



## SEASON OF LENT—WEEK 4 14 March, 2021

As Australia looks to a post COVID-19 world, we have a unique opportunity to renew our vision, to reimagine policy and to find creative ways to rebuild a nation that is just for everyone.

—Dr Deidre Palmer, UCA President

### Opening Sentences

In this season of increasing darkness,  
the way of Jesus shines before us.  
Will I see? Will I follow?

We worship a humble servant—  
crucified, risen and leading us on.  
Will self-giving love be my aim and measure?

As we recover and build a new normal,  
the Gospel inspires change and reorientation.  
Will I be a person of vision, justice and courage?

### Opening Prayer

You in whom my hope is found:  
many questions lie before me—  
questions not only about the future  
but of priorities and being.  
Anchor me in your love.

Secure in your heart  
and trusting of your presence,  
draw me from the shelter of self  
into the grace of community.  
Open me to you in the other.

Awaken me to your Spirit  
who makes us one with God,  
one with each other and one with all creation.  
Amen

## ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING WORD

### Gospel Reading—Mark 12:13–44

The religious leaders sent some Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to trap him in what he said. They came and said to him, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?”

But knowing their hypocrisy, Jesus said, “Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it.” And they brought one. Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” They answered, “The emperor’s.” Jesus said to them, “Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were utterly amazed at him.

Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him a question, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; and the second married the widow and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be?”

Jesus said to them, “Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong.”

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbour as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

As Jesus taught, he said, “Beware of those who are religious, who like to walk around in fancy clothes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

## Going Deeper

The religious leaders who questioned Jesus did so to trap him. Their questions were insincere and hypocritical, perhaps even a foil for their own behaviours. For example, the Sadducees (who did not believe in life after death) posed a convoluted question about a woman who was widowed several times and whose wife she will be, and yet, Jesus draws attention to the fact that the widows in their midst are not being taken care of in the way their law requires.

- Invite God to reveal ways you might be justifying and rationalising certain behaviours and attitudes at this time.
- Open yourself to change as you receive God's forgiveness.

Jesus shone a spotlight on the widow who shared out of her poverty. He seems to applaud the woman's humility and generosity but, in a roundabout way, he also points out the lack of justice and care on the part of the community—*she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on*. In other words, how is this the case among you?

- Who are the "widows" in your experience—those who are neglected and impoverished by systems at this time?
- How are you complicit, even if it is simply choosing to be ignorant or unaffected?
- Open yourself to change as you receive God's forgiveness.

## **RESPONDING WITH OUR LIVES**

### **Prayers of the People**

To the One who was and is and is to come: We witness your power as we observe a sunrise or gaze upon a million stars. Help us to see your constant force resting upon our lives.

In your mercy, hear our prayer.

You have known us from the beginning. Help us to know ourselves and our gifts that we offer. May we do so with joyful generosity. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

We have witnessed your integrity and righteousness. Help us to seek honesty in ourselves and transparency in one another. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

As we move from old ways of being, may we not forsake your wisdom but search for your ways in all things. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

As you prepare a new way, help us relieve our anxieties and tensions and hard hearts to shift more fully into being your custodians. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

Your heart is the same in the wilderness as it is in Eden. Call us to be your heartbeat in our community. In your mercy, hear our prayer.

## **Disciples' Prayer**

Life-Giver, Pain-Bearer, Love-Maker.  
Source of all that is and that shall be.

Father and Mother of us all,  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:  
The hallowing of your name echo  
through the universe!  
The way of your justice be followed  
by all peoples of the world!  
Your heavenly will be done  
by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.  
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.  
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.  
From trials too great to endure, spare us.  
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and forever. Amen.

## **Blessing**

Full of Christ, we resume our service in the world—  
a world in need of compassion,  
a world in need of imagination and vision.  
Let us go forth to be people of The Way,  
praying, listening, attending,  
generous and open of heart,  
cultivating God's new creation.