

40 DAYS OF LENT
40 REFLECTIONS
40 SIMPLE ACTS OF GENEROSITY

WEDNESDAY 13 FEBRUARY TO SATURDAY 30 MARCH

SERMON NOTES FOR CHURCH LEADERS
FOR USE DURING LENT 2013.

JOIN THE 40ACTS CHALLENGE TO TAKE PART IN
FORTY DAILY GENEROUS ACTS DURING LENT 2013.

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WELCOME TO 40ACTS

What is 40acts?

40acts is a generosity challenge which invites people to do Lent a bit differently. During the forty days of Lent, 40acts participants will be invited to take part in forty simple acts of generosity which will challenge them to 'do Lent generously' in 2013.

Lent marks a pivotal point in the history of the church, when Jesus prepared to give himself up as a sacrifice. Traditionally we mark Lent by giving something up, but what if it could be more than that? What if Lent was a preparation for a lifetime of big-heartedness?

Small acts of generosity, performed by thousands of Christians across the UK and beyond, have the power to make a big change to our communities, to our churches and ultimately, to our world.

How do these sermon notes work?

These sermon guides act as a companion to both the 40acts campaign as well as the study material for small groups of both adults and young people.

The sermon notes are divided into seven separate sessions and provide adaptable service templates. In order to follow the seven-week period of Lent 2013 (Wednesday 13 February to Saturday 30 March 2013), the course will work best when run on a weekly basis.

The sermon notes have been designed to suit a wide range of ages and interests. Church leaders should feel able to adapt or remove certain sections of each session to suit the needs and interests of their particular congregation.

→ **Scripture**

Luke 24:13-35
Joshua 5:13-15

→ **Essential Question:**

What are the blocks that we need to remove from our lives in order to prepare ourselves to be used by God?

→ **Preparation**

If you're keen on using visual aids, consider having one of the following next to you as you preach:

- a pair of walking boots
- a generosity kit (see below)
- a range of glasses, swimming goggles and blindfolds

Introduction

The Bible is full of journeys - some in fear, some for victory, some out of shame. Two of the most interesting in the New Testament happen on roads that lead to two well-known locations: Damascus and Emmaus. While Saul's steps were interrupted in a highly dramatic fashion, it is the experience of the two disciples which seem more familiar to many of us. It takes time for them to comprehend the true identity of their traveling companion. We can all learn a lot from the encounter.

Step 1

We are not alone on this journey

Key points to draw out:

- Verse 15: Jesus slowed down and walked with them, at their pace.
- Verse 16: They were kept from recognizing Jesus – the blindness was due to an error on their part. Jesus was not playing games with them.
- Verse 17: Jesus already knew the answer to his question 'what are you discussing?' So why does He ask it?
- Verse 19: The disciples call Jesus a 'prophet', which by definition erases the resurrection from the story. It's a major error, yet Jesus remains gracious.
- Verse 28: Note the significance of the fact that they had to invite Jesus to stay with them.
- Verse 31: What made their eyes open?
- Verse 31: Why did He then

- disappear?
- Verse 33: What happened next?

Step 2

None of us needs to feel stuck

If you track the disciples' responses to the mysterious stranger they encounter, you can see that they move through distinct phases:

- pessimism (verse 17-20)
- self-pity (verse 21)
- a glimmer of hope (verse 22-24)
- hunger for more (verse 29)
- seeing the truth (verse 31)
- optimism and proclamation (verse 33-34)

Do any of these stages define our feelings about God today? Perhaps all of us in some way can be found at different points of the scale at different times of life. Wherever we are and whatever we are feeling, it is nothing new to Jesus. He can slow to our pace and help to guide us forward.

Step 3

Whose battle is it anyway?

Remind people of the story about Joshua before he marched around the walls of Jericho (Joshua 5:13-15). Joshua mistakenly asks the commander of the Lord's army whose side he is on. He is rebuked and corrected: this battle is not Joshua's, but God's. This same trap can snare so many of us into inaction or distraction. We can assume that what matters most are our feelings, our potential, and our agenda. Yet our true purpose is found when we take our lead from God.

Conclusion

None of us presents to God as a perfect offering. We are all broken and stained. We all stumble along the path and we all get confused from time to time, mistakenly substituting our own agendas for God's. And none of this surprises God.

Introduce the idea of the generosity kit (see below) as a way each of us can prepare for whatever opportunities God chooses to put in front of us over the coming weeks.

Lead people towards confession for the ways in which they have got sidetracked, given into doubt, self-pity or self-promotion. Remind them of the power of Jesus to open their eyes so

that once more their hearts might burn within them.

Close by urging people to pray that they would view things more clearly; seeing where God is at work and noticing the way God may be leading them.

What's a Generosity Kit?

Take a bag and fill it with useful items that you can give away to anyone in need: spare change, batteries, a hi-vis jacket, a first aid kit, some gloves, a voucher for a coffee shop. Then keep the kit in your car close to hand and be on the lookout for opportunities to delve inside and help people.

This weeks 40acts

Wednesday 13 February: Create a generosity kit

Thursday 14 February: Love

Friday 15 February: Make a list

Saturday 16 February: Get uncomfortable

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

→ **Scripture**

Exodus 16:4-30

→ **Essential Question:**

If God invites us to be His co-workers, shouldn't we also be collaborating with each other?

→ **Preparation**

Visual aids could include a map (possibly charting the exodus out of Egypt), multiple pairs of walking boots or climbing rope running from one end of your congregation to the next.

Introduction

Last week we looked at the journey taken by two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We considered the need for each of us to see more clearly how God might be able to use us in our everyday situations and conversations. Today we're looking at another journey, and exploring the significance of traveling with others.

Story

US Christian leader Tony Campolo tells a story about speaking at a conference in a city far from home, and suffering from jet lag. He found himself awake in the middle of night and feeling hungry. So he headed into the city centre and found a 24 hour coffee shop and got himself a coffee.

As he sat there he saw a group of women come into the shop. They were talking loudly and were dressed provocatively and it became obvious that these women were prostitutes who worked locally. He overheard one of them say that it was her birthday the next day. One of the others said sarcastically "So what do you want us to do about it? Throw you a party?" The birthday girl said "Well, I was just telling you. Why would I expect a party? I've never had a birthday party before."

Tony listened to this and came up with an idea. He found out that the girls came in at around the same time every night and he asked the owner if he would mind if they threw a birthday party for this girl when she came

in the following night. The guy was really surprised but agreed to put up streamers and decorations. And so he went and got a birthday cake.

The following night, after speaking at the conference, he returned to the coffee shop, and at just the same time as before, the girls appeared. Tony got everyone in the shop to shout out "Happy Birthday!" The birthday girl was totally surprised and overwhelmed. And then he brought out the birthday cake and gave her a knife to cut it with. But the girl turned to him with tears in her eyes and said "Do you mind if I just take the cake home with me? It's just... I've never had a birthday cake before."

After the party was over and the girls had gone back to work, the owner of the coffee shop asked Tony why he had done something like that. Tony said "Because I'm a Christian". The coffee shop owner laughed and said, "Don't be stupid, I know lots of Christians and I know lots of churches, and they don't do anything like that. What kind of a church do you go to?"

And in a moment of inspiration, Tony replied, "I go to the kind of church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes". The coffee shop owner said, "No you don't. There ain't no church like that". But then he said "But if there was, I think I'd want to join it. Yeah, I could be interested in a church like that."

Step 1**Why are they wandering?**

Look at Exodus 16:4-30 and remind people of the context:

- This is one month after the Israelites escape from Egypt. They may still be traumatised, and it's clear that the buzz has worn off and reality set in. Chapter 15 reveals them feeling thirsty, and now they're hungry. As a result some are taking survival into their own hands.
- God steps in to save, yet they remain confused. Manna arrives every day. Every day they are dependent on something they cannot define.

Step 2**How has Jesus changed things?**

Look at John 6. This passage can be

aligned with this story from Exodus. Yet there are differences:

- John 6:13: Jesus offers more than enough bread.
- John 6:19: Jesus walks on the water, not through it.
- John 6:30 – 32: Jesus says that manna is not enough.
- John 6:35: Jesus offers himself as the 'bread of life' – the only way of knowing God.
- John 6:41: People are grumbling. Some things don't change.
- John 6:69: 'We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God'. Again we see a community of faith flourishing in response to God's generous provision.

Step 3**What about us?**

Where possible, fit all this to your own community, describing its needs, its potential and the way in which God has been using you as a group to pass on God's love and generosity. Encourage others to persist with this and remind them of the wider needs still waiting to be met. Paint a picture of your community transformed even further by those who are committed to following God's lead.

This weeks 40acts

Monday 18 February: Read the local news

Tuesday 19 February: Be a mentor

Wednesday 20 February: Visit your local

Thursday 21 February: Cross a generation

Friday 22 February: Get together

Saturday 23 February: Grab a cuppa
Read the local news

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

→ **Scripture**

Micah 6:8

→ **Essential Question:**

If God cares about justice, how much of a practical impact should it make on our lives?

→ **Preparation**

Set up a laptop and projector in order to facilitate the activity.

Introduction

'If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.'

Desmond Tutu

Churches talk a lot about 'mission', and it's a code word that comes loaded with meaning, but does our definition extend to how we reflect Jesus' concern for people's spiritual, emotional, relational and physical needs?

Activity

Introduce a quiz.

1. On average how much do we each spend on clothes each year in the UK?

Answer: £400

2. How many pairs of shoes does the average American woman own?

Answer: 30 pairs

3. What percentage of the world's garment workers are female?

Answer: 90%

4. What percentage of children between 4 and 14 in the developing world work?

Answer: 25%

5. In China you need to earn 50p per hour to maintain a basic standard of living. What do you think is the average pay for garment workers?

Answer: 15p per hour

Step 1

Micah 6

In this chapter, God gives provides some clear directions. The questions found in verses six and seven cover the standard religion of the time: sacrifices, burnt offerings, even a mention of the inhuman Canaanite practices of child sacrifice. But are they what God really wants? Verse 8 talks about justice, mercy and humility before God – it's a great summary of the mission that God calls us to (and it's a three point talk waiting to happen).

Firstly, it shows itself in an acceptance of justice. We should be concerned at those structures around us which are fundamentally unjust and work to see that law is upheld, that the courts are fair, that resources like money and land are shared fairly. Where the rich oppress the poor and rulers and politicians are corrupt we find ourselves looking at a spiritual issue.

Secondly, it shows itself in mercy. God also wants us to be people of mercy and forgiveness, the kind who show love and compassion on a personal level. Mistakes will be made and people will be hurt, and God wants us to offer mercy and kindness to those who are struggling, who find themselves marginalised and excluded.

And finally, it shows itself in humility before God. For Christians, showing mercy or being concerned for justice is rooted in acknowledgement of God's power and authority. Everyone has been created in the image of God and his love is for everyone equally. He calls us to acknowledge him in everything we do, to walk our lives in a humble relationship with him.

Step 2

The only questions that matter

Someone said that there are just two theological questions that really matter. The first is 'What kind of God?' and the second is 'So what?'

If God cares about justice, mercy and humility - more than fancy religious practice or ritual - then what does this mean for us?

Look at Amos 8:4-6 and provide a

little context: Amos is speaking to the corrupt business practices of the day and lists five things that God dislikes. First up there's the fact that they couldn't wait to get the trade-free Sabbath and festival days over and done with so that they could get back to business. Then there's the line about 'skimping the measure... and cheating with dishonest scales'. They boost the price unfairly, trap the poor and sell sub-standard goods.

So what if God cares about justice? The answer is clear: it should have a profound impact on the way we trade with others, whether we are producers or consumers.

Step 3

Where next?

In the same way that we live in an age of increasing consumer choice, we also find ourselves facing multiple opportunities to shop and trade in ways which articulate a more healthy response to God's passion for justice. Try to steer people away from the One Response Fits All school of thought, encouraging them to try each of the different 40acts challenges this week: Forgive us when we have closed our eyes and ears to the truth about the way that our shopping hurts others. Help us to see the many ways in which you weave our stories together with the lives of others. Open our eyes, God and use us for your glory.

This weeks 40acts

Monday 25 February: Buy Fairtrade

Tuesday 26 February: Give intelligently

Wednesday 27 February: Share the Bible

Thursday 28 February: Check the label

Friday 1 March: Celebrate cultural diversity

Saturday 2 March: Live on a fiver

Visit 40acts.org.uk to find out more about 40acts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

WEEK 4

Make someone's day

→ Scripture

Isaiah 6:1-8

→ Essential Question:

Grace extends to us; will we show it to others?

Preparation

Visual aids could include invitation cards – one per person.

Introduction

“Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” **Winston Churchill**

None of us quite match up to the potential we possess, but all of us are loved by a guiding Father who calls us on, together.

Step 1

The Desecrated Temple

Isaiah 6:1-8 begins by telling us it is set in the year that King Uzziah died. 2 Chronicles 26 tells us Uzziah was king in Jerusalem for 52 years and that he was a good king - until he did a terrible thing (2 Chronicles 26:15). He desecrated the temple by taking charge, trying to do what only the priests could do. Uzziah tried to control God and spends the rest of his years in isolation as a result. The entire country suffers.

Yet this passage is not about what Uzziah has done, it is about what God does. How true is that of our lives as well? What defines us are not the things that we do but the things God does. Sin doesn't define us, grace does. Our achievements don't define us, God's mercy does. Our experiences don't define us, God's love does.

That is why Isaiah shows that even from the temple which has been desecrated - much as each of our lives can fail to match up - we can find ourselves in a place of God's holiness. 'Holy, Holy, Holy' is not limited to the angels; each of us can call it out too.

Step 2

The Vocational God

When we encounter God's holiness it cannot fail to reveal to us how far things are from where they should be. We echo Isaiah's words in verse five - "woe to me!" And he's right; we should be aware of our shortcomings as individuals and as a community.

But the story does not end there. There is mercy and forgiveness and God's gift to put things right. And when God speaks He so often speaks vocationally. Why? For there is work to be done.

Holiness is not an experience, a vague sense, a hovering feeling – and abstraction. Holiness is an invitation to enter into what God is doing and intending to get done in the world. Holiness is for everyone, for everyone has a part to play in God's plans for the world He created. The question is, will we accept the invitation?

Step 3

How?

Remember the words spoken to Isaiah, God's not-so-rhetorical question in verse 8? Where was God sending Isaiah? Where he always sends us: out. Out to demonstrate God's love to the people He's crazy about. Out to the world stained by injustice but still throbbing with goodness and grace. Out to the people who are similarly imperfect - ones who are good people making bad choices (just like king Uzziah and just like us) - to call them deeper into the cry of Holy Holy Holy. Out so that everyone would hear God's invitation.

This week presents an ocean of opportunity for every single one of us in this room. Will we raise our hands and say, like Isaiah, "here am I. Send me!" Because if we do - with eyes and hearts wide open for any possible prompt from God's Spirit - we will gather again next week with tales of God-scripted adventures and faith on fire.

This weeks 40acts

Monday 4 March: Surprise someone

Tuesday 5 March: Encourage

Wednesday 6 March: Hug

Thursday 7 March: Smile

Friday 8 March: Say thank you

Saturday 9 March: Love your church

Visit 4oacts.org.uk to find out more about 4oacts and to sign up to daily challenges during Lent 2013.

→ **Scripture**

Genesis 18, 19 and Exodus 3:7-10

→ **Essential Question:**

Are we prepared to be used by God?

Introduction

Remind people of the story about the man caught in a flood and forced to climb onto the roof of his house. He prays for God to save him. A man comes along in a canoe and offers to give him a ride to safety, but the man send him away saying "God will save me." The waters rise and a fire crew arrive, offering to rescue the man. "No thanks," he says, "I'm waiting for God to save me." The waters rise and a helicopter arrives. The man waves it on, still convinced that God will intervene. The waters rise and the man drowns. In heaven the man is rather annoyed and complains to God. "What do you mean?" says God, "I sent you a canoe, a fire crew and a helicopter. What else were you waiting for?"

Step 1

Divine and human justice

Remind people of the story in Genesis 18. Abraham and his aging wife Sarah receive visitors who tell them that she will conceive. Then one of the visitors (God) pauses, considers the depravity of the nearby city of Sodom and wonders about destroying it. Abraham bargains with the Almighty, seemingly bending His arm, getting God to agree that if fifty Godly people can be found that the city would be spared. God agrees. Abraham says "what about 45?" God agrees. 40? OK. 30? Yes. 20? Fine. 10? Go on then.

What happens next? The angels visit the city, the citizens try to rape them and only four decent, righteous people are found. The city is destroyed, just as God suggested it would be even before Abraham started bargaining.

And here's the question: why did

God let Abraham go through the negotiations? As the omnipresent Creator, the all seeing, Almighty one, surely God knew that Abraham's figure of ten was too high and that the city would end up trashed anyway. Why go through the motions?

So here's the answer: God wanted Abraham to ask, to get involved, to care about the state of his fellow man because that it precisely how we've been made. We're not here to soak up the blessing and ignore the responsibilities. We're here to offer an accompaniment to God's divine justice: human justice. We're supposed to get involved, we're supposed to care, to feel, to ask questions and rage against the machine of a world plagued by the marks of the fall.

The rest of the Bible continues the theme: God's offer of relationship with his created beings and our flip-flopping between responsibility and apathy, between being the bringers of the blessing and being trapped by the bubble.

Step 2

Divine partnership

Exodus 3:7-10 contains a great speech from God. It makes such a great start, like an Oscar-winning warm-up to one of those explosive sequences where the good guy saves the day. The fact that God declares that he has 'seen the misery... heard the crying' and has 'come down to rescue them' would surely have got Moses rubbing his hands in eager anticipation at the remarkable spectacle about to be witnessed. Then comes something unexpected: 'I am sending you'. The killer line, the counterpoint which shifts the tone as God places Moses at the heart of his plan.

"You" God says, singular, not plural. "You", alone, impetuous, unwise and wholly unqualified to do the job. "You", overwhelmed and dwarfed by the task. "You", worrying about how on earth you're going to make a difference.

We all know what follows. We know

that God's power to save is more than enough without the input of Moses, but that through His grace Moses was invited into partnership with God, to be the waiter who delivered the order. Does God want us as ready-made heroes? No. Surely He'd rather we were on our knees, aware of all the reasons why we can't match up, but ready to obey all the same.

Conclusion

Remind people of the need for change within your wider community; the lives that need hope to shine upon them, the people who are struggling and need support, the poverty, the isolation, the brokenness. Give thanks for the ways in which so many of those needs are being met, but be clear how much need remains around you. Then issue the challenge: who will God use to take His hope and love out to them?

This weeks 40acts

Monday 11 March: Clear out your wardrobe

Tuesday 12 March: Take someone new

Wednesday 13 March: Share a good joke

Thursday 14 March: Go screen-free

Friday 15 March: Make something

Saturday 16 March: Let them choose

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→ Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:18

→ Essential Question:

Do we recognise that all of creation has God's fingerprints on it and are we prepared to make changes to our lifestyle as a result?

Introduction

Karl Barth said that a Christian is one who is thankful and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us that in all circumstances God wants us to give thanks.

Yet expressing our gratitude is something that we become less proficient at with age, particularly when it comes to creation. What different choices would we make if we gained a clearer - more thankful - appreciation of the world which God has made?

Step 1

How do we talk about climate change?

There are many possible routes to take:

- We should care for the world because God cares for it (Matthew 10:29, Psalm 65)
- We should care for it because when we don't it is the poor who suffer (1 John 3:16-18, Ezekiel 34:16)
- We should care for it because we were told to care for it (Genesis 2) Each argument is valid and strong and can be backed up by more than the verses listed here.

Step 2

Beyond Legalism

What if we approach it from another angle - one more closely aligned with Barth's notion of a Christian being someone who expresses their gratitude? What would those choices we make look like if we wondered less about what rules we must follow and acted instead out of an overflow

of thankfulness for all He has given us?

Step 3

Examples of gratitude

Exodus 15:1-19. Immediately after their escape through the Red Sea, the Israelites sing this song of thanks to God. They remind each other of what God has done for them; His care, provision and protection. What would happen if we brought an appreciation of God's creation into our worship? What would change if - instead of seeing thanks for creation as a prayer to be mumbled while out walking alone - we tried to express our gratitude corporately - and with volume?

Daniel 2:23. Before he returns to the King to reveal the contents of the dream, Daniel gives thanks to God. He is confident that God has acted and answered his prayer. There's a clear link between prayer and thanks, between Daniel asking God to help and then thanking Him for it. When we find ourselves in situations where we are dependent on God to help, it's far more likely that we will end up having something to thank Him for. Prayer leads to thanks, so let's pray more. About what? Take your pick: lives at risk from a changing climate, livelihoods that depend upon the seasons, people who work to protect and restore the vulnerable.

Luke 17:11-19. Of the ten lepers that Jesus healed, only one returned to give thanks. Even though it might mean going against the crowd and standing out as a minority, we should never forget to give thanks. What stops us from doing this? Are we too busy? Are we too caught up in selfish consumerism to acknowledge God's provision? Are we too ignorant of the way that goods are produced to consider the hands that worked to bring them to us?

It's over to you

Conclusion

There are so many things for us to be thankful for. Perhaps as you bring it to a close it would be good to draw some of those myriad blessings to people's attention. Be specific if you like and name names. Send people out with Barth's words ringing in their ears.

This weeks 40acts

Monday 18 March: Have a car-free day

Tuesday 19 March: Donate blood

Wednesday 20 March: Listen

Thursday 21 March: Say no to plastic

Friday 22 March: Use your influence

Saturday 23 March: Plant a tree

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→ **Scripture**

Luke 9:57-61

→ **Essential Question:**

Are we ready to risk?

Introduction

As we come to the end of Lent we find ourselves looking at one of the hard sayings of Jesus. What did He mean when He spoke about letting ‘the dead bury the dead’? Is He devaluing life here on earth? Is He anti-family? Is He in danger of raising the bar too high?

The word in question - (nekros) has both a literal and figurative meaning – just like it does for us today. We can be dead on our feet, dead tired and dead to the world or just plain dead. In this context Jesus is using the word in its figurative sense, referring to the spiritually dead, the ones who have yet to cross over into new life with Jesus, the ones that are unenlightened, unaware of the revolution that Jesus is rolling out. Of them He says: “Let the spiritually dead take care of the physically dead. Leave the ritual to the ones who don’t see what’s going on here – I’ve got a better offer for you.”

Step 1

Jesus challenges views on burial

Burial was a mightily significant thing for Jesus’ audience. It was a sacred duty, and one which the Bible devotes plenty of time to – with almost 90 references in the history books of the Bible. Joseph’s bones were exhumed in Egypt so that he could eventually be buried in Canaan (Genesis 50:22–26; Joshua 24:32). It’s why Jacob’s grief was so intense when he heard that Joseph had been killed and devoured by wild animals, denying him the possibility of burial.

Why was it important? Like many of the early laws it made sense on a practical as well as theological level – in a hot climate an unburied corpse is a grave risk to the health of others. But it also marked the collective

memory of God’s people. Tombs and burial rites helped tell the story of God’s people, reminding them of the trust that they could place in him.

But Jesus is editing the values of the day – about burial. He’s not saying no to burial, but as with Lazarus and himself, tombs are no longer what they used to be. He doesn’t say that people should not be buried, but the task is clearly no longer of such great significance. By suggesting that the spiritually dead can take care of the burial rites, Jesus makes a massive statement about the decreasing importance he places on the role of the burial ritual.

But this is not so much a statement about what we should not do as it is about what we should be doing. Because...

Step 2

Jesus is also challenging the relationship between rabbi and pupil

The relationship between a rabbi and his disciple was a uniquely important one. Rabbis were even more important than fathers to their pupils:

“When one is searching for the lost property both of his father and of his teacher, his teacher’s loss takes precedence over that of his father since his father brought him only into the life of this world, whereas his teacher, who taught him wisdom [i.e., Torah], has brought him into the life of the World to Come. But if his father is no less a scholar than his teacher, then his father’s loss takes precedence...”

If his father and his teacher are in captivity, he must first ransom his teacher, and only afterwards his father – unless his father is himself a scholar and then he must first ransom his father.”

Mishnah (ancient Rabbinical text written by Pharisees)

It was accepted that disciples would give up plenty to follow their new masters. Jesus raises the stakes still further, making it clear that following Him should have profound implications for the way in which we view religious ritual. He is also offering the chance to not just be the pupil to the master, but to share the journey,

to take on the royal decree that comes from God himself.

Why was He doing this? Look again at what Jesus says to the man: “follow me... proclaim the kingdom of God”. That word translated as ‘follow’ is *akoloutheo*. It is used 76 times in the gospel, mainly translated as ‘follow’ but also as ‘reach’ – drawing on the noun ‘*keleuthos*’ meaning road.

So Jesus was making the proposition of a lifetime: that in saying “yes” to Him the man would get closer to Him, that he would reach Him, accompanying Him on the journey. Jesus was offering partnership, the chance to learn from, be devoted to and share with Him in the life’s work of being a living, breathing ambassador and student and teacher and servant of the absolute King of all kings. That, Jesus says, counts for more than a ritual that can be performed by someone for whom it clearly has no deeper spiritual content. Relationship trumps ritual every day.

Step 3

Those two questions again

In an earlier session we mentioned what one commentator suggested were the most profound theological questions one could ask. Firstly, what kind of God? Well, this passage reveals the way that God is driven to extraordinary lengths in order to establish relationship with us. Over the last seven weeks we have been reminded of God’s generosity, His love and sacrifice.

And throughout this Lent period we have seen that the answer to the second question - so what? - is clear: by God’s very nature we are given the opportunity to be drawn in to a fulfilling, profoundly life-changing, outward-looking, justice-championing, generosity-breathing life. Anything else is second best.

THE 40 ACTS

Monday 25 March: Stand up,
stand out

Tuesday 26 March: Pray

Wednesday 27 March: Go beyond
yourself

Thursday 28 March: Practise your
testimony

Friday 29 March: Forgive

Saturday 30 March: Overcome your
story

Visit 4oacts.org.uk to find out more about
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during Lent 2013.

Acknowledgements

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