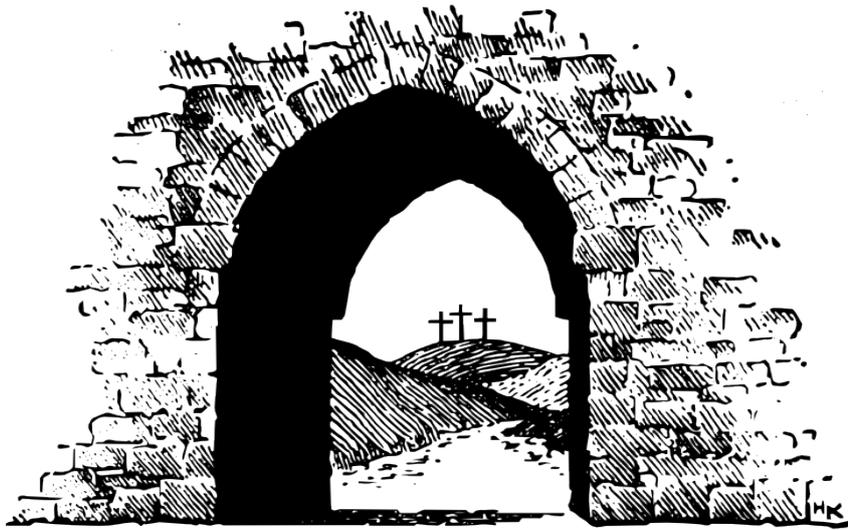


Holy Week

5 Days of Reflection



Monday of Holy Week

Bible reading – John 12: 1 - 8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Palm Sunday with its excitement is over and Jesus has retreated to the home of His friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The room is full of people, Jesus, His disciples, Lazarus, and in the background Martha is busy cooking. Maybe there are noises of pots and pans. Maybe Martha is singing. She is happy in her own home, doing what she loves most – preparing food. The candles flicker on the walls.

Into this crowd of men gathered round the table comes Mary. Mary who used to sit at Jesus's feet and listen. Again she sits at his feet and this time she pours out expensive ointment and anoints his feet, wiping them with her hair. There is stunned, horrified silence. You can feel the tension in the air. The thoughts buzzing. This is appalling, why is Jesus allowing this to happen? The only person who speaks is Judas and he gets it wrong.

This week we also are in our homes. Some of us may be happy and settled, doing what we most love – cooking, caring - but that is not true for everyone. Some are uncertain, fearful, angry. All those emotions were experienced that night in Bethany. One thing is certain, the only people who knew what would happen that week were Jesus Himself and Mary – out of the years spent listening to Jesus, Mary has heard what no-one else had heard, Jesus had come to Jerusalem to die. In the silence and the space she has found listening to Him Mary has heard what God was doing. Let us this week give time to bring our uncertainties and fears to God and to leave them with Him and let us take time to listen to what He is saying to us.

PRAY Speak Lord, in the stillness, while I wait on thee; hushed my heart to listen in expectancy. Amen

Tuesday

Bible Reading - John 12: 20 to 28

Some Greeks went up to the festival. They came to Philip, "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." So Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.

In today's reading we are told that certain Greeks asked Philip if they could have an interview with Jesus. These people might have been converts to Judaism, but they were more likely to be part of a group of Gentiles called "God-fearers" who were attracted by certain aspects of the Jewish faith. I think at this time of global crisis we will find many who are concerned about the future and their own mortality. 'Is there something in this Christian faith' they may be asking? There is no mention if the Greeks had their interview, but our Lord's response was key to the future of us all.

Jesus tells the crowd, that His mission was now reaching a climax and he would soon die as the substitute for the entire world and that all who believe in Him would receive eternal life (see John 3.16). Amazing, incredible good news, but the thing which always hits me, when I read this account is the initial question from these Greeks – "**we want to see Jesus**". Down the centuries whatever the church gets up to, good or bad, the one consistent factor is the person and work of God's Son our Lord Jesus.

These Greeks recognised it wasn't these followers who made the difference, they wanted to see the originator of this new hope. The same applies today, and that is why we often pray 'make us more like Jesus', so that those who are searching will be attracted, as these Greeks were, and not put off by the unacceptable and dislikeable attitude and behaviours of us, his followers. What an opportunity, but also what a responsibility we carry and the only way we can be more like Jesus is through the Holy Spirit's influence in our daily lives. Today, as never before, we have such an opportunity to reflect Christ's message to the world around us.

A prayer for today

Heavenly father, in your tender love towards your world, you sent your Son, our Lord Jesus, to come as a human being, to be prepared to suffer and die on that cruel cross to bear my sin. Help me to follow his ways and attitudes and to rejoice daily in the confidence of eternal life through His victory over death. Amen

Wednesday

Bible Reading John 13.21-26

“Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’* So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot.”

Jesus is troubled in spirit. He has washed their feet. Everyone’s, including Judas’. **“Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me,”** says Jesus. We hear those words and look at Judas. The disciples heard those words and looked at each other. Their uncertainty betrays the possibility it could be any one of them. Jesus knows he will be betrayed. He knows who. He knows when. So does Judas. The only ones who do not know, the only ones who are surprised, are the other disciples.

This meal is one of love and betrayal. The two always exist side by side. To deny that we can and do betray Jesus in some way, denies that we are loved by Jesus or that Jesus has given himself over to us. In giving Judas the bread Jesus has handed himself over to Judas. He has made himself able to be betrayed. I’m sure the other disciples and us, are relieved when the bread is dipped and given to Judas. He’s the one to blame. Judas makes it easier to not look at ourselves sometimes. The truth is we have all been given the bread of Jesus’ life. We have all been washed in the water of his love.

Yes, in this moment it is Judas. At the cross it will be Peter. A different time, different place, different circumstances it will be someone else. In these uncertain times, and as we approach the Cross of Good Friday, let us not forget that Jesus has give himself to us. He shared himself with us just like the disciples. In doing that He has shared His love, knowing that it may not be given back. But Jesus dose this anyway. So let us turn our self-interest to love and kindness. Let us turn fear and uncertain to hope of the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross.

Lord God,

Give us strength to walk faithfully with Jesus. Even when the road we walk is rocky, even when the message of the cross seems like foolishness and even when we feel betrayed. You, Lord, are always faithful. We stumble, we become lost, but you are steady and sure. Give us the grace to endure our troubles and reveal to us the glory of your kingdom, through your son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Maundy Thursday

Bible Reading - I Corinthians 11:23 to 26

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

²⁵ *In the same way, after supper Jesus took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

²⁶ *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

It is a deep human instinct, I believe a God given one, that all of us mark significant moments with significant meals. Sharing a meal especially a festive one, binds together families, close friends and even strangers. Such meals say more than we could ever put into words about who we are, what we feel about each other and the hopes and joys we share together. Significant meals not only feed our bodies but they also say something at a very deep level about acceptance. In the Middle East, meals are key to peace making. The great Jewish Festivals all function in this way, but supreme of all the festivals is Passover. Not only does the content of that meal (lamb and unleavened bread) remind those who take part powerfully of deliverance and of the need to act hastily, there is also a clue in the way in which the meal is taken. Everyone is said to 'recline' at table. This is a symbol of a free people at ease with themselves and their situation.

This meal will be the most special meal Jesus has had with his disciples because through his death on the cross the next day, he is going to give the words of thanksgiving new meaning. Ever since, we depend on the death of Jesus for our life both now and into eternity. And so, here God's kingdom touches earth – the heavenly party has begun and you and I are a part of it. One final thought, Sometimes it seems that the church has tried to use too many words – some of our Eucharistic prayers it feels to me are very wordy indeed. It is almost as if we are trying to explain every nuance and theological angle in case we miss something out, but at its core, the actions of breaking and giving the bread, blessing and giving the cup cannot be explained away. We 'Do this' to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

'God's riches at Christ's expense' is never more true than when we partake of the bread and wine.

Lord Jesus, when I think upon your sacrifice, that you died in my place, it causes me to sing that I love you Lord. Amen.

Good Friday

Bible Reading – John Chapters 18 and 19

John chapters 18 and 19 tell of the events on that fateful day leading up to Jesus' crucifixion. The story tells of how Judas betrayed Jesus to the chief priests in the Garden of Gethsemane ; how the Apostle Peter denied he knew him; how he was sent before Pilate, the Roman Governor who washed his hands of him; how the soldiers cruelly treated and then took Jesus and crucified him; his amazing last words and then how blood and water flowed from his side due to a soldier's spear; how his dead body was laid in a clod dark tomb. It is in so many ways a difficult read but I suggest an essential one for any Christian as it helps us to consider afresh just what Jesus suffered physically and mentally for us on that day.

Lord, you know life is difficult at present with this Covid - 19. I'm confined to home; I can't do much real church work; I can't worship with my church friends and worst still share in Holy Communion; I am a little worried about what the future may bring if I'm honest; I can't meet family and friends face to face; oh there's so much else Lord. I don't really mean to moan Lord but I'm sure you know life is particularly difficult at present.

And yet, I've just reread what happened to you on Good Friday in John chapters 18 and 19 Lord. How could people made just like us do such things to you? Lord I can go out into my garden and yet the Garden of Gethsemane for you was a place of betrayal. I can still talk to my family and friends through modern technology, yet your friends ran away and left you and Peter denied knowing you three times . Lord, I regularly wash my hands to stay safe but that day, Pilate, the man in authority over life and death, was weak and eventually washed his hands over you and condemned you to be mercilessly flogged, humiliated and crucified, the worst death possible. Lord, I can continue to worship you on my own and even with others through technology, even if shared Holy Communion, is not possible. For you though that day a soldier's spear ensured for evermore that we would remember the blood and water flowing from your side and make your actions at the Last Supper so real and meaningful.

Lord, I'm sorry in my human weakness I have a tendency to moan. I pray that I can use this time to focus more deeply on you, what you did and still do for me, and the amazing promise of hope of eternal life when my time comes.

A prayer

Lord our Saviour, help us to lean on you in these times we are going through knowing that you suffered so much for us on that day we call Good Friday. Help us to hear that promise of eternal life for those that follow you. Help us to love you more and more and never forget the sacrifice you made for us and all that turn to you. Amen