

Lent Reflections for the second half of Holy Week.
(Wednesday, April 1st – Sunday, April 5th)

Wednesday, April 1st: John 18,15-18, 25-27

15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, **16** but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. **17** The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' **18** Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' **26** One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' **27** Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

When we read the account of Peter's denial of Christ, it's easy to focus on that moment of weakness, rather than on the fact that Peter was one of only two disciples sufficiently loyal to follow Jesus that far. All the others had run away! It is also easy to forget just how lonely and afraid Peter must have felt. He had no way of knowing exactly what was going on inside, but he could be sure that things didn't look good for Jesus and , as a known associate, he could expect to be treated in the same way. So Peter made his self-serving denials - and afterwards wept bitterly over them. Not for the first time, we find Peter's impetuous nature getting him into trouble. And not for the first time, we know that Jesus both understands and forgives Peter. In this story of Peter, I find great encouragement- and I hope you will too. Jesus does not expect us to be perfect. He knows that we will have times of failure - and will weep over those times - but, as long as our hearts remain faithful, even if our words and actions fall short, we will be forgiven and helped to find the strength and courage to go on.

Prayer

Gracious Lord,

Thank you that you understand our moments of weakness, fear and failure. Help us to receive your forgiveness and grace, that we may not be discouraged but be ready to learn from our mistakes and persevere in our efforts to follow, love and serve you faithfully, day by day. Amen.

Thursday, April 2nd (Maundy Thursday): Luke 22.7-23

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus^(b) sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' ⁹ They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' ¹⁰ 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" ¹² He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' ¹³ So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it^(c) until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' ¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' ¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'^(d) ²¹ But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. ²² For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!' ²³ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

Today's reading brings us full circle from the time of Christ's birth to his final night. At the time of his birth in Bethlehem (King David's ancestral home), Jesus - or his parents - had to borrow a space in an overcrowded city. Now, at the end of his life, Jesus is in another crowded city - Jerusalem, (King David's capital city), and once again he is borrowing a room. Now there are no adoring shepherds or wise men; no gifts being offered. Instead, Jesus, in full knowledge of the betrayal, desertion, denial and suffering about to come, gives his disciples a final gift. As they celebrated their Jewish ancestry and deliverance, Christ gave them, and us, the gift of the Eucharist as the fulfilment of ancient prophecies and the promise of salvation.

The bread and cup which Christ shared with the disciples were not just any bread and cup. The bread was the middle of three loaves - the Messiah's bread - which was traditionally broken in half. One half was hidden for children to find as symbolic of the search for the Messiah. The other half would not be eaten. Notice that Luke refers to "the"cup, taken after supper. The cup remaining after the meal, was the extra cup of wine kept aside in expectation of Elijah's return as the forerunner of the

Messiah. In taking and giving the bread and cup, Jesus was declaring his status as the Messiah.

Christians everywhere will be commemorating the Last Supper at Maundy Thursday services today. It is, of course, commemorated at every Eucharist, but today, with the elements of foot washing and stripping of the Altar, and bearing in mind what will follow tomorrow, our services take on a particular solemnity.

I encourage all unable to attend a service today to spend some time reading the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper; either select your favourite to read prayerfully and reflectively or, if you have time, read all four accounts, noting the differences. Why do you think different writers focus on different parts of the story?

Reflection

At the beginning and end of his life, Jesus used borrowed rooms in overcrowded cities. What room do we make for him in our often overcrowded lives?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

In the crowded busyness of our lives, help us to make room for you.

As we commemorate your Last Supper and all the events of Maundy Thursday, we thank you for your love, humility and sacrifice. By your grace may we also extend love and sacrificial service to one another and to you. Amen.

Friday, April 3rd (Good Friday): Mark 15.33-41

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land^[a] until three in the afternoon. **34** At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'^[b] **35** When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' **36** And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' **37** Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. **39** Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he^[c] breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'^[d]

40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. **41** These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

I am the most squeamish person I know. I can't stand the sight of blood, cover my eyes when anything remotely violent occurs in a theatre performance and look away if there is anything involving blood on the TV. Even reading a description of a violent scene makes me cringe and I'm tempted to skip down a few paragraphs to what comes next.

Many of us are tempted to do this when it comes to Good Friday; to rush through the horrors of that day because they don't bear thinking about, and to focus instead on the joys of Easter Day. The trouble is, that without Good Friday, there could not have been an Easter Day. We cannot fully enter into one, unless we have first fully engaged with the other.

Today, try as much as you can, to come to Good Friday as if for the first time and without knowing what happens next. Look on the agony of Jesus, hear his screams and join in the anguish, fear and despair of those gathered around the cross. But hear too, the words spoken by Christ: his prayer that God would forgive those crucifying him; his words of reassurance to the penitent thief and of care for his mother. Marvel at the depth of love that can think of such things at such a time. Kneel, either physically or figuratively, at the foot of the cross and weep for the things in your life which continue to put Christ on the cross.

Prayer

Crucified Lord,

As we marvel at the depth of your love which in the midst of unimaginable agony, spoke words of forgiveness and comfort, we repent of all the sins which put you on the cross and pray for grace to amend our lives. Amen.

Saturday, April 4th (Holy Saturday): John 19,38-42

38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. **39** Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. **40** They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. **41** Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. **42** And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

As with yesterday, we need to try to approach today as if we don't know what tomorrow will bring. Today is not a day of eager anticipation but of utter bleakness and desolation. The first disciples had not only seen their dearly loved friend and teacher suffer an agonising death, they had also witnessed the end of all their hopes and dreams for the future. Jesus and hope alike were absent.

There are times in the lives of most of us when God seems to be absent and prayer futile; no answers are forthcoming. Yet even at such times, God is there. Darkness may conceal him, we may have to wait in the shadows of uncertainty, even fear, for a while, but if we have patience, faith and perseverance, God will reveal his plan and bring us back to his light and life.

Prayer

Loving and ever-present God,

In times of darkness, doubt and fear, help us to hold fast to faith, remembering that you are always there, holding us in your arms and guiding our steps. Amen.

Sunday, April 5th(Easter Day): John 21,1-14

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,^[a] Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³ Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' ⁶ He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards^[b] off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

After any bereavement there comes a time when we have to try to return to ordinary life; go back to work or pick up our everyday routines. Yet life will never be quite the same because someone is missing.

That is how it was for the disciples. After the fear and misery of Good Friday had come the joy of Easter Day - but now what? What were they supposed to do? They were no doubt confused - torn between grief and despair, joy and uncertainty. It comes as no surprise that it was Peter who initiated the return to work - a fishing trip - and who later jumped into the sea to rush to Jesus. Nothing would ever be the same again for Peter and the other disciples. Even if they went back to their homes and jobs, everything would be different because their lives had been touched and changed by Jesus. The joy of Easter Day could not remain - there would be times of

suffering and sorrow ahead - but the hope given by not just Easter Day, but the weeks that followed, would remain for ever.

Once we allow Jesus to take charge of our lives, there is no going back. Yes, we still have to live the daily round of work and family commitments with all the ups and downs they bring. We will have days when we are filled with the joy of Easter Day and days when such joy feels like a distant dream. But Easter is not just one day; the Easter Season lasts for fifty days, incorporating the resurrection and subsequent appearances, the ascension and Pentecost. Because of these, we have a joy and hope which go on long after hot cross buns, Easter eggs and toy rabbits or chicks have disappeared from the shops. Jesus has risen and lives on and so our Easter joy, sometimes hidden, but ever present, also lives on. Alleluia!

Prayer

Risen, triumphant and glorious Lord,

We thank and praise you for the salvation and eternal life which you have won for us.

May the joy of Easter fill our hearts and show in our lives, this day and always.

Amen.

All Bible passages are taken from the New Revised Standard (Anglicanised) Version.

Passages used are those suggested by Maggi Dawn in her book "Giving It Up"

Reflections are my own, inspired by Maggi Dawn.