

Diocese of Middlesbrough Adult Formation | Journey to Easter Episode 5

00:00:06 Nicola

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.

Hello and welcome to episode 5 of Journey to Easter.

My name's Nicholas Sweetman and I'm Adult Formation Coordinator for the Diocese of Middlesbrough. And again, I'm joined by my friends, Father Phil and Emma.

Guys, how's Lent going five weeks in? Father Phil, how's your Lent going?

00:00:56 Fr Phil

It's going nicely, thanks.

Yeah, so keeping up with some of my practices, which is good. There's been moments of having to start again, but that's been very fine. And then, as I've mentioned in previous podcasts, some inspirations that the Lord has given, some of them are starting to bear a bit of fruit recently, which is great. So, bringing those with us and just welcoming all the other things that are happening for us.

But great to see you both. Great to see you, Emma. How was your Lent?

00:01:32 Emma

Ben's going lovely so far. I have been on retreat for the past week, so I've had a very blessed and Holy Week and feel. I think maybe this sense of progress is probably because I've not had to speak to anyone for the past week. It's just been me and the Lord.

But yeah, God's done some really beautiful things just in my interior life, in my heart, a lot in terms of preparation for consecration, lots of resting as well, which has been very much needed.

Nicola, how about you?

00:02:09 Nicola

Yeah, I would say I feel like I'm really just getting into Lent now, even though it's week five. I feel it takes me a bit of time to kind of adjust to the new rhythm of life and kind of really kind of get used to, I suppose, the different focus of the day-to-day. And also I've realised that sometimes by making space for God through my various Lenten practices, it's actually giving him an opportunity to speak to me and telling me of other things.

So, I've like taken up fasting other things because I've noticed that they take up a lot of my time that kind of distract me from God. I feel like it's never too late to add something extra if you feel like that's what the Lord's asking you to do because that's definitely my experience.

00:02:58 Fr Phil

Nicola, that's brilliant. You're just getting into Lent. I feel I have to stop myself from checking out because as soon as we hit St Patrick's Day, and then we have the celebration of St Joseph's, and then this week we've got the Annunciation. I start thinking, oh, it's all coming white again.

And these little hints of stepping out of the purple of Lent, just, they push me into wanting to celebrate the resurrection soon and just to forget about all that Lent was behind. So I'm trying to stay there and trying to keep myself in that space.

00:03:32 Nicola

We're all at different stages on the journey. Some of us are really deep into Lent. Others of us are just trying our best to keep going and even just getting started.

But that's the beauty of the Christian life, you know. One of my favourite scriptures is from Lamentations about His mercy is new every morning.

And it's a real reassurance to me that whatever's gone before, today's a new opportunity to start again. So if you're listening and your Lent isn't going so well and you, know, don't worry, there's still time left to make an offering to God of yourself, of your time, of your prayer, fasting, almsgiving.

There's always a chance to start again.

So shall we, as we have every week, let's hear from Sunday's gospel and then we'll use that to anchor our conversation.

00:04:28 Emma

So we've got a reading from the Gospel of John.

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, Take the stone away. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, Lord, by this time there will be an odour, for he has been dead four days. Jesus said to her, Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen

strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go.

What's coming up as we listen to this gospel, guys?

00:05:52 Nicola

For me, the first thing is how it's such a supernatural event, and yet there's some really natural elements to it, like there's going to be an odour, really human bits of life, don't go in there, Lord, it's going to stink. He's been dead for days. And then moments later, we're seeing this miraculous event and how the Lord really uses the ordinary moments of life.

You know, death is a very natural part of life, but he can really use any situation to demonstrate his divinity, but also to draw us into that life with him that is beyond the natural.

00:06:43 Fr Phil

I think for me it comes back to the way the Lord gives us hints of grace in life, a grace that's going to be fulfilled in our eternal life, in time with heaven with him.

So just as I was saying before about, we've had some of these big celebrations in the life of the church, which have meant that the priest wears white rather than the purple of Lent. You know, they're kind of hints of the celebration of Easter to come, I find, in the Lenten journey. And so this moment in Jesus's journey towards Jerusalem, it's kind of like, here's a real strong hint of the resurrection ahead. I am the resurrection and the life, he says.

00:07:26 Emma

I was just thinking, Father Phil, as we were reading it about what you had just shared and those hints of the resurrection. And I love that, you know, we get this gospel in Lent, that some of our Lent readings, particularly through the week, can be quite focused on kind of healing and sin and forgiveness. But actually, it's, I think for me, this is just a reminder that Lent's a preparation for Easter, not a preparation for Good Friday.

And I think what you were saying, Nicola, about getting into Lent, that we then get 50 days to celebrate Easter. And I just think that's such a gift from the church that we get so long to relish this, this great miracle. And even now we're getting those little kind of hints of it coming forward.

00:08:13 Nicola

Yeah, and I think that's one of the things that really marks us as being different as Christians, living with that eternal perspective, you know, that we're not living for, I don't know, we're not living for something in the future that was unknown.

We're living for eternal life with Christ.

That's the whole point of our lives is to be with him in union in heaven. And that living that way with that perspective just shifts things so radically. And I think about it quite a lot, that eternal life starts today, that knowing where we're aiming for, knowing where we're going is a really important part of living the Christian life.

00:09:01 Emma

Right, this was something that came up in a way on my retreat that so many of the gifts that were given by God, they're not things to kind of prepare us for something that's going to happen or something that we have to do, but they're things to show us how much God loves us now.

Even sort of time itself, it's not something that like, oh, this is a time of testing and a time of preparation. This is a gift to show us how much God loves us. In the same way, you know, we don't spend time with our friends just to like, as a mutual self-improvement activity, we spend time with our friends because we love them deeply. And then the change happens as we spend that time together. And that's been a real shift in mindset, I think, for my sort of second half of this Lent after retreat.

00:09:53 Fr Phil

I like the image of the stone as well, you know, roll the stone away, you know, because it opens things up, doesn't it, you know, and it makes me think, whereas life opened up for me, perhaps in Lent, perhaps generally, where are the stones that the Lord has rolled away?

Because sometimes, we have to sit with a period where it doesn't seem clear the way forward or sometimes, just as a moment of grace, suddenly a new ave opens up, a new door opens before us and the image of rolling the stone away is again, that's the grace entering our life, you know, the new life, you know, that we that we need in our day-to-day.

00:10:46 Emma

And I love going back to Martha's response, that very human, almost resistance to that sometimes that like, is we're invited to receive some of that grace sometimes, but we just come up with all of the practicalities of what that couldn't work because X, Y and Z, no, I couldn't take that job because, it's a change in pay or got to move location and actually that the Lord knows what he's doing in these invites to kind of to roll these stones away.

00:11:16 Fr Phil

That's so true. Yeah.

Sometimes that's it on the journey, isn't it? Sometimes you just have to walk it and then you figure out as you go along, I guess.

Yeah.

That's nice.

00:11:29 Nicola

And I think like a great theme of this gospel is the friendship dynamic between Jesus and Lazarus and Mary and Martha. And I can't help but think of, I don't know if you guys have seen the episode of The Chosen where you see the raising of Lazarus. Obviously, it's not like, they use some artistic license in it, it's not verbatim from scripture. But it really, it really brought home to me the kind of reality that Jesus is not just kind of floating around Galilee, having a couple of interactions with people, but that he's really building up friendships, not just with his, you know, the immediate 12, but other people as well, that there are people that he is doing life with, going around for dinner, you know, sitting and chatting and all these things.

And that actually, these are not, it's not like in the previous gospel, we heard Jesus healing the blind man. Like, had he ever met him before? We don't know. But we do know that he's been around to Mary and Martha's house before. We do know that he's in relationship with them. And that kind of just gives us another insight, I suppose, into life with Christ. That it's not just about a one-off encounter. It's a reminder of the kind of the friendship that's available for us with him.

00:12:58 Fr Phil

That makes me think of when I do marriage prep and we talk about different elements of love and one we talk about is friendship. And it can be a bit of a sort of theoretical thing to speak of. So trying to sort of root it in our experience. I always say friendship is characterized by what we share. So, you know, like as a kid growing up, you share school together. So you're in the same class. And because of that shared experience, friendships grow.

And then, you might share an interest in football with someone. So your friendship grows because you're on the same sports team or whatever. But then as life develops, you share something of yourself as well. So maybe people share in difficult experiences of your life and just think about the people who stood by you and shared in your most difficult moments. Those friendships are strong, they go deep, that sort of thing.

So to think of Jesus wanting to be a friend with us and to say, I want to share with you. You know, and that's kind of like our prayer, isn't it? You know, we share our life with him, but here in this gospel, like from what you're saying there, he wants to share resurrection with us. And so beautiful that he shows that in the context of friendship, you know, with these people that he's created such a connection with and journeyed with and sat around the table with, had a meal with them, shared his exhaustion with, that sort of thing, a laugh, whatever it might be.

Yeah, Jesus, the one who wants to share.

That's a really nice thought.

00:14:43 Emma

I love that thought. Yeah, Jesus sharing the resurrection in context of his friendship with us as well. That's really beautiful.

Again, I think as well, the friendship in this passage comes through in that we get some of their personalities really come through as well. I think sometimes in the scriptures, you know, you get a single healing or you get the kind of the apostles as apart from, you know, the three close friends is a bit of a homogenous group.

Whereas Mary and Martha, I feel like you really get their two different personalities, both in this and also, you know, in this sort of more well known one of Mary and Martha at dinner with Jesus. Like, I think you can definitely tell Martha was the older sister, like she was the one that like had it all together.

And even in the gospel, just before this bit, Martha's the one that comes with like the writer answers. And they're like, yes, Jesus, I know you're the resurrection. I knew the resurrection will happen in the future. And the one that comes with all practicalities, whereas Mary like just goes and cries at Jesus in this.

And I just think it's so beautiful the way that God honours our different temperaments and personalities and wants friendship with each of us, not just kind of one peak of this is what you have to be like if you're a disciple of Christ.

00:16:03 Nicola

That is such a good point, Emma, about how we don't have to fit. There's not like a cookie cutter, well, we'd say biscuit, wouldn't we? But you know the phrase, a cookie cutter Christian. You know, we're not all the same.

And we each have our own stuff to work through with the Lord. We each have our own life experiences. We've all, you know, had different highs and different lows in our lives.

And yet, the Lord relates to each one of us and calls each one of us into that friendship with him and really gives each one of us what we need as well. Like I think, some of the things that I might need to keep me close to him might not be the same as other people. there are some things that we all have in common, but the way that we pray, for example, might be different depending on, our temperament or the way that we, I don't know, there's different ways, isn't it?

Even our charisms, our callings, the gifts that the Lord gives us are different because we need each other as well. Like if we were all the same, I don't think the church would function very well if we were all the same either.

Because even those people that you think, I wish they were a bit more like me because they're driving me nuts. Because obviously, you know, you think of yourself as the right kind of person. But I think, you know, they can teach us so much. Even the people that challenge us and kind of grate up against us are actually revealing something more about ourselves than actually about them that the Lord wants us to talk to Him about and just say like, why is it that I'm reacting like this, Lord? Why is it that this is what's bothering me? We can just be curious about those things.

00:17:54 Fr Phil

That's interesting thinking about our temperament, but have you ever thought about what was Jesus' temperament like?

I suppose that comes across time to time in the gospels and things. I mean, did he just have like the perfect temperament to be able to connect with everyone, just being patient and that sort of thing? I mean, were the particulars about his personality?

I mean, I'm no sort of systematic theologians, I don't know what those sorts of things say. But, in his humanity, and I think that's what comes out beautifully in something like The Chosen, you know, you mentioned that before, Nicola, the TV show that's dramatized the life of Jesus. He does have a beautiful temperament in that show, and I think they do a nice way of doing that.

But I just wondered if you'd ever thought about that yourselves.

00:18:43 Emma

I once did an exercise with a sort of young Ignatian group that I was with, where we did a sort of personality type quiz about ourselves as kind of insight. But and then and personality of Jesus. And one of the things that was really interesting is we tend to think that Jesus was quite similar in temperament and personality to us. So where I kind of, things that I like and I see, I would like be like, was Jesus an introvert or an extrovert?

I'm such an extrovert. And I'm like, well, Jesus clearly loved going to the dinner and he had a wide circle of friends. Like, you know, of course he was an extrovert, but actually someone that's an introvert would look and say, well, he needed to go to the hills at night and pray by himself. He must have been an introvert. And I think sometimes that's the sort of the beauty of encountering Jesus in the gospels as well, that he's not got this kind of single on or off personality type, if you see what I mean.

00:19:39 Nicola

That's really interesting to think about. I'm not sure if I have thought about what Jesus's temperament or personality was like. I think, I feel, I definitely, I think when I first really started to have a relationship with God, I definitely found it easier to relate to like God the Father, like God the Father almighty, powerful, can do anything, like somebody you

can really, I don't know, there was something that I found easier to pray to God the Father. And then getting to know Jesus is, I feel like obviously you can get to know him in scripture and then in prayer, talking like one to one with him. It's been like a slower journey for me, just kind of talking to him person to person.

I feel like for a long time when I thought about Jesus, I thought about him in the Eucharist. Like I'd, you know, I'd think, oh, well, I'm, you know, receiving Jesus in the Eucharist and I'd maybe go to adoration, and I'd speak to him there. But then actually remembering that He is a man and I can relate to him like person to person like that, which is such a gift of the incarnation. I don't know, I just found it a kind of slower journey for me and the way that my faith developed, but I'm so keen to know him, like so keen to know him more and more and just really, yeah, like build up that time with him and talk to him and it's something that I just try and do, just try and sit and talk to Jesus.

Does that make sense? I hope it does.

00:21:32 Fr Phil

Yeah, I think totally, because as Emma pointed out, you know, there's sort of no one personality type, as it were, that comes through the gospel, so that we just relate to him as we are, don't we, you know, and he just, he welcomes us in that respect.

I always laugh because in the gospels, Philip turns to Jesus and says, Oh, Lord, you know, show us the Father and we should be satisfied. And Jesus, almost with a face palm sort of thing, goes, Philip, have I been with you all this time and you still don't know me? And sometimes I laugh to myself at those words and just think, Yeah, I've been with you all this time, Lord, I still don't get it, but I'm trying, I'm trying, you know?

00:22:17 Nicola

But I actually think that knowing that you don't get it is actually really important.

I think like if we ever think that we're the finished article, that we've learned all we can about Jesus, that we are, you know, we've got, we're all sorted out now, I think that's probably not a good place to be in your life. And actually recognizing like, oh, I still got more to learn about God is actually a really positive and healthy place to be.

00:22:46 Fr Phil

Yeah, I don't think that's what we mean by discipleship, isn't it? if we think of disciple as someone who's a learner, and Jesus is our teacher, Jesus is our leader in that respect, we come to him ready to learn, open to that. And I think probably almost without realizing it as well, that suddenly we become Jesus to others as well.

And suddenly, we're then reflecting the things that he wants out in the world.

And so to commit to discipleship, it's almost to be in that sort of interim place, isn't it, where you're bringing people to the Lord, but turning to him all the time and yeah, learning his way and yeah, those things, yeah.

Here's a question. Are there people in the gospels that you guys connect with, relate to or that help you on your journey?

00:23:41 Emma

So I actually have a big thing with Peter, like the impulsivity and the slight quick temper. I think I've been really relating to over the past few months. And another little gem from retreat was sort of thing about Peter walking on water. And I think we often hold that up as a great thing. Like look at, you know, Peter's faith in the Lord.

But actually, Jesus never asked him to come out of that boat. Like when you go to that gospel, it's Peter that asks to get out the boat. It's always Peter testing Jesus getting out of that boat. And the rest of the disciples are just happy to receive Jesus into the boat.

So that's in Matthew's that we hear Peter walk in water and it's Mark and John. It's all about how the disciples received Jesus into the boat rather than any of them feeling the need to kind of get up and get out.

So yeah, I just love that and how Jesus kind of holds that kind of, not necessarily impulsive, but just quite quick and quite, yeah, quick to make decisions, often without having thought through every consequence of them.

Yeah, I really love Peter.

00:24:54 Nicola

I think for me, I mentioned before when we had this gospel reading, the woman at the well, and that kind of intimate encounter that she has with the Lord and that she can talk to him and he knows everything about her already, but she still kind of shares her life with him and, you know, and then she's thirsty for what he has to give her.

I feel like that's, it's my experience and what I aspire to. So trying to be really genuinely honest with the Lord about this is who I am, this is where I need you. But also hearing back from him about who I am, who he says I am and what he invites me into.

I just love that kind of It's that moment of encounter with the Lord, with that woman. And I have a, I think I might mention it before, but I have an icon of the woman at the well that I have next to where I try and sit and pray on the morning. And it just, it's like, it's almost like it's an entry point for me for prayer. It kind of like gets me back to the place of remembering what it's about when I might sit down and think, oh, I've got all this to do today or I'm still thinking about stuff that's going on with the kids or my husband or life.

But that brings me back to, okay, so you're sat here now with Jesus like the woman at the well and he's ready to give you, the grace for this particular day. You just need to be honest with him about how you are and what you're feeling and needing. So for me, yeah, that one is definitely, she's definitely somebody I relate to.

00:26:42 Fr Phil

Nice.

I mean, that's nice, for perhaps our listeners to reflect on as well, just if you're joining us today from the podcast, then is there someone who you relate to, in the gospels, because that might be the Lord speaking to your heart.

00:26:58 Emma

What about you Fr Phil? Who do you relate to?

00:27:02 Fr Phil

That's a good question.

This is going to sound like a silly answer because I'm almost answering for someone else, but when we were training in Birmingham, there was a group of Mother Teresa's sisters near us, missionaries of charity. And one of them was called Sister Bartimaeus. She was a wonderful, wonderful song. I said, Sister, why did you choose Bartimaeus as your name? And she said, because I am a blind beggar. And I just really like, it was just such a wonderful answer, before the Lord, here I am, come and enrich me, lead me, guide me.

But what I love is in the story of Bartimaeus, when he's crying out to the Lord, 'cause the Lord's walking by, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. And he shouts all the louder 'cause the crowd's all around. And suddenly everything changes because at first they're saying, quiet you, quiet you, you're going to disturb the Messiah as it were. And then Jesus says, call him here. And they say, get up, he is calling you.

And I love those words. So I often think of, you know, blind Bartimaeus, you know, Get up, the Lord is calling you, you know, you've got your next assignment or something, or the phone goes for the hospital and you're a blind beggar and you're just being led by the Lord and enriched by him.

Get up, he's calling you.

Sometimes I need it on a morning as well. If I'm struggling, I think, go on, get up, he is calling you.

00:28:41 Emma

I think it's super useful during Lent as well to kind of think about, you know, how is our temperament before the Lord?

And was it just towards the season of Lent that if we're someone that tends towards being over scrupulous and kind of over, I've got to do my penance exactly as I set it, sometimes we need to lean into actually, you know, let's, let's embrace Sundays and, you know, have break our fast on Sundays and let's, let's really live by those kind of little springs of the But also if you're someone like me, that's like, oh, well, it's all just vibes really.

And just like, let's, let's just see how it goes. That actually, for me, it's much you spoke earlier, Nicola, about, you know, maybe picking something else up. Whereas for me, I really would struggle with that because I wouldn't pick something new up. I would just hop from thing to thing and wouldn't have that kind of sustained effort during Lent.

So I think it's super helpful as we move towards Easter. How does our temperament play into how we receive the Lord, both during Lent and then in the resurrection.

00:29:50 Nicola

Yeah, and I think there's different ways, isn't there, that we can...because Lent's a long time, it is a long time, and there are different ways that we can think about things to keep going.

Like I know some people have like Lent calendars, like some, there's a lady in my parish creates a Lent calendar every year and you can, there's something like every day to do and it's a kind of mix of praying and fasting and it's just, it's like a little prompt and just seeing the kind of working your way through that is a good, if that's the kind of thing that helps you.

And I've also seen people who kind of put like 40, I don't know, 40 hearts or something on like a string and they move Jesus along like a little peg, like really journeying all the way through from the beginning. So I think that's a good one for kids sometimes because they can't, like my children don't know what like 40 days is. Like they don't really, like the youngest one still is like, how many days till the weekend? You know, time's a bit of a hard concept for them to grasp. So this idea, like a visual journey to Easter is good.

And also just kind of the preparations that we make. So I have started to think about, right, well, how are we going to approach Holy Week at home? You know, when are we going to start? Like, we don't, I've got loads of Easter decorations, guys. I love putting them around my house, like little Easter trees with eggs on and little glass jars that you can fill up with Cadbury's mini eggs and all that and I've got a wreath for the front door and but actually you have to get those things organised in Lent otherwise you can't do it

in Easter because have you ever tried to buy an Easter egg on Easter Sunday? There's like barely any left.

So you've got to start preparing and looking ahead while at the same time recognising it is not time yet. You might be starting to stock up those mini eggs in the kitchen cupboard, but it is not time to eat them yet. So yeah, just, I don't know, just looking at it in terms of moving forward and what it is that keeps you going, how you like to prepare. There's just so many different ways we can do it.

And this, you know, it's just finding the thing that works for you, I think, isn't it?

So we hope that if you're listening today that your Lent's going well. And I don't know about you guys, but I've had a few people talk to me saying like they're enjoying the podcast and I share it with my parish every Monday morning.

I've been told that it has to be on there early because one of the ladies in my parish likes to listen first thing. There's no morning mass in our parish on a Monday, so instead she's listening to the podcast, which is good to hear. But it's been wonderful to hear from people. so that our chats have purpose, we're not just, we're not just chatting for the sake of it. It's been great to know that you're enjoying it and that you're journeying with us and that's been good to hear.

Let's finish our podcast as we have done every other week with a time of prayer.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord, we thank you for the season of Lent, for this opportunity to prepare to celebrate your death and resurrection at Easter.

Help us to live with an eternal perspective.

Help us to give each day over to you.

Lord, I pray that you would bless each one of us and that we would really just be open to the graces that you have to give us in this time of Lent.

We make all our prayers through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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 e-mail, adultformation@rcdmidd.org.uk.

And let's keep each other in prayer as we Journey to Easter.

