

## **St Stephen's, Canonbury**

### **Lent 2016 - Challenged to Change**

#### **Lent Reflection and Study Material**

**Lent 4:** 'I have loved you.'

**Readings:** Revelation 3: 7-13 and Mark 15: 1-15

#### **Revelation 3: 7-13**

"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no-one can shut, and what he shuts no-one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no-one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no-one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

#### **Mark 15: 1-15**

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and turned him over to Pilate. "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. "Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

## Questions

Begin by reading the passages. Is there anything that you find particularly meaningful or puzzling or challenging? Share any verses together or hold the words in prayer. Ask that God will help your understanding.

We heard how the Philadelphians had something special about them. Jesus commends them for keeping their faith even though they are weak. Their reward is that a door has been opened for them. A door into heaven. A door that no one can shut. Do you find it easy or not so easy to believe that this door is open for you?

Philadelphia was a church that somehow shone with the light of the love of Jesus. It shone so brightly that even those who opposed it were going to fall down and see how much Jesus loved them. Do you think it is possible for a church to be described in the same way today? Have you ever been part of a church or do you know of a church that you would say has this same sense of love at its heart?

As we think about God's love we are drawn to the cross, where love becomes real in thorns and nails and unspeakable suffering. Talk about what the cross means to you. Do you find it hard to believe that this is the extent of God's love for you?

In Philippians 2 St Paul calls us to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. How can we have the same humble, servant attitude? Do you have examples of humility in others that have inspired you in your walk with Christ? How challenging is the call to humility?

What would it mean to St Stephen's to be a 'cross shaped' church? What changes might this mean and how might we make these happen?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus,  
in your journey to the cross you show us what true humility is.  
Show us how to live with this same attitude.  
Challenge us to be humble in every circumstance.  
Change our hearts that together we may be a truly cross shaped church  
that speaks of your love to all;  
In your precious name we pray. Amen.

## **Family friendly version**

We talk about the story of Jesus dying on the cross as showing us how much God loves us. How do you think this terrible event shows us love?

St Paul in Philippians tells us about Jesus being God but giving up the glory of heaven to come to earth and die for us. Then he says that we should have the same attitude in our lives. How do you think we can be like Jesus?

We read about a church in a place called Philadelphia that Jesus was really pleased with. They were a church where people loved each other and put other people first. How could we do that in St Stephen's?

Jesus said to the Christians in Philadelphia that he had opened a door for them. It was a door into heaven through which they could pass to be with him. What do you think heaven is like? How can we know that we are going to heaven?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus,  
Thank you for showing us your love as you died on the cross.  
Show us how we can be like you and show your love to others. Amen.