

HIDDEN RIVER CIRCUIT DEVOTIONAL ARTICLES

Edition 26: OCTOBER 2026

Welcome to the October edition of Circuit reflections, as we think about stories in the Bible and what they can mean for us today.

Take your Bible and ponder on the stories and the words in the passages.

Take your hymn book and sing to the God who speaks through poetry and song.

Take your time and wait for God to speak to you and bless you.

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WEEK 1: October 4th: A Reflection by Karen Drayton

Scripture Exodus 20. 1-20, Psalm 19, Matthew 21. 33-46

We are living in an age where the great leaders of the world are tearing up the law books, and national and international laws are being broken at a great rate, seemingly without any retribution or consequence. I watched two children waiting at a bus stop swinging on the gate outside my building. They were with their parents. They knew they were doing wrong, as they were looking all around to see who was watching, including me, and knowing they would not be made to stop. The only people allowed to berate children are their parents, and if they do not take any responsibility, what can be done?

How many of the Ten Commandments can you remember? God gave the Hebrews the Commandments after they had been freed – it wasn't a condition of their freedom. It seems like he was saying "I have set you free from slavery, now let me teach you how to live as free people." The Commandments are part of a relationship and a covenant, rather than simply a moral code. The first commandments concern Israel's relationship with God, the later ones concern relationships with other people.

But the Hebrews didn't listen, and we don't listen.

What is interesting in the three bible passages suggested for today, is not so much the laws they propound as the attitude to those laws and the ways in which keeping – or breaking – laws can affect individuals and society. After Moses has presented the Israelites with the Ten Commandments (which were accompanied by thunder and lightning, smoke on the mountain and trumpet blasts) we hear that they were afraid and trembled. In fear of death, they begged Moses not to let God speak to them directly.

Moses responded by telling them not to be afraid, the dramatic phenomena which had accompanied the law-giving were, he said, because God had come to test them 'and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin'.

The second reading comes from the book of Psalms – a collection of writings and songs which are thought to date largely from the period when Israel was a settled nation, living under the rule of David and other kings, so around 1000BCE, several hundred years after the time of Moses. In Psalm 19, possibly written by David himself, after a beautiful hymn of praise to the way in which creation speaks of God, we find a rather different attitude to the law has developed. In verses 7-10 the law is described as perfect, sure, right, clear, pure, true and righteous and its effect on people is painted in extravagant terms, as something which 'revives the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes'. The law is, the psalmist claims, more desirable than 'much fine gold' and 'sweeter than honey' and the hearer is enjoined to keep the law for in doing so 'there is great reward'. It's an interesting progression from the thunder and fear of Exodus, to move to the honey, gold and reward of the Psalms. It's also an important progression, which might be mirrored in the way our own society has represented God and God's law over recent centuries. At one time, fear was a prevailing emotion in church teaching and preaching. Gradually that element has been softened and more emphasis has been placed on love and well-being.

Let's try and hear the Gospel story as they might have heard it. It's a story about a vineyard; in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, the vineyard was often used as a symbol for Israel so the hearers would assume that was what was meant here. In that case, the landowner, the owner of the vineyard, would be God. God is described as having taken care over the vineyard, and then leased it to tenants whilst travelling abroad. We imagine that the Jews listening would have seen themselves as the tenants, taking care of God's precious vineyard through their observance and promotion of the law of Moses.

With the next scene, the story becomes rather more disturbing for them – for the owner sends slaves to collect the fruit, who are beaten, killed and stoned by the tenants. What is Jesus getting at here? Later in Matthew (23:37) Jesus accuses the Jewish leaders as having 'murdered the prophets and stoned the messengers' who were sent to them, so they probably have an uncomfortable realisation that they are being 'got at' here. Finally, Jesus tells them, the owner decides to send his son, hoping that the tenants will respect him; on the contrary, however, they think that by murdering the son and heir they will inherit the vineyard instead. The story is becoming very pointed and poignant now but they realise that the tenants have made a big mistake – killing the son will not lead to them inheriting, far from it, it will lead to their destruction as well. A nasty moment for them – one probably intended to give them the chance to realise what they are doing and look again at Jesus and who he was. But sadly, they miss the opportunity and continue in their campaign to get rid of Jesus.

Reading the parable in that way makes it all too easy for us today to demonise the responses of others and congratulate ourselves on not being the target, but is that really a good use of Scripture? Isn't the fact that this story is included in our readings today an indication that we too have something to learn from it? Are we too, at times, tenants like those in the story?

Do we sometimes cling to our own rights and privileges, rather than recognise that the vineyard/the church belongs to God, not to us? What happens when I forget that everything – and everyone – ultimately belongs to God?

Do we, like those tenants, fail to offer back to God the fruit for which God looks?

We have heard Jesus stories many times, we have taken the meaning of the parables to heart – and yet we still go our own way, We fail to trust God. We fail to offer all we have to him. We store up our treasure in bigger and bigger barns. We judge and put down others. We see specks in others' eyes and not the log in our own. We care for ourselves more than others. We break the ten commandments without fear of retribution, knowing we are loved unconditionally. In fact, we are just like the two boys swinging on the gate.

Let's re pledge ourselves to do more listening and walking in the way of Jesus.

Singing the Faith 563 By John Ernest Bode

1. O Jesus I have promised

To serve you to the end;

Lord, be forever near me,

My master and my friend;

I shall not fear the battle

If you are by my side,

Nor wander from the pathway

If you will be my guide.

3. O Let me hear you speaking

In accents clear and still,

Above the storms of passion,

The murmurs of self-will;

O speak to reassure me,

To hasten or control;

Lord speak and make me listen,

O guardian of my soul.

2. O let me feel you near me;

The world is ever near;

I see the sights that dazzle,

The tempting sounds I hear;

My foes are ever near me,

Around me and within;

But, Jesus now draw me nearer,

And shield my soul from sin.

4. O Jesus, you have promised

To all who follow you,

That where you are in glory

Your servant shall be too;

And Jesus, I have promised

To serve you till the end;

O give me grace to follow,

My master and my friend.

WEEK 2: October 11th: A Reflection on John the Baptist

By Jean Dyde, former Local Preacher

Scripture: Matthew 3.1-17

Recently my thoughts have been on John the Baptist and the many questions I would like to ask. John had been the forerunner, and when John's disciples noticed that more people were going to Jesus than to John, John showed his humility by saying, "I am the forerunner and it is time for me

to be less, and for Jesus to grow.” There was no jealousy in John, he knew what he had to do, as we see in John 3. Verses 27-36.

In our Bible we are told that John recognised Jesus in the womb (Luke 1. 39-45) and next we find that while Jesus lived in Nazareth, John is in the desert preaching repentance and offering baptism for the repentance of sins. We are told that this answers Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 3.3), and after that we hear very little about John.

We assume that Jesus and John are about the same age, as John recognised Jesus while both were still in the womb at the same time (Luke 1. 41). We do not know how long John had been in the desert preaching, before Jesus. We don’t know how he knew that he was the forerunner of Christ, and what his destiny was.

John must have died in his early thirties, as Jesus began his work when about 30 years of age, and John was killed not long after Jesus had begun his work.

Of course, we all recognise his call for repentance, and his baptism of people in water, unlike Jesus, who baptised in the Spirit. Jesus’ claim was that he had come to find the lost souls, this showed in his parables of the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son. In his way he also called for repentance.

But you may be asking yourselves why am I concerned with John the Baptist? I feel we can learn more about ourselves by knowing more about John. He was human like us, but he must have had a close relationship with God. Somehow he was told what God wanted of him, but how? And I cannot help but wonder, did he sin – did he have the tendency to speak out when he shouldn’t? I have to say there are times when after I have said something, I say to myself, “ I should not have said that”. Again it is so difficult to forgive someone who has hurt us, but now I think of those words in Our Lord’s prayer “ Forgive my sins, as I forgive those who sin against me” and I I wonder - am I forgiven if I still hold a grudge against that person? It’s surprising then how quickly I learn how to forgive!

The main problem is we are human, and try as hard as we can, our mouths can let us down, or perhaps we have another weakness as we are reminded in the hymn I have chosen to use with this reflection? Here we are reminded of those different ways we can slip, as sometimes we act without thinking first, or we can even commit those sins that we are not aware of.

Both John and Jesus asked us to repent, and yes, when we first came to our Lord we repented and were baptised, but when we ask in our Lord’s prayer to forgive us our sins as forgive those who sin against us, we are once again admitting that we still sin and repent our actions.

Singing the Faith 422 A hymn by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

1. Father we have sinned	2. Father of the nations,
In word, and deed, and thought,	You who bless the poor
Through ignorance, through weakness,	We’re servants of the endless want
Through deliberate fault:	And drive for more
We’ve sinned against our neighbours	We’ve made our greed a virtue
And against you, Lord,	While the children starve;
Yet we are truly sorry	Come, change our joy to sorrow
and we turn to you once more.	Till our lives reflect your heart.

WEEK 3: OCTOBER 18th: A Reflection on Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate

By Jean Dyde, former Local Preacher

Scripture: Matthew 27: 1-25

When I begin a reflection, I am given a name, my first was Mary Magdalene and I have since worked on John the Baptist, but this time I have been given two most unlikely names: Judas Iscariot and Pontius Pilate. I ask myself, what can I do with these two men? Judas is known to be a thief and he betrayed Jesus, and Pontius Pilate could have saved Jesus. Pontius Pilate was said to be a strong man and capable of saving Jesus' life, but was he? Could he?

I have read Pontius Pilate's life story but unlike those who see him being a strong man, in the book he is depicted as a weak man, frightened of upsetting the Scribes and pharisees for if he had upset them they would have complained to Caesar who would then have called Pontius Pilate back to Rome and he would have been sent into obscurity, and never be heard of again and eventually this did happen to him, even though he did cave in to the Scribes and the Pharisees.

The truth is, that Pontius Pilate knew who Jesus was, his wife was a follower of Jesus and Jesus had healed their crippled son. She was trying to stop Pontius Pilate from having him crucified, and of course the Devil was allowed to keep him frightened, encouraging him to hand Jesus over. And in our reading we know that Judas realised he had sinned, and then took his own life.

And my next questions was – how can I use this? I then heard of someone who does not believe in the Devil, yet the Devil is mentioned in the Bible. I have also heard that he did not believe in heaven. Yet I expect that he believes as we do that God's guidance was given in the Bible, and so I ask if we do not believe, are we doubting God himself, if we do not believe those words spoken by Jesus when he spoke of heaven and earth?

Also, in the Bible it sometimes states the God allowed the Devil to tempt people, he even had Jesus tempted, and poor Job in the Old Testament. The Devil tried to make out that God had no faithful believers and poor Job was chosen to prove his faith, and how that poor man suffered for it!

But I wonder would we have followed Jesus if he had not had such a cruel death - would we have believed that it was through his death that our sins are forgiven?

We in our faith cling to the cross. He had to die that way for us, and these two men had to play their part. If they hadn't played their part, where would we be today? Would we be in Church praising our Saviour, or perhaps we would be worshipping wood or clay images that have no power at all?

Jesus had to die for us, and in that cruel way, and to make it happen God used the Devil. Today the Devil still does his evil work, that is why st Paul has told us to keep our armour ready, and we have to realise that the Devil can still try and test our faith, and the stronger the faith the more severe the testing.

Singing the Faith 237 A hymn by Herman J Stuempfle

1. Jesus tempted in the desert,
Lonely, hungry, filled with dread:
“Use your power” the tempter tells him;
Turn these barren rocks to bread.
“Not alone by bread” he answers
“Can the human heart be filled,
Only by the Word that calls us
Is our deepest hunger stilled”.

2. Jesus tempted at the temple
High above its ancient wall
“Throw yourself from lofty turret;
Angels wait to break your fall!”
Jesus shuns such empty marvels,
Feats that fickle crowds request;
“God whose grace protects, preserves us
We must never vainly test”

3. Jesus tempted on the mountain
By the lure of vast domain
“Fall before me! Be my servant!
Glory, fame, you’re sure to gain!”
Jesus sees the dazzling vision,
Turns his eyes another way:
“God alone deserves our homage!
God alone will I obey!”.

4. When we face temptations power
Lonely, struggling, filled with dread,
Christ, who knew the tempter’s hour
Come and be our living bread.
By your grace, protect, preserve us
Lest we fall, your trust betray.
Yours, above all other voices
Be the word we hear, obey.

WEEK 4: October 25th: A Reflection by Karen Drayton:

Scripture: Romans 1. 1-20

Seeing God in all the things that he has made.

“Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made “

“Wherever I turn my eyes, around on earth or to the heavens

I see you in the field of stars

I see you in the yield of the land

In every breath and sound, a blade of grass, a simple flower,

An echo of your holy name”. – Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (1092-1167)

“We shall awaken for our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation, deeper and deeper, we will repon 5o i5w endangerment with passion. Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars. Gaze at the beauty of earth’s greenings. Now think. What delight God gives to humankind with all these things. All nature is at the disposal of humankind. We are to work with it. For without it we cannot survive”.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Isn't it amazing that even since the Bible, through the 11th Century, up to today, people have seen God shows himself in our amazing world? It is full of treasures that David Attenborough and others like him have helped us see in glorious, colourful detail. If you ever want a flavour of all that God does in nature, reading the final chapters in Job is a great place to do it – **Job 38. 1-41, 39. 1- 18** especially.

If you want to see God in nature you just have to stop and watch a glorious sunrise, or sunset, or watch the clouds moving and making shapes, or observe a minute bug covered in green, black and purple shininess....or a snail retreating into his shell.. or a heron flying... or hear a buzzard calling in the sky.

I was immeasurably fortunate as a child to attend a Christian boarding school in Darjeeling, as my parents were missionaries in India and they often lived in tiny villages where there was no schooling. Following the footsteps of the Raj, Mount Hermon School was built for the British to spend the summers in the cool of the hills, rather than on the scorching plains. We had a fantastic view of the Himalayas, and I spent many hours sitting on the roof of the school outside my dormitory, mesmerised by the beauty of Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. For me, it represented the strength of God, the steadfastness of God, the greatness of God, and when the pink, purple or orange of the sunrise or sunset caught the tips of the mountain ranges, the beauty of God, the aesthetic nature of God was so evident – surely He must love beauty too, to have created so much? I feel now there was no way I could not be a Christian having been able to see this amazing view so often. And yet, many of my classmates, sharing the same experience, do not believe in God. What a gift the gift of faith is! We wish it for all those we love and know!

To me, creation isn't merely functional. There is extraordinary **unnecessary** variety, beauty and imagination: a rainbow, birdsong, flowers, colours, landscapes, snowflakes, fingerprints. For those with faith, Creation suggests a God who delights in making things different and beautiful. The Bible doesn't treat beauty as irrelevant. Beauty can stop us in our tracks. A sunset, a landscape or a bird in flight can produce something close to worship: “Wow!” And creation is remarkably abundant and varied. There isn't just one kind of tree, flower, bird or human personality. Knowing God has created a world full of variety and difference and beauty can therefore help us to embrace God's love for difference and variety – surely he delights in the beauty of different races, countries, weather, wisdom, ways of being? And surely we can extend our love to people different from ourselves too.

Mountains, oceans, storms, galaxies, the birth of a child, the extraordinary complexity of a living cell—all can evoke a sense of a power vastly beyond ourselves. Creation constantly reminds us that we are part of something much larger and older than our own lives. Especially when we look at the stars, we are pointed beyond our brief existence towards the eternal. My mother-in-law finds it too difficult to consider the stars in the heavens and the light years of time they are away, the immensity of the universe. But she would agree with Psalm 19: “The heavens declare the glory of God.”

The interconnectedness of ecosystems and the astonishing structures of living things can point towards the order, intelligence and wisdom in the nature of God. Nothing exists entirely on its own. Plants, animals, soil, water, atmosphere and human beings are woven together. Creation can therefore teach us something about how God values relationships and mutual dependence, about how God would like us to live in relationship with one another, with an acceptance that we all have different gifts and a different place in the scheme of things.

Creation also shows us God's amazing generosity – Creation continually gives and gives and gives again: trees produce oxygen and fruit; soil and plants and animals produce abundant food; rain sustains life; sunlight gives warmth and energy. There is something profoundly gift-like about creation.

Spring after winter, seeds dying and producing new life, forests regenerating—the seasons give us a powerful sense of forgiveness, renewal, that even things that look dead can always have a new beginning in another form – think of a caterpillar turning into a very dead like pupa, then emerging in glorious technicolour as a butterfly, such a short-lived insect, yet so valuable and so important! Consider a potato planted in the ground, becoming nothing, while lots of new potatoes have emerged from its life given sacrificially. There is a sense that nothing is really the end. It gives us a vocabulary for looking forward to new life after death, in a different place, in a different shape with different capabilities – a resurrection and new life we can hardly imagine. Each new day offers us a new beginning, with God's daily gift of a sunrise. He doesn't want us to wallow in regret or shame, but offers us the freedom of deep forgiveness, allowing us to begin again, to try again, to be loved and love again.

But perhaps most importantly, creation doesn't explain God completely. It points beyond itself. We can look at the night sky and understand something of God's greatness while simultaneously realising how little we understand.

Nature does not tell us everything about God. Creation gives us genuine knowledge of God's eternal power and divine nature, and Christians believe that God's character is revealed even more fully in Christ. We glimpse some of God's nature in creation, and in Jesus, we believe we see God's character and love made visible in human form.

As John1:14 puts it - "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

So next time you watch things in nature, out of your window, on the TV or in the wider world - ask yourself – what does this show us of God's nature? And how can we be more like Him?

Singing the Faith 51 by Thomas O. Chisholm

1. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;

There is no shadow of turning with Thee;

Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;

As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed thy hand has provided,

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

2. Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest

Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,

Join with all nature in manifold witness

to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love;

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,

Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;

Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow,

Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

