



Prepared by
 Rev David Fender

assisted by resources from
Spill the Beans
<http://spillbeans.org.uk>

Gathering with God *If you wish, light a scented candle if you have one, and say:*

We light this candle, the warmth of the Presence of God in our midst. Today, many candles are lit, in various homes - but the light is the same: Jesus is the Light of World and we remember this light during these times of darkness.

Pray

Lord God, we bless you again for the rich tapestry of life, for our dependence on other people, for the way we can be enriched by people of every creed and colour, for the way we can grow and be moulded by your spirit through all the chances and changes of life. We bless you for the unfolding human spirit and for the life of your son who continues to inform and inspire our way.

As we reflect on this Tuesday of Holy Week, we recall Jesus' devotion to truth as we recall how he faithfully bore witness to the last. Forgive us we pray, for our lies and deceit, for the half-truths, for all that is done to deceive others for our own ends.

As we recall how he wrestled with those who had earthly power, forgive us for our abuse of our privileges for our sometimes cold and callous disregard of others and their feelings. Forgive us when we champion our rights but so readily forget our responsibilities.

As we recall your son's ministry which embraced the least, last and lost of society, forgive our exclusive spirit which for no good reason judges others by how they seem and not for who they are.

God forgive us, grant us a humility which realises its ignorance, admits its mistakes, recognises its need welcomes advice, accepts rebuke and bring us to see the best rather than the worst of others.

And as we recall his steadfastness grant us,

something of the wisdom which was in Jesus words,

something of the help which was in his hands,

something of the love which was in his heart,

that we might not grow weary or lose heart, but stay faithful to the last, even through pain or sorrow.

We pray for those who are in pain and sorrow as our world is ravaged by COVID19.

Grant healing to the sick, eternal life to the dead and consolation to the bereaved families.

We pray that an effective medicine to combat the sickness be speedily found.

We pray for the relevant governments and health authorities that they take appropriate steps for the good of the people.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection & Bible reading John 12:20-36

If you are able, watch the video reflection by David Fender at www.ssuc.org.au/devotionals, otherwise please read on for a the full text.

Our reading focusses on the difference between being religious and being spiritual.

Everyone was going up to the festival, remember this is the week of Passover. It's a religious event. The Jews were doing what was laid down for them in the law. It was what their parents and grandparents had done, all the way back to the days when the law was first given.

But for the Greeks they didn't want to go through a religious event, they wanted to see Jesus. They wanted a spiritual experience.

And it leads me to think how often I substitute religious activities for spiritual encounters with Jesus.

Let me explain, I grew up in a Christian home. I attended Sunday School and worship. I led Day Camps and children's camps. I was a member of church council in my late teens. In my early twenties I was part of a small group, taught Sunday School. My life was filled with doing all the right things.

But then something clicked for me. Doing these things was no longer enough. I felt God's love overwhelm me. I found myself longing to spend more time in his word. My times of prayer moved from a shopping list, to a time of dwelling with God.

This was a huge difference for me. It took me from knowing about God, to knowing God and it meant that I no longer lived for myself.

When we move beyond religious activities to a spiritual experience, we end up dying to ourselves. Jesus says "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also."

Somehow death and seeing Jesus are intimately related. To see Jesus is more than looking at him. It is more than just believing the things he said and did. We follow Christ as participants in his life and ministry.

As I died to myself, I found my life being changed, and it continues to change. My attachments to power, status, money and possessions were one of the first things to go. My willingness to give for the sake of others, to humble myself, to let go of my agenda, for the sake of God's, all this continues to change.

It's changing, because it's an ongoing process. I still catch myself having thoughts, attitudes, behaviours that show me and others, that dying to myself is an ongoing process. The rhythm and routine of the religious activities can become so easy to give us a sense of order and control in our lives. But then they are taken away, for instance our places of worship are shut or the things we see in our world that give us security are taken away. It's in times like this that a dying relationship with Jesus, gives me courage, hope and strength.

Pondering

During this time of social distancing, it causes me to think about my religious practices. When I no longer must go to church on Sunday, am I still drawn to Christ and find alternative ways to worship him? When I no longer must read my bible to prepare devotions and sermons, am I still drawn into his word. When I'm no longer praying with others, am I still praying for others? When I no longer must interact with others, am I finding ways to remain relationally connected? What about you?