

## Diocese of Middlesbrough Adult Formation | Journey to Easter Episode 1

### Introduction

Announcer, welcome to journey to Easter, the podcast where three friends come together to share our Lenten journey, struggles and triumphs. The aim is to encourage each other and you to make the most of this sacred season. So whether you're walking your first lent or your 50th grab a cup of tea. Take a quiet moment and join us as we journey to Easter.

### Nicola

Hello and welcome to the second episode of Journey to Easter. I'm so glad you could join us again and I hope that your Lent is going well. Once again, I'm joined by my friends, Father Phil and Emma. And guys, how's your Lent going? Emma?

### Emma

Yeah, so far, so good. Yeah, I just think, you know, kind of, we've started, we're on the way. I definitely think, you know, it hits this point in Lent, and I'm like, oh, like, we've still got like, several weeks to go. We're still not halfway. And I really noticed this week, you know, how Lent isn't just this kind of ideal, like, I'm living this alongside my daily life, like, I've got all of my night shifts, I've got a bit of a cold going on, I've got all of the kind of things to juggle alongside it, so I'm just kind of at that stage where, like, we're on the way, but, you know, the kind of, you know, the blisters have started on the camino that is Lent this year. So, yeah, how about you, Father Phil?

### Fr Phil

I love that image, because, you know, I said last time I'm doing a bit of an exam on each day. And I bought a notebook from doing the Camino in the summer. So my notebook is my Camino notebook. So that fits well with our Lenten journey. And I've enjoyed that. You know, it's bringing things up for me, perhaps to trust more in the Lord, perhaps, you know, with the future and that sort of thing. It's helping me to recognize areas of joy and light. You know, some of it's been in my sort of teaching role in the parish, you know, helping with catechesis. and that sort of thing. So that's been really great. And then I keep going back to the beginning of it or the origin of it all the time. we heard last week and reflecting on how Jesus is being tempted, using scripture to affirm the good things that he's looking for to reject the things of the devil, the temptations of the devil. And just the other day, I noticed that again and again come up almost quite quickly together. And it made me think, yes, Lent can be a bit again and again. We fall again and again,

but we try again and again, and we go on again and again, and here we are again and again.

Nicola

Hmm. I hear you. My Lent started with half term, so it felt completely crazy because we're out of our normal routine and I was working, but my husband and kids were all off and they were, you know, they've been up to Edinburgh and it just, it felt, everything felt a little bit out of the usual routine of things, which felt like a difficult time to start Lent because you're shifting certain habits and practices anyway. So I felt like it was a bit of a chaotic start and I'm really glad now we're back in the routine of school because I find everything, just the rhythm of life helps me to kind of notice those areas that I'm trying to make a bit different during Lent. So yeah, well we're off, we're definitely off and you're right Emma, there is a long way to go. Shall we hear our Gospel passage that's going to really root our conversation today?

Emma

Matthew 17 verses 1 to 9.

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother. and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, Rise, and have no fear. And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.

What's coming up for you guys as you listen to that Gospel reading?

Nicola

For me, it links a little bit back to what you were saying last week, Emma, about this affirmation of identity and how this is another moment in the Gospel where we hear that voice from heaven declaring that Jesus is the Beloved Son, and just how we probably need to hear this more than once for ourselves, definitely. In fact, over and over again. We have an opportunity to hear that the Lord say that to us each day that we His beloved sons, we are His beloved daughters. And just how, for me, it's probably like a lifelong lesson that this Lent the Lord is definitely inviting me to kind of ponder a bit

more and in my prayer time just spend time kind of hearing a little bit more from him about what he thinks about me as his daughter.

Fr Phil

As I listened to this I was struck by the final two words, Jesus only. And as all of these things were going on, you know, there's loads of imagery in the Transfiguration Gospel. And yet it ends with they saw Jesus only. And maybe that's a beautiful thing of our encounters in life, that they help us to see Jesus more clearly. And maybe it's a great motto for life as well. Jesus only. Jesus only. That will be my life. Jesus only. It sounds like a saint sort of thing to say, doesn't it? It really does.

Emma

Yeah, so loads coming up for me. I think this is one of those Gospels that you do hear again and again, just through life and through your faith journey. This Gospel actually always reminds me of the first time I went to Lourdes. So when I was there in sixth form, I was in sixth form in Hexham, Newcastle, the other diocese. And our head of sixth form at the time said, When we have those moments like we have when we go to Lourdes or we go on pilgrimage or on retreat or something, we have these kind of mountaintop moments where we see things as they really are, where we see Jesus as he really is. and we see the church as it really is. And that, you know, we have that encounter as we've been speaking about. But we then, you know, he then included the kind of the second part of this gospel where they go back down the mountain and they're told to tell no one, and they're kind of back to their daily life. And so he gave it to us at the end of the week. to say, yes, you've had this mountaintop moment, but now you've had it for a reason or to sustain you as you now go back down into your daily life. I think, correct me if I'm wrong guys, this comes at the point in Matthew where they start the journey towards Jerusalem, or at least start that. The Gospel takes a bit of a turn to like looking towards the passion and the crucifixion. So I think that's a super, yeah, this gospel always reminds me of those moments that we've had that real encounter and that real clarity. But also that thing of kind of going back down the mountain and, you know, the Christian life isn't always just these mountaintop moments. you know, Peter, James and John, like, let's build some tents, let's, like, stay here. But actually, these moments, they form these kind of peaks, but we're not kind of meant to just stay there. I think that's what I kind of take from this gospel today.

Fr Phil

I think the encounters of life are always good to go back to, aren't they? Sometimes I think of them like are pictures on the wall you know you think of the the pictures you

have on the wall why did you choose to put those particular ones in place well it does take you back to those moments and we can recapture some of that grace some of what we experienced at that moment, and it can carry us through again the day -to -day life that we're in. So let's, you know, kind of, let's frame that grace that was received and let it inspire us then for our day -to -day life as we go.

Nicola

Yeah, I would definitely agree with you both there in terms of those encounters. can really sustain us and we need them essentially, you know, we're all invited to encounter Jesus. That's what, as a disciple, you can't follow someone if you don't know who they are or where they're going or what they do, you know, you just, you just be, I don't know, turning in circles. So as we journey through life, the Lord invites us into these encounters so that we can know him and get to know him more and more, you know, the more we encounter him, For example, in prayer, the easier it is to listen to his voice, you kind of start to recognize, you know, I always think, I spend a lot of time at like soft play and parties and things. And you're like, you know, you might not have this experience guys, but you'll hear a kid crying. I think, oh, that's not my kid, phew. Or sometimes I'm like, oh no, that is my child. That's definitely because I'm tuned into their particular way of saying mummy. And I always think, actually, I want to be as in tune to the voice of God as I am to my own children's voice. So I want to hear it as often, you know, the Lord inviting me to be with Him, to spend time with Him and to encounter Him. And Lent's really great for me because it's just an opportunity to be more intentional about seeking out the voice of the Lord in my day to day.

Emma

Yeah, for sure. Have you guys had any of these kind of encounter moments recently that have kind of given you that refreshment or that inspiration?

Nicola

I actually started Lent with a beautiful encounter because I went down to London to meet with people who do my job but in other dioceses around England and Wales and we had a talk that morning from Bishop Egan from Portsmouth, who's the Bishop for Evangelization, and he was talking to us about, you know, how important evangelizing is, sharing our faith with others, and how important it is to have an encounter with Christ. And I, as he was speaking, I felt so encouraged and kind of galvanized to kind of get on with that work of sharing Christ with others. And it was a great way to start Lent, especially, you know, I'm relatively new to my job, still figuring it all out, you know, but being encouraged that we're actually on the right track because we're trying to share Christ with people day to day. was a beautiful encounter with the church as well because, you know, meeting all the people from, you know, the different diocese as

well, sometimes you feel like you're on your own but you're not, but there's this great body of people from across the country all trying to do the same thing, so it was a really great encounter for me at the beginning of Lent.

Emma

I've also had a really beautiful encounter moment right at the beginning of Lent. So the first weekend of Lent, Fr. Phil and I were at a baptism of these very sweet four -month - old baby boys who were twins. I love baptisms, I think they're really cute. We were godparents as well, so that was a real gift to have that kind of spiritual parenthood given to us by the church. But I remember during the homily, the priest who was sort of leading the baptism was preaching about how this was the most important day of these baby boys' lives. And then I looked over the baby boy that was sat next to me and he sat there like a four month old baby, he's just like sucking his dad's thumb. And I just had this really beautiful image of how God sees us, that we're saying this is the most important day of their lives. This is more important than the day they graduate uni, they get married, whether they pursue a religious or a kind of priestly vocation, this is the most important day. And we're giving it to them when they're four months old and like not even cut their teeth yet, just kind of totally unaware of what's going on. And I just had this real sense of, you know, how we really like work hard to prepare ourselves to kind of make ourselves ready, but God will just bestow these gifts on us as and when is the right time.

Fr Phil

I really enjoyed that baptism too, Emma. And it was great to think of ourselves making the sign of the cross on our forehead with ashes recently and to say, like this body of ours, remember you are dust and unto dust you shall return. And then to be reminded that through baptism, our body has been marked in a beautiful way in preparation for the life of holiness, but especially for the life of heaven too. So it was a, it was It was a great sort of contrast. It was like this flip side of the coin to the action that we'd done at the beginning of Lent. It's a remind us of the journey of holiness that our baptism brings. And speaking of baptism, I was thinking too of those we've been preparing in parishes for the grace of baptism or to be received into the church, we sometimes say into full communion with the church, for people particularly, perhaps who have already been baptised, perhaps in another Christian tradition. Because we went to the rite of election at the cathedral. And so What happens there is that all the parishes around the diocese, they're invited to bring those preparing for this great sacrament to the cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent. And the bishop welcomes them and he puts the names of those to be baptized in the book of the elect. And he says, you've been chosen by the Lord. You

know, you've come here at this moment. And certainly for my group, as we came up, they sold this wonderful building, our cathedral in Middlesbrough is a vast space, when you get a real sense that we can hold the diocese here in this place. And then they were confronted by the bishop, who shook their hand, who welcomed them, who gave them a cross, and they saw all these other parishes as well. And I thought, gosh, this is a true moment of encounter on their journey. And it's not just an encounter with Christ and his invitation, his choosing of them, but an encounter with the church, the body of Christ, you use that phrase, Nicola, encounter with the church. And I thought, that's a beautiful thing. This is the place where we come to meet the Lord. We come to receive his grace. And there's so much of that happening for us in this time of Lent.

Nicola

And I also just think that our baptism is something that we can unpack for the rest of our lives, We are, in my parish, we're doing the We Dare to Ask kind of reflections each week and it's something that has come from the Bishops of England and Wales and it's unpacking baptism and I think what baptism gives us, how it changes us and transforms us is something that we can revisit kind of over and over again. This is a little bit drifting away from Lent, I suppose, but we celebrate our baptism anniversaries in my family. And I feel like I talk about this a lot, but I love it because we are remembering each year that it's a really important day, just like the day you were born. You celebrate your birthday and you have a party and it's exciting. So should our baptism anniversary because we're born again in Christ and we are welcomed into his family, set on that eternal, that road to heaven and it's something worth celebrating. So I'd really encourage you if you haven't, if you don't know this already, find out when you were baptised, celebrate the day. It can be something small but it's just worth noting and just being grateful for because baptism is such a beautiful gift. that we can just discover more and more of how we're called to live. And we've got a baptismal inheritance that we can inheritance that we can discover.

Fr Phil

I like that Lent ends with our renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter. So, you know, what is our Lenten journey about? Well, perhaps it's a sense of renewing the grace of baptism in us, you know, that we've been called beloved sons and daughters of the Lord, that we're made for the life of grace, we're made for the heavenly inheritance that the Lord wants for us. So in all this, you know, prayer, fasting and alms giving, you know, that have the idea of holding that candle, perhaps at the Easter vigil or on Easter Sunday, and being ready to respond again in our acts of faith. Because in our liturgies on a Sunday, in our gospels, we're going to get quite long gospels coming up. We're going to get The Woman of Samaria who comes to draw water and the Lord says, give me something to drink. We're going to get the man born blind, and the Lord gives him his

sight and then says, do you believe in the son of man? And he says, who is he that I may believe in him? And then we get Martha and Mary and the raising of Lazarus. And the Lord says to them, I am the resurrection of the life. Do you believe this? So the Lord is trying to draw out our faith from us, invite us to faith. And that's for us in our celebration in church, we might call it our liturgical celebration, is going to be that moment at Easter Sunday when we hold that candle and we renew our baptism or promises, our act of faith in the Lord who loves us and has called us.

Nicola

Wonderful. And there are ways we can remember these things in our day-to-day lives as well. Even if you're struggling to pray this Lent, just sit down and just think, you know, thank you, Lord, for the gift of my baptism. Thank you that you've called me, that I'm chosen. that you've got a plan for my life. Maybe, I don't know if you've got a little holy water stoop in your house. We have one, it's forever running dry. It doesn't seem to last very long, topping it up all the time. But just as you leave the house, just, you know, blessing yourself with holy water as a reminder of your baptism, the same way we do when we go into church. And just trying to, I suppose, get these mountaintop experiences, like baptism is a wonderful celebration day, but bringing them into the reality of our day-to-day living is a way that we can allow those experiences to help us encounter the Lord in the everyday.

Emma

Right. The other thing that I've found helpful over the past few years is actually, you know, 'cause a lot of us maybe that were brought up either as Catholics or, you know, in another Christian denomination that were baptized as babies, is actually just looking through and praying through the rite of baptism itself. You know, when we make, when we renew those baptismal promises on every Easter vigil, actually praying with, well, what am I promising here and what are the symbols that I've had had given to me and through my baptism. And what do all of these things mean? I actually keep a copy of the rite of baptism in the kind of in a folder alongside the rite of consecration of virgins that I'm going to hopefully receive in September. And it's beautiful, the parallels actually, like the candle features again, the white garment features again. So yeah, just praying with those different symbols that we receive as well.

Fr Phil

So Emma, have you been reflecting on how your vocation is going to build on that baptism? Is that the purpose of putting those two together?

Emma

Yeah, exactly. It was something now retired Bishop Terry said to me in my very first meeting with him was about how consecrated life sort of, you know, is in a way of fulfilment of our baptism. And I think for each of us, it's that reality that our vocations and that discernment, it's a fulfilment of our baptism. So the consecration of virgins isn't a sacrament in itself, but it's this recognition of the reality that is the church. Yeah, how we're kind of all called to this bridehood and this kind of full communion with the church through our baptism. So it's been a real beautiful reflection. And I think, you know, even at this baptism, the priest had me put the white garments on the babies and we had some lovely baptism shows. And there's something, you know, about the white and the kind of the bridehood that goes with that, even though they're little baby boys. Yeah, it's a real, real beautiful set of symbols. And, as we've said, kind of the most important thing that the church offers us and the most important day of our lives.

Fr Phil

That's nice to reflect on, you know, wherever we feel like the Lord has brought us to our, what our vocation is, you know, to sort of begin again from that centre point of baptism, say, you know, here I am, Lord. At this point in my life, you've brought me through, these things and you brought me to this place at this time. And through the grace of my baptism, you know, may that inspire, strengthen and encourage the work that you've called me to today.

Emma

Right. And it's, I think there's something as well about that unity with Christ in his baptism, just going back again to this passage of this is my beloved son, this is my beloved daughter, and that being spoken over us. And there's a real awareness that I have of, the universal core to holiness, the fact that through our baptism, each and every one of us is called to that fullness of that sonship or that daughterhood. with alongside Jesus, like with united with Jesus in that through our baptism. So even if we're at that place where we don't feel that we've kind of discerned our vocation yet, or I definitely went through a phase of thinking I didn't have one. I was just like, I'm just going to float around in the church for ages. But just realizing that we're all good to prepare ourselves for that kind of that universal holiness.

Fr Phil

And that's a beautiful thing about the, so I've been reflecting, as I said, on Jesus going into the desert again. And of course, all of those questions, if you are the son of God, in a sense, it's kind of, if you are a child of God, that I can sort of ask myself that question. And one of the things that's been coming up in my examine is it's perhaps overthinking the future a bit, or, just, perhaps worry about the future. It's a really, I mean, everyday, sort of experience, isn't it? You know, we want to control so many things. And maybe

just coming back to, you know, the Lord's called me to this point, not to discourage me, but because there's something good for me, you know, there's something about his love being present in this moment. And perhaps there will be difficult times, but, you know, I can move through them, I can address them, I can... open myself to them, knowing that I'm loved by the Lord, that the love of God is the foundation of my life.

Nicola

Absolutely. And it's the foundation of the gospel as well. You know, when we think about the kerygma, the gospel message, you know, the first bit is that we are created by God because He loves us, to be in a loving relationship with Him. And how beautiful to have this season of Lent to draw us back into that love. That loving encounter and just, I mean, right now, guys, hearing the conversation, the desert is not seeming like a desolate place at all this Lent so far, to be able to reflect on all the great things that we've been given through our baptism, through our identity found in Christ, it's actually a real joy. And once again, I'm just like kind of reminded of how good the church is to us, given us this season to pause, to remember and to move forward in the knowledge of who we are as people created, chosen and loved by our Heavenly Father. What a gift it is to know that. Amen.

Emma

Right, definitely feels like, the desert, it's that stripping back to what's important, rather, Lent isn't this period of, oh, I'm going to beat myself up, or like we said last week, I'm not going to prove myself to God, but it's like, okay, I'm going to put down the things that I'm carrying, that God is saying these things are weighing you down.

Nicola

Absolutely. And maybe that is where we kind of draw our conversation to an end today. And let's just pray. Let's just pray now that we come to know how loved we are by God this Lent.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.

Heavenly Father, I thank you that you speak over us your words of truth, that we are beloved by you. I pray that you would help us to understand more and more the identity we have as your children, that you would illuminate our minds so that we understand how it is that you want us to live. Whether that be in the big decisions, such as our vocation, or just in each small moment of every day. Thank you, Father, that you are drawing us into the desert this Lent. so that we can discover more of your love for us. Amen.

Emma & Fr Phil

Amen. Amen.

Nicola (Outro)

Thank you for joining us. We hope today's conversation has inspired you to take another step in your own Lenten journey. We'd love to hear from you! Share your thoughts, or reflections with us on social media or contact us via email [adultformation@rcdmidd.org.uk](mailto:adultformation@rcdmidd.org.uk) and let's keep each other in prayer as we Journey to Easter.