

Spare a minute!

Bishop John Ford



A time of giving

About this year's writer

Bishop John Ford was born and brought up in England where he studied law before being called to ordination in the Diocese of Southwark (South London). Whilst in his first post as a curate he met his wife Bridget across a Font when she was God-mother to a candidate that John had prepared for Baptism. They were married in 1981 and have three grown up sons (all living in England) and they have six grandchildren.

During John's ordained ministry he has been a parish priest in South London and Sussex, Chaplain to the bishop, Diocesan Adviser for mission, a residentiary Canon in charge of the liturgy and music of one of the great English Cathedrals and before being elected Bishop of The Murray in 2012 (arriving in Australia in 2013) he served as Bishop of Plymouth in the Diocese of Exeter in England. He was ordained bishop on the Feast of St Lucy (13th December) 2005.

John enjoys cooking and is starting to learn how to grow things to include in his recipes – he finds this challenging! In the past he played a lot of cricket and still enjoys watching the game (in all its forms). He is also a fanatical Manchester United supporter – he is, however, learning to barrack in the AFL. But living just south of Adelaide, he doesn't disclose which local team he favours.



Overview of the Book		2
Suggestions to conduct the studies		4
<hr/>		
Study One	- Preparation Material	6
Study One	- Don't waste time	9
<hr/>		
Study Two	- Preparation Material	12
Study Two	- Seize the moment	15
<hr/>		
Study Three	- Preparation Material	18
Study Three	- You've had long enough	21
<hr/>		
Study Four	- Preparation Material	24
Study Four	- When I find time	27
<hr/>		
Study Five	- Preparation Material	30
Study Five	- Time will tell	33
<hr/>		
Study Six	- Preparation Material	36
Study Six	- Now is the time	39
<hr/>		
Additional material available on line for these studies at www.grassroots.com.au		
Other Grassroots Resources		Rear

Produced by Grassroots Resources Australia - PO Box 484 Brighton SA 5048
Telephone - 0409 441 246

E: info@grassroots.com.au W: www.grassroots.com.au



The Rt Rev'd John Ford

I expect that many who read this book and/or participate in the brief course that it contains will, like me, have mixed feelings about the holy season of Lent: our Sunday liturgies are less joyful than we might hope and our daily living might or might not be deprived of particular luxuries that we would normally enjoy.

Possibly by halfway through the season our guilt is compounded because what we promised at the beginning has rather eluded us! We talk about Lent as being a time to give things up and, of course, the main thing to be given up is that which separates us from God. Therefore Lent is a time to get things right; to be faithful in our praying, our serving, our study and our worship; and to repent of any unfaithfulness.

When the period of Lent was first introduced into the Christian calendar it was a time of rigorous preparation on the part of those who were to be initiated into the Body of Christ at Easter. For many of these the six weeks of Lent marked the end of very long periods of preparation and the approach of their baptism filled them with joy

and expectation. Nowadays for most of us Lent is a time that we use to prepare ourselves to renew our own baptismal promises at the Easter celebrations.

It is my experience that a serious approach towards the preparation of people for baptism, and the proper instruction of either the candidate or their families in the months following initiation, leads to a renewed and reinvigorated community that is on the road towards growth. This has been to the front of my mind in preparation of this course.

In the six sections of this book I have taken the following Sunday's gospel reading, upon which I provide a brief commentary, then I link its theme with one of the signs or symbols commonly used during our Rites of Initiation. I have tried then to reflect both of these elements in comments concerning how we approach the question of time. We inhabit a hectic world and, for many of us, time is at a premium. For others, time can weigh heavily since there is no one to share it with or nothing to occupy its hours.

Whether you have a minute, or an hour, or a day, the moment of your baptism has placed you in a relationship with God, in Christ that invites you to eternity.

Our Christian vocation is to occupy the wide open spaces of God's eternal life and love and our Lenten discipline should be used to open ourselves afresh to the workings of the Holy Spirit who draws us closer

to the Father and brings his eternal life to us now. We are used to adjusting our watches when travelling into different time zones; Lent is a time when we consciously ask God to adjust our ideas about life and time so that they reflect more of his eternal life and love.

If you are participating in this course as part of a group then I suggest the best way to approach the material is to read the Biblical commentary, the comment about the symbol, and the reflection concerning time in preparation for the group meeting.

I would like to suggest that the best way to approach the Biblical text is through a process which has been variously described in Christian history but is most commonly known as *Lectio Divina* or divine reading.

Following this introduction I provide an suggested outline for a group meeting including a time of *Lectio Divina*. I have made the assumption that a meeting is likely to last about one and a half hours. If following the course alone (or if the group prefers) then use the commentary and reflections to feed a more traditional discussion group. Whichever route you take, the most important exercise is to engage with the Scripture passage. At the end of each section I have provided some questions – not to be answered, but as discussion starters.

I hope that you will find some of what I say helpful, and I pray that, as you follow this path of Lenten devotion, you will be drawn closer to the glory of God and more deeply into his life which he graciously poured out for

you on the cross and into which you were plunged at the moment of your baptism.

I further pray that this Lent all of us might grow in our awareness of the fact that our baptism, whilst being an historical event, has a contemporary meaning for we are baptised, we are the Body of Christ and we are called to be that Body in and for his world today.

I am very grateful to have been asked to share some thoughts for Lent and I thank those responsible for the production of the course.

What I have to offer I do so in humility and it comes with love from me to you.

+ John Ford
Murray Bridge

A GROUP APPROACH FOR HAVE YOU GOT A MINUTE?

The following is a guideline only. Use what you feel comfortable with.

- Once assembled someone should ask the group to settle themselves and get comfortable for a time of prayerful reflection on the Scriptures. After a brief period of silence an opening prayer is said.
- This way of approaching the Bible is by way of corporate reflection on the text in periods of silence. It is important that everyone realises that what follows is designed to draw us deeper into the text of Scripture and, in so doing, bring us close to the life giving Word of God. What happens now is that each person in turn reads one verse of the passage quietly and gently, going around the group until the passage is completed.
- There now follows a period of silence during the course of which each person identifies a word or short phrase that has spoken to them. You could underline it if you write in your Bible, or just keep it in mind as the silence continues.
- Each person is then encouraged to mention their phrase and says why they chose it.
- Then to explain “How does this passage of scripture touch my life?”
- Now in open discussion the group shares how the various passages of scripture and the associated symbol touches
 - 1.....them as individuals and their view of time
 - 2.....the common life of the parish community and its witness to the gospel, especially as it relates to being baptised and all that is implied by our initiation into the community of faith.
- Then look at the questions provided as discussion starters with particular emphasis upon how initiation could prove an exciting evangelistic opportunity. “What part could I play in this?” should be the challenging question to each person.
- Closing prayer, Lord’s Prayer, Grace and refreshments.

OUR FATHER,
*who art in
heaven*

*For those wishing additional “In depth” material on these studies
you can find it at www.grassroots.com.au/Studybooks/StudyBk.htm*



Lent is a journey that moves us to the cross

Good Friday service of symbols Yankalilla South Australia

Biblical Commentary

In Matthew's temptation story the tempter's challenge to Jesus could be summed up by the question, "What kind of person (Son of God) are you?" Given its place in the gospel narrative – straight after the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan – we are led to think that the location for this episode of temptation would be the Judean wilderness.

However, more important than the geographical location is the historic biblical motif that the wilderness is presented as a place of testing.

Israel was tested during the 40 year sojourn, the prophets were tested in the desert etc.

The Hebrew word most commonly translated either desert or wilderness is "midbar" and behind this word is the "idea" of a desert or wilderness. It comes from the root "dabar" which can mean to lead (as in flocks to pasture). Frequently references to the desert conjure up images of inhospitable barrenness and endless sand-dunes; a terrain unable to support or sustain life.

This is clearly not what the writers of the Old Testament had in mind. Rather the idea underlining these words is of a place that requires people to be led in such a way that they can discover the provision of all things necessary for their life. Wandering around lost in a desert can result in the vision of a superficially attractive oasis depicted in a mirage. Of course this is illusory and has no basis in reality. Fruitless meandering around in

meaningless wanderings or wanderings so characteristic of our individualistic culture will not lead to the sustaining and nurturing sources of life. For us to find these, being led and communal travelling are essential; there are guides and fellow travellers readily available but for Jesus in the gospel narrative, his communion with the Father is sufficient.

I pray that this Lent can be a time when we seek what God has provided and, in order that we find it, we turn to the guides which his outpouring love has given: the Scriptures, the fellowship of the Apostles, prayer and the breaking of bread. I hope some of what I provide will assist in a small way.

So for Jesus in the wilderness, there is temptation. In the Old Testament background to this notion lies the process by which partners to the Old Covenant were scrutinised to see if they would keep their side of the agreement: whether Israel would remain faithful to Yahweh; would the prophets continue in their proclamation; how Moses would remain steadfast in his leading of the people.

The account of the temptations of Jesus is perhaps best understood as a portrayal of God's Son as the one who, in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews has, "in every respect been tested as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4v15) rather than as an account of Jesus being lured or led into sin by the devil. In fact Matthew's account uses a different word for the tempter. It is interesting to note that the tempter,

Don't waste time - Study 1

tester or devil doesn't lead Jesus into the wilderness but rather the Spirit of God leads him and, therefore, makes the tempting/testing/trial a possibility. It is essential to note that the tempter remains under God's ultimate control.

The three temptations themselves have the tendency to conjure up in our minds scenes of an epic nature; great acts of wonder working being demanded to persuade the watching hoards of the power and influence of the one being challenged. The text doesn't really permit the imagining of a great scene of news worthy merit when we might hear the reader introduce the subject by saying, "And now over to our reporter at the Jerusalem Temple where there is to be a display of the most incredible kind ... over to you N what's the latest?"

Stones into bread is located in the wilderness where, by definition, there are no crowds. Even in the Temple there is no reference to great crowds of people and the pinnacle of a very high mountain would also be most unlikely to be crowded! These are not show stopping, all singing, all dancing events of power and might designed to convert the masses. Rather they are, once again, another way of Matthew introducing Jesus as the Son of God. The one who accepts testing from God but refuses to test God. The presentation of Jesus as God's son is key to these early chapters of Matthew's gospel. He has already presented him thus three times, 1v20; 2v15; 3v17 and here the same presentation is underlined. Jesus is

the true Son of God who passes the tests and is unscathed in the process. He is the faithful one who can uphold the covenant with the same unending faithfulness as is displayed by the Father who initiates that covenant relationship.

The baptismal robe

Paul tells us that we must, "put on Christ" (Romans 13v14). Think for a moment about what we mean when we say that we put things on. It is a common expression used when producing a drama, we are putting on *The Importance of Being Ernest*; sometimes we think that sportsmen are putting it on when they roll around the field after a tackle; quite commonly we, put on an act - we play at, or pretend, to persuade others of our goodness or virtue, our wealth or status.

In these latter examples there are not many things that provide more effective props or disguises than our clothing. Power dressing or dressing down, depending on the circumstances or desired response. Clothing covers up a multitude of sins and parents are only too well aware how so often, particularly male offspring of a certain age, cover up what is basically dirty and smelly with newly bought or laundered clothes the appearance of which transforms that which is underneath! Or it's covered up by an over application of the most commonly advertised fragrance!

Perhaps we might make similar claims for the use of make-up and its ability to change appearance. So much so that it is not uncommon to hear a person talk about having to

put their face on!

In earlier days labels told you if your clothes were inside out. Today the label is often paraded as a token of one's success and wealth or as an example of our developed and sophisticated taste.

Paul's plea to the Romans to put on Christ was taken into the liturgy of baptism from the earliest of times. Baptism by total immersion was the norm and before going down into the waters of new birth the candidate was stripped naked – itself a symbolic action of renouncing the past – putting it off and denying it. Then, with nothing to mask or hide behind, not able to pretend or cover up, no play acting or putting on but simply “as we are” the candidate is baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ. Coming up from the waters, they are then clothed with the robe of baptism symbolising the new life into which they have entered.

This garment is a far cry from the beautifully embroidered, often precious, family heirloom that is frequently referred to as the “Christening robe”; although what is put on is indeed exquisite, costly and inherited! It is nothing less than the new life of Christ himself; glorious life available to us by adoption and bought with a very high price.



Spare a minute!

If a minute is all you have, don't waste it pretending!

Of course most of us like to dress up and that's not just the clergy in church! Somehow we do feel different and perhaps more presentable when we take time and care with our appearance. And there is no harm in this.

But, in the face of God, it is a waste of time to try and cover up who we are or improve what we are by our efforts at self-improvement. He knows who and what we are in the wilderness of truth about our life as it really is. No amount of dressing up can hide ourselves from him. He longs for us to put on Christ, to be dressed up only in and with him; to become truly what God has made us to be. Like those in the deserts of the Bible, the Lord will provide and often we are distracted from recognising his provision by a variety of masks and disguises.

This Lent, and in particular, this week as we ponder the gospel; no masks, no pretence, honesty in the face of one who has made us to be loved by him and to love like him. In the words of Augustus Toplady in the hymn “Rock of Ages”, “naked to the cross I cling”.

Marked with that cross and being clothed in the life of him who gave himself upon it, there is no time to waste.

Have you got a minute?



Introduction and Welcome

In preparation for these studies, you will need a pen and your Bible to this and to each of these studies.

When gathered, group members are invited to share one or more of the following:

- Introduce yourself. If you know each other fairly well, share something that others may not know about you that is of interest.
- Share an expectation that you have for this Lent.
- Share how you prepare for worship.



Shared Prayer

Once assembled someone should ask the group to settle themselves and get comfortable for a time of prayerful reflection on the Scriptures. After a brief period of silence an opening prayer is said.

O Lord and heavenly Father,
 Who has given to us, your people, the true bread that comes down from heaven, even your Son Jesus Christ;
 Grant that throughout this Lent our souls may so be fed by him that we may continually live in him and he in us;
 And that day by day we may be renewed in the spirit by the power of his endless life,
 Who gave himself for us, and now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen *(Frederick Macnutt 1873-1949)*



Appreciating the scriptures

Each person in turn reads one verse of the passage quietly and gently, going around the group until the passage is completed.

- There now follows a period of silence during the course of which each person identifies a word or short phrase that has spoken to them. You could note it here.

.....

.....

.....

- Each person is then encouraged to mention their phrase and says why they chose it.
- Then explain “How does this passage of scripture touch my life?”

- Now in open discussion the group shares how the various passages of scripture and the associated symbol touches
 1. them as individuals and their view of time
 2. the common life of the parish community and its witness to the gospel, especially as it relates to being baptised and all that is implied by our initiation into the community of faith.



Questions

QUESTIONS TO PONDER - Conversation starters

- Do you recognise the idea that often before God we cover things up? Can you share any personal examples?
- *I think that congregations often waste time pretending to do the work of the gospel when what really is happening is the preservation of all that is wrong with institutional life. There is nothing wrong with the model of the Church as Institution provided it is exactly that. An institution is put in place to do something and we have put on Christ to be his Body in the world.*

What are the common things behind which we hide, that prevent us from doing/being what we have been called to be and do?

- *I was once involved in a conversation with Rowan Williams when he speculated that God taking time to waste with humanity was a good description of the Incarnation.*
How do you respond to that?
- What does the conversation that you have had thus far say about prayer?
- How easy is it to be distracted from taking the time to pray? Do you have a minute?
- What one thing will you try this week that helps you to be more conscious of the fact that you have been clothed with Christ?



Prayer

Closing prayer

You might like to dim the lighting (if that is possible) to change the environment a bit for the prayer time. Maybe you could turn off the lighting and light a number of candles to give a special atmosphere.

Almighty God, you have made us heirs through hope of your everlasting kingdom.

In the waters of baptism you have promised a measure of grace overflowing to all eternity.

Take our sins and guilt away, and so inflame us with the light of your Spirit, that we may know your favour and goodness towards us, and walk in newness of life, both now and for ever;

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Shared Cuppa and Fellowship time.



Prepare for next week by going over the upcoming reading.
John 3: 1-17

