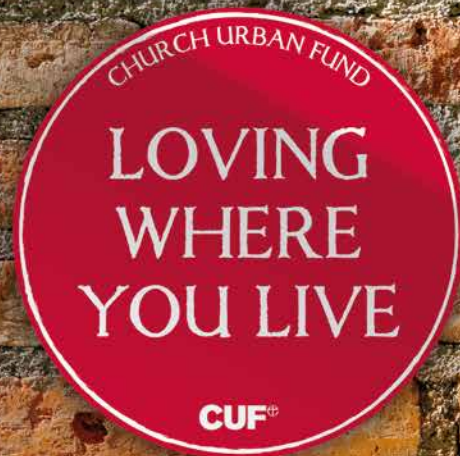


# Lent 2024

## SEASONAL IDEAS FOR REFLECTION AND WORSHIP



**This year Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent coincide with Valentine's day. Lent is a time when we commit ourselves afresh to follow the example of the loving life of Jesus, turn to our neighbours in loving service and prepare to reflect on God's love for us shown on the cross.**

Use this simple act of reflection and worship as a reminder to look out for expressions of love in your community, to be open to God's love and to turn towards others in loving service. You can use it with a group, as a short service or for individual reflection.

### Opening prayer

Loving God, we ask you to journey with us this Lent as we walk towards the cross and empty tomb with Jesus.

Give us the grace and insight to understand love in its purest forms, and see where you are showing your love in our communities.

Give us strength to show compassion and kindness, even when it is difficult.

Show us how to love ourselves, so that we can be open to the love that you have for us, and be generous with our love for others.

As we look at the pain and injustice in our communities, keep our hearts soft enough to keep breaking, and give us the courage to transform the places where we live with love.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, the one who took on flesh to show us your love.

Amen.

### Scripture Reading

#### 1 John 3:16-20

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

## Recognising love

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**A reflection by Nadine Wilkinson, Partnerships Manager at CUF. Formerly serving as a Methodist minister, Nadine has also managed a community centre working in local authority, social prescribing, preschool education and homelessness prevention partnerships in south London.**

We might merely glimpse it. We may feel completely overwhelmed by it. We certainly recognise it. In barely noticed habits and grand gestures, we express what matters deeply to us, and the places and people to whom our passions move us. Love takes flesh.

As Lent begins, the legends of Valentine return our attention to love. Less well known is that the root of the name lies in a sense of strength and health which also marks the legendary love that gives itself for others.

In the living and dying of Jesus we recognise strength in a love that does not grasp at power, possessions or self-interest, and is sustained by the loves shared in common with people. It is a love recognised by authorities at the heart of imperial and religious life, and by individuals at the margins of neighbourhoods. It is a love, recognised by those who follow Jesus, as life-giving and transforming. It is God's love in the flesh to be given and received through us.

That love demands of us a strength of conviction and a health in our relationships. We find it in communities where we are welcomed, heard and included, where our contribution is valued and incorporated, and where our experience is allowed to transform the way things are accepted as being. In forgotten places remembered, in overlooked places rediscovered, in angry places reconciled, in crumbling places rebuilt, in hungry places refilled and in unjust places reformed, we see that love take flesh. Lent moves us in the company of Jesus amongst places and people where we recognise again the reasons for giving our love and for being open to the transforming love of others.

Dying, Jesus turned toward those whose love was sustaining. Moved by those who live God's transforming love, the strength and health to be found in giving and receiving love is worthy to be recognised.

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## Questions for reflection

- Who are the individuals and organisations serving our neighbourhoods? Read local news or follow community boards on social media to find out more about those who are working together in support of the places and people where we live.
- What are our neighbours already doing that inspires, teaches or challenges us?
- What can we learn?
- With whom can we start conversations about what we can bring to support the work already going on?
- How can our prayers be an expression of love, hope and faith? Who do you know, or what situations are you aware of, that you can lift to God in prayer today?

## Spend some time celebrating and praying for your neighbourhood

Using a local map, photographs and names of organisations, create a display which highlights those who are working together to support your neighbourhood.

Ask individuals and organisations whether they have information which you might add to your display. Make heart shaped cards or sticky notes or hearts available on which prayers for your neighbourhood can be written and added to this snapshot of the place where you live.

\* **Paths to action:** See our other ideas for praying, planning and making a difference this Lent.



## Closing prayer

Loving God,

Open our hearts to our neighbours this Lent, to friend and stranger.

Open our eyes to recognise your love being shown in our community.

Open our doors so that all are welcomed.

Bless us and transform us in giving and receiving your love.

Amen.

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