

Faces for and against



Reflections for Holy Week 2017

Easter, is almost without argument, the single most important festival in the Christian Calendar. It is the time when they great cry, 'Alleluia! Christ is Risen' and the triumphant reply, 'He is risen indeed! Alleluia!' reverberates around and shapes the world.

However, first we must journey with Jesus to the Cross and beyond. This year as we journey we will explore some of Jesus' companions.

Each day a biblical text has been chosen and questions given to be explored either on your own or during our Common Worship together, each daily section concludes with words of hope and challenge, from a hymn, poem or quotation. It is my prayer that this booklet will enrich our time together

Palm Sunday – A cacophony of voices

God, our hope of victory,
whom we constantly betray
grant that us so to recognise your coming
that in our clamour
there may be commitment,
and in our silence
the very stones may cry out aloud in your name. Amen.

A cacophony of voices

Holy Week is full of sounds from the sound of singing and chanting as the crowds made their way into their capital city, hailing the coming of someone that was different to the hammer of nails, through flesh, on wood. There was also the sound of raised voices, and voices that were subdued, and voices that could not speak, frozen in horror. The sound of water going into a bowl to wash feet and then imperial hands. This week what sounds will we make and what pattern will our lives follow as we journey to the cross and beyond.

Biblical Text – Matthew 21

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple^[c] 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. ¹³ 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.'

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard^[a] the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read,

"Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise for yourself"?"

Questions

1. Which voice in the passage do you most identify with?

Reflection for Palm Sunday

Hail to the Lord's anointed, great David's greater Son!
Hail in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,
To take away transgression and rule in equity

© James Montgomery, 1771-1854
Based on Psalm 72

Holy Monday

Sons of Thunder

¹⁶ So he appointed the twelve:^[a] Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder)

I imagine that you do not get the nickname 'sons of thunder' for being

calm and passive. They did want to call down fire on a village simply for not wanting to welcome Jesus and wanted to sit on thrones next to Jesus when the kingdom came.

James was the first martyr from amongst the Apostles and John was arguably one of the earliest churches greatest theologians and poets.

For the sons of thunder there is truth in the adage that it is not where you begin, but where you finish.

Biblical Text – Mark 10: 35-40

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' ³⁶ And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' ³⁷ And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' ³⁹ They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'

Questions

1. What is it that James and John are asking for?
2. What do you Jesus means by the baptism he will be baptised with?
3. If you had a nickname what would it be? And would your faith challenge it?

Reflection for Holy Monday

I am anointed, but it is a secret,
Anointed openly by water and fire
visible to those who were able to see

I am anointed, but no
not a political animal or zealous priest
nor a soothsaying prophet nor a dreamer of dreams
I am anointed, free to be.
I am anointed to hang on that tree

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Holy Tuesday

Honest Thomas

Thomas, the twin, one of the twelve is usually known by the adjective, 'doubting. This is always quite strange given the fact that he gets this title because he could not believe his crucified friend had come back to life. Sometimes, I might wish that he was given the adjective, 'honest' instead partially because I believe that faith and doubt are siblings, that sometimes wrestle, often play and maybe pray together. Honest Tom does though have the ring of used car salesman about it though.

Thomas, by tradition, was martyred in India. The Orthodox Church on the subcontinent tracing its roots back to the witness of the Apostle.

Biblical Text – John 11

¹¹ After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' ¹² The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, [\[a\]](#) said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

Questions

1. What does Thomas mean, do you think?

2. When he finally saw Jesus. He did not believe Jesus was raised from the dead because he was not with the others, what do you think he meant by declaring, 'My Lord and My God'?
3. The image of faith and doubt dancing together is evocative. What do you think about it? Would you use a different image?

Reflection for Holy Tuesday

"We do not know... how can we know the way?"

Courageous master of the awkward question,
You spoke the words the others dared not say
And cut through their evasion and abstraction.

Oh doubting Thomas, father of my faith,
You put your finger on the nub of things

We cannot love some disembodied wraith,
But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.

Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,
Feel after Him and find Him in the flesh.

Because He loved your awkward counter-point
The Word has heard and granted you your wish.

Oh place my hands with yours, help me divine

The wounded God whose wounds are healing mine

© Malcolm Guite

Divine and mortal

Fragile and Immortal

Constrained and Expansive

The God in the human

showing us what it means to be human;

so that we might understand the divine

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Holy Wednesday

Mary of Nazareth

Mary has always been a central figure in Christianity. She has always been absolutely key; right from that moment early in Luke's Gospel when she's told "Blessed are you amongst women".

Mary would probably have been as young as 12 when she was betrothed to Joseph, marrying when she was around 14/15 years old. Women in a First Century context were, for the most part, devoid of legal and economic rights. Mary grew up in a highly charged political atmosphere. This puts into context the Magnificat, which in many ways is a statement of liberation: spiritual, economic and political.

Galilee was occupied by Romans and would have been an oppressing place for the Jews. If a Roman soldier said "you've got to carry my backpack one mile", they'd have to do it; they had no option. The Romans forced the Jews to pay taxes to Caesar.

One can imagine there was talk about trusting in God and that maybe in their lifetime he would send a Messiah. They may have thought that this could be the time for the Saviour to come. And it was in this highly charged theological atmosphere that Mary wove her way to the well, perhaps holding in her arms the infant Jesus. Mary of Nazareth would have watched her eldest son grow, observed him work alongside Joseph, and leave home. There were times when Mary seems to have thought that her son was 'mad' and with other members of the family tried to restrain him.

Mary would undoubtedly have watched the events following Palm Sunday unfold with maternal horror. She would have expected such an eventuality though. This does not necessarily imply divine foresight, rather a realistic assessment of what happens to those who undertook prophetic actions in the capital city of a country occupied by Imperial Rome.



Mary remained loyal to her son, staying with him to the bitterest of ends, and one might imagine that her own passion was nearly as great (in a sense) as her son's.

Biblical Text – Luke 1

'My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
⁴⁸ for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

Questions

1. Can you remember the first time you heard, said or sung the Magnificat?
2. How important is Mary for you?

3. She was given a gift by God. Like so many gifts, they are not ours to keep. What gifts have you given away?

Reflection for Holy Wednesday

Cradled once, and then laid in a wooden manger
Cradled again, after been laid on a wooden cross
God's gift, mother's anguish
The most tender of gifts
The most bitter maternal tears
And then in the morning, to the tomb
Clothes folded neatly
And mother knew her bird had flown

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Maundy Thursday

Judas

Judas is a challenging and controversial figure. Historically, because little is known of the man of Kerioth; and theologically, because what does it mean for 'satan to enter' someone, which is how John and Luke seem to explain away the betrayal.

On a human level, Judas challenges and confronts. How many of us are willing to state that we have never let someone else down; even if we have not betrayed someone?

Perhaps, there is a bigger reason why Judas seems to speak to us. One of the theories postulated for his betrayal is that he had become disappointed and disillusion with Jesus.

Have you ever been disappointed with Jesus? It takes a very brave person to admit that this is the case. But I wonder whether each of us at some point has been disappointed. Disappointment may have set in because fervent prayers have not been answered, for example.

Biblical Text – Matthew 26

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' ⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

Questions

1. In some Orthodox traditions, Judas is a saint; what is your reaction to that?
2. Betrayal runs deep. Can it be forgiven?

Reflection for Maundy Thursday

The Judas Tree

© D Ruth Etchells

In Hell there grew a Judas Tree
Where Judas hanged and died
Because he could not bear to see
His master crucified
Our Lord descended into Hell
And found his Judas there
For ever hanging on the tree
Grown from his own despair
So Jesus cut his Judas down
And took him in his arms
"It was for this I came" he said
"And not to do you harm
My Father gave me twelve good men
And all of them I kept
Though one betrayed and one denied
Some fled and others slept
In three days' time I must return
To make the others glad
But first I had to come to Hell
And share the death you had
My tree will grow in place of yours
Its roots lie here as well
There is no final victory
Without this soul from Hell"
So when we all condemned him
As of every traitor worst
Remember that of all his men
Our Lord forgave him first

Good Friday

a kaleidoscope of faces (priests, soldiers, women of Jerusalem, Simon, family, the crucified)

It is difficult, I think, to imagine ourselves at the foot of the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not that I do not want to be with Jesus, supporting our crucified and dying God, as he begins his final battle. No, it is for me that fact that, sometimes, I cannot look at the consequences of our sin, my sin, squarely in the face. This year, hesitantly, I am going to try.

Biblical Texts

³⁴Then about that time Jesus shouted, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" ³⁵Some of the people standing there heard Jesus and said, "He is calling for Elijah." ³⁶One of them ran and grabbed a sponge. After he had soaked it in wine, he put it on a stick and held it up to Jesus. He said, "Let's wait and see if Elijah will come and take him down!" ³⁷Jesus shouted and then died (Mark 15: 34-37)

³³When the soldiers came to the place called "The Skull," they nailed Jesus to a cross. They also nailed the two criminals to crosses, one on each side of Jesus. ³⁴⁻³⁵Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people! They don't know what they're doing." While the crowd stood there watching Jesus, the soldiers gambled for his clothes. The leaders insulted him by saying, "He saved others. Now he should save himself, if he really is God's chosen Messiah!" (Luke 23: 33-34)

So the soldiers did these things, ²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home (John 19: 25-27)

Questions

1. 'Father, forgive them...' Take a moment to think about the hardest thing you have had to forgive. The current Chief Rabbi calls forgiveness 'life's greatest adventure'. Do you think he is right?
2. Think of a time when you have felt alone. When was that? How did you deal with it at the time? How do you deal with it now?
3. Which of the sayings of Jesus from the Cross means the most to you and why?

Reflection for Good Friday

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

(c) Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

Holy Saturday

Lazarus

I spluttered once, and then twice. The dryness of my throat was apparent, and then the stench. Stench? Stench of what? Where am I as my eyes moistened and adjusted. I am dry. It is dark, as I feel for the first time clothing bandaged around me. But what is it. I remember my sisters wrapping me in linen when we children. But where I am I now? It stinks... and I remember. Is this it? Darkness, but wait resonating I hear a voice. 'Lazarus'. Lazarus – that is me. I am being called. I see a chink of light. 'Come out – the voice calls. It is him – Jesus. I struggle to move; what are these things. I hobble towards the light. Slowly, my legs are bandaged – and weak; they seem like I have not used them for ages. 'Lazarus, Come out!' My ears seem to retune

to the call. I have been unwell. Is this dying? I struggle towards the light. A hand touches my own and pulls me further into the light.

My eyes blink and blink again at the brightness, and I find myself staring into his eyes. It is Jesus. His eyes look like they are on fire. He smiles and laughs. 'Untie him' – he commands.

Untie me? I begin to remember. Mary and Martha fall upon me. I am not as strong as I was, as the three of us tumble on to the floor as if we were children. Jesus lifts me up. 'Thank you'. He smiles back at me with a smile that suggests that he had done something easy, as if a greater battle lies ahead.

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Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha. He was one of Jesus' close friends. After an illness, he died, and Jesus raised him to life. It was this miracle that secured Jesus' fate. By tradition, Lazarus became bishop of Kittim in Cyprus.

Lazarus cannot though be separated from his sisters Mary and Martha. They are a family group who together are friends of Jesus and his disciples. It is their home in Bethany that is the base for Jesus during the final week of his life.

Lazarus's sisters, Mary and Martha, like their brother, are also attracted to Jesus. Earlier in the Fourth Gospel, whilst Jesus is teaching, Mary sits and listens; whilst Martha scurries about preparing food. She asks Jesus to rebuke her sister for not helping, but is told firmly that Mary has chosen a better way.

Yet, when Lazarus dies, it is Martha who comes to Jesus immediately when Jesus arrives – and it is upon the lips of Martha that the great declaration of faith is put

This is what I have come to believe: that you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one who is to come into the world.

You will remember that in the Synoptic Gospels, the great confession of faith is put on the lips of Peter. In the Fourth Gospel, it is on the lips of Martha, a woman.

Mary, who had sat at the feet of Jesus, has to be invited to come and see Jesus. It is Martha who guides Jesus to her brother's tomb.

Before Passover, Jesus was back at their house, and Mary pours expensive ointment over Jesus, preparing him (he suggests) for burial.

This is not at all to suggest that one woman's faith was stronger than the others; it is just that they, like us, were complex human beings.

How many of us do not doubt the truth of Easter at certain times?

Biblical Text – John 11

³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Questions

1. One of the themes of this story is friendship. I wonder when the last time was that you sat and prayed for your friends and that they would have a closer relationship with Jesus.
2. Why was it that Jesus waited to go to Lazarus? It is a question asked by both of his sisters.

Reflection for Holy Saturday

Bitter pain, searing loss
divine abandonment, mother's tears
mocking soldiers, cruel crown
battered body, beyond the lament
gathered together; in one place
together in silent defiant space
silence demands its sacred pause
the stillness does not wait

we need not pretend it does
lest all is forgotten as the breath comes again

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Easter Day

God of terror and joy, you arise to shake the earth
Open our graves and give us back the past:
so that all that been buried may be freed and forgiven
and our lives may return to you through the risen Christ. Amen.

Alive

The resurrected Jesus is none of other than our Lord and God
demanding loyalty, offering freedom, allowing obedience and giving
grace.

Biblical Text – Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid

Questions

1. He has risen, he is not here. How do you respond to such a statement?
2. What is the most exciting thing about the story of Easter for you?
3. What have you learnt this week during our journey to Easter Day? Give thanks to God for it and all that others have learnt too.

Reflection for Easter Day

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!



Yr Eglwys Yng Nghymru ar Ynys Cybi
The Church in Wales on Holy Island