

Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone



Readings and Reflections for use at home

Holy Week

Monday 6 April to Saturday 11 April 2020

Welcome to our Readings and Reflections for Holy Week.

Over the next six days, we will explore the things Jesus did in the build up to the cross. Each day, there is at least one reading and a short reflection and prayer response.

You are not alone on this journey to the cross. Jesus goes with you, and your church friends are walking alongside you.

May God bless and guide every step you take, and look forward in hope to the Easter edition when Jesus bursts into new life.

God bless you and all your loved ones.

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A Prayer of Daily Preparation

True and humble King,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant me the faith to follow in your footsteps,
this Holy Week, and be found beside you,
on Good Friday, at the foot of the Cross.
It is a journey of love and sacrifice,
that leads to joy and hope.
Amen.

Readings and Reflections for use at home in Holy Week

MONDAY - Jesus turned over the tables

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, 'It is written,

“My house shall be called a house of prayer”;
but you are making it a den of robbers.”

Matthew 21:12-13

Jesus has entered the bustling city and is yearning for a time of peace, so he goes to his Father's house - the temple. Instead of sacred stillness, there is noise. It's like a busy marketplace. Doves and pigeons are being sold for sacrifice and coins changed into ones that do not bear the Emperor's image. It's all too much! Too much! Jesus wants everyone to stop what they are doing - to stop and strip back their worship to just the essentials. Which, of course, are God and you, and nothing more.

It feels a very apt reading - and action - for this extraordinary Holy Week. For most of us, the “Stay at Home” regulations have required us to take a fresh look at our daily lives and strip away much of our busyness. Each day, we adjust more and more to this new pace of life, and find we have the space to go deeper into our relationship with God - sensing his presence with us.

Take a moment to be still on this Monday of Holy Week. Reflect on what you have been learning about God - about yourself - and how you might, perhaps, live when we can start again, kinder than before.

TUESDAY - Jesus taught in the temple

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Matthew 22:34-40

Jesus spent much of Holy Week teaching in the temple; offering parting words of advice and guidance to those who have come to listen to him, whilst turning the tables on those who have come to trip him up. This is the most crucial of all his teaching. If you remember nothing else, Jesus is saying, remember these two key laws - write them on your hearts - live by them. Live by them.

Firstly, love the Lord your God with all that you are, all that you can be, with all that you have. Everything that we have - and have had - is God's generous gift to us. If we look around us at the birds and wild animals, gardens and fields, parks and woodlands, we can see God's handiwork and sense the abundance of his love for us, and for all that he has made. How can we respond other than in obedience, love and praise?

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

And resting in him, we feel drawn to live as Jesus did. Our servant King, in Holy Week, shows us what it means to love others as God's children, like ourselves. Pause for a moment to rest in God and ponder these laws.



WEDNESDAY - Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, 'Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.' But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

Matthew 26:6-13

The Last Supper is not the only meal that Jesus ate in Holy Week which we remember. And it's more than a meal, it is an act of worship - a unique and precious one. One which points to who Jesus is, and what he has come into the city to do. The woman's act at the meal table is unexpected and unusual, extravagant and emotional. I can't help smiling when I think of Jesus, sitting there, with sweet smelling myrrh rolling down his face and dripping onto the table. I wonder if his closest friends, the disciples, had to choose between a fit of the giggles and the grumbles. If so, they chose to grumble about the waste, and failed to see the significance of her action. Jesus is going to die. She is preparing him for the grave.

At this turning point in Holy Week, with the cross in view, contemplate what words you would like to say to Jesus. How might you be as heartfelt in your thanks and praise, in your worship and devotion?

THURSDAY - Jesus ate with his friends

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matthew 26:26-30

Memories of some meals last a lifetime. Usually, this is because of who we shared them with and what we were celebrating. It's rarely because of the food that we ate. Jesus and his disciples would have shared in the annual Passover meal on other occasions, but they are not recorded. This one was different. This one was memorable. Memorable for all time because of what Jesus did during the meal. He did something surprising, something unexpected; he gave us a new reason for remembering God's salvation on this Jewish day of remembrance.

He took the Passover bread - flatbread, made without yeast - and broke it - sharing it with his disciples. Just as his Father gave the Israelites a bread-like substance in the wilderness, manna, to satisfy their cravings, Jesus gave us the bread of thanksgiving to feed us till we want no more, as the great Welsh hymn says. To want no more than his self-giving love; a love made real on the cross. He is the bread of life.

As you prepare to break bread at home, say this Jewish prayer of blessing and then, eat and remember Jesus and the meal he gave us. Recall one or more times when it has been really memorable, and why. Give thanks.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe,
who brings forth bread from the earth. **Amen.**

FRIDAY - Jesus sacrificed his life for us

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

Matthew 27:45-51a

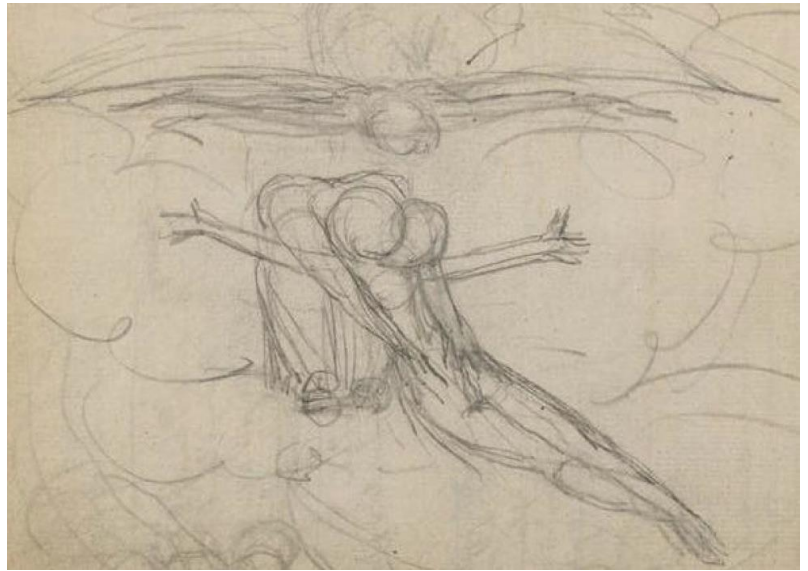
At his baptism in the river Jordan and on the mountain top with his three closest friends, Jesus is revealed as God's Son. From out of a bright cloud, a voice speaks, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' What a powerful and loving affirmation by Jesus' Father. You can feel the glow in Jesus' heart being matched by the bluest of skies, punctuated by the purest white of clouds - a sign of his Father's presence. On Good Friday, the sky matches the mood - it is as black, as threatening, as any thunder storm. It is a sign of the death to come. It hints at God's absence. Is he keeping a safe distance from his Son? If so, it must have been the hardest thing he ever did as a loving parent.

On the cross, Jesus senses his Father's self-isolation. He feels all alone as he does what his Father's wishes; dies to show us how much God loves us and all of his creation. He cries out to his Father in loving desperation. 'Where are you?'

William Blake captures what happens next in a beautiful and poignant sketch of the Holy Trinity on Good Friday as Jesus' body is taken down from the cross.

It is only after Jesus' death that his Father can reply, 'Here I AM.'

Take time to contemplate this image. Ponder where God is for you in dying, death and bereavement. When we are at our lowest and we feel a sense of absence, where is God for us? Where was he for Jesus?



William Blake (1757 - 1827)

SATURDAY - Jesus is laid in his grave

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, when he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

Matthew 27:57-60

You've heard the expression, 'Silent as the grave.' It is a very true saying for the Saturday of Holy Week. Jesus lies dead, his actions are unseen. Yet, God never dies - so, where was his Son on this day of silence? Where would you like him to have been, if not resting in the grave?

Reaching down into the depths of hell to rescue his friend Judas?

Sitting in the paradise of heaven, chatting to the criminal from the cross next to him?

Sharing in a loving reunion with his Father, being renewed by his Spirit, ready for the big surprise on Easter morn?

Where is Jesus today?