



Joel's Jesus

A Journey through Lent and Easter

“Saving the best wine until last?”

Introduction:

This collection is designed to offer a flexible range of resources to enable a meaningful journey through Lent and Easter within our homes and schemes.

The material can be used either as part of our regular services or can be used in smaller group activities (or indeed both!)

The material is deliberately intended to facilitate a ‘mix and match’ approach, in order to enable Chaplains to tailor it to the precise needs and circumstances of their own context and, we hope, it might spark ideas of your own which you could feed back as part of a review and development process. Equally, it aims to provide Chaplains with a resource that could be used in its entirety.

However, there is a ‘theme’ that runs through the whole of the journey and this is: **“what does it mean to save the best wine till last?”** and it is around this theme that the material is intended to cohere.

Structure:

This journey is built around six of the ‘signs’ in John’s Gospel: one for each week of Lent. It also carries forward the story through the events of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day.

Each sign and the events of the Triduum are narrated as seen through the eyes of ‘Joel’. Joel was a servant at the wedding in Cana and witnessed the turning of the water in to wine. His interest is piqued and, when Jesus returns to Cana and heals the Official’s Son, Joel decides that he will follow along with Jesus. He wants to know what this best wine that is saved until the last will actually be.

The ‘Joel’ stories are printed here and have also been professionally recorded and can be downloaded or played from the CD in order to provide a different voice: rather like a serialisation on the radio.

Building on the story from Joel, this pack contains ideas for a theme for a short address or discussion points that might be developed in a small group setting. There are also practical liturgical ideas that you might like to select from as you plan your services/groups during Lent and Easter. Each session includes suggestions of symbols for a Lenten Cross display.

Of course, there is value too in just listening and letting the story speak for itself, week by week.

Joel's stories and the accompanying material are structured around the following pattern which is intended to explore the question: what does it mean to save the best wine until last?

- **Week One:**

"The Wedding at Cana in Galilee" (John 2: 1-12)

- **Week Two:**

"The Healing of the Official's Son" (John 4: 46-54)

- **Week Three:**

"The Feeding of the Five Thousand" (John 6: 5-14)

- **Week Four:**

"Jesus Walks on the Water" (John 6: 16-29)

- **Week Five:**

"The Healing of the Man Born Blind" (John 9: 1-7)

- **Week Six:**

"The Raising of Lazarus" (John 11: 1-45)

- **Palm Sunday**

(John 12: 12-19)

- **Maundy Thursday and Good Friday**

(Selectively from John Chapters 17, 18 and 19)

- **Easter Day – The Resurrection**

(John 20: 1-31)

Joel's Jesus

Each week, in order to give a visual reminder of the overall theme, you ought to have on display in your service or your group, a large wine glass or clear glass pitcher. Each week, fill this a little more with "wine" (cordial or red-coloured water) until, by week six, it is almost full. On Good Friday, the "wine" should be poured away as part of the ending of the service or group. On Easter Day, it should be filled and filled and filled until it is over-flowing.

The materials in the main body of these documents are almost entirely the work of Richard Golding, chaplain at MHA Starr Hills, Lytham St Annes. In developing the resources, Richard received some help and input from Deacon Fiona de Boltz, chaplain at MHA Mickle Hill, Pickering; Christine Hewitt, former chaplain at MHA Warde Aldam, South Elmsall and Ted Britton, chaplain at MHA Moor Allerton, Leeds.

The appendix offers more suggestions as to how this material might be adapted for use with those whose cognitive abilities are significantly impaired.

Each of the monologues has been recorded and are available on the resources page of the website.

Week One
The Journey Begins
The Wedding at Cana in Galilee
(John 2: 1-12)

The Wedding at Cana in Galilee

(John 2: 1-12)

Let's be fair: everyone loves a wedding! The bride and groom starting their lives together; two families coming together too and the hope at least of another generation. Meeting people that you haven't seen for years and actually being pleased to see them even if you then go back to avoiding them after the day it is over. If none of that appeals to you, then it's at least a good excuse for a party isn't it?

I'm Joel and if you are, like me, a servant in the household where the wedding is happening it's also hard work ... especially since the honour of the house is at stake! I mean, you want people to leave thinking: that was amazing, best wedding I've been to in I can't remember how long. You do not want people to leave comparing your celebrations unfavourably with the one they were at a month ago. Certain standards do have to be met.

So, we were relieved that everything was as it should be, all the proper niceties attended to, the wine flowing freely and everyone having a great time. It was an interesting guest list. Mary from Nazareth had brought her son along and he had brought a few other young men who have started following him around. That raised a few eyebrows. You see, Mary's son, Jesus his name is, has turned out to be one of those preacher types. We get a lot of them. They wander around telling you what they reckon God wants and gather some followers for a while before they disappear back in to obscurity, or someone shuts them up. Some people are attracted to that sort of thing. He has a good trade too, a carpenter they say. But it doesn't look like he's for sticking to that.

Anyhow, they didn't seem to be making a nuisance of themselves. In fact, they seemed to be having a whale of a time. There was lots of laughter and, you know, there is something about this Jesus fella. He was the life and soul of the party.

Then disaster struck! I told them that they ought to have ordered more but did anyone listen to me? Of course not! So it wasn't a surprise to me at least when the wine ran out! It's a disaster if that happens. I mean, the celebrations are in full swing and you can't even make sure that there's enough wine. It's serious: complete humiliation and disgrace time.

I overheard Mary telling Jesus that we'd run out. I didn't catch exactly what he said but it was along the lines of: 'what's that got to do with me?' Anyway, like mothers the world over, she's having none of it and she comes bustling over to us servants and tell us to do whatever Jesus tells us to do.

We thought he might at least send us off to see what wine we could beg or borrow from elsewhere before anyone noticed that we'd run out. But no, he gets this silly

little smile on his face and tells us to fill up the water jars that we use for the purification rituals. I remember thinking: 'what is the point of that?' None of us were exactly happy because it not only seemed pointless but it also meant that we had to carry in one hundred and eighty gallons of water and pour it in to the jars. You try it! It isn't much fun!

Anyhow, when we'd done that, he told me to draw some water off and take it to the steward of the feast. Now, I wasn't happy about that either! The wine's run out and I'm supposed to go to my boss and say: never mind, here have a glass of water instead! I thought this was going to be the cue for some sort of sermon, you know, some holier-than-thou little word on purity or something. Now, this wasn't the time or place for that and I was already practising my excuses to my boss in my head as I handed him a cup.

The Steward's eyebrows shot up and I thought: 'here we go!' But the face he's making isn't the face you'd pull when you expected wine and you got water. It's the face you pull when you've just drunk the very best wine you've ever tasted in your life! I glanced into the cup and, sure enough, it was full of wine!

I was pretty blown away by that. I mean, that's a neat trick isn't it? And the Steward was then congratulating the bridegroom and telling him that everyone always serves the best wine first and then serves the cheap stuff when everyone has already had a few! I mean, you do, don't you? "But you" the Steward said loud and clear "have saved the best wine till last!"

The bridegroom seemed pretty happy to take the credit and I was about to grab the Steward and tell him that he'd got Jesus to thank for it, however he did it, when Jesus catches my eye and tells me to 'shush!' I went back over to him. Only we servants and the lads that he'd brought with him actually knew what had happened ... and his Mum, presumably.

Jesus looked at us and smiled. He said to me: don't you want some too? Well, I didn't need asking twice and, you know, the wine was amazing! We were all looking at him and looking at each other open mouthed but Jesus just wandered off back in to the party. I kept catching glimpses of him throughout the rest of the evening. It's odd. I'm not one for traipsing around after these preacher types ... standard temple worship is good enough for me, thank you! But there's something about him. Who is this guy who saves the best wine 'til last?

As You Start Thinking:

This miracle is the first in John's Gospel; it is the first 'sign' of who Jesus actually is. We re-imagine it from the perspective of Joel, someone who was there and a part of what went on. It is the fact that the best wine is saved until the last that really captures Joel's interest since everyone knows that the poorest wine is always served last! From here, Joel determines that he will follow along with Jesus and find out what saving the best wine till last actually means.

For many of those living in our homes or participating in our scheme, the idea that the best wine is served last might sound wrong. It doesn't feel and it doesn't look like the best wine that they are currently experiencing. In fact, they might well say that

the best wine was drunk deeply of (or not deeply enough) a very long time ago. Hence, this is a journey. Like Joel, we embark upon a journey to see how it can be that the best wine is saved until last when everyone knows that it is not!

Practical Ideas:

- Have the large glass or pitcher clearly on display at the beginning of the service. If you have a Lenten Cross display, you could place it next to that. At the end of the service or group meeting, pour a little “wine” in to the glass/pitcher.
- There are stone water jars such as the ones featured in this story that still exist. Pass round or project a picture of one of them to demonstrate just how large they actually were. Remember: six of these jars would hold about one hundred and eighty gallons of water!

Development Ideas:

- An easy starting point might be a few minutes reflecting on Weddings, which are very special days but something with which we are all familiar. Perhaps point out just how important it is that everything goes well on the ‘big day’!
- The miracle is spontaneous, Jesus seems reluctant and it’s actually his Mum that rather forces him in to it. C S Lewis said that we could be “surprised by joy.” Perhaps reflect on the ways in which God has and does surprise us in our ordinary, daily lives with spontaneous moments of joy.
- It must have seemed a stupid thing to do for the servants who were asked to carry in 180 gallons of water to fill the jars. Sometimes we aren’t sure why we are being made to do something that, perhaps, we would rather not. Maybe we even resent it when we are. Do we need to stick with it, however, and see what God might bring out of it?
- Saving the best wine until last was a coup de theatre! No-one expected that! In fact, it went clear contrary to what everyone assumed would be the case. Perhaps mention that Jesus allows the bridegroom to get the credit (and he doesn’t deny it!!!)
- **Key Question:** Does God really save the best until last and, if so, what does that look like?

Prayers:

Mary said to the servants at the wedding feast, “Do whatever he tells you”. Please Lord, help us to hear your voice and to be obedient to your guidance. You may not want us to ‘do’ anything, but simply to ‘be’ in your presence, soaking up your love and your healing. Lord Jesus, take the water of our lives and turn it into the wine of your kingdom. We know that you made us for love, to be loved and to love others. We know that you love us and that you can transform us by the power of your Holy Spirit, to become more than we could hope or imagine. Take

us in our frailties and transform us into vessels full of the very best wine – your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**

Loving Father, sometimes we can feel as though the wine has run out and there is no more to come. Those times when we feel tired or when we feel a little lost or forgotten are hard. Sometimes it isn't easy to see you in the hum-drum of our daily lives, in the ordinary routines. Help us, Father, to look for you in the ordinary. Surprise us with love and with joy, when we least expect it. We thank you for all the good wine that we have drunk so deeply of in our lives so far. Help us to trust that the best wine is yet to come.

Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, who turned the water in to wine in Galilee.
Amen

Father, we thank you
For those times when we are surprised by joy.
For those who work the miracles of our everyday life. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving Lord, as we think of all the blessings and happy occasions in our own lives, we remember those who have no family or friends, or who live far away from all those they love. We ask that all who are lonely will find a listening ear, hear a kind word and experience a touch of your love. May they know themselves to be loved by you and by others. We pray for our own home/scheme here in ... and ask that all the residents and staff here may glimpse your presence and peace, and know your transformative love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

People with no family and/or friends nearby

People who are lonely

People for whom memories of family occasions such as weddings are a source of pain

People in need of a listening ear, a kind word or to be reminded of God's love for them.

For further thoughts and Suggested Hymns and Songs see Appendix 1: (Joel's Jesus – Further ideas (particularly for those living with Dementia) and Appendix 2: An example of how one Chaplain might use these materials

Week Two
The Decision to Follow
The Healing of the Official's Son
(John 4: 46-54)

The Healing of the Official's Son

(John 4: 46-54)

You remember this Jesus I told you about, the guy who made the water turn in to wine at the wedding? Well, a couple of days ago, he came back to town. There have been all sorts of rumours about him and people are starting to say crazy things.

He went to Jerusalem for the Passover, apparently, and created quite a stir there. They say he went on the rampage in the temple and chucked out all the money changers and the guys who set up stall there to sell the sacrificial animals. That didn't go down too well, as you might imagine. He told the people there that if they knocked down the temple, he would build it again in three days! Three days? Have you any idea how long it took to build that place?

He's been hanging around with that chap, John. You know the one, keeps dipping people in the river to baptise them and telling them that the Kingdom of God is at hand. I think the two of them are related. Apparently, he was seen with a Samaritan woman too. He's keeping some odd company, that's for sure. But he's getting quite a reputation as a healer.

People have been repeating something he apparently said to a Pharisee called Nicodemus. I actually wrote it down: "God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Well, after that, when I heard he was back I had to go and see, didn't I?

I found him easily enough on account of the great crowd milling around. I caught his eye for a second and I could have sworn he smiled at me. Maybe he recognised me from the wedding feast and I found myself hoping that he did remember me.

Then, there was a man pushing through the crowd trying to get to Jesus. Looking at his clothes, you could tell that he was important. The word went around that he was a government official from Capernaum. Well, this looked like it could turn ugly. I mean, people like him who live in the Roman's pockets and do very nicely out of it aren't exactly popular people and, if he was about to try and shut Jesus up, I think it would have been the last thing he did.

But he didn't. He pleaded with Jesus, asking him to go back home with him and heal his son because it looked as if the lad was going to die. The crowd were still murmuring about that. After all, if this Jesus is who people are starting to say he is, he's come for the people, the Jewish people and not for those that are in cahoots with the government. He's come to set us free from them, not cosy up to them.

Jesus said to him, and I heard it: "Go; your son will live!"

The official looked mightily relieved, thanked him profusely and hurried off. I tell you this, at the time, we all thought that Jesus had just cleverly fobbed him off and the bloke had fallen for it. I mean, we were in Cana and the poorly kid was in Capernaum ... how could he have done anything?

But I tell you without a word of a lie, the following day the rumours started going around that the official's son had recovered. What's more, the fever broke and he started to get better at the precise moment that Jesus had told his Dad to go home and that his son would be alright.

He turns ordinary water in to the best wine. He heals with a single word.

I've made a decision. I'm not married yet, can't afford it, so there's only me to worry about. It might sound crazy but I have decided. They say that Jesus will be heading back to Jerusalem again soon. I'm going to go with him. I've got to see what happens next if nothing else.

As You Start Thinking:

This is a very interesting healing miracle. Jesus heals the Official's Son with merely a word and does so from a distance. As ever, the operative principle is the faith of the person who is asking for the miracle. Also, the Jewish people expected a Messiah who would come for them and only them. The Official was unlikely to have been popular and would certainly not have been seen as a part of the Jewish community.

Is the best wine being healed of the things that afflict us? Is it particularly special because this healing is available to all?

Practical Ideas:

- Have your glass/pitcher on display, containing the "wine" that you put in it last time. At the end of the service/group, top the "wine" up a little more.
- If you have a Lenten Cross display, place upon it a wrist watch, pocket watch or a small clock. The proof of this miracle was in its 'timing'. If you don't use a cross, perhaps have the time-piece next to the "wine" or pass it around while the story is being heard.

Development Ideas:

- An easy starting point might be to spend a few moments reflecting upon those who heal us: doctors, nurses, the care staff etc. It is comforting to know that there are skilled and dedicated people there for us.
- Jesus heals with little more than a word. This is because the Official asks and also believes that Jesus both can and will respond. The Official is desperate, in a panic. He turns to Jesus believing that he can help. Do we, naturally, turn to Jesus when we are troubled in body mind or spirit and do we do so believing that he both can and will help?

- This healing is not limited by time and space. God's love and God's power are capable of reaching everywhere. It is possible for God to heal even those wounds from long ago: memories and old emotional and spiritual scars.
- Jesus' love and willingness to heal isn't limited to a certain 'in' group. It doesn't matter who you are, what you are or what you have been. This love and healing is there for you; it is there for the asking!
- **Key Question:** When our medical conditions and our frailty of body or mind cannot actually be healed, what does healing mean? Is this healing the best wine?

Prayers:

Loving God, we are amazed at how much you care for us. As we look at this watch, we remember that time itself is in your hands. Jesus spoke, and the official's son was healed at that very moment. Lord, you see all of our moments and our days – our times are in your hands. We ask for your healing wherever it is needed in the world, in our loved ones, in ourselves. Speak Lord, and heal us; help our faith and trust in you to increase. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**

Loving Father, the older we get, the more healing we seem to need. The hours spent in the doctor's surgery, the clinic and hospital visits aren't something that we look forward to and they remind us that our bodies don't work as well as once they did. Thank you for the expertise, the care and the commitment that those who are called to heal us give. Bless us too with that deeper healing of soul and spirit. Give us a wholeness that goes beyond the frailties of our bodies, the wholeness that you alone can give. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. **Amen**

Father, so often we feel powerless and at our wits end.

Remind us to seek you and to cry out to you,

You who are always ready to heal and to restore. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, as we think about Jesus's healing ministry, we bring before you those known to us who are in need of a touch from the Healer – those residents and staff from our own home/scheme here, (name them if they have given permission). We think of those who are concerned about their loved ones who are ill, especially children. We remember other people in need of healing and peace further afield - those in the wider community, across the country and the world. Lord, we pray for those who we don't know but who are in need of your healing – there are people whose stories we may know only in part, those mentioned on television or in the newspapers or on the internet. We pray for all those who work to bring comfort and

healing – for all doctors and nurses, and aid workers. As we have been thinking about the official who came to Jesus, we think of those who hold public office, especially our MPs, the Cabinet, our Prime Minister. Please bring order out of chaos, and pour out your healing peace with justice wherever this is needed. In Jesus's holy name we pray, Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

People who are ill in body or mind, or in any kind of pain

People suffering pain or illness across the country and the world

Health workers, doctors and nurses

Politicians, the local MP, Prime Minister and cabinet members

Anyone in public office

Week Three
A Dramatic Miracle
The Feeding of the Five Thousand
(John 6: 5-14)

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

(John 6: 5-14)

By then, we were on the other side of the Sea of Galilee and things were really starting to get out of hand. It's incredible what this guy can do, such as the old fella at Bethzatha, the pool with five porticos. This chap had been bed-ridden for nearly forty years and he asked Jesus to help him in to the pool which has healing properties. Jesus just said to him: "take up your bed and walk!" And he did! That's just one example, there were so many more.

Because of that, of course, more and more people were following Jesus every day. By then, there were thousands and thousands of them. We could barely go anywhere because of this great horde of people. Hence, we had to head up to the mountain in order to try and get a bit of peace. But they all followed us and Jesus sat down and taught a throng of about five thousand men, and that's before you start on the women and the children.

Of course, as the day wore on, this huge crowd and were all starting to get hungry. Precious few of them had thought to bring anything to eat with them. I could tell that those followers closest to Jesus were starting to get a bit anxious. I mean, how on earth were we going to feed so many people? We couldn't afford the bread even if we could have got hold of enough of it, which was doubtful. A hungry crowd can quickly turn hostile.

It was Andrew who suddenly appeared with a little lad. He was a good kid, obviously, and clearly he had been taught the value of sharing because he'd brought along the five little barely loaves and two fish that he had with him for his own supper. It was a nice idea but, as Andrew said, it wasn't likely to help much.

But Jesus just told them to get everyone to sit down. I was watching him like a hawk; he was up to something. He blessed the bread and the fish and said that it should be handed around. I tell you, I went hot and cold all over. I watched and, the further out in to the crowd that the food went, there was more and more and more of it. The more people shared it around, the more of it there was. Everyone ate fit to burst. Everyone ate their fill and a bit more besides and all from this one little lad's picnic.

When everyone had go to the point where they couldn't eat another thing, we started to gather up the left overs. I tell you that there were twelve big baskets full left over.

It was the most incredible thing. To be able to feed all those people and from almost nothing. The power that this man Jesus has must be out of this world. Before, I've seen him do many things but it's always been fairly private. To know what had happened for sure rather than just hear-say, you needed to be there. But this time, he did it in front of thousands and thousands of people and all of them were a part of

it. I could see that, for Jesus I was getting to know, this was just all of a piece in the sense that he always responded to anyone's need.

But this time the impact of what he'd done was massive. I thought to myself: this is it! This really is it, the end of the Romans and their puppet government. The crowd were really working themselves up by now. They were all for taking Jesus back down off the mountain and crowning him as king right there and then. I mean, with a King like that, no-one would ever have to do a day's work again and, if he could do that, what couldn't he do?

Then I noticed that Jesus had quietly slipped away. I grabbed one of his followers, the one closest to him, and demanded to know where he'd gone. I was caught up in it all, you see. I said: "They're going to make him the King! Where is he?"

He just looked at me and said: "Joel, that isn't what this is about!"

As You Start Thinking:

This is the only miracle that is re-counted in all four of the Gospels; it must be a pretty important one! It is also the most public of the miracles. It happened before a crowd of five thousand men (they didn't even count the women and the children in those days) so an awful lot of people saw it and were a part of it.

It is intensely practical too: feeding people! Jesus takes next to nothing and gives a multitude a very good dinner out of it.

The reaction of the crowd is interesting too. Delight, of course, and an immediate desire to make Jesus their King. A King who could take away any fear of hunger or want and, with it, the need to work so hard to survive must very definitely have seemed like the best wine.

But was it?

Practical Ideas:

- Have your glass/pitcher on display with the "wine" from the last two weeks in it. At the end of the service/group, top the "wine" up a little more.
- If you have a Lenten Cross display, place a few small bread rolls on it. If possible, a small picnic hamper would be a nice touch. Otherwise, place the bread/hamper next to the timepiece from last week along with the glass/pitcher.

Development Ideas:

- An easy starting point might be spending a few moments reflecting on picnics. Food always seems to taste better when we eat it outside, especially if you're feeling really hungry.

- Jesus takes the little food that the boy brings and makes a huge feast out of it. Even something small, willingly shared, can have a bigger impact than we think. What is it that we have, even though we might think it isn't very much, that we can share?
- This is a colossal demonstration of power, especially amongst a people for whom food was often scarce and even basic subsistence was precarious. The reaction of the people, therefore, wasn't a surprise.
- To some extent, the miracle back-fires. The reaction of the people is to want Jesus as King, just like any other King except this one would usher in an era in which no-one would ever need to work anymore and would instead be entertained by wonders.
- **Key question:** Is the best wine to be found according to the values and structures of our usual world view i.e. A King like any other, only better!

Prayers:

Loving and generous God, thank you for providing for our needs – for our food and drink, the warmth and comfort of our home here, for those who care for us and for those we love. Thank you for this story of the boy's picnic lunch, told in every gospel, which encourages us to be generous. As we do this, we know that the little we have can be used and transformed by you into much more than we can ask or imagine. In Jesus's name, **Amen**.

Loving Father, for a long time we dreamed of not having to work, not having to provide for ourselves and for others, to plan and to budget, ensure the housework was done. We would have been pleased if anyone had offered us a life of ease, a chance just to put our feet up. It's odd, but there are times now when we would like all that work and responsibility back because it can seem that there's not a lot left now that it has gone. Loving Father, help us to see the things that we do have and the things that we are as special and valuable. Help us to take these things, small as they might seem, and share them with you and with those around us. Help us too to remember that your Kingdom is not a Kingdom of this world. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen

Father, we bring to you today the little we have and the little we are, knowing that in your boundless love you will make of them an abundance to your glory.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, as we think about how Jesus fed the multitudes, we remember those who do not have enough to eat today – people in our own communities who have to rely on Foodbanks, people who are too proud or too unwell to ask for help, people struggling on in poverty. We know that this is not limited to our country and think of places across the world where people are hungry – places where there is famine or

disaster, places where wars prevent food getting through, places where the harvest has failed. Prompt us to help in whatever ways we can. We also remember farmers across the planet who work to provide food for all. Come Lord Jesus! Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

People living in poverty

Those struggling to make ends meet

Those working in Foodbanks and people using their services

People across the world who are working to alleviate hunger

Farmers

Week Four
An Amazing Rescue
Jesus Walks Upon the Water
(John 6: 16-29)

Walking on the Water

(John 6: 16-29)

Evening came and still there was no sign of Jesus. He'd gone, disappeared up in to the mountains after the crowd that he'd fed with the loaves and fishes wanted to make him King.

It wasn't just me, a lot of us were feeling a bit disappointed and a lot confused. Quite a number of those that had been in the crowd had slouched away feeling pretty disillusioned when they'd realised that Jesus had scuttled off rather than let them make him king.

Part of me can't help thinking that they had a point. After all, I started on this journey because of this man who saved the best wine until last. You remember, at the wedding in my home town of Cana? What could possibly be better wine than having a King like him! Peace, freedom, justice and plenty for all, being able to take it easy. What could possibly be better than that?

Anyway, I was mulling this over and we were waiting for Jesus to come back but, as the day started to wane, we decided that we might as well get back in to the boat and row back to Capernaum.

The weather looked alright and, when we set out, the sea was pretty calm. But that's the thing with the Sea of Galilee, the weather can change very quickly. When the cold air pours down off the mountains and hits the warm, moist air rising off the water then storms can blow up in minutes.

That's what happened to us. We got caught up in the most violent storm. For several hours we were fighting a losing battle, making little or no headway with our oars and being blown further and further out in to the sea until we must have been three or four miles out and we were absolutely exhausted.

Then there was this figure coming towards us. Someone was actually out there walking towards us on the water. I don't mind telling you that I screamed my head off. We were all terrified. It looked like we were done for, for sure, and that this was some spirit from the next world coming to take our souls to Sheol.

Then someone pointed, I can't remember who it was, open mouthed. I looked up and the figure walking towards us is ... Jesus! He's smiling, laughing and saying: "Don't be frightened! It's me!"

We bundled him into the boat and then, well, it was almost as if it had happened straight away because the next thing that I can actually remember is us arriving at Capernaum!

Of course, the minute we got there some of those who had been up on the mountain the day before come rushing up. They wanted another free feed, by the looks of it, and Jesus told them off. He told them straight that they were only there because they'd had such a good dinner the day before.

One of them asked him what they should do, then, if they were to be doing the work of God. He fixed this bloke with a look and said: "This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He has sent!" Then he turned to me with a question on his face.

Some people are starting to say that he is the Son of God and, from what he's just said, it looks like he might actually believe himself that he is.

What do I believe? He's the most wonderful man I've ever known and I have seen the things he can do: turning water in to wine, healing with just a word, making abundance out of little and even walking across the sea! If he isn't the Son of God then I really don't know what he is. I really just don't know anymore. What would him being the Son of God even mean? What would it mean for me?

As You Start Thinking:

This miracle comes hard on the heels of the disappointment at the rather anti-climactic ending to the feeding of the five thousand. Bewildered, tired and maybe not a little grumpy, Jesus' followers set off in their boat to cross to the other shore.

They journey, or intend to journey, in their own power. As they do, one of the sudden storms that can sweep across the Sea of Galilee as the cool mountain air flows down and meets the warm, moist, rising air from the sea blows up. They are blown off course, frightened and at the end of their strength.

The waves make a pathway for Jesus to come to them and he demonstrates a stunning ability to control the normal laws of nature (i.e. sinking), the forces of nature and even time and place itself. It's no surprise that, after this story, we hear for the first time that Jesus is being referred to as "the Son of God".

But what does that mean?

Practical Ideas:

- Have your glass/pitcher on display with the "wine" from the last three weeks in it. At the end of your service, top up the "wine" a little more.
- A blue scarf made of chiffon or other light material could be used to symbolise water and added to your Lenten Cross or other display along with the items from the last three weeks.

Development Ideas:

- An easy starting point might be thinking a little about boat trips: rowing boats, sailing boats, even big cruise ships. What is it that is nice about being on the water? How about when it gets stormy? A question to explore might be: “is Jesus in the same boat as me?”
- Life has its storms and we have all been through them from time-to-time. This story shows that Jesus is present very powerfully in the stormy times of our life and uses the waves that threaten to engulf us as a pathway to reach us. How has Jesus been with us in the ‘stormy’ times? Remember the old hymn: “Count Your Blessings! Count them one by one, and you will be amazed what the Lord has done!”
- Alternatively, think about times when we have felt as though we were being asked to walk on water, like Peter was in another rendering of this miracle. Do we find Jesus especially close when we are being asked to do something that we fear that we can’t possibly do?
- The Feeding of the Five Thousand and the Walking on the Water are less about what Jesus can do and more about who Jesus is. The proper response to them is to see Jesus as he actually is: The Son of God!
- **Key Question:** Like Joel, we need to ponder what Jesus being the Son of God actually means: about him and about us! If he actually is the Son of God, what might this best wine saved until last be?

Prayers:

Loving God, at times when we are feeling anxious and afraid, help us to hear Jesus’ voice saying: “Don’t be afraid, I am here!” Thank you that in all the circumstances of our life, you are here with us through the power of The Holy Spirit. Help us to know your presence with us, no matter how stormy life feels. Thank you for your faithfulness and constant companionship every day. In Jesus’ name, **Amen**

Lord Jesus, some days it can feel like I am in a ‘perfect’ storm. Everything that can be wrong is wrong: with me, with my surroundings, with those around me. Some days, I feel that I am helplessly blown further and further from where I want to be and, being honest, that I am sinking. Lord, use those stormy waves to make your way to me. Surprise me as you climb in to the boat of my life with me. For with you beside me, the storms will calm and I will be able clearly to see the shore. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord, the Son of God, our guardian and our saviour. **Amen**

Father, when our troubles seem impossible to overcome and we feel to be sinking without hope, point us to your Son who makes of our troubles a pathway to reach and to rescue us. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving Lord, as we remember the fear of the disciples during the storm on Galilee, we pray for all who live in fear today. May they know your your comfort, peace and presence. Each of us has our own worries and anxieties too – help us Lord, to bring

them to you and to know that you are with us, you are 'in the same boat as us'. Come to us Lord Jesus – help us to see Jesus walking towards us through the storms, bringing peace within, even whilst the tempest rages around us. Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

People who are afraid for whatever reason – the anxious, the depressed,
those who are in real or imagined danger

Ourselves and our own fears and worries

The knowledge that Jesus is present with us now

For that peace 'which passes all understanding' for all who need it

Week Five
The Deepest of Cures
Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind
(John 9: 1-7)

The Healing of the Man Born Blind

(John 9: 1-7)

We'd had another quite difficult time in the Temple. Things have been getting pretty tense and Jesus hasn't really been doing anything to calm things down. Quite the reverse, in fact.

There was this debate going on between Jesus and some of the religious leaders. Jesus went so far as to say that he was the one that Abraham had been promised would come. By that, he meant the Messiah. It's being said about him a lot but now he seemed to have said it himself, and right in the Temple too.

Well now, Abraham died I don't know how many hundreds of years ago, so they challenged him and asked how he could possibly have been seen by Abraham. Then he said it: "before Abraham was, I am!"

It was that "I am" that did it! That's the Jewish name for God! You see, when God spoke to Moses and Moses asked God: 'Who are you?' God replied: "I am that I am!" So, we Jews call God Y-W-H which just means: "I am!" The thing is, by saying that, Jesus has as good as said that he was God!

Their response was, I have to say, completely predictable! It was blasphemous, you see, at least it was to the Jewish leaders, and the penalty for that is stoning. As soon as he'd said it, they all started finding and picking up stones to throw at him (and us too, I imagine!) and I don't think they wouldn't have stopped until he was dead. Jesus had to nip off pretty smartly and hide until they eventually dispersed before we could slope off out of the Temple.

As we were walking, there was this poor soul begging. I'd seen him before and I think he was quite a well-known character. The thing was, he'd been born blind. He'd never been able to see and, so, he'd never been able to work. Hence, his eking out a sorry existence by begging. Someone asked, I didn't catch who it was, whether this man had been born blind because of his own sin or because of his parents' sin. It's a common idea: some physical or mental disability is the result of sin and, therefore, it's ... well, shameful, really.

Jesus said it had nothing to do with anyone's sin but that, in this case, he'd been born blind so that God would be revealed by what happened to him. Jesus also said that he was "the light of the world" as he walked across to this man who had been born and lived only in the darkness of blindness.

He knelt down and made a sort of paste with the clay soil which he put on to the man's eyes before telling him to go and wash in a nearby pool called Siloam. Someone helped this poor fella find his way and he duly bathed in the pool and washed the mud off his eyes.

By now, it was almost as if I knew what was coming next. The moment the man opened his eyes, he could see! That has never happened to anyone who was actually born blind. Even some of his neighbours didn't recognise him. He was radiant, transformed and whole for the first time in his life.

We heard some time later that the man had been dragged in front of the Pharisees who were pretty keen to know what had happened. He told them, apparently, and they were angry because whatever Jesus had done, he'd done it on the Sabbath and that was wrong because you could call it work! They argued some more and, eventually, they decided that this had been a stunt and that the man hadn't ever been blind in the first place. Hence, Jesus was a sinner twice over because he'd done this on the Sabbath and it was a con trick. They even hauled in the man's parents and asked them about it. They confirmed that he had been born blind but, as for the rest, they were pretty cagey.

The man refused to condemn Jesus as a sinner. As he said about Jesus: "if this man were not from God, he could do nothing!" Well, they were angry about that. So much so, they threw him out of the Synagogue which basically meant that he was no longer one of God's people!

When Jesus heard, he went and found the man and asked if he believed in the Son of Man. Jesus also said that he was the Son of Man. At which the man born blind immediately said: "Lord I believe".

As You Start Thinking:

Once again, the dramatic tension is building in this episode. On top of people saying that Jesus must be the Messiah and beginning to regard him as the Son of God, he now seems to be saying it about himself. To refer to himself, in the Temple, as the one whom Abraham had said would come and, still more, to refer to himself as "I Am" was supremely provocative to the Jewish religious authorities.

Then Jesus heals the man born blind. As well as pointing to his capacity to bring a healing so deep as to give to us a wholeness that we had never before possessed, this signals something else. The fact of the man's blindness was attributed to his or his parents' sins. The wholeness that Jesus brings is contained in his power to deliver us from our sin and its consequences.

Is the 'best wine' that Joel is seeking the forgiveness of sin and, if so, what might that look like?

Practical Ideas:

- Have your glass/pitcher on display with the "wine" from the last four weeks in it. At the end of your service, top up the "wine" a little more.

- For your Lenten Cross or other display, add a pair of sunglasses (symbolising the light of the world) to the items from the last four weeks.

Development Ideas:

- If you wear sunglasses, the world looks very different. If you wear them in the dark or even indoors, it might be impossible to see anything much at all. What does light give us? The ability to see things better, find our way, not bump in to things? It enables things to grow (things stop growing largely in the dark) and, because of the sun, it gives us warmth. Remember the phrase: "I have seen the light!" What does that mean?
- When Jesus healed the man born blind, it must have been an amazing thing for the man: to see the world for the very first time. How might God help us to see the world as it really is, in all its glory and wonder?
- When Jesus healed the man born blind, he brought him a wholeness that he had never had before. He had been always somehow incomplete before he met Jesus. How might God wish to make us more whole than we had ever been? Through the forgiveness of sin? Accepting us just as we are? Giving us unconditional love?
- The Jews became angry with Jesus because he appeared to be calling himself God or, at the very least, the Messiah. They are also angry because he healed the man on the Sabbath when no work was allowed. In what ways might we seek to limit God or fail to see the revelation of God when it is right in front of us?
- **Key Question:** A wholeness that we have never possessed before and the forgiveness of sin and a rescue from its consequences ... Joel is clearly nearing the 'best wine' that he is looking for. But how will these things make themselves clear, what does this actually mean?

Prayers:

Loving God, we thank you because you are a God who heals. Thank you that you see what is in our hearts and offer forgiveness and restoration and healing, even when we are spiritually or emotionally blind. Thank you for the gifts of sight and hearing, and forgive us if we take these for granted. Thank you for all the sights and sounds that have brought us joy over the years – our loved ones, special places, music, art and books. Fill our hearts with gratitude for all that has brought us joy. In Jesus' name, **Amen**

Loving Father, I could certainly do with some healing! Wholeness seems like a long, long way away. I give to you my frustrations, my resentment and my fear at all the changes that are happening to me and which I know can't be reversed. I know the healing that I want and long to have. But show me the healing that I need, prompt me to come to you and ask you for it. Heal the scars that no-one can see, make whole the brokenness that is inside of me. Help me to see that healing is deeper

than the renewal of ageing limbs. Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, who alone can truly heal us. **Amen**

Father, sometimes our wounds are so deep that they are part of the warp and weft of us. Let your Son bring your healing touch to the deepest parts of our minds, our hearts and our souls. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, As we have thought about Jesus healing the man who was born blind, we ask you to bless those of us in our community/home who have trouble seeing – those with cataracts, glaucoma or other eye problems. We think of not just physical sight, but also remember the times when we are blinded by prejud each person in your own image and all that you have made is good. Help us Lord, to help each other and to see people as you see them – as beloved, cherished and valuable. Please Lord, heal our 'blind spots' just as you minister to those ice or distrust or dislike of others. Help us Lord to remember that you created who physically can't see. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

Those who have any sort of eye trouble, partial or total sight loss, cataracts or glaucoma

People who are blinded by their own prejudices, (including ourselves)

Those who work in the NHS and privately to alleviate physical blindness

Ask God to show us where we have our own 'blind spots' and help us to see people through Jesus's eyes of love.

Week Six
The Divine 'No' to Death
Jesus Raises Lazarus
(John 11: 1-45)

The Raising of Lazarus

(John 11: 1-45)

We'd had to get out of Judea again. Everywhere we went, the religious authorities and their hangers on were trying to trip Jesus up. That said, he was still riling them up by not backing down when they accused him of blasphemy. The result of that was that he was in danger of being either stoned to death on the spot or arrested and then executed. So, we crossed the Jordan and got out of the way.

Then Jesus got a message. Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, was dangerously ill at home in Bethany. The sisters had sent to let Jesus know. Jesus really loved all three of them and I knew that he was very close to Lazarus, so it was a very worrying message.

Initially, Jesus said that Lazarus would be alright. I suppose that we just accepted that and he seemed happy enough to stay put where we were. But then, two days later, he suddenly announced that we were going to Bethany which is only a couple of miles from Jerusalem so it would be pretty dangerous. Perhaps he'd had a message that Lazarus was worse.

I couldn't really work out what he thought or knew. Firstly, he said that Lazarus was asleep. That was good news because that would mean that the fever had broken and he would get better. But then, he said that Lazarus was dead but that he was glad for our sake that he hadn't been there in time to save him.

Whatever, we just shrugged and set off. I can tell you that we knew something was up and I didn't feel too good about it either.

It was all a bit tense when we finally arrived at Bethany. Lazarus had been dead for four days; he was in his tomb already. It was pretty clear too that Martha and Mary blamed Jesus for that. As they said: if Jesus had been there, they were convinced that Lazarus wouldn't have died.

Mary took him to the tomb and the most amazing thing happened. For once, Jesus seemed to be at a loss. He just stood there and cried; I mean really cried like he was heartbroken. I couldn't believe it. I'd never seen him like this before.

Eventually, he seemed to pull himself together a bit. But then, he told them to take away the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. Everybody winced. It was too late now and it was Martha, ever practical, who pointed out that there would be a very bad smell after four days!

But he insisted and so, unwillingly, they rolled away the stone. It was as if he was speaking to a child who had crawled in to a dangerous place where they shouldn't be: Jesus shouted out – "Lazarus, come out!" Everyone there held their breath. I mean, what was he playing at? The man was dead and had been for four days! But then, we saw something moving in the entrance to the tomb. I felt faint; I really thought I was going to pass out because there was a figure walking out of the tomb still in the bandages that they'd wrapped his body in.

Jesus told them to take the wrappings away and there was Lazarus, blinking in the sunlight and looking like he couldn't work out what on earth was going on. People were crying, laughing and the two sisters just grabbed their brother trying to touch him and hug him and kiss him all at the same time.

My whole body was shivering. I was elated and, also, weirdly, a bit scared. But one thing I knew: this was it! This was what he had meant. This was saving the best wine until last! What more could there be? His friend, Lazarus, was dead and now he wasn't! Jesus had brought him back; he was alive again. That meant that he could bring anyone back to life again that he wanted. Given that, the whole world would soon follow him! Imagine it: if you followed him then he could bring anyone you cared about back to life when they died. This most certainly was it: the best wine!

But even in my excitement, it quickly became clear that something wasn't right. It felt like the threatening presence of a great big storm could on the horizon. The Pharisees quickly got to know about it; I mean the news spread like wild-fire! They too could see what this meant and it would bring the Romans down on us hard! Rome would wipe Judea off the face of the earth because of this. Soon, it was being said that Caiaphas, the high priest that year, had said that Jesus must die because it was better that one man should die rather than the whole nation.

We couldn't go about openly now, like we had before, either. Nor could Lazarus because the Pharisees wanted him dead too and for keeps this time. We had to sneak away, to Ephraim, almost in the wilderness ... and wait.

As You Start Thinking:

The raising of Lazarus represents the 'tipping point' in John's Gospel. It ranks high amongst the most dramatic moments in the whole of the New Testament. Whereas much about Jesus' motivations for doing what he did in the way that he did are obscure and debated, one thing stands out. Confronted with the death of his friend, Jesus' response is exactly the same as ours: grief within which is the single word "No!"

The raising of Lazarus shows us the human reaction to death coupled with divine power. We automatically say "no" when we hear of someone's death. Jesus' "no" has impact: Lazarus is called back from the tomb.

This must have looked like the 'best wine', how could it not? Yet the raising of Lazarus is complicated and raises as many questions as it answers. Equally, raising Lazarus makes Jesus' own death all but inevitable. His opponents amongst the religious authorities simply cannot allow a man who can bring someone back from the dead to carry on!

Practical Ideas:

- Have your large wine glass/glass pitcher on display with the 'wine' from the last five weeks in it. At the end of your service/group, top up the 'wine' until it is almost full.
- On your Lenten cross or other display, add a large, flat stone and some bandages to the items from the previous five weeks.

Development Ideas:

- "Jesus Wept": The shortest verse in the whole Bible and one of the most powerful. When we are hurting, when we cry, Jesus is with us in our pain and grief and feels it just like we do. We are not alone!
- "Lazarus! Come out!" Jesus' response to death is like our own. When we hear of someone's death, we almost automatically say "no" and we want the person back. We would do anything to have them back. Jesus has the power to make that happen.
- The Best Wine? It must have seemed like it and Joel's initial reaction is just that, quiet understandably. But, as Joel dimly perceives, there are problems with this:

Lazarus would have to die again one day. This is not everlasting life but a restoration to life for a while longer.

Could Jesus have restored everyone to life in this way? Clearly not! How, then, would he choose who to bring back to life and who to leave dead? What if your loved ones were not brought back?

The raising of Lazarus is the most potent demonstration of Jesus' power. It is a divine power, the power over death! It is this that means the religious authorities cannot allow him to go and they decide that he must die. The raising of Lazarus makes Jesus' own death inevitable.

- **Key Question:** Clearly, power over death is in some way the 'best wine'. Ultimately, it is the only 'wine' that will matter. However, is our human understanding of what power over death would look like (i.e. bringing someone back or preventing them from dying) enough?

Prayers:

Dear Lord, thank you for sending Jesus to live our life and die our death. Thank you that by weeping, Jesus sanctifies our tears and shares in our human grief. Thank you that by being angry about the cruelty and suffering of death, Jesus allows us to share in that anger and frustration. We praise you that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, that he has conquered death. Lord, thank you that we can have the assurance of everlasting life because of what Jesus has done, in whose name we pray. **Amen**

Loving Father, it's true that in the midst of life we are in death. There are times when deaths come one after another after another and we have already seen it far too many times before. It brings with it pain and parting, anger and often fear; fear because it will most certainly not spare us! Give us grace to look death in the eye without fear. Give us grace to bear the pain that it has brought and still brings. Give us grace to look to Jesus who wept over the death of his friend and called him out of the depths of the tomb. Give us grace to know that Jesus himself was prepared to die, to die that we might live forever with him. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen**

Father, in the face of death what can we say except 'no'. Thank you that the same 'no' spoken by your son brought Lazarus from the tomb so that He might enter it himself only to destroy the power of death forever. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Eternal and life-giving Lord, as we think about the raising of Lazarus, we remember too the grief experienced by Martha, Mary and Jesus himself. We remember today all those who are grieving the loss of loved ones, and ask for your presence to surround them, and your peace to fill them again. We think of those who have died in this community/home and we ask for your blessing and comfort for all those who mourn. Thank you that as we read about Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, our mourning is made holy. Help each of us to minister to those who mourn, and to be gentle with ourselves as we walk through times of sorrow and grief. You are with us! Amen.

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

All those who are grieving

People who seek to bring comfort, including

Ministers, pastoral workers, chaplains and funeral directors

Those seeking meaning in their lives after a major life change

Anyone in need of comfort and reassurance

Palm Sunday
The King Is Coming!
The Triumphal Entry In To Jerusalem
(John 12: 12-19)

The Triumphal Entry in to Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

(John 12: 12-19)

One thing is absolutely clear to me and that is that there is no way we should be seen anywhere near Jerusalem for the Passover festival. It really wouldn't be safe to go there. I hardly need to tell you that the news about Jesus calling Lazarus out of the tomb, raising him from the dead, has spread like wild fire.

Six days before the Passover, we went back to Bethany, in fact to Lazarus' house. Perhaps Jesus wanted to check on him, make sure he was alright. Well, he certainly was. He looked a picture of health, in fact. He certainly had a good appetite at the dinner that the sisters gave for Jesus. It was there, of course, that Mary (Lazarus' sister) performed her rather grand gesture of pouring a whole pound of the very expensive perfume, nard, over Jesus' feet and wiping it away with her hair. I suppose there's no limit to what you might do for the person who has summoned your dead brother out of the tomb and given him back to you.

We hadn't been there long when a huge crowd descended on the place. Of course, they wanted to see Jesus but they also wanted to see Lazarus. People had come to believe in Jesus, deserting their traditional faith, because of what happened to Lazarus and, naturally, people wanted to see him with their own eyes. However, this very fact is putting Lazarus' life in danger as well as Jesus'.

However, notwithstanding any of this, Jesus announces that we are to head to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover there. The news of our arrival has definitely gone before us. There is an *enormous* crowd waiting for us. They have cut the branches of palm trees and they're waving them and cheering themselves hoarse. The whole of Jerusalem can hear what they're shouting:

"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel."

Jesus does nothing to damp down all this excitement. He found a young donkey, untied it and rode in to Jerusalem on it ... on a *donkey!* You might think that's rather bizarre but there were plenty there who saw the significance of it, even if that didn't include some of his own closest followers. To many of us, it was obvious that this was what Zechariah had spoken of:

"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your King is coming sitting on a donkey's colt!"

It isn't easy not to get carried away with all the excitement. After all, I was more than a bit mystified when Jesus didn't let the people make him King after he'd fed the crowd of five thousand or more. I certainly wasn't alone in that. But I can't help thinking that perhaps this is different, that it wasn't the right time back then but that it is the right time now. He is after all riding in to *Jerusalem* and people have overheard the Pharisees apparently throwing the towel in. They're muttering to one another: "You see, you can do nothing! Look, the whole world has gone after him."

Eventually, I have to shove aside any nagging doubts that I might have. This is just too big, too amazing not to be real. The reality is that, as we ride in to Jerusalem, Jesus has the whole world at his feet and the crown is his for the taking!

As You Start Thinking:

This story is very often referred to as "the triumphal" entry in to Jerusalem. Coming hard on the heels of the most astonishing of the miracles, raising Lazarus from the dead, there must have been a very clear idea in peoples' minds about how the story would end.

Jesus' followers, both new and longer established, must have been ecstatic. Witness the palm waving and cries of 'Hosanna'. The religious authorities seemed, to some extent, almost on the brink of throwing the towel in and the civil authorities must certainly have been nervous. It appeared that the final confrontation, the day of reckoning, was at hand.

It both was and was not a triumphal entry. It did lead to triumph, just not in a way that anyone could have dreamed or expected that it would. The triumph was won by passing through what appeared to be utter failure.

Practical Ideas:

- Have your large wine glass/glass pitcher on display with the 'wine' from the last six weeks in it. At the end of your service/group, top up the 'wine', squeeze just a little more in.
- On your Lenten cross or other display, add palm branches if you can acquire some (maybe from your church) alternatively, use some flags or bunting to symbolise a triumphal procession.

Development Ideas:

- Think of processions that we know about. Perhaps the recent Royal wedding or the victory parades at the end of conflicts. Maybe even the parades in towns and villages at, for example, May time.
- Jesus was being welcomed as a political leader, with supernatural powers! What qualities do we look for in our political leaders? Why is it that, very often, they can seem to let us down?

- What does it tell us that Jesus allowed the impression to be given that was given when he seems to have known all along that he was riding to his death?
- **Key Question:** How often do we tell God what 'triumph' looks like and ask Him to do what we've described rather than allow God to *show* us what 'triumph' looks like?

Prayers:

Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah: grant us the faith to know you and love you that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory. Amen

Prayers of Intercession:

Loving God, as we think again about the events of Palm Sunday, we ask that you will help us all to welcome Jesus again, the King who came riding humbly on a donkey.

Hosanna means Lord save us – so we pray Lord that you will save us from all the things that hinder us from being the people you want us to be.

We pray for people who want to welcome you, but are unable to because of fear, or past hurts, especially those who have been hurt by the church or by other Christians. Lord save us from all that divides us.

We pray for all people across the world who are living in countries where people are oppressed, for those who are not allowed to worship freely, for those longing for liberation.

Lord Jesus, we pray for all those who are leaders of countries and communities, – may they lead with humility, justice and compassion.

We pray for the peace of the city of Jerusalem, and the whole region – for Israelis and Palestinians, for Muslims, Christians and Jews.

Loving Lord, Prince of Peace, we ask for your help in breaking down any barriers that exist between ourselves and others, in our community here, in the wider community and across the world.

Hosanna – Lord save us! Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

People who want to welcome Jesus, but are unable to, for whatever reason

All leaders of countries and communities, may they follow Jesus's example and lead with humility and compassion

For Jerusalem, the Holy Land and the whole of the Middle East – for all the nationalities and religions that are represented there.

For your peace to come, the peace that brings freedom and justice for all

For our hearts to be open to welcoming Jesus – hosanna!

Maundy Thursday and Good Friday

All Is Lost!

The Betrayal and Death of Jesus

(John 17, 18 and 19)

Maundy Thursday and Good Friday

Ever since we'd arrived back in to Jerusalem and the crowd had gone mad, shouting and cheering as if they were welcoming Jesus as king, I'd had this feeling that something dramatic was about to happen. It was as if everything was building to an inevitable climax.

At the Passover meal, which I served, after all that's what I do; things got very weird. Jesus washed everyone's feet. I was astounded! That's my job! I'm a servant, after all. But Jesus did it; he took the lowliest place. Of course, Peter couldn't keep his mouth shut! It's all 'me, me, me' with him. 'Oh, Lord wash all of me then' and all that kind of thing. He shut up when Jesus told him that he would deny him three times before the cock crowed! That gave him something to think about for once.

Jesus also gave us a new commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you!" It's lovely, I know, but then he started saying that he was going away for a little while. He was talking about mansions in his Father's house and saying that he would make a place there for us and come back for us. He said such a lot that night but those were the things that I remember best.

Then Judas sloped off. He looked rather shifty to me but the others said he'd just gone out to give something to the poor because he had the money box. I didn't like it. I didn't like it one bit. There was something horribly wrong about all of this. It was later, when we'd gone out for a walk in the gardens that Judas turned up again with soldiers. Peter, predictably, went berserk and chopped off the high priest's slave's ear ... apparently he was some poor chap called Malchus. It didn't help. They arrested Jesus and we scattered. I was told later that, before the night was out, Peter denied Jesus three times. And then the cock crowed.

The next day was like a horrible nightmare. I kept waiting for something to happen, something decisive. I mean, like legions of angels or thunderbolts or something, anything, which would stop this from happening. This had to be the moment and I was waiting and praying for the best wine. But it didn't come!

The Romans clearly had no interest in crucifying Jesus. Even Pilate said that he'd done nothing wrong. But the chief priests had stirred up the crowd and they were baying for blood, screaming out that they wanted him crucified. Pilate argued with them, even asking of they really wanted him to crucify our king. But it made no difference. "We have no king but Caesar" they shouted back.

They made him carry his own cross, all the way to Golgotha. I followed all the way, still desperately expecting something to happen or, if not, praying that I would just wake up and find that it was all alright after all.

But they crucified him. They crucified him and nothing happened except the soldiers gambled at the foot of his cross to see who would get his tunic. It broke my heart to see Jesus' mother, his aunt and Mary Magdalene standing by the cross along with the follower that had always been closest to him. Jesus told this man to look after his Mum and for her to look after him.

Then Jesus asked for a drink and they held up a sponge full of vinegar for him. I looked at him and it was as if he nodded a little. He said: "It is finished". Then he died. He just died. Nothing happened, there was no rescue and no intervention of any kind. I'd followed this man because he'd saved the best wine till last, all that time ago back in Cana. I'd followed him expecting something wonderful but all it had meant was to bring me to this place where he died. He'd turned water in to wine, he'd healed the sick and the blind, and he'd fed a multitude with nothing at all. I'd seen him walk on water and I'd watched him call Lazarus out of the tomb. And then he just died, just like anyone else.

There was a garden nearby with a new tomb in it. They buried him there but I didn't stay to watch. I couldn't. It was all over!

As You Start Thinking:

Because we know how the story ends, it can be difficult to indwell the emotions that contemporary witnesses to these events felt. It must have been clear that a climactic moment was being approached; Jesus was on a collision course with his opponents both in the religious and civil authorities. However, the faith that they had come to have in Jesus, coupled with the events of Palm Sunday, must have led them to have confidence that victory was assured.

There must have been a mounting sense of unease that Passover night; Jesus' own statements can only have been perplexing if not alarming. Then comes a stunning betrayal and the disciples respond with anger and with fear. The following day was a nightmare of staggering proportions. Joel's journey, to see what saving the best wine until last would mean, appears to end with something as hateful, prosaic and final as ... just another death!

Everything was lost, nothing was left except broken dreams, shattered faith and an abandonment of hope. Saving the best wine until last, the victory of love, appeared to be nothing more than a well-meant lie.

Practical Ideas:

- Have your large wine glass/glass pitcher on display with the 'wine' from the last seven weeks in it, full almost to the top. At the end of your service/group, pour away the 'wine' into a bucket or other suitable receptacle with no further comment.
- On your Lenten Cross, or other display, place symbols of the crucifixion. These might include a crown of thorns or some large, heavy duty nails. (The

shroud/winding sheet that can be found in some churches might be a little inappropriate, however)

Development Ideas:

- Good Friday in the past: the shops all closed and theatres, cinemas etc. all closed. Having to be quiet and respectful all day, even as a restless child who wanted to play out!
- Jesus was betrayed. What things betray us? Friends and families? Our bodies? Our minds?
- The loss of every one of their hopes and dreams at the crucifixion left the disciples in fear and despair. Why was it necessary for Jesus to actually die? What does that tell us about God's closeness to and love for us?
- **Key Question:** What does the disciples' apparent loss of everything that had mattered to them at the foot of the cross say to us about our moments of despair? Does it say that those moments are very, very real and cannot be dismissed glibly? Does it also say that God is in them and the story doesn't and won't end there?

Prayers:

Almighty Father, look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross; who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever Amen.

Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayers of Intercession:

Faithful and loving God, as we think of the suffering of Jesus, we remember all those who feel abandoned or betrayed by their friends. Lord, we know that Jesus experienced those hurts and wounds too, and we pray for your comfort, peace and reconciliation. We lift to you all those who are in anguish today because of physical, mental or spiritual pain. We especially remember those who are facing death. We pray that they all will know the comfort of your presence very close, and that you will give them your peace, strength and courage. We pray for all those in our home/scheme who care for us and look after us. Thank you that we never have to face suffering on our own, and that your grace is sufficient for our needs. Thank you for all that you have done through Jesus who has lived our life and died our death. We put our trust in you, faithful God. Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

Those who feel betrayed or abandoned by friends or family

Those in any kind of pain – physical, mental or spiritual

Those who are fearful about the future

Those facing death

Those who know there is suffering and anguish to come

The carers in our home/scheme

Easter Day
Alleluia! He Is Risen!
The Resurrection of Jesus
(John 20: 1-31)

The Resurrection

(John 20: 1-31)

For a couple of days, I'd been hanging around with Thomas. He was one of the original followers of Jesus; they called him The Twin. He's a nice bloke, keeps his feet firmly on the ground and doesn't get carried away.

Thomas and I felt much the same way. We were just hanging around trying to think of what to do next. I mean, we'd left everything behind and ended up with all our hopes and dreams sealed up in a cold, stone tomb. So much for that, then! We were hurt and upset, certainly. It would also be fair to say that we were more than a little angry and feeling pretty let down.

I mean, Jesus didn't even fight for it, did he? He just let them crucify him. He just gave up and died. So ... what next? Both me and Thomas decided that we didn't want to be around the others and especially not that idiot, Peter! All mouth, mouth, mouth and then he actually said that he didn't even know Jesus. Although, in fairness, both me and Thomas were thinking that we'd got some serious living down to do now.

By Sunday evening, there are crazy rumours circulating around. It's being said that Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb. Well, she would do. She's a lovely lady and she absolutely adored Jesus. He gave her back her dignity after what had been, shall we say, a colourful past.

Anyhow, when she got there, she found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb and the body had gone. Now, that's not altogether surprising. The Jewish religious authorities could quite easily have decided that it would be best not to have a permanent memorial to Jesus just outside the city. Peter and the guy that Jesus was closest to also went and they saw that the tomb was empty too.

It's sad, not very pleasant but ultimately not all that unusual. However, they're also saying that Mary saw someone near the tomb that she thought was the gardener. But then, this man spoke to her, called her by name, and she realised that it was Jesus himself standing there.

Thomas and I talked about it. It's such a shame. I mean, the poor woman is grief stricken after all and pain like that can play tricks on your mind. She *wanted* to see Jesus, of course she did, and so the poor soul thought that she had done.

Anyway, that evening, the rest of Jesus' original followers (minus Judas, of course) came battering the door down and wanting to speak to Thomas. Now they're *all*

saying that they've seen Jesus! They're saying that he was suddenly just standing there in the house that they're hiding out in, despite all the doors being securely locked. They're saying that it was *him* and that he even showed them the wounds that had been made on his body when they crucified him.

Thomas is having none of it and I can't say I blame him. He tells them in no uncertain terms that he won't believe it unless he can put his fingers in the holes made by the nails. With that, they flounce off and leave me and Thomas just looking at each other.

For the next week, these rumours are getting wilder and wilder. Thomas is still adamant that it isn't true, can't be true. I still agree with him but ... as the days go by, I keep feeling my scalp prickling and sometimes I almost feel breathless. It's like I know he's around, Jesus I mean. It feels like it did that day when he came back to Cana after the wedding feast, the day I saw him again and he healed the Official's son.

Thomas is still pretty sure that it's all a lot of nonsensical wishful thinking. But, eventually, he cracks and agrees to at least go and see the others and find out a bit more. So both of us go to the house where they are staying.

You might not believe me and I would understand why you didn't. But I will tell you because I have to tell you what happened. Well, nothing initially. But, then, I looked up at the same time as Thomas. And I tell you this: Jesus was standing there. He was standing there just like he always had with that little smile on his face that he always got when he was up to something.

He reached out his hands and I could clearly see the holes that the nails had made. It was him; there was no doubting that anymore. And Jesus tells Thomas to put his fingers in the holes and his hand in to his side. Well, of course Thomas doesn't! There's no need. He just says: "My Lord and My God!"

As for me, I'm just standing there with tears streaming down my cheeks because this is actually real and this is actually happening and it's happening to me. Jesus looks at me and smiles just like he did at the wedding party. Then he gently says my name and gives me that same questioning look that he did on the street in Cana and many times since. As if he's saying: "Well, what do you think?"

And I know, I truly know that he did all this for me.

Jesus brought spontaneous joy in to the ordinary things of life. He healed all those who asked. He took the little that we are and have to give and made of it a huge abundance. He refused to be made a king like any other but he walked through the storms of our troubles to rescue us. He made us whole and complete. He showed that he understood how fearful death was and he showed us his response to death when he called Lazarus out of the tomb.

But the best wine of all, the wine saved until last, is that he called Lazarus out of the tomb and went into it himself instead. Just at the point when everything seemed to have gone, when it seemed that there was nothing left but memories, then there came the best wine. Everything makes sense now. At the end everything makes sense because he didn't stay in that tomb. He walked straight back out of it. Life

doesn't end; it's just changed and he promised that we would all be with him, together for all eternity.

I believe him!

As You Start Thinking:

It must have been difficult to believe. Let's face it, it still is very often. That Joel should have found himself on the same side as the sceptical Thomas is entirely understandable. If we're honest, we would have been too. If faith is easy, it isn't faith.

The continued humanity of the risen Jesus is very striking. He ate and drank with his disciples. What is more, the scars of the crucifixion weren't miraculously healed. He bore them and still bears them. With a profound understanding of just how difficult this was to believe, Jesus takes Thomas up on his request and offers his scars for him to touch and feel. That is the moment for Thomas.

The scars, the wounds, the damage weren't somehow illusory. They were very, very real and yet they have been glorified now.

The best wine that Joel sought is finally revealed. No matter what happens, no matter how we are betrayed, no matter how much we think that all is lost and there is no hope, God is in that with us. No matter what has hurt us and damaged us, the resurrection shows that *"all shall be well. All manner of things shall be well!"*

Practical Ideas:

- Have your empty 'wine' glass/pitcher on display. At the end of your service/group, fill it and fill it until it overflows (making sure there's something to catch it in!)
- At the start of the service, remove the items from your Lenten cross/display together with a brief reminder of what each one meant. Have some flowers ready to replace them with and, if possible, dress your cross with them.

Development Ideas:

- Easter Parades, Easter egg hunts and whole communities celebrating together.
- It was Jesus' continued humanity that convinced those who couldn't believe in the resurrection. The resurrection is a resurrection of *us* as unique individuals but healed and made perfect again.
- The resurrection is a better 'last wine' than even the raising of Lazarus or the prospect of a 'King Jesus' ruling over Israel. God's promises to us and plans for us are far, far greater and more wonderful than anything we can imagine.
- The darkest hour is just before the dawn.

Prayers:

Lord of all life and power, who through the mighty resurrection of your Son overcame the old order of sin and death to make all things new in him: grant that we, being dead to sin and alive to you in Jesus Christ, may reign with him in glory; to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be praise and honour, glory and might, now and in all eternity. Amen

Risen Christ, for whom no door is locked, no entrance barred: open the doors of our hearts, that we may seek the good of others and walk the joyful road of sacrifice and peace, to the praise of God the Father. Amen

Prayers of Intercession:

Resurrection God – as we praise you for raising Jesus from the dead, we remember those who have died ... We ask for your blessing on all those who have lost hope, or who see no future – those who are still going through Good Friday and who are in need of your resurrection touch. We pray for those who need your new life to be breathed into them, and all those seeking to start afresh. We pray for our activities coordinators who help us to have fun, experience new things and to be aware of your creation, (animals, music, art and beauty), all things that can renew our joy and lift our spirits. We pray for ourselves and for others when we don't recognise you, because we are burdened down with grief or concerns. Open our eyes Lord to new life everywhere, give us new hope and fill us with Easter joy. Jesus is alive – hallelujah! Amen

Or put it into your own words and pray for:

Those who have died

Those who feel hopeless

Our activities coordinators

Ourselves and others when you go unrecognised in our midst

Those things that bring us joy

APPENDIX 1: Joel's Jesus – further ideas (particularly for those living with dementia)

Here we give only very brief ideas, in the belief that you are the experts on your particular group of residents and with a little prompting and imagination will come up with your own ways of sharing the stories. These ideas have been put forward by Liz Day, chaplain at Emmandjay Court and Glen Rosa, Ilkley

Week 1. Wedding at Cana

Visuals

Wedding photos – own and those of famous people eg Royal family

Copy of the marriage service – read the vows

Glass of water – add red squash as illustration of wine

A wedding certificate – look at the details

Illustrations

Talk about wedding experiences

What did you wear / sing / honeymoon

Hymns

(popular at weddings)

Love divine

Lord of all hopefulness

All things bright and beautiful

Give me joy in my heart

Songs

Get me to the church on time

Daisy, daisy

Week 2. Healing of official's son

Visuals

Plasters, bandages

Picture of a red cross

Illustrations

Personal story of having fallen as a small child – going to my aunt's house for plasters!! (and sympathy!)

Story of the expectations of 'Jesus' healing the kitten in 'Whistle down the wind'

Ask about expectations/ hopes of healing residents have experienced

Hymns

Great is Thy faithfulness

Oh love that wilt not let me go

Jesu's hands were kind hands

Week 3. Feeding of the 5,000

Visuals

Pretend fish and chip parcel with newspaper

Picnic basket

Communion set

Illustrations

Stories of school trips (as a pupil and a teacher) – always needed a packed lunch! When the children came to writing up their experiences – always included what they had in their sandwiches, which was more important than the educational content of the day!

Ask about residents' experiences of picnics, what they would take

Hymns

Break thou the bread of life

Jesus the Lord said, I am the bread
Guide me O Thou great redeemer (bread of heaven)

Week4. Jesus walks on water

Visuals

Seaside connections:

Flags for the top of sand pies

Bucket/spade

Pictures of seaside scenes (donkeys etc) – pictures we share book

Windmills

Illustrations

Personal story of when I was a small child and my father took me into the sea at Woolacombe on his back. A huge wave engulfed us and he held on to me for dear life whilst we surfaced!! He told me later how scared he had been of letting me go.

Memories of favourite seaside holiday destinations

Memories of storms (huge waves at Scarborough!)

Storms of life

Hymns

Will your anchor hold

Lead us heavenly father lead us

For those in peril on the sea (can't remember first line!!)

Songs

O I do like to be beside the seaside

My bonnie lies over the ocean

Week 5. Jesus heals a man born blind

Visuals

Feely bags or boxes – have to put their hands in and feel the object they can't see

Closing our eyes – what can we hear?

Illustrations

Putting on sunglasses, changing the clarity

Talking of transition between night and day

Memories of walking outside (maybe on holiday) in the pitch black

Personal memory of going into a cave on a geography field trip and the leader asking us all to turn off our headlamps!

Memories of playing blind man's bluff – scarf round eyes

Ask – if residents couldn't see – what they would miss most

If a resident is partially sighted, ask them about their experiences/ frustrations – acknowledging their difficulties and praise how they manage (sounds patronizing – but needn't be done in that way!!)

Hymns

Amazing grace

Now let us see Thy beauty Lord

All things bright and beautiful

Week 6. Jesus raises Lazarus

Visuals

Bandages

Toilet rolls (Christmas game – mummies !) someone gets wrapped in a toilet roll so they look like a mummy and then they burst out of their covering!)

Illustrations

Childhood games – cowboys and Indians where we would 'pretend' to be dead.

Personal illustration of a plant which I kept forgetting to water. I gave it some water one evening and in the morning I announced to my husband, 'Look, my plant is alive again'!

Personal illustrations of rescuing birds who fly into the windows of the house. They seem dead, but are just stunned and they eventually fly off.

Hymns

I danced in the morning

There is a green hill

Christ the Lord is risen today