

Sunday 2nd April 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Today is Palm Sunday when we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem ahead of that momentous week.

In Matthew the story begins in Chapter 21 where we read of Jesus' instructions to the disciples before his entry into Jerusalem.

Read Matthew 21:1-17

Take a moment to remember the events of Holy Week that followed the entry into Jerusalem. In Matthew it takes until the end of Chapter 27 and we realise how much is packed into that time, possible it was longer than a week but in our church calendar we only allow a week. Below is a brief summary of those chapters and an invitation to listen to two pieces of music which provide a moment for reflection.

Matthew 21 – Entry into Jerusalem, turning the temple, healing and teaching

Matthew 22 – teaching and challenges from the Pharisees and Sadducees

Matthew 23 – more of the same

Matthew 24 – Jesus teaches the disciples

Matthew 25 – parables and explanations

Matthew 26 – the woman with the oil, Judas agrees to betray Jesus, arrangements for Passover, the Last Supper, Gethsemane, betrayal, arrest, High Priests and denial

Music – Listen to Eric Clapton's [Theme for a movie that never happened](#)

Matthew 27 – Pilate, crowd and Barabbas, flogging, scourging, mocking, the walk to the cross, Bandits,

Music – Listen to Vangelis' [Psalmus Ode](#)

Reading Matthew 27:45-56

Reflection Darkness

So much darkness.

There was the physical darkness,
the night in Gethsemane and that strange eclipse at midday
when it seemed the light had left the world forever.

The light that was born at creation,
that light that shone from his eyes,
the light of love itself,
had vanished, vanquished by the power of fear.

There was the darkness in our souls.
The light had vanished from our lives,
we felt bereft, despairing,
an overwhelming sadness surrounded us as we turned away,
our hopes and dreams in tatters.

There was nothing left but darkness.
How do you move forward when you cannot see the path?
How do you put one foot out of bed when there is nothing,
not even a shadow on the wall?

We disappeared, fear taking us backwards.
For days we stayed hidden,
paralysed by the darkness,
even though light had returned to the world
it could not lift the immense sorrow
that seemed to squeeze the life from our hearts.
But we learnt something new,
the light is more powerful than the dark.

It was only a flicker at first, a rumour even,
but a rumour that spread like the sunrise,
a glint here, a glint there and then realisation.
It took us a while but that light relit hope,
and suddenly we could see the way forward
and light and life took us to the future.
Love filled our hearts once more.

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Reflection

Betrayed, denied, abandoned, forsaken – what a week. We can all have bad weeks, and sometimes a period much longer where gradually we feel as if we are sinking and can go no further. It has become known as a ground zero moment. It is a terrible place to be as the world seems to crumple around us. I was recently reminded of how different layers can be like the ever decreasing Russian dolls. As we open and remove the next one it is like taking of a layer, until finally you reach the smallest doll that does not open.

For Jesus, in that week,
the first layer might have been the loss of comfort and security of friends;
the second layer the loss of trust in the judicial system;
the third layer the loss of human dignity as he was stripped and scourged and faced public humiliation;
the fourth layer the loss of trust in God's promise;
the fifth layer the loss of life.

All that remained was the core of his being, that which was, is and will be.

It is a pattern all too familiar in the world around us. It tells of betrayal, denial and a feeling of abandonment and sadly often leads to death. It is often caused by injustice and prejudice fuelled by social media. This is what we are called to stand against

Margaret Silf tells of watching some beautiful sweet peas slowly fade as the petals fell to the ground one by one and then the realisation that when the flower had died in its place a seed head grew – the promise of new life. The seed heads cannot form until the flower had fallen. If we only concentrate on the loss we can become desolate, we must hold onto the hope that new life comes and the essence of what has been is never lost.

For people of faith this story, this experience is about the loss of certainty. Often we walk our pilgrimages of faith in the straightjacket of certainty, the things we were taught in our childhood and were told was the truth. Now straightjackets do not allow much freedom of movement and certainty does not allow for the possibility of wonder. If we do not allow our journeying to lead us to explore new possibilities we will not expand our knowledge of God. Certainty can give a false sense of having arrived, when the reality is we are stuck in a cul-de-sac.

When certainty begins to unravel we can find ourselves losing those layers and revealing our central core and the realisation dawns that we have been holding on to a human image of God. Feeling vulnerable is never comfortable but in that place we can discover the mystery that is the reality of God. In God we walk in a cloud of unknowing, and at times it does feel like a fog but it is a fog in which we discover the true presence of God.

None of us know how we will respond in a crisis. The disciples had a bad week, and they too lost their certainty, or at least their perceived certainty that they knew who Jesus was and with the loss came insecurity. One by one they fell away. 12 disciples, 12 flickering candles extinguished when the storm hits. 12 disciples often depicted in stained glass windows, courted with sainthood and the names of churches and yet they are the candles that went out. Others, often unnamed, remained loyal the candle however weak remaining alight – the B team, the extras, the women at the foot of the cross, the provider of the room where the disciples hid away, the centurion who acknowledges the terrible mistake, Veronica who wiped Jesus face as he walked to the hill, the person who offered him vinegar to slake his thirst – fragile candles whose flame burned brighter as they met and engaged with Jesus. When we look at this story we are attracted to the A team, the ones who have since been feted but it is the B team with whom we most identify and they are the ones who lasted the course on the day.

Around Europe, in the hidden corners and pleasant suburbs of the most populated cities people today are standing up against the worst atrocities imaginable and finding themselves the victims of abuse and hatred as their layers are stripped away. Can we be their B team, bringing comfort and hope without obvious reward, can we be let go of our certainties and keep the flame of love alight? What do we learn from this week – there is no such thing as certainty in creation, and it is often the B team rather than the big names, who quietly accept and embrace change as they love their neighbour through the worst the world can offer.

Psalm 31 (Psalms for a quantum world)

In the eternal source of all being, I am;
let me always know this.

In oneness is my strength,
through my connection to God,
source of all being,
is all wisdom and knowledge.
In oneness I am free and belong,
in this I trust.

Many do not understand this
and put their trust in possessions and wealth,
but in oneness I have all I need.
I am known and loved for who I am,
and I need not fear.
My body is frail, but life is eternal.

Our present reality brings many sorrows,
and sometimes I despair.
I seem invisible to others,
I feel I do not exist or worse feel threatened,
but in oneness I trust,
in your presence, I am,
for now, and all time.
I rest in your love and feel my joy,
I speak my need and it is heard.
Others may doubt,
others may choose separation
but in oneness is hope and peace.
In oneness we are complete.

Praise God for love beyond earthly measure.
Praise God for life eternal.
Praise God the ground of our being.

Come, live in oneness, and be.

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Reflection – **One week, one world, oneness**

It was a week,
we all have them,
some are good some less so,
some have moments,
highlights or best forgotten bits.
One week amongst many,
sometimes difficult to track,
days merging into each other but one week.
This week started strangely and got stranger.
This week started brightly and got darker.
This week started with crowds

and ended with a few forsaken followers,
or did it?
One week that would change the world.
Without this week, we may never have heard,
never discovered a new way of being.
One week;
one people, one faith, one world
all waiting to discover oneness.
At the beginning of this week some thought they knew,
rightly or wrongly.
At the end of this week some thought they knew,
rightly or wrongly.
It takes time to know, time to grow, time to change.
This was the beginning of change,
one week in one world that leads to oneness.
Celebrate this week, celebrate change, celebrate.

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