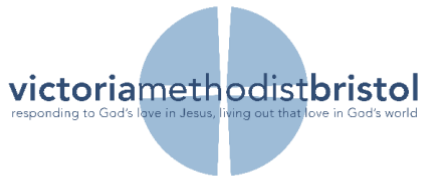


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# LENT KNIT-ALONG 2025

## WEEK 5

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**Pattern by Lyn Lloyd-Jones**  
**Reflections by Christine Stones**

### Introduction

We are really grateful to Christine Stones for writing the accompanying reflections for week five of the Lent Knitalong.

Chris(tine) Stones is a member of Victoria and a Local Preacher in the Bristol Circuit. Before retirement, many years ago, she worked in varied posts primarily based in services for children and families. Sadly, in terms of handicraft projects, she never progressed beyond crocheting a simple scarf and hat decades ago! She is filled with awe and delight admiring and benefitting from the creative handiwork of others. She enjoys weaving together words and images in prose and poetry.

### THIS WEEK'S REFLECTIONS

Everyone who has travelled with a child is familiar with the frequent question, "Are we nearly there?" This week starts with the Fourth Sunday in Lent which is half way through Lent. You have now just passed the midpoint of your knitting and reflection journey. Half way on any journey provides an opportunity to reflect on how far have we come whilst continuing to follow the path ahead. This week's reflections consider some of the varied factors that influence who we are and what gives meaning to our life's journey. We might imagine these factors as circles that we are, or could be, part of and which provide both nourishment and challenge.

## Sunday, 30 March

### *Mothering Sunday*

The circle of influence at the beginning of our lives contains our first key human relationships. Today there are varied settings and contexts that are the first circle for a child. Many are fortunate to have experienced a loving and safe beginning, but sadly some primal relationships fail to meet the vital basic needs of a child.



The fourth Sunday of Lent in the UK is also known as Mothering Sunday but was not initially about mothers. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or possibly even earlier, it was established as a day when individuals were encouraged to return to their 'mother' church - the one where they were baptised or taken as a child. At its inception young people, many employed as servants, were given a day's holiday to return to their first church. This would also mean joining their families and a tradition began where they would pick wild flowers on their way to give to their mothers.

Now in the UK, the Sunday is predominantly known as Mother's Day. A vast number of countries across the world, through different origins and traditions, hold an annual Mother's Day on varied dates, many in May. All have a common theme of being a day to honour mothers and provide a particular opportunity for offspring of all ages, who wish, to express love for their mother with card and gift. It can be a very profitable day for restaurants, card shops and florists!

The earliest circle a child needs for flourishing is a loving one that provides safety, security, nourishment, and nurture. The parenting role in our modern world is one with many challenges. It can bring many joys but also times of difficulty and deep distress. It may be the birth parents who meet their child's specific individual needs. But when family members are unable or have failed to fulfil the vital parental role, a fortunate adult will often speak of another or others who provided the crucial love and affirmation needed. Sometimes this is another family member, an alternative family, or others that offer reliable unselfish love to the child as they grow.

In spite of God being frequently addressed as Father, She has also been referred to, for many centuries, as Mother who responds to need, provides nourishment, comfort and strength to prepare for life's tasks:

*Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,  
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,  
then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,  
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.*

Joachim Neander (1650-1680)

## Reflection

Remember and give thanks for the mother/s or others who have provided vital nurture, nourishment and strength in your life.

Reflect on the opportunities you have been given to nurture and nourish.

If your memories and reflections bring pain and distress, be open to God's unending and unconditional love encircling you.

## Monday, 31 March

### *The Compassionate Father (Luke 15:11-32)*

The gospel in the Common Lectionary yesterday was the 'Prodigal Son'.

A more fitting title would be the Compassionate Father. A familiar story where a young man longs for freedom and adventure and asks his father for his inheritance in advance.

With amazing generosity, the father in the parable meets his son's request. The son squanders his advance inheritance on riotous living. When a time of famine arrives, he finds himself in a foreign country, homeless, starving, and penniless. His only option is to mind pigs – a task forbidden by religious law - a degrading task for a Jew and one that could lead to his family disowning him. The son reaches a turning point. It's not clear if it's a moment of deep repentance or more a pragmatic choice of self-preservation. He comes to his senses, asking himself what is he doing starving, for even his father's servants have more than enough to eat. He rehearses a speech asking forgiveness and acknowledging that he should relinquish any claim to sonship. But he does not get to make his carefully prepared speech, for "while he was still far off his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." Seeing his son in the distance, whom he feared he would never meet again, the father throws dignity to the wind and rushes in joy with outstretched arms to welcome his dishevelled, disreputable, and derelict son home. Rembrandt's painting, the Return of the Prodigal Son, shows the father embracing his son who has dropped to his knees.



This, Jesus says, is like God's unconditional love.

Kahil Gibran, the Lebanese-American poet wrote in his book *The Prophet*:

*Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself...*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts...*

*You may house their bodies but not their souls...*

*You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

It can take courage to leave home and it can require courage and facing some sadness and anxiety for parents to let children go. Parental instinct to protect a child, and fear of toxic factors in the modern world, can make it hard to encourage young people to seek healthy separation from home.

Tragically, there are some situations where relationships breakdown and a child is disowned or where a progeny disowns their parent/s and leaves with a farewell, "You won't ever see me again."

Loving and caring for children involves letting go and trusting that it's a new step and transition into a different but continuing relationship. Nurturing also includes warmly welcoming back when they have lost their way, or been rejected or hurt.

### *Reflection*

Who has shown you compassion and understanding when you have felt lost or ashamed?

Who in your family or friendship circle needs your compassion and understanding?

Remember and pray for those for whom family life has been abusive, neglectful or lonely.

## Tuesday, 01 April

### *Siblings*

In that first circle of our lives there may have been siblings. Theories are offered about how position in a family can affect identity or personality. Observations can become stereotypes such as the responsible eldest child or the spoilt youngest.

Unsurprisingly, sibling rivalry and ambivalence can frequently feature in families. From Cain and Abel onwards, there are stories in the Bible which give us memorable pictures of sibling relationships both loving and revengeful.

We see sibling rivalry, jealousy, and forgiveness in the story of Joseph. Jacob, the father of twelve sons, clearly favours his son, Joseph. (The family relationships are complicated by four different mothers being involved in the total of 12 sons.) Joseph is a bit of a tell-tale, informing Jacob about his brothers' behaviour. He also shares dreams containing scenes implying he would become great and all would bow before him. The brothers seek to kill him but instead take an opportunity to sell him as a slave. They tell their father that Joseph has been killed by a wild animal and he is heart-broken. In the following years Joseph prospers, rising to power in Pharaoh's household. Subsequently we see his forgiveness of his

brothers and he enables his father, his siblings and wider family to move to Egypt and escape the famine in Canaan.

If we think of other siblings portrayed in the Bible we can think of Miriam, Moses' older sister. Her brother as a male Hebrew baby was in danger of infanticide from Pharaoh. Their mother, Jochebed, desperate to save his life, made a watertight basket and with Moses inside, floated the basket on the river. Miriam stood on the river bank anxiously watching out for her baby brother's safety. Seeing Moses drawn from the water by servants of Pharaoh's daughter she quickly offers to fetch a wet nurse and so enables their mother to meet her brother's earliest needs.

From the New Testament, in yesterday's reflection on the parable of the compassionate father, we meet the furious resentful older brother. On the return of his prodigal son, the father organises a great party to express his joy at the safe return of his younger son. The older brother angrily refuses to join the party even when his father pleads with him to share his delight at the safe return of his brother. It is suggested that, in Rembrandt's painting, the tall figure on the right is the older brother with his hands clasped in disapproval. He feels that he's been the righteous older son, obedient, dutiful, law abiding and hard working. He sees his brother as undeserving of further generosity from their father. His rage and resentment prevent him seeing and sharing in his father's joy and celebration.

### *Reflection*

Have you shared family life with siblings or do you have others who are or have been like siblings to you? Give thanks for what you have shared.

Have there been conflicts and resentment that you regret and for which you want to seek forgiveness and reconciliation? God, the compassionate parent, offers us forgiveness and courage to seek reconciliation.

Do you need wisdom and strength to cope with sibling rivalry today?

## Wednesday, 02 April

### *The family of the Church*

Healthy growth and development require us to enter wider circles than a family grouping. During our lives we will be members of multiple circles, many overlapping, some discrete, but each providing opportunities and challenges.

At the beginning of the week we remembered that Mother's Day in the UK has its Christian roots as Mothering Sunday when Christians were encouraged to return to their Mother Church. It reminds us of the call on the church to be a family. A community where all are recognised as children of God and brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. In Baptismal services it is not just parents and godparents that make vows of commitment to provide

care, nurture and support to the children and adults in their midst. Also, the whole community of the church are asked to receive with joy those baptised and to maintain the Church's life of worship and service that enables their pilgrimage of faith.

Where do we see the birth of the family of the church? After Jesus' arrest, and shortly before his death, the gospels record that most of his disciples ran away. In his book, *The Seven Last Words*, Cardinal Timothy Radcliffe OP suggests, "To be a Christian is to recognise at the foot of the cross is born our family." He points to John's Gospel chapter as the early foundation of the Christian Community:

*'..standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.'*

— John 19:26-27

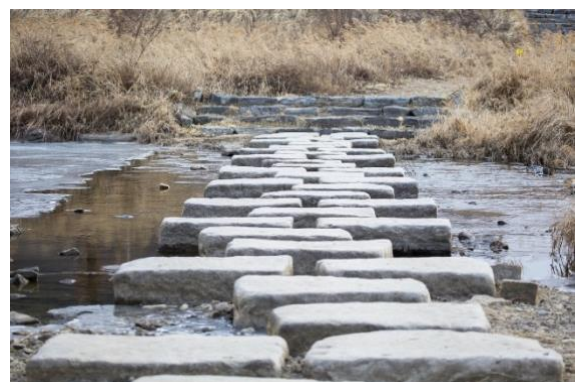
A family formed by Jesus of those who were unrelated to each other but bound by their love of Him and his revelation of God's eternal love.

The Inclusive Church movement challenges the family of the church to welcome all with open minds and hearts. Both recognising and welcoming the return of those, who we have seen flourish from their earliest years, and each and every one who steps over the church threshold and thus into its family.

Each member of a Christian community can be seen as a potential threshold of that community. Verses from a poem, "Isn't it strange?" by RL Sharpe challenge each of us in our lives:

*Isn't it strange that princes and kings  
And clowns that caper in sawdust rings  
And common folk like you and me  
Are the builders of eternity.*

*To each is given a bag of tools,  
A shapeless mass and a book of rules;  
And each must make, ere time is flown,  
A stumbling-block or a stepping-stone.*



Stepping stones are secure footholds when the way ahead seems uncertain, tough or rough.

### *Reflection*

Give thanks for those who in your life have been Stepping Stones into the family of the church or into another loving community.

What can you do to avoid being a stumbling block and become a Stepping Stone for others in their pilgrimage of life?

## Thursday, 03 April

### *Unity in Diversity*

In various circles in our lives, such as faith communities or shared interest groups, we find people with whom we hold important factors in common. It can be very comfortable and comforting to be in a community where we share a lot. We easily understand, or sometimes assume, that we share people's backgrounds and beliefs. In an inclusive community there will probably be significant differences. If you are shy or retiring it can be more of a challenge to meet people very different from yourself and from unfamiliar circumstances. But a diverse community offers much to celebrate. Members can learn from and with each other, finding enrichment through unfamiliar personal stories, ideas, cultures, and traditions. But it takes time and a willingness to listen carefully.

Within the Christian faith there are many examples of communities that can be described as intentional communities. They come together by intention rather than chance and purposefully reach across traditional divides celebrating difference and working together for a common cause.

Examples include the Iona community, founded in 1938 by Rev George MacLeod, a Church of Scotland parish minister who started it in Glasgow and, with others who shared his vision, subsequently planting and growing the Community on the beautiful and rugged island of Iona. The Island has deep spiritual layers reaching back to AD 563 and St Columba and his Irish followers and was a long standing place of pilgrimage for Celtic Christianity. There are the remains of four Celtic crosses on Iona.

The Iona community has grown over the years into a dispersed international ecumenical movement working for justice and peace, the rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship. Members of the community write, "We find hope, courage and challenge in our faith which calls us to unity in diversity." <https://iona.org.uk/>

Another renowned community reaching across the traditional divisions within the church is Taizé, an ecumenical Christian community formed in France during World War II. Today the Taizé community includes brothers from all Christian denominations, including Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. It is a Christian Centre which welcomes all and particularly encourages visits from young people, individually and in groups.

Participating in communities such as Taizé and Iona provides an opportunity to search for communion with God through community prayer, song, silence, personal reflection and sharing.

Brother Alois, the previous leader of Taizé, wrote, “There is a taste of celebration to see so many young adults together in all their diversity. It gives us a great hope that it is possible for all humanity to live in peace.” <https://www.taize.fr/en>

In the world today we have opportunities to be part of a community containing members that we cannot physically meet, including the Lent Knitalong. Virtual communities can unite us in a common concern but also enable us to encounter people very different from ourselves.

### *Reflection*

What have you most gained and give thanks for, from membership of face-to-face communities?

What do you appreciate about virtual communities?

What have you learnt about others and yourself from being part of a diverse community?

Are there ways you would like to seek to encounter and learn from people very different from yourself?

## Friday, 04 April

### *Communities that Bridge Conflict*

It often seems that, rather than celebration, difference and diversity are frequently the source of hatred, conflict and violence. It has tragically often been seen within Christianity and across different faiths.

There are examples of intentional communities specifically formed to bridge longstanding and acrimonious divisions between different communities.

One of these is Corrymeela in Northern Ireland. It was founded in 1965 when the people of Northern Ireland were deeply divided into two separate groups: Unionists who wished to be part of the UK and Nationalists who wished to be part of a united Ireland. In addition to politics the two groups were divided by school, housing, worship (Protestant or Roman Catholic) and this extended to many aspects of daily life. Corrymeela was founded by Ray Davey who had been deeply affected by three years in a World War II prisoner of war camp. He became Protestant chaplain at Queens University in Belfast and had a vision where the divisions in Northern Ireland had been broken down and replaced by tolerance and neighbourliness. He was influenced by the work of George Macleod and the Iona Community, as well as Taizé and Agape in Italy. Through, Ray’s vision and leadership a group was formed sharing a commitment to reconciliation in Northern Ireland. They bought a building perched on the hill on the north coast of Co. Antrim and fittingly the hill and the



building were called Corrymeela which in Gaelic means “Hill of Harmony.” A friend involved from the early days of Ray’s vision shared with me the challenges and the achievements.

True to its name Corrymeela became a place where people with opposing views, background and faith could meet together. Initial interactions included politicians, church leaders, families and children from deprived backgrounds. In 1969 when the ‘Troubles’ began, the work of the community assumed a new significance – a safe space where people on opposite sides of the divide could meet. Individuals and groups who had seen themselves as enemies met and began to discover that they had much in common and were all human beings. Deeply traumatised Children and families could find peace in the midst of turmoil. Nationalists and Unionists, Roman Catholics and Protestants could meet and set aside long-held caricatures that each had believed about the other. It continues today to be a place for meeting and reflecting, joy and sorrow, for healing, forgiveness and renewal and for worship. The motto of the community - “It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness” and the light shines on.

<https://www.corrymeela.org/about/our-community/50-years-a-short-video>

In its vision and work Taizé has also sought to bridge divisions between different communities.

Every year since 2017 the community has organized Christian-Muslim friendship meetings.

For a week, around a hundred young people from France and around the world are invited to attend each other's prayers and engage in discussions on themes such as fraternity or mercy. This allows young people to start an unburdened dialogue, especially in the tense context of the war in Gaza. Examples of the impact of these meetings on young people from very different traditions provides hope and inspiration and the challenge to open ourselves to those from whom there is a tragic divide.

<https://international.la-croix.com/religion/at-taize-a-countercurrent-dialogue-between-young-christians-and-muslims>

### *Reflection*

Give thanks for communities that inspire hope for the bridging of divisions.

Are there ways you would like to encounter and listen to people from very different backgrounds and with ideas that you find hard to understand?

## Saturday, 05 April

### *Circle of Creation*

The ultimate circle that influences our lives can be viewed as the natural world in which we and all humanity live. Awesome in its beauty and bounteous in diversity. There are few

people who are not amazed, moved, or filled with wonder at magnificent mountains, rippling streams or rushing waterfalls. We can be enchanted by birdsong, or wind whispering through woods, shimmering sunrise and glowing sunset. At the heart of creation we may sense the abundant steady love of God the creator. We rely on the natural world for its generous resources from air, land and sea to meet our fundamental needs. Research shows that spending time in the natural world holds considerable benefits. A study of 20,000 people from diverse backgrounds, found that those who spent 2 hours during a week in green spaces, either over a number of days or on one occasion, were more likely to report good health and psychological well-being than those who didn't. Perhaps a target for each of us?

We have become increasingly aware of how, as human beings, we have tended to view ourselves as being the superior species, separated from nature and unthinkingly exploiting and damaging the earth. The dangerous changes resulting from human activity, and the refusal of many to listen to the grave warnings, has led to a Climate Crisis. At times we can feel overwhelmed by the diagnosis for the future of the earth and powerless in curing it. But if we look and listen, we can see and hear the efforts and positive effects of many working together on the healing of nature and humanity. There are projects seeking to enable active restoration of both the natural world and public health and well-being. Many projects bring together people, struggling with physical or mental health issues, to participate in Nature Recovery activities which benefit the health of the environment, the well-being of those working on the project and the wider neighbourhood.

*From the Canticle of Creation by Francis of Assisi*

*All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,  
And first my Lord Brother Sun,  
Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.  
How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars;  
In the heavens you have made them, bright  
And precious and fair.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,  
And fair and stormy, all the weather's moods,  
By which you cherish all that you have made.*

*Praised be you, my Lord,  
through Sister Water,  
so very useful and humble,  
precious and chaste.*

*All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
Through whom you brighten up the night.*

*How beautiful is he, how merry! Full of power and strength.  
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our Mother,  
Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces  
Various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.*

### *Reflection*

If you can, go outside and look carefully and thankfully at the wonder of the world surrounding you.

What can you do, however small, to increase your care of God's creation that is damaged by selfish human activity?



Parent & Baby hands by [Liv Bruce on Unsplash](#)

Return of the Prodigal son by Rembrandt, public domain, via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Stepping Stones by [dae jeung kim](#) from [Pixabay](#)

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