

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

Monday 22 – Sunday 28 March by Rev. Wendy Sellers

Monday 22nd

Tricky Word No. 36 – Divine



There are many meanings for the word Divine.

The first isn't really one of those words most of us can successfully carry off. 'Darling, that new hat is divine' is just not the sort of thing most of us say these days unless we are dramatic types. So, as an everyday word 'divine' can mean superlative or sensational – the very opposite of mundane and ordinary.

A second, quite outdated, definition means a cleric or clergy person. I'd quite like to list my profession as 'divine' on the census, but it doesn't seem to be an option!

To 'divine' can also mean to work out or guess. So, you might try to divine what someone else was talking about.

A fourth meaning is to search – specifically for minerals or water underground using a special rod or stick. This looks like magic, but apparently isn't and really seems to work.

But to those of faith, 'divine' simply means Godlike or heavenly. Its opposite is 'mortal'. The divine being is eternal and immortal: unlike us it is not subject to decay and death. God is essentially divine.

Yet, when you think about it - all of these words are linked. Our divine God is 'divine'. He is sensational. Our divine God is served by people, including divines called to a specific ministry. The divine God leaves us to work out or divine so much about Himself and ourselves, too. And the divine God allows us to search for Him, and to find Him.

Five meanings – one God. And he is simply Divine.

Tuesday 23rd

Tricky Word No. 37 – Way



The church does love multi-syllabic words – words like ecclesiastical and hermeneutics.

Today's word has only three letters but, nonetheless, it holds a host of meanings. It apparently crops up as either 'way' or 'ways' a whopping 543 times in the Bible. It is used particularly in Psalms and Isaiah, which refer to the Holy Way – a life lived according to God's

expressed wishes. It's also used to refer to the activities of God – so Isaiah talks about 'God's ways' being different to 'our ways'. Then, in the New Testament we have the prophesy that John the Baptist will go before the Messiah to 'prepare his ways'. And this means preparing the people through repentance – asking them to turn towards God.

In the Bible, the road of faith (the way) is not simply laid out for us to follow. Instead, following the way is a collaboration between God and his people, and God and the individual. Each of our 'ways' will look different. Even more, the way may well be a path that we need to help to construct. We are God's partners just as John was called to be.

You and I also know there is a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way. Choices have to be made. We know that while God (like Frank Sinatra) might do things in his own unique and possibly mysterious way, the rest of us may not always have that option. Indeed, we may sometimes have to 'give way' and let God's purposes over-ride our own wishes and desires.

Jesus said of himself, 'I am the Way'. For this reason, The Way was a name for early Christianity. What it means is that the way is not just the route somewhere. It is also, somehow, simultaneously the destination. One of the many paradoxes of faith.

Way. Such a tiny word. God doesn't need big words. Our small everyday words can contain a wealth of meaning which can, on reflection, lead to a deeper understanding of God.

'Make me know your ways, O Lord. Teach me your paths.' (Psalm 25)

'I am the Way, the truth and the life.' (John 14)

Wednesday 24th

Tricky Word No. 38 – Trespasses



If you are a Winnie the Pooh fan you will know that Piglet had an uncle called Trespasses Will, short for Trespasses William (or so Piglet believed). The name comes from a broken sign and the reader knows that actually the sign would originally have said 'Trespassers will be prosecuted'.

To trespass is to go somewhere you are not allowed or entitled to go. As the signage indicates, there may be a price to pay if you disobey the instruction and choose to trespass anyway.

The word 'trespasses' is most familiar to us as part of the traditional words of the Lord's Prayer. 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'. This wording is one of the reasons I'd always choose the traditional words over the contemporary version – which uses the word 'sins' instead.

The word 'sins' holds within it an ancient idea, from the early chapters of Genesis. The actions of Adam and Eve mean humans become innately sinful. According to this view, our state at birth is the one that God needs to save us from. We are sinful and God makes us clean.

'Trespasses' takes the opposite position. The sinful lies elsewhere, outside of us, and we may choose to trespass, or indeed accidentally trespass, into places we do not belong. When we do so, there is always, sadly, a price to pay. And there is always a way back.

Trespassing means we have strayed away from where God wants us to be. We have wandered away from the people he intends us to be.

Trespasses tells us this separation from God is not our natural state. And Good Friday tells us that the ultimate price for our trespasses was paid for by Jesus on the cross.

Piglet's sign said 'Trespassers will...'

How shall we complete that? How about:

'Trespassers will be forgiven.'

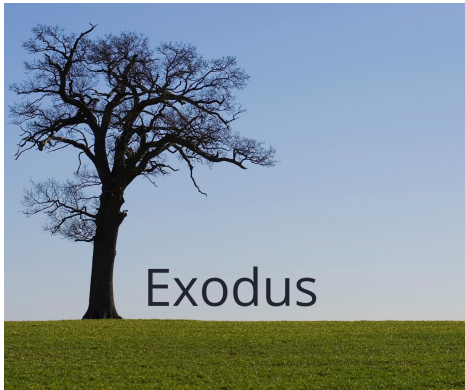
'Trespassers will be welcomed back home.'

'Trespassers will remain precious in God's sight.'

You choose.

Thursday 25th

Tricky Word No. 39 – Exodus



The book of Exodus tells us of the Israelites' flight from slavery in Ancient Egypt, an event so important it has a book of the Torah all to itself. Exodus is the defining moment of the Jewish faith, beginning with the Passover and ending as they arrive on the borders of their new land. On the way, they are gifted the Ten Commandments and give their long-suffering leader, Moses, all sorts of bother. Images from Exodus scatter the pages of the Bible. Its shared memory kept the Israelites faithful during their exile in Babylon and still unites Jews today.

Exodus is about leaving the relative safety of somewhere, heading to a destination known only to God and travelling with Him - knowing the journey is as crucial as the arriving.

Exodus is also the name of a song by Bob Marley, who converted from Christianity to Rastafarianism. The song is about 'movement', as people journey together with God, towards a better life.

Here is an edited extract of the lyrics to reflect upon. Jah means God, derived from the Hebrew YHweh.

Exodus: Movement of Jah people.

*Men and people will fight ya down
When you see Jah light.*

*Let me tell you if you're not wrong.
Everything is alright.
So we gonna walk – all right – through de roads of creation;
We the generation
Trod through the great tribulation.*

*Open your eyes and look within.
Are you satisfied (with the life you're living)?
We know where we're going,
We know where we're from.
We're leaving Babylon.
We going to our Father land.*

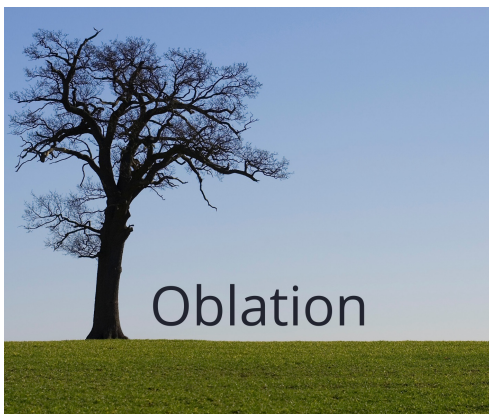
*Jah come to break downpression,
Rule equality,
Wipe away transgression,
Set the captives free.*

Exodus: Movement of Jah people.

(Bob Marley and the Wailers 1977)

Friday 26th

Tricky Word No. 40 – Oblation



An oblation is an offering, taken from the Latin word *oblatio*, meaning to offer. It is a term used in the church for a solemn gift or presentation to God.

This ancient word was used in early editions of the Bible, including the 1611 King James Bible, to particularly indicate the offering of food in the temple, and thus came to be used as the bread and wine at the Eucharist.

Another word from the same root is 'oblate', meaning people who have devoted themselves, or have been devoted as children by their parents, to a monastic life.

So, oblation is about the offering of something really significant to God, even as we acknowledge that all things come from God. It is about sacrificing something important. In the case of bread and wine, the original offering seems relatively unimportant. What matters is what God is going to do with that offering. Perhaps medieval parents took the same view of the children given to the church. The opposite of oblation is withholding or refusal, which you may find helpful.

Below is an image of a sculpture called Oblation by Tolentino.



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oblation_\(statue\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oblation_(statue))

The concrete sculpture, painted to look like bronze, measures 3.5 metres in height and symbolises the 333 years of Spanish rule in the Philippines and the archipelago's struggle for independence. *'It symbolises all the unknown heroes who fell during the night,'* said the sculptor.

The male figure offers himself completely, naked with arms outspread. Nothing is held back.

What, I wonder, do we withhold? What do we refuse to let go of? What oblation can we offer, to the God who held nothing back on the cross?

Saturday 27th

Tricky Word No. 41 – Paschal



The word paschal is the equivalent of the Greek word *pascha*, the Aramaic *pasha* and the Hebrew *pesah*. It means 'the passing over' and refers to Exodus 12 and the night when the destroyer passed over the houses of the Israelites but not that of the Egyptians.

However, the Christian church, while embracing the term, did not stick with its original meaning. Instead 'Paschal' came to mean the passion, death resurrection and glorification of Christ. The lamb sacrificed and eaten at Passover is represented by Jesus – the Paschal Lamb.

Paschal also refers to the big white candle we use in church. In ordinary times a new one is acquired each year, which is lit for the first time at the very first service on Easter morning. It is marked with a cross. This is joined by the Greek letters Alpha and Omega – symbolising God as both beginning and end. The year is included to show God is present in this congregation (I understand that this year some canny churchwardens have been busy changing the year from 2020 to 2021, as the candle didn't get much use last year and they are expensive!). Some churches push in five nails to represent Christ's wounds.

At dawn on Easter Day, we usually have a bonfire at St Mary's, as many, many churches do throughout the world. The Paschal candle is lit from it. As it is processed into the church building, we chant three times.

The light of Christ

Thanks be to God.

This year the service will be outside. But still the Paschal candle will be lit as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the Paschal Lamb.

Palm Sunday, 28th

Tricky Word No. 42 – Hosanna



Hosanna is a word of rejoicing, so you might think it similar of our word 'Hurrah'. However, its more literal translation is 'please save us'. It's a Greek word that most scholars believe is made up of two Hebrew words – 'yasha' which means 'to save or deliver', and 'anna' which means 'please, I beseech'. Other scholars believe its Hebrew roots comes from a different verb tense of 'yasha'. In this tense, hosanna becomes a command to bring about salvation, rather than a plea. Two subtly different interpretations.

Hosanna occurs in the New Testament six times. Matthew, Mark, and John all mention that the people called out 'Hosanna' in praise and celebration during Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem during the week before Passover, and so it is used in many of our Palm Sunday and Easter hymns.

'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!' is Matthew's version. These people celebrating Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem were quoting Psalm 18, his arrival was the result of a very long wait. It is now a familiar part of our Sunday liturgy.

However, Matthew also included another mention of 'Hosanna' outside of Palm Sunday. After Jesus cleansed the Temple by driving out the moneychangers and merchants, children in the Temple praised Jesus by crying out, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!'.

Hosanna is a cry for salvation, but can also be a cry of thanks. Two polar opposites coming together: cries for help and cries of praise. We tend to focus on the praise, perhaps because for Christians the help has arrived. It arrived as a young man riding on a donkey. It arrived as a condemned man on a cross. Our help arrived as our risen Lord in a garden. Hosanna.