

ST JAMES' CHURCH, KING STREET,  
SYDNEY, NSW



*Bishop Andrew Proud preaching on Easter Day at St James'.  
Photograph by Chris Shain.*

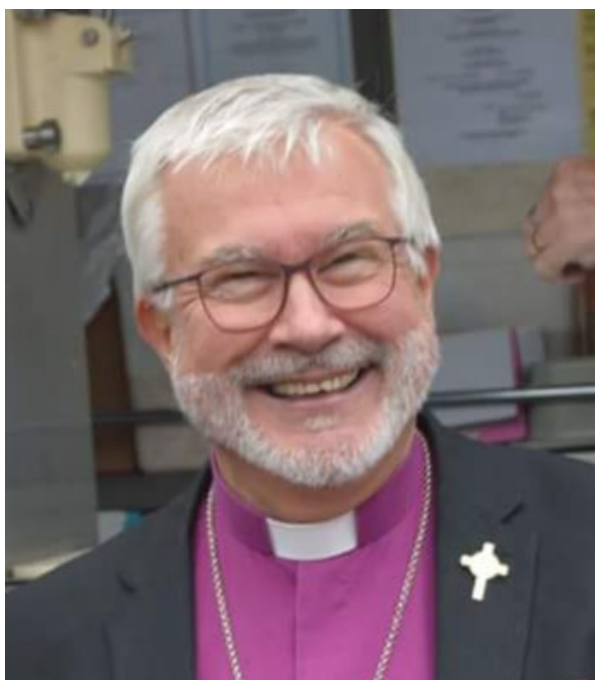
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# HOLY WEEK AND EASTER SERMONS 2024

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THE RIGHT REVEREND ANDREW PROUD

## The Right Rev'd Andrew Proud



Andrew Proud was deaconed in 1980 and priested in 1981. After over twenty years as a parish priest, Andrew and his wife moved to Ethiopia as USPG mission companions.

In 2007, he was made the first Bishop of the Horn of Africa (within the Diocese of Egypt), responsible for Anglicans in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somaliland, Somalia and Djibouti. Most of his work there was on the border between Ethiopia and South Sudan, planting and resourcing new churches.

Upon their return to the UK, Andrew was Bishop of Reading, in the Diocese of Oxford, responsible for Churches and clergy in Berkshire, where he and his team piloted a missional process for the Diocese.

When he retired, in 2019, Andrew was licensed by +Donald as an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Peterborough, where he helps out in various ways. He maintains an active interest in Ethiopia, as Trustee of two charities and, when it is safe to do so, leads pilgrimages to the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela. He enjoys singing with the Northampton Chamber Choir and tending two allotments. He and Janice have five grandchildren.

## Palm Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024

*Mark 14:1 – end of 15*

Today marks the start of Holy Week. We should probably call it holy of holies week...as the Jerusalem Temple is replaced by Jesus as the place where we meet with God and enjoy intimate communion with Him. We took a pilgrim group to the Holy Land ten years ago now. As we climbed - from Galilee - up to Jerusalem, you could actually feel the spiritual pressure mounting.

Today, we see Jesus entering Jerusalem; next Sunday, His resurrection, but there's so much in between. Today's events are deeply moving, in themselves. The golden gate was closed the day Jesus rode in, awaiting the Messiah.

It still is closed.

His entry into the city was so incredibly simple. He brought with Him no tanks, or armoured troop carriers. It wasn't an invasion - and it certainly wasn't a Triumph, which is how Rome honoured its returning conquering heroes. He came with no national emblems or flags, either just the palm branches waved by the crowd, shouting: 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' He didn't come in a chariot - He travelled on two animals.

There were no red carpets, just the cloaks people strew in His way.

And so He arrived - not to glory, but to cleanse the Temple. Not just the Temple built of stone – the second Temple on that site – destroyed by the Roman siege in AD70. But the inner sanctum of our hearts. For you and I are Temples, too. Temples of the Holy Spirit, where God is pleased to dwell. And as He comes to purify the Temple which is the heart of the Holy City, the navel of the world He comes to purify us, too.

A troubling and awesome thought. For me, I hope and pray that what He'll find is the high altar of my heart dedicated to Him, the One, True God. But I know there might be other side chapels in here, each one with an altar dedicated to the godlets I have put my trust in in the past.

My ordinary background and upbringing; a tendency to judge quickly; pride in what I have done in ministry; and my wisdom and judgement. I won't go on – not because there aren't more – there are, many more – I just don't want to embarrass you. But I would like you to think for a moment about what yours might be. And to acknowledge, with me, that it's painful to allow the Lord in to cleanse and to heal.

Painful, because He may disabuse us of our self delusions. Perhaps I'll discover that what I thought was a rather nice high altar, dedicated to the One True God, adorned with brocades and gold was – actually - a shrine to myself all along.

Just suppose, for a moment, that I was rich and I had in my possession what I thought was a beautiful old masterpiece, inherited from my family. Something I loved to show off to my friends from time to time. And then, one day, I dared to invite an expert from Christies into my home to admire and value it. I think I'd be heartbroken to discover that the painting I loved wasn't an original at all, just a very good copy.

To be purified is painful. So, of course the people that day were disturbed when the Lord appeared and began to purify and cleanse the sanctuary of Israel. He had to purify it because the Temple had developed a religious system that was so embedded in its own rules and practices – it had stopped being open to any fresh revelation from God. And He purified the Temple because, as John has tells us early on in his gospel, Jesus identified Himself with it. 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days, I will raise it up.'

He is the reality to which the temple points. His own body, first destroyed and then raised from the dead, is to be the true temple - a house of prayer for all nations. He Himself is now the place where God's presence dwells among us. He is the place where we can find God, where we can be with God and where we can commune with God, by staying close to Him, if we believe in Him, if we trust in Him. Jesus, a person, not a building. Flesh, blood and bone, not a place encased by stone and mortar.

And of course His death and resurrection will be the reality to which the whole Passover celebration points.

So, what began as a hugely popular arrival in the holy city that first Palm Sunday quickly became highly dangerous. Afterwards, He leaves Jerusalem and heads down, east of the Jordan. You can imagine, I think, that having seen him that day, hopes soared – When they saw Him leave, hope must have vanished like autumn mist. So, of course, the question on everyone's lips was, 'Will he come for Passover, or not?'

John tells us they even went looking for Him. Well He did come for Passover. And, in fact, He died at Passover, as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple. The lamb of God loved His friends to the end. This we have seen - and heard.

Palm Sunday may have felt, in the moment, like a triumphant denouement to a thrilling tale, but He had to go downhill, from here, into the dust, before he could be raised from the dead. Pray for the strength to stay close to Him this holy of holies week. To watch and wait with Him. To pray with Him. To stand with Him in His suffering, so we can share fully in His glory and the joy of His resurrection next Sunday.

And because it is – and always has been – the sanctuary of our hearts that God is most jealous for allow Him to enter in, to do what He needs to do, to make us the people He wants and needs us to be.

I leave you with this, one of my absolute favourites, from Rainer Maria Rilke's Book of Hours.

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
 then walks with us silently out of the night.  
 These are the words we dimly hear:  
 You, sent out beyond your recall,  
 go to the limits of your longing.  
 Embody me.  
 Flare up like a flame  
 and make big shadows I can move in.  
 Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.  
 Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
 Don't let yourself lose me.  
 Nearby is the country they call life.  
 You will know it by its seriousness.  
 Give me your hand.

*Book of Hours, I 59*

Amen.

## Monday in Holy Week

*John 12: 1-11*

One of the many things we loved about living in Addis Ababa was that so many people came through on their way somewhere. Family and friends, of course, to stay with us, and people we'd never met, too – usually en route to the rock hewn churches of Lalibela or birding in the Bale Mountains and asked if they could meet up, because they wanted to understand something of the country before they travelled.

But whoever it was, and if I was in town I'd drive them around the City pointing out things tourists never got to see. And as I did - I would ask – 'tell me what you're noticing'. And it was fascinating - because visitors saw things we had begun to take for granted, and it gave us a way-in to talking about that extraordinary, beautiful and difficult country.

Well, there's something of that going on here for us this evening. So much is familiar about this section of John and the long climb up to Calvary Hill, we scarce notice the details any more. And as, this week, of all weeks, we need to have our eyes open if we are to grasp, with heart and mind what He has done for us - and as I am your visitor let me tell you what **I** notice along the way.

Of course, we know what time of year it was, because John tells us - precisely – it was six days before Passover – so it was a time of pilgrimage, and Jerusalem was already filling up.

John has been preparing the ground for this Feast for some time – he wants us to understand – to see this death for what it is - a sacrificial death. And he starts by taking us to Bethany. A place we've been to before in this gospel.

In Chapter 1, it's in Bethany that John the Baptist announces the One who is coming and whose sandals he is not worthy to untie.

And here we are again. And in the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha - again.

Last time we were here, before Jesus had raised his friend, Lazarus, from the dead Mary had thrown herself at his feet and cried 'Lord, if you'd been here....my brother would be alive!'

There are intentional echoes here, I think, of other deliberate encounters of contrast. In Luke, while Mary sat at His feet, which only a faithful disciple – or a rabbinical student would do - Martha was in the kitchen, slaving away...

And, again in Luke, between the father and his two sons, the one, a prodigal who returns; and the other, faithful, elder son who can't forgive or rejoice...

I think that's how John wants us to read this stand-off with Judas, His betrayer.

I wonder, where you were in each of those dramas? With Mary - or Martha? With the younger, or the older brother? There's a little bit of both in us all, if we're honest. And John is asking - where are you now? Are you with Mary, or Judas? Forget that he tells us Judas was a thief, just for now.

John is asking – What kind of disciple are you? Are you one who sees following Him as a call to love without limits?

Or one who sees following Him as a call to discipline and responsibility? Both have their place. But it's the anointing I really want us to think and pray on.

In Mary's simple act – in the scent of sweet perfume filling the room, in the cup of blessing he shared, In all of these, I think we are meant to see light. In her anointing His feet – and the mercy He shows, we're meant to understand that Judas's judgment is undone. More, actually - that the judgement of the world is undone. In other words, it's mercy that opens the way to life.

As the sweet smell of that perfume, filling the room masks - no, more than that banishes the stench of Lazarus's tomb (11:39) - we can see that life and death, wholeness and corruption run like threads through both scenes.

A short time after Mary wipes Jesus' feet, Jesus wipes the disciples' feet.

So John is pointing out something new here - Mary is being presented as a model disciple - in kneeling at His feet, and anointing them with costly perfume, and drying them with her hair John wants us to see how close she is to Jesus (13:8) ..... quietly, faithfully, lovingly keeping the command He gave at the Last Supper – 'If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet.....' (13:14-15).

Mary's gift goes beyond extravagant. It would take a labourer an entire year to earn enough money to pay for that ointment! She exceeded common decency, too. What she

did was incredibly intimate – and - she'd have had to let her hair down to dry His feet with it. Only someone who sold her body for a living would do such a thing.

*Jesus* was deeply moved by it.

*Judas* was deeply offended.

Did he regret losing the chance to pilfer the value of the perfume, I wonder.....?

Or was it Mary's lavish love that He found abhorrent - mindful of what he had just committed himself to? We can't know.

But it's that fragrance I'd like to leave you pondering.

Rudyard Kipling begins his poem, 'Lichtenberg', about a small town in South Africa, defended by Australian troops during the Boer War, with this:

"Smells are surer than sounds or sights / To make your heart-strings crack."

Mary's perfume gift filled not just the whole house but the minds and senses of everyone there. I think John is inviting us, his readers to honour Jesus in extravagant ways, too. The precious gift of our whole self – down to every last strand of our hair – something that demands our all,

Or - perhaps - demands yet more of us offered to Him who rode into Jerusalem to die as our anointed King.

Let us pray.

Gentle, gracious Lord, grant to us,  
 your people here gathered  
 the spirit of unity,  
 that we may dwell together in your love,  
 and so bear, to the world,  
 the ointment of your healing  
 and the dew of your blessing,  
 in your precious name we pray it  
 Amen.



## Tuesday in Holy Week

*John 12: 20-36*

Even a child knows that you can't force a rosebud to open by picking and pulling at the petals – you have to wait - for the right time, and it'll open all by itself. But, how do you know when the time's right, more generally? To know when the ripe moment has come...?

Well, here, Jesus knew His hour had come... Because some Greeks, Gentiles had come up to Jerusalem for the Festival and had asked Philip, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus...'

Paying attention, especially to who we are meeting is, and always has been essential to mission work - which we are all called to whatever our context: beautiful, cosmopolitan Sydney; small town Northampton, where we live, or the border country of Ethiopia.

Notice, Jesus didn't think His hour had come because of what everyone thought the Greeks stood for: their military prowess, or their flourishing democracy, her great philosophers or her culture.

This was a different time - and a different place. Greece was in decline by this time, long past the golden eras of Plato - and Socrates; And - well, this encounter doesn't happen in Greece. They are a long way from home – they are out of place – they are sojourners, strangers. And they approach Philip, a Galilean, despite his Greek name because they want to meet the man everyone was talking about.

In the first century, Galilee was widely regarded as the backend of the world. Which means that Philip and Andrew were a long way from home, too. And it's Philip I'd like us to think about for a bit. Philip had been with Jesus from the very beginning. He had been there at the wedding in Cana; he was there in the boat – when the Lord walked across the Sea, off Capernaum; he would've seen the healings and the feeding miracles with his own eyes.

He was there when Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the Temple (John 2), and - when the crowds turned their backs on Him and his own brothers rejected him (John 6, 7).

He'd had seen Him almost arrested, and nearly stoned to death (John 10).  
He knew the highest highs and the lowest lows of being a disciple. He knew Jesus - and he knew what it was to follow Him through thick and thin.

When he sought out Nathaniel, because he thought they'd found the One, and from Nazareth – and Nathaniel had sneered 'can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip simply said 'Come and see!'

And now - these Greeks want to see And things are come full-circle.

So, Philip *knows*. He's seen the promise, and the peril, and he's had to reckon with them both. He knows the power - and the glory, but he also knows that the power and glory he's seen in Jesus are not the power or glory many were hoping for.

He knows that Jesus is the one true Messiah – that all the others are and had been, simply, pretenders – but he wasn't naïve. He knew that following Him wasn't some pleasant uphill stroll, through shaded, tree lined avenues, like Hyde Park, ending in triumph and glory.

He knows – it's all true. And so, of, course he was the right person to be friend and guide to these strangers. When you think about it, they must have followed the triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

And heard tell, in the crowd, of the healing of the man born blind – and Lazarus being raised from the dead.

Like the crowd, maybe they, too, thought they'd found the world's next, great conquering hero. Who would throw off the yoke of Rome.  
 Someone to rival Alexander the Great and Philip of Macedon.  
 Somebody who really is "*King of Israel*."  
 And of course, He is!

But what they don't think – what they can't begin to imagine – is that in a few short days, He will be hanging on a cross.

That He will have laid down His *life*...for his followers, and for His enemies.  
 And as they climb together up to Jerusalem, I'm pretty sure Philip can't imagine it either.

But with Philip's help, they might just make it through Good Friday – and still be there – on Easter Sunday.

So, the time **had** come, the time for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Even now, Jesus doesn't spell out His end – perhaps because they weren't ready to hear it? That's the real question to ask...of them, and of ourselves.

'Are we ready?'

And all this other stuff - about grains of wheat and all of that is simply the Rabbi's way, of preparing the ground for the big reveal...which came, the moment He looked fear in the face.

Pushing on, through the terror, He addresses His search for a way out, and ours when He says – 'it is the very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.'

It is only when the thunderous voice proclaims , 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again' that He spells His end out:

'But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

Curiously, Jesus refused to meet these Greeks, but He must have known they marked a tipping point in God's mission to this world He loves so much - and what it would cost. His death was to be for the whole world, not just the favoured few.

Tonight, Philip gets us a little further down the road to Calvary Hill.

May God give us the courage to be ready, for whatever comes in life... and to take Him by the hand with the same light, trusting grasp a small child holds the open fingers of a parent's hand.

So we, too, are ready when the hour of our own death comes. Amen

## Wednesday in Holy Week

*John 13: 21-32*

We stand on a threshold this evening – which narrows – as the darkness deepens, on the way to Calvary Hill. The ‘treachery of Judas’ is an important strand woven through the drama of these few days – And, of course, it has inspired a huge amount of art and literature, all designed to bring us to our knees in sorrow for our own betrayals.

And we could stay with that; we could each spend a useful half hour reflecting on where we are still falling short and falling into sin right now. But I’d like to take us in a different direction – and I’m indebted to the English priest, Bill Vanstone, for this.

Bill’s sadly no longer with us, but in his superb little book, ‘The Stature of Waiting’, he points out that the Greek verb John uses to describe what Judas did - *paradidomi* – shouldn’t be translated betray – at all – it literally means to hand over.

He goes on to say – if you look at the way John’s written, you see that up until this point in the Gospel everything Jesus says and does is done in the daylight.

The healings, the signs, the teaching, His encounters, all proof that He is the true light who has come into the world.

But then, here, as Judas slips out to do the dread deed, all that changes – and the hinge is John’s tiny sentence, ‘And it was night.’ From now on, it is the hour of darkness, and all Jesus can do is wait, to let it unfold.

We could almost leave it there, too, and decide to watch and pray paying attention to all the ways the darkness creeps over Him, trying to obliterate the light. But I think there is more we can fruitfully say and do - and to do that, I am going to take you to the Book of Jonah.

You remember, I am very sure, Jonah, caught in a huge storm out at sea – all hell breaking loose around the ship. The crew tried everything they knew, to save it – calling on their gentile gods for help, and throwing all excess baggage overboard. And all the while, Jonah is asleep – and a really deep sleep, too such that not even the storm wakes him.

We think - straight away – of Jesus sleeping through the storm on the lake. The Captain, seeing Jonah sleeping – and by now, very afraid – wakes him - because he thinks that if he’s sleeping, he must know something they don’t.

Which, to his mind, means Jonah is the only one who can actually do something! But the captain can't call on Jonah's God. Because he doesn't know Him. He needs an intermediary, an intercessor. He needs Jonah.

And this is where the two stories converge and intersect, as fear achieves what pride never can. Pride built the tower of Babel; but it was fear that made Herod and Pilate friends that day.

In the pagan culture of Jonah's time, 'lady luck', fortuna, was key to everything which is why people would toss a coin to decide who was 'it.'

And so, out of fear, they cast lots, to see who's 'It' – and the lot falls on Jonah.

Now, this is where it gets really interesting because what we begin to see here is the standard formula for atonement offerings. Which work like this.

In Exodus, Moses' offer – of his own life in place of the people – is rejected by God and Aaron is commanded to make the offering for sin – by becoming high priest! And when Abraham laid his hands on Isaac, the Lord provided a ram – which Abraham took – extending his life and Isaac's life – to the ram itself.

On the day of Atonement, two identical male kids were brought to the high priest, who, dressed in his vestments, would cast the urim and thumim to see which kid was destined for Azazel – the demon of the wilderness, to be the scapegoat – and which was to be the lamb of God.

And, in the book of Jonah, which is read in-full, in synagogues, at Yom Kippur, the day of atonement to this day, Jonah becomes high priest to and a sacrifice for the nations.

Wonderfully, in Hebrew, the name 'Jonah' means an atoning sacrifice.

So when Jonah says, 'take me', 'bind me over' – we should be really sitting up and paying attention: because there's our formula again.

Jonah is offering himself for the Gentiles! For an unclean people, a people his own people despise.

When you think about it – if there was simply a need for Jonah to die, he could've jumped off the ship and into the sea all by himself - and saved them the trouble. But they must *take* him, they must lay hands on him,  
 Just as Abraham took and laid hands on Isaac.  
 He needs to become an extension of their own lives. So that his life becomes the way they offer their lives to God.

And, of course, we see this in the passion narratives. Jesus could have jumped off the Temple roof if all he had to do was to die.  
 But one of his own disciples had to initiate the liturgy of His sacrifice.

And, it couldn't be clearer – First, Jesus is bound and handed over to the Temple guard on the Mount of Olives; then bound over again to the high priest; who binds him over to Pilate; who binds him over to the Edomite, Herod, who mocks him and robes him – before binding him back to Pilate again.

And then, as the liturgy draws to its close, Barabbas is released, just like the lamb – and Jesus is handed over to the crowd for crucifixion, the scapegoat.

I don't know if you know this, but the high priest would read excerpts from Chronicles and Job as he stood, barefoot, on the pavement, Gabbatha, on the night before the atonement sacrifice in the Temple.

And so when Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers who, like the sailors on Jonah's ship, came from all over the known world – they vested him in a seamless violet mantle, high priestly garments.

And there He stood, on the pavement, Gabbatha - barefoot.  
 The crown of thorns as his priestly turban – and the reed?

Well, Cain slew Abel – and the name Cain means 'reed', but also 'jealousy' and 'anger.' And, the gospel tells us, Jesus took upon himself all their jealousy and their anger. And so, He was bound to the wood of the cross –  
 Just as Isaac was bound to the wood of the sacrifice.

But reflect on this, if you will – if Judas – who John refers to as the thief, and the betrayer, played such a key role in the drama of the world's salvation – then there must, always, be hope for you and for anyone we, or society, might write off as being beyond the pale.  
 Amen.

**MAUNDY THURSDAY**  
**John 13:1-17; 31b-35**

I shall never forget our first visit to  
 St. Luke's, Gambella, a small town  
 right on the border between Ethiopia and South Sudan.

Let me see if I can sketch it for you.

It was April 2002, we'd not long been in the country,  
 and our Bishop had come, from Cairo, to take us down there, to introduce me.

By 4 in the afternoon, it had begun to get cooler  
 (only 38 degrees by then), and the Church Council, the choir and the Mothers' Union  
 were waiting for us at the compound gates.

After the fulsome and enthusiastic greetings  
 which we would come to love -  
 Male, male mgwa! Male mdid! Male chum chum!  
 Hello! How are you? How's your body?  
 And how's the eating?.....  
 they enveloped us in their midst and took us,  
 drums beating and crosses waving  
 through the dust of the busy market.

After twenty minutes,  
 the dust sticking to our prickly skin,  
 we neared the church compound –  
 where the whole congregation came now out to meet us,  
 strewing Neem tree branches across our path  
 as the singing and drumming intensified.

And as we entered the huge,  
 beautifully-swept compound,  
we were swept up, too, towards a row of chairs,  
 borrowed from the school  
 where they sat us down, and proceeded to take

off our shoes and socks  
 to wash the dust and sweat from our feet  
 with the precious water the women had carried  
 all the way from the Baro river,  
 two kilometres away.

With soap and that oh, so precious water,  
 they wash even between your toes  
 and up your ankles –  
 before dabbing your feet dry on a cloth,  
 just like Mum used to when we were small,  
 before forcing your sticky socks back on - all awry  
 and lacing on your shoes.  
 I can tell you, it makes you want to cry.

Because everything in you shouts, No! Please.  
 This is what I should do for you.

But it is good for us - especially those of us from  
 here, from the wealthy, self-sufficient, all-sufficient West,  
 to be humbled like that,  
 to receive such love - from people  
 who have nothing and know real brokenness.

It changes everything –  
 and it's how it is meant to be In His Kingdom.

Well, there's all of that here in this passage.  
 The love - and the down-to-earthness.

This is both the beginning and the end –  
 the beginning of the long, slow climb up to  
 Calvary Hill  
 and the end - the climax, the goal  
 of everything He's said, done and stood for so far.  
 "Now" says John, "he loved them right through to the end".

That and the next two verses are all John says by way of introduction to the foot-washing  
 and the rest of his gospel.



Of course, it was Passover.

And John has taken great pains to point out the connections between the feast and Jesus:

In Chapter 1 [29 and 36] he tells us Jesus is the Passover lamb.

In Chapter 2 [verses 19-21], Jesus speaks, at Passover, of the Temple, his body, being destroyed and rebuilt.

He feeds the crowds at Passover time,  
and goes on to speak about feeding on His  
body and blood.

And now, he's back in Jerusalem - for a final Passover.

Interestingly, John doesn't describe the meal itself –  
assuming we would know the details already  
from Matthew, Mark and Luke –  
and our regular participation in the Eucharist.

He doesn't describe the meal, either  
but it's as they're eating that Jesus points us  
beyond this night  
to the events of the next day.

Then, John tells us that Jesus' time had come.  
He's not saying - this is now the time for Jesus to die,  
or that he'll go straight to heaven.

The foot-washing and the crucifixion are more  
like rungs on a ladder  
stretching from this world  
to the world of the Father.

Jesus, God's eternal Word  
must fully live the terrors He's alluded to;  
this is the way home that he must take.  
He has no choice.

And thirdly (and for John this is really important), what is now done is an act of supreme love.

Now, says John, “he loved them right through to the end”

Not just doggedly, because he was committed and couldn’t back out even if He wanted to.

No. John is telling us that He loved them to the uttermost. There was nothing love could do for them that He did not do now.

All that is there in the first verse. The second and third verses prepare the way, too.

There is Judas, allowing the devil’s whispered suggestion to insinuate its way into his imagination. I talked about his role last night, But in the spirit of John, tonight, let me just say.....

Evil has a way of creeping into the cracks when love is going to the limits.

And then, the Word who was with God; the Word who was God – now become flesh..... who had laid aside his clothes of glory to become one with us – now lays aside His garments to wash the disciples’ feet.

Something He had to do – because He had come from God. The foot-washing and the crucifixion are deeply connected, showing us how much He loves us. Next time Jesus has his clothes changed, in chapter 19 [5], it will reveal Him as the man, the king.

After that, of course, He will be naked on the cross, revealing His all.

But also revealing the Father's heart –  
as He gives his life for the world.

The little episode with Peter, misunderstanding again what Jesus is up to - is deadly serious.

Jesus must wash us if we are to belong to him.  
Neither Peter or the others really get that, yet.

It's only later, when he's commissioned them  
after the resurrection,  
that the penny drops.

As we hear and reflect on this,  
We are meant to imagine what it means for Him to  
wash us – sacrificially –  
not just with water and a towel,  
as if he were the host  
and we, honoured guests –  
but with His blood,  
shed willingly for us on the cross.

And, just as important.....  
is for the world to see you and I,  
Jesus' followers,  
doing what He did.

So they know how much they are loved, too.  
That's the new commandment he gives us tonight.  
To love one another as He loved us.

Join me in praying now for the grace  
and the strength to live in that love.

And the joy that such love brings  
such that we won't give a fig for the dust  
and the sweat of the road  
clinging to ours - and especially other's  
grimy, gnarled feet.

Let us pray.

Come, Creator Spirit, source of all Life,  
Sustain us when our hearts are heavy  
And our wells have run dry,  
For you are the Father's gift  
Together with Him who is our living water,  
Even Jesus Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

## Good Friday (1) Deeper: the Pit Dungeon

On the edge of Jerusalem,  
standing on top of one of the many little,  
folding hills that surround the city,  
is Caiaphas' house,  
Where they held Jesus  
the night before he stood trial before Pilate;

The same place Peter denied him - three times – by the fire in the courtyard.

It doesn't look much, as you approach it –  
there's a church built over the house,  
which is nice enough –  
but beneath the house,  
deep in the cellars, is a pit dungeon -  
carved out of the rock  
and conical in shape –  
probably twenty or thirty feet deep.

Above it, by the small circular hole at the top of the pit,  
they used to chain prisoners –  
cruciform – to lash and humiliate them –  
before lowering them into the pit dungeon –  
by a rope noosed under their arms  
awaiting crucifixion.

You can go down - right to the bottom today –  
and we did –  
all 60 of us, huddled in the dark –  
while up above, one of us read Psalm 88 into the hole they lowered the bodies through.  
Listen now to the first nine verses:  
1 O Lord, God of my salvation,  
I have cried out day and night before You.  
2 Let my prayer come before You;  
Incline Your ear to my cry.  
3 For my soul is full of troubles,  
And my life draws near to the grave.

4I am counted with those who go down to the pit;  
 I am like a man who has no strength,  
 5Adrift among the dead,  
 Like the slain who lie in the grave,  
 Whom You remember no more,  
 And who are cut off from Your hand.  
 6You have laid me in the lowest pit,  
 In darkness, in the depths.  
 7Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
 And You have afflicted me with all Your waves.

Selah

8You have put away my acquaintances far from me;  
 You have made me an abomination to them;  
 I am shut up, and I cannot get out;  
 9My eye wastes away because of affliction.

None of us had ever thought about the horror –  
 the terror – the cruelty –  
 of what He went through before his crucifixion.  
 You could almost feel it.

We were down there under electric light:  
 He would have been there in total darkness.

We could smell was that musty, warm,  
 earthy smell you get in an underground space.

His nostrils would have been full of  
 the urine and faeces of the petrified prisoners  
 who had been there before him.

The next morning, they would have dragged him out by the rope – into the cold, early  
 light –  
 of the day of his trial and crucifixion.

Such were the depths He was prepared to go to for you and for me.

And so here's the thing -

that However deep we find ourselves – in sin, despair, sickness, darkness, or suffering –  
 He has been there –  
 and still is - deeper still, holding us,  
 never letting us go.

For many reasons – amongst them, pride –  
 we tend think our problems  
 are worse than anyone else's;  
 our sins more dreadful – unforgiveable, in fact;  
 our pain more unbearable

The Pit Dungeon and the Cross remind  
 us that nothing is irredeemable;  
 no one is beyond the pale;  
 nothing is so dark and desperate  
 that it cannot be transformed.

Let me leave you in this homily  
 with an apocryphal story about Judas.....

## **Good Friday (2)**

### **Golgotha**

We walked the Via Dolorosa,  
 the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem.  
 Of course we did.  
 Perhaps you have too?

If you have, you'll know it is still, really busy  
 in those narrow, crowded streets.

Paradoxically, you feel so alone,  
 swamped, even as you are, by the crowd –

As people go about their everyday business –  
 the excited, urgent voices of tourists and their guides,  
 office workers slipping out to buy lunch,  
 policemen scrutinising the crowd,  
 stall-holders hawking their wares,

the crowd pressing in.

I think we need to learn to find Him in the crowd –  
in the busyness of the everyday,  
because if we can find Him there,  
we'll find Him anywhere.

And here we are now – at the foot of the cross, Golgotha, the place of the skull, in  
Aramaic.

Of course, this cross - which looms above our heads –  
would have cast but a tiny shadow in the midday sun,  
across the stones, dust, bones and scraps of discarded clothing lying all around.  
For this was the rubbish tip of Jerusalem –  
outside the city walls –  
where dogs and scavengers picked and poked around for carrion.

Except - this cross is not only thrust  
deep into the rock, stone and soil and spoil  
outside the walls of this city,  
it is thrust deep into the sin, decay, disease,  
detritus, death and entropy of the world –  
deep into the Fall itself.

And – just as a tree draws moisture  
and nutrients from the soil –  
so this cross draws all the chaos and sin  
up into itself – and transforms it.

For this is not just one of the thousands of other crosses Rome used as gallows –  
this is the cross of our Christ.

The healer and redeemer of the world.

The Anglican priest and psychiatrist, Martin Israel wrote -  
if Jesus had had absolute knowledge of his resurrection as He died on the cross –  
then this death would have been  
merely theatrical.



But there's nothing theatrical about this death.  
 Absolute knowledge of his resurrection?  
 Somehow, I doubt it.

Because as He is raised up upon the cross  
 and hangs there,  
 we see Him groping in a darkness  
 infinitely denser than anything we can  
 imagine or endure.

On this cross,  
 He is allowing all the despair of separated humanity to enter into himself.

Just think about what that means.

He is *allowing* that –  
 to the point where an unthinkable chasm is opened up -between God and God.  
 Between the Father and His crucified Son.

As if God, dying in the flesh on the cross, chose to plumb the depths of atheism  
 and all the hells ever dreamt up by humankind.  
 No wonder he cried 'eloi, eloi, lamma sabacchani'  
 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

He knew He could have failed.  
 That was the extent of the risk He was prepared to take for love of our love.

What more proof do we need that God is infinite love?

This cross we're standing under  
 reverses the entire cosmology of the universe:  
 it mends the rift that appeared in time and matter at the Fall.

It is that momentous an event.

Why else would the sky darken completely at three in the afternoon?

And why else would the veil of the temple tear in two?

And just as last night, we remembered Jesus kneeling before Peter, to wash his feet,  
it is as if Jesus kneels before us now –  
offering His death for you and for me.

God's love is not impersonal and abstract.  
His love is no mere philosophical proposition.  
And we should never talk about as if it were.

This death we're witnessing today  
proves that each one of us will be  
received by Him - face to face - in his kingdom.  
The cross is indeed the tree of life.  
It is the means by which the axis of the world is brought back into line and  
creation is given a new stability.

It is also a solemn pledge,  
a promise made by God,  
that the door to paradise is open again –  
if we chose to go in-  
and will never be shut.

Jesus offers us, now, in this place,  
and at this moment  
what He promised the thief crucified at his side.  
And will we take it?

## Good Friday (3) The Stone Seal

The closest I have come to seeing anything like His burial, is in Ethiopia, where they still bury, in the ground, with a concrete slab cemented in place – instead of the traditional stone to keep the hyenas out.

This stone, the stone that sealed His tomb was meant to silence Him for good.

He who, only a week ago, said, to the grumbling Pharisees  
“I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out!”

This stone was meant to seal Him in the cold, dark land of death - for ever.

They still didn't know who they were dealing with  
No one did.

Having told us, earlier, the names of all the women who stayed by the cross, watching, to the bitter end, John is surprisingly thin on how they all – melted away

And we have no idea how much time elapsed between the soldier piercing His side with a spear and the ‘After these things’ – we have here.....

But it's the middle east, and it must have been later the same day that two men from the margins of the story were the ones who showed up – not one of the twelve, or his own family.

Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple – but a secret one

Following the conventions of John's Gospel,  
you'd expect him to appear under cover of dark,  
but here he is - in broad daylight.

And then, Nicodemus –  
who had come to Jesus by night  
much earlier in the gospel –  
here, now, bringing a  
hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes for the burial

That's a hundred times as much as Mary  
poured over Jesus' feet at Bethany –  
and **they** thought **she** was being extravagant!

**This** was the kind of amount you would use for a King.

But it's the stone I want to focus on for a moment.  
which John doesn't mention –  
until it's found - rolled away - only a few verses on.

Stone is really significant in Israel/Palestine – because of the geology of the terrain  
So of course it played a major role in the spiritual imagination of her people.

At Bethel,  
Jacob balanced twelve sacred stones  
in a pillar - to mark the place  
where God had spoken to him in a dream

And Moses - strikes rock in the wilderness  
from which God makes so much life giving  
water flow out –  
that you can't but grasp that God is merciful

We're meant to remember Moses and the rock  
when we hear that water sprang from His side  
after the centurion lanced Him with his spear –  
to see if he was dead.

He - the living Word –

Was then, and always has been –  
a stumbling stone an outrage, to many.  
This stone seal was meant to silence Him for good.  
To lock Him in the dark for ever.

Yet, what was meant to be the final act  
in a sorry saga to finish Him off,  
turned out to be the opening lines  
of many more Acts in the divine  
drama of salvation

And, today, you and are wrapped and written into it - the latest sentences and  
paragraphs  
of a story that will run and run.

What part are you being called to play in that drama  
here, through St James',  
do you think?

## Easter Vigil, 6am Easter Morning

*Alleluia! Christ is risen!*

In the second cluster of rock-hewn churches in Lalibela,  
high up in the rugged mountains of northern Ethiopia  
there is a deep underground gallery and tunnel,  
that climbs up between Beit Lehem  
where the holy bread for the Holy Liturgy is baked,  
and the sacred vessels are kept  
and the Church of Beite Gabriel Raphael.

You enter this tunnel and - instantly,  
you are in deep, smothering darkness.

And it's not an easy climb.  
The tunnel floor is uneven  
and from the low ceiling all manner of nasty protrusions threaten to do you damage.  
The only way to navigate it safely –  
is to keep one hand on the person in front of you –  
and the other on the ceiling above you.

We usually sing a Taize chant as we climb,  
'The Lord is my Light' - encouraging one another  
because the tunnels' long enough  
to make some panic  
And unsettle the stoutest heart.

Which is the point.

At the end of it, you reach a gallery,  
where the only way out is to climb steep steps  
carved into the bedrock,  
to emerge - into the narthex of Beite Gebrial,  
in the blinding light of day.

King Lalibela's workers dug out the tunnel  
to represent Jesus' descent into Hades after His death,  
to harrow Hell.

Who knows who, or what He met there?

The Scottish poet, George Mackay Brown, reflects on that beautifully:

“The Harrowing of Hell”

He went down the first step.

His lantern shone like the morning star.

Down and round he went

Clothed in his five wounds.

Solomon whose coat was like daffodils

Came out of the shadows.

He kissed Wisdom there, on the second step.

The boy whose mouth had been filled with harp-songs,

The shepherd king

Gave, on the third step, his purest cry.

At the root of the Tree of Man, an urn

With dust of apple-blossom.

Joseph, harvest-dreamer, counsellor of pharaohs

Stood on the fourth step.

He blessed the lingering Bread of Life.

He who had wrestled with an angel,

The third of the chosen,

Hailed the King of Angels on the fifth step.

Abel with his flutes and fleeces

Who bore the first wound

Came to the sixth step with his pastorals.

On the seventh step down

The tall primal dust

Turned with a cry from digging and delving.

Tomorrow the Son of Man will walk in a garden.

Well, this is the day that He Walks in the garden

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The day - the only day in the year -

the early Christians were baptised.

By the third Christian Century, the Church had begun to dig Baptistries deep down into the rock - and our liturgy began to settle into the form which is carrying us here.

By 387, when Augustine and his friend Allypius, and his illegitimate son, Adeodatus, were baptised by the fourth A Bishop Ambrose, in Milan, these baptistries were huge.

We have seen one, on the Tunisian coast, not far from Carthage. The Basilica stands in ruins, but it would have held 1,000 people. Only the Baptistry still stands.

And there, just like us here - before dawn on Easter Day, everyone who was to be baptised would stand, facing West, facing into the darkness in front of the Bishop - who asked them the same questions put to candidates for Baptism today.

And as they answered, 'I turn to Christ' the bishop would turn each one around, physically, to face the sun, cresting the horizon in the East.

Then, they would pass through a leather curtain one by one to descend thirty or so steps, to the font filled with running water - never still. Only running water for the Living God.

Twelve pillars stood around the baptistery - a carved apostle at the head of each one.

At the bottom, the candidates took all their clothes off - to show they were leaving their old lives behind and stepped down into the water, where the Bishop and - having baptised by total immersion, many times, I know it's near impossible alone - another priest were waiting.

Each candidate was then plunged beneath the water three times:



in the name of the Father - whoosh  
 And the Son - whoosh  
 And of the Holy Spirit- whoosh.

After, they each put a plain white robe on,  
 to signify their new life in Christ  
 and then climbed steps on the other side of the font,  
 which led up into the Basilica  
 which would be flooded in candlelight,

and there, they would join the congregation  
 for the whole Liturgy, for the very first time

and pray the Lord's Prayer - for the very first time

and receive the sacrament of our salvation -  
 for the first time.

Afterwards (and I love this small detail)  
 they were each given special slippers  
 to wear for the whole of Easter Week -  
 so their feet wouldn't touch the ground.

Why am I telling you all this?

Well, because this morning, linear-time collapses  
 and we and God's whole Church,  
 Living and Departed  
 are being held in an eternal NOW  
 at the still point of the Universe.

For this is our Passover Feast.  
 Alleluia!

The gates that were bolted shut are unlocked. The iron bars that held us are shattered,  
 melted in His red-hot presence. Everyone is now set free.

Immersed in His love, we shall never again be separated from God.

In the Holy Spirit, Jesus walks at your side

waiting, in every moment  
for your response of loving faith,  
that Yes - like Mary's Yes -  
by which our freedom is set free.

My sisters and brothers!  
Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

## Easter Morning 10am

Before I begin, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you, Fr Christopher - and Marianne - for your generous hospitality this week.

And I'd like to say to all of you how much we have loved being here - thank you!

Thank you, all of you, for your welcome and your kindness - thank you for the beautifully led liturgies, for the glorious singing. For the quality of the reading and intercessing and live-streaming.

The whole week has moved us deeply. And we've loved being here.

So.....Herein is our Easter joy

That when Mary Magdalen got to the garden tomb very early in the morning – it was empty!

Finding a place empty when you want something is usually a massive disappointment – and Mary, finding His tomb empty, assumes the worst.

And - well - it was so at odds with everything they'd seen Him do, and heard Him say.

You could say - Fullness - was His message!

Remember - He said He had come that they might have life – and not just *life*, but life in abundance – life in all its fullness.

When He was a guest at a wedding in Cana, in Galilee – and the wine ran out - He told them to fill six, vast, **empty** stone jars with water – full to the brim – which He turned into 120 gallons of the finest wine. Enough to get the whole of Galilee drunk!

Five thousand men had come out a long way to hear him speak that day and by the end of it, they were, naturally, famished....

He not only fed them with as much as they could eat – They could have fed many more with what remained. Yet now, here, this Easter Morning, All of that is - overturned.

Because His tomb was empty when she reached it – and because she not only saw Him with her own eyes but spoke to Him – the last person she ever expected to see alive again – and because of the witness of the twelve and Paul and so many, many others, our eyes are opened, too.

To see that sin and darkness and death are conquered for ever.

They need no longer have any hold or power over us; we need never be afraid of them again.

And just as the veil in the Jerusalem Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom the moment He died on the cross, revealing that the holy of holies in the Temple had been *empty* all along. So now the empty tomb proves that the gates of hell are shattered and the gates of heaven are wide open. For everyone to go in. To stand before God as equals.

Here, in here, in the Church of God –  
 there is no longer any distinction  
 between rich and poor,  
 between black and white,  
 between male and female,  
 between straight and gay  
 between adult and child,  
 between slave and free,  
 and between priest and people.

I find myself increasingly drawn to the Christian East these days and, in a wonderful Easter sermon, preached by St John Chrysostom - John the golden-mouthed - in fourth Century Antioch - Antakya, in modern day Turkey - where the dreadful earthquake was recently - John may have preached it there first but it's used on every Easter Morning, to this day - in the Christian east because it says everything you could possibly want to hear, to lift your heart and fill your soul with joy.

In the sermon, He proclaims that today a great table is laid, the fatted calf is served, and all are invited to eat their fill. No one need weep for their sins, for forgiveness is risen from the tomb! No one need fear death – because His death has set us free

See what strong, deep roots our Easter celebration has!

The preacher of another, earlier Easter sermon [2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Melito of Sardis], only rediscovered in the 1940s puts it like this:

Death is abolished and Hell is crushed!  
 His sermon ends with the voice of Jesus:  
 'I am your forgiveness,  
 I am the Passover of salvation  
 I am your light  
 I am your resurrection.'

John the golden-mouthed, completes the thread:

None of us need fear judgement, And none of us need ever be a slave to sin again.

See - what incomparable, priceless gifts – totally unmerited – God gives today, in absolute trust and love for each and every one of us!

God, said Meister Eckhart, 'is a great underground river, that no one can dam up and no one can stop.' And today, a stream is welling up – to become a torrent, filling all things.

His loving kindness spreads wide over the face of the whole earth. By means of this living water, everything has been and is, still, being redeemed.  
 And yet – and yet - God respects our freedom and keeps it inviolable.  
 God, as my Orthodox friends in Ethiopia often say - remains the beggar,  
 waiting at the gate with infinite patience, begging for love and longing to be let IN.

He is always ready - with an eager longing –  
 to *fill* our hearts with His joy  
 to fill our lives with His peace,  
 to fill His Church with His presence -  
 and to renew His world –  
 with light and hope and peace  
 and justice and mercy.

So when you come forward, a few moments from now to make your Easter Communion – and as you stretch out your empty hands receive all of that abundance from Him and let His love fill your dear heart.

This is important. For it is how He calls us to share with Him in mission to love and redeem this broken, hurting world He so loves.

‘Without Him’, said St Augustine, ‘we cannot Without us, He will not.’

My prayer for you - all week - has been that in this, your 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary year God will continue to fill you with His love and open your eyes to see what He might be calling you to next, in the heart of this beautiful, extraordinary and exciting City.

I began our week together with a prayer-poem from Rilke’s Book of Hours.

I’d like to finish with another.

\*

I believe in all that has never yet been spoken.  
I want to free what waits within me  
so that what no one has dared to wish for  
may for once spring clear  
without my contriving.

If this is arrogant, God, forgive me,  
but this is what I need to say.  
May what I do flow from me like a river,  
no forcing and no holding back,  
the way it is with children.

Then in these swelling and ebbing currents,  
these deepening tides moving out, returning,  
I will sing you as no one ever has,  
streaming through widening channels  
into the open sea.

Alleluia! Amen!