ This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

¹² 'On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴ 'This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord – a lasting ordinance.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

GOOD FRIDAY

REFLECTIONS AT THE CROSS | THE GOOD NEWS OF THIS TERRIBLE DAY

Psalm 22 | Luke 23:44-49

Good Friday confronts us with the depth of Christ's self-emptying love. Jesus enters fully into suffering, rejected and misunderstood, **bearing the weight of humanity's brokenness**. Participation this day is profound: we are invited to enter into the story, to mourn, to recognize our complicity, and to stand alongside Christ in his suffering.

Psalm 22 captures the anguish and yet the trust that frames Jesus' death: even in apparent defeat, God's redemptive plan is at work. Good Friday calls us to embrace the **cross-shaped reality of life in the Messiah** – a life that sometimes involves suffering, endurance, and solidarity with those who are hurting. It is a call to **participate in God's restorative work**, following Christ not only in triumph but also in trial.

GOOD FRIDAY | REFLECTIONS AT THE CROSS

Psalm 22

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?
- ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.
- ³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.
- ⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
- ⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
- ⁸ 'He trusts in the Lord,' they say, 'let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'
- ⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Do not be far from me, for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
- ¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
- ¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
- ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.
- ¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.
- ¹⁶ Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.
- ¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
- ¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

- ¹⁹ But you, Lord, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
- ²⁰ Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
- ²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.
- ²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
- ²³ You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
- ²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
- ²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfil my vows.
- ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord will praise him –
may your hearts live for ever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,
- ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him –
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
- ³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
- ³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Luke 23:44-49

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.' ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

EASTER SUNDAY – THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

Colossians 3:1-4 | Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Sunday bursts forth with **hope**. The resurrection shows that the cross is not the end, but the gateway to new life. To participate now means to live in the **resurrection-shaped reality**, anticipating the fullness of God's kingdom while embodying it in our communities.

Colossians reminds us that our lives are hidden in Christ, raised with him, and oriented toward the life to come. Matthew's account highlights the first witnesses – Mary Magdalene and the other women – who encounter the risen Lord and are immediately called to **go and tell others**. This is a powerful reminder that resurrection participation is **inseparable from witness**: the joy, hope, and new life we have received in Christ is meant to be shared.

Easter invites us to **live resurrection-shaped lives**: serving, forgiving, loving, and participating in the restoration of God's people as a cross-shaped family, energized by hope, empowered by the Spirit, and called to share the good news with the world around us.

Colossians 3:1-4

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **2** Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. **3** For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Matthew 28:1-10

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2 There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. **3** His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. **4** The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5 The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. **6** He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. **7** Then go quickly and tell his disciples: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him." Now I have told you.'

8 So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. **9** Suddenly Jesus met them. 'Greetings,' he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. **10** Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.'

SMALL GROUP | LIFE GROUP HELPS AND PROMPTS

The Restoration of God's People: A Redeemed Family

Isaiah 61:10–62:5 | Galatians 3:23–25, 4:4–7

God's plan to restore his people reaches its fulfilment in Christ, uniting Jew and Gentile into one redeemed family.

Key Points:

- Restoration is both **personal and communal**.
- Our identity as God's children is a gift, not earned.
- The church is the visible expression of God's covenantal promises.

Questions:

1. How does it feel to know that God calls you part of a redeemed family?
2. In what ways do you experience God's restoration in your own life?
3. How might this shared identity change how we relate to others in our community?

New Year Beginnings: Adopted as Children into God's Family

Ephesians 1:1–14 | John 1:10–18

Our adoption as God's children invites us into a life marked by blessing, grace, and communion with God.

Key Points:

- Adoption brings **security, belonging, and participation in God's promises**.
- God's family includes all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike.

Questions:

1. What does adoption into God's family mean for your sense of belonging?
2. How can we reflect this adoption in our daily interactions?
3. How might this shape the way we start this new year?

The Beautiful Restoration of God's People

Genesis 12:1–3 & Exodus 19:3–6 | Ephesians 2:1–10

God's covenantal promises are fulfilled in Christ, bringing a broken world into life and blessing.

Key Points:

- Restoration involves **transformation and reconciliation**.
- We are created for **good works, unity, and witness**.

Questions:

1. How do you see God's promises fulfilled in your life?
2. How does understanding our restored identity affect the way we treat others?
3. How can we participate in God's restorative work in our community?

In and by the Messiah and Spirit

Ephesians 2:11–22 | John 15:1–17

The Spirit unites us in Christ, forming a living temple and community rooted in love and obedience.

Key Points:

- Union with Christ is **both personal and corporate**.
- We are called to **abide in Christ** and bear fruit together

Questions:

1. How do you experience union with Christ in your daily life?
2. How does the Spirit shape the life of our church as a family?
3. In what ways can we encourage each other to “bear fruit” together?

One: United and Growing

Ephesians 4:1–7, 11–13 | 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

The church is one body, gifted and diverse, united under Christ.

Key Points:

- Unity does not mean uniformity – **diversity in gifts strengthens the body**.
- Our life together is **participatory and interdependent**.

Questions:

1. How do you see diversity of gifts at work in our church?
2. How can we grow in unity without losing individuality?
3. How might you contribute to the growth and health of the body?

Holy: Set Apart

Ephesians 4:17–24 | 1 Peter 2:4–5, 9–12

God calls us to holiness – a life distinct in character, reflecting the restoration of his people.

Key Points:

- Holiness is relational: we live it **together, as a temple**.
- Set-apartness involves **ethical, spiritual, and communal living**.

Questions:

1. How do you experience being “set apart” in daily life?
2. What practices help you grow in holiness?
3. How can we support each other as a holy community?

Apostolic: Sent with the Gospel

Ephesians 6:10–20 | Acts 1:1–8

God empowers the restored people to witness and act as ambassadors of his kingdom.

Key Points:

- The church is **sent for mission**, equipped by the Spirit.
- Apostolic life combines **prayer, witness, and courage**.

Questions:

1. How do you see yourself participating in God's mission locally or globally?
2. What does it mean to be "sent" in your context?
3. How might we strengthen our prayer and witness together as a church?

Cruciformity: A Cross-Shaped Family (Lent)

James 2:14–17 | 1 John 3:1, 11, 16–18, 4:11–21

Our restored family lives by the pattern of the cross – self-giving, loving, and active in faith.

Key Points:

- Faith is **participatory and relational**, expressed in action.
- Cruciformity shapes **every interaction, not just personal devotion**.

Questions:

1. How does self-giving faith look in your family, church, or workplace?
2. How can we practically embody love in our church community this Lent?
3. What is one act of participation you can take this week to serve others?

Ash Wednesday: The Right Kind of Fast

Isaiah 58:1–9a | Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Lent begins with repentance and reflection – fasting as a spiritual and communal practice.

Key Points:

- True fasting focuses on **justice, mercy, and humility**, not merely ritual.
- Lent calls us to **communal reflection and reorientation** toward God.

Questions:

1. How can fasting or spiritual discipline help your heart align with God?
2. How might repentance be a communal, not just personal, practice?
3. What could you "fast from" to better serve God and others this Lent?

A Cross-Shaped Family: Devoted to Each Other

Romans 12:3–10a | Acts 2:42–47

Devotion to one another models the covenantal love of God in our communal life.

Key Points:

- Participation in Christ is **expressed in devotion, hospitality, and shared life**.
- Community is **not optional**; it shapes identity and witness.

Questions:

1. How are you currently devoted to fellow members of our church?
2. How can we better live as a cross-shaped family in practice?
3. How does devotion to one another witness to God's kingdom?

Imitating Christ's Humility

Philippians 2:1–11 | John 13:1–5, 12–17, 34–35

Cruciform living calls us to humility, service, and self-emptying love.

Key Points:

- Humility is central to cross-shaped participation.
- Imitating Christ is **both ethical and relational**.

Questions:

1. What does humility look like in your daily interactions?
2. How can imitation of Christ transform conflict or disagreement?
3. Where might we need to "empty ourselves" to serve one another better?

Forgiven and Forgiving

Colossians 3:12–17 | Matthew 18:21–35

Forgiveness is essential for a restored family to thrive; it reflects Christ's reconciliation.

Key Points:

- Forgiveness is **both received and extended**.
- Cruciform living involves **bearing with one another in love**.

Questions:

1. Who might you need to forgive this Lent?
2. How does being forgiven by God shape our forgiveness of others?
3. How can our community cultivate a culture of forgiveness?

Love in Action

1 Corinthians 13 | John 15:9–17

Love is the measure of participation in the cross-shaped life.

Key Points:

- Love is **active, not just emotive**.
- Union with Christ is expressed in **service, patience, and endurance**.

Questions:

1. How does love guide your decisions and priorities?
2. What practical steps can you take to express Christlike love in your household or workplace?
3. How does this passage challenge our understanding of church community?

Serving One Another

Romans 12:10b–15 | 1 Peter 4:7–11

Service is both a **humble posture and an honour**, reflecting Christ's life and teaching.

Key Points:

- The Greek word for "servant" (doulos) implies **full submission and love**.
- Mutual service strengthens community and testifies to God's kingdom.

Questions:

1. How can you serve others in a way that honours them and glorifies God?
2. Where might self-giving service be most needed in our church?
3. How can we cultivate a culture of humble, joyful service?

Palm Sunday

Psalms 118:1–2, 19–29 | Matthew 21:1–11

Jesus enters as king, yet misunderstood by many; the kingdom is near, but participation requires discernment and faith.

Key Points:

- The story highlights **expectation, hope, and misunderstanding**.
- Our participation is **not passive**; we are invited into the narrative.

Questions:

1. How do you respond to Jesus' kingship in your life?
2. How can we cultivate expectation and hope in our community?
3. How do we participate in God's kingdom today?

Maundy Thursday: The Good News of the Final Meal

Exodus 12:1–4, 11–14 | 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Communion is central to the cross-shaped family; it embodies our union with Christ and one another.

Key Points:

- Participating in the meal recalls God's saving acts and our covenantal belonging.
- Communion invites **active remembrance and commitment**.

Questions:

1. How does remembering Christ's sacrifice shape your life?
2. How does communion foster shared identity and participation?
3. In what ways can we live out this covenantal participation daily?

Good Friday: The Good News of This Terrible Day

Psalms 22 | Luke 23:44–49

The cross reveals God's love and the cost of redemption; our participation is through witness and alignment with Christ's suffering.

Key Points:

- Cruciformity includes **bearing with suffering and injustice**.
- God's plan encompasses **redemption through pain**.

Questions:

1. How does Christ's suffering shape your understanding of God's love?
2. Where are you called to participate in God's redeeming work amid suffering?
3. How can our community support one another through trials?

Easter Sunday: The Good News of Jesus' Resurrection

Colossians 3:1–4 | Matthew 28:1–10

Resurrection shapes our identity, mission, and witness; like Mary Magdalene, we are called to proclaim the good news.

Key Points:

- Resurrection life is **participatory, communal, and missional**.
- Witness is integral to being God's restored people.

Questions:

1. How does the resurrection reshape your daily life and choices?
2. Who might you be called to witness to this Easter season?
3. How can our church community embody resurrection hope for the world around us?