



St. Andrew's Church,
Leicester Forest East

Words of Jesus



**Prayers and Reflections
for Holy Week and
Easter 2022**

Introduction

We live in a world where things mean different things to different people. So much of how we engage with the world is subjective—it depends on us. What we believe and value affects how we understand and make sense of our world. For example, we can hear and take away different emphasises, impressions, and meanings from the same speech or conversation depending on how we're feeling at the time, what value we ascribe to the topic being discussed or what we think of the speaker themselves. Most spoken words are themselves transient and eventually forgotten; “giant leaps for mankind” being one of the rare exceptions.

The Gospel writers record many spoken words of Jesus. They each saw something in what he said — some deep truth that prompted them to think these spoken words needed to be recorded so they could be heard by future generations. This itself brought the truth to one of his sayings: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”* (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33 NRSV).

Much as now, Jesus' words and ministry polarised the people of his day. There were many reactions to what he said ranging from jubilant 'hosannas' to angry cries of 'crucify'. Jesus continues to speak to us today, and challenges us in his words and actions to decide for ourselves which of these cries we will join with; whether we will celebrate or deny the truth he represents of God's love for the world.

In that fateful, holy week, Jesus speaks to several people knowing that these will be some of his final words. This booklet explores some of what Jesus said in the days before his death, listening and devoting our attention to him as we traverse the week that culminated in a great leap for all humankind back into the arms of our loving God. Who are the people Jesus speaks with? What does he choose to say, and what does he mean by what he says? Why does he say those words when and where he does?

These are some of the questions our contributors explore in the reflections within this booklet; each based around a different Holy Week saying of Jesus. Some invite us to view the scene through the eyes of someone who was there; others take a step back and invite us to consider what these events mean for our lives today. It is OK if you disagree with our interpretations—we all respond to what we read and hear in our own way. But it's precisely because we hear these words of Jesus in different ways, that we have the opportunity to learn and take new inspiration from one another's perspectives. Someone else may share an insight or a nuance that we have not picked up ourselves, which can reshape our own perspective and response. I urge you to take this approach as we journey together with Jesus through his final days, hours and minutes. Let go of your preconceptions and allow his words to speak to you afresh this Holy Week, and prepare to experience once again the joyful Easter proclamation and all it means for you, for us, and for the world: *'He is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!'*

These materials have been designed to be used in the evening, marking the end of each of the days of Holy Week with a pattern of bible readings, reflections and songs, along with suggestions for people and things you might pray for alongside your personal prayers. However, if that time of day doesn't work for you, just pick a different time; the important thing is committing ourselves to spending time with God in prayer. These resources can stand alone, or be read alongside the daily prayer resources available online from www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer and www.leicester.anglican.org/everyday-faith/calendar-or-prayer (paper copies of these can be made available on request).

You may like to spend some time thinking about where and how you will pray. I would suggest finding somewhere where you are less likely to be interrupted, perhaps switch off your mobile phone if it can distract you. Some people find it helps to have something to focus on. Perhaps you could light a candle, set up a cross, or a picture of Jesus or something that helps you to think about God? If you run out of words, know that God is with you, and that the Holy Spirit *'intercedes with sighs too deep for words'* (Romans 8:26).

So, let us listen together to the words of our Lord spoken to ears long ago and into our hearts today. *"Speak Lord, for your servant is listening"* (1 Samuel 3:9 NRSV)

Rev'd Dave Hover
Editor

Palm Sunday 10th April

Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Opening Prayer

If you have a Palm Cross, you may wish to say this prayer and then place the Cross in your window as a mark of witness and praise to Christ our King:

Lord Jesus Christ, who entered Jerusalem in your Father's Name and whom your people welcomed with joy, come into our hearts and our world today. Come as Prince of Peace into places of fear and violence. Come in your gentleness, and put tyrants to shame. Amen.

This prayer may be said instead or in addition:

Loving God, who in Jesus became one of us, in your humble entry into the city you came as good news to the poor, joy to those who were sad, you turned the world's values and priorities upside down. The crowd cried "Hosanna, save us!" Come into our lives and our world today as our humble Saviour, who heals broken lives and a broken world. Amen.

Bible Reading & Reflection

Matthew 21: 1-11

A king who rides a donkey? Don't be ridiculous! That's what I thought when I first heard the rumours of what was going on. I didn't like Passover, and the days round it. Not because I thought the festival was unimportant- far from it.

I was after all a good Jew, a Pharisee I'll have you know. But it was the way it always seemed to attract undesirables to Jerusalem. You know - crowds of scruffy people who ask you for money (maybe not politely), make a lot of noise, leave their rubbish everywhere... They don't know how to behave. I also don't like people who challenge the way things should be, who set themselves up against the authorities. But a guy who claims to be a king, riding on a donkey? That was a new one on me, I had to go and investigate. Not just to do crowd control either, though that was indeed a concern.

So, reluctantly, I went along... and it didn't take me long to find the crowds. You could hear them from half a mile away - and the guy next to me, you could probably smell from that distance too. I couldn't, for a minute, see the 'star of the show', and I wondered if it was all a wind-up. But suddenly... the crowd went quiet, and then exploded into cries of "Hosanna!" ("God, save us!") And there he was, this small, scruffy bloke, looking totally ordinary, sat on a donkey. I thought "Really?" What on earth was so special about him?

But there was just something about him that was so compelling that I just had to watch. When he came close to me, it was as if his eyes just looked into my soul. I started feeling very embarrassed, and though I was a good six inches taller, feeling very small. Suddenly the values I had lived for, seemed very silly. I was knocked off my high horse. I remembered all the times that I had put others down to feel better about myself. But at the same time, he looked at me with such love that I couldn't despair.

Something changed in me that day. I've still got a lot to learn, I'm not perfect yet. But I learned something that day. I was reminded who was King of my life - and it wasn't me. He cut me down to size - but he also set me free. "Hosanna" has become my song, as I have been set free to live more as he lived, love more as he loved.



Song

*Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Lord, we lift up your name, with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Hosanna in the highest!*

*Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings!
Lord, we lift up your name, with hearts full of praise;
be exalted, O Lord, my God!
Glory to the King of kings!*

Carl Tuttle

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Prayers

We pray for:

- all who follow your call, even when it leads beyond what is comfortable and known, into the unknown. At this time, we remember especially those working for peace in the most troubled corners of your world;
- all whose insecurity leads them to a pride that hurts others, all who misuse your name to do violence to others. May your humble love speak to their hearts, enabling them to see those they harm as their brothers and sisters, and to stop their violence. We pray especially for those doing acts of violence in Ukraine at this time;
- all who hold on to faith, and proclaim you as Lord, even when and where it is unsafe to do so;
- all for whom the way ahead is uncertain: those who are facing health challenges, those who are bereaved, those facing loss of jobs or relationships, those for whom 'living with the virus' strikes fear into their hearts. We remember at this time especially all those travelling from Ukraine to other countries, including

the UK, as refugees; may they find safe space and a genuine welcome;

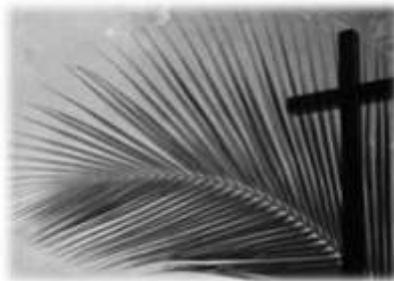
- all who do not know who Jesus is, who do not know his love for them and everything he has given on their behalf; that they would encounter him this Holy Week and join the joyful cry of praise to the King;
- the people & things that God has placed on our hearts;
- our prayers to be entrusted into the hands of our King and our God as he rides to glory, that we would be given confidence to shout his praises in word and deed.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, as you ride into Jerusalem today, help us to follow you all the way and not give up. May we know that you love us, whether others value or disregard us, and that your humble love changes the world. Amen.



Monday 11th April

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'. Be with me this night, as I offer myself to you. Hear my prayers for others and for myself, and keep me in your care.

Opening Prayer

O Lord, clear our hearts and minds of all unrighteous clutter. As we seek to be your Church in our day, drive out all that is unworthy of you. Let us think not of human transactions – our losses and gains – for we gather under the banner of your love that demands no price but our love in return. Help us to sacrifice all that we are to your service, as Jesus sacrificed everything for us. Amen.

Bible Reading & Reflection

Matthew 21:12-17

One thing that we know about Jesus is that he was not bound by convention! His first priority always was to do the will of God and he didn't worry if it upset people. But then it only upset them if they didn't want to hear the truth about themselves or their actions.

Jesus enters Jerusalem and goes to the temple where he finds, instead of a place of prayer, a livestock market. The people who are running the temple are more concerned with making a profit than enabling pilgrims to pray. In fact, in many ways they were hindering them from simply going into the temple to pray.

We know Jesus' reaction to that – he drove them all out. He removed the barrier that was stopping people coming to the temple to pray. He opened the temple again for its proper purpose, a house of prayer.

Do we put up barriers today that stop people coming into church? In many ways the traders in the temple were not doing anything wrong, they were following the requirements made by the Jewish law. They had misunderstood the reasons that lay beneath the requirement to sacrifice and so were now stopping people worshipping God. We don't tend to have livestock markets in the back of our churches today. We can still put barriers in the way of people coming in to worship though. We can insist that they dress a certain way, we can make the service difficult to follow unless you know what you are doing and we can make people feel unwelcome by not talking to them or insisting that "that's my seat!"

It is also how people outside the church perceive us, whether it is true or not. People can see it as a friendly welcoming space where they are accepted and supported or as a place where they are expected to behave and think in a certain way before they are allowed in.

We saw how Jesus reacted when he arrived at the temple to find that it was not being used properly. How would he react today if he turned up on our church doorstep? Would he want to overturn things that were happening or would he be happy to go in? Would he say "well done" or "could do better?"



Song

*Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions:*

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

*Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And a symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:*

*All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Marty Haugen

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Prayers

We pray for:

- our response to Christ's challenge; recognising and allowing him to drive out those things that we place between us and God;
- that our churches may be places of true welcome where all can find a home and be accepted for who they are; a beloved child of God;
- business owners, the self-employed and all who are anxious about their financial future amidst the rising costs of living and of doing business;
- the people & things that God has placed on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Almighty Father, who sent your only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sin, show me how I can honour you and bring glory to your name, by walking in the way of Jesus. Give me grace and mercy as I try and fail, guidance when I'm not sure which way to go, and wisdom to trust you in all things. For your love brings light and life to all who seek it. May I seek you evermore as I walk with you through this Holy Week and beyond. Amen.

Tuesday 12th April

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'. Be with me this night, as I offer myself to you. Hear my prayers for others and for myself, and keep me in your care.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, help us to make you the cornerstone of our lives. We want to do that today, God. We know that anything we build without you just won't last. We've tried and it has failed. We want you to be first in our lives. We want you to be the foundation of our lives, of our church and of our community. Lord Jesus, be our cornerstone and rock on which we live. Amen.



Bible Reading & Reflection

Mark 12:1-12

I'm my own boss! I can do this on my own! Why pay back when I could have it all!

As these words are written Putin, an unelected dictator, is trying to take what is not his. We are all guilty – we have a beautiful planet with enough for all, but we refuse to share, we take for own advantage, we destroy for future generations. Our '4 score and 10' is a temporary tenancy in this world.

Even with God we try to create rules, rituals, and obligations, forgetting that throughout time He has lavished outrageous and unrelentless love on us. Throughout we have constantly rejected that love by going our own selfish ways. A love freely given yet we dare not accept; in case our lives, our own convictions, and ideas are challenged and changed for ever.

He sent his prophets in Old Testament times to bring us back into relationship – we rejected them; today we try to find our own connections to God, yet Jesus is clear – he is the Way, the Truth, the Life. He is the path to true life. He is the building block on which our relationship, our restoration to the Creator God is made.

But this outrageous love, this cornerstone, moves ever closer to a finality, to be smashed into pieces, dust to dust, scattered across the hillside of Golgotha.

God will not interfere with our lives, they said.

God will not interfere with my life, I say.

Conveniently forgetting that the true owner of all I survey will call me to account when those very pieces of dust - every atom, every molecule is soon restored to glory.

Song

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust is Jesus' name*

*Christ alone, Cornerstone
Weak made strong in the Saviour's love
Through the storm
He is Lord, Lord of all*

*When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest on His unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil*

Christ alone....

*When he shall come with trumpet sound
Oh, may I then in Him be found
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless, stand before the throne*

Christ alone....

Eric Oskar Liljero, Jonas Carl Gustaf Myrin &
Reuben Timothy Morgan. © Capitol CMG Publishing

Prayers

We pray for:

- those impacted by conflict and war – nation upon nation, particularly the people of Ukraine;
- those who have been made homeless by oppression, war and threat of death;
- those whose foundations are crumbling through economic circumstances and pressures;
- the damaging impact of human civilisation on our planet and its delicate ecosystem; that all peoples would learn to live humbler, less selfish lives in harmony with the Earth and strive to safeguard God's creation;
- ourselves to allow Jesus to become the cornerstone and rock on which we build our lives;
- the people and things that God has placed on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we leave this reading and reflection behind, Lord, remind us of all that we have from you. Help us not to reject your Son, your people, your gifts or your love. Amen.

Wednesday 13th April

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'. Be with me this night, as I offer myself to you. Hear my prayers for others and for myself, and keep me in your care.

Opening Prayer

Creator God, we shall not find your glory in bricks and mortar built by human hands. Jesus the Christ, though others claiming to be the Christ may appear, we know them to be false and you divine. O Spirit, known by wind and flame, draw near. In you we find the force of fire and hope. Amen.



Bible Reading & Reflection

Mark 13:1-13

Famine, pestilence, wars and rumours of wars... Are we living in the end times? So, a letter sent by some Jehovah's Witnesses in my home town cheerfully

pronounced. Cheerfully because in interpreting the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine as being the 'signs of the end of the age' that Jesus is talking about here, it must mean for certain that Jesus is coming back to save the elect and carry them off to a new world. And there was much rejoicing.

Or is there? Is that interpretation right? Is this really what Jesus is saying to his disciples?

We never read the Bible or hear Jesus' words in isolation. We always hear them in the context of who and where we are in the world, and what's going on around us and in our lives. The Bible is an important source for understanding the Christian faith and the world in which we live, but it is not our only resource. Taken on its own, any passage from the Bible can be misunderstood and read in the light of our own preconceptions and assumptions. To help us avoid misreading the Bible, the tradition of the Anglican and Methodist Churches has always been to read the Bible and world events in the light of our own experience and the tradition of faith we have inherited and received through the Church, and apply our God-given powers of reason to all this information in order to arrive at a wise understanding. How might we do this with these apocalyptic words of Jesus and the traumatic events of recent times?

Well, human experience throughout history tells us that famines, plagues and wars have been happening for the 2000 years since Jesus spoke those words. Every generation has experienced them, yet Christ has not come again. Reason might therefore say to us that he is no more likely to come now than at any time in the last two millennia. Indeed, it has been the folly of many in the past to try and predict the exact time of Jesus' appearance, and thereby fulfilled but one part of the prophecy; that many people will be led astray.

Elsewhere (in Matthew 24:36), Jesus says the day and hour of the Son of Man's second coming is unknown to everyone except to God the Father. We won't be able to predict it therefore; we can only maintain an active state of readiness, as Jesus outlines in the subsequent parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-12). It is for this reason our Church tradition has always taught us to live in the now and not try to second-guess what God might do in the future, whilst at the same time being always watchful for signs of Jesus; signs of his coming again in glory and signs of his work in the world right now through the Holy Spirit.

Where do you see and experience Jesus in the present time, in our world and in your life?

Song

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart!*

*Prepare the way for the Lord.
Make a straight path for God.
Prepare the way for the Lord.*

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart!*

*Rejoice in the Lord always: God is at hand.
Joy and gladness for all who seek the Lord.*

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart!*

*The glory of the Lord shall be revealed.
All the earth will see the Lord.*

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart!*

*I waited for the Lord. God heard my cry.
Our eyes are fixed on the Lord our God.*

*Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.
Wait for the Lord, keep watch, take heart!*

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Prayers

We pray:

- with thanks for the guidance we receive through the gift of God's word in scripture, in the teachings of the Church, in the experiences of our lives, and that we can interpret these signs through the ability God has given us to reason and to seek understanding;
- for eyes to see and minds to recognise the signs of Christ's presence with us now, as well as watchfulness for the signs of his coming again in glory;
- for all people who suffer this day due to pestilence, war or famine; that God will grant them the strength

- and courage to come through their times of trial;
- for the people and things that God has placed on our hearts;
- for the Holy Spirit to come among us in new ways to equip us for the work God calls us to in the present, and to inspire us with renewed hope for the future.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

It's difficult to live with uncertainty. However bad a situation, knowing what you have to face means that you can start coming to terms with it, facing your fears, planning your strategy. If we knew that the world was going to end on a given date, how would that affect our living in the meantime? How would I need to change? How would I want to change? Is it possible to live each day as if it were my last, while knowing that it may not be?

I need your help, God, to listen for you in the clamour of voices calling for my attention, to focus on you in the midst of competing priorities, to trust you in this time of uncertainty. Amen.

Maundy Thursday 14th April

Today we remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples, when he washed their feet and left them the new commandment to love one another. There is no formal end to today's service, as Good Friday's service is a continuation of today's. You are invited at the end to keep watch with the disciples.

Before you begin, you may wish to wash your hands or feet, or wash the hands or feet of those living with you; remembering that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and calls us to be cleansed of our sins.



Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your disciples, 'I am with you always'. Be with me this night, as I offer myself to you. Hear my prayers for others and for myself, and keep me in your care.

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you have invited us to share in the supper which your Son gave to his Church to proclaim his death until he comes: may he nourish us by his presence, and unite us in his love. Amen.

Bible Reading & Reflection

Luke 22:14-23

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

On the night before he died, Jesus *said* a number of things, but it is perhaps what he *did* that we remember more clearly. Knowing that these were the final hours before his death, Jesus could have spent the whole evening giving his disciples detailed instructions and reminders about the work they were to do in his name, healing the suffering, comforting the broken and telling the world about the love of God and the kingdom of heaven. He could have – but he didn’t. Instead of giving lists of instructions, Jesus instituted a simple action – the sharing of a meal – which is still remembered every day around the world.

I wonder how the disciples felt when they heard Jesus talking of them eating his body. Did they recoil at the concept of drinking his blood? I know I would if a friend suggested that to me, no matter how much I trusted them. And yet, somehow, in this moment, Jesus started something which has continued ever since.

Memory is important, and Jesus knew that people needed to remember the sacrifice he was about to make. Words alone are not always easy to remember. As a trainee teacher, someone said to me, “Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand.” Jesus knew that his words alone would not be enough on this occasion.

“Do this in remembrance of me.”



Whenever we gather for worship and share the sacrament of Holy Communion, we are doing as Jesus himself commanded his close friends. We become involved in Jesus Christ's story in a very real way, along with the community of Christians all around the globe. In partaking of the Eucharist, we are fed by Jesus, just as those first disciples were.

Whatever we believe happens when we receive Holy Communion, we do this in remembrance of him.

Song

*Broken for me, broken for you,
The body of Jesus, broken for you.*

*He offered His body, He poured out His soul;
Jesus was broken, that we might be whole:*

Broken for me...

*Come to My table and with Me dine;
Eat of My bread and drink of My wine.*

Broken for me...

*This is My body given for you;
Eat it remembering I died for you.*

Broken for me...

*This is My blood I shed for you;
For your forgiveness, making you new.*

*Broken for me, broken for you,
The body of Jesus, broken for you.*

Janet Lunt

© 1978 Sovereign Music UK

Prayers

We pray for:

- those who are in positions of leadership: that they would reflect Christ's servanthood;
- all who have no-one with whom to share a meal;
- all who do not have enough to eat and drink, and for the work of our local foodbanks;
- all who make the bread and wine which we share to remember Jesus;
- those who do not know that they are loved by God;
- all who are losing or have lost their memories;
- the people and things that God has placed on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Song

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide
The darkness deepens Lord, with me abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away
Change and decay in all around I see
O Thou who changest not, abide with me*

*I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me*

*Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me*

Henry Francis Lyte

The Watch

After the disciples had sung a hymn they went to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to his disciples 'Sit here while I pray'. He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.'

*You are invited to remain with Jesus, reflecting on his words:
'Could you not watch with me one hour?'*



Good Friday 15th April

Today we remember Jesus' crucifixion.

Lord Jesus Christ, today we remember how in the deepest darkness, you were still the Light of the World, how when hatred seemed to be winning, your love still shone out. Tonight, Lord, touch the dark and fearful places in me with your light and your love.

Opening Prayer

(Say or sing:)

*Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.*

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Bible Reading & Reflection

Luke 23:33-43

It's the worst possible thing any mum could have to watch - her own son being killed in such a brutal way. Especially when he hadn't actually done anything to deserve it. Even worse, they weren't doing it privately, like they (sometimes) do executions today, but in public, making it as humiliating as possible. And those two guys they put him with... both bandits, as bad as each other. So of course I was there, to support my friend Mary on this worst day of her life. She looked done-in even before they started - and I'm surprised it didn't kill her - though somehow it didn't. Strong woman - and maybe, she didn't want to let on, in front of the horrible people who were doing this, how she felt? Certainly I wanted to keep a brave face on it, not let those horrors think they'd won.

I won't go into gory details of what happened, beyond saying that "gory" was unfortunately the operative word. I'm not surprised, with that and the crowds pushing and shoving, that Mary fainted several times, and I had to pick her up. Certainly I wanted to throw up a few times - and felt angrier than ever before in my entire life. And when Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing!" I felt even angrier. Of course they jolly well knew! He shouldn't be making excuses for them.

But then, something remarkable happened. The thief on Jesus' left was, as you might expect, effing and blinding at everyone, and taunting Jesus. But then... the guy on his right said, "Oi - pack it in, mate! You and I are getting what we deserve, but this guy? He's done nothing wrong!"

All the crowd fell silent, shocked to the core. I couldn't believe what I'd heard. But I found I could believe his next words, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" - and Jesus' reply, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Through Jesus' forgiveness, through his love in the face of hatred, the cycle of violence was broken. A man whom others had written off had, at the eleventh hour, turned away from evil, chosen good and found hope.

Not long after that, Jesus died - and Mary, my two friends and I were the last to slip away. Our hearts were broken, and we had no idea of the surprise that would greet us on the third day. But through what Jesus, and the guy on his right, said, we could, even then, see a glimmer of hope in the darkness.



Song

(Suggested Tune: Slane- Be Thou My Vision)

*Come, wounded Healer, your sufferings reveal —
the scars you accepted, our anguish to heal.
Your wounds bring such comfort in body and soul
to all who bear torment and yearn to be whole.*

*Come, hated Lover, and gather us near,
your welcome, your teaching, your challenge to hear:
where scorn and abuse cause rejection and pain,
your loving acceptance makes hope live again!*

*Come, broken Victor, condemned to a cross —
how great are the treasures we gain from your loss!
Your willing agreement to share in our strife
transforms our despair into fullness of life.*

Martin Leckebusch

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Prayers

We pray for:

- those in positions of leadership and responsibility:
that they may use their power to serve others,
especially the most vulnerable;
- for those who do not believe the good news of Jesus
Christ, whether they have lost faith or cannot grasp
that they are loved;
- those who suffer, who are persecuted for what they
believe, who face abuse, bullying or discrimination,

who are denied basic rights;

- those who have lost hope and see no way out of their situation;
- the people and things that God has placed on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, even in your greatest agony your love knew no bounds: even when hateful people sought to destroy you, you repaid hatred with forgiveness, breaking the cycle of violence. May we know your love that is stronger than any wrong we have done, anything we are ashamed of, and leave our sins at the foot of your cross. May we watch and wait, ready to walk on in freedom to love and forgive others. Amen.



Holy Saturday 16th April

On this day we mourn Jesus' death with the first disciples. Today the Church recalls that Jesus descended to the dead bringing salvation to those who had already died, while we continue to watch and wait in the hope of resurrection.

Opening Prayer

Almighty God, pour out the fullness of blessings on your people; we have recalled the dying of your Son and look towards his resurrection from the dead: Give us peace, increase our faith and be our eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Bible Reading and Reflection

Luke 23:44-49

33 years ago, angels sang of his birth: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace and goodwill among all people!', and he was given life.

3 years ago, as he emerged from the waters of baptism, a voice from heaven said: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased', and he was given purpose.

Over 40 days in the wilderness the devil tempted him, and he did not give in to sin.

2 years ago, the Pharisees told him to go away and that Herod was looking to kill him, and he did not give up.

Last year, Peter told him that the fate of being handed over to the chief priests and the elders to be killed must never happen to him, and he did not give way or turn aside from his destiny.

Last week, as he entered Jerusalem the crowds shouted: 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!', and he did not give in to the lure of popular acclaim.

2 nights ago, one of his best friends came in the night with a detachment of soldiers and betrayed him with a kiss, and he did not give in to hate.

Early yesterday, the crowd shouted 'Crucify! Crucify him!', as Pilate washed his hands of him and soldiers beat him, and he did not give in to fear.

Later that day, the passers-by mocked him as he hung on the cross, and he did not give in to despair.

In the afternoon the sky turned black, and knowing it was finished at last, Jesus gave up his spirit.

And the centurion guarding him said: 'Surely this was a righteous man, and God's Son.'

Today there is... silence.

What hope could tomorrow possibly bring?

Song



*Were you there
when they crucified my Lord?*

*Were you there
when they crucified my Lord?
O, sometimes it causes me to
tremble, tremble, tremble,*

*Were you there
when they crucified my Lord?*

*Were you there when they
nailed him to the tree?*

*Were you there when they
nailed him to the tree?*

*O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?*

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

*O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they pierced him in the side?*

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

*O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble,
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?*

American Spiritual

Prayers

We pray for:

- courage to take up our cross and follow Christ, that we would follow God's call as he did and never give in or give up;
- all who are mourning the death of a loved one;
- all who are close to death and those who journey with them;
- comfort as we lament our sorrows and losses of this past year;
- the people and things that God has placed on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God, as we stand at the foot of the cross,
may we remember the wonder of who you are.
Beyond sin, your love is inexhaustible.
Beyond brokenness, your forgiveness is incomprehensible.
Beyond betrayal, your grace is poured out eternally.
Beyond death, your life is unimaginable.
Beyond human understanding,
your ways are always higher than ours. Amen.

Easter Sunday 17th April



Today we celebrate Jesus' resurrection: his rising from the dead. Jesus has triumphed over death and calls us to everlasting life in him!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Alleluia!
May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

Song

*This joyful Eastertide,
away with sin and sorrow.
My Love, the Crucified,
has sprung to life this morrow:*

*Had Christ, that once was slain,
Ne'er burst his three-day prison,
Our faith had been in vain:
But now hath Christ arisen,
Arisen, arisen, arisen!*

*My flesh in hope shall rest,
and for a season slumber:
till trump from east to west:
shall wake the dead in number:*

Had Christ, that once was slain...

*Death's flood hath lost its chill,
since Jesus crossed the river:
lover of souls, from ill
my passing soul deliver:*

Had Christ, that once was slain...

George Ratcliffe Woodward

Opening Prayer

God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell: fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Bible Reading and Reflection

Luke 24:1-12

You will have noticed our final reading does not have Jesus in it, and that all the words spoken are not by him but rather are about him. He's dead – or so believe the women who go to the tomb to complete the burial ritual left incomplete on Good Friday.

To their great surprise, instead of a body they discover an empty tomb and two angels, who tell them of the words that Jesus spoke which have now come true. Then they remembered his words... and go and tell others the good news about Jesus.



These two aspects, remembering and telling, are key for us who live no longer in the shadow of death and the cross, but in the everlasting light of Jesus' resurrection. What Jesus says endures and has been remembered for so long because for many generations people have found deep and life-transforming truth in them. We are changed by our encounter with him; his presence with us reshapes our lives, his words inspire us to live more as he lived and to love more as he loved. His example encourages us to not be bound by social convention but to break down all barriers between peoples, as he has broken the barrier between us and God, so that all are welcome to come in, and sit and eat with him. We at last come to recognise that building our lives on the firm foundation of Christ as our cornerstone, brings us into the glory of God's kingdom and the promise of healing and restoration. Knowing the power of his words and the difference he makes to our lives, we are more alive to his presence in the world and learn to watch for him there. As we have been told, so have we seen, and will

always remember through living out our faith through acts of love that reveal to others who Jesus is. And so we re-tell his story in the hope that others will wonder what it means and come to see as we do, that no matter how dark it may get, no matter how much it may look like evil has triumphed, death and sin do not have the last word. That final word belongs to Jesus, and he has declared that it is finished – and that by his blood, we are set free.

This is true for me, for you, for everyone. Jesus' words reveal to us our way back to God, that it is through him who said: 'I am the way and the truth and the life'. His death and resurrection open the path for all to return to God, and everyone should know about it and should hear of what Jesus has done for us.

There have been times in history where words have been spoken which have changed the world, after which things have never been the same again. 'I have a dream...' 'We must become the change we wish to see in the world...' 'One small step for man...' These are all powerful words spoken at significant moments. So too are Jesus' words spoken in that most Holy of Weeks 2000 years ago. They are nothing less than the opening of the way to salvation. Hearing and believing Jesus' words of truth is surely one small step for us, and one giant leap for all humankind. So, remember Jesus' words and tell others about him. In doing that we will surely encounter the risen Christ more and more, as we share and remember his words, and live out their truth in our lives.

Reaffirmation of Baptism Vows

As we follow the Way of Christ, we affirm the presence of God among us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In baptism, God calls us out of darkness into his marvellous light. To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.

We recommit ourselves before God to our baptism vows:

I turn away from sin.

I reject evil.

I turn to Christ as Saviour.

I trust in him as Lord.

May God, who has given us the desire to follow Christ, give us the strength to continue in the Way.

As brothers and sisters, we profess the faith of the Church:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Almighty God, we thank you for our fellowship in the household of faith with all who have been baptized into your name. Keep us faithful to our baptism, and so make us ready for that day when the whole creation shall be made perfect in your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. May Christ dwell in our hearts through faith, that we may be rooted and grounded in love and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

Prayers

We pray for:

- the Easter joy to become a deeper reality in our lives;
- courage that we may face whatever the future holds calmly and unafraid, always confident that neither death, nor life, nor anything in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord;
- all signs of new life. For those who are pregnant, have recently given birth or adopted children. For our farmers and all who beckon new life into being;
- for all who are suffering and find it hard to be joyful today;
- the people and things that God has placed on our hearts.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

Song

*We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.*

*Tell of his birth at Bethlehem
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim,
The word made flesh, a light for all.*

*Tell of his death at Calvary,
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross;
For all he loved his life he gave.*

*Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory.*

*Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
To live for him, the Lamb who died.*

*Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.*

Edward J Burns

Blessing & Conclusion

May Christ, who out of defeat brings new hope and a new future, fill you with his new life; and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and all who you love, this Easter Day and always. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! May we find in Christ Jesus, our risen Lord, a companion for our journey, a sure ground for our hopes, the peace that passes understanding, and the joy that life is eternal.

With the risen life of Christ within us,
live in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!
Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!

HAPPY EASTER!



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