

2022 – 14TH -17TH APRIL - HOLY WEEK AND EASTER DAY – WORSHIP AT HOME

Dear Friends,

This week we prepare ourselves for the glory of Easter by first reminding ourselves of the happenings leading up to it – the dark to the light. Walk with me through the events to the glorious joy of knowing the risen Christ. Every blessing, *Margaret*.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Matthew 26: 17-20:

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying: ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’

He said: ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.”’

So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’

Meditation of Matthew:

We were there to celebrate Passover, the twelve of us and Jesus, together in the upper room. And I don’t mind telling you our hearts were pounding, our pulses racing, our imaginations running riot.

I mean, the Passover! You know the significance of that, surely? A reminder of God delivering his people, setting them free from captivity – opening the way for a new and different life.

Well, what were we to expect? Oh, it’s easy now, looking back, to realise we were wrong, but at the time it seemed to all of us – all except Judas, anyway – that this was it – the moment we’d been waiting for – the time when Jesus would pull the rabbit out of the hat, turn the tables on his enemies and show us he was in control after all. Only then, while we were eating together, enjoying ourselves more than we had in a long time, he stood, quietly, solemnly – and we could see from the look in his eyes and the set of his face, that he had other ideas.

He took the bread, lifted it high, broke it – enough for all of us – ‘This is my body, broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ And before we had time to argue – time even to take in what he was saying – he was holding the cup, passing it round – ‘Take this and drink. This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood.’

We were staggered, horrified – and, to tell the truth, more than a little shocked.

All right, so he had talked of death before – often, too often – but we’d never actually believed. We thought he was exaggerating, I suppose – painting the blackest picture to keep us on our toes.

But here he was, if we’d heard him right, offering his own epitaph – saying his final farewells – preparing us for the end.

And he was, of course, in a sense; it was the end of a chapter – the last page of the book.

Yet it wasn’t over, by no means the end of the story; that had only just begun, and we, astonishingly, were part of it – his body here on earth, the sequel to what he had started!

Well, we’ve done as he said – week after week – year after year – breaking bread and sharing wine, reminding ourselves of who he is and who we are – of what he has done and what we have still to do – and we’ll go on sharing his supper, gladly, humbly, confidently, until he comes.

Matthew 26: 14-16:

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said: ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment on he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Matthew: 27:3-5:

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. He said: ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ But they said:

‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’ Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

Meditation of one of the Priests:

Thirty pieces of silver, that’s all it took – thirty measly pieces of silver to betray his closest friend. Can you believe that?

We couldn’t. We’d expected a hundred, at least, probably more, but we started low, just to play safe, expecting him to haggle, see how high we’d go. You should have seen him, though – hardly able to contain himself, eyes almost popping out of his head – he could hardly keep his hands off it, the greedy devil! I honestly think he’d have settled for less if we’d pushed him. But we were in no mood for playing hard to get – after three years of scheming – three years of waiting – we’d finally got our man where we wanted him – and for thirty pieces of silver!

Money – the depths people will sink to for it, selling their very souls; it’s incredible, pathetic, really. As if anyone can really imagine it will buy them happiness!

Well, it didn’t do Judas much good, that’s for sure – just a few days later and there he was again, crawling over our doorstep, actually expecting sympathy.

‘I’ve been a fool,’ he told us. ‘Betrayed an innocent man.’ And he tried to give the money back. Well, he was a bit late for that, wasn’t he? A little far on in the day to start having scruples; the damage was done, from his point of view anyway. There was no going back – Jesus was done for, all over bar the shouting – we couldn’t have undone his actions even if we’d wanted to, but we didn’t, of course – and to be truthful, we rather enjoyed watching him squirm. Served the wretch right, that’s how we saw it, even if he had done us a favour.

Anyway, we told him eventually to get lost – he’d made his bed, he could lie on it.

Only he couldn’t, not anymore. He couldn’t live with himself – couldn’t carry on with the knowledge of what he had done. He hanged himself, apparently, and good riddance as far as we were concerned.

But there is an odd twist to it all – a little detail which even now I’m trying to make sense of – for that night in the garden when he betrayed Jesus – with a kiss of all things – do you know what Jesus said to him?

‘Friend, do what you are here to do.’

Friend! God’s truth, that is what he said. Well, with friends like that who needs enemies, that’s all I can say. But Jesus, apparently, even though he knew what Judas was up to – even though he saw right through him – still had time for him.

It is a mystery to me – but then, Jesus always was, wasn’t he? It may sound daft, but if Jesus has made it to that heavenly kingdom he was always on about, I actually think he’ll have found room there even for Judas, despite everything!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we remember today that you were broken not just for us, or even for many, but for all. We rejoice that your love isn’t for the select few but for everyone – young and old – rich and poor. So we pray for our world in all its need. We pray for all who feel broken today – shattered by disappointment, tragedy, and bereavement – overwhelmed by poverty and hunger, disease and deprivation – crushed by injustice, oppression, imprisonment, and violence; all those who have been broken in body, mind, and spirit, battered by the circumstances and events of life.

We pray for those who long for wholeness – delivery from physical pain, sickness, and disease – freedom from fear, anxiety, and depression – an answer to inner emptiness and spiritual longing – the opportunity to be at peace with you, their neighbour, and themselves.

May your grace bring hope – may your love bring healing.

Lord Jesus Christ, broken for all, reach out now to our broken world and teach us to reach out in our turn. Show us where you would have us serve – teach us what you would have us do – and use us to fulfil your purposes – to the glory of your name. **Amen.**

GOOD FRIDAY

Journey with Jesus – The Way of the Cross

Here we follow the footsteps of Christ's last journey as he goes to the cross and enter into the story of the Passion in a more personal way. We stop along the way to remember Jesus' suffering, but also recall the faith and love he showed right up to the moment of his death.

Jesus is sentenced to death: early the next morning, Jesus was bound and taken to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate questioned Jesus carefully – 'Is it true that you are the King of the Jews?' he asked. 'It is you who say this,' Jesus replied. Despite the many accusations made by the chief priests, and the questions asked by Pilate, Jesus stood silent and made no attempt to answer any of them. Reluctantly, Pilate sentenced Jesus to be crucified and handed him over to the guards.

Reflection: The prisoner said little in his own defence. His silent acceptance and calmness angered his accusers. Words would make no difference anyway: they had agreed his guilt.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me when I fail to recognise your presence among us; for the times when I shut my ears and mind, and refuse to listen to what you have to say to me.

Jesus is crowned with thorns and receives his cross: The Roman soldiers who took charge of Jesus made fun of him and mocked 'the King of the Jews'. They wrapped him in a robe of royal purple and plaited thorns to be his 'crown'. When they had finished taunting him, they dressed him in his own clothes, and gave him a cross to carry.

Reflection: Mocked and abused, taunted and torn, they laughed at your misery, and crowned your gentle head with cruel thorns.

Prayer: Lord, bruised and bleeding, you accepted your lonely cross and carried the weight of the world's sin. Forgive me when I complain about my own cross. Help me to carry it gladly on my journey through life.

Jesus falls for the first time: Exhausted and weak after being beaten and abused, Jesus had walked only a little distance before he stumbled under the weight of the cross, and fell for the first time.

Reflection: The road is long, and the journey hard. The cross grows ever heavier and there is no-one to help. You stumble and fall.

Prayer: Lord, how many times have I faltered and fallen? Tripped up by my own lack of understanding, and stumbling over pebbles of doubt. Help me to get up and begin again.

Jesus meets his mother: Many people had gathered to watch the sad procession making its way to Golgotha, and among them stood Mary, the mother of Jesus, who wept with sorrow when she saw her beloved son's suffering.

Reflection: Step by painful step she shares your suffering, her heart pierced by a sword of sorrow and pain. A glance is enough, her loving look says everything, and then she is gone.

Prayer: Walk with me, Mary. Stay beside me on my journey, and comfort and strengthen me with your mother's love.

Simon helps Jesus: When the soldiers saw Jesus struggling, they were afraid he would not survive the journey to the place of execution. So they chose a man from the crowd to share their prisoner's burden. The man came from Cyrene and his name was Simon. He helped Jesus to carry his heavy cross.

Reflection: A stranger in the crowd is chosen to help you. His hands lighten your load, his shoulder shares your heavy burden.

Prayer: Lord, a stranger's help made all the difference to your struggle. May I help others along the way as they struggle with the crosses they bear.

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus: Among the crowd watching Jesus' suffering was a holy woman named Veronica. Seeing his plight, she was filled with pity and compassion, and she stepped forward to gently wipe his bloodstained face with a towel. As she lifted the towel away, the image of Christ's face remained imprinted there.

Reflection: She saw your suffering and was moved to help. She did not stand aside, or pass you by. You touched each other with love.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to step from the crowd of indifference, and do something positive to show my love for others.

Jesus falls for the second time: Jesus stumbled, and the weight of the cross made him fall for a second time.

Reflection: Each step grows more difficult. The weight of your cross seems ready to crush as once more you fall.

Prayer: Lord, however crushed I feel by the troubles and worries of life, help me to my feet. May I know that all will be well with you by my side.

The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus: many of the women wept with sadness when they saw the pitiful state of Jesus as he struggled along the way to Golgotha. Seeing them crying, he said to them, 'Do not cry for me, women of Jerusalem, but save your tears for yourselves and your children.'

Reflection: The women wept for you, but their tears made no difference because no-one would listen.

Prayer: Lord, you made time to listen, even on your way to die. Let me open my heart to hear and understand those who cry out and are ignored.

Jesus falls a third time: The cross was heavy, and Jesus was exhausted. Urged on by the soldiers' spears, he staggered on slowly and painfully, until finally he fell for a third time.

Reflection: Almost there now. Not much further to go. Face down in the dirt, you must get up and carry on. Your journey is almost complete.

Prayer: Lord, don't let me give up, when I fall time and time again. Disheartened and feeling sorry for myself, help me to continue on my way.

Jesus is stripped of his clothes: When they reached the place of execution, the soldiers stripped Jesus and threw dice to divide his clothes among them.

Reflection: Stripped of clothes and stripped of dignity, standing naked before the crowd, you suffer the final act of humiliation.

Prayer: Lord, strip me of everything which keeps me from being close to you and your love.

Jesus is nailed to the cross: When they reached the place called 'the skull', they nailed Jesus to the cross and raised it up to stand between two thieves. Above him they placed a sign which read: 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.'

Reflection: They pierced your gentle hands and feet and nailed you to the wood. Stretched out in love, you hang above the world you came to save.

Prayer: King of love, forgive me when I wound and hurt you by turning away from your outstretched arms.

Jesus dies on the cross: For three hours darkness fell over the land like a blanket, and the sun lost its brightness. Then Jesus called out, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' And a short time later, he cried out again, 'Father, I place my spirit into your loving hands.' Then he bowed his head and died.

Reflection: You hang there lifeless. Your task is finally complete. Your journey has finished.

Prayer: Lord, when everything seems lost, and darkness surrounds us, may we look at your cross and be filled with hope.

Jesus is taken down from the cross: Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, asked Pilate for permission to remove Jesus' body from the cross. Together with Nicodemus, he gently lifted Jesus down and placed him in the arms of Mary his loving mother.

Reflection: Once more you are held in the loving arms which first held you in a stable long ago and wrapped you in a lifetime of love.

Prayer: Lord, like Mary your mother, may I welcome you into my life with open arms.

Jesus is laid in the tomb: Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus in a shroud, and, together with the women, they carried the body to the tomb where he was to be buried. They laid him inside and rolled a stone against the entrance.

Reflection: They left you covered and alone in the darkness of the tomb, and the darkness of sorrow.

Prayer: Lord, let your tomb be a symbol of hope and joy in moments of sadness and sorrow.

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Lord Jesus Christ, you gave your whole self for us.

Not just a little, not simply part, but everything, offering your life for the life of the world. You took the way of the cross, and endured the agony of death. You experienced the pain of betrayal, the hurt of denial, and the sorrow of being abandoned by your closest friends. You suffered the awful isolation of separation from God as you took our sin on your shoulders.

Forgive us that we find it so hard to offer anything in return. Forgive us that we hold back, giving only grudgingly of ourselves.

Lord Jesus Christ, you went the whole way for our sakes – help us to come a little way in return. **Amen.**

Living God, in so many ways, this is the blackest of days recalling the darkest of moments – a day on which hearts were broken and faith tested to the limit – a day of appalling suffering and agonising death – a day when all hell was let loose, and love seemed overwhelmed.

Yet we call this day ‘Good Friday’, for in all of that horror you were there.

In the despair, in the pain, in the humiliation, in the sorrow, you were supremely at work, demonstrating the immensity of your love.

Living God, as we recall those terrible yet wonderful events, give us new insight into what you did that day, for us, and for all. **Amen.**

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EASTER SATURDAY

Matthew 27: 59-61: So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid Jesus in his own tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Meditation of Mary Magdalene: We sat there, stupefied – too numb to cry – too shocked to take it in or to accept that our friend, our teacher, our Lord, was dead.

But he *was*.

We’d watched it all, the whole terrible nightmare unfolding before our eyes.

We’d seen the crown of thorns pierce his head – the soldiers strike him across the face – the whip lacerate his flesh – and the spear thrust into his side.

We’d heard the groans, the gasps, as they hammered in the nails – as they hoisted up the cross – as he hung there in agony, limbs outstretched, muscles tearing from bone.

And, finally, that last defiant shout as he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

There was no denying it, much though we longed to.

He was dead – his broken body cut down and sealed in a tomb.

Our hopes were dashed – our master gone.

Our world, it seemed, was over.

Prayer: Remind us, Lord, that you are there even in the darkest moments of life – there in the moments of hurt and betrayal – there in the times of crushing disappointment – there where there is pain and sorrow – there in death itself, in all its apparent finality.

Remind us that, whatever we face, you have been there before us to prepare the way and see us through.

Amen.

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ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

See what a morning, gloriously bright, with the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
folded the graveclothes, tomb filled with light, as the angels pronounce Christ is risen!
See God's salvation plan, wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
fulfilled in Christ, the Man, for he lives:
Christ is risen from the dead!

See Mary weeping, 'Where is he laid?' as in sorrow she turns from the empty tomb,
hears a voice speaking, calling her name; it's the master, the Lord, raised to life again!
The voice that spans the years, speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us,
will sound till he appears, for he lives:
Christ is risen from the dead!

One with the Father, Ancient of Days, through the Spirit who clothes faith with certainty;
honour and blessing, glory and praise to the King crowned with power and authority!
And we are raised with him, death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered,
and we shall reign with him, for he lives:
Christ is risen from the dead!

Stuart Townend [b. 1963] and Keith Getty [b.1974]

Singing the Faith 309

Loving God, we catch a glimpse today into the mystery of this world – into the strange puzzle that there can be no life without death – no light without darkness – no joy without sorrow – no starting the new without ending the old.

May that truth give us strength when days are hard to bear.

Reassure us with the knowledge that in the bleakest moments you are there, and that it is often at such times that you are supremely at work.

Though we do not see or understand, teach us still to trust, confident that in Christ all things will be made new to the glory of your name. **Amen.**

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you that we can worship you not simply as the crucified Christ but as our risen Lord and saviour.

We thank you that this was not the end but a new beginning, not simply for you but for us!

We praise you then for this time of joy, of thanksgiving and celebration – a time that speaks of victory, renewal and hope.

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you for the great message of Easter and the wonderful truth that countless generations across the years have found it to be true in their own experience.

Open your word to us, so that we may meet with you and receive your life for ourselves. **Amen.**

Luke 24: 1-12: At the crack of dawn on Sunday, the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb, so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus.

They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then – out of nowhere it seemed – two men, light cascading from them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them: 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, when he was still with you in Galilee: "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again."' Then the women remembered his words.

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Meditation of Bartholomew: [by Nick Fawcett]

What's done cannot be undone, isn't that what they say?

As much as we might wish otherwise, it's impossible to turn the clock back.

And that is exactly what we had thought a few days before as we stood in desolation and watched the Master suffer on that cross – as we watched him breathe his last – as we saw him cut down, limp and lifeless, and carried to the tomb.

It was over – finished – those three wonderful years we'd spent with him at an end, never to be repeated. What possible reason was there to believe otherwise?

So when the women burst in on us, babbling about the tomb being empty, the stone rolled away – well, I hate to say it, but we didn't pay much attention. It just couldn't be, could it?

At least, that's what the theory said; the facts told a different story – and what a story it was!

For the next thing we knew, he was there amongst us – the one they thought they'd destroyed, back from the grave – the one we all believed dead and buried. Alive!

And, in that moment, the world itself was turned upside down, for suddenly we knew beyond doubt that what is done *can* be undone – the proof right there before our very eyes.

Defeat had become victory – despair, hope – sorrow, joy – darkness, light – tears, laughter!

The forces of evil had conspired to do their very worst, only for the havoc they'd wreaked to be wiped away in a moment – rolled back as surely as the stone from the tomb, by the power of love.

Do you realise what that means? That no situation is too hopeless and no person too dreadful to be beyond redemption. That no matter who we are or what we do – however much we fail – however much we stray – *still* he can turn us round and transform our lives.

That there is nothing in heaven or earth – in life or in death – that can finally separate us from the love of God revealed in Christ!

He had been to the cross. He had carried our sins. He wrestled with the powers of darkness. And he had triumphed over it all.

Life was beginning again for you, for me, for everyone willing to receive it.

That – and that alone – cannot be undone.

Lord Jesus Christ, you appeared to different people at different places, at different times - to Mary in the garden – to Cleopas and his companion on the Emmaus road – to the disciples in the upper room – to your followers in Galilee.

Each had their own unique meeting with you, and it was only when you met with them, face to face, that the truth dawned – only then that they dared to believe you were alive.

Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot see you quite as they did, but we, too, can meet with you and experience the reality of your living presence.

Meet with us now and always. **Amen.**

And may the blessing of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – be with us and with all whom we love and for whom we pray, this glorious Easter Day and for evermore. **Amen.**

A HAPPY EASTER TO YOU ALL