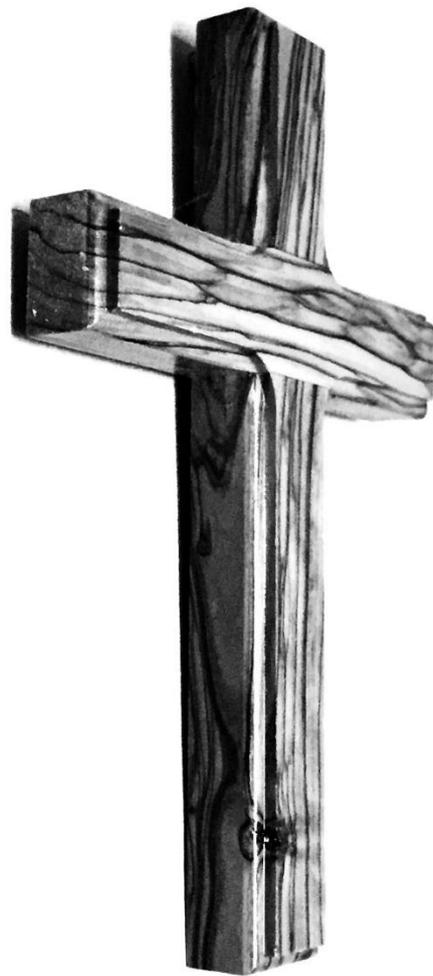


EASTER REFLECTIONS



ST SAVIOUR'S RETFORD

Helpful Information

This booklet is a resource to help you to pray and reflect during this Easter season. Whilst we may be scattered and unable to meet in person we remain united by our faith in Christ and our love for each other. Easter is always a time of great sadness, as we remember the depth of our fallen human condition, but also immense hope as we recall God's great love for us and the victory he has won for us through Jesus. In these uncertain times may our hope be fixed firmly on him.

Jesus said "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever!"

(Revelation 1:17-18, NIV)

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REFLECTIONS - JESUS THE GREAT I AM

PALM SUNDAY

Read John 12:12-19

On Palm Sunday we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem as a triumphant King, but riding humbly on a donkey. It's a contrast, which sets up the rest of Holy Week, as the king of all will humble himself even to the point of death on a cross. These Holy week reflections draw on the I am sayings in John's gospel. In Exodus 3 God declares to Moses I am who I am. In John's gospel Jesus takes these words of God on his own lips and uses lots of different pictures to help us understand who he is, what he's going to do and what it means to have him in our lives.

For reflection and prayer

- How do you feel at the start of this Holy Week? Why not turn those feelings into a prayer
- How can trusting Jesus is a humble king help you today?

Church's Prayer for Palm Sunday

True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
which is the path of glory.
Amen.

MONDAY - I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Read John 1:1-14 and John 8:12

When you are looking for something behind the sofa and it's too dark to see it, if you're sensible you go and get a torch so you can see more clearly. If you can't be bothered you end up fumbling around in the dark. Jesus says "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He alone shows us what God is truly like. He said if you have seen me you have seen my father (John 14:9). If we want to see what God is really like we don't have to fumble around in the dark, we can look at Jesus. When we look at Jesus we see a God who like light is warm and beautiful, pure and radiant. But sometimes we don't like too much light, it can reveal our mess and flaws. Sometimes we prefer to hide in the darkness. On that first Easter week the religious leaders argued and discussed with Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem - they saw God in flesh in all his beauty and wonder, but they were unwilling to let his light touch their lives. This Easter are we willing to step into the light and see the living God in the face of Jesus and let his light shine in our lives?

For reflection and prayer

- What do you most like about Jesus? How can that help you trust God today?
- In which part of your life do you need Jesus to shine his light today?

God of wisdom,
may the light of your eternal Word,
our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
lead us in holiness and guide us to glory;
we ask this in his name.
Amen.

TUESDAY - I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE

Read John 14:1-6

I wonder when the last time you got lost was? I had a friend who once got so lost that he accidentally walked into a lake fully clothed. We can often feel a bit lost when it comes to God, so we try different ways to get to him; maybe we try to be good by doing and saying all the right things, perhaps we try to be religious going to church and praying and reading the Bible regularly, maybe we just guess. But Jesus is clear that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We don't have to guess and we don't have to rely on being good, or religious. Which is great, because those things depend on our knowledge and abilities. If we're being good and religious we feel okay, but if we have an off day, we make some mistakes, we forget to pray, we can be really worried about what God thinks of us.

Jesus first friends often worried about whether they were on the right track with God. The night before Jesus died he comforted them by explaining that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. They and we don't have to worry, because knowing God doesn't depend on us it depends on him. The only question is will we trust him? Will we follow him?

For reflection and prayer

- In what ways are you tempted to try your own way of getting to God instead of trusting Jesus?
- How does knowing Jesus is the Way, the truth and the life comfort and strengthen you today?

Almighty God,
your Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence.
Give us new hearts and constant wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

WEDNESDAY - I AM THE GATE

Read John 10:7-10

Most farmers will tell you that sheep are stupid; left to their own devices they get hurt and lost. No wonder the Bible sometimes talks about me and you as being like stray sheep (Luke 15:1-7). For sheep to survive they need protection and pasture. The picture of Jesus as the gate says this is precisely what he provides for his people. In those days the Shepherd would often act as the gate to protect the sheep from intruders and ensure they were led to the right pasture. If Jesus is our gate and we are his sheep he is there to protect and provide for us. This can be different from how we think of Jesus. We are sometimes tempted to think of him as boring or very serious, or someone who adds things to our to do list, or perhaps makes us feel guilty because he's so perfect. But if Jesus is our gate and we are his sheep he is always out for our good and the best life is found in listening to, following and trusting in him.

The Wednesday of Holy Week is traditionally called Spy Wednesday when we remember that Jesus was betrayed by his friend Judas to the authorities. The world is so often motivated by personal gain, money and power, which so often destroys what stands in its way. But Jesus as the gate selflessly opens the way for us to have life, and life in all its fullness.

For reflection and prayer

- In what ways are you relying on yourself or others to find meaning and satisfaction in life?
- What does it mean for you today to find fullness of life in Jesus despite the world feeling so strange and uncertain at the moment?

Jesus, You are the door. Through You we are kept safe eternally and receive many blessings, help us open our lives to you today. In Jesus Name. **Amen**

MAUNDY THURSDAY - I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

Read John 6:25-40

In the past weeks of panic buying we've seen the need for our daily bread in a new light. Bread was even more of a daily necessity in Jesus day where subsistence farming was often the norm. Jesus' claim to be the bread of life is more than a creative picture. It calls to mind the story of God's people Israel when they were freed from Egypt and sustained in the wilderness by God's provision of daily manna (Exodus 17). There was always enough for each day, never too much, never too little, always enough. Jesus provision for us each day comes at a cost as on that first Maundy Thursday he tore bread and shared wine as a vivid picture of how his life would be broken and poured out for us; of how he would become empty, so that we might be filled full to overflowing. To receive Jesus as the bread of life is to acknowledge that only he can truly sustain and satisfy us. That only he is enough and only he can give us today our daily bread.

For reflection and prayer

- Jesus is the bread of life. What do you need from him to get through this day?

Church's Prayer for Maundy Thursday

God our Father,
your Son Jesus Christ was obedient to the end
and drank the cup prepared for him:
may we who share his table
watch with him through the night of suffering
and be faithful.
Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY - I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Read John 10:11-17

Shrek the New Zealand Sheep managed to run away and escape shearing for six years. As you can imagine once he was found he looked like a right mess. According to the Bible we are like lost sheep (Isaiah 53:6). We have wandered away from God preferring life our way rather than his way. In Jesus though we find not condemnation, but rescue. He is the Good Shepherd. In the Old Testament the Good Shepherd is a picture for a good and just leader who will rescue God's people from error and lead them back to him (Ezekiel 34). Jesus is the ultimate good shepherd who cares for us so much that he lays down his life for us on that first Good Friday. He loves us so much that he doesn't want to lose us and through giving up his life he offers forgiveness, friendship and care now and forever in his loving arms. The Good Shepherd wants to know us today. Are we ready to listen to his voice and follow him?

For reflection and prayer

Church's Prayer for Good Friday

Eternal God,
in the cross of Jesus
we see the cost of our sin
and the depth of your love:
in humble hope and fear
may we place at his feet
all that we have and all that we are,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SATURDAY - I AM THE VINE

Read John 15:1-17

On the night before Jesus died his friends were obviously worried and concerned as he spoke about his coming death. One of the images he draws on to help them understand how they can stay close to him in his physical absence is that of a vine and branches. He explains through this image how close his friends can be to him. He is like the vine, the life source for his followers, the branches. It is a picture of an intimate connection that his followers can have with him, so intimate that you're not really fully alive without it.

This Easter Saturday with the impact of the Coronavirus being felt globally we can perhaps identify more than ever with the silence of the empty tomb and Jesus' sad and scattered disciples. But his absence then guarantees that his presence with us now will not go away. We must seek to remain in him and with him. Remaining united to Jesus means listening to and trusting in his words (v.7). It is to build our lives on the solid rock of his teaching found in the scriptures. As we maintain our connection with him our lives will be truly fruitful whatever we face.

For reflection and prayer

- How can you make the most of the opportunities you have to remain connected to Jesus through his word?
- How does it feel to know how closely connected to Jesus you can be?

Jesus, true vine
ever giving yourself that the world might live,
let us share your death and passion:
make us perfect in your love.
Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY - I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

Read John 11:1-44

The reality of death and our seeming helplessness to fight it has been brought home to us in no uncertain terms in recent weeks. Perhaps it's the only certain statistic - 100% of people are born, 100% of people die. But into our world of disease and death Jesus speaks words of life. "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die; and those who live and believe in me will never die." (v.25-26).

Jesus looks at our broken world and offers resurrection, which, at first at least, isn't what we want. Mary and Martha just wanted Jesus to have been there in the first place to stop Lazarus dying. We often want Jesus to do that don't we? To remove all the bad stuff, to stop it in its tracks. But Jesus doesn't offer removal, he offers something better - resurrection.

Removal is temporary, resurrection is eternal. Resurrection means that life lived with Jesus will bring new hope to even the darkest moments of pain and loss we experience. Resurrection means that with Jesus all that is dark and damaging in our lives will be used by God to enable us to experience an even greater depth of his love and kindness than if they weren't to have happened. Resurrection means that those who believe in Jesus will know an eternity without pain and loss, where God himself will eclipse all that has caused pain in this life by wiping every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4) and the pain of loss will be like a distant memory or a forgotten bad dream. Resurrection means that life lived with Jesus is more glorious and satisfying even in the midst of pain and loss.

This is the shape of the Christian life, because it's the shape of Jesus' life. Stooping low to enter our mess. Not simply to put a plaster on our brokenness, but to completely renew and recreate it. How do we know that Jesus can do this and it's not just wishful thinking? Because he tells Lazarus to come out of the tomb and he

does. He's been dead four days and with a prayer and a shout he walks out alive. Even more remarkable, in the days to come Jesus himself would walk out of his own tomb defeating death for ever and making the reality of his resurrection a possibility for all who trust in him.

This is not myth and legend. When you look at the evidence of history you have to try a lot harder to disprove the bodily resurrection of Jesus that first Easter Sunday than you do to prove it. The question for us is the same that Jesus posed to Martha "do you believe this?" Do you believe that when the world seems like it's lost hope there is earth shattering, grave shattering hope in Jesus? That in him not even death can have a hold on us. That in him is real and lasting life now and for all eternity. That in Jesus the powers of sin, death and hell are done for, because he has risen alleluia.

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

Church's Prayer for Easter Day

God of glory,
by the raising of your Son
you have broken the chains of death and hell:
fill your Church with faith and hope;
for a new day has dawned
and the way to life stands open
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Easter Greeting

Alleluia. Christ is Risen
He is risen indeed. Alleluia

EASTER PRAYERS & LITURGY

An Easter Confession

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins,
and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength,
and not by the power of your resurrection.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

May Almighty God,
who sent his Son into the world to save sinners, bring *us*
his pardon and peace,
now and for ever. **Amen.**

A Creed for Easter

Let us declare our faith in the resurrection of our Lord
Jesus Christ.

All Christ died for our sins in accordance with the
Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received,
and this we believe. **Amen.**