



SECOND WEEK OF LENT

Second Sunday of Lent – 28 February 2021

Today, we see Jesus taking his inner circle of friends, perhaps his best friends, Peter, James and John, on a hiking expedition. They went up the mountain **'where they could be alone by themselves'** (Mk 9:2). I find this pastoral care of Jesus' so refreshing: we all need time out from time to time. We cannot keep going on the treadmill of life without a rest; for many, the enforced change of life brought about by the global pandemic has offered a chance to assess their priorities and see what is important in life.

It is on the mountaintop that they experience TRANSFIGURATION; for these special friends it was a preview of what their life with Jesus could become. In this mountainous wilderness, away from all distractions, they gain an insight into who their best friend actually is: **'his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them'** (Mk 9:3).

This new faith experience would be so important for the three apostles as they tried to come to terms with the implications of Jesus's ministry and teaching.

This experience of the divine is something we are called to share; our faith is also about the yearning to see God and experience his power—it is about being touched by the Spirit and being moved by the voice of the Lord

whispering in our ears. Our faith is so rich—our God so good—that it makes no sense at all to limit what is possible for us to the dry bones of what we should or should not do each day. Our faith is about entertaining angels, every bit as much as it is about seeking to comfort the afflicted and to heal the sick. It is about seeing visions of a new heaven and a new earth, every bit as much as it is about seeking justice and resisting evil. It is about being



*Transfiguration - Theophanes the Greek,
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

refreshed by God, as much as it is about refreshing others in God's name. Mark is trying to give us a picture of heavenly glory, a glory that we share with Peter, James and John.

We are then introduced to two important figures in Hebrew scripture: Moses, who gives the Law, and Elijah, who is the great prophet. Both guiding law and sage prophecy will form part of the Christian way, and it is Peter who wants to stay and make himself at home—he feels content and happy here. Each one of us has had experiences in life that have made feel comfortable and unwilling to be challenged. Peter wants to stay in this 'heaven': **'Rabbi it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'** (Mk 9:5) However, Mark also notes that they were frightened by this experience, as a cloud comes down to obscure the heavenly vision; in this fear and uncertainty we have the comforting voice, a voice that we last heard when John baptised Jesus in the Jordan (see Mk 1:9-11): **'this is my son, the beloved, LISTEN to him'** (Mk 9:7).

These chosen disciples are in no doubt about WHO Jesus is; as the beloved son they are called to listen to him. While this experience is sustaining and helpful to the disciples, we need to ask, in all seriousness, did they truly LISTEN to Jesus? Do we, here in 2021, truly listen to God's word? Do those words guide my life today? The plain truth is that Jesus had to walk his friends down the mountain to get on with the so-called 'real world', but that transfiguration experience never left them—they saw the divine in reality, and that is what incarnation is all about.

You may have been on pilgrimage to Lourdes, Knock or the Holy Land; you probably loved it and would be quite happy to stay; however, like Peter, you had to get back to your family, to work and the ordinary everyday. With a good pilgrimage memory, your 'everyday' can be transformed and you can begin to see life in a whole new perspective. The sacred experiences that are recounted in the bible, the experiences of the divine that are recorded there, are still needed today—and they still occur today. Some catch sight of God in the beauty around them; some glimpse him during a close encounter with death; some meet him in a special way during a period of suffering, others while they are praying at special gatherings or at mass. Never throw away those strange and mysterious experiences that have happened in your lives. Never let go of those things that you do not understand or cannot explain. Rather, meditate on them, delight in them, and use them as a source of strength for your time of service in the valleys below.

Do we truly take to heart all that is expected of us? Lent is the ideal chance to start again, so that we can say with the centurion after Jesus's death, **'in truth this man was a son of God!'** (Mk 15:39). Today presents the call to LISTEN with an open heart that forces us to action, as Michael Winstanley advises:

Lent is above all a time for listening, real listening: listening to the Father's love, listening to the message of Jesus, listening to the needs of others, near and far away; listening to our beautiful and groaning world, listening to what is deep within us.

(*'Lenten Sundays'* p. 91)

Today: spend a quiet moment to see the glory of God all around you, especially in your family and friends.

We can pray: God of love and of justice, God of holiness and of mercy, God of thunder and of the still small voice within, we pray you to shine brightly in our world today. Give us a double portion of your Spirit and help us to hear your word and understand the marvels you are performing. Grant that we may see beyond the problems of our world and see your anointed one in all his glory. Touch us and lift us into the light and peace of your presence. Strengthen us for your service as we worship you - we ask it in Christ's name. Amen

Watch, listen and pray:

You Raise Me Up

<https://youtu.be/sza4rh1YzsM>

1 March 2021- Feast of St David



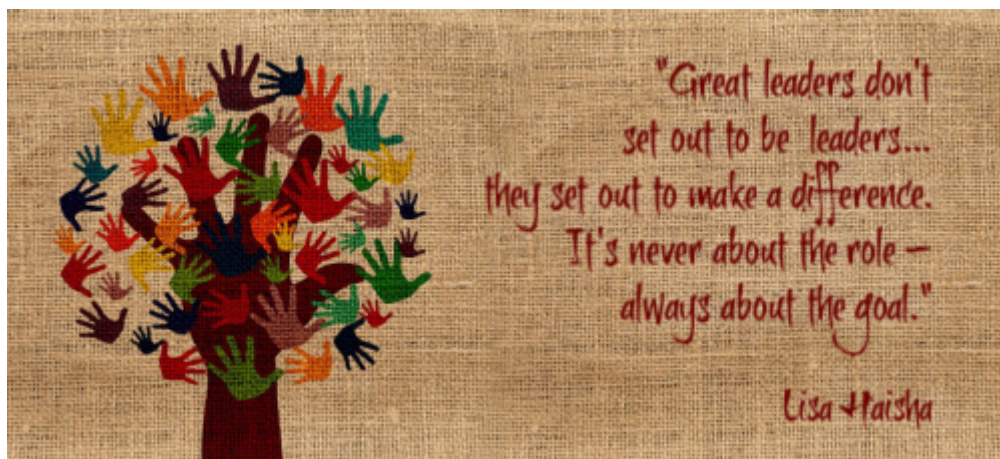
Today we mark the feast of St David, patron saint of Wales: Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Hapus – Happy St David's Day! Sadly, not much is known about this sixth century saint, though he seems to have been an abbot and local bishop, who helped to spread the Christian message throughout Wales, and into Ireland and what is modern day Brittany in France. The cult of David arose after his death since St Kentigern, of the monastery of St Asaph, had a vision of David entering into the glory of heaven—it was his 'transfiguration experience'.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus reminds us that we are called to give good example: **'you are the light of the world.'** (Matt 5:14). This is not about showing off or letting the world know just how wonderful we are! It is about guiding others: a plane can only land in the dead of night if the runway lights are on. You can only drive your car effectively at night, if the lights are on. We are given this wonderful invitation today to be light to others; David tried to help his compatriots to see the beauty of the gospel. In his life and death, he became that beacon of faith for the Welsh people.

Today, there is no need for false modesty or to think that we need not show our gifts and talents. These gifts and talents are given to you by God—you must develop them and let the light of God shine clearly through your actions. Today you will make a difference and you will help others, sometimes in the most simple and unassuming of ways. Like David, be the change that the world needs, a change that only you can make.

Remember that today is a FEAST, and you are called to celebrate with the people of Wales—raise a glass, eat an ice cream or chocolate (or a Welshcake!) to give thanks for the Church of Christ in Wales.

Today: be the change you want to see in the world (Ghandi)



We can pray:

Let me be the change I want to see
To do with strength and wisdom
All that needs to be done.
And become the hope that I can be.
Set me free from my fears and hesitations
Grant me courage and humility
Fill me with spirit to face the challenge
And start the change I long to see.
Today I start the change I want to see.
Even if I'm not the light
I can be the spark
In faith, service, and communion.
Let us start the change we want to see.
The change that begins in me. (La Sallian prayer)

Tuesday 2 March 2021

Today we are invited to listen to the gospel of Matthew, where we see Jesus **'addressing the people AND his disciples'** (Matt 23:1); he is preaching in the temple, the heart of the Jewish faith, but he calls out the hypocrisy and vanity of the pharisees. He explains that they must be listened to, as they have a special standing because they **'occupy the chair of Moses'** (Matt 23:2). Jesus points out that it is these pharisees that place heavy burdens on others, but do nothing to support or help them; they want their places of honour and the best seats in the synagogue: **'everything they do is done to attract attention'** (Matt 23:5). Jesus wants his leaders to be people of service as **'the greatest among you must be your servant.'** (Matt 23:10); the Christian way is to lead by example.

It is all too easy to join in this condemnation of figures from the distant past, without facing up to a similar type of clericalism that we see in our Church today. Pope Francis constantly warns us about it; clericalism could be defined as a false or sycophantic respect and esteem for clergy. It lends itself to the persons of priests, in view of their clerical office, an excessive deference and acquiescence. In a clericalist culture, the clergy often stand above and aloof from their flocks, and the faithful can respond to this distancing in a childish spirit of obedience and false reverence. Francis points out that clericalism can be a sin for both clergy and laity: for clergy, if they demand to be treated as superior to the laity; and for laity, if they resign themselves to the status quo—'Let Father or the Deacon or Sister do everything'—and shirk the responsibilities proper to their own vocation as baptised Christians. The Holy Father is uncompromising in his criticism of this clerical culture in the Church:

Indeed, he said, "there is that spirit of clericalism in the Church, that we feel: clerics feel superior; clerics distance themselves from the people. Clerics always say: 'this should be done like this, like this, like this, and you – go away!'" . It happens "when the cleric doesn't have time to listen to those who are suffering, the poor, the sick, the imprisoned: the evil of clericalism is a really awful thing; it is a new edition of this ancient evil". But "the victim is the same: the poor and humble people, who await the Lord".

L'Osservatore Romano's report on Pope Francis' Morning Meditation at Santa Marta on 13 December 2016 ([from the Vatican website](#))

Today: realise your worth and do a simple act of service today

We can pray: Lord God, help us to realise that the greatest day in our Christian journey is our baptism—a sacrament that we all share. We pray that we remain true to our baptismal vows and are prepared to truly serve others; we thank God for the individual gifts that we have. Together, let us build up the Body of Christ; this prayer we make through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Wednesday 3 March 2021

I love the reading presented for us today (Matthew 20: 17-28): it shows the humanity and simplicity of those early followers of Christ. Jesus has an important message for the, that stresses the needed commitment in following him; he draws the twelve apostles to one side and tries to make them see the power of his words. Their trip to Jerusalem is not going to be a holiday, but the place of his execution and death at the hands of their own chief priests and teachers, but he does give them hope: **'on the third day he will rise again'** (Matt 20:19).



Image from jw.org

We are dealing with some very heavy duty theology and reflection here; however, a loving mum wants to get to the heart of things as she asks Jesus, **"promise me that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom."** (Matt 20:21). She is a good mum who has seen her sons move from the safety and security of their jobs, to the life of following an itinerant preacher; in her mind there must be some sort of recompense. She is trying to say to Jesus, "I like the idea you're going to be a KING. When the victory happens, since I asked FIRST, can my two boys get best spots in the new regime?" James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were part of that inner circle—with Peter they had witnessed transfiguration. However, Jesus preaches a gospel of equality and not exceptionalism: we do not get special treatment in the reign of God because we have a theology degree, or we go to a prayer meeting, or because our mums ask for special treatment. Jesus makes it quite clear to both his friends that they will have to experience the suffering, pain and rejection that he has already spoken about. In this way, Jesus is able to return to his theme of taking up the cross—so essential for authentic Christian living. The reign of God is not about hierarchy and status, it is about following the example of Jesus as best we can.

The irony is, in God's wisdom, when Jesus comes in his kingdom on Calvary Hill, the people on his right and left do not have any power or receive any glory. When he is raised on the cross and he wins peace, forgiveness and restoration; when he brings his KINGDOM, who are those on his left and right? Two CRIMINALS: they die with him, and that is the true nature of the kingdom Jesus is bringing!

Today: make a conscious effort to include everyone

We can pray: Dear Gracious and Loving God, as I take this time to be still, help me to let go of anxiousness and feel your peace. Your Word says that you are love and where there is love there can be no fear. Help me to let go of fear and receive your perfect love. I come before you with heaviness because of being hurt by others. Help me to accept the effect that their actions have had in my life and to let go of this hurt. Holding onto past hurts – Holding onto resentments and judgments weighs me down. I release this hurt. I release this weight on my body and spirit. I ask your love to carry me. I let go of hurt, resentment and judgment. I forgive those who have hurt me. Because I practice awareness in all areas of my life, I am aware of self-criticism or poor choices. I accept my actions. I forgive myself and let go of poor choices or self-criticism. To receive or accept love, I let go of building walls of self-protection.

Help me to receive and accept love. Help me to freely give love. Help me not to strive for perfection but to make progress each day. I accept the choices I make. I can trust myself. I make good choices. Each day, help me to step into the glorious person you created me to be. I accept and find comfort in knowing I am completely loved with your divine, perfect love.

In the name of your Son whose example lights our way, Amen

Thursday 4 March 2021

*We remember **Casimir**, a patron saint in both Poland and Lithuania. He was noted for his integrity and for standing up for justice and peace. Why not enjoy a Polish cream cake, which was a favourite of St John Paul II? It resembles a vanilla slice and was renamed in honour of the Polish pontiff—enjoy your **kremowka papieska**!*



In the gospel today, we have the traditional story of the rich man and Lazarus, a tale of the rich and poor, of the 'haves' and 'have nots'. It is a parable of contrast: the rich man has everything, from fine purple fashion to daily feasting; while Lazarus **'covered in sores, longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table'** (Lk 16:20-21). In the story, they both die on the same day: with poor Lazarus taken up to the care of Abraham, while the rich man is sent to hell. It is interesting to note that only the rich man is given a name: Fr Kieran Anderson SDB suggests that the rich and powerful are usually well known—today, their every move is reported daily in the tabloids, while the poor are usually anonymous. Jesus deliberately gives only the poor man a name in this story: we cannot overlook the poor, no matter how special we may feel. Fr Kieran also points out that this is a strong Lucan theme, especially if we look to Mary's prayer of praise at the Visitation:

... the Almighty has done great things for me—holy is his name ... he has filled the hungry with good things, the rich sent empty away (Luke 1:49 & 53)

It is a simplistic morality tale: the rich man had a daily opportunity to help and support Lazarus but made the free choice not to. The rich man sees that he has wasted his life and wants his five brothers to be warned not to do the same, because now is the time for conversion and when we die it will be too late. Abraham tells the rich man his brothers already have Moses and the prophets, in other words they already have the Sacred Scriptures, the word of God. If they will not listen to the Torah or the prophets, they will not listen to someone who rises from the dead. Abraham is unable to offer any practical assistance, except urging the rich man to believe—even in the unbelievable: someone rising from the dead. As Christians, we are called to affirm this.

The rich man is begging for Lazarus to support him and his family. Even though, in the eyes of society, he is a beggar who seemingly had so little to offer anyone, it is Lazarus who proclaims the reign of God. 'Lazarus', in some shape or form, continues to knock at our door, and so the Church has many initiatives to help the poor. How many hospitals, schools, hospices, shelters have been founded by the Church to heed the call of Christ to care for the poor?

What is the parable saying to us? Surely it is asking us to reflect once again on our consumption to see whether it is moderate or out of control. Surely it is asking us to reflect on whether we are sufficiently sensitive to the needs of those around us who are suffering in any way. What is being critiqued in the gospel today is the ease with which so many of us ignore what is happening around us. It is indifference—to those who are in need and those who are suffering—that Scripture puts before us today as sinful.



*The Rich Man and Lazarus,
Meister des Codex Aureus Epternacensis,
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

Today: make a conscious effort to support your local food bank—most supermarkets and many churches now have drop-off points; or sign up for a subscription to the 'Big Issue' and support sellers who are unable to sell the magazine on the streets during lockdown. [Find out more here.](#)

We can pray:

Lord, help me to raise up those who are fallen and to realise the great things that God has done for me. May I do all I can today to make unbearable lives that bit more bearable.
AMEN

Friday 5 March 2021

In today's gospel reading from Matthew, we are presented with the parable of the vineyard. Once again, we see Jesus using something that his audience would readily understand—he is the great communicator. In a simple paragraph of story, he is able to show what happened to the prophets and messengers sent by God to the people of the Covenant—we see how the tenants ignored and mistreated the vineyard owner's servants in the most vivid way: they **'thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third'** (Matt 21:35). Becoming a prophet was not the best career plan, as it involved much rejection, little recognition and no retirement to look forward to. The owner of the vineyard finally sends his son and heir, thinking that the tenants would respect him. But no: **'they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.'** (Matt 21:39).

As the good teacher, Jesus asks his audience to make the adjudication: what should happen to these wicked tenants? They have no hesitation in condemning them and offering the vineyard to those who will respect and care for it—people who will listen to the messengers and the son with respect. Jesus is trying to get his followers to realise that the gospel is a universal truth.

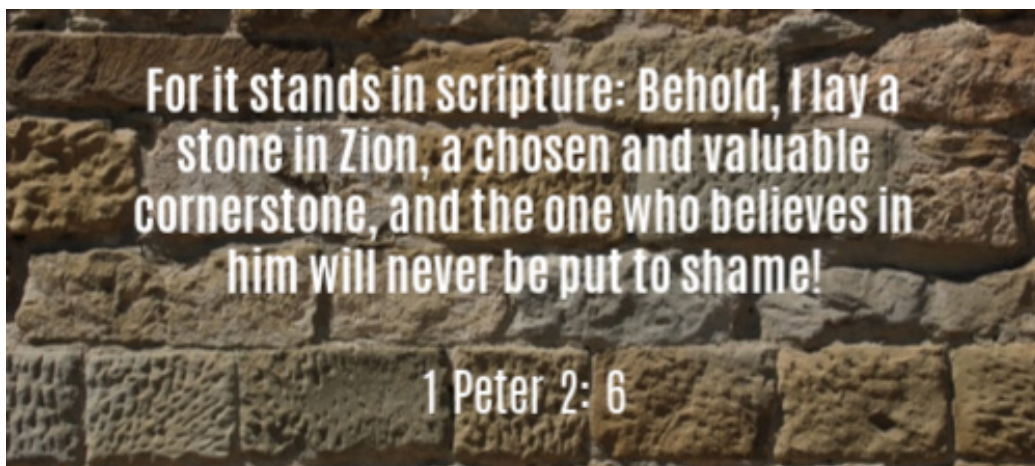


Photo by Edouard Dognin on Unsplash

The truth and power of God can be found in the most unusual places, as we are reminded in the Psalms: **'It was the stone rejected by the builders that proved to the keystone'** (Ps 118: 22). The image comes from the ancient quarries where highly trained stonemasons carefully chose the stones used in construction. No stone was more important than the cornerstone because the integrity of the whole structure depended on the cornerstone containing exactly the right lines. If the cornerstone was not exactly right, the entire building would be out of line; thus builders inspected many stones, rejecting each one until they found the one they wanted. Jesus also saw that God can choose people for ministry that are not perfect and flawed—we can all offer something and, remember, only YOU can do your ministry. I can try to follow your example, but only you can do it effectively. Let us listen to the Word of God and live the gospel as we are called to live it.

Today: try to get out of the 'we've always done it this way' mindset as it is a barrier to movement.

We can pray: Thank you, Jesus, for turning human plans upside down and making a new reality through your death and resurrection. Enliven your church today so that we are a truly faithful house built on your solid foundation. Amen.

Watch. listen and pray: 'The Stone the Builders Rejected, by the Loma Linda Academy Choir

<https://youtu.be/jjf0KBf-qwo>

Saturday 6 March 2021

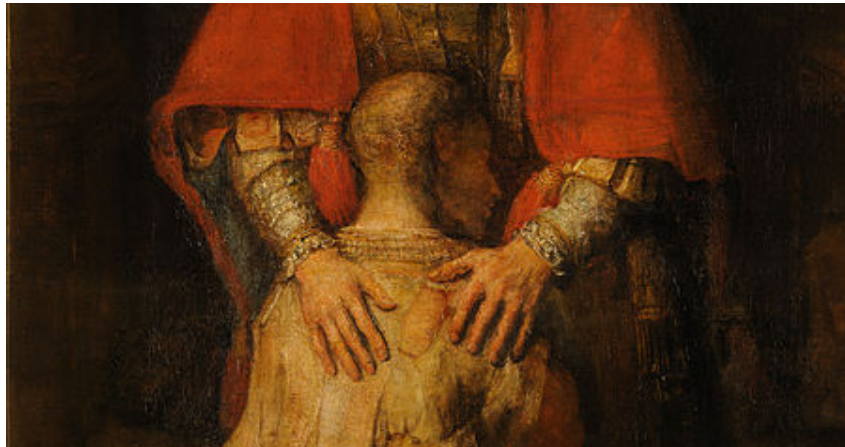
Today we are presented with what is, arguably, one of the most popular parables ever told: the story of the Lost Son, or the story of the Faithful Brother, or the story of the Loving Father. It is a parable so famous and engrained in our psyche that we almost know it off by heart. It is the third parable of loss in a series of three that Luke presents: the Lost Sheep (Lk 15:4-7), the Lost Coin (Lk 15:8-10), and the Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32)—each parable forces us to think about what is important and what counts in our lives. Luke places this trilogy of parables in the general context of Jesus being with the undesirables—the ones very much rejected

by the Pharisees and scribes. They complain that Jesus not only '**welcomes**' these public sinners, but also '**eats with them**' (Lk 15: 3). Thus, the parables are directed at these leaders in an attempt, by Jesus, to get them to reflect on the immensity of God's love that is not limited, but available for all. We know what the younger son did with his share and what a failure he became; we know his lonely journey back to his father; we know his heartfelt attempts to make reconciliation; we know all about the totality of the father's love for BOTH his sons—even in the face of the older boy's anger and bitterness. It reminds us that none of us should ever limit the love of God; no matter how many pages of scripture we read or how many hours we spend at the prayer group; no matter how many rosaries we say, or novenas we make. We do not have the right to say who is worthy of God's love; Jesus told this parable so long ago and yet, so often, we just do not understand the depth of God's love for everyone, not the ones that I pick and choose.

I love Rembrandt's great painting, 'The Return of the Prodigal'; the artist gives a theology lesson through his use of colour, lighting and symbols used, but let us zone in on the hands of the Father in the painting:



The prodigal son is held warm in the embrace of the father; he is safe and that he is loved. Look closely at the hands: on the left we see a slim, slender hand that could be feminine, while the right hand is broader and indicates masculinity. The son is embraced by the gift of love—love from a loving mother and a loving father.



Detail from The Return of the Prodigal: Rembrandt, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

We need to share that love of unconditional acceptance and not limit God's love; the Church of God is far too precious to allow it to become judgemental and limiting. We need to constantly thank God for giving us a Holy Father who reminds us often:

God always waits for us, he does not get tired, he does not lose heart. Because it is us, each of us is that reunited son, that rediscovered coin, that caressed sheep that he puts back on his shoulder. He waits every day for us to notice his love. And you say, "But I've done many horrible things, I've done too many!" Don't be afraid: God loves you, loves you as you are and knows that only his love can change your life.

Pope Francis: Angelus Message 15/09/2019

Today: Who do you count as important in your life? Remember them in prayer; get in touch and remind them just how special they are.

We can pray: Dear God, You know our hearts, you hear our prayers, and care about all that concerns us. You understand the burden we carry and how we want, more than anything, to see our loved ones come to you. Help us to remember that you love them more than we ever could. And you desire to extend your great love and forgiveness, your mercy and hope. Thank you that nothing is too difficult for you. Thank you that your power is unlimited, and you came to set the captives free. Thank you that you wait, arms open, for the prodigal to return, that you look for his arrival to lavishly celebrate that he's come home. We praise you for you are Redeemer and Rescuer, Saviour and Lord. We know and believe that there's no pit so deep that your love can't reach us still. We understand that your mercies are new every morning, and your faithfulness is great.

(Debbie McDaniel)

For the children



My son was lost, and now he is found!

Image by Jean-François Kieffer via Qumran2.net

BibleWise

Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus

LUKE 16:19-31

Are the statements below TRUE or FALSE?
Read the story and color in the appropriate box.



Lazarus had lots of food to eat and a home.

TRUE

FALSE

The rich man ignored Lazarus.

TRUE

FALSE

After he died, Lazarus went to heaven.

TRUE

FALSE

The rich man went to heaven and became friends with Lazarus.

TRUE

FALSE

The rich man wanted to warn his brothers to be kind to people who need help.

TRUE

FALSE

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Activity from Biblewise: <https://biblewise.com/kids/>

Family activity:

Make some Welshcakes for St David's Day – and learn some Welsh!

Have you heard of Welshcakes? They are a very old kind of cake. They have different names in different parts of Wales, for example, *pice bach* – little pies! They are not baked in the oven. They are cooked on a griddle or a heavy frying pan.

They can be eaten warm or kept in a tin when they have cooled, to eat later. (But in my family, there are never any left to keep!)



Watch this video (it's in Welsh) and see if you can make some.

https://youtu.be/na96S_rD51k

To help you, here are the ingredients in English too:

- 225g blawdd plaen – plain flour
- 90g siwgr mân euraidd – golden caster sugar (you can use white granulated sugar, though!)
- hanner llwy de powdwr pobi – half a teaspoon of baking powder
- pinsiad o halen – a pinch of salt
- hanner llwy de sbeis cymysg – half a teaspoon of mixed spice
- 50g o fenyn—butter or margarine
- 50g o floneg—lard (you can use all butter, or all margarine instead of the lard)
- 50g ffrwythau sych—dried fruit
- 1 wy wedi'i guro— beaten egg
- llaeth—milk (add a little if the mixture is 'rhi sych'—too dry)

Dydd Gŵyl Dewi Hapus!

(say 'Deethe goyl dowee hapiss')

