



**Readings and Reflections
on the journey
from
Palm Sunday to Easter Day**

Introduction

This year, our Lenten journey has been very different. We started the journey as congregations coming together in our Chapels to prepare, through Lent, for the great celebration of Easter. We recalled Jesus' own preparation for his ministry as he went into the desert to be alone.

We now approach the day of the great mystery of the resurrection and continue to prepare ourselves as we travel through Holy Week, but now we journey alone, or in small family groups. We are separated by physical distance because in our love for one another, we are caring by not meeting, by social distancing and by self-isolation.

The church buildings are closed but the Church is open. For we are the Church, the Body of Christ and as we remember the familiar events at the end of Jesus' earthly life, we can rejoice that in this time of walking in the shadows, the light of the risen Christ breaks through.

May God's peace and blessing be with you.

Pat

PALM SUNDAY

Reading Luke 9:36-42

Reflection

Great welcome that soon turned to rejection. We are fickle. We can quickly turn away, change our minds and reject others we so recently respected. Yet whatever lay ahead within that crowd long ago, they opened their hearts and arms in sincerity and joy – recognising the Lord. Whatever the future held for them, they would not forget Jesus passing by on that donkey. I do not know what they expected this King to do or how he would save them.

But within a week their fickleness would replace ‘Here is our King,’ with, ‘Crucify him because our king is Caesar!’

Palm Sunday is a day that challenges us about our loyalty, asking us if we are ready to follow Jesus when the faith gets demanding and tough. But thank God that Palm Sunday is also about the one who, however often we change our tune, stays faithful to us and loves us so much that he will remain faithful to us and even die for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
the disciples accompanied you into Jerusalem,
proclaiming you the king who comes in the name of the Lord,
the Messiah - God’s anointed on earth, the one to save Israel.
Jesus, God among us, you accompany us in our daily living.
We welcome you as the one who comes in the name of the Lord:
God’s Word made flesh,
the one with the power of God, who is love,
offers his love, mercy and forgiveness again and again.
Jesus, bringer of peace,
giver of grace and revealer of glory,
lead us into this Holy Week:
as we remember your story, renew our commitment
to follow your way.
Amen.

MONDAY

Bible reading John 12:1–8

Reflection

This beautiful and simple act of love by Mary pouring oil on Jesus' feet has spoken to millions of people down through the centuries. In the deepest sense, it was an anointing of the one who Mary loved. Not done in some great temple or cathedral, not done in church or chapel, by religious leaders, but in a small home which was just as sacred.

We are all in our small homes this year as we self isolate, often in great fear, as the coronavirus continues to effect so many. Our homes are just as sacred. God's love is present and the light of the divine is shining brightly, as it was years ago in the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary.

In this strange time when we may feel alone and unsure that we can offer our all to God: our fear, our anger, our doubt, our feeling overwhelmed, and those moments when the light breaks through with a phone call from others, an act of kindness.

Mary offered her gift of perfume and we too can offer all we have to Jesus and find that like Mary, we too are kneeling at his feet.

Prayer

Lord,
let me reach into the deeper places within me
and there find your love.
You sit with us in our isolation
and walk with us as we search for you,
and touch us in our longing and our need.
Anoint us with your blessing
so that we can always feel your presence in our lives.
Amen.

TUESDAY

Bible reading John 12:20–26

Reflection

Greek visitors came to town for the festival and asked to see Jesus. They wanted to know more about him; like many of us today they were seekers, even if that term was not used then. Andrew and Philip told Jesus about their request. But the reply wasn't what they expected, and certainly didn't seem to offer encouragement to those who were seeking. Jesus told them about the cost of following him. I'm sure that wasn't the answer that Andrew and Philip wanted to take back to the Greeks. Jesus' words contained challenges that were not going to be easy, then or now.

Within our affluent society, so much encourages us not to be selfless but constantly to be selfish and to put ourselves and our happiness first. The individual life is important, but if we only concentrate on that and forget we are part and parcel of a wider society, we reduce and belittle our humanity.

As we self-isolate and socially distance ourselves, we have over recent weeks seen both selflessness, as thousands offer help to others and carers and NHS staff and volunteers work tirelessly, and selfishness as people hoard food and flout the rules to keep apart without regard for anyone but themselves.

As we continue the spiritual journey through this Holy Week, Christ invites us to keep moving beyond ourselves; to learn over time that we are not the centre of the universe but part of it, and Jesus makes it clear that discipleship has a cost. Yes, inner transformation in Christ is possible, but the journey may be filled with struggles, days of darkness and many questions. For most of us doubts and faith are companions.

Prayer

Lord, help be thankful for those days
when I can truly say I am walking in faith,
and help me to know that on the days
when fear and doubt threaten to overwhelm me,
I am still held in your love. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Bible reading Luke 22:14–23

Reflection

Today we get a bit ahead of ourselves as we read about and reflect on the Last Supper. This gospel passage begins with the Passover meal. Jesus and his close friends are gathered to share the bread and the wine. We cannot even begin to imagine the number of people throughout the centuries who have joined together this sacred meal and in this year many will miss this way of remembering.

All of the disciples were fearful and uncertain about what lay ahead, and even in the midst of their togetherness, Jesus tells them clearly that one of them will betray him. How did the disciples react to that news? Did they know who Jesus was meaning? What would betrayal bring in its wake? Why was Jesus anxious to tell them this?

Humans betray each other – perhaps in our personal experience, not every moment of every day, but frequently. And all of us sometimes betray another quite unconsciously – even if we are shocked by the behaviour of someone like Judas. We say to ourselves, 'we could never be a Judas' but let us not be so sure!

As we ponder these events on this day in Holy Week, we need to be honest with ourselves. We need to acknowledge that we have sometimes betrayed the call to love our neighbour by acts of unkindness, of failing to give a kind word because of our own pride, of our actions and our words not being the same. But in all of this pondering, we also need to remember that Jesus invited all his disciples - Judas, who would betray him, Peter, who would deny him, all the others who ran away, he invites them all to share in that sacred meal.

Prayer

Lord, I ask for your forgiveness
for all the ways even unconsciously
I have betrayed others.

Help me to hear that Jesus welcomes all to his table
and forgives all who turn to him.

Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Reading John 13:1–8

Reflection

Jesus was fully aware of the path of suffering now lying ahead. Yet here we read not just of that, but also of his love for those close to him. The band of disciples – those who had put their trust in him even when his teachings were difficult to comprehend – were listening carefully to his every word. In reflecting on these words we see that Jesus was on a quite specific journey, as were the disciples, even if they knew little about its direction. They were experiencing what all of us experience – lack of knowledge about what the future holds. The simple act of washing the feet of the disciples tells us much about the core of Christ’s mission on earth. In some hymns today we hear the term ‘servant Lord’, and in this gesture of love, Jesus illustrates what it means when we say that God stoops down to us wherever we are in life.

This is not a distant God disinterested in our human hopes and struggles, but one who stands close in humility and graciousness. In tenderness his hands reach out. At Christmas we declared that he came down that we may have love: the fulfilment of that love is now in front of him.

And before we move into Good Friday, we should think for a moment of Peter’s response to what Jesus was doing. He felt unworthy to have his feet washed by the Master. We can all understand that. Here, however, a basic truth comes into play. We are not worthy. Yet in the mystery of faith we are accepted and healed as we are by the one who knows our human brokenness and bewilderments.

Prayer

Lord, teach me to remember,
teach me to look forward in faith,
and so teach me to live each moment
in the light of your love.
Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

Bible reading Mark 15:33–41

Reflection

‘Many a true word is spoken in jest.’ If you need convincing that this is true, take a look at the words that were hurled at Jesus on the cross. ‘He saved others, but he can’t save himself!’ Mocking which must have added to Jesus suffering. You can just see them, smiling, laughing and being really pleased with themselves, and saying to each other, ‘He promised so much but we knew they were false promises. Now we can see he’s nothing special.’

Yet, if they had known who he was, they couldn’t have spoken the truth more profoundly. Yes, he could have saved himself. He could have not come to Jerusalem at all. For someone who had healed the sick, raised the dead, stilled the storm, fed the crowds, to come down from the cross was nothing.

But if he had, he would have gone back on his mission, on his calling; for it was only through his accepting suffering that he could open up the way of life for others.

‘He saved others, but he cannot save himself.’

How wrong they were, yet how right!

Prayer

Lord,

I am amazed at the astonishing truth
that lies at the heart of this week —
that you endured the agony of the cross
and the darkness of the tomb,
not because you had to but because you chose to;
you could have chosen to save yourself
but you chose to save the world, you chose to save me.

Thank you Lord

Amen.

HOLY SATURDAY

Bible reading Luke 23:50–56

Reflection

Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take Jesus' body for burial. It is interesting that Joseph, who was a respected member of the Jewish Council, was in his heart waiting for the coming Kingdom of God. Pilate gave permission; and later in the day Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the body of Jesus in linen with the spices according to the Jewish custom. Then in a new tomb, Joseph's own tomb, not far from the place where Jesus had been crucified, they buried him.

A period of waiting began; and in the Christian tradition this became a silent vigil observed by millions throughout the ages. Waiting is always difficult, and this particular time of waiting is also framed by fear, grief, and uncertainty.

Today, in the great shadow of the corona virus pandemic, we are in a period of waiting and that waiting is filled with fear, grief and uncertainty. And as we wait, God waits too, in solidarity with God's people.

In the midst of our usually hectic lives, on this holy day we become silent and listen for that still small voice which accompanies our lives.

Prayer

Jesus Christ, who suffered and died on the cross.

We bring before you
the suffering of your people

Lord, Jesus Christ, in your suffering, all brokenness is named and held and so we wait in silence.

May I wait with a patient heart,
a calm mind and a quietened soul
until the light of your resurrection shines upon us.
Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY

Bible reading Luke 24:1–7

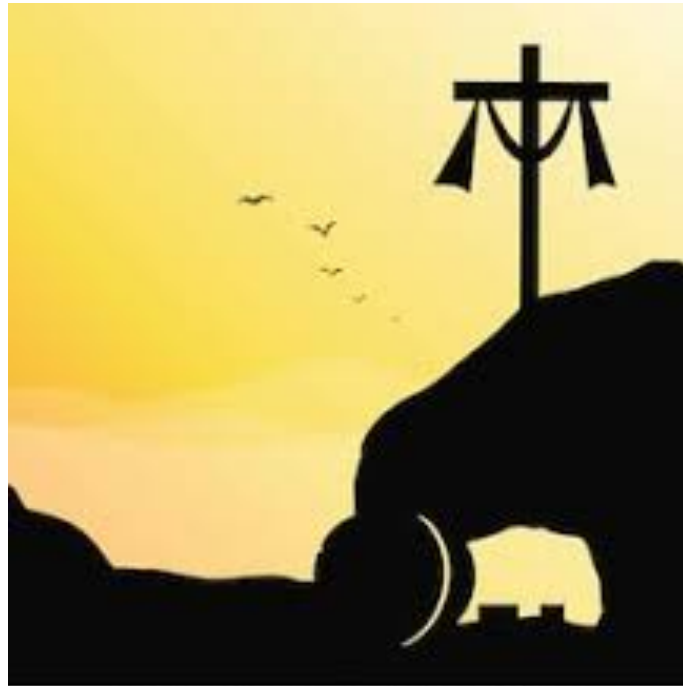
Reflection

The Resurrection is a mystery: nobody witnessed it. When the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb, they expected to discover and tend a corpse, but they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, they were frightened by the sudden appearance of two men who said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” Then they remembered his words.

The descriptions of the first Easter Sunday are filled with amazement, confusion, fear, excitement and joyful unbelief as the friends of Jesus try to come to terms with what has happened and take in the truth of it. Faced by the question: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” – they see the truth that Jesus has trampled down death by his dying and gives life to the dead. By his resurrection Jesus has proved himself stronger than hatred, evil and death. So we can all proclaim with Saint Paul when he wrote to the Christians in Rome: ‘I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’ Even in this time of fear of, and suffering from, the corona virus pandemic, God is with us.

Prayer

Lord, as I celebrate the wonder of the resurrection,
teach me to live in the light of what you have done,
confident that no situation, however dreadful it may seem,
is beyond your power to redeem
and so may I put my trust in you always,
for this life and the life to come. Amen.



Some of the material has been adapted from the following publications
'In light and love ' Published 2019: Wild Goose Publications© Peter Millar
'The Folly of God' © 2007 Pauline books and media
"Experiencing Easter with Adults" © 2012 Gloucester Diocesan Board of Finance