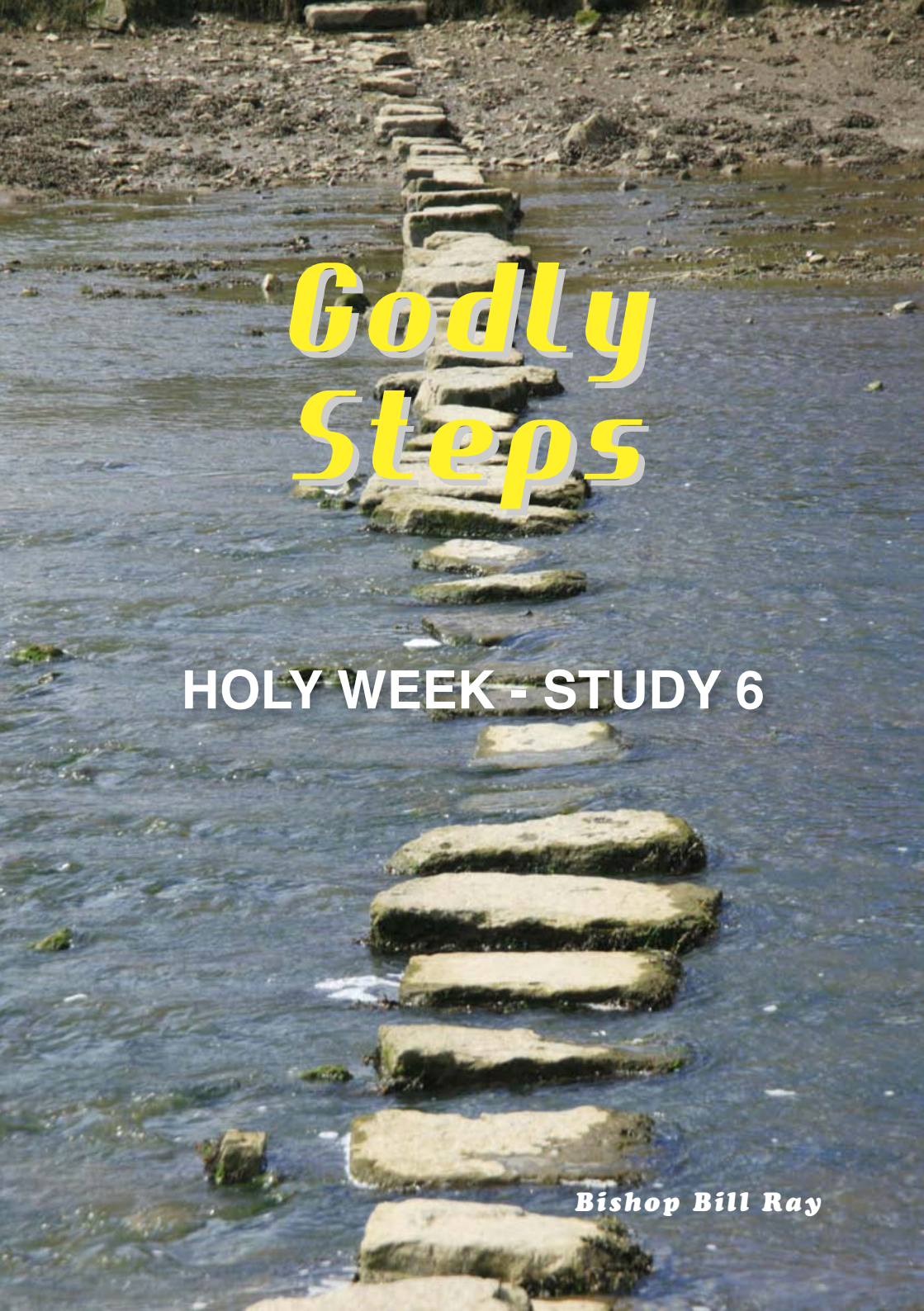
Godly
Steps
HOLY WEEK - STUDY 6
Bishop Bill Ray

Servant Ministry - Study 6

As Christians we are called to a life of servant ministry. From literature and movies we can often think of servants as people who are told what to do, treated harshly and have an estranged relationship with their master. Their role is to enable those who employ them to enjoy a life of comfort and splendour. Christian ministry, servant ministry, ministry based on Jesus Christ is quite different. The key difference is that Christian servants know and love the Master, strive to live according to the Master's teaching, as well as being concerned for the world and its people that God has created.

As we come to the last study of this Lenten Series, we also come at the start of what is known as Holy Week.

In some Churches, worshippers will hear these words,

"This morning begins the Great Week of the Christian Year.
During Lent we have been preparing by works of love and self sacrifice, for the celebration of the Lord's death and resurrection.

With Christians throughout the world, we come together this week to call to mind, and to express in word and action, the centre of the Easter mystery: our Lord's Passover from death to life.

Christ entered in triumph into the Holy City to complete his work as Messiah: to suffer, to die and to rise to new life. Today we commit ourselves to walk the way of the cross, so that, sharing his sufferings, we may be united with him in his risen life."

(Palm Sunday Liturgy, Liturgical Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia)

Servant ministry is walking in the way of the cross, to share in Christ's suffering so that we are united with our Lord in heart, mind and action.

During these studies we have been focussing on the fact we do not always listen to God the way we should; that we are called to go forth in faith not knowing where God will lead us; that even though we grumble and feel that God has not cared for us, God hears us and listens to us; that the ways of God are not our ways and that our God is a God who brings new life in its abundance.

It is because of what our Lord has done for us that we serve him, so that His love and grace may be made known.

Often when people refer to servant leadership, they go to John 13 when Jesus washed the disciples' feet. We will hear this passage on Maundy Thursday. Also in many Churches people will participate in a re-enactment of this ministry by our Lord. Yes serving means we are humble, it means that we may be involved in doing what others may regard as unpleasant, such as washing smelly feet.
Yet, servant ministry is this and more.

In the prophet Isaiah, there are four

suffering servant passages, Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6, today's passage 50:4-9 and 52:13 to 53:12.

In today's passage from Isaiah, we learn that in being a servant of God we will have to face rejection, because the way of the world is not the way of God. However, our God upholds and sustains us as his servants. In this passage we read four times, "The Lord God has ….". Our Lord is proactive, one who upholds us in the various situations we find ourselves in as we serve Him. As servants of the Lord we are able to sustain others who are weary with a word; avoid walking away from those who attack us, uphold those who challenge us, knowing that the Lord will help and uphold us in our journey with him.

In this passage we are reminded again that servant ministry is God centred and we focus on God as quoted in the hymn from an earlier study, "Through all the changes scenes is life, in trouble and in joy".

As mentioned earlier, the Psalms cover the whole gambit of life. In this Psalm portion (31:9-18) the psalmist calls out to the Lord in his time of trouble which includes grief, sorrow, failing strength, being the scorn of enemies and people plotting. As you travel through verses nine to fifteen one would wonder how much worse life can get, but then in verse sixteen the psalmist states boldly that he has put his trust in the Lord and proclaims that God is his God. In fact the psalmist goes further and insists that all our days, all our life, all situations are in the hands of the Lord. The closing verse of this portion of the Psalm is a glorious plea requesting God to make the face of the Lord shine upon us and save us.

As we move into Holy Week we do so knowing that our servant ministry is based solely on our Lord. We know that our Lord has endured all that we have endured and is always present to uphold and sustain us in our ministry. It is the Lord's ministry that we are called to and privileged to undertake. That is why we are able to sing, "To God be the glory" when we celebrate the season of Easter.

Welcome.

- Follow up any questions from last week, or any thoughts or ideas that came to you through the week.
- In what ways have you been enriched over the past six weeks?
- Share your experience of a Palm Sunday service that spoke to you in a special way.
- The reading this week addressed the people of Judah who are in exile. Discuss how we as a Church, a nation, as individuals can do more for refugees.
- In one of the parishes where I was the Vicar, instead of a harvest festival we had an "underwear festival". People were invited to bring new underwear to send to the Asylum Seekers Centre in Dandenong, and outer southern of Melbourne. This addressed and important issue for asylum seekers and provided some dignity. Would this be something your congregation/church would be interested in doing? How would you prepare your Church for this mission activity?
- Share how this Lent has prepared you for Holy Week and Easter. During this Lenten period, what blessings have you received and what have been the challenges for you?

Opening Prayer. *(Say Together)*
O God,
the Redeemer of all who trust in you:
heed the cry of your people,
and deliver us from the bondage of sin,
that we may serve you in perfect freedom
and rejoice in your unfailing love;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading. *Isaiah 50:4-9 & Psalm 31:9-18.*
Ask someone from the group to read the passage or have each member read a verse in turn

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. It is because of our baptism that we are called to be servants in ministry. How well do you think this is understood in our Churches?

2. Ministry involves two aspects, "being" that is, knowing what and why we believe, and "doing" caring and reaching out to people. It is sometimes said that some people are the "Marys" of the world attending to the spiritual, while others are the "Marthas", those who do things. Are you more Mary like or a Martha? How can we achieve a balance in our ministry?

3. Have there been times when you have been like the Psalmist and cried out "Have mercy upon me for …." Was that a time of spiritual renewal for you?

4. In our society there are some who would see crying out to the Lord, not quiet the right thing. What would be your response to them?

5. In Isaiah 50:4 mentions that that our ears are to be open and listen to those who are taught. Share how you listen to the Lord. What insights have you gained over the years?

6. Is 50:9 – In what ways has the Lord helped you over the years and during this past Lent?

Extra Questions: (If required)

1. Read John 13 and share your thoughts about the relevance of this ministry model for Christians in 2104.
2. In the Isaiah passage four times it states, "the Lord God …." The verses then go on how to state how God has worked in the lives of people. How has God worked in your life this Lent?

3. Complete, "In our Church/Parish; The Lord God ……"

4. Psalm 31:16; Share how you have put your trust in the Lord.

5. Some people have come to faith in recent years. What Psalm 31:17 say to those who have recently come to faith?

6. In what ways has the face of the Lord shone on you?

Overview of the Studies
Share your thoughts about the value or otherwise of the experience you have had together these past weeks.

What highlights or new insights did you feel you were able to experience?

Worth Thinking About – Study Six:
The story goes that a clergy person in a Western Victorian town used to go to the local Rail Station at 11.45 a.m. each day. Each day he sat in the same place at the far end of the platform. He watched the train arrive. He viewed the passengers boarding and alighting. He then watched the train leave the station and then returned to parish work. After about eighteen months, one of the lay officers of the Church asked him why he went to the station each day, sat there in the same place and spoke to no-one. The reply was, "The train is the only thing in the Parish that I do not have to push!"

It would appear that with this model of ministry the clergy person did everything.

What is your definition of ministry?

Closing prayers (*Share your own prayers followed by this prayer*)
Everlasting God,
in your tender love for the human race
you sent your Son to take our nature,
and to suffer death upon the cross:
in your mercy
enable us to share in his obedience to your will
and in the glorious victory of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Refreshments and Fellowship.

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