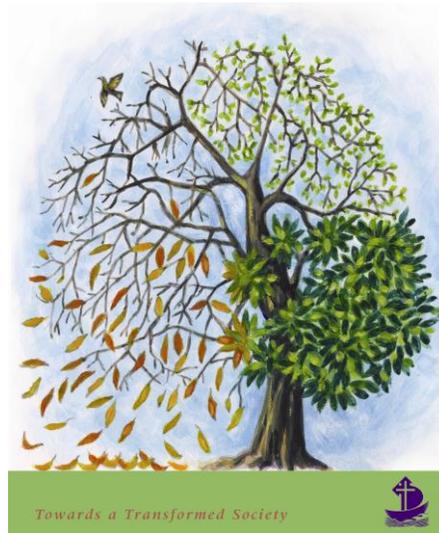


Social Justice Season

“Towards a Transformed Society”

August 2011



Diakonia offers to the Church a bi-annual Social Justice Season (SJS) Bible Study series. Our theme in 2011 is “Towards a Transformed Society”.

trans-for-ma-tion *n.*

- 1.a. The act or instance of transforming.
- 1.b. The state of being transformed.
2. A marked change as in appearance or character, usually for the better.

trans-form *v.*

trans-formed; trans-form-ing; trans-forms *v.tr*

1. To change markedly the appearance or form of.
2. To change the nature, function, or condition of; to convert.

So, transformation has to do with change, especially change towards something better. The theological term for this change is *to convert*.

The *transformation of society* has to do with both personal conversion and communal change. Hence, yes, I do personally need to engage with the study material, but it can only have its intended effect if we together also have a conversation.

So, my suggestion is that we take up the SJS themes in our Eucharistic Worship, in the month of August. In summary, the sub-themes are:

1. **Attitude – God and Self** (*A Theological Reflection on Attitudes*)
2. **Theological Reflections on Governance / Leadership** (*Holding People Accountable*)
3. **Sharing Resources** (*An Economic and Environmental Justice Issue*)
4. **Moving Forward with Hope** (*The Good News*)

What follows is my attempt at “melding” the SJS focus with the set lections. It is offered to you as a resource for use in congregational worship, alongside the small group study series.

Tracy Bell
29 June 2011

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| DAY | Nineteenth Sunday of the Year | 7 August |
| SJS SEASON THEME | TRANSFORMATION OF OUR ATTITUDE | Week 1 |
| THEME NOTES | <p>The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter; and indeed, the Spirit of God does comfort the disturbed, but equally, the Spirit disturbs the comfortable.</p> <p>A divinely transformed attitude to ourselves will mean fresh courage and confidence for those who think too negatively of themselves, and humility to those who think too much of themselves.</p> | |
| | <p>In the movie <i>Keeping the Faith</i> (2000), a Jewish Rabbi says to a younger colleague: "Our world is complicated, and we are all fearful. All that a [preacher] can do is to offer his life as a guide to other fearful people". So, take courage, and don't hide behind theology; try instead to share your story...</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Where has the Spirit of God needed to discomfort you?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Where have you known the restoring comfort of God's Spirit?</p> | |
| LITURGY OF THE WORD | <p><u>1Kings 19v9-18</u></p> <p>Elijah is in the Wilderness, and so depressed that he wants to die. But, twice, an angel / messenger brings him food and water. This strengthens him to travel 40 days and nights to Sinai.</p> <p>There, he tarries on the mount of God (v11), while God "crosses over"... A violent wind and earthquake tears at the mountain, but God is not found in it. Then, there is a great burning fire, but God is not found in it... Finally, there is a "still small voice" (v12), and God speaks.</p> | |
| | <p><u>Psalm 85v8-13</u></p> <p>The psalmist affirms that he will "listen intelligently" i.e. act in obedience to bring about the <i>shalom</i> (v8 – literally: safety / wellness / happiness / peace) that Jehovah will speak into being.</p> | |
| | <p><u>ROMANS 12v1-8</u> <i>Lectio changed</i></p> <p>Offer yourself as a living sacrifice (v1); Be transformed by the renewing of your understanding (v2). All that you have, and all that you are is God's grace / gift (v3). So, offer yourself in thankful service of others. Adjust your attitude, per <i>Rom 12:1-2a; 8b-14; 16-17; 21 [The Message; see below]</i>... And allow all that you are to be <i>transfigured</i> - or transformed from within – so that you, literally, "glow with God". <i>[6 August = Feast of Transfiguration; An option would be to use that set of lections, incl Lk 9v28-36.]</i></p> | |
| | <p><u>Matthew 14v22-33</u></p> <p>The feeding of the multitude has just occurred, and Jesus sends the disciples across the lake. (v22 – <i>peiro</i>; literally, to "pierce" or "go through"). We read that the wind and the waves came up; could it be that Jesus had intended his followers to "prove themselves" (cf Rom 12) by the way they "go through"? Jesus then went to a high place to pray (v23); I imagine he did this so that he could watch his followers' progress, as he prayed for them. And, when their fear abounded, he went to them – walking on water. They are afraid, but Peter steps out of the boat. And, as long as he fixes his eyes on Jesus, he walks on water. But then he shifts his focus to the wind and the waves, and starts to sink. And, as soon as he refocuses on Jesus – "save me!" – the elements fade once more.</p> <p>Jesus says: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Actually, a better translation would be: "Why did you waver? You lack confidence" (v31 - <i>oligiopistos</i>). – Now, usually we would interpret that to say Peter lacked faith in Jesus; but Jesus was still on the water... Peter was the one who sank. I think that it was himself that he doubted; not Jesus. And, in this, Peter is just like us. All too often, we have faith in God... but lack confidence in our ability to cope with the storms of life.</p> | |
| | <p style="text-align: center;">Spirit of energy and change, In whose power Jesus was anointed To be the hope of the nations: Be poured out also upon us Without reserve or distinction, That we may have confidence and strength To plant your justice on the earth, Through Jesus Christ; Amen.</p> | |
| <p>COLLECT</p> <p><i>Janet Morley No.60; pg29 All Desires Known 3rd Ed (2006)</i></p> | | |
| PARTICULAR INTENTIONS | <p><input type="checkbox"/> August = Month of Compassion – Who do we need to be "moved in the gut" (<i>splangizomai</i>) by and for? Who do we need to, literally, "suffer with" (<i>cum patior</i>)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Special day of Prayer: Pray for prisoners and those who minister to them [07/08]</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Laurence, Deacon & Martyr, 258 [10/08] – Pray for our permanent deacons, that they may be "lightening rods" for God's grace, and genuinely have compassion and serve all.</p> | |

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| OTHER | <i>Prayer of Approach – See: Additional resources, below</i> |
| | <p><u>Before the Prayer of Self Offering (APB 88, p129), read: Rom 12:1-2a; 8b-14; 16-17; 21 [Msg]...</u></p> <p>So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life--your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life--and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it... Keep a smile on your face. Love from the centre of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Don't burn out; keep yourselves fuelled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath... Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody. Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone... Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.</p> |
| BLESSING | <i>Franciscan Blessing – See: Additional Resources, below.</i> |

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| DAY | Twentieth Sunday of the Year | 14 August |
| SJS SEASON THEME | TRANSFORMATION OF OUR LEADERSHIP | Week 2 |
| THEME NOTES | <p>It is never easy to confront powerful authority with the truth; and yet that is precisely what we as faithful followers of the Jesus Way, are called to... to hold our leaders accountable to the truth.</p> <p>This raises a particular challenge for us; we cannot hold others – in the church, government or family - to standards that we ourselves do not live to. We need to practice what we preach; to walk the talk.</p> <p>Further, we need to remember that when people are put on a pedestal, it is easy to topple them. For this reason, when those in leadership slip and fall, we should not condemn them. Instead, we should hold them accountable, and help them to become their best version of themselves.</p> <p>Sometimes, confronting them head-on is not a good idea. Usually it is not polite to do so. It is also not the African way of doing things. So, we need to carefully discern how we are to go about it... Then, our confrontation can be indirect, careful, polite, BUT it should be clear about their wrong behaviour.</p> <p>Having said that, we need to approach such a “calling to book” with all humility... and to recognise that we may not have all the facts, and thus may be ourselves overstepping.</p> | |
| LITURGY OF THE WORD | <p><u>2 SAMUEL 12v1-13</u> <i>Lection changed</i></p> <p>It is never easy to confront powerful authority with the truth. Even if you are God's prophet it is wise to be a little careful. So, Nathan tells a touching story that has the hint of truth to it. And David reacts quickly to declare that he would use his power to right this wrong... which then gives the prophet an opening to say: “You are the man!” (v7).</p> <p>David recognized the truth of Nathan's challenge, and this led him to make a change and repent of his sin (v13)... And, because of that Jehovah “crosses over” his sin, and he does not die. However, he does have to live with the consequences of his actions... but that is a story for another day.</p> <p><u>Psalms 32</u> <i>Lection changed</i></p> <p>The psalmist affirms that he was secretly sinning, and because of that his interior life was desiccated; all the life-juice had been leached out. Then, he repented, and Jehovah taught him the way to go. Now, where once he was covered over with sin, he is covered over with God... who is his “hiding place” (v7), and the source of his life and joy.</p> <p><u>Romans 11v13-16, 29-32</u></p> <p>Israel fell, but this does not mean they will never be able to get up again. No, their failure is simply the opportunity for others to return to God (v11, 15). For, God does not take back the gifts he has given, or forget about those that he has chosen (v29). God is merciful / <i>compassionate</i> (v32) to all.</p> <p>And, we who are made in the image and likeness of God (cf Gen 2v27), are to have compassion for the struggles of others, and to gently help them to become the best version of themselves.</p> | |

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| | <p><u>Matthew 15v21-28</u></p> <p>In the gospel, we have the story of an unnamed Canaanite woman who approaches a Jewish Rabbi to ask for compassion and help (v22; v25). This poor woman is on the bottom of the totem pole, but she screws up her courage, and makes her case to a very powerful man. – She does this, quite frankly, because she is a desperate mother seeking relief for her daughter... and will stop at nothing to get it. First, she is ignored... so she shrieks and pleads so loud and so long that even the disciples go to Jesus, asking that he “relieve” (v23) her. To which he responds that he is only “sent” to the “lost sheep of Israel” (v24). At first glance, this may appear as a rebuff; but the Canaanite woman is shrewd, and capitalises on Jesus’ broken silence....</p> <p>It is the opening she needs to ask again for help / succour. And Jesus says that “it is not right to take the children’s food, and give it to dogs” (v26). To which she responds that “even the dogs get to eat the scraps that fall from the table”. – Notice the link with the Romans lection; the spiritual food that Jesus offers will not go to waste... it is there to be eaten by anyone who is hungry; even the “dog woman”.</p> <p>You see, the woman spoke the truth; she confronted the Jewish Rabbi, and – from that very moment – her daughter was made whole (v28). In fact, Jesus goes so far as to affirm her “great faith”. This is no small praise, when compared with Peter – that rock on which the church is to be built – and his “wavering” in last week’s gospel.</p> |
| <p>COLLECT</p> <p><i>Janet Morley No.29, pg14 All Desires Known 3rd ed (2006)</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Vulnerable God You challenge the powers that rule this world Through the needy, the compassionate, And those who are filled with longing. Make us hunger and thirst to see right prevail, And single-minded in seeking peace; That we may see your face And be satisfied in you, Through Jesus Christ; AMEN</p> |
| <p>PARTICULAR INTENTIONS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> August = Month of Compassion – Who do we need to be “moved in the gut” (<i>splangizomai</i>) by and for? Who do we need to, literally, “suffer with” (<i>cum patior</i>)? <input type="checkbox"/> Special day of Prayer: Sunday Schools / Children’s Ministry – Pray for our children and those who minister with them. <input type="checkbox"/> Bernard of Clairvaux, Religious, 1153 [20/08] – Pray for our religious communities; that they would be faithful to their call to “make community” and to serve. |
| <p>OTHER</p> <p><i>Janet Morley Pg59 All Desires Known 3rd ed (2006)</i></p> | <p><u>Confession and Mutual Absolution</u></p> <p>O God, you have searched us out and known us, And all that we are is open to you. We confess that we have sinned: We have used our power to dominate And our weakness to manipulate; We have evaded responsibility And failed to confront evil; We have denied dignity To ourselves and each other, And fallen into despair.</p> <p>We turn to you, O God; We renounce evil; We claim your love; We choose to be made whole.</p> <p><i>In turn, each person turns to their neighbour, and takes their hands, and says: “Your sins are forgiven; be at peace”</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Prayer of Approach – See: Additional resources, below</i></p> |
| <p>BLESSING</p> | <p><i>Franciscan Blessing – See: Additional Resources, below.</i></p> |

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| DAY | Twenty-First Sunday of the Year | 21 August |
| SJS SEASON THEME | TRANSFORMATION OF OUR SHARING OF RESOURCES | Week 3 |
| THEME NOTES | <p>Gleaning is not something we are familiar with in our culture. Especially when machines reap harvests so efficiently. Still, it is not unusual for a commercial farmer to allow subsistence farmers to gather cobs after the combine has been through.</p> <p>Boaz's actions with Ruth were unusual though; he asked the reapers to deliberately drop some wheat stalks for her. This was a generosity that "went beyond". And, in the African concept of <i>ubuntu</i>, we find a similar bent towards being generous in sharing our resources.</p> <p>Nonetheless, an interesting statistic is that, it seems, on percentage of their goods, poorer people are often more generous than wealthy people. Perhaps this is at least partially because, when we have stuff, it is easy to find our security in that stuff. Well, rich or poor, we all need to learn to trust God, rather than our material goods... and to be generous in our sharing of what we do have.</p> <p>A few years ago, a SJS focused on <i>The Oikos Journey</i>; it invited us to reflect on 'the Household of God', with the basic premise being that there is enough for everyone's need but not their greed. Perhaps it is time to revisit this challenge?</p> <p>Another area of challenge lies with the many refugees in South Africa today. Their situation is similar to that of Ruth; as a foreigner, she too had no right to work in that country. And yet, through his generosity in the sharing of his resources, Boaz both helped her, and provided an example for us to emulate.</p> | |
| LITURGY OF THE WORD | <p><u>RUTH 2v1-23</u> <i>Lection changed</i></p> <p>In Ruth 1v16, we read of Ruth's choice – which baulked at tradition – to make her home with her mother-in-law, after her husband died, rather than returning to her father's house... <i>Where you go I will go; where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.</i></p> <p>Naomi and Ruth were family, in the truest sense. So, although she was a foreigner in a strange land, Ruth did what any daughter would do for her mother... she went to glean from the corners of the fields which had been left for the poor traveller.</p> <p>Boaz, who is a wealthy and powerful man, offers Ruth his protection, and invites her to tarry in his fields with his household. And, when necessary, to eat and drink with them... He then further instructed his workers to deliberately drop stalks so that she could easily glean and provide for Naomi.</p> <p>Here, long before the time of Jesus, we see one of the principles that he taught in action... Family is not those linked to us by blood; it is those we share ourselves and our resources with.</p> <p><u>Psalms 128</u> <i>Lection changed</i></p> <p>Blessed are those who walk in the ways of Jehovah; they shall eat from the labour of their hands, and be productive.</p> <p>This psalm has echoes of the Beatitudes i.e. "Blessed are..." (cf Matt 5v1-12). Here, the Greek word <i>makarios</i> means "divinely blessed" or "joyful" (not "happy"). And the point is that the followers of Jesus, then and now, are to know an inner joy that does not depend on haphazard situations / feelings. But, did you know that the story as Jesus told it on that mountainside would actually have had a different emphasis? Jesus spoke Aramaic, and the culture he belonged to was an "oral tradition". So, he wouldn't have said "blessed are..." Instead, he may have used the verb <i>yashar</i>, which in antiquity wasn't about a condition (joy); it was a call to action... "Get up. Go ahead. Do something. Move!"</p> <p><u>Romans 11v33-36</u></p> <p>Everything in the world around us is of God, and came to be through God... and will return to God. For, God is the ultimate householder; the earth is God's <i>oikos</i> – actually, "sanctuary".</p> <p>The resources under our care are valuable... and belong to God, not us. And so, like Boaz (cf Ruth 2), we who manage the household of God should include the "other"... and share what we have.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> All hands together To change the world. All hands together To till the land. All hands together To pull up the weeds. All hands together To share our joy. </p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Vamos Caminando, Peru 1985</i></p> | |

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| | <p><u>Matthew 16v13-20</u></p> <p>There is an interesting progression in this Jesus story... Who do “they” say I am? It is a question to get the conversation going, a teaser if you will. - We all know that, in closed communities such as the church, people love to recount what “they” are saying. Perhaps because this is easier than owning our own feelings and opinions. Well, whatever the reason, Jesus plays into the preference, and various suggestions are voiced. But then, having got the conversation started, Jesus changes it up. “Yes”, he says, “but who do YOU say I am?” It is almost as if he is saying that, while he is interested in “those folks out there”, he is really concerned with his followers – those that know him “up close and personal” – and their response. It is interesting that only Simon Peter voices a response... which meets with approval. There is however a third element to this progression; in the portion just after today’s lection, we see Jesus start to say: I say “I am...” It is almost as if, having listened to what “they” say, and what “we” say, he then goes on to tell his own story. – It is a good principle; much as we need to listen in community to what others think, there comes a point when I need to tell my story... and, more importantly, I need to live out my story; to get up, go ahead, do something, move! The implication is that I can’t wait for someone, somewhere to “do it”; I need to start with the sharing of God’s resources placed in my care... and let it ripple out. Perhaps this is why we are told that what ever we bind or loose on earth has an effect in the heavens (v19).</p> |
| <p>COLLECT</p> <p><i>Janet Morley No.32; pg16 All Desires Known 3rd Ed (2006)</i></p> | <p>God of the poor, We long to meet you Yet always miss you; We strive to help you, Yet only discover our need. Interrupt our comfort With your nakedness, Touch our possessiveness With your poverty, And surprise our guilt With the grace of your welcome In Jesus Christ; Amen.</p> |
| <p>PARTICULAR INTENTIONS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> August = Month of Compassion – Who do we need to be “moved in the gut” (<i>splangizomai</i>) by and for? Who do we need to, literally, “suffer with” (<i>cum patior</i>)? <input type="checkbox"/> Special day of Prayer: Theological Education Sunday [21/08] – Pray for many to be raised up to an ordained ministry, and for those whose ministry it is to “form” them. <input type="checkbox"/> Pray for refugees everywhere, and particularly for the Abahlali baseMjondolo (Shack Dwellers) Movement... and for the ongoing court case surrounding the Kennedy 12. |
| <p>OTHER</p> | <p><i>Consider offering a Contemplative reading of the Gospel, per the suggestion below.</i></p> <p><i>Prayer of Approach – See: Additional resources, below</i></p> |
| <p>BLESSING</p> | <p><i>Franciscan Blessing – See: Additional Resources, below.</i></p> |

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| DAY | Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year | 28 August |
| SJS SEASON THEME | TRANSFORMATION OF OUR PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE | Week 4 |
| THEME NOTES | <p>In his book, “The Power of Hope”, Viktor Frankl, whilst reflecting on his observations in Hitler’s labour camps, writes, “He [<i>she</i>] who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.” In the bible, hope is both a focus and an attitude. And, hope stands at the centre of a response to the Christian gospel - along with faith and love.</p> <p>In the movie <i>Keeping the Faith (2000)</i>, a Jewish Rabbi says to a younger colleague: “Our world is complicated, and we are all fearful. All that a [preacher] can do is to offer his life as a guide to other fearful people”. So, take courage, and don’t hide behind theology; try instead to share your story...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How have you been able to move from despair to hope? <input type="checkbox"/> Tell stories of times when you have seen the power of hope at work transforming a seemingly desolate situation and motivating people to move forward. | |

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| <p>LITURGY OF THE WORD</p> | <p><u>Genesis 50v15-21</u> Joseph's father dies, and this sends his brothers into a tailspin of fear; because he is no longer there to protect them from their brother, who they have profoundly wronged. They ask for forgiveness (v17), and humble themselves (v18) before Joseph; these are – of course – good things to do, but the problem is that they are fear-induced... The brothers are not doing this because they have been convicted, but because they are afraid. And, how often have we as the Church done just this; tried to scare folk into the kingdom, rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to work? Just a thought. Joseph responds: "Fear not, for I am in the place of God" (v19). Literally, he has submitted himself to God's ways, and therefore he will not repay sin with sin. Instead, he is kind and cares for those who have wronged him (v20). Literally, Joseph's mind has been transformed by God's Spirit.</p> <p><u>Psalms 103v1-13</u> Jehovah has not dealt with us according to our sins (v10); but more than that, Jehovah has actually removed our sin from us... <i>For as high as the heavens are above the earth, and as far as the east is from the west, so far has Jehovah removed our sins from us!</i> We have been renewed by Jehovah's kindness and succour; it is as if the damage that our immature self has wrought is "rebuilt", and therefore transformed so that it can bring life.</p> <p><u>COLOSSIANS 1v3-12</u> <i>Lection changed</i> Paul and Timothy write to the faith community at Colossi; they are thankful (v3 – <i>eucharisteo</i>) for the faith and agape love shown in the community (v4). The implication seems to be that these saints are living out their hope very practically... caring for one another. It seems that this group, like the Acts church (cf Acts 2), is "fertile" in good works, and "growing" in both their understanding of the things of God, and their practice of the fruit of the Spirit (v11 cf Gal 5v22). The reason for this can best be summed up in the word "hope" (<i>elpis</i> – v5). This speaks both of their active expectation that the best is yet to come, and of their confidence in this particular moment. The sense is that the Colossi community is "being the change" that they seek. They are not waiting for another to come and do it for them; they are hope-filled transformers in their place and time.</p> <p><u>Matthew 16v21-28</u> Jesus, having asked both "Who do they say I am?" and "Who do you say I am?", now shifts to tell his followers who he is; "I say I am"... And, it is all too much for Peter, who rebukes Jesus, and asks him not to say the things that he is saying about his coming torture and death. And, Jesus responds by saying that Peter should not tempt him, for there is a difference between the hope-filled perspective of a transformed mind, and that of one who still lives according to the flesh (v23). The implication seems to be that, while Peter is learning and growing, his mind is still in the process of being transformed (cf Rom 12v2). And, aren't we like that? - Let our daily prayer be: "Lord, renew my mind, give me your perspective on whatever comes my way today, and help me to be your agent of transformation in it. Amen."</p> |
| <p>COLLECT</p> <p><i>Janet Morley. No.51; pg25 All Desires Known. 3rd Ed (2006)</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Mighty God, Most holy and most humble, You have chosen to hear our cry And share our poverty. Come close to our world, Kindle our hearts And melt our despair, That with all your creatures We may live in hope; Through Jesus Christ; Amen.</p> |
| <p>PARTICULAR INTENTIONS</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> August = Month of Compassion – Who do we need to be "moved in the gut" (<i>splangizomai</i>) by and for? Who do we need to, literally, "suffer with" (<i>cum patior</i>)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Special day of Prayer: People with Disabilities – Pray for the "differently abled", and that the able bodied church would be hospitable to them.</p> |
| <p>OTHER</p> | <p><i>Prayer of Approach – See: Additional resources, below</i></p> |
| <p>BLESSING</p> | <p><i>Franciscan Blessing – See: Additional Resources, below.</i></p> |

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A prayer of Approach

Janet Morley

We're here because we are hungry
For all that God offers:
For acceptance, for challenge,
For a place and a people
Who want to be with us,
Who want to feast with us
Whoever we are, and whatever we bring.
Give us today our daily bread:
Give us today the bread of tomorrow.

We're here because we are hungry
For all that God offers:
For a taste of the truth –
That all is not hopeless,
That we are not helpless,
That the powers of this world
The rules of the market
Will yield to God's rule.
Give us today our daily bread:
Give us today the bread of tomorrow.

A Franciscan Blessing

Source Unknown

May God bless you with discomfort
at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your heart.
May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for His justice, His freedom, and His peace.
May God bless you with tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.
And may God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference in this world,
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.
And the Blessing of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit
be upon you; those you love and those for whom you pray--
this day, and for evermore; Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mat 16:13 When Jesus and his disciples were near the town of Caesarea Philippi, he asked them, "What do people say about the Son of Man?"

Mat 16:14 The disciples answered, "Some people say you are John the Baptist or maybe Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet."

Mat 16:15 Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Mat 16:16 Simon Peter spoke up, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Mat 16:21 From then on, Jesus began telling his disciples what would happen to him. He said, "I must go to Jerusalem. There the nation's leaders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law of Moses will make me suffer terribly. I will be killed, but three days later I will rise to life."

A CONTEMPLATIVE READING

1. Read through passage (v13-16) 2 times.
2. Make the point that, having asked what folk "out there" were saying about him, Jesus then shifted the focus onto those he was speaking to.
It's almost as if Jesus isn't terribly interested in what books and church leaders and other people are saying; he wants to know what YOU think about him... Who do YOU say he is?
3. Silent reflection.
4. Read the passage (v13-16 + v21) a 3rd time.
5. There's a very interesting movement, from "Who do they say I am?" to "Who do you say I am?" to "I say I am..."
Like Jesus, we are concerned about what people "out there" say about us... but, we are far more interested in what those we care about think of us... and, in the end, it doesn't really matter what anyone else thinks or says – each of us needs to decide for ourselves who it is that we are.
Who do you say you are?
6. Silent reflection.
7. Who do you say you are?... Who do you say Jesus is?... Who do you say you are, in Jesus?...
8. Silent reflection.
9. Read the passage (v13-16 + v21) a final time.