



Ways to worship during Holy Week when we can't be together

Church services will be shown on TV or online and you may wish to watch, listen or participate.

Palm Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 50:4–9a Philippians 2:5–11
The Passion of Christ;
Matthew 26:14–27:end



On Palm Sunday we remember the Passion of Christ. We take time to read through the story that is so familiar, yet - in the words of Tom Wright¹, offers us 'that which unmakes and remakes the world, ourselves included... the figure at the centre beckons, woos, disturbs, frightens and compels us.'

This year, one verse stands out as being particularly poignant to us, for reasons we may have never before fully appreciated, and is worthy of personal reflection. Pilate has asked the crowd who he should free, Jesus or Barabbas. The crowd screams for Jesus to be crucified...

'So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves."'

Because of our current health crisis, we are all taking great care to wash our hands, to rid ourselves of any possible contamination.



Points for reflection

In Matthew 26:39, Jesus prays in Gethsemane and says "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." It's an astonishing act of humble service. It's not about thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves *less*².

How do you feel when you wash your hands, in the present time?

Do you pray, sing, or count as you wash?

How does this influence the way you feel, as a Christian?

How can this simple act, often done in our homes in isolation, be seen as an act of service?

Set aside time to wash your hands carefully, knowing that in the current climate you are not alone, but are sharing in a moment of loving service and prayer.

◆ Lord, you humble yourself. You bow down like a servant. You give yourself away for us. Teach us to learn from you how to love, how to hold nothing back, how to give ourselves. Fill us with that Spirit of yours that Spirit of loving and serving all our brothers and sisters sincerely, without counting the cost. Amen. ³

¹ Tom Wright, Twelve Months of Sundays; SPCK (2001) p.51

² Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life; Zondervan (2002) p.265.

³ Liturgical Institute, Trier, in 'An Anthology for the Church Year, No. 109

Monday of Holy Week

Readings: Isaiah 42:1–9
Hebrews 9:11–15
Mary anoints Jesus;
John 12:1–11



Our current situation, with many of us isolated and separated (for good reason of course), completely overturns the social norm. The usual encouragement to get out of our homes, to seek company, share concerns and joys, to find interesting hobbies and pursuits, has been reversed. This is exactly what Mary does in today's gospel reading.

'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.'



We can imagine the wonderful smells in Lazarus' home that day. Martha had served dinner, so the room must have been filled with the aromas of freshly baked bread, and roast lamb or goat, cooked over a smouldering fire. Then Mary approached and broke every social rule in the book, an instant of total scandal! The room filled with a scent so intense, so luxurious and gorgeous that it smothered all else. In a prophetic act of adoration, she anoints Christ and lets down her hair to wipe his feet with it.

Points for reflection

Most of us, if we're honest, react with horror and embarrassment at social impropriety. Judas – the man who will soon betray Jesus – is the one who objects.

Where are you, in this picture?

Who do you feel closest to; Mary? Judas? Martha, Mary's sister? Or one of the other guests?

What would you say, or do?

We know what events will follow and can place Mary's actions in context. Hunt your home for the most beautiful scent you can find (perfume or aftershave poured onto a cotton pad or tissue; a flower, maybe even food) and place it beside a picture of Christ, or a Bible. Take time to enjoy the scent in the presence of Christ, who loves you.

◆ Creator of all, Sustainer of all, Saviour of all, Your glory and majesty are beyond our understanding, Your power too awesome to behold. And yet your love enfolds us as a gentle breeze. Saviour of all, Sustainer of all, Creator of all, We bless your holy name. Amen.⁴

⁴ www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Praise.htm

Tuesday of Holy Week

Readings: Isaiah 49:1–7

I Corinthians 1:18–31

Jesus speaks about his death;

John 12:20–36



I once had a conversation with a lady, a lifelong church goer, who attended church faithfully but admitted that she was still waiting to hear from God. She remained ever hopeful. In today's reading, Jesus is speaking and revealing his fears, and explaining what is to come.

“Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder.’

The thunder – the voice of Almighty God – was for the crowd's benefit. Some heard it as the voice of an angel. And many were clearly confused, hence the further questions in the passage. Yet someone heard Jesus' words for what they truly were, and recorded them for us in the passage we read today. He gave us the reassurance that we are children of light if we believe in the light, a comforting thought in times when we may feel lonely.

Points for reflection

God speaks to us each in a language that we can understand. For some, this will be loud and crystal clear; for some, an image may form; another may hear a whisper, as gentle as a feather.

How do you listen to God?

How do you feel that God speaks to you?

What can you do to make more room for listening and hearing God in your life?



The sound of thunder can be awesome! Or frightening. Distant rumbles, accompanied by falling rain, can even be comforting. 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.⁵

⁵ www.living-prayers.com/topics/listening_prayer.html

Wednesday of Holy Week

Readings: Isaiah 50:4–9a

Hebrews 12:1–3

Jesus foretells his betrayal;

John 13:21–32



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

Points for reflection

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.

◆ God of mercy, we acknowledge that we are all sinners. We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said and done, and are mindful of all that we have failed to do. For the sake of Jesus, who died for us, forgive us all that is past, and help us to live each day in the light of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Maunder Thursday

Readings: Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14

Corinthians 11:23–26

John 13:1–17, 31b–35

Judas has left the building, and no one suspects what is to come. How puzzling Jesus' words must have seemed to them at that point;

“Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him...Little children, I am with you only a little longer’...Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”



The disciples had left their families and had spent over three years following Jesus as he roamed the land. To be told that he would be leaving them would have been confusing, shocking and worrying; the disciples are told not to travel. We can empathise, as we sit in our homes with normal life suspended, in a state of bewilderment; and yet we can cling to the words of Jesus we know so well. *‘Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.’*

Points for reflection

After all the miracles, signs, teaching and preaching, Jesus one instruction was to show love. It's not easy, when we are in isolation or separated from the people we care for and about. We must think creatively.



Reflect on the past few weeks. What have others done for you, or have you heard about, that brought a moment of joy, comfort or consolation?

How can you express love to another, within the understandable limits of your current situation?

Express your love for someone in the best way that you can. Be creative! Make a phone call, write a letter or card. Arrange to watch a movie 'together', chatting through it on the phone or online. Read the same book as your friend, and compare notes at a later date, or by email. Take photos, write a poem, sing to a neighbour over the garden fence. We are children of a creative, loving God!

◆O God, protect those whom we love and who are separated from us. Guide them when they are uncertain, comfort them when they are lonely or afraid, and bless them with the warmth of your presence. Thank you that neither space nor time can cut us off from the love we have in each other. Amen.

Good Friday

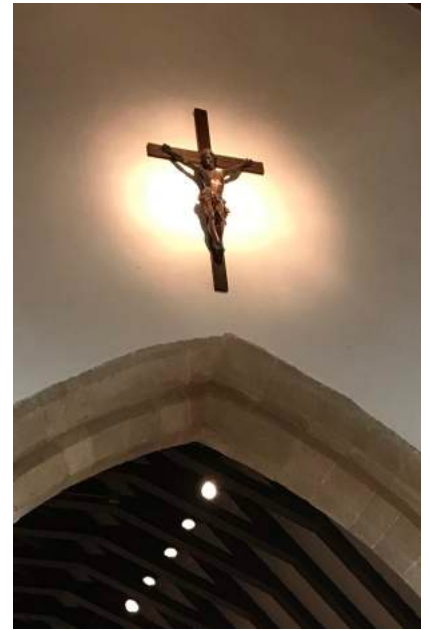
Readings: Isaiah 52:13–end of ch. 53

Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:7–9

John 18:1–end of ch. 19

Today's reading of the Passion encompasses all that is most holy and precious to us. Jesus is arrested, beaten, and crucified.

'Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ...it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."



The sign was so much more than a simple label to identify Christ – or, indeed, a deterrent to others to make such bold claims. Written in Hebrew (or Aramaic), the local language, the community would have been able to read it. Greek was almost universal, as English is to us today, and Latin was the language of the Roman Empire. The sign proclaims the truth to all nations; Jesus is Israel's Messiah to all the world.⁶

Points for reflection

Jesus	Ye-ho-sjoe-a
of Nazareth	Ha-na-zoe-rai
the King	Wa-melek
of the Jews	Ha-je-hoe-diem



Look at the first four letters of the sign's Hebrew translation... 'YHWH'. When Moses asked God for a name to take to the Israelites, God replied 'I am' (Exodus 3:14); 'YHWH', or Yahweh. What Pilate had written, he had written - and he wasn't willing to change it.

Today, join with services broadcast on TV or online. Take time to ponder over today's readings, and pray as you feel moved by the Spirit. Ensure you look after yourself, call a friend, or the church office number if you'd like to talk to clergy.

◆ Lord, I realise that what I see of your love is only the beginning. One drop from the whole ocean. And, like the sea, moving, surging. All-embracing. Seeking to surround me, not to overwhelm, to drown, but to hold me, buoy me up. A love with room to spare. No rejections. No high-tide mark of rubbish, pushed up and thrown aside. I wish Judas could have known that. I wish that somehow in his own agony in the garden, so different, Lord, from yours, so like to mine, he could have reached out from the depths of his despair and felt your hand. There's nothing I can do about that. I leave it with you, Lord, as I leave so much. You've got strong hands.⁷

⁶ Tom Wright, John for Everyone Pt. 2: SPCK (2002), p.126.

⁷ Eddie Askew, in Angela Ashwin (ed), The Book of a Thousand Prayers: Zondervan (1996) p.337

Saturday Easter Eve

Readings: Job 14:1–14
Matthew 27:57–end
The Burial of Jesus:
John 19:38–end

Jesus is taken from the cross, anointed with spices and wrapped in linen cloth.

'In the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.'



In 1879 in the village of Knock, Co. Mayo, the community witnessed a vision of Mary, Joseph, St John, angels and Jesus Christ in the form of the Lamb of God. The picture, above, is the central portion of the enormous mosaic in Knock Basilica, showing the Lamb beside a cross on a plain altar, surrounded by angels. This was apparently visible for around two hours, as the village stood in the pouring rain, looking on.⁸ When I visited Knock, (now a large complex and tourist attraction) I didn't expect to feel so deeply moved.

Points for reflection

The disciples had little warning before Jesus was taken so brutally from them and their loss must have hit them hard. It's common for a person who has died to be seen or heard by their loved ones. Whether this is physical, spiritual, or imagined is immaterial; such an event provides a much needed sense of connection, eliciting a whole range of emotions.

Place yourself in the position of the disciples, seeking closure following deep tragedy.

How does this compare to our understanding, safe in the knowledge that resurrection joy is to come?

Today is a day of waiting, of quiet anticipation. Time spent in this liminal state can be healing, restorative, and inspiring, if we embrace it. Try taking off your watch and find something to do that is an enjoyable 'time filler', such as crochet, a jigsaw, sudoku, baking or gardening.

◆ Dear Lord, may I realize afresh today what Your death and resurrection mean for me. Forgiveness, freedom, and the ability to walk with You through this fallen world into eternity. May I always find my satisfaction in You and Your willingness to offer Yourself to me. In Jesus' name. Amen.⁹

⁸ www.knockshrine.ie

⁹ Rachel Olsen, www.womansday.com/life/g26399295/easter-prayers/?slide=21

Easter Day

Readings: Acts 10:34–43

Colossians 3:1–4

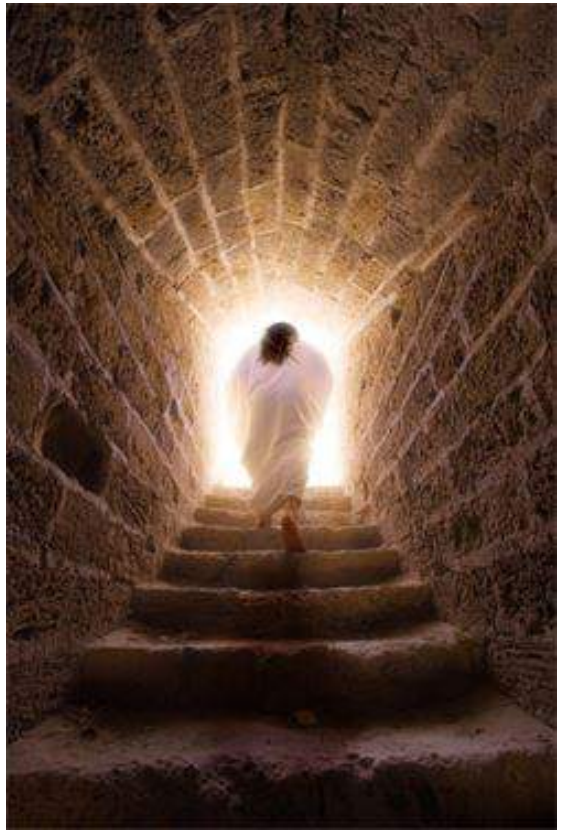
The Resurrection of Jesus:

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!



Points for reflection

There is so much to learn from the precious few verses printed above. Know that, as you pause to reflect today, you are in the company of millions of Christians worldwide.

If you're able, sit in your garden or sit where you can see a garden, park or green space; place a vase of flowers near you, or focus on this cross smothered in fresh flowers. Ponder over these questions:

*How would you react if you arrived at the tomb?
Jesus called Mary by her name. What does it mean to you, to know that He also calls **you** by name?
What does the resurrection of Christ mean to you?
How does this shape your life?*

This Holy Week may have felt strange as we have journeyed in a state of separation. Just for today, rejoice that we are united in celebration of the resurrection of our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ.

Easter Day prayers

God of the open garden,
we have found you and long to hold you fast.
But you refuse our clinging need,
eluding the love that would bind
and possess you,
sending us out
beyond the bounds of our feeble knowing.
Rapt in our joy and desire,
we cannot interpret you:
you have gone from us again,
moving into morning, moving into light.
In your great love,
wait for us where you have sent us,
Go ahead of us,
be there to meet us,
risen, released into your world.¹⁰



*Christ, you are risen
from the dead.
We are risen with you.
May our life never deny
This eternal life,
this peace and hope
and joy.
Praise and glory to
the God of life
who is stronger
than all kinds of death.
Amen.*

BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

By his great mercy he 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!



May the light of Christ, rising in glory, scatter the darkness of your hearts and minds; and may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, rest upon you and those you love and pray for, and be with you always.

Compiled by Revd Sally Prendergast

¹⁰ All prayers on this page from Angela Ashwin (ed), *The Book of a Thousand Prayers*: Zondervan (1996), p. 347–352

