

deepening darkness and shafts of light



Reflections for Holy Week and Easter 2013

Holy Week and Easter is the pivotal and most poignant week of the Christian calendar. It is a period that captures a full-range of human emotion particularly if as the people of God we attempt, difficult though it is, to journey with Our Lord from Palm Sunday to Easter Day, as if it were the first time. As Rowan Williams perceptively notes, 'there is a danger that the alleluias of Easter drown out the

cries of the crucified'. It means that we are in danger of treating the tension, anger, betrayal, denial and even death as trivial. They are momentary and fleeting when confronted with the triumph of the resurrection. This is in some ways convenient; we do not do suffering and death. Our theme for 2013 is *deepening darkness and shafts of light* dances around two particular verses of scripture: 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not comprehended it' and 'even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.' The first is from the opening of the Gospel according to John. It is a verse normally used at Christmastime; however it is equally appropriate as we stumble towards Jerusalem, that in spite of the darkness that is about engulf us fleeting glimpses of hope-filled light are still discernible, traced in prophecies of old. The second is from the Psalmist, where he acknowledges that God is present even in places that are bleak. As we journey through Holy Week, our God goes with us as one who will straighten every pathway and bring hope in the darkness.

Palm Sunday – Gathering Clouds



Luke 19: 35-39

³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the

deeds of power that they had seen,³⁸ saying,

'Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!'

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' ⁴⁰ He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

Thought for Palm Sunday

Most of us at some point will have been waiting for something to happen; the birth of a child, the forthcoming job interview or the thought of what might be as a relationship blossoms. Many Jews at the time of Jesus were expecting God to intervene to help them. Their land was out of their control, and for the most part important decisions were removed from their hands. Jews though were familiar with the stories of old and experienced within their worship that God's story shaped their future as it did their past. It was within the present that God seemed silent. The teacher, Jesus from Nazareth, had changed this for people around him. Suddenly, there were outbreaks of God's activity in the present. It enabled them to dream. Thus, when they came to God's holy city, they needed to shout: 'blessed is the king'. It was in these words that hope came and fear began to creep in behind. For as many who delighted in the man from Galilee, there were more who wondered what it might mean; for whom belief that God could intervene stripped them of their control. It was for this reason they were sure that Jesus must be dealt with. As we enter Holy Week, where do we stand: are we hopeful or fearful, giving or controlling and what will we do with Jesus as the week unfolds.

Prayer

God of hope and expectation
God of grace and glory
Hold us in the palm of your hand as we journey

In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Holy Monday – Darkness Foretold

Luke 20: 9-16

⁹ He began to tell the people this parable: ‘A man planted a vineyard, and leased it to tenants, and went to another country for a long time. ¹⁰ When the season came, he sent a slave to the tenants in order that they might give him his share of the produce of the vineyard; but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ Next he sent another slave; that one also they beat and insulted and sent away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third; this one also they wounded and threw out. ¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, “What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.” ¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, “This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.” ¹⁵ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.’

Thought for Holy Monday

Most of us love stories. Stories can capture moods, rekindle imaginations and allow our spirits to soar. God's story is one that has the ability to capture the full range of human emotion. Jewish people knew God's story; as their story was inextricably interlinked with the divine one. They knew its highs and lows. Their scholars could trace the contours and interpret for their current age. When Jesus told the people listening to him this parable; they would have known what he meant. Those first hearers would have known that 'vineyard' was shorthand for the land of Israel, and 'tenants' for 'Israel's leaders'. Jesus told this story therefore knowing it would be a public rebuke to those who were already hostile to him. I wonder what story Jesus would tell about us, and how we would feel about it as he did so.

Prayer

God of hope and pain

God of grace and glory
Help us to hear the story you want to tell
In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Holy Tuesday – the Consequence of Darkness

Luke 21:20-24

²⁰ 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.^d ²¹ Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; ²² for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfilment of all that is written. ²³ Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; ²⁴ they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Thought for Holy Tuesday

We are beginning to get to the point in the story when it would be quite easy to ask, why doesn't Jesus just get out of Jerusalem? You do not need to be that smart to realise how the pieces of the puzzle are going to fit together: that something is going to happen to Jesus looks increasingly possible. Jesus does not leave; instead he continues to tell a story. This part of the story looks into the future. One thing should be absolutely clear. Jesus was not a fool. Anyone who looked at how Israel was behaving and had an inkling as to how the Roman Empire dealt with dissent would be able to imagine how things might turn out. Indeed, those with knowledge of God's story would know Jerusalem had been captured before and the people carried off to places they would rather not have gone. There are always consequences to our actions; both corporately and as individuals. Jesus sees the need to proclaim what the outcome might be. At this point, however the outcome is not inevitable; a course has been set; but that course can be changed. When Jesus looks into my future, I wonder what courses I might feel the need to modify.

Prayer

God of hope and journey

God of grace and glory

Help us to listen to the story you tell and amend our lives accordingly
In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord

Holy Wednesday –Patterns of darkness emerge



Luke 22: 1-5

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near.² The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; ⁴ he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them.⁵ They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money.⁶ So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

Thought for Holy Wednesday

Feasts are very important. They bring people together. This is true in most cultures, and particularly true in Judaism. The Passover is the pinnacle of the year. It is a time when they are reminded of the great deliverance from slavery to freedom; of the covenant made with the

God of the universe to be representatives of all that is good and life-giving. Feasts always seem to have an underbelly, which are not good. In the midst of sumptuous foods and laughter, there are those with little to eat and no one to laugh with. Stories always seem to have someone in them whose role it seems is to take the blame. Judas is the one who is held accountable in the story of Holy Week. It is easy for someone to take the blame; it absolves the rest of us of our own responsibility and culpability. As we move ever closer to the feast of Easter, what is it that we would rather not look at and who should we include this year that we have excluded in other years.

Prayer

God of hope and exclusion
God of grace and glory
Be with us when we are blamed
In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Maundy Thursday – Darkness comes

Luke 22: 49-43

⁴⁹ When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' ⁵⁰ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'

Thought for Maundy Thursday

There are times when most of us will have faced moments that are bleak and seemingly without the presence of light. Maundy Thursday must have been one of those such times for Jesus. At the point of his arrest, Jesus hands over the control of his destiny to others. He is passed from Jewish authorities to the power of Rome, who in turn handed him to Herod, who after mocking him handed him back. It is

if no one quite wanted to take responsibility for this particular prisoner's death. As we reflect on not being in control, I am reminded of Rowan Williams' observation that most human beings crave control and act as if we are in complete charge of our destiny. Jesus' willingness to hand himself over stands in stark contrast to how we live our lives at times. As we watch him passed from pillar to post, let us ask ourselves when was the last time we rejoiced because we were not in control.

Prayer

God of hope and powerlessness
God of grace and glory
Help us to be vulnerable
In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Good Friday – Darkness captures the Light

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land⁴⁴ until three in the afternoon,⁴⁵ while the sun's light failed;⁴⁵ and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last.⁴⁷ When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.'⁴⁸ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts.⁴⁹ But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Thought for Good Friday

God's story seems to have come to a shuddering and shocking end. Death does that. It ends things. Death is never ever nothing at all. The final breath is always just that. St Paul's description of death as the final enemy is utterly appropriate. God's story had of course come to a shuddering and shocking end before; whether that be in the Garden at the beginning of creation when the first human couple disobey the divine command or when those who were the covenant people chose exile rather than obedience. Yet, when the Light

seems to have gone, precedents within God's story are hidden. They are shrouded within the shadows. For patterns and precedents to be discerned, time needs to be taken in the darkness; that requires courage. Courage is always possible even when what is familiar has gone.

Prayer

God of hope and darkness
God of grace and glory
Give us to courage to wait in the stillness
In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Holy Saturday – Light flees away



Luke 23:50-56

⁵⁰ Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council,⁵¹ had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning.⁵⁵ The women who had come with him

from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid.⁵⁶ Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Thought for Holy Saturday



Jesus was buried. It is mentioned in Scripture almost as a footnote. This is because we have for the most part learnt to do without Holy Saturday; it is almost as if we move from the final breath to the first gasp of Easter air without a pause. Pause today and take stock; for somehow in the darkness, light has escaped: it has redefined the darkness and there is now no reason to be afraid. Only in the stillness and the waiting will we be able to see this and begin to remember that darkness and light are both the same to the one who made us. That is God's story, and with grace it might become ours.

Prayer

God of hope and stillness

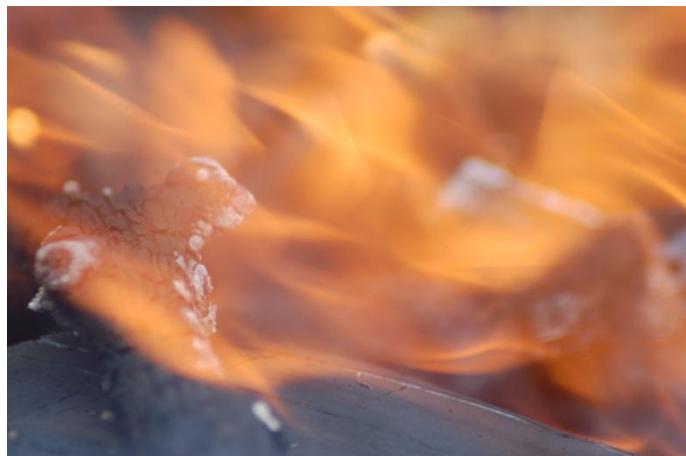
God of grace and glory

Darkness and Light are both the same to you; help us to appreciate that

In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Easter Day – Darkness vanishes forever

Luke 24: 1-12



But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they went in, they did not find the body.^[a]⁴ While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.⁵ The women^[b] were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men^[c] said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.^[d]⁶ Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee,⁷ that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.'⁸ Then they remembered his words,⁹ and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest.¹⁰ Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles.¹¹ But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.¹² But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.^[e]

Thought for Easter

God's story continues on and so does ours. Indeed our story can graciously be part of God's story. We can take part in God's story if we so wish. That indeed is the message of Easter.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

Prayer

God of hope and wonder
God of grace and glory
Help us to be part of your story
Help us to allow you to be part of ours
In the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.