



Conversations with Art Through

Lent 2020

***The Church of the Holy Trinity
NYC***

&

St Stephen's with St John's, Westminster

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Introduction:

Graham Buckle, Vicar of St Stephen's

We are trying something new this Lent, and I am delighted that our friend Marc Woodhead, was able to help and make some wonderful suggestions of paintings both from where he works in the National Gallery in London, and also from the Frick collection, NYC. Each week we will look at a painting, not always the most obvious we might associate with our themes for the week. But we encourage you, together with our contributors, to go more deeper into the picture, and explore with your own thoughts to aid your prayer and devotion. We have included the web link to the picture, where you can explore the painting in greater depth and detail. We encourage you to do so as you read and pray.

John Beddingfield, Rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity, NYC

I will never forget the first day of a class I took on Art and Spirituality in seminary. Professor Fred Shriver began by asking, "Has anyone checked out my credentials for teaching this course?" Getting no response, he asked, "Do you know where I studied art history, painting, architecture, color, and light?" Again, there was silence, until Professor Shriver shouted, "NOWHERE! THAT's where!" He went on to explain, "I know what I know, and ask what I ask of art, and you, and God, because I have spent years LOOKING. That's how we learn—by looking." I often think of that class with tremendous gratitude for the gift of encouragement Professor Shriver gave me and so many others—to look, to apprehend, and to pray with our eyes. Lent is an especially good time to practice our looking, and I'm so very grateful to be practicing with our two parishes and friends. This season, and always, may God bless us with eyes to see and hearts to love.

Marc Woodhead, Educator at the National Gallery

When we are discussing the paintings in the National Gallery, London, and the paintings of the Frick Collection, New York, the paintings seem to me to come to life, to be alive. When we are responding to the paintings, sharing our thoughts, reflecting upon the feelings they evoke in us, I always feel that I am learning more about the paintings and about myself, and what it is to be human.

It is a great privilege to be part of this conversation about Art, a conversation during Lent, across the Pond, and, we could also say, communing with artists and ideas across time.

Wednesday 26th February

If there is one thing we must all confront, and which we all desperately avoid, it is death. We pad against it with jokes, cushion ourselves with property, and mourn a little for our own mortality with each bereavement.

Vanitas paintings — from the Latin translation for the Biblical Hebrew hevel (meaning: nothing, vapor, vanity, etc.) in Ecclesiastes — was a dark satire on a fashionable still life of the Dutch Golden Age. Nouveau riche Dutch patrons often commission still lifes showcasing their wealth.

Jan-Jansz Treck's Vanitas confronts us with a post-mortem of our property, showing them mere objects we borrow. It faces us with our own death; it invites us to learn how to die. As Christians, we ask, how do we entrust our end to God, who also gifted us our beginning.

Calvyn du Toit, Musician & Theologian, Holy Trinity

Thursday 27th February

On looking at this piece with no knowledge of its origins or meaning, we were struck by the scene of chaos. As some of you may know already, this is unique for still life paintings which normally depict a sense of serenity.

When we looked closer, we noticed several items of opulence - jug of wine, silk scarf, jewellery box - immersed between rather more ominous looking objects, eg. a skull, a knight's helmet etc.

When thinking about how this painting may link to Lent, we thought how Jesus denied himself of all things (opulent or otherwise) during the 40 days and 40 nights but was tempted several times by the devil and yet still he resisted.

The haphazard layout of the table reminded us of the chaos that ensued just before his crucifixion. If you look closely, you can also see the skull with a crown of twigs...

Once we investigated the actual meaning of the piece, which is that nothing lasts forever yet the arts remain, it gave our interpretation further gravitas.

You can have all the luxuries in the world, yet these are just as likely to bring chaos to your life. The one remaining constant for us all is Christ.

*Amanda, Seb and Archie Kershen
Zumba Teacher, Members of St Stephen's and Junior Church*

Friday 28th February

I have always loved how I am simultaneously drawn to and repulsed by Dutch Vanitas paintings. These works, defined by symbols representing the transience of life, are vehicles through which the viewer can contemplate their own mortality. The fleeting nature of earthly achievements and pleasures is conveyed through the depiction of representative objects, often arrayed in a seemingly haphazard manner to emphasize decline and decay.

In this work by Jan Jansz. Treck (1605/6-1652), the artist includes images that allude to learning and art (books and drawing), music (instruments and score), power and war (helmet), riches (treasure box and fabric), pleasures (clay pipe and wine jug), baptism (scallop shell), as well as symbols of the passage of time (hour glass), and death (skull). The painting is particularly evocative through subtle touches such as the dying ember near the clay pipe and the palm “crown” surrounding the skull.

During the Lenten period of reflection and contemplation, I find the gruesome beauty of Vanitas paintings provides a unique focus for meditating on the ephemeral nature of worldly goods and pursuits.

Suzanne Julig, Art Advisor & Educator, Holy Trinity

Saturday 29th February

The most striking image in this painting, which immediately leaps out at the viewer, is surely the skull which surmounts everything else. The rest of the objects represent either earthly pursuits, passions and pleasures – the lute, the sheet music, the lavish cloth, the flagon of wine, a flute – or earthly glory – the helmet. But above all else sits the skull, placed in the same position as the helmet. This painting is an unmistakable *memento mori* – a reminder of our mortality. The skull sits just above an hourglass, measuring the span of our lives. Something about the straw or twine curled around the cranium suggests a crown for *Mors Triumphator*.

Death is supreme sovereign, his power irresistible. All earthly joys and pleasures are vain and fleeting.

Our first instinct might be to see this as a bit negative, depressing and dreary, but I don't think it is. As with all *memento mori*, the idea here is not to cripple us with anxiety about fear of our own death, but to confront it and consider what is really important. Reflecting on the certainty that we will at some point die, the natural next step is to think about what we want to achieve by then.

What will be important to us as we look back on our lives and what do we want to leave behind?

Duncan Hegan, Tea@3 Helper and Pastoral Assistant at St Matthew's Church

Lent 1
“Temptations”
1st - 7th March



The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain

Duccio, 1308-11

Tempera on panel

Frick Collection, New York

<https://collections.frick.org/objects/152/the-temptation-of-christ-on-the-mountain>

Christ is on the mountain.
The Devil with black wings
falls off a precipice
and evil is banished.

from Liz Witts, Poet St Stephen's Church

Sunday 1st March

My eyes are drawn to the strength of Jesus' finger pointing; resisting temptation and rebuking Satan. This strength serves as a reminder that I am giving up something for Lent: not to kick start a diet or to waver after a day. My Lenten promise will help me

to grow closer to God through resisting daily temptations. I am giving up something to transform myself spiritually: to train my ears and heart to hear God and listen to him.

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Rosetta Dyer, Head Teacher at Burdett Coutts

Monday 2nd March

I love how this painting juxtaposes Jesus' blue and red garments against the devil's pitch-black! Jesus' temptation in the desert, which appears in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark, culminates in him being led to the top of a mountain, where the devil offers all of the world's riches if Jesus will worship him. Jesus rebuffs the devil immediately, replying, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”

The temptation narrative exemplifies “kenosis,” the theological term for Jesus' emptying of his own will so that he can become receptive to God's will. Lent is a time when, like Jesus, we strive to empty ourselves of our ego, selfishness, and love of earthly pleasures, all of which keep us from what is most important: loving God, and living according to His will.

Steve Knight, Environmental Ministry Volunteer, Holy Trinity

Tuesday 3rd March

This depiction of The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain is quite spectacular. The painting uses size and scale to illustrate the juxtaposition of good and evil, divinity and impiety, resistance and temptation. Jesus has been taken by the devil to the highest point of the mountain, above the earth majestically towering over the spurned kingdoms with their diminutive buildings and crenellations. He is taken to this high level so that from this standpoint he can observe all that he can command if he only succumbs to the devil's temptation and worships him. Even the head of Jesus has been situated at the apex of the painting to again give his position dominance over all he could have power over if he follows the devil.

The artists impression of the devil is interesting too. Described as many things: Satan, an angel, demi-god, Lucifer - here he is shown as a demon in black (not red as is commonly depicted) with hair, gnome ears, forked feet and bat wings (with surprisingly no long tail) and with a grin on his face possibly denoting teasing, slyness or mischievousness. All the qualities you would expect from a being devoid of morals, conscience or goodness.

Jesus is shown rejecting the devil and sending him on his way reminding him that the only one worthy of praise and reverence is God himself. Jesus is supported by two angels sent down from God to give ministry to him and tend to him following his 40 days and nights of fasting in the desert.

Tony Sewell, Weekend Verger at St Stephen's Church

Wednesday 4th March

Isn't it strange that, though our lives are inundated with pictures, many find it hard to read, no less pray through, images? Many of the images surrounding us give us the very same choice Satan (the Deceiver) gives Jesus in Duccio's painting. Bow to the way we see the world, and you shall receive it.

Such an instant microwave dinner version of the world, however, is always a half-dish. It offers little of what a shared meal is: more than sustenance but a shared experience of preparation, consumption, and then tidying. Half-backed ideas we should consume without questioning. As image after image promises us quick fixes to our problems more than ever, we need to approach all pictures with prayerful discernment.

Calvyn du Toit, Musician & Theologian, Holy Trinity

Thursday 5th March

Dear Friends at St Stephen's Church, London and the Church of the Holy Trinity, New York,

I wonder when you look at this painting you notice the deep reds, blues and also the icy mountain that that Christ is standing on. Notice also the blackness of Satan and the kingdoms that the Christ is tempted with. In these temptations we see the humanity of the Christ as one who battle through. As you and I read this story and look deeply at the picture we also remember what St Paul says in 1 Cor. 10. 13-15: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to us. God is faithful He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted He will also provide a way of escape so that you can stand under it"

So friends, whether your temptation this lent is power, status, money or any other temptation, let us look at the faithfulness of God who always provides a way of escape, so that we can overcome. Remember also that we have a loving God who will restore and forgive when we do fall. Yes, our temptations may feel huge but don't despair, look for the way of escape and draw on the Saviour's love.

Sr Theresa Pountney (CA Sister), Weekday Member of St Stephen's Church

Friday 6th March

This painting depicts the famous Gospel passage of Satan's final attempt at Jesus "with all the kingdoms of the world and their glory."

Jesus and Satan are shown as much larger than the kingdoms, not only because of the height of the mountain but perhaps also of the smallness of what is being offered when compared to one's soul and the Kingdom of God?

I find myself most focused on the angels who came to minister to Jesus after he sends Satan away. Jesus doesn't seem to know of their presence while he's dispensing of temptation. Maybe that's what Faith is about? Not knowing what will happen but at the same time knowing God will not desert us on our journey?

*Joe Lipuma, Vestry Member & HTNC Volunteer and
Patti Li, Physician & Volunteer, Holy Trinity*

Saturday 7th March

Firstly, I must just say that I absolutely adore Duccio's work and the whole story of the Maesta - the magnificent double-sided altarpiece which was carried proudly by the people of Siena, through their streets and placed on the high altar at the crossing of the Cathedral in 1311. This panel was a small part of the altarpiece, the third scene of the predella on the sanctuary side of the altar. I am delighted to mention that we also have, at the National Gallery in London, two panels from the rear predella, two stories from the latter part of Christ's ministry, the healing of the blind man, and Transfiguration. The panels in London and New York seem to me to be like separated siblings, brothers and sisters.

In the Frick Collection panel of the *Temptation of Christ by the Devil* I particularly love the play of scale within the painting, the clarity of the lines and design, and the questions that Duccio opens up through his representation of the narrative, which you have explored in your reflections and thoughts. I love the colours, the myriad of greys, lilacs, earth red browns and pale mint greens, which provide a magically muted backdrop for the intense blues and reds that lead our eyes to Jesus. At first glance, we are hovering above the roof tops, balconies and crenelated campaniles of the city lower left, but on closer inspection, we can also walk through a gateway and along a terracotta road into the city, we can imagine being on the mountain tops and, at the same time, being within the city walls.

For me, the composition feels perfect, everything is meant to be this way, and yet, this panel was not only designed tell this story, but also to *speak* to the other panels across the entire surface of the Maesta, across 27 different panels on the rear.

Marc Woodhead, Educator at the National Gallery

Lent 2
“Prayer”
8th - 14th March



Interior
Vilhelm Hammershoi, 1899
Oil on Canvas
National Gallery, London

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/vilhelm-hammershoi-interior>

Sunday 8th March

Upon my bed, night after night

I looked for the one whom I love with all my heart.

I looked for him but couldn't find him.

“I will rise now and go all around the city,
through the streets and the squares.

I will look for the one whom I love with all my heart.”

I looked for him but couldn't find him.
The guards found me, those who make their rounds in the city.
"The one whom I love with all my heart—have you seen him?"
No sooner did I depart from them
than I found the one whom I love with all my heart.
I held on to him and now I won't let him go,
until I've brought him to my mother's house,
to the chamber of the one who conceived me.
I place you under oath, daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild deer:
don't rouse, don't arouse love until it desires.

Song of Songs 3:1-5 (Common English Bible)

Yvonne O'Neal, Vestry Warden, Advocate, U.N. & Anglican Communion Work, Holy Trinity

Monday 9th March

Vilhelm Hammershoi is a Danish Painter known for paintings of his house. This particular painting is of a room with a large table. Originally the table was larger. When looking closely you can still see the pencil drawing underneath the paint layer. The woman in the painting was added later. She is his wife. In his other paintings she is often depicted reading a book or a letter. The feeling one gets while looking at this painting is kind of a gloomy one. The room has no decorations. The woman is wearing a long black dress, which raises the question: Is she in mourning or is this a woman who is feeling lonely or depressed. The figure has her back turned to us.

Destiny De Keyser, St Stephen's Junior Church

Tuesday 10th March

We see a woman shut in
by closed doors and
turned away from us.

How can we know her or she us?

Do the doors imprison her, or did she choose
to be alone with God?

For what might she pray?

Is God with her in her solitude
giving her courage to transform
herself and her world?

Patsy Weille, HTNC Volunteer & Board Member, Holy Trinity

Wednesday 11th March

I feel drawn in by the stillness and the quietness. I enjoy the combination of restfulness with the energy of strong clarity. There is softness in the light on the table surface, and the black dress. There is sharpness in the lines around the front table edge, around the apron edge.

Perhaps especially in Lent this sense of stillness could be an invitation to slow down. On the other hand the two doors could represent a dramatic choice which is facing this person.

We, the person who might pray, are standing behind the figure, perhaps standing *with* her. The figure could be ourselves or it could be another person who needs our prayer. There may not be anything we can offer other than prayer.

Part of us may hope that our prayer will 'help' her; part of us sees prayer as an additional way of 'being with' another person. Entering the still presence of the image may be a way to do that.

*Annie Power
Member of St Stephen's Choir and Coordinator of our "Enquirers Group".*

Thursday 12th March

For [Christ] says: Pray interly [interiorly, inwardly, entirely, wholeheartedly] though it seems to you that this has no savour for you; still it is profitable enough, though you may not feel that. Pray wholeheartedly, though you may feel nothing, though you may see nothing, yes, though you think that you could not, for in dryness and barrenness, in sickness and in weakness, then is your prayer most pleasing to me, though you think it almost tasteless to you.

*Julian of Norwich, Showings of Divine Love, chapter 44.
Julian was a fourteenth century English anchorite and author of what is believed to be the earliest surviving book in the English language to be written by a woman.*

Friday 13th March

The room and its occupant are painted in the same subdued tones, so that personality is almost erased, which is emphasised by the rear view that Hammershoi offers us. It is unsettling to see the model as just one of the tastefully placed 'objects' in the room.

At another level, to me the scene radiates quietness, but not loneliness. The lady has space and time to be mindful – distractions are few.

Old-master paintings of the Annunciation often place Mary alone in an uncluttered space, calm and attentive to her unique experience.

John Turpin, Member of St Stephen's Church Choir

Saturday 14th March

It is interesting that this, more than any other painting we have selected, generated the most interest amongst the congregation at St Stephen's. The theme for this week is "prayer", something we all should take seriously in our Lenten observance. And Vilhelm Hammershøi's "Interior" creates a perfect imagine for us to contemplate as we attempt to communicate more deeply with God. I was interested in this painting because Hammershøi was born in 1864 in Copenhagen, Denmark, a city I visited last summer whilst on sabbatical. His pictures I managed to see certainly resembled his poetic, subdued portraits and interiors he was renowned for. And "Interior" is of no exception. What is the young woman in black doing as she faces away from the artist to what seems to be a stove. Is she praying? Using prayer beads? Has the artist stumbled over her by accident...? Is she contemplating something other than the subdued bare room? Do take time to look at this picture in close details, and see for yourself the wonders that Hammershøi creates with his brush to masterful effect.

Graham Buckle, Vicar of St Stephen's Church

**Lent 3
“Study”
15th - 21st March**



The Magdalen Reading
Rogier van der Weyden, Before 1438
Oil on panel
National Gallery, London
<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/rogier-van-der-weyden-the-magdalen-reading>

Sunday 15th March

The Magdalen Reading was one of the first paintings that I can remember loving. I collect images of women reading, and this piece, dating from when the general populace was unable to read, is especially powerful and affirming, making obvious the accepted identification of the Magdalen with Mary of Bethany, who differs from her sister Martha in choosing a more scholarly path. I went on to study the Middle Ages in graduate school, and returned to the painting as evidence of the way medieval settings and clothing were seen as perfectly appropriate for biblical characters and stories, so alive was the past in the present of their faith, *as indeed it should be to all good Christians!* (to paraphrase the fifteenth century pilgrim-mystic Margery Kempe when rebuked by a priest for excessive crying at Easter).

The Magdalen is composed and focused, gathering wisdom and intellectual ammunition for the mission ahead. This image has powered me through much reading and writing, but also reminded me of the pleasure of a beautiful green dress, or the other job (and the oil pot) nearby.

Christina Barker, Member of St Stephen's Healing Team

Monday 16th March

Mary Magdalene is perhaps reading about herself in the Bible. She is absorbed in the “wondrous story” as she relives it. She had been cured and made whole by the saving power of Christ’s love and forgiveness, and she knows that Jesus lives. Her face is serene, as if she has not only a special understanding of the text but affection for the words.

We can read about ourselves in Scripture. We may not find our names, but we can identify ourselves. As we learn the story from “poets, prophets, scholars, saints, each a word from God repeating,” (Hymn 631, v.2), we can find the serenity of hope.

“How sweet are your words to my taste! They are sweeter than honey to my mouth.” (Psalm 119:103). We return from age to age in thanksgiving.

*Louisa Young, Lector, Church Tour Guide,
Renewal Works Team Member, and Volunteer, Holy Trinity*

Tuesday 17th March

I have been chosen to read a part of our exodus story tonight. This is a great honour, so I practise now to do a good job.

I also have another other plan. I believe my master is the Messiah we were promised many, many generations ago. He has given me so much. The way he treated me and included me in his group of followers was absolutely amazing. I actually felt as if I, in spite of being a woman and living by myself, did have standing and something to contribute. This is such an amazing state of life that I want to give something back. I have here an alabaster jar full of Spikenard. This is the most expensive perfume around here. I shall make a little speech, wash the master’s feet and give him a good massage with plenty of my perfume oil. I hope he likes it because the scent will cling to him a long time. I want to show him my appreciation so much, and honour him in a special way. For the way he deals with us all something extraordinary needs to be done for him.

*Tamara Katzenbach
Leader of Guided Meditations at St Stephen's Church*

Wednesday 18th March

When I look at this painting, I see a woman who is presumably reading from a prayer book, or perhaps a Bible. I then look out the window to see three people outside. Two of them seem to be walking on a path and the other seems to be practicing archery (let's hope nothing more dramatic than that is going on). I wonder if the people outside would be welcome to come inside and pray with the woman. Could she turn the latch to open the window and call out to them to invite them in? I wonder what they'd say if she did that. Who might be just outside our window that we could welcome in to worship with us?

Paul Chernick, Vestry Member, Holy Trinity

Thursday 19th March

A few years ago I was organist of a church dedicated to St Mary Magdalene, and in preparing music for the patronal festival and listening to our vicar's sermon I discovered how difficult a figure Mary Magdalene is to pin down. This is partly because of the late 6th century conflation of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and an unnamed "sinful" woman. Although this conflation was officially undone in the mid-20th century, their stories are nevertheless entangled. And this 15th century painting features a version of this "composite" Magdalene, appropriately ambiguous - hair only partially veiled, her dress modest but fur-lined (symbolising sexuality), sitting on a sparse room's floor but on a red cushion reading a lavish devotional book, her face and gaze tilted downward perhaps simultaneously in sorrow or repentance and concentration on study, an active outdoors alternative to her contemplative life visible in the distance. Mary Magdalene has been portrayed as exemplary for many reasons. But something of which her many aspects - sometimes ambivalent or even contradictory - might remind us, both about ourselves and others, is that we are all complex and composite, made up of many histories, stories, and contexts that can seem incongruent but are, in fact, perfectly fine and natural. And, further, the fact that this painting is a fragment of a larger (and lost) altarpiece might remind us that which part or side of these entangled identities you see of others, and others see of you - for it is rarely possible, if ever, to see the whole at once - depends on that cornerstone of the visual arts: perspective.

Matthew Blaiden, Director of Music, St Stephen's Church

Friday 20st March

Here is a woman who is so engrossed in her Bible or prayer book that she doesn't even seem to notice the pomp and circumstance around her. She seems to have taken a moment aside, as other folks seem to be celebrating some sort of a ceremony, wearing proper clothes and all. But look at her: hungry for knowledge! She doesn't even seem to mind missing that beautiful day outside. This is what it is to seek wisdom, to seek truth, to seek Love.

*Ben Gaines,
Marketing Analyst and Husband to an Art Teacher, Holy Trinity*

Saturday 21st March

When looking at this beautiful painting by Rogier Van der Weyden of Mary Magdalen Reading, I am struck by her absorption in the written word. What happens when we read and encounter text on paper? Stories and font styles both printed and hand-written can affect us emotionally, evoke memories, and allow us to create links and make new connections in our minds, and transport us in space and time.

I am reminded of Alan Bennett's brilliant *History Boys*, when the inspirational teacher Hector explains to one of his students "The best moments in reading are when you come across something, a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things that you'd thought special, particular to you. And here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, maybe even someone long dead. And it's as if a hand has come out and taken yours."

Rogier Van der Weyden was, in a way, playing with time in this painting, dressing this biblical figure in 15th century clothes and placing her in a Late Medieval room, allowing the viewer to bring her close, as an aid to meditation. Rogier painted in Brussels, Flanders and, along with Jan Van Eyck in Bruges, was one of the first wave of artists to develop and perfect the technique of oil painting which influenced painters all over Europe. Oil paint is pigment colour mixed with walnut oil, and, unlike the other favoured processes in Italy, fresco watercolour, or egg yolk tempera (both dried very quickly), oil paint takes several weeks to dry, and allows skilled artists like Rogier to work in microscopic and macroscopic realistic detail, and, brush away their brush marks, and so producing a seemingly magical image to contemplate, connecting us to the past.

Marc Woodhead, Educator at the National Gallery

Lent 4
“Alms Giving”
22nd - 28th March



The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly

Thomas Gainsborough c.1756

National Gallery, London

www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/thomas-gainsborough-the-painters-daughters-chasing-a-butterfly

Sunday 22nd March

Thomas Gainsborough's *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly* is a fusion of two Rococo pictorial traditions: the *fête galante* and the Grand Manner portrait.

Favoring lightness over drama, and shifting attention from the monarchy to the aristocracy, Rococo art focused on the lives of the upper class. Two types of paintings developed: the *fête galante*, which celebrated outdoor amusements, and the Grand Manner portrait, which asserted status through the scale of figures.

Gainsborough embraces both genres in this work. His daughters innocently chase a butterfly through an Arcadian landscape. Their bodies fill the picture plane and the low horizon line brings them into the viewer's space; their curiosity becomes our own.

This Lenten season, let us remember that curiosity, too, is a type of light.

Rebecca Bennett, Artist & Art Teacher, Holy Trinity

Monday 23rd March

When voices of children are heard on the green,
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still.
Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,
And the dews of night arise;
Come, come, leave off play, and let us away,
Till the morning appears in the skies.

No, no, let us play, for it is yet day,
And we cannot go to sleep;
Besides, in the sky the little birds fly,
And the hills are all covered with sheep.
Well, well, go and play till the light fades away,
And then go home to bed.
The little ones leaped & shouted & laughed,
And all the hills echoed.

*From Songs of Innocence, William Blake sent by Janet Davey
Weekday and Evensong congregant at St Stephen's*

Tuesday 24th March

From Cocoon forth a Butterfly

As Lady from her Door
Emerged — a Summer Afternoon —
Repairing Everywhere —

Without Design — that I could trace
Except to stray abroad
On miscellaneous Enterprise
The Clovers — understood —

Her pretty Parasol be seen
Contracting in a Field
Where Men made Hay —
Then struggling hard
With an opposing Cloud —

Where Parties — Phantom as Herself —
To Nowhere — seemed to go
In purposeless Circumference —
As 'twere a Tropic Show —

And notwithstanding Bee — that worked —
And Flower — that zealous blew —
This Audience of Idleness
Disdained them, from the Sky —

Till Sundown crept — a steady Tide —
And Men that made the Hay —
And Afternoon — and Butterfly —
Extinguished — in the Sea —

*Emily Dickinson (1830-1886),
American poet*

Wednesday 25th March

They regard and reach out. Well, the younger girl reaches out. Whilst keeping hold of her older sister's hand. The object of their attention, the white butterfly, is on top of a large thistle.

When the Vicar suggested that I write a reflection about this painting, he mentioned both dance and alms-giving. It is a very graceful scene, like dance can be. Now, can alms-giving be like reaching out for something, but in thorny circumstances, like the thistle? On the radio, I have heard advice given that giving food to people on the streets can deter these people from going to places that provide not only food, but also other forms of support that can help them move out from homelessness.'

*Heather Williams
Liturgical Dancer at St Stephen's Church*

Thursday 26th March

The important thing is not to stop questioning; curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to

comprehend a little of the mystery every day. The important thing is not to stop questioning; never lose a holy curiosity.

*Albert Einstein, Statement to William Miller,
as quoted in LIFE magazine (2 May 1955)*

Friday 27th March

My eyes are drawn to the expressive faces of the two sisters. The younger girl looks rather sad, perhaps wanting to grasp hold of the butterfly which is beautiful but will always be out of reach. The older sister seems to understand that it will not be possible to catch the butterfly and may be gently restraining her little sister. It reminds me of the huge gift of family love which God has given us and in particular of the love of brothers and sisters. We will always be supported by this love and the love of God even when we are sad and happiness is just out of reach.

Alison Neilson, Bursar at St Stephen's Church

Saturday 28th March

In Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, there is the advice, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer." Like Gainsborough's daughters, who enjoy the game of chasing the butterflies, but perhaps fail at catching them, I've learned over time to accept and enjoy the game, the process, and the adventure. If answers come, I'm as surprised and grateful as if a butterfly were to sit for a second on my finger.

John Beddingfield, Rector of Holy Trinity

Lent 5
“Passion”
29th March - 4th April



The Agony in the Garden
Jean Penicaud I, 1520-25
Painted enamel on copper, partly gilded
Frick Collection, New York

<https://collections.frick.org/objects/300/the-agony-in-the-garden;jsessionid=F19D6FA0F201F1F2BBCF19715ED8CB8A?>

An angel with blue wings
holds up a wooden cross
before the eyes of Christ
while the disciples sleep.

from Liz Witts, Poet St Stephen's Church

Sunday 29th March

At first glance, this image is one of serenity, even transcendence. The very night sky seems to worship Jesus, as at his Nativity. The flowers glow, and he kneels in the centre, translucent, like a jewel.

Yet Jesus' brow shows beads of blood; he is troubled, 'even unto death'. All that we can see of him - fragile head, hands and feet - are soon to be brutalised by nails and thorns. And he kneels alone. His friends sleep, Peter clutching a sword that says maybe he never understood anything. An angel is sent to strengthen, but he seems rather far off: glory lies the other side of suffering. And how close is Judas' mob; how soon they are to crash in to the scene.

More than anything, this vision of the fragility and the preciousness of Jesus reminds me of Mary of Bethany's anointing of his body with nard, doing so with a simple devotion that is the opposite of Judas' betraying kiss. So for me, the image is an invitation to make a devotional space, between Lenten repentance and Easter glory.

Steve Rolfe

Wednesday Communicate at St Stephen's Church, Works locally at the DWP

Monday 30th March

Anger, anguish, and quiet all form a thick tension in Jean Pénicaud's *The Agony in the Garden*. Judas leads an angry mob approaching from the left. To the right three disciples serenely asleep: Peter knife in hand. In the center, Jesus agonizes about the fate held before him. His future crucifixion hangs suspended in the night. All seems quiet, too quiet.

How similar this scene is to our time? Many are angry. Such hate always risks tipping into the crucifixion of a figurehead or hated group. Others are asleep, choose avoidance. Then there are those, like Jesus, who sufferer. They suffer under lapsed promises and hateful vindictiveness. The powerless who serve only to move onlookers' anger or complacency. May we learn to follow Jesus in anguish, sadness, and love rather than hate or indifference.

Calvyn du Toit, Musician & Theologian, Holy Trinity

Tuesday 31st March

Agony. Not a word you use lightly.
Extreme suffering: physical, emotional, spiritual.
Christ prays alone.
His friends, asleep.
His foes, approaching.
"Let this cup pass."
Yet he knows he must drink.
Above, the deep night sky:
alive with stars, exquisite in clarity and beauty.

Below, the man in prayer:
every nerve alive, unique in humanity and divinity.
Feet that he washed will soon run away.
Lips that swore loyalty will soon deny.
Those who hate will soon be satisfied.
Those who love will soon be horrified.
What is the sound that finally rouses him from prayer?
His friends' breath, heavy with sleep?
His betrayer's footsteps, leading the soldiers?
His own blood, sweat and tears, hitting the ground?
Or maybe, just maybe, the whisper of wings?

*The Revd Lindsay Meader
Assistant Priest at St Stephen's, Chaplain to the London Theatres*

Wednesday 1st April

You should take no notice of the temptation to give up prayer and should thank God for your desire of practicing it. Be assured that your will wishes to pray and loves to be in God's presence. Nature complains at the idea of using self-constraint. When you feel oppressed, you should move occasionally to some place where you can look at the sky and should walk about for a short time. This will not break off your prayer, and human frailty must be humored lest nature succumb. We are seeking God by such means since we take them for His sake, and the soul must be led gently.

Teresa of Avila, Letter to Don Teutonio de Braganza, 1574

Thursday 2nd April

We are in the Garden of Gethsemane. Christ prays to God whilst Peter, James and John are asleep on turf dotted with white flowers. Christ's eyes focus on the cross held by an angel, whilst Judas and the crowd approach through the gate.

Having told the disciples that anything they ask in His name the Father will grant them, Christ, asking that the cup of suffering may be taken from him, knows that is the one thing that cannot be granted. Penicaud shows beads of bloody sweat running down over Christ's forehead.

In our anxious world we seek calm. Some through mindfulness, some through prayer, some through both. In mindful meditation it is hard to silence intrusive thoughts. Those who pray may succumb to verbosity in fear of silence. When, after praying, there is no immediate 'answer' to latch on to we need to remember that

there *will* be one. We have Christ's word. Yet even he, on the cross, asked why God had forsaken him.

Andrew Brown, 8am Communicant and coordinator of St Stephen's Healing Team

Thursday, 3rd April

O God, early in the morning I cry to you.
Help me to pray
And to concentrate my thoughts on you:
I cannot do this alone.
In me there is darkness,
But with you there is light;
I am lonely, but you do not leave me;
I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;
I am restless, but with you there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;
I do not understand your ways,
But you know the way for me...
Restore me to liberty,
And enable me to live now
That I may answer before you and before me.
Lord, whatever this day may bring,
Your name be praised.

*From "A Prayer for Fellow Prisoners" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer,
the German pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident,
who was hanged by the Nazis April 9, 1945.
A simple version of this prayer is often sung
in the Sunday 6 pm service at Holy Trinity.*

Saturday 4th April

Even though Judas and the soldiers are at the gates of the Garden of Gethsemane the overriding atmosphere in this small enamel painting on copper is one of peace and serenity. As the angel swoops down bearing the cross, a symbol of Christ's fate, he is consoled by a flow of curving forms - the fabric of the sleeping disciples, their golden haloes, the white rocks, the clods of grass, and pools of water. Everywhere harmonies

of luscious greens and blues. Christ's deep ink blue robe, his cobalt halo, a tapestry of golden stars set on a deepest ultramarine night sky, above a carpet of viridian and emerald moss, grass and a constellation of small white flowers. Everything feels tangible and near to the surface like a Samuel Palmer. He seems to have already reached Paradise on earth.

Marc Woodhead, Educator at the National Gallery

Palm Sunday Holy Week & Resurrection



The Supper at Emmaus

Caravaggio, 1601

Oil and tempera on canvas

National Gallery, London

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio-the-supper-at-emmaus>

Sunday 5th April

Today we gaze not upon the horror that unfolds this week, but upon a Christ whose radiance illuminates the disciples dining with him. The light of Christ fills the room. To one side rests the bread and wine whose blessing has opened their eyes to their guest's identity. Stunned, one leans forward to be sure his eyes aren't deceiving him.

The other flings out his arms, side to side, forcing our eyes off the canvas and into the world. The excited pair have jiggled a luscious basket of fruit almost off the table, abundant fruit about to be spilled out. Is this a symbol for the abundant Light of Christ about to be pour out upon us at the Easter Vigil, the new life and hope of the resurrection? Alleluia!

Helen Goodkin, Biblical Scholar & Teacher, Holy Trinity

Monday 6th April

A moonlit supper. No oil lamps or candles are lit. Perhaps they couldn't afford one or they might be hiding. Hiding from whom where there is the light that lightens the darkness? According to the Gospel of St Luke (24:16), we recognize that these three men yet haven't realized that the man in the midst is the risen Christ.

Where is the light? This Lent I order a lantern ignited by solar power(See; solar-aid.org). When you look at the sun for a moment, an afterimage remains for a while. What does the radiant man in the middle leave in you when you close your eyes to receive his blessing? Can you hear his blessing or do you rather see three perplexed men quarrelling before supper?

Thomas Yoji Shibata, Community of St Anselm and Server at St Stephen's

Tuesday 7th April

Namaste

As told by Luke, two apostles encounter a stranger on the road to Emmaus and invite him to dinner. While they eat, they recognize the resurrected Jesus and are amazed. Caravaggio's 1601 painting depicts this supper in a style typical of the artist: the dark background is pierced by dramatic "stage" lighting, the characters gesture theatrically, and the models are street people.

Jesus chose to begin and end his ministry with the sharing of food, and Luke suggests that what the apostles recognize in the stranger is His manner of sharing food, a common, but Eucharistic ritual. I think, however, that what the apostles recognize is the divinity within the stranger. Jesus taught that "the kingdom of God is within," that all humans have a spark of divinity within them. Jesus remains with them and within them, Not as an apocalyptic epiphany, but as a realization of the immanence of the holy.

Chris Knight, Professor, Member & Morning Prayer Regular, Holy Trinity

Wednesday 8th April

The two seated facing Jesus are engrossed, the third standing is more considered. You and I are the fourth person seated at the table with Jesus reaching out to include us while his face shows he is reaching deeply into himself through what he is saying to those around him. Caravaggio's style and composition is immediate, pulling us into this moment across 2000 years.

The meal is barely touched. This resurrection is serious, we have to dig into it. It makes me wonder if the banquet in heaven is necessarily going to be a jolly affair or something that will reflect the drama of the resurrection.

*Jeremy Cavanagh,
Ordinand at St Augustine's College and Member of St Stephen's Church*

Thursday 9th April

In Caravaggio's Supper at Emmaus we see the moment two disciples totally unexpectedly realize the stranger with whom they have been traveling is Christ. Caravaggio has used light to emphasize the light of surprised recognition breaking through to the two disciples and the realism of the painting enables the viewer to share the surprise.

The story reminds us that as post-resurrection Christians aided by the Holy Spirit we must always seek to be in Christ's company. With attentiveness and expectancy, we must ask what is Christ giving me through this person, this group, this situation? Concomitantly, we must sufficiently free ourselves of the preoccupations of the ego to be open and able to receive what God in Christ is giving us and enable the light to break through.

Simone Crockett, Spiritual Seeker, Teacher & Cyclist, Holy Trinity

Friday 10th April

The painting of the Supper at Emmaus is the moment when the risen Christ appears to some of his disciples at supper. In St Luke's Gospel the story is told that the disciples haven't recognised Jesus on the road, and then invite him to stay with them as it is almost evening. Sitting down to eat, he is recognised, but then disappears. The character to the right in the picture is wearing a seashell, the mediaeval symbol of pilgrimage. It draws you in to the idea that he is a pilgrim at Christ's table. At St Stephen's on a Monday we have "Tea @3." Anyone who is around at 3pm can come for tea, cake and conversation. Regardless of whether they have a Church connection

or not, or have just wandered in from the street. It is reminiscent of Saint Paul's exhortation in the letter to the Hebrews, when he reminds us not to neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. We may also be entertaining pilgrims to Christ, whether or not they are known. Whether or not they have a shell visibly displayed.

“We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road.”

Andrew Crawford, Weekday Verger at St Stephen's Church

Saturday 11th April

One of my favorite verses of scripture is Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (NRSV). The story of the two disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus is perhaps the ultimate example of what can happen when we open our eyes and hearts to a stranger. The Church helps us understand the special significance and sacramentality of bread and wine, but how many times have we also found ordinary food and drink of other kinds to hold sacramental qualities? While we celebrate the Incarnation at Christmas, the Emmaus story comes around Easter as if to remind us once again, that this Jesus who is put to death, who descends to the dead, and who rises again has a body—a human body that walks, talks, eats, and drinks. In showing hospitality, we offer care for the body of another, admit our own humanity, and look for the risen Christ in all we encounter. Looking at art this season has helped us focus our gaze. With newly sharpened eyes and with Easter faith, we can look more closely for the risen Lord Christ in other people, wherever we encounter them.

John Beddingfield, Rector of Holy Trinity

Sunday 12th April

I hope you have enjoyed, as much as we have, our journey together exploring these wonderful and varied pictures. We have now reached our goal - Easter is upon us: “Alleluia Christ is Risen!”, we rightly proclaim. However so often in our churches we have been so busy preparing for this day and season, that when it is upon us we are so exhausted with all the things we have been doing during Lent that we are unable to celebrate the risen Lord properly! Tired clergy and church workers go away for a break and we are left wondering what our supermarket's will be prompting tomorrow as they prematurely look ahead to the next commercial gimmick they can take advantage of (Father's Day perhaps?). But the celebrations and party have just begun. As we look at Caravaggio's wonderful ‘*The Supper at Emmaus*’, with its rich colour

depicting a lunch/supper party in motion, we are almost taken back to that supper the previous Thursday evening. Here, however, is a depth of movement in the painting that wasn't so present a few days previously: here we see the risen lord (with a shadow cast behind - this is no ghost!), almost directing the disciples onto something else, even before they've seemingly eaten. One seems to be on his way, another listens intently, whilst the third appears to be asking the risen Lord to come with them. What is Jesus Christ pointing to? Our mission perhaps: to go into the world and proclaim the good news (Mk 16:15) and make disciples (Matt 28:19). He is sending us out of our ghettos and confines of our shadowy rooms into our communities to party and rejoice and proclaim the promises of his resurrection. May we do so with all colour and joy that our Lord Jesus expects.

Graham Buckle, Vicar of St Stephen's