

# Thought for the Day

## Holy Week and Easter 2022

Sunday 10 April

### Palm Sunday



When we go abroad to warmer climates, one of the first things we are likely to notice when our flight lands is the palm trees that fringe the airport and line the road into town.

Date palms are majestic trees with long and large leaves spreading out from the top of a single trunk. They can grow to more than 50 feet in height.

Why do we associate palm branches with Christ's triumphant arrival in Jerusalem a week before he is crucified? The answer is in **John 12: 12-13** - *'...the great crowd that had come for the [Passover] festival... took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting: 'Hosanna!', 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Blessed is the king of Israel!'*

In Biblical times, palm branches represented goodness, wellbeing, grandeur, steadfastness and victory. They were often depicted on coins and important buildings. King Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple. And Psalm 92 tells us that *'The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree.'*

It's not surprising then that the crowd welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem by waving palm leaves and laying them before his humble donkey.

But palm fronds also herald Christ's second coming. The book of Revelation reveals that, at the end of times, people from every nation will raise palm branches to honour Jesus.

Palm Sunday marks the start of one of the most important journeys in our faith. It will culminate in the Resurrection of Jesus, our saviour. So today, as if you are arriving at a foreign airport, enjoy the palm trees that every year represent something new and exciting - Easter.

Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Monday 11 April

## **The Perfume**

*'Then Mary took a whole pint of very expensive perfume made of pure nard and poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house.'* (John 12. 3)

Everyone was shocked; everyone except Jesus.

This perfume was worth more than a year's wages; a waste.



This woman was expected to cover her hair in the presence of men. Here, shamelessly, she uncovers and with it dries their feet; a disgrace.

Only Jesus could see that this was Mary's goodbye. Only he could see that this was her unique rite of passage, preparing him for his approaching death.

In 2018, the artist Grayson Perry helped Roch Maher and his family to create their own unique rite of passage. Roch was terminally ill. He didn't want to wait until he'd died to celebrate his life, so with Grayson, he designed his own Living Funeral. Here, friends and family gathered to tell their stories through laughter and tears, and to speak the words that are too often left unspoken until it's too late. Each person was then invited to place a memento, something that reminded them of Roch, into an urn created by Perry.

*Lord, may we take time today through words or gift or gesture to speak our unspoken love and appreciation to one person who deserves to know.*

Rev. Alan Stewart

Tuesday 12 April

### **30 pieces of silver**



The Gospels agree that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for money – 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26. 16), a relatively paltry sum, which never did him any good.

Material gain can also be a snare in our everyday world –  
for officials who look the other way in return for cash  
for contractors who cut corners to make a bit more profit  
for international corporations who avoid paying taxes

for individuals who dodge VAT or income tax  
for employees who keep quiet about wrongdoing in hope of promotion  
for us when we buy something cheap knowing it is the fruit of exploitation.

All should hang heads in shame and confess a share in the guilt of Judas.

For Jesus, the betrayal by Judas must have been a sharp anguish on top of the baying of the crowd in Pilate's courtyard, the jeers of passers-by, the insults of the priests, the mockery of the soldiers, because Judas had been his friend, chosen to be among his closest followers.

*"Even my bosom friend, whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."* (Psalm 41.9)

Rev. Bill Church

Wednesday 13 April

## **The Purple Robe**



Purple combines the calm stability of blue and the fierce energy of red. Because purple dye was very expensive, it is a colour that became, historically and in contemporary culture today, associated with royalty, nobility, luxury, power and ambition.

According to the gospels, once Jesus had been condemned to be crucified, the Roman soldiers guarding him felt at liberty to mock, humiliate and make fun of their prisoner. Knowing that he had been heralded as the King of the Jews, *'They put a purple robe on him'*, (Mark 15. 17). This amplified their cruelty as they tormented the man who they saw as merely a convicted criminal.

The robe may also have incited the Jewish leaders to press ahead with their intentions: *'Jesus came out wearing the purple robe... As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify! Crucify!'* (John 19. 5-6).

Scholars advise us that in Old English, some translations for the term purple mean "lengthen". This refers to the lengthening of the days as spring approaches, and this is the season in which we observe Lent.

Purple, linked to Christ's passion, is the liturgical colour worn during Lent. When we look at the purple vestments and church decorations, we are called upon to remember what was done for us by Christ's suffering.

So the purple robe has a lot to answer for. The Roman soldiers mockingly placed it around Jesus because he claimed to be the King of the Jews. Of course, in reality, he is much more than that — he is the "King of kings, and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19. 16) and fully entitled to wear a purple robe. It symbolises all that is royal and regal about Easter.

Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

## Maundy Thursday

### **Bread and wine**

'I am the Bread of life'. 'I am the True Vine'.

On a spring Thursday evening, hiring the room upstairs in a suburban pub for a private party, Jesus brings these images to life, makes them flesh and blood.

Bread, the staple food of much of the world. The daily essential, our first guard against hunger and want. Wine, the drink of Kings, the sign of the bounty and generosity of God's creation.



This is no ordinary evening. It is the night of Passover, the yearly commemoration of that momentous night when their God set their ancestors free from slavery in Egypt a thousand years before.

Fresh bread is served, warm and substantial. Not to be sliced and served, not dinner roll portions, but one large round loaf, to be torn and handed round. Wine drunk boldly from a shared bowl, knowing that refreshment is needed for great events ahead. We have sanitised all this in our Eucharist. I'm not sure Jesus would understand.

Ancient kings gave bread to the people at festive times, to show their wealth and status. Men of power solemnly confirmed their treaties with a shared draft of wine. Jesus will do more: "As I give you this bread, soon I will give my own body. My father will make a new treaty with all his creation, and my blood will flow as its seal. Will you then at last understand who I am?"

Geoff Oates, Lay Reader

(Image attr: Winston Morgan, Florida, USA)

Good Friday

## **The Thorns**

*'The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head.'* (John 19. 1)



He said he was a king so they dressed him like one; a purple robe and a crown of thorns. Today, no doubt they would have crowned him with a makeshift wreath of barbed wire. The soldiers salute him, strike him, scar him and scoff him.

In this moment, Jesus stands in solidarity with everyone who's been bullied, maligned or marginalised.

From the savagery of the playground to the bullying of the boardroom, the same cruelty lies within us all; the same ability to use our power, our safety in numbers, our weapons to strike and scar and scoff.

When was the last time you felt humiliated, pierced by the words or actions of others? Often, these are defining moments in the story of our lives.

Former Secretary General to the United Nations Kofi Annan once said, 'All the cruel and brutal things, even genocide, start with the humiliation of one individual'.

Humiliation violates a person's dignity and diminishes their worth as a human being. This injustice creates an internal rage that has to go somewhere. Either it becomes destructive (to self and others) or we choose to channel it into empathy and justice (for self and others).

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once wrote, 'Never allow anyone to be humiliated in your presence'.

*Lord, we give you the scars of our humiliation. Weave these thorns into a circle of protective love for ourselves and for others.*

Rev. Alan Stewart

Holy Saturday, 16 April

### **The Stone: the full stop, pause or exclamation mark?**



Jesus is taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb on the Friday evening before the beginning of the Sabbath.

We come to Holy Saturday. It is the Jewish Sabbath. Everything seems to stop. The crowds and the followers of Jesus retreat and fade away. Soldiers are positioned to stop any trouble but, all is quiet in the darkness of the tomb, sealed with a huge stone. Is anything

happening? And what is so special about this day?

Traditionally, the day marks what some call 'the harrowing of hell', when as the Apostles' Creed puts it – Jesus 'descended to the dead'. (Also see reference to this in 1 Peter 1. 3:19-20). This language encompasses the idea that Jesus experiences everything human, he goes to the place on the cross where he feels abandoned by God – one definition of hell - but then he not only withstands this agony but overcomes the power of evil and absolute darkness. Even hell cannot constrain or limit him. There is nowhere that the light of Christ cannot shine. In Portugal and Brazil, this day is called 'Hallelujah Saturday', and for Coptic Christians it is the 'Saturday of Light'.

Yet it is still a day of strange quietness; a time of waiting for the resurrection of Easter Day. It mirrors the waiting of the church. Jesus's death on the cross has redeemed the world but it is a world where we still experience the reality of evil. We long for the time when 'God's will, will be done on earth as in heaven', when Christ's light will be seen shining everywhere.

Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Easter Day

## **The Road**



*'They asked one another "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?"'*

On that first Easter evening, on a road to a long since forgotten village called Emmaus, two friends are walking back to the life they'd known before; before Jesus had gatecrashed with his manifesto of love and grace. Two days previously they'd watched love and grace die on a Roman cross.

So, with broken hearts and broken dreams they walk, until a stranger gatecrashes their grief asking if he can join them for the final leg of their journey. During those few miles, this stranger unpacks the scriptures, making sense of the senseless death of their friend. And when, finally, they arrive at the village, they invite him in for something to eat. And it's here, within this meal, within the simple everyday action of breaking bread, that suddenly they realise that this is no stranger; this is their friend who was dead but somehow lives!

Today, with all creation we celebrate the truth of resurrection. Today, we affirm that in the end, love wins; grace triumphs!

*Risen Lord, whatever road we find ourselves on this day, may we sense not only your company but also your comfort, your courage, your confidence... because there is no road we walk where you do not also walk alongside.*

Happy Easter!

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He has risen indeed, alleluia!

Rev. Alan Stewart