## Study 1

In the baptism service in *A Prayer Book For Australia*, the following question is put to those who are about to be baptised and begin their journey of following Jesus.

*Will you each, by God’s grace, strive to live as a disciple of Christ, loving God with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself, until your life’s end?*

The question asks the baptismal candidate not just whether they will follow Jesus but whether they are prepared to follow until they die! Deciding to follow Jesus is a life-long commitment.

Perhaps the biggest temptation that followers of Jesus are faced with is the temptation to give up and turn away after following for a time. The parable of the sower in the Gospels addresses this issue.

*Matthew 13.18 'Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.*

## What might tempt followers in Australia to give up their discipleship of Jesus? We don’t face the degree of persecution and danger that followers in many parts of the world must face each day – and yet, paradoxically, the threat of beatings, lawsuits and death seems to strengthen the faith and following of these disciples.

## Perhaps the subtle temptations of the world mentioned above in the parable of sower, best describe our 21st century following-context.

## Here are links to some encouraging stories of Australians who faced the temptation to turn away from their following of Christ and yet persevered. They were faced with sadness, loneliness, conflict, grief and disappointment and yet they did not give up.

## The Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/threlkeld-lancelot-edward-2734>

## Mrs Georgiana Molloy <http://georgianamolloy.com/georgiana-molloy/>

## Saint Mary McKillop <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mackillop-mary-helen-4112>

## We who follow him in Australia today also require courage and life-long commitment, even though our following of Jesus is far less likely to land us in court or in a hospital. We are called to stand up for the just treatment of those who have inadequate employment and housing, for asylum seekers and Indigenous peoples. We are called to stand up for the protection and restoration of the environment. Our Anglican Church describes the here and now following of Jesus in terms of the Marks of Mission and these have been picked up by almost all Anglican Dioceses as an excellent summary of how we must live in our present contexts as followers of Jesus.

**The Five Marks of Mission**:

* To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
* To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
* To respond to human need by loving service
* To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
* To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

## Study 2

The importance of rest for Jesus and his disciples

The brief time that the disciples had with Jesus and the Old Testament heroes on the mountain of Transfiguration was intended to take them briefly out of their busy present; they were given a moment of respite and, un-expectedly, a moment of heaven. Jesus understood the need for regular rest periods and the Gospels mention him taking the disciples aside on other occasions, away from the crowds, to have a break. This was the Jewish way – or at least the Jewish ideal. Sadly for them, this rest time could not continue forever. The heroes departed, and the glory of Jesus faded. They had to come down to the other disciples, to a father desperate for his son’s healing and to a new round of busy everyday, present-moment living.

In the time of Jesus the Jewish community had a weekly rhythm of work with a Sabbath day rest at the end. Sabbath was first and foremost a regular break so that people could return to their routines of living with renewed strength and enthusiasm. Sabbath as a time of rest and recuperation had been mandated for hundreds of years as a required aspect of their community life and following of God. It was written into their scriptures and enshrined in their laws. By the time of Jesus however, this intended relax-day became anything but that because it was complicated by a raft of behavioural rules and regulations.

*Exodus 20.10-11 But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.*

Human beings were created as bearers of God’s image. We are intended to be God-like in our relationships and our commitment to holy living . . . and if God felt the need to relax and enjoy what had been created then we are mandated to do the same. Jesus understood this and was committed to a regular period of rest and refreshment.

This link is to a more detailed explanantion of the importance of ‘rest’ for the Jewish people <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sabbath/>

The importance of rest breaks for workers and followers

For people engaged in challenging intense work, the need for regular breaks is critical. Workers have tea and lunch breaks each day. Full time workers have a day or two off each week and fly-in/fly-out workers may have a week on and a week off. There is annual leave and long service leave. All of this is intended to make for a happier, healthier and more productive workforce. During the Vietnam war the term ‘R and R’ was well known as thousands of American soldiers and sailors flooded into Sydney and Brisbane. No one can continue to engage in intense engagement with their present moments without a refreshment break.

Many people however rarely if ever get a break when they are caring for others. Single parents, mothers with infants and carers of disabled and aged family members are often overwhelmed with the constant demands of those in their care. Respite for carers of frail aged and physically and mentally infirmed peopled is a critical issue for their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Today’s followers of Jesus are no different in their need for regular time out. We too require rest time for our bodies and minds but we also require time out to process our experiences of following Jesus and to recharge our faith-batteries. Clergy have a tradition of an annual retreat where they go away by themselves or with others for several days or weeks of rest and reflection. This is a great privilege not often afforded other followers today. Youth camps can help young followers in this way and more and more parishes see the need for annual retreats for the adults. The Cursillo movement has helped in this regard too.

## <https://wellnesskeen.com/importance-of-recreation>

## Study 3

## Following Jesus requires courage and every-day commitment. It’s tough. There is a cost. When we live the values that Jesus taught there will be opposition. Jesus describes this tough following as ‘taking up our cross daily’. The great 20th century German follower Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it ‘the cost of discipleship’; there is a price to be paid for following Jesus. Here are links to bio stories of some followers in the past century who taken up their cross and followed to the life’s end.

## Sadhu Sundar Singh <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadhu_Sundar_Singh>

## Dr Deitrich Bonhoeffer <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dietrich-Bonhoeffer>

## Archbishop Luwum of Uganda <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/101.html>

## Archbishop Oscar Romero <http://www.caritas.org.au/docs/primary-school-resources/oscar-romero-biography.docx>

## Many who follow Christ in 2019 in other parts of the world, experience restriction and persecution from aggressive adherents of other religions or by secular governments. They require great courage and our prayerful fellowship. This link is to a recent report on the danger faced by Christians in many parts of the world.

## <https://www.churchinneed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/persecution-1-1.pdf>

## Study 4

## The Gospels reveal a lot about the ‘ordinary’ context in which God was revealed in the life of Jesus. In the midst of the small everyday, often overlooked happenings, God was present and interested. Jesus, who lived in a family home and a small rural village for 30 years understood and embraced the importance of the ordinariness of life, the daily repetition of regular tasks and the reality of boredom and lack of motivation.

## Here are links to some followers of Jesus who are or were able to see God clearly in the ordinary everyday life and lives around them.

## <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/innertravelers/brother-lawrence.html>

## <https://www.challies.com/christian-living/ordinary-christian-living-for-the-rest-of-us/>

## Here are links to groups of Christians who have devised strategies to keep themselves engaged energetically and positively in the challenges of their local communities.

## <https://www.larche.org.au/us/what-we-do/>

## <https://www.corrymeela.org/about/our-history>

## Another interesting example of Christ-followers engaging with their local context and learning to see God in the ordinary life of their community is recorded in the book The Gospel in Solentiname by Ernesto Cardenal.

## <https://www.bookdepository.com/Gospel-Solentiname-Ernesto-Cardenal/9781570759024?ref=grid-view&qid=1547257225512&sr=1-6>

## In the 1970’s in the small central American nation of Nicaragua, Rev Ernesto a small Cardenal was pastor to a small congregation of ordinary folk in the Solentiname Islands. The people were mostly fishermen and their families, simple people whose *here and now* was dominated by earning a living and raising their families. They were poor and powerless. They lived in a wider community where power was help by wealthy families supported by powerful conservative politicians and a ruthless military. Their situation was not unlike the people of Israel in the time of Jesus. They felt unable and unwelcome to participate positively in the life of their country. They could see no way of changing their situation for the better.

## One Sunday during worship Fr Cardenal discovered that he had left his sermon at home and so after the Gospel was read he asked the congregation what they thought about it. They looked at him blankly and after more encouragement to comment and discuss it became apparent that they had been disempowered even by their church so that they felt inadequate to even discuss the scriptures. Fr Cardenal refused then to preach to them on Sundays and gently led them each week in a discussion of the Bible readings. The people gradually gained confidence in their right and ability to engage with the Bible and then with the authorities and issues in their community. Simple fisherman began to live positively in their local area, agitating for just wages, and for adequate education and health care for their families and communities.

## Study 5

The Gospel reading for the 5th Sunday in Lent links the twin stories in John chapters 11 and 12 of Jesus in Bethany engaging with the small family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The themes of hospitality, family, love, life, death, resurrection and anointing are woven together.

The anointing of Jesus by Mary is, according to John, the second time she anointed him. The first was mentioned in the previous chapter, John 11.2. The mention in John 11.2 is strikingly similar to Luke 7.36f. *One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment.She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.*

## Although Wikipedia articles are regarded cautiously by most, and rightly so, this one is a reasonable summary of some ways of understanding the event of the anointing of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

## <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anointing_of_Jesus>

## Another interesting proposal about these chapters that focus on the family in Bethany, is made by Fr Jean Varnier and taken up by Archbishop Justin Welby in his Lenten study book.

## Jean Varnier raises the possibility that Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, was handicapped in some way and that this required him to be cared for at home by his sisters. They suggest that a young healthy Jewish man would be expected to marry and form his own household. They propose that Lazarus was handicapped in some serious way that prevented him from marrying and living independently so that he stayed at home to be cared for by his sisters. If this is so, then the embracing of every aspect of ordinary everyday life by Jesus includes befriending and relationship building with those whom society hid and pushed to the margins. Not only did Jesus notice and restore those whom society spurned because of their skin diseases, lameness, bleeding or blindness, he befriended them.

## <https://www.bookdepository.com/Gospel-John-Gospel-Relationship-Jean-Vanier/9781616368906?ref=grid-view&qid=1547264127973&sr=1-9>

## <https://www.bookdepository.com/Dethroning-Mammon-Making-Money-Serve-Grace-Justin-Welby/9781472929778?ref=grid-view&qid=1547263615666&sr=1-1>

Study 6

Remembering

To special meal in the upper room at Passover time where Jesus and his disciples remembered the great liberating exodus event of centuries before, Jesus added another layer of meaning and foreshadowed another divine liberating event. His body would be broken, and his blood shed and this sacrifice of himself would be recalled again and again until he comes again. His disciples would meet him whenever they gathered to share bread and wine and remember his sacrificial life and death. Paul recorded this event in 1 Cor 11.23-26 and said that he received this instruction from the Lord himself.

‘Do this in remembrance’ opens a rich possibility of meaning. The remembering of the Passover event involved a somewhat mystical participation in the original event because they were the recipients of the benefits of the event. In an important sense, in this remembering, in chronos time, all that mattered was the reality of the kairos time event – God’s saving action in the past and the here and now life of his followers.

The Greek word translated as “remembrance” was anamnesis. The equivalent Hebrew word in the Old Testament is zikaron. Both these words describe a remembering that brings the reality of the remembered past into the present moment but also looks forward, bringing the future into the present moment. The church was reminded of the rich depth of meaning in the word when it is used in Jewish and Christian worship contexts by the theologian JJ Von Allmen who was writing in the 1960’s. When the Church remembers, it remembers not just what Jesus has done but what he said he will do! He said “I will come again and take you to myself” that he will “prepare a place for you”, “I am with you always”. When believers meet and share holy communion they are with their risen Lord, located in the present, between the past-cross and the future-banquet that awaits them in their heavenly home. The events remembered are not just recalled or brought to mind but are life-giving events that are celebrated.

(J J Von Allmen “The Lord’s Supper” in Ecumenical Studies in Worship. Lutterworth Press. London 1969)

Jesus was present and revealed in the breaking of the bread at the end of the day’s journey on the Emmaus road (Luke 24.30) and on the beach by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21). Jesus said, ‘remember I am with you always’ (Matthew 28.20). From now on the Lord would be present with his people in a real way wherever and whenever they gathered and remembered the upper room meal. He was physically absent after his resurrection and ascension but was present with them as they remembered and celebrated in the ‘sacrament’ of holy communion.

In an excellent little book Sharing One Bread, Sharing One Mission, published by the World Council of Churches in 1983, a group of Christians were asked to write a little about what the Lord’s supper meant to them personally. One contribution was by the Chilean theologian Rubem Alves. He wrote of the experience of sitting on the swing seat on the front porch of the home he had lived in since childhood. During the summer time when the rosemary bushes bloomed the scent hit his nostrils and he was immediately transported back to the time of his childhood. He was sitting on the same swing seat on the same porch but sitting next to his father. It was an experience of utter bliss, of safety and love. The rosemary scent raised in him feelings of joy and peace but also of grief, sadness and a yearning to be with his dad again. This is anamnesis. A remembering that brings past, present and future anticipation together. Alves said that this is what the celebration of holy communion would have been like for the first disciples who had known Jesus in the flesh. His absence was painful. They clung to his promise of return. They longed for him. The holy communion brought them together with him throughout their life journey. It is how we should approach our understanding of ‘anamnesis-remembering’ today.

We are invited to understand this power of remembering as we share holy communion. Jesus the incarnate and crucified Saviour is present with his people because he is also the risen Lord, the head of his gathered body.

Restoring

When Peter had denied Jesus for the third time and the rooster crowed, he ran away. He gave up on his following of Jesus when the going got tough. On this incredible night Judas had given up following Jesus by betraying him and Peter did the same by denying Jesus and abandoning him. There was however a critical difference between Judas and Peter; Judas despaired and gave up. Judas wasn’t around to return to ask forgiveness from the risen Lord; Peter was.

The well-known story-telling theologian Megan McKenna sees the three-times-denial as the end of Peter’s disciple-relationship with Jesus. A few day alter in the garden of resurrection, McKenna points to the message given to Mary Magdalene by the angel and Jesus - ‘Go and tell his disciples, *and Peter*, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee’. McKenna’s assertion is that Peter was no longer a disciple and so is mentioned separately to the disciples. If he had he not denied Jesus and ran away, he would have still been one the disciples and not needed to be mentioned by name. Many people had followed Jesus for a time until they could no longer understand him or face the cost of following and Peter had now joined that group. Interestingly this mention to Mary of the disciples and Peter is only in Mark’s Gospel – and we are told by the early church father Papias that Mark was writing down Peter’s own recollections. If McKenna is correct then Peter made an honest assessment of his failure and faithlessness.

Many Biblical scholars propose that Jesus, in John’s Gospel, is dealing with this issue of Peter’s abandoning of discipleship during their interesting conversation by the sea of Galilee in chapter 21. In their conversation Jesus asks Peter three times “do you love me” and this may be seen as a reversal his three-fold denial in the courtyard. He left his discipleship behind – now the lost sheep has been restored to the fold.