

St. Andrew's Boreham

Holy Week at Home

Lent is a journey - travelling with Jesus as he returns from temptation in the wilderness to his victory over death on the cross in Jerusalem. While we are physically apart as a community, we can still journey together as a church, knowing that Jesus journeys with us.

We have produced a series of reflections and prayer activities for each day, as we journey to the Cross and beyond (Adapted from a resource created by Revd Sally Prendergast).

Palm Sunday

Deciding to Go - Matt. 21:1-13

There is a saying: 'The first step is the hardest...' Have you ever found this?

Especially if the journey is a difficult one; one that you don't really want to do perhaps, or one that is scary or unpleasant.

Jesus stands on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the walled city of Jerusalem and the Temple. He knows what is ahead - 'We are going up to Jerusalem', he tells his disciples in 20:18; 'and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified.'



The Mount of Olives looks one way over Jerusalem, but turn the other way and the view is over the Judaeen Wilderness to the Dead Sea and, beyond that, Jordan. Jesus could have fled. He could have gone back into the wilderness. No one would have found him.

Yet he doesn't.

He takes the first step on what he knows will be a difficult journey. He tells his disciples to go find a donkey - fulfilling prophecies made so many years before - and takes his first steps down towards Jerusalem, towards pain, betrayal, and death.

Why? Why does he take such a hard road?

Because he knows what lies beyond the pain and the death - life. Verse 20:18 ends: 'On the third day he will be raised to life.'

This Palm Sunday we start our walk with Christ through Holy Week, through the sorrow of Good Friday to the joy of Easter Sunday.

Place your Palm Cross somewhere where you will see it every day.

Remember that, though we are apart physically, we journey together, united by Christ's love.

Monday of Holy Week

Breaking the Rules- John 12-1:11

Social distancing rules - rules that we never had to comprehend or adhere to before - have become almost second nature over the past few weeks. It is a difficult reality of our current situation that we cannot be a physically close to one another as we want to be.

Yet 'social distancing' is not a new invention. There have been strict rules as to how to behave in public for thousands of years - who should wear what, who can talk to whom, and what is a 'polite' distance at which to have a conversation.

There were social distancing rules in Jesus' time - and Mary ignored them all.

'Then Mary took about half a litre of pure nard, and expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair.'



By Artus Wolffort - <https://fahrzeuge.dorotheum.com>

In the presence of others (her family and the disciples) Mary lets down her hair (a definite social no-no), bends down, and gets far closer to Jesus than any social etiquette of the day allowed. She broke the rules of propriety and she broke the rules of modesty.

She wasted all that wonderful perfume.

Or did she?

Why do you think she did it?

Why do you think she risked the scorn of her family? Of her friends? Of Jesus' friends? And even of Jesus himself?

Jesus rebukes Judas, when Judas scorns Mary's actions. Why?

'You will not always have me.'

On the cross Jesus pours out everything for us.

On the cross his life is poured out so that we may have life.

On the cross Jesus breaks the rules of life and death - dying, and then rising again.

In your house find something that smells wonderful - some perfume perhaps, or a scented candle, a flower, or even some food.

Enjoy the fragrance, and remember the presence of Christ with you.

Tuesday of Holy Week

Listening on the Journey - John 12:20-36

I spent a couple of years working for a church in London. It was quite a 'charismatic' church (or as I heard some describe it, a 'happy-clappy' church.) I loved the church and the community there, but I sometimes felt a little left out.

People would talk about 'hearing from God'.

"I felt God say this to me..."

"I believe God is telling me to do this..."

"I received a picture from God saying this..."

Why was I not hearing these things? Was God not speaking to me, or was I simply not listening?



Journeys are not just about getting from A to B. When I go for a walk with friends, it is the talking and listening to each other which brings usually more joy than the walk itself.

Faith is a journey with God. But what happens if we don't feel like we are hearing from him?

"Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The crowd that was there and heard it said that it thundered; others said an angel had spoken to

him. Jesus said, 'This voice was for your benefit, not mine.'

Some of us might hear God loud and clear, like thunder. For others it might be the a whisper. For some we may not hear anything verbally, but know the voice of God through the words of others, or the words of Scripture.

However those who heard God's voice - whether as thunder or as the voice of an angel - heard it was because they were there, listening.

As we journey with Jesus this week, let's put some time aside to listen.

Choose a piece of music to listen to that best reflects the mood you wish to feel. Set aside time to listen to it in comfort, perhaps resting in a bed or a cosy chair, with a candle, picture or cross to focus on as you listen.

*(Pray slowly) Heavenly Father, I wait upon you. I pause, still my mind and still my heart. I wait upon you. I stop, and listen beyond the everyday. I wait upon you. I rest, and allow my soul to have space. I wait upon you. Quiet, at rest, held. I wait upon you. And call Abba, Abba Father. I know you have searched me, and you know me. I know you are the beginning and the end. I know you are the Redeemer. I wait upon you, allowing your grace to penetrate my whole being. And in this place, close, protected and eternal I find that this grace renews my strength, wipes away my tears, and promises new hope. I wait upon you. Amen.**

*www.living-prayers.com/topics/listening_prayer.html

Wednesday of Holy Week

Love and Betrayal Along the Way - John 13:21-32

Jesus is sharing a meal with the disciples when he reveals that he is to be betrayed.



Colijn de Coter / Public domain

We can imagine the looks bouncing around the room as the group immediately tries to work out who it is. No one dared speak, until Simon Peter (usually the first to open his mouth!) nudges the man beside him...

‘One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him;... 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.”’

Why didn't Jesus directly accuse Judas, face to face, there and then?

Why hand him a piece of bread and whisper privately to the beloved disciple beside him?

Was there a risk that the others would have tried to dissuade him, prevent or slow down the inevitable?

The beloved disciple was clearly trusted by Jesus. Judas, on the other hand, was not... and yet still Jesus washed his feet and shared a meal with him. He did not object or defend himself, but trusted entirely in the truth that would be our salvation

We have so much to learn from Jesus' behaviour.

We, too, will have been betrayed in our lives, treated unjustly, talked about, the subject of gossip. It hurts, and that pain can linger.

How do we respond to those who hurt us?

How could, or should we respond?

What prevents us from acting with dignity, empathy and ultimately forgiveness?

Take a piece of bread and a small bowl with a little oil or melted butter in. Remember the times when you've felt betrayed, and pray as you feel able for healing and peace, for all involved. Dip your bread into the bowl and remember that we have hurt others, and they have hurt us, often unintentionally. **Eat and know that – through Christ – we can forgive and be forgiven.**

Maundy Thursday

The Hard Road - John 13:1-17; 31b-35

Many of us will be familiar with the readings for today - Maundy Thursday - the day when we remember how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Peter (being typically Peter-like) doesn't get the lesson, first refusing to let Jesus wash his feet, because that is **not** what a respected person with authority does, and then wanting to jump right in and be washed from head to toe.

He thought the lesson was about purity.

But it wasn't.

It was about humility.

'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord"', Jesus says to them, 'and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet.'

To wash another's feet is a humbling task. There is no getting away from it - people's feet can be smelly at the best of times, and we live in a world of nice cotton socks and regular showers.

It is also humbling to have your feet washed by others. I am sure I'm not alone in not placing my feet in my list of best features. They spend most of their time hidden, even in the summer!

How do we serve one another?

How do we let others serve us?

Does a lack of humility ever stop us from helping others, or indeed, letting others help us?

In your pack you will find a bar of soap - a precious resource in these upside down days!!

Use it to wash your hands (or your feet!).

Think of those who have helped you, and thank God for them.

Think of those you have helped - and thank God you were able to help them.

And ask God - who else may I help? And may I have the humility to help them.



Ford Madox Brown / Public domain

Good Friday

The End of the Road? John 18:1- end of 19.

“It is finished.”

Back on Sunday we talked about Jesus starting his journey towards Jerusalem - a journey that he knew would end here: on the cross.

It was a lonely journey.

A friend betrayed him.

A friend denied knowing him.

His other friends fled in fear.

Loneliness has sadly been a common feature for many other the last few weeks. You may have been feeling lonely yourself.

Social distancing and isolation may protect us from the virus currently racing around the world, but it can let a darkness in - a darkness that comes when we are in our own company for too long, and our own thoughts and fears seem to come out of hiding and refuse to leave us alone.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that: “...we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way - yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Heb. 4:15-16).

In the space of a few days Jesus went from being cheered into the gates of Jerusalem, showered with palm leaves and the cheers of the crowd...

...to being on his own, alone and abandoned, on the cross.

Only, if we look closely at the story, we see that he wasn’t alone, not completely.

His mother, Mary, was with him, as was the beloved disciple, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. They couldn’t be right next to him, but they were as close as they could be.

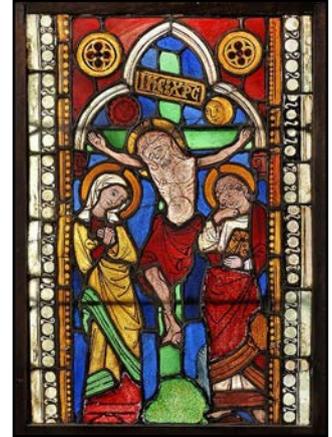
While on the cross he forged a new relationship - entrusting his mother into the loving care of the beloved disciple.

Then, with his dying breath he said ‘It is finished’ - restoring the relationship between humans and their God, which had been broken ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the Garden of Eden.

This Good Friday, why not make contact with someone who might be feeling alone; or contact someone who you have not spoken to in a while.

And give thanks - that we have a God who knows what it is to be alone, yet promises to be with us always.

By Gabriel Hildebrand - <https://commons.wikimedia.org>



Easter Saturday Evening

What are you waiting for? John 19:38-end

If you had asked that question to Joseph of Arimathea, he might have said: Nothing. There is nothing to wait for anymore.

Hope was lost.

Hope was gone.

Hope had died a criminal's death on a wooden cross.

All that was left now was the practicalities of death - getting permission to take Jesus' body down from the cross; buying the perfume and spices; wrapping the body in the fragrant linen; placing the body in the tomb (Joseph's tomb), and placing the large, heavy stone in front of the entrance.

There was no hope.

But we know differently; we know what will come in the morning; we know that this is not the end of the story. For us this is a time of waiting - the benefit of hindsight, you might say.

Easter Saturday is a strange day in the church calendar. It is a liminal day.

We know what is to come in the morning; we know there is hope. But for now we sit with those who do not know hope. We sit with those who wait for a brighter day tomorrow, not sure if it will come.

Take some time today just to sit. Pray for those who feel lost, who feel without hope. The liminal space is uncomfortable, and that is okay to be there for a short time, but we do not have to stay there for long.

Normally, outside of 'Covid-19' times, churches around the county host a vigil service in the evening on Easter Saturday. Everyone is given a candle as they come in. The service starts off in darkness; then the brand new paschal candle is lit. From this one flame, all the other candles in the church are lit. The church building gets brighter and brighter as the light spreads around the congregation.



This year these services will not be able to happen - yet that does not mean the light goes out.

This Easter Saturday evening light a candle (or a few!).

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' John 1:5



Easter Sunday

Called by Name - John 20:1-18

This is not a vision or a trick of the light. As Mary Magdalene bends to look into the tomb, she sees – no doubt with utter horror – that Jesus is not there. She runs to the disciples, who scramble to the tomb and see that he has gone.

Mary remains in the garden, bereft, and is approached by the gardener: ‘Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?”’

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!”

The impossible has happened – Jesus is risen, death has been defeated! No longer do we have to carry the guilt of our wrongdoings. We are loved and accepted, despite our flaws; if we turn our eyes to the risen Christ, we are washed clean and forgiven.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

(It feels like such a long time since we have said that word, it is well worth saying it twice!)

One thing that always strikes me about this passage is how Mary did not recognise Jesus until he said her name.

Mary, one of Jesus’ closest disciples.

Mary, the one who Jesus chooses to appear to first after his resurrection.

Mary is called by name, and it opens her eyes to the truth that is before her; that Jesus isn’t dead - he is alive!

It is Jesus that allows Mary to see the truth - and it is the same for us. It is Jesus who gives us the ability to see him - in the faces of those we meet, in the hands of those who help us, in the love of those who love us. And like Mary, Jesus charges us to tell others of what we have seen.

Today, though we are physically apart, we rejoice together, as we rejoice with Christians around the world.

Our Lord is Risen! He is Risen indeed!

By his great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and into an inheritance which cannot perish or be defiled, nor can it ever fade. So let us rejoice!

If you can, spend some time outside in a garden, or near some flowers, or on a walk; enjoy the chocolate, and rejoice!