CONTENTS: Resources for Lent (pages 1-3); Reflecting on Scripture (page 4-5)

1. Resources for Lent

On the Diocesan website we can find this helpful information offered to resource us through Lent, as individuals and as church groups:

http://stasaph.churchinwales.org.uk/life/steering-groups/developing/resources-for-lent-2016/

‘Lent is often kept as a particular time of study and devotion, both privately and in small groups. The Revd Dr Richard Hainsworth, the diocesan director of Exploring Faith provides a summary of books and courses that you might like to consider to help you keep this season.’ Richard lists a number of books for private study and reflection, and two courses (from US [formerly USPG] and CTBI) for groups, the latter being available in both languages. Also he suggests some films which can be helpful to watch and reflect upon, as well as the practice of journaling and a pledge-based response.

I’d like to draw your attention to another course, based online with printable resources, helpful to follow either as an individual or as a group. The Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE) is the oldest Anglican Religious society for men, and its North American community has had a strong online presence for some years. I’ve used their Lent courses in parishes for several years, and people usually find the short videos and discussion materials engaging and helpful. This year their course is called Growing a rule of life:

‘This year the Brothers’ Lenten series will focus on God as the Chief Gardener of our souls and use a tool from monastic spirituality called a ‘Rule of Life’ to explore and cultivate our relationships with God, Self, Others, and Creation. Just as stakes and lattices nurture the growth of young plants, so too can spiritual disciplines support the flourishing of our whole being.

Join us to dig deep and dream big about ways to live into a more abundant life with Christ. Begins Ash Wednesday: February 10, 2016.’

Most of my group members are not online, but that’s not proved to be any obstacle to the use of these courses. I’ve simply downloaded the daily videos or the weekly compilation video and then shown excerpts on the TV at the meeting venue using a laptop or a tablet. This year there is an accompanying workbook which mixes text with helpful illustrations, and a facilitator’s guide devised by SSJE and the Center for the Ministry of Teaching at the Virginia Theological Seminary, to aid first-time and experienced group leaders.

All these and other supporting material with links are available at http://ssje.org/ssje/growrule/

On the next pages are screenshots of the introductory pages of the Workbook. The Workbook is available via Amazon in the US but not on the UK site. It can be downloaded though simply by signing up at ssje.org for the daily videos. This gives a book of A4-size pages, so these can just be printed off if you’re happy with that size; if you want a smaller version of A5-size pages, let me know as I’ve made that size for my own groups here.

For any individuals or group members who are online, there are additional opportunities of sharing experiences throughout Lent.
Growing a Rule of Life

In this series, we will focus on God as the Chief Gardener of our soul, and we will seek out ways to grow into the fullness God desires for us. Just as stakes and lattices support the growth of young plants, so too can spiritual disciplines support the flourishing of our whole being. This series uses a tool from monastic spirituality called a ‘Rule of Life’ to help us cultivate our relationships with God, Self, Others, and Creation. This is an exciting opportunity to dig deep and dream big about ways to live into a more abundant life with Christ.

This series is designed for use by both individuals and small groups. In small groups, facilitators will guide the growing process as participants discuss and learn together. For individuals, daily videos and reflections will lead them through a similar process. Ultimately each participant will create a unique Rule of Life to guide and sustain their Christian life beyond the class.

The series is organized into six phases. Each phase will help us develop some aspect of our own ‘Rule of Life.’ In these phases, we will look deeply at our relationships with God, with Self, with Others, and with Creation.

For Individuals

* Subscribe to the video series at www.SSJE.org/growrule
* You will receive a daily email with a mobile-ready video and a question.
* Watch the video each day, and take time to reflect on the question it poses. You may want to use a journal to record your thoughts.
* Share your thoughts, using #growrule on your preferred social media site.

For Groups & Leaders

* At www.SSJE.org/growruleresources you will find a detailed ‘Facilitator’s Guide’ created by the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE) and the Center for the Ministry of Teaching at the Virginia Theological Seminary. It is designed for first-time group leaders as well as those who are more experienced.
* You will also find additional supporting materials, including images and text for use in bulletins, email, and as website badges.
* Encourage individuals to subscribe to www.SSJE.org/growrule and to sign up for a study group. Please contact friends@ssje.org if you want to add your whole community’s email list to receive a daily email with a video from the SSJE Brothers.
* Share your group’s experience, using #growrule on your preferred social media site.
* Read comments on www.SSJE.org/growrule and share them with others.
* Use the workbook, videos and the comments as inspiration for sermons.

Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living

_Living in Rhythm: Following Nature’s Rule_

Br. James Koester marvels how living in rhythm with the creation can draw us into deeper life with God and greater balance within ourselves.

Download from www.SSJE.org/growrule
My Garden Fence

We will be digging deeply into our lives during this series. Before we begin to set out our ‘garden plot,’ it is important that we set up a ‘fence’ to provide a space within which to work. This fence provides protection and safety, and allows our garden to flourish. Here are some ‘fence posts’ you might want to consider before starting the process. Add more ideas on the blank posts in the diagram if you’d like!

Be Open. Open yourself up to this process. Invite God fully into each idea and question you may have.
Be Creative. Think outside the box. You may have a unique image of what you want your garden to include.
Be Gentle. Be gentle with yourself. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a competition.
Be Realistic. Simple and honest answers are far more useful than sweeping, idealistic ones.
Be Patient. This is part of a lifelong process. Give yourself time to develop your ideas along the way.
Be Flexible. Be willing to change and modify your ideas as your life moves through different seasons.

Watch | Answer | Share           www.SSJE.org/growrule
2. Reflecting on Scripture

Lent is a time when the intention of having a deeper relationship with Holy Scripture is present, and all Church traditions encourage a prayerful engagement with the Bible. There’s often felt to be a gulf, however, between popular presentations of Scripture and academic studies. It can be quite a challenge find thoughtful material which might support preaching or daily reading and which doesn’t involve leaving academic learning behind. Many of us may use Feasting on the Word: Preaching through the Revised Common Lectionary. There are four volumes for each of the three years of the Sunday Lectionary cycle, each Sunday having four different perspectives on each reading. There is a real wealth of support for preaching and prayerful reflection here. The books are quite pricey, but the electronic Kindle version is usually cheaper than the print version on Amazon, and around the period for each volume to come in to use, I’ve noticed that Amazon lower the price of the Kindle version considerably. By shopping seasonally I’ve been able to buy each book in Kindle format for about £11-12 each. A bargain. (But not today – prices on the website are high, but that might change tomorrow!) http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_2?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=feasting+on+the+word+year+c+&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3AfFeasting+on+the+word+year+c+

Old and New Testament studies continue to develop well beyond whatever period we have spent in any focused period of training or study. A new generation of commentaries takes seriously the needs for the rounded development of Christian communities, and the authors are drawn from across the spectrum of Church denominations, whatever the background of the publishing house. One ongoing series, easily available, and reasonably affordable, is Paideia (the series introduction is below, and a link to the volume on Luke is here for a look: http://www.amazon.co.uk/Luke-Paideia-Commentaries-New-Testament/dp/0801031907/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1454510776&sr=8-1&keywords=paideia+luke

Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament is a series that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed. This series is aimed squarely at students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-division undergraduates—who have theological interests in the biblical text. Thus, the didactic aim of the series is to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting and related to its context within the New Testament.

The name “Paideia” (Greek for “education”) reflects (1) the instructional aim of the series—giving contemporary students a basic grounding in academic New Testament studies by guiding their engagement with New Testament texts; (2) the fact that the New Testament texts as literary unities are shaped by the educational categories and ideas (rhetorical, narratological, etc.) of their ancient writers and readers; and (3) the pedagogical aims of the texts themselves—their central aim being not simply to impart information but to form the theological convictions and moral habits of their readers.

Each commentary deals with the text in terms of larger rhetorical units; these are not verse-by-verse commentaries. This series thus stands within the stream of recent commentaries that attend to the final form of the text. Such reader-centered literary approaches are inherently more accessible to liberal arts students without extensive linguistic and historical-critical preparation than older exegetical approaches, but within the reader-centered world the sanest practitioners have paid careful attention to the extratext of the original readers, including not only these readers’ knowledge of the geography, history, and other contextual elements reflected in the text but also their ability to respond correctly to the literary and rhetorical conventions used in the text. Paideia commentaries pay deliberate attention to this extratextual repertoire in order to highlight the ways in which the text is designed to persuade and move its readers. Each rhetorical unit is explored from three angles: (1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative or rhetorical flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that are of
interest to the contemporary Christian. Thus, the primary focus remains on the text and not its historical context or its interpretation in the secondary literature.

Our authors represent a variety of confessional points of view: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. What they share, beyond being New Testament scholars of national and international repute, is a commitment to reading the biblical text as theological documents within their ancient contexts. Working within the broad parameters described here, each author brings his or her own considerable exegetical talents and deep theological commitments to the task of laying bare the interpretation of Scripture for the faith and practice of God’s people everywhere.

Another ongoing series, again with a wide range of authors, but double the price, is the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary

http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=Smyth+%26+Helwys+Bible+Commentary
and with a few volumes available, the New Cambridge Bible Commentary

http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-keywords=new+cambridge+Bible+Commentary

Each of these I’ve found to stimulate some engagement with the text and a prayerful response in contemporary church life, and so offer the suggestion of them, and I hope you find them worth a look. If you would like to see a screenshot or two or further information, just contact me.

Finally, do look out in STAR for details of training from the Cursillo movement introducing the spiritual method for use in parishes, at training days on Saturday March 5, May 7 and July 2.

Rev. John Harvey
Director of Spirituality
revjohnharvey@googlemail.com