

HOLY WEEK

THE WAY BETWEEN



CONTENTS

Introduction.

Palm Sunday - John 12:13 - *Hosanna!*

Monday - John 13:4 - *He got up.*

Tuesday - John 13:12 - *Return to the table.*

Wednesday - John 15:4 - *Abide.*

Maundy Thursday - John 17:21 - *Be one.*

Good Friday - John 19:30 - *Finished.*

Holy Saturday - John 19:40 - *Burial custom.*

Easter Sunday - John 20:19 - *Risen.*

Credits.

INTRODUCTION

THE WAY BETWEEN

Several years ago, walking through a local village, I discovered a path. It was in a quiet out of the way spot, with no signs to either say it was a public footpath or private property, but it was very clearly a path. It was overgrown and neglected, it didn't look like it had been walked by many, it wasn't clear who owned it, but there it was, and I began to walk...

This year Holy Week offers us a very different path and God invites us to walk it. We are in lockdown, we are in the world but not of it, we cannot meet together physically to pray, to confess, to lament, to sing, or even to be silent - it feels very strange and uncomfortable.

We are in the world but not of it; does that sound familiar? It should, of course, because on the night before his death, in John chapter seventeen, Jesus prays for his Disciples "they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" he says. For those who follow Jesus there is more to the world than we can see, we are part of the world, we often walk its streets, fill its churches, live its life, but we know there is more, we know we belong to God. This in-between place, in the world but not of it, has always been our place, now we are called to see it in a new way. We are called to walk the way between, to look for signs and symbols, to listen for voices and songs, to encounter the one whose way this is.

This week we reflect on verses from John's Gospel as God invites us on a journey. Holy Week is a path we have walked many times, in different ways we have found our way through, it has often been costly and painful, but we have walked it. This year the path has not been walked, it is unfamiliar ground, but it is in front of us, so let us begin to walk...

PALM SUNDAY

HOSANNA

.....
John 12: 13 *"They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"*

It's easier to shout "Hosanna" when you are in a crowd of people, it's easier to shout "Hosanna" when everything is going well, but what about now? What about today? The story of the triumphal entry is great, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a Donkey and the crowds celebrate! In John 11: 56 people are looking for Jesus, wondering if he is coming to the festival in Jerusalem, then in John 12 he does, and they greet him extravagantly! They are welcoming their expected national, political Messiah, who will free them from the Roman occupation, who will restore Israel, but of course Jesus challenges all their notions of the Messiah - one of peace and hope, not war and violence! Jesus allows them this moment to celebrate, to acclaim him, when so often before he has forbidden it! Now is the time to see the Messiah as he rides into the city, almost like he says "I am here, whatever comes, and I am not leaving: come and meet your Messiah".

Where do we begin our journey through Holy Week? Look at John 12:13 They "went out to meet him", they went out of their way, they made an effort to meet Jesus and he met them. In these strange times God is among us, calling us to see the Messiah, the one who will not leave us, or forget us. Yet we need to do something - be prepared to meet him, go out of our way to meet him. As Holy Week begins, let's do that.

*They were all going.
Friends, neighbours, family,
cutting down branches
scouting the best spot.
But not me,
I'll wait here.
I can see from a distance.
Enough to catch the gist anyway.
One more parade,
one more man,
one more hope,
I've seen it all before,
so I'll wait here.
Maybe...
Well, would it hurt?
Just one look?
Because, honestly this one is different,
no warhorse,
no military,
just a man on a donkey.
No violence,
but starting a revolution.
Peace.
That's the revolution.
In the midst of all the mess of the world, peace.
So, I'll get up,
wash my face,
brush my hair,
and meet him myself.
And by the way,
there's room for you too.*

Think:

1. What makes you shout Hosanna today?
2. What kind of Messiah is Jesus?
3. How can you make space to meet Jesus today?

Pray:

*Hosanna,
blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Gracious God, we remember
how you rode into Jerusalem so
many years ago,
defying all expectations,
and offering a
glimpse into a new world.
Give us a fresh vision
of that world,
a world of peace,
hope and love.
In our towns,
our villages
and our cities
may we know your presence
and greet you as our Messiah. AMEN.*



MONDAY

HE GOT UP

.....
John 13:4 *"He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist"*

This is a parable in action rather than teaching through story. Jesus does something, performs an action, in order to show the disciples how to 'be'.

First, Jesus gets up - he arose - a fascinating appetiser for what is to follow... There is always in John's Gospel a pointer to, a glimpse of, the divinity of Jesus, the reality of the incarnation and the promise of what is to come.

Secondly, and the main thing for our walk during this week, Jesus takes off the towel. He laid aside the towel. What are we laying aside? This year has been described as the 'Lentiest Lent ever'. We certainly have laid aside more than before and more than we ever expected. I wonder, what have we let go of in this time? Some of the things we have let go of have been hard: being together, worship and fellowship, seeing family and visiting friends, even popping out for a coffee or a meal. Isolation has certainly felt like we are in a wilderness, an in-between place. But in between means from one into another and sometimes that can be a positive and creative space.

At this time of year we would usually be out and about seeing fields starting to show signs of life and growth... but sometimes some fields are left to grow over, to go to grass for a year... They

are fallow. They are left to one side for a time in order to replenish, rest, and receive nutrients. An odd thing to say about a field? But that is part of the in between space for us. We have an opportunity to pause, to look at our practices with fresh perspective, and to prepare for what is to come next.

And what comes next? We will have to get up, to rise, as we are already seeking to respond to the challenges around us in these days of isolation. But beyond this strange new world we live in, we are called to rise and proclaim the work of Christ in our lives and the world. We hear the phrase 'Let go and Let God'. How will we put into action the 'being' of Jesus? What will we let go of in order to fully respond?

Think:

1. What are you holding on to?
2. What do you need to let go of?
3. What difference will that make?



Pray:

Dear God, guide me.

Dear God, lead me.

Dear God, show me your way.

AMEN.

Do:

Sort some things to let go of; maybe to take to a Charity shop*/ Foodbank donation point. (*when safe!).

TUESDAY

RETURN TO THE TABLE

.....
John 13:12 *"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to the table"*

I was never picked first for sports, or for anything else. I was always last, and so I didn't have to wait for the game to begin once I had been chosen, it started straight away. I didn't have the time of waiting, watching everything falling into place.

As I read this part of scripture, I wondered about the disciples whose feet were washed first. How long did they have to wait? Did they become impatient? Or, perhaps, did they sit and rest in the presence of their Lord?



At the heart of the words John writes there is an invitation to be present at the table of the Lord, to know His hospitality, His grace and to simply rest in His presence. Holy Week is an opportunity for us to do the same, and perhaps even more so this year as some distractions have been taken away.

Don't spend this time wondering when it will all begin, when everything will start. Spend time simply resting in the presence of God, listen for his voice, know his touch. Be refreshed.

When Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples he got up and returned to the table, to the place of community, of fellowship and grace. When the busyness was over, he returned to the table. As we travel through Holy Week, as the busyness is stopped, make time to return to the table, to be in fellowship with God, and know the refreshment of God's grace.

Think:

1. What is distracting you from God at the moment?
2. What do you need to do to enable you to rest in the Lord's presence?
3. What are you waiting for as you rest in God?

Pray:

Loving God, thank you for opening your table, inviting me to come and to rest. Help me to put aside all that distracts, and simply be fed by you. AMEN.

Do:

Today, create space to sit and be still, to rest in the presence of the Lord, for even in our 'isolation'; there is noise and activity.



WEDNESDAY

ABIDE

John 15:4 *"Abide in me"*

There is a lot in that word 'abide', it is often translated as 'remain' but that never feels quite right. Remain feels too trivial, too simple, too cheap. Abide feels deep and mysterious and embracing. When Jesus says abide in me it feels like this is about trusting all that we are to God, releasing ourselves to God because that is where life and fruitfulness is to be found.

When Jesus calls his Disciples to abide in him, he has of course, been using the image of the vine, "I am the vine and you are the branches - abide in me and you will bear fruit" he says. In the vine life flows through the sap, which feeds and nourishes the branches and allows fruit to grow. Without the sap the branch is just a branch, it will not bear fruit and it will not know the life of the vine.

The call 'abide in me' is about finding our place, as those who are loved by God, honoured by God, and called by God, to bear fruit in the world. Bearing fruit is not a burden, rather it is the natural result of the life of God flowing into us, which means we can't do anything other than bear fruit!

Remember though who first heard these words of Jesus, a group of disciples sat around a table, for whom the world is about to fall apart. Within twenty-four hours they will have watched as Jesus is betrayed, tortured and executed. They will struggle to know what

to do or where to go. They will feel the world has shifted under their feet - and yet it is to these disciples that Jesus says, 'abide in me' - whatever happens, wherever you go, when you fail and when you succeed abide in me and whether you realise it or not, whether you are ready for it or not, you will bear fruit!

Our world has changed, and our Holy Week has changed and it is easy to shrink away from everything - to curl up until it all goes away. But God still calls us to abide in him, to rest all we are, to rest our whole being in God - in the true vine, the one who is the source of life and goodness, the one who will hem us in with grace, and in whom we will bear fruit that transforms a broken world.

Think:

1. How do you feel about the world today?
2. Where is God in all the mess?
3. What does it mean to abide in God today?

Pray:

*Loving God,
you are the source of all life
you are the source of all goodness
you are the source of all hope
open my eyes today
that I might find in you a home
and abide in your love. AMEN.*



Do:

Find a way to be a fruitful witness to the love of Christ today.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

BE ONE

John 17:21 *"That they may be one..."*

Here is the prayer of our Great High Priest. Here Jesus is emphasising his role as Lord, as Master, as Teacher, as Saviour. His prayer is a conversation between himself and God asking that God will keep all who belong to him holy as they exist in the world. He prays too that their love for one another may reflect the unity of will and purpose that exists between God and himself. This is a prayer of dedication, of consecration, of sanctification. This is a prayer by which we may know and see God working through us.

Here Jesus has turned his gaze from Earth to Heaven, here the hour of the passion is in reach. This is a threshold moment, an in-between space. In this space, Jesus prays that the disciples may be so dedicated to the task, and so sanctified by the truth about God that he has taught them, that they may be able to fulfil their vocation as his apostles as completely as he fulfils his vocation as the son of God. The root word of dedicate or consecrate in this setting means not only 'to make holy', but 'to dedicate what is already holy'. In this search for holiness, what is it that makes the difference? What is it that will enable us to accomplish the task set before us? What still unites us?

The thing that unites us is love. So what does this love look like? What might this dedicated unity of purpose look like?

It is what Jesus comes to do. It looks like Jesus is being the Good Shepherd of the flock; not for a nation alone but to gather together all the children of God. The community of the Gospel makes plain that the purpose of unity is that we are reliant upon one another as we are ultimately reliant upon God. This community relies on the gift of glory, mutually experienced as an imitation of the divine life, so that our lives are modelled on God.

Think:

1. In John we see a new commandment: "that you love one another as I have loved you". How will you show love to others today?
2. What unites you with other Christians?
3. How can we be the church in these strange times?

Pray:

Eternal father, giver of light and grace, we have wounded your love, and marred your image in us. We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past; and lead us out from darkness to walk as children of light. AMEN.



Do:

On this night, Jesus prayed that the disciples might be one. spend some time praying for the unity of the Christian church. *Lord, Hear us, Lord unite us.*

GOOD FRIDAY

FINISHED

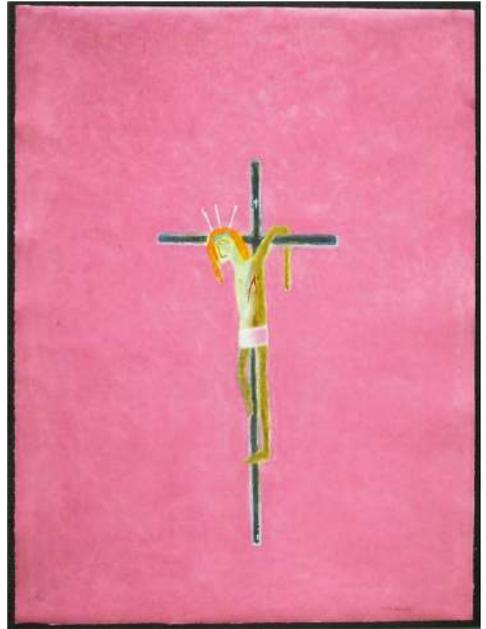
John 19: 30 "It is finished"

*They climbed the hill,
Following their Lord,
Who once rode to cheers,
Now the crowd jeers.*

*And as they watch,
Their hopes begin to ebb.
His promise of life and love,
Seem far away from this.*

*Nailed on a cross,
His life begins to fade,
His friends cry 'why'
Why must the Lord die?*

*'It is finished' is his cry,
and they who crowd around,
Do not know that new life will dawn
on the third day.*



The disciples see pain and suffering, humiliation and ridicule poured out on their Lord, their friend. They know only that he is taken to the cross and there he is put to death. There is nothing good that they can see, only the ending of what has been the

most exciting and challenging time of their lives. All this is coming to an end, 'yes' they say it is truly finished. But as we read this story again we know that this ending is actually a beginning. New life is dawning, it will come. But there is a time to wait.

In a sense, our life now is held in this time of transition, an in-between-ness. We are waiting for the time when we can gather again to sing the great songs of faith, to shout the praises of our Lord. For now, we have to wait. As we wait, we give thanks to God for this day, which we may not understand or be able to put into words, we simply know that this ending is a new beginning.

Think:

1. Do you find it hard to wait?
2. What are you carrying on the way?
3. Do you take time each day to give thanks to God?

Pray:

Loving God, I cannot put into words my thanks for all you have done. I praise you for your great love which led you to send Jesus to die for me. I long to be part of your new beginning, that I might come to you and know your love daily. AMEN.

Do:

Make a list of the things you want to give thanks for.
Make time to say thank you to God today.

HOLY SATURDAY

BURIAL CUSTOMS

John 19:40 *"They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews"*

After all of the excitement of the week, after the anti-climax of the day before, in the midst of the grief and numbness, certain duties and rituals must be observed. Here, in the ordinary things of life we are led to transformation. Here is the challenge: don't give up on the ordinary...

Trying to keep some semblance of normality in this new reality is certainly very current for us in these strange times. What are the things that we are holding onto in order to make sense of our day-to-day routine? I wonder what routines and rituals we can establish in order to keep ourselves grounded, hopeful even, in the midst of this?

In the verse from John's Gospel, we see Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus taking an enormous quantity of spices to give Jesus a respectful, devout burial in a new, pure, unpolluted tomb. Even in the strange new reality they exist in, they seek to ensure that the proper rites and rituals are observed and that Jesus is buried in such a way as to demonstrate the respect and honour in which Jesus was held. These faithful disciples choose life, and all the complicated and messy, but necessary, parts of living it, even in the situation in which they find themselves.

They choose life in the midst of, in the very face of, death and darkness. They look to the horizon, to the new day.

Think:

1. What are the everyday things you can do to sustain your faith in the weeks ahead?
2. What are you grieving?
3. How can you be ready for the light on the horizon?

Pray:

Eternal God, may we shine with the brightness of your one true light: set us aflame with the fire of your love, and bring us to the radiance of your heavenly glory. May the light of Christ, rising in glory, banish all darkness from our hearts and minds. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN.

Do:

Light a candle - a small one in a dimly lit/dark room - and see how, even as your eyes adjust, the darkness is pushed to the edges. Pray for those who are struggling with grief, and fear and hopelessness. Pray that they may know the warmth and light of the presence of God in their midst.



EASTER SUNDAY

RISEN

.....

John 20: 19 *"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"*

It had been a hard few days for the disciples. They had sat with Jesus to eat, allowed him to wash their feet, listened to him speak, but then it all seemed to fall apart. Within a few hours Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and the next day nailed to a cross like a criminal. Then he was dead and sealed in a tomb - done, finished, over.

Sunday comes with unexpected news - the stone has been moved from the tomb. Mary told Peter, and he and the beloved disciple ran to the tomb. Finding it empty, they saw the linen strips used to wrap Jesus' body, and they believed!



But the next time we meet them they are locked away together in fear of the outside world - they saw the empty tomb, they believed, but "what now?" they wonder "what do we do? What does all this mean? What difference does it make?" While they are wondering all that with the doors locked, Jesus stands among them! "Peace be with you" he says.

Jesus, risen from the dead stands among his friends, victorious over death, victorious over all the limitations that human life would try to impose - fear, hopelessness, and locked doors! Jesus stands among his people and the world will never be the same! Will everything be easy now? Will everything be ok? Will everyone see the wonder of the resurrection and embrace the love that God has for them? No. Life will still have its challenges, there will be hard times ahead, questions and doubts and fears may still arise, but in all of that the risen Christ - by some miracle of grace - speaks his words of peace.

When Jesus sat with his disciples at supper a few days earlier he said "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid". Now in this locked room Jesus stands among his people and says "peace be with you" the fulfilment of that promise - peace not as the world gives, peace which breaks down barriers and ignores locked doors! A peace which cannot be defeated!

This is a strange Easter, when we are behind our own locked doors, but Christ still offers his peace to us! Locked doors and closed church buildings will not hinder the risen Christ!

Let us be open to know the power, the glory, the peace of the resurrection today and every day!

*Thine be the glory,
Risen, conqu'ring Son;
Endless is the victory,
Thou o'er death hast won;*

Endless is the victory! Today, tomorrow - endless! In lockdown and beyond - endless! In life and in death - endless! The risen, victorious, Jesus stands among us.



Think:

1. Where do you see hope today?
2. Where do you see peace today?
3. Where do you see love today?

Pray:

Holy God,
risen and victorious
stand among us we pray
chase away our fears
and bring us your peace
Amen.

Do: Look for a sign of the risen Christ breaking through our lockdown today - maybe something in your garden, maybe some good news, maybe some momentary realisation of the presence of the Prince of Peace in our life

HE IS RISEN!

HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!



CREDITS

Written by: R Byass. G Edwards. S Edwards.

Some material copyright TMCP - The Methodist Church.
Methodist Modern Art Collection (TMCP)

unsplash.com

hubblesite.org

Lent.Holy Week.Easter - Church House Publishing - Church of England.

Please ask before reproducing.

Thanks for joining in!