



Parramatta
Mission



uniting
church
in Australia.
Synod of NSW & ACT

Lenten Devotions 2020

Holy Week

6th -12th April 2020

Parramatta Mission

Uniting Church in Australia



Lent commenced on Ash Wednesday, 26th February, preparation the church for Easter. From Ash Wednesday to Easter is 40 days, not counting Sundays, and correlates with Jesus being in the wilderness for forty days after his baptism, tempted, yet found without sin. Christians the world over give attention during this time to their relationship with God, reflecting upon growth in faith, how the faith is expressed in relationship with others. This year the pastoral team are encouraging Lenten devotions through providing a daily set of Bible readings and reflections. A Bible reading is chosen for each day, and a member of the team will write a brief reflection for that day. You are encouraged to use these reflections as part of the daily devotions, using prayers of your choice. If you have other devotional material, you might like to either suspend, or augment that material with what is provided through the newsletter. The daily prayer guide from the Uniting Church is also included, for those who wish to take this up.

Reflections will be written by:

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Psalm: Rev Dr Amelia Koh Butler

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Rev Christine Bayless Kelly

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Collated by : Coral Harris

Monday of Holy Week

6th April 2020

Psalm 36:5-11

5. Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.
6. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.
7. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
8. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
9. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
10. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!
11. Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

Prayer

God of steadfast love,
light of the blind and liberator of the oppressed,
we see your holy purpose in the tender compassion of Jesus,
who calls us into new and living friendship with you.
May we, who take shelter in the shadow of your wings,
be filled with the grace of his tender caring;
may we, who stumble in selfish darkness,
see your glory in the light of his self-giving.
We ask this through him whose suffering is victorious,
Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

**Monday of Holy Week,
6th April 2020**

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." ⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

**Reflection
What's most important?**

There will come a time when we look back on Covid 19 Pandemic and think about how it helped us think about what is most important in life- and it is not just toilet paper! In this reading of the anointing of Jesus' feet we discover that the same dilemmas we might have now happened back then as well. The cost of what Mary used to anoint Jesus' feet was exorbitant. Judas objected - just as we can sometimes object- especially when money is tight. Yet Jesus reminded all of them that there was something far greater than money and cost and worrying about how they could afford what was needed let alone what was special.

For many of us this will be the first Easter where we are not in church. And that is a cause of grief and anxiety and wondering 'what can we do'. Yet still, Jesus speaks about matters which are far beyond our current reality. In his suffering and death, referred to in this reading the most costly of spices and oil are never enough to anoint the One who has come. How much more would we give our Lord if we were presented with the same situation?

Christine Bayliss-Kelly

Tuesday of Holy Week

7th April 2020

Psalm 71:1-14

1. In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.
2. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.
3. Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.
4. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
5. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
6. Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.
7. I have been like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.
8. My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all day long.
9. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
10. For my enemies speak concerning me, and those who watch for my life consult together.
11. They say, "Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver."
12. O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!
13. Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed; let those who seek to hurt me be covered with scorn and disgrace.
14. But I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more.

Prayer

Holy and immortal God,
from earliest times
you have named us
and called us into discipleship.
Teach us to follow the One
whose light scatters the darkness of our world,
that we may walk as children of the light. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Tuesday of Holy Week

7th April 2020

John 12 :20-36

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" ³⁵Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Reflection

Life from Death

So much could be said about this collection of sayings. The concept of life coming about through death is something we consider every year at Easter. However, it is at the heart of our faith throughout the whole year. Verse 27 speaks about Jesus' determination to continue on the difficult journey of what we now call Easter. Should he ask to be saved from the pain and suffering? I often am reminded of the critical element of having children. It might sound easier for a clean sterile surgery for children to be birthed - yet this is rarely the case. To have a child involves pain and mess and the process of birth is not something most people look forward to. It is tough on the babies as well. Rather it is the joy of what comes after that matters more than what happens along the way. New life comes about through struggle and pain. We appreciate the light more when we have been in darkness. And just as Moses was lifted up on a pole in the desert so people might live when they saw him (Numbers 21:4-9) Jesus was also lifted up that we might also live. Life truly does come about from death.

Christine Bayliss Kelly

Wednesday of Holy Week

8th April 2020

Psalm 70

- 1 Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O LORD, make haste to help me!
- 2 Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me.
- 3 Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!" turn back because of their shame.
- 4 Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!"
- 5 But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!

Prayer:

Troubled God,
in every generation
you call your people to contend
against the brutality of sin and betrayal.
Keep us steadfast even in our fear and uncertainty,
that we may follow where Jesus has led the way. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Wednesday of Holy Week

8th April 2020

John 13 : 21-32

²¹ After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³ One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved - was reclining next to him; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. ³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

Reflection:

The setting is the last supper. Jesus is troubled in spirit for he knows the chain of events that were going to unfold soon. At the supper we see the extraordinary juxtaposition of Jesus' love and Judas' betrayal. It is extraordinary because Judas' betrayal doesn't stop Jesus' love for him. Authentic love always risks betrayal.

Tonight it is Judas. Tomorrow it will be Peter. At the Cross it would be the absence of the disciples. "Lord, who is it?" echoes in every age, in every place. At a different time, at a different place, in a different circumstances it could be anyone of us. Judas is not so much the culprit as he is the mirror of our betrayals. It is not simply Jesus and his love that we betray. We betray ourselves. Every betrayal of Jesus betrays ourselves. We hand ourselves over to the night, betraying our life to death, our love to self-interest, and our hope to despair. We turn away from the light, the source of our life, and once again Jesus is troubled in spirit.

Judas will go out into the night, but the question remains, "Lord, who is it?" "It is one with whom I have spent time, with whom I have shared conversation, to whom I have given bread and drink. It is one whom I love and to whom I have given myself." By giving the bread to Judas, Jesus makes it clear that "..... nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ."

Manas Ghosh

Maundy Thursday of Holy Week

9th April 2020

Psalm 116 : 1-2, 12-19

1 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.
2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
12 What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?
13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,
14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.
15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.
16 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise
the LORD!

Prayer

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal
your son established a new covenant for all people,
and in the washing of feet
he showed us the dignity of service.
Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit
these signs of our life in faith
may speak again to our hearts,
feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Maundy Thursday of Holy Week

9th April 2020

John 13:1-17, 31-35

13 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

(NRSV translation)

Reflection:

This reading is for Maundy Thursday. The word “Maundy” comes from the Latin word “Mandatum” meaning "command" which is the first word of the song that is sung at the ceremony of the washing of the feet, "*Mandatum novum do vobis ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos*" meaning "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

Bible is full of stories of love, and admonitions to love God, others, neighbours even enemies. But when it comes to actually *loving* God or neighbours or enemies, who is there to show us how to do it? Now we have the standard, the guide, the model, the paradigm to follow, and that is Jesus Christ. He not just gives a new commandment he enacts it and sets the new paradigm.

The setting of this “new commandment” is crucial to understand the radical nature of the “new commandment”. This was the final moment in Jesus’ life: a friend of him just betrayed him; another was going to deny him in a few hours’ time; and he himself knew what was going to happen to him soon. In spite all these in absolute love and obedience to God the Father’s will he drank the cup to the last drop and went all the way to Golgotha to give his life for all humanity. His sacrifice was the most loving thing he could have done. And no betrayal, no denials, nothing deterred or thwarted his love for God his Father and for us. He did what he believed and taught his followers to do that.

Jesus’ love for his disciples not only provides a new paradigm of love; but also inaugurates a new community, whose hall marks are Christ-like love and humility. Although he was the Master like a slave when he washed the feet of his disciples, setting a new paradigm for humble service.

Then Jesus reminds his followers that “by this all shall know that you are my disciples.” It is not our Christian names, or church affiliation, or theology that will make us his disciples but our Christ like love and humble service. In this world where there is so much selfishness, hatred, violence and suffering it is hard to follow this command. But we must not lose heart because the One who gave us the commandment to ‘love one another’ also said “just as I have loved you”. We are always at the centre of his love.

Manas Ghosh

Good Friday
10th April 2020
Psalm 22 :1-24

1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.
3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
6 But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.
7 All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
8 "Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver-- let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
12 Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.
14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;
15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.
16 For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled;
17 I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;
18 they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.
19 But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!
20 Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!
21 Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
22 I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
24 For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

Psalm 22 : 25-31

25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

28 For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Grieving God,

on the cross

your Son embraced death

even as he had embraced life:

faithfully and with good courage.

Grant that we who have been

born out of his wounded side

may hold fast to our faith in him exalted

and may find mercy in all times of need. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Good Friday
10th April 2020

John 18 : 1-19 : 42

18:1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' ⁵They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁸Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.' ⁹This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?' ¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. 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, ¹⁶but 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. ¹⁷The 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. ¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' ²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' ²³ Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. 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. ²⁸ Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' ³⁰ They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' ³¹ Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' ³² (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' ³⁴Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' ³⁵Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' ³⁶Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'

³⁷Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

³⁸Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. ³⁹But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' ⁴⁰They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit. 19:1 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.'

⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.'

⁷The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.' ⁸ Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever.

⁹He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' ¹¹Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' ¹²From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.' ¹³When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. ¹⁴Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' ¹⁵They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' ¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' ²⁰Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' ²²Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' ²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' ²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. ²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. ³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' ³⁷And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.' ³⁸After 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. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now 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. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

(NRSV translation)

Reflection

John 18 : 1-19 : 42

As we come to this, the crux of our journey with Jesus, we cannot but slow down. Here the darkness of religious authority and political power collide with the person of Jesus who embodies the greater, disregarded power of God. This year, we may find we read this passage with a somewhat different focus. Can we discern the Jesus who stands there as the powers, seen and unseen, circle around? There are questions and dialogue here that start as the soldiers and religious elite come for Jesus and he asks "For whom are you looking?". We might pause and hold that question for ourselves. To their response, "Jesus of Nazareth", Jesus states "I am he", the same word God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Here is God in Jesus, standing, awaiting all that will happen next: all the tension, untruth, mockery; Peter's denial: "I am not" (a disciple); all the rejection, pain and dying. "I am he", says Jesus. So, he remains for us through to the ending, the entombment as darkness falls. As we wait, in our present moment, let us remember those words: "I am he".

Mary Pearson

Holy Saturday
11th April 2020
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

1 In you, O LORD, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.
2 Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.
3 You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
4 take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.
15 My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
16 Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Prayer

Eternal God, rock and refuge:
with roots grown old in the earth,
river beds run dry,
and flowers withered in the field,
we wait for revival and release.
Abide with us
until we come alive
in the sunrise of your glory. Amen.

1 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.
2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
12 What shall I return to the LORD for all his bounty to me?
13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD,
14 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.
15 Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones.
16 O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.
You have loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the LORD.
18 I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the LORD, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Prayer

Eternal God, in the sharing of a meal
your son established a new covenant for all people,
and in the washing of feet
he showed us the dignity of service.
Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit
these signs of our life in faith
may speak again to our hearts,
feed our spirits, and refresh our bodies. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Holy Saturday

11th April 2020

Matthew 27:57-66

57When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. 62The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63 and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." 65Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." 66So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone. 57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

(NRSV Translation)

Reflection

In the gospel of Matthew there are very few 'rich' disciples. Those whose names we have previously known in the text have fled. Joseph remains. He must have been well regarded in society. It was the normal practice for a body to be left on the cross: it could take days to die and the body might have been left for the dogs and birds of prey. But not in this case. Joseph is of a standing that enables him to have access to Pilate and be entrusted with the care of the body for the sake of its being placed in a tomb. That is unusual. Joseph seems to have thought ahead. Jesus died around 3pm; the sabbath begins at sunset. There are a number of things to be done, including the provision of a linen cloth, the deposition of the body and its being carried to the tomb. We do not know if the two Marys moved the exact same circle of Joseph – probably not. Their sitting opposite the tomb is critical to the Easter story: they are witnesses to Jesus having died on the cross, his burial in the tomb and then they are present again when the tomb is discovered to be empty.

Let us pray: Thank you, God of care and compassion, for those see our needs and attend to them when we are in our hour of most need.

Clive Pearson

Easter Vigil
Saturday, 11th April 2020

Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

2 O give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.

3 O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;

4 who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever;

5 who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever;

6 who spread out the earth on the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever;

7 who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever;

8 the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever;

9 the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever;

23 It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever;

24 and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever;

25 who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever.

26 O give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Easter Vigil
Saturday Evening, 11th April 2020
Matthew 27:62-66

Reflection

⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "You have a guard^[a] of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can."^[b] ⁶⁶So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Only Matthew tells us this story. Pilate is probably a little perplexed. It would seem as if he did not wish Jesus to be put to death. He never addressed the question of blasphemy. He has already said that Joseph of Arimathea could take down the body and place it in a tomb. For a governor concerned with security, law and order he probably thought the matter was finished. Now come the chief priests and the Pharisees (who had not previously been mentioned in the passion narrative); they demand that a guard be placed on the sealed tomb. One can imagine how this episode functioned in the life of the early church. Matthew was writing for a Christian congregation that is mainly Jewish in composition. They are in a minority. It is not difficult to visualize some taunts. Their belief that Jesus has been raised from the dead is met with a rumour that the disciples stole the body away in the middle of the night. Jesus is dead; his body has been removed. For us this account is important as part of the Easter vigil. We are placed in the space in between the cross and the resurrection. For the confession that Jesus has been raised from the dead it is absolutely essential that his being deceased and housed in a tomb is preserved. It is a critical element in the confession that he has been resurrected.

We pray for those who watch and wait with the dying; we pray for those who watch and wait in hope for signs of new life bursting from the tombs we make for ourselves.

Clive Pearson

**Easter Sunday
12th April 2020**

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

1 O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

2 Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."

14 The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.

15 There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

16 the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly."

17 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD.

18 The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death.

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

20 This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it.

21 I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Prayer

Love divine,
in raising Christ to new life
you opened the path of salvation to all peoples.
Send us out, with the joy of Mary Magdalene,
to proclaim that we have seen the Lord,
so that all the world may celebrate with you
the banquet of your peace. Amen.

Amelia Koh-Butler

Easter Sunday
12th April 2020
Matthew 28 :1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

(NRSV translation)

Reflection

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he^[a] lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead,^[b] and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." ⁸So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The two Marys complete their act of witness: they are the ones who discover that the tomb is empty; they are the first to hear that Jesus is raised; they are the first to 'meet' the risen Jesus and 'hold' his feet; they are the ones who first hear the call for the disciples to go back to Galilee where they will see Jesus. They are the first. That should not be taken for granted. The Bible reveals a rather patriarchal set of worldviews: it is men who exercise power and women were not allowed to be witnesses by law. Here we have an episode where the established order is turned upside down. The Easter stories in all the gospels assign this role of witness to the cross, the tomb, the empty tomb and the appearances to women. These two women here testify to the climax of the gospel: Jesus has been raised from the dead. So often in our contemporary witness we emphasize the teaching of Jesus and a prophetic concern for justice on behalf of those pushed to margins. That teaching remains but it should not come at the expense of the witness of these women. The Easter season is the most important season of the Christian year. It is because of the confession that Jesus was crucified, his tomb is empty, and he has been raised.

Let us pray that we might be faithful witnesses to the dying and rising of Christ Jesus Christ. Let us not be afraid to profess this faith in the Galilees of our day and place.

Clive Pearson

