

Reflections & Prayers for Sunday
21st March 2021
Passiontide begins



The joy of Easter is almost here, but before that we must accompany Jesus in his Passion. Traditionally the final two weeks of Lent are used as preparation for the sorrowful events of the Easter drama. It is a mini 'season within a season', a period of time to focus more and more on the Passion and death of Jesus and so accompany him on his way to Calvary.

"One of the old traditions that typically began with this day is the covering, or veiling, of images in the church building. All the statues, icons, even crucifixes, would have some sort of shroud or veil obscuring them. In past days where church buildings were beautifully and vividly decked with visual splendour, this would have been a stark sight to behold. On one level this tradition is easy to understand as an anticipation of the starkness of Holy Week: the mourning of Christ's death on account of our sins, the injustice of his conviction, is aptly expressed in the covering of images that normally bring us joy."*

The good news is that Passiontide does not have the last say, and this sombre period of preparation ends quickly so that our hearts can rejoice in the beauty of Christ's resurrection.

* <https://saint-aelfric-customary.org/tag/passiontide/>

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Readings for this Sunday

You may want to find your Bible and read the lessons set for this week:

Jeremiah 31: 31-34 “I will make a new covenant...”

Hebrews 5: 5-10 “Christ did not glorify himself

John 12: 20-33 “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”

Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

Jesus Speaks about His Death

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 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. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Reflection from the Revd Tim Lomax

Several weeks ago we were told by the Prime Minister that there was light at the end of the tunnel, that as the vaccination programme is rolled out we will begin to emerge from the pandemic bit by bit. He even gave an indication of dates as to when this might happen.

And in the meantime, there was to be more weeks of lockdown, closed businesses, separation from friends and family. A further time of difficulty before things improve.

This mirrors what we see in the gospel reading today.

In the chapters before today's gospel passage, the writer John's accounts of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the events around Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, hint at the future glory of Jesus in the resurrection. That hope-filled day in the future.

And yet, in today's section of scripture John highlights **how** Christ, the Son of Man will be glorified, what will come before the resurrection, in the days preceding this.

John records how Christ wants his disciples, the Greeks that get a mention and the crowd to face up to the awful events ahead.

And it doesn't make for easy reading. It involves falling to the earth and dying, losing life, serving, and following. The glorious hope of the resurrection is preceded by sacrifice, pain and death. In fact more than this - the glorious hope of the resurrection grows within the sacrifice and death of Christ.

John writes 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.'

It is a wonderful paradox written into the DNA of creation. A seed needs to fall to the ground and cease being a seed in order for new life to grow.

The decay and bleakness of Autumn and Winter must come before the warmth, sunshine, rain and growth of Spring and Summer.

It is the death-defeating principle woven into God's world. Life grows in suffering and death. Christ died so that we can live.

I grew up in Stoke-on-Trent, the Potteries. My dad worked in pottery factories and I spent lots of time in the factories. Health and Safety wouldn't allow it now, but back then in the

80s, you could walk through a kiln, climb on a conveyor belt or try one of the cigarettes in the staff room without anyone batting an eye lid!

I loved finding out from my dad how pottery was made and it never ceased to amaze me how the brittle, fragile plates and cups that had been pressed from clay, came out from the ceramic kilns so beautiful and strong after being fired at around 1200 degrees Celsius.

Pottery quite literally goes through the furnace to complete the production process.

The prophet Isaiah painted a picture of the life-giving process or work of art that God is undertaking with each of us...

“...we are the clay, and you are our potter, we are all the work of your hand.” (recorded in Isaiah chapter 64 v 8).

And I can vividly picture what the clay must go through to be the work of God’s hand. It is the intense heat of the kiln that changes the appearance and properties of the pottery.

To go back to Saint John’s writing the intense heat of the potters process is the equivalent of falling to the earth and dying, the losing of life, the serving, and following seen in Christ and all those who with him, know the glory of everlasting life.

In Susan Howatch’s Novel ‘Glittering Images ’the sculptor Harriet March says this of her work -

‘No matter how much the mess and distortion make you want to despair, you can’t abandon the work because you’re chained to the bloody thing. It’s absolutely woven into your soul, and you know you can never rest until you’ve brought truth out of all the distortion, and beauty out of all the mess.

But it’s agony, agony, agony whilst simultaneously being the most wonderful and rewarding experience in the world. And that’s the creative process so few people understand.

It involves an insane sort of hope and an indestructible sort of love.

You can’t create without waste and mess and pure undiluted slog.

You can’t create without pain, it’s all part of the process, it’s in the nature of things.’

That’s a sculptor speaking. But it could be me or you talking about life, couldn’t it?

Or it could be an amazing description of the Christian faith - an insane sort of hope - an indestructible sort of love, and it could also be God talking about his grace at work in the world.

Over the years I have become increasingly aware that healing follows the wounds. In fact more than this, healing is found in wounds - truth out of distortion, beauty out of mess, new life through pain - it's in the nature of things.

It's God's plan for healing all creation in Christ.

In Jesus we have an insane sort of hope, an indestructible sort of love at work in our wounds as individuals, as churches, communities, towns, cities and nations.

This insane hope and indestructible love is growing in the wounds inflicted by the pandemic - the isolation, separation, loss of income, loss of work, disrupted relationships, interrupted education, and of course Zoom meetings!

Be assured of Christ's love and hope today - in whatever pain, distortion and mess you are dealing with at the moment - as every single one of us is - despite our pretence or the way we put on a brave face.

I would like to remind us too that God's plan to save the world is a creative process as is our part in it now.

Christ's words recorded by John show that you can't create without waste, mess and pure undiluted slog.

You can't create new life without pain.

A seed must fall, if it is to bear fruit.

What seeds are falling or have fallen in our own lives, in our families, in our network of friends, in our places of work, in this church?

Be encouraged - Christ's creative process of new life is at work for good in all these things and I pray you will have the eyes and heart to see it today.

And at this time of emerging and recovering from the pandemic in the months ahead, what other seeds within the life of this church, need to fall into the earth in order to bear fruit?

I'd encourage you to think and pray about it in the days and weeks ahead and to talk about it gently with one another and as a PCC.

During Holy week the senior staff of the diocese and others are hosting a number of short retreats. Just a couple of hours - enabling us to come away and rest a while with Christ.

The first hour involves a guided reflection inspired by the account of Jesus feeding the 5000, which explores how God is shaping us at this time. For the second hour you can book onto an hour long Zoom with others to talk and pray together about the Bible passage. You can find further details on the diocesan website.

Thinking, talking and praying about these things will help us to have the courage to face what needs to fall to the ground and die in the life of the church in the new and challenging world that is emerging, so that the new life and creativity of Christ can grow, flourish and bear fruit that will last.

So that we can see the hand of God the potter in the uncomfortable things we are experiencing in our lives at this time.

The grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die to bear much fruit. And I, says Jesus, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

This new life that Jesus speaks about, can only grow in the wounds. And it is through the agonising creative process of God's purposes that we find the certain hope and healing of the resurrection, and fullness of life in Christ.

That is the insane hope and indestructible love of God. Amen.

Prayers

The Collect for Passion Sunday

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

A prayer concerning the Coronavirus

God of compassion,
be close to those who are ill, afraid or in isolation.

in their loneliness, be their consolation;
in their anxiety, be their hope;
in their darkness, be their light;
through him who suffered alone on the cross,
but reigns with you in glory,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

May Christ, who bore our sins on the cross,
set us free to serve him with joy. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Church of England
Monday	The Diocese of the Bahamas and The Turks and Caicos Islands – The Church in the Province of the West Indies
Tuesday	The Diocese of Bakuru - The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Wednesday	The Diocese of Ballarat – The Anglican Church of Australia
Thursday	The Diocese of Bangor – The Church in Wales
Friday	The Diocese of Banks & Torres - The Anglican Church of Melanesia
Saturday	The Diocese of Barbados – The Church in the Province of the West Indies

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	Parish of Little Gaddesden (Deanery of Berkhamsted)
Monday	Parish of Nettleden (Deanery of Berkhamsted)
Tuesday	Parish of Northchurch (Deanery of Berkhamsted)
Wednesday	Parish of Potten End, Holy Trinity (Deanery of Berkhamsted)
Thursday	Parish of Sunnyside, St Michael and All Angels (Deanery of Berkhamsted)
Friday	Parish of Tring, Team Parish (Deanery of Berkhamsted)
Saturday	Parish of Wigginton (Deanery of Berkhamsted)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Fovant Close, Gordon's Walk
Monday	Gorselands, Grange Court Road
Tuesday	Green Lane Close, Greenway
Wednesday	Grove Avenue, Grove Road

Thursday Hadleigh Court, Hammondswick
Friday Hatching Green, Hatching Green Close
Saturday Hawsley Road, Hawthorn Close

The Sick:

Amy, Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Enid, Chris, Sophie and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Janet Carruthers

On their year's mind:

Joan Currant, John Wellstead, Jessie Hawkins, Jessop Hall, Iris Lockett, Grace Crawley, Arthur Canfor, Christine Farenden

LENT WEEK 5: from our Lent@Home offering - Our Baptismal Covenant

Week beginning 21st March – *find a shell*

Historically, the season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for the sacrament of Holy Baptism. Jesus began his ministry after his baptism.



Read the story of Jesus Baptism - Mark 1:4-11.

Hold the shell. The shell is a symbol of baptism - often a shell is used to pour the water over the person to be baptized. Do you remember your baptism? What have others told you about your baptism? What does being baptized mean to you? What difference does your baptism make in your life day to day? How are you living out the promises made at your Baptism? The shell is also a symbol of pilgrimage Where are you on your pilgrimage of faith (just starting out, at a crossroads, walking alone or with others)?

Prayer: Creator God, you are the source of all life and motivation. May we journey in faith and love, rejoicing and eager to serve you. Grant us a glimpse of your glory as we seek to follow you – the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

[Church at home:](#)

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).