

# Stay focused



Katharine Smith *reflects on* Mark 13:1-8

If you're walking along a narrow pathway with a muddy bog on one side and a sheer drop on the other, you need to keep focused on the way ahead, whatever the distractions or temptation to look elsewhere or stray from the path.

Perhaps in today's Gospel reading Jesus is giving similar advice to the disciples, and to

us, about the end of time. We are called to follow in his footsteps and we need to stay focused on the path no matter what is going on around us. There have always been wars and rumours of wars; nations have always risen against one another; earthquakes and famine have shattered the lives of many people down the centuries.

**Lord Jesus, help us to keep focused on the path that leads to you. Call us back from temptation and distractions. Walk alongside us as we seek to do your will and fill us with love for our suffering brothers and sisters. Amen.**

## Keeping Christ in Christmas *Part 2 – Christmas presents*

by Heather Cooke

Last week we began to prepare spiritually for Christmas, as signs of the festive countdown appear all around us. Some of us may be organised enough to have started our Christmas shopping already. Have you drawn up a list? Planning ahead is no bad thing, and God did just that. God had a plan for our salvation, and Christmas marks

an important part of that plan, to enter into our world as a baby and live a human life. For Jesus is Emmanuel, "God with us". He is on our side, he died for us and rose again; he is with us today, and one day he will come again in glory.

As we start to shop for Christmas presents, let's keep the Christ in Christmas this week, by giving thanks for God's Christmas presence in Jesus, inviting him into our hearts.

*"O come, O come Emmanuel!"* 

We can't ignore these things, much as we might like to, and the path we're called to tread is the way of peace, healing and love.

Our focus is to stay on those who need to hear the proclamation of God's good news and to keep our sights on the part we can play in that proclamation and the working

out of God's purposes. If we are distracted and start trying to interpret the signs and predict the coming of the end times, we risk straying on to treacherous ground or losing our footing completely.

The message is to keep focused on the path of love, for God is love and everything else is but a distraction. 

## Remembrance Sunday

by Caroline Hodgson

Poppy seeds can lie on the ground for years, germinating only when disturbed. In 1915 the soil on the battlefields of the Western Front had been churned up to such an extent that the poppies were blooming like never before. It was around this time that Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae had to preside over the funeral of his friend and fellow soldier Lieutenant Alexis

Helmer, who died in the Second Battle of Ypres. McCrae's grief, and the sight of the poppies, moved him to write his famous poem "In Flanders Fields".

Since then the poppy has become an emblem of both suffering and hope. But it's all too easy for it to become merely decorative – a brilliant piece of branding. Yet each year the solemnity of the ceremonies held in churches and before memorials around the world, the bowed heads and the shared silence, stirs in us a powerful collective memory which, although not ours as individuals, is inherited from our parents and grandparents. 

“**In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.”**

John McCrae (1872-1918), Canadian poet, doctor, author, artist and soldier