

Thought for the Day in Lent, focusing on tricky words in the Bible

Monday 1 – Sunday 7 March by Melanie Seward

Monday 1st

Tricky word No. 16 - Soul



'Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."'

(Matthew 22. 37)

If you have ever listened to Soul music, you will know that it is characterised by the sound as much as the lyrics coming from deep within, from a place deeper than the emotional heart, from our inner self.

Over the ages people have had very long debates over what exactly the inner self is or, to put it simply, what makes you, you or me, me! Lots of us think that the sum of the physical body and its mental processes do not adequately explain all of who we are. It all changes from moment to moment, day to day, year to year, yet most of us experience and strongly believe that something within us gives us a constant identity.

In Genesis, in the first account of creation, one of the Hebrew words meaning 'create' (bara) is used in verses 1, 21 and 27- at each new phase of creation - for the universe, for the animals and human beings. The second account of creation reveals that man is created from dust and God adds his breath. There is something inside us that is distinct to humans; it is not physical but is spiritual and is immortal.

Christians believe that God creates a soul that is unique for each human being and it is God's desire that this soul is to have life in abundance through Jesus Christ in this life and the next.

Remember the words of Jesus: *'What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?'* (Matthew 16. 26)

Tuesday 1st

Tricky word No. 16 - Holy



*'For I am the Lord your God;
consecrate yourselves, therefore,
and be holy, because I am holy.'*
(Leviticus 11. 44, quoted in 1 Peter 1. 16)

The word 'holy' literally means 'set apart' for the glory of God. In church, through prayer, we dedicate items and even the whole building to glorify God. We talk about the saints as having led a 'holy' life - meaning that they have lived their lives in a way that exemplifies dedication to the love of God in what they say and do. However, only God is by nature holy and pure or without flaw or blemish and, therefore, worthy of worship. As Reginald Heber writes in his hymn, *'Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee, perfect in power, in love and purity'*.

We challenge an individual that they are being self-righteous or smug (claiming moral superiority) by saying they are 'holier than thou'. Yet it also says in the Bible, 'Be holy as I am holy'. We are called to be holy - in that God asked of us that we live our lives set apart from evil by turning to the light of Christ and walking in that light. Quite a task, but note that we do not have to do this relying on our own strength and inspiration alone. The Spirit of God, or breath of God, is there to guide.

If, in our lives, we are seeking to be holy, ultimately the distinction between what is considered holy (set apart) and what is secular becomes indistinguishable. All elements of life are lived to the Glory of God.

*Holy, holy, holy! Lord God almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three persons, blessed trinity!*

(Words: Reginald Heber, 1826)

Wednesday 3rd

Tricky word No. 17 - Anointed



*'So Samuel took the horn of oil
and anointed him in the presence of his brothers,
and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD
came upon David in power.'*
(1 Samuel 16. 13 - NIV)

It may not be many years before we once again have a coronation of a new King. The service will include the ritual of the Archbishop of Canterbury using holy oil to make the shape of the cross on his head, hands and heart. In centuries past, monarchs claimed that they ruled by divine right and, whilst today the monarch's powers are limited by Parliament, she is still the Head of the Church of England and promises to rule with the help of God: it is a sacred duty.

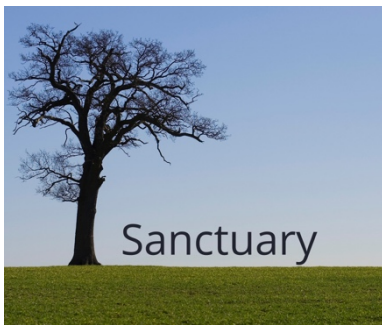
The origin for these ideas is found in the Old Testament, where Samuel anoints David, son of Jesse, to affirm God's choice for the Kingship of Israel. David is 'set apart' and empowered. In common parlance, the phrase 'the anointed one' is used to identify the next person to take a responsibility in e.g. succession planning at work. Being the chosen one can have positive or negative overtones; many of us will remember José Mourinho accepting the label of 'the special one'.

Anointing is not about being special or being recognised by other people, it is all about God doing the choosing and there is always an accompanying calling to walk and live with God. In the church, we use holy oil to anoint in the ceremony of ordination to the priesthood and we use it to anoint the dying. We anoint infants at Baptism as a sign of raising them according to God's promises whereas, with adults at Baptism, it is a sign of them renouncing evil and turning to Christ. God has anointed or chosen each of us and stands by each of us in our calling to follow him.

*'Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He
anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our
hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.'*
(2 Corinthians 1. 21-22)

Thursday 4th

Tricky word No. 18 - Sanctuary



*'Then have them make a sanctuary for me,
and I will dwell among them.'*
(Exodus 25. 8 - NIV)

In the Old Testament, God was understood to dwell amongst his people. In the wilderness, a pillar of smoke during the day and a pillar of fire throughout the night announces this. God's presence was to be found in the Tabernacle - the tent in which the Ark of the Covenant containing the commandments was kept. King David moved this to Jerusalem and Solomon placed the Ark in the central room, the Temple called the Holy of Holies. These places were all sanctuaries.

Today the area in church behind the communion rail and containing the altar, is called the 'Sanctuary' - it faces east towards Jerusalem. Yet a sanctuary is any place where God's presence can be discovered and where we can respond in worship. It is a place where we encounter God's peace, love and care of our souls, where we feel able to reorientate ourselves to God.

Many of us say that we discover God when we are outside as easily as in a church building. In lockdown, we have become even more aware that our sanctuary is also the footpath, the garden or the place where we commune with others through Zoom.

Finally, 'sanctuary' is not just about escaping the pressures of work and family. It is more than just being in a place - the hotel with the infinity pool, the holiday cottage in the countryside, even the quintessential parish church. It is about the process; a willingness to seek and listen, taking the opportunity to be open and encounter. Then we will experience the faithful, loving presence of God.

Friday 5th

Tricky word No. 19 - Kingdom



God is eternal and his kingdom is eternal. This same God created a world where we could live in harmony with Him and with one another. However, lots of things made that almost impossible – stuff like us wanting all the control and none of the responsibility, as well as wanting to possess all the knowledge instead of seeing God as the source of all

wisdom. The result was, and is, sin and evil, conflict and suffering. Not what God intended. So, to break down these barriers, he sent Jesus.

Jesus told us that we should pray, *'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'*

He explained that God's kingdom on earth is like a mustard seed that grows into a bush, which gives shelter to the birds. God's kingdom starts small and grows beyond expectation and even beyond what is thought to be possible. The Kingdom of God is growing every time we reflect the love of God and others experience that love for themselves, every time we experience the forgiveness of God and extend our willingness to forgive towards others, and every time we are comforted by the peace of God and become instruments of peace in his world.

The Kingdom of God, sometimes called the Kingdom of Heaven, is as real as you can get. In one sense it is already here, yet in another, the time when God's will 'will be done on earth as in heaven' is not yet here. Jesus taught that all of this will come to pass.

*For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.
Amen.*

Check this out: [The Lord's Prayer - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgN0s2xmCuM&feature=emb_rel_end)

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Saturday 6th

Tricky word No. 20 - New Covenant



Have you ever had an agreement or a relationship go so far off the rails that it becomes almost impossible to get it back on track?

In the time of Moses, God made an agreement, or covenant, which provided a framework for a relationship with his people. The Old Testament tells us that the people were to worship the one and only God and have no others, as well as keep his commandments. He would be their God and they would live in the land to which he led them. But this agreement did not work out; as the centuries ticked by, it all went pair-shaped with the worship of foreign gods, exile, disdain for the poor and, for some, rules and rituals overtaking the matters of the heart. Whatever God did to get the people to understand both the consequences of their choices and how the world could be, the people chose not to change.

So, God undertook to provide a framework through which his world would be renewed. It arose out of the old one; Jesus was born of and into the Jewish people as the Messiah, the one announced by the Prophets (God's messengers). As Messiah, he would lead the people back to God and make them a great nation. Jesus, the Son of God, showed people how to walk with God and live with others. His life, death and rising from the dead triumphed over suffering and death. Those who repent, have faith and abide by his teaching and in his love, will enjoy forgiveness, joy, peace and everlasting life. This is the new covenant - the new relationship between God and all people. Through his son, he offers it to each of us.

Sunday 7th

Tricky word No. 21 - Communion



'While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body". Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

(Matthew 26. 26-28)

This year, Maundy Thursday falls on the first day of April. We remember Jesus' Last Supper with his closest disciples, recorded in all four Gospels. They share the meal of the Passover Festival that all families would be eating. They remember the account of the Passover in which their forebears eat a hurried meal of sacrificed lamb and unleavened bread, the angel of death strikes down the Egyptian first born and God delivers their people from slavery.

Jesus, as the most senior ranking male, would be expected to bless and break the bread before handing it round for all to share. Similarly, he would have been expected to bless the wine and take a sip before all drank. However, they were surprised and confused by references to his blood being poured out being linked to 'the new covenant' and 'the forgiveness of sin'.

Also, on Maundy Thursday, we remember the institution of Communion as a celebration. For many Christians, receiving communion is encountering Christ's presence in a most profound way. Christ's blood was shed so that we might partake of the bread of life. Communion is spiritual food and ignites an awareness that forgiveness and transformation by his light is happening because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

In the Church of England, Holy Communion is never celebrated alone. It is a shared participation in the shared blessings of Christ (1 Corinthians 10. 16-17). It is a cup of thanksgiving for Christ dying for all and celebrates a death that offers forgiveness to all. As such, it is a celebration together at the end of which everyone is sent out to welcome others into this same communion of believers.