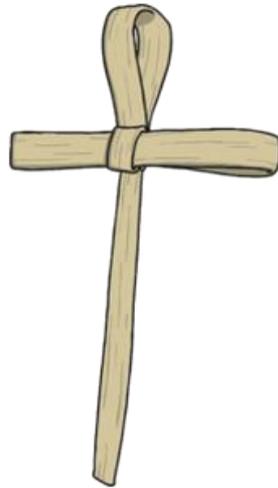


The Story of Holy Week in Nine Objects

Resources for Reflection



The Story of Holy Week in Nine Objects

After a year of confinement due to the pandemic we have been propelled into a virtual, online world, of screens and electronic communication. We miss the world of physical presence and touch, the material world that reminds us that the Word became *flesh* and dwelt among us. This Holy Week we have chosen a more tactile approach, to reconnect us with the physicality of Jesus' story. Nine objects will take us into the depths of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

There are sometimes dark and disturbing themes as we focus on the painful reality of Jesus' arrest, torture and execution. We do not turn away from these as they remain a reality in so many human lives today. However, each reflection does turn to the light of Jesus' teaching and example, as a way of holding and transforming the hurts we all face.

We will join together each day in church or at home, to share a time of reflection and prayer. We will often be using a form of Compline, Night Prayer, with simple Taizé chants, music and silence. You might like to create a space at home to be the focus for your prayers, adding each object as we come to it.

You are welcome to come to St Andrew's Church or to attend online at home. A list of services and times are at the foot of each page.

Palm Sunday	Palm cross	Jesus entering Jerusalem
Holy Monday	Some coins	Jesus overturning tables
Holy Tuesday	Cloth blindfold	Jesus is arrested
Holy Wednesday	Thorns	Jesus is mocked
Maundy Thursday	Nail	Jesus is crucified
Good Friday	Dice	The soldiers throw lots
Holy Saturday	Sponge	Jesus dies
Easter Day	Stone	The stone is rolled away
	Easter eggs	Resurrection life!

Come and join us online – you can find us on:

Facebook Live

<https://www.facebook.com/StAndrewsChurchShifnal>

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCImI-zjbFRp8A6VcAyp5mXA>

Church website

www.standrewschurchshifnal.org.uk

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Bible Passages – The New Revised Standard Version

Night Prayer



Chant: *We sing a chant from Taizé*

The Lord Almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord
who is making heaven and earth.

**Holy Spirit of God, brooding over the wild, restless waters of our lives,
Laughing with the wind's fury or gentle touch,
Rising with the sun and settling amidst the stars,
Be present here among us now.**

Amen

Let us reflect in silence on the day which is ending. Let us look deeply at any pain we have encountered today – any unhappiness we have experienced ourselves or seen in others.

SILENCE

Let us reflect with thankfulness on the joys of today – the connections, the gifts, the integrating wholeness we have known.

SILENCE

Let us hold in the silence of our hearts any people and situations we pray for tonight.

SILENCE

We light a candle to remind us that even when we are shrouded in darkness, in our personal life or in the life of humanity, Christ's love is a fire that never dies out.

**Chant: In our darkness, there is no darkness, with you O Lord.
The deepest night is clear as the day!**

Psalm: *We read a psalm*

Reading: *We read the passage set for today*

Reflection: *We share the reflection set for today*

Silence: *A period of meditation, about 5 minutes long*

Compline hymn:

**Before the ending of the day,
Creator of the world, we pray
That you, with steadfast love, would keep
Your watch around us while we sleep.**

**From all ill dreams defend our sight,
From fears and terrors of the night;
Tread underfoot our deadly foe
That we no sinful thought may know.**

**O Father, that we ask be done
Through Jesus Christ, your only Son;
And Holy Spirit, by whose breath
Our souls are raised to life from death.
Amen**

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.

I commend my spirit.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

Keep me as the apple of your eye.

Hide me under the shadow of your wings.

Prayers: we bring to God all that is on our hearts

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer;

When I call, answer me,

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer;

Come and listen to me.

Visit we beseech thee O Lord this place,
and drive from it all the snares of the enemy;
may your holy angels dwell herein to preserve us in peace,
and may your blessing be upon evermore;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

In peace we will lie down and sleep;

for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.

Abide with us, Lord Jesus,

for the night is at hand and the day is now past.

As the night watch looks for the morning,

so do we look for you, O Christ.

Prayer of St Columba

Be thou, O Lord, a bright flame before us,

be thou a guiding star above us,

be thou a smooth path beneath us,

be thou a kindly shepherd behind us,

tonight and always. Amen

Chant: *We sing a chant from Taizé*

Palm Sunday – Palm Cross

Object

Today's object is a palm cross.

Psalm 118 26-29

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of the Lord.

The Lord is God, and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.

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

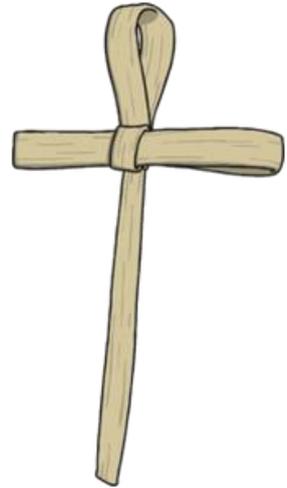
Bible Reading Mark 11 1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Reflection

When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the people cried "Hosanna!" and carpeted the road with palm branches and with their cloaks as if he were a king. They hoped that he would be the one to fulfil God's promise, to set them free, to bring in God's kingdom of justice and peace. By riding a donkey and coming in peace Jesus turned all their expectations upside down.

Carpeting the road was a very physical action, not just a feeling or a thought. How do we affirm *our* hope in Jesus? How do we allow our thoughts and feelings to flow into action?



How far is our faith “stuck in our heads”?

What are the physical and practical signs of our faith?

To lay down a cloak is to offer something of value, to take off a layer of protection, to come, undefended, to ask Jesus to be our King. We bolster ourselves with all sorts of defences; our property, our image, our social class, our education, our brands, our position at work, our language, our friendships. To welcome Jesus is to lay down our cloaks, and to come “just as I am without one plea”.

What do I need to lay down to come to God “undefended”?

Today, as we hold our palm cross, we connect deeply with Jesus in his humility and simplicity. The natural palm branch is completely commonplace, used to make floor mats or sunshades, for roofing or for sweeping. Provided by nature for free, yet so beautiful, palm branches are so right to welcome the servant king who said that the kingdom of God is very near to us, in our midst - here already, if only we can see!

Today, can I notice the wonder and simplicity of God, in creation and the natural world?

Today, palms are being planted more than ever before. Sadly, our demand for palm oil means that we are cutting down pristine rainforest and planting palm oil plantations. We are losing innumerable species and replacing the rich biodiversity of the forest with a mono-culture that is incapable of sustaining life.

How can I change my consumer choices, my spending or any investments to protect God’s world?

Prayer

King of our hearts, as we welcome you today
may our loud hosanna move us to action.
Give us courage to lay down our cloaks
and come to you undefended, without pretence, just as we are.
Open our eyes to your presence in creation,
to recognise you in its simple beauty and balance;
help us to honour you through our care for its diversity.
As we hold our palm cross, touch our hearts with your compassion.
Lord Jesus, be our King, today. **Amen.**

Services

8.00am Early Communion (Book of Common Prayer)
10.20am Procession with Palms starting in the Millennium Garden
10.30am Parish Communion
Online worship from 10.15am on Facebook and YouTube.

Holy Monday - Coins

Object

Today's object is a coin.

Psalm 69 6-9

Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame
because of me, O Lord God of hosts;
do not let those who seek you be dishonoured
because of me, O God of Israel.

It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.

It is zeal for your house that has consumed me;
the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.



Bible Reading Mark 11 15-19

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?
But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Reflection

We have been working on what our purpose is as a church and recently launched our new Mission Statement: "Reaching out together, to share God's amazing faith hope and love". It is intended to help us to weigh all our activity against this plumbline. Are we being true to our calling? In our busy lives and in our active church, we need to make space for God to challenge us and change us.

This challenge is just what Jesus was doing in the Temple in Jerusalem. He was being a very physical "plumbline" – you could even say he was being a living mission statement. His action came before his words. He drives out all who were buying and selling sacrifices, all who were exploiting the people coming to worship. He overturns the tables of the moneychangers, who were making a profit from changing ordinary money into temple currency. Jesus brings the focus back to the true purpose of the Temple: "God's

house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations". His challenge is two-pronged – and we'll look at each in turn. The first challenge is that the purpose of the temple had been lost in all the focus on money and trade: it needs to return to its true purpose, to prayer, to be a focus for connecting people with God.

What might Jesus want to overturn or refocus in *our* church?

The same thing can happen on a personal level to each of us. What is our core purpose in life? When the chips are down, we all want to be loved, to feel needed and valued, to be cared for, to connect with one another in compassion and love. Family and friends turn out to be worth more than position and possessions. Sometimes we can get caught up in all the secondary things and lose sight of our core purpose as human beings. Jesus' plumbline helps us to choose what matters!

What might Jesus want to overturn in my life?

The second challenge is to be outward-looking - to be a house of prayer for all the nations. It is so easy to become inward looking, to lose sight of God's broad horizon. The Temple leaders, the people of Israel, had become very focussed on their own concerns and needs, very Israel-centred, as if God was their own personal possession. They have a special calling, they have been chosen, but for a greater purpose. God has a purpose for all the nations, and for the entire cosmos. Sometimes churches can become equally inward-looking and absorbed with our own needs. Jesus' plumbline helps us to turn outwards and to look for God's presence and purpose in the world around us. God stretches us beyond nationalism and even localism, to discern his calling to be world-focused – to be a house of prayer for all the nations.

Are there places where I am challenged to broaden my horizons?

In my own prayers, do I need to adjust the balance between inward-looking and outward-looking prayer?

Prayer

King of the nations, you overturn the tables of our lives.

Help us to make room for you, to drive out all that is selfish and abusive, all that diminishes others, or tries to exploit them.

Help us to discern the plumbline of your purpose for us, your calling to see beyond our narrow walls, to the broad hall of your love.

May we make space for your Spirit to pray within us, that together we may become a house of prayer for all the nations. **Amen.**

Services

7.30pm Compline with music from Taizé in church and online

Holy Tuesday - Cloth Blindfold

Object

Today's object is a cloth blindfold.

Psalm 146 7-9

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Bible Reading Mark 14 53-65

They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Reflection

Why do we blindfold prisoners? What is it about our eyes that is so important? The soldiers began a macabre game of blind man's bluff, hitting Jesus and calling out "Who was it?" There is a deep, painful irony here. The man who opened the eyes of the blind, who helped so many to see in a new way, is here blindfolded for sport. We often mock people we fear or find challenging.



Have we ever been afraid of, or challenged by, others daring to speak the truth?

There is another reason we blindfold prisoners: we hide the eyes, the windows to the soul. Human beings are essentially good, gentle, kind, and humane. It is not in our nature to harm, to torture, to kill. We have a natural empathy with another person, when we look into their eyes, that says, "This could be me, my family, my friend". The way to inflict cruelty is to de-humanise, diminish, demean our enemy - and covering the eyes can be a way to side-step the humanity of our victim. You can no longer see the eyes, the windows, the soul, so you reduce the human being to a thing.

Where have we seen human beings treated in this way? And how have we responded?

The religious authorities had first tried keeping a semblance of order and justice. They had heard witnesses make wild claims, but these contradicted one another and failed to convict Jesus. Then they tried to get him to convict himself, but he remained silent. There is a strong theme of powerful passivity in this exchange. Jesus simply refuses to take part in their crooked games. But then they ask him outright, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" This is not a trumped-up charge; it is the truth: he is the "way the truth and the life". And in the presence of truth, Jesus cannot keep silence. Jesus says, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power'."

"I AM" is always a very significant claim in the Bible. It is God's own revelation to Moses who asked God to reveal his name: "I AM who I AM" is the name of God. It is also the claim that asks us what we believe about who Jesus is. Is he just a good teacher, or is he "God with us", the incarnate Son of God?

Jesus was in the business of opening eyes, not shutting them! As we hold the blindfold, we think of the times that Jesus opened the eyes that were blind, like Bartimaeus begging on the roadside, bringing healing both to him and to all those who had walked past and not seen or noticed him.

Who is Jesus to me? What does he want me to notice today?

Prayer

Light of the world, you can never be hidden, smothered or diminished.

Though the soldiers covered your eyes, you shine through in truth and justice, and in our deepest humanity.

Give us courage never to be silenced by fear, never to go along with the crowd, but to find you in the eyes we encounter.

Help us to recognise you as the "I AM"
and acknowledge you as our King. **Amen.**

Services

7.30pm Compline with music from Taizé in church and online.

Holy Wednesday – Thorns

Object

Today's objects are thorns.

Psalm 25 19-21

Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.
O guard my life, and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.



Bible Reading Mark 15 6-20

Now at the festival Pilate used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Reflection

Jesus is handed over from the high priest, the religious authorities, to Pilate, the Roman Governor. “Hail, King of the Jews!” Just notice the detail in this scene. Pilate's reluctance to have Jesus killed is palpable. He knows in his heart that it is wrong: “Why, what evil has he done?” But he gives in to the angry crowd, releasing a known terrorist, and sending an innocent man to be crucified. It is “realpolitik”. It happens every day - a grubby arrangement to keep people quiet, to pander to our demands, but knowing it is wrong. In the same way today, foreign policy decisions can be made with despotic regimes whilst “holding our nose”, for the sake of trade or jobs or influence.

Have we witnessed this kind of “realpolitik” arrangement that lacks complete integrity?

But the last paragraph of our reading goes so much further than Pilate had intended. He had already had Jesus flogged and sent to be crucified. Then comes an unauthorised, added cruelty that the soldiers have dreamed up for themselves. They called together the whole cohort, about 480 men, to enact a piece of cruel pantomime. They dressed Jesus up, a purple robe, a crown of thorns, knocking him about, spitting on him. They began to mock him, kneeling, offering homage.

Have you ever been intimidated, belittled, made fun of?

Jesus had never claimed to be king, but he had offered a very different picture of what a true king could be. His entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey challenged the powerful as he came humbly, riding a beast of burden. A bit like Pope Francis refusing the limousine and being driven in a little Fiat. When he knelt to wash his disciple’s feet, he had shocked them by saying that leadership leads to service, not to privilege. Jesus challenged the way we understand power. During the times of the British Raj, the use of the Magnificat was prohibited in India. The suggestion that God was casting the “mighty from their thrones” and lifting up the “humble and meek” was too threatening by half: it was not to be encouraged! When we hold the thorns we hold a challenge to our own understanding of power, Jesus invites us to kneel with him and humbly to serve.

Where do we feel particularly powerful or powerless?

Are there ever times that we rely on power that needs “casting down” from its throne?

Where do we want power structures to change?

Prayer

Servant King,
you challenge our assumptions and power structures,
you invite us to belong to your peaceable kingdom,
where swords will be beaten into ploughs,
spears into pruning hooks.
Help us to cast down our pride.
Raise up in us our truest selves,
that we may kneel and serve with you. **Amen.**

Services

7.30pm Compline with music from Taizé in church and online.

Maundy Thursday - Dice



Object

Today's objects are dice.

Psalm 46 1-3

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Bible Reading Mark 15 21-24

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

Reflection

The passage takes us into what Hannah Arendt called “the banality of evil”, the normalisation of truly appalling acts of cruelty. Here, we are taken into the details of what crucifixion meant for Jesus. The heavy cross piece was too much for him to carry. Simon of Cyrene was just a passer-by, caught up and compelled to take part. The name, the “place of the skull” reminds us that the Romans crucified thousands of people, it was a permanent feature for killing, like a concentration camp. Wine mixed with myrrh, a narcotic mixture to dull the pain, but refused, Jesus did not want to be drugged out of his mind.

And then, the casual reference to them dividing his clothes between them. It is good to pause and take it in for a moment. Taking the prisoner's clothes was a perquisite for the soldiers, a little bonus, to divide the clothes. Human beings love a game, a gamble, a chance that we might win a prize. So many trapped in poverty buy lottery tickets in the hope of riches they hope will solve all their problems. Online gambling is only a click away and has drawn many into addiction and debt. The gambling can become like the narcotic mixture they offered to Jesus, a way of dulling the pain, but doing nothing for the reality of our suffering.

Are we aware of things we have turned to, to dull the pain of life?

What are we to make of the chance events in our lives? We talk about being lucky or unlucky. Some are born into great privilege, others into great poverty; some have good

health, others have to live with disability and illness. Some people trace the hand of God in all these events. Others would say that the universe is not controlled by God, and that chance is an element of the reality that makes life possible. Either way, whatever happens to us, we know that the important question for a person of faith is always “Where do we go from here?” How do I respond to this situation?

Albert Einstein famously said that “God does not play dice”. He was wanting to affirm the essential order and predictability in the physical universe. He found it hard to accept the presence of randomness at a subatomic level. Strangely, for Christians, this poses less of a problem. The possibility of chance allows the universe to be free to become what it may. St Paul in Romans 8.21 wrote “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

When we hold the dice, we remember the element of random chance in our lives. As Simon was grabbed out of the crowd by chance to help with Jesus’ cross, as the soldiers cast lots for Jesus clothes, you could say that they were lucky or unlucky. Beneath the freedom of random chance there is a deeper intention and purpose for our lives and our universe that is held by God. When things happen to us, we have the choice of how we will respond.

Has a chance event ever led to a change in your direction?
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Prayer

Be present, O merciful God,
and protect us through the silent hours of this night,
so that we who are wearied
by the changes and chances of this fleeting world,
may repose upon thy eternal changelessness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

From the office of Compline

Services

7.30pm Communion of the Last Supper and stripping of the church.
in church and online.

Good Friday - Nail

Object

Today's object is a nail.



Psalm 12 11-12

Do not, O Lord, withhold your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.
For evils have encompassed me without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me, until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails me.

Bible Reading Mark 15 25-32

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Reflection

Our hands are so incredible, capable of such delicate touch, of intricate movements, one of our greatest gifts. The pandemic has deprived us of this gift of touch, our fear of infection has made us distance ourselves from one another. With our hands we reach out in love, we invent and create, we communicate, we express ourselves. Our feet, enabling us to stand, to run, to dance, to maintain the extraordinary feat of balance we call walking! These were never meant to be nailed to a cross. It goes against all nature.

Notice with thankfulness your own hands and feet, all that you touch, all that you can do.

Holding the nail takes us right to that dark place where Jesus was crucified. He had done nothing to deserve death: Pilate had said, he was an innocent man. In the garden of Gethsemane, he had prayed that God would let this cup pass from him, yet he chose not to run away, but to stick with the hard path to the cross. Why would an innocent man accept this punishment? In 1 Peter 2.24 we read "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" Somehow this appalling suffering is to be transformed, these wounds will be for our healing.

Have you ever known a painful experience that has, somehow, brought healing?

Nails are made of iron, physically embedding; but words can also pierce as deeply and as painfully. The passers-by derided him, twisting his own words against him “He saved others, he cannot save himself”. It reminds me of the way we can build people up and then delight in tearing them down. Derision flows so easily from our lips, especially if we feel challenged or threatened by somebody. Jesus’ life and teaching drew the crowds, he comforted the challenged, and he challenged the comfortable: comfortable people often resist challenge.

Have you known the pain of people’s hurtful words? How have you dealt with them?

In St Luke’s account of this moment, Jesus reaches out from this place of agonising pain. He turns to one of the criminals crucified with him and says, “Today you will be with me in paradise” and to those who were driving in the nails, “Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing”. We are not defined by what other people do or say: we can choose how to respond, with hatred or with love.

Can this be a moment to choose a different response ourselves – perhaps to turn towards forgiveness, letting go of some hurtful words or actions?

Prayer

Lord Jesus,
Your words are now twisted against you,
your hands are now pierced with nails,
and yet your words bring life,
your touch brings healing.
When we are challenged,
help us not to lash out in our anger.
When we are hurting,
give us grace to echo your words of forgiveness.
May your wounds bring healing to our broken world. **Amen.**

Services

10.00 – 12.30pm **Easter Trail in Church** – book using our online system.
2.00 – 3.00pm **Service of the Last Hour on the Cross**, in church and online.

Holy Saturday - Sponge

Object

Today's object is a sponge.

Psalm 104 14-15

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.



Bible Reading Mark 15 33-39

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.

Reflection

These words from the cross are some of the most human, a heartfelt cry of desolation, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus has come to the end of his resources; he is exhausted and empty and he feels completely abandoned by God. Sometimes we have wrongly pictured Jesus as being super-human, as if his relationship with God has insulated him from the reality of suffering and death. It could not be further from the truth. Just like us, Jesus felt doubts and fears, temptations, needs, and even separation from God.

Have you know times when you have come the end of your own resources?

Jesus was thirsty: in compassion someone put a sponge on a reed and lifted it to his mouth. After all the cruelty, we see the natural humanity of people reasserting itself. His disciple John, his mother Mary and several other women had stayed with him throughout the ordeal. Soon others will join them: Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council asks for his body to be released for burial and provides a burial tomb.

When we hold the sponge, we connect with simple kindness and compassion; the bystander gives a drink to a thirsty man, connecting us to people who stick with others through the toughest of times. We think of Jesus promising that no one who comes to him will ever go thirsty, promising living water springing up to eternal life in us.

This year we have certainly known what it is like to run out: the shortages in the shops, the isolation of lockdown, the sleepless nights and sometimes the hopeless days - the pandemic has pushed us to the limits. When we run out of hope or run out of faith, when we run out of energy or run out of our own resources, we may notice the impact of the kindness and compassion of other people, who simply stick with us, stay in step.

Have you been grateful for the support of others, when you've been at rock bottom?

Holy Saturday is all about space, drawing breath in the face of grief and powerlessness. Those who remain with Jesus to the end take his body down from the cross and lay it in a borrowed tomb. Like many who have been bereaved in lockdown, they could not do what was customary for Jesus' body; all they could do was wait for the sabbath to end.

When grief can't be expressed, we may push it down, hide it away, develop a thick skin - like soil in winter, with a hard surface. For new life to break through, the farmer harrows the field, breaking open the surface pan of the soil, allowing new shoots to grow.

Have you known times when you have needed to sit with the space after an ending or after a tough time, drawing breath and waiting before new patterns emerged?
What are the things you are sitting with at the moment?
Are there "no go areas" in your life that need breaking open, for new shoots to emerge?

Prayer

Suffering God, in your vulnerability and humanity you cried out,
in your desolation you showed your real humanity.

When we are hurting and lost, beyond our own strength,
help us to notice the care and support of others who meet us where we are.

Break through the hardened surface of our grief and pain
with your harrowing love,
to give space for your Easter life to grow in us. **Amen.**

Services

7.30pm Hoping and Harrowing, a service for Holy Saturday in church and online.

Easter Day - Stone

Object

Today's object is a stone.

Bible Reading

 Mark 16 1-8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.



Reflection

The earliest, most reliable of the manuscripts of St Mark's gospel end at this point. It is a shockingly stark ending. They fled from the tomb, the Greek words are "*tromos*", that is trembling and "*ekstasis*", that is bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. More comfortable endings appear in later versions of the gospel. Perhaps it was too shocking an ending for the early church? It is certainly very different to the bunny-filled, daffodil-decorated chocolate fest that Easter has become! This was not a fairy story where the baddies all got their comeuppance and they all lived happily ever after! If a film ended like this, you would be on the edge of your seat demanding "so what happened next?" The early church began in the trauma of seeing its leader crucified, and in the terror and bewilderment of the resurrection.

It is the women who come to attend to Jesus' body. They come despite the trauma of his death and the dashing of all their hopes. There is a resilience in their grief. They come bringing spices and wondering how they will move the stone. The tomb had been sealed with a heavy stone to prevent the body being taken by wild animals, to prevent his disciples from stealing it. Other accounts tell of soldiers posted to guard the tomb. But the heavy barrier they had expected to encounter had been moved already!

Many of us live with real and imagined blockages in our lives. Some live with disabilities, or ill health, some live with fears and phobias, some live with difficult experiences and memories in our past. Sometimes these blockages constrain and prevent us from living life to the full, from realising our hopes and dreams. Sometimes they prevent us from

even starting. The women did not know how they would move the stone, but still they went.

What are the blockages that constrain your life today?

Stone is chosen as a material for tomb stones precisely because it is heavy, hard and durable. It speaks of permanence, we want it to last, to preserve our memory. The human heart, by contrast, is warm and soft, but short lived. In the words of the hymn, “I the Lord of sea and sky”, God promises to “take away our hearts of stone, give us hearts for love alone.” This is the real story of Easter.

Our human hard heartedness, the very worst of human nature, leads us to Good Friday. Realpolitik, vested interests, revenge, punishment, mockery, death. God overturns it all. The hard, heavy stone of Good Friday is rolled away to reveal something very different. Easter is about impossible love, God who loves the world so much that he sent his only Son to break down the barriers that constrain and limit our lives, and to reconcile us to himself. Easter Day is about life through death, the breaking through of love and life.

What one stone do you want God to roll away for you this Easter?

So perhaps there is room for the humble daffodil, the Easter bunny and the chocolate egg? All signs of life breaking through; breaking through the very worst of human nature, breaking through the hard carapace of our grief, breaking through the dark night of our loss, even breaking through the long year of the pandemic. Perhaps we *can* allow our final object of Holy Week to be an Easter egg!



Prayer

God of life, you roll away the stone
to show an empty tomb;
you break open all that is deadly and closed
with your transforming love.
Lead us from death to the fullness of your abundant life,
with Jesus our living Lord. **Amen.**

Services

8.00am Early Communion in church

10.30am Open Air Easter Eucharist in the Churchyard and online.

(Please bring a garden/picnic chair and dress for the weather! If the weather makes it impossible, we will revert to a church-based service.)