

outside Holiness

Holy Week 2021
*experiencing and embodying
the stories of Jesus' last days*



Introduction

In Jesus' day, holiness meant strict separation from everything that wasn't pure. A high ranking in holiness, achieved by observing ritual codes of cleanliness, meant closeness to God. Jesus introduced a true revolution by spending his life in company with those deemed far from God, unable to meet the requirements of purity. He did what was unheard of, offering friendship, respect and sympathy to those 'outside holiness.' Some celebrated; others were scandalised. And the kingdom of God he proclaimed—bringing justice and dignity, liberation and compassion to the poor, and standing against all that dehumanised people—increasingly provoked the oppressors and privileged. Eventually his protests against their illegitimate power systems put his life in danger.

In this week of remembering and re-enacting the last days of Jesus' life, we are invited to disrupt our living spaces and daily routines with physical symbols and bodily activity. We do so to bring home the disruptive influence of Jesus as he turned the understanding of holiness on its head. We do so to bring home the demarcations we are still in danger of falling into as to how and where we expect to find God. Not in separation and exclusion, but in the mess and muddle and depths of life, Jesus showed people the God of life and love.

As the week's story unfolds in the pages ahead, use the practical and liturgical ideas as you choose. Expand them, adapt them, simplify them, as your imagination and energy and space allow. If you wish to listen to or sing the songs which are listed, recordings and lyrics for each day will be here— <https://iona.org.uk/about-us/prayer/outside-holiness-material-for-holy-week-2021/>

Enter into this tough and trying story with what time and heart you can bring. So, wherever we are, we make this journey together, offering ourselves to God in this Holy Week.

Palm Sunday

Praising & Provoking

Embodying

Lay a scattered line of coats or other garments across your sitting room floor, or on a garden path. Tear several large, roughly leaf-shaped pieces of paper or cardboard (use newspaper, packaging waste or similar). A few times during the day, take one or two 'leaves' and write on them a few words in response to "For what reasons do I cry Hosanna to Jesus today?" Throw the leaves on the coats, shouting, "Hosanna!" and making further joyful noise with your voice or saucepans!

Reading

Mark 11:1-11

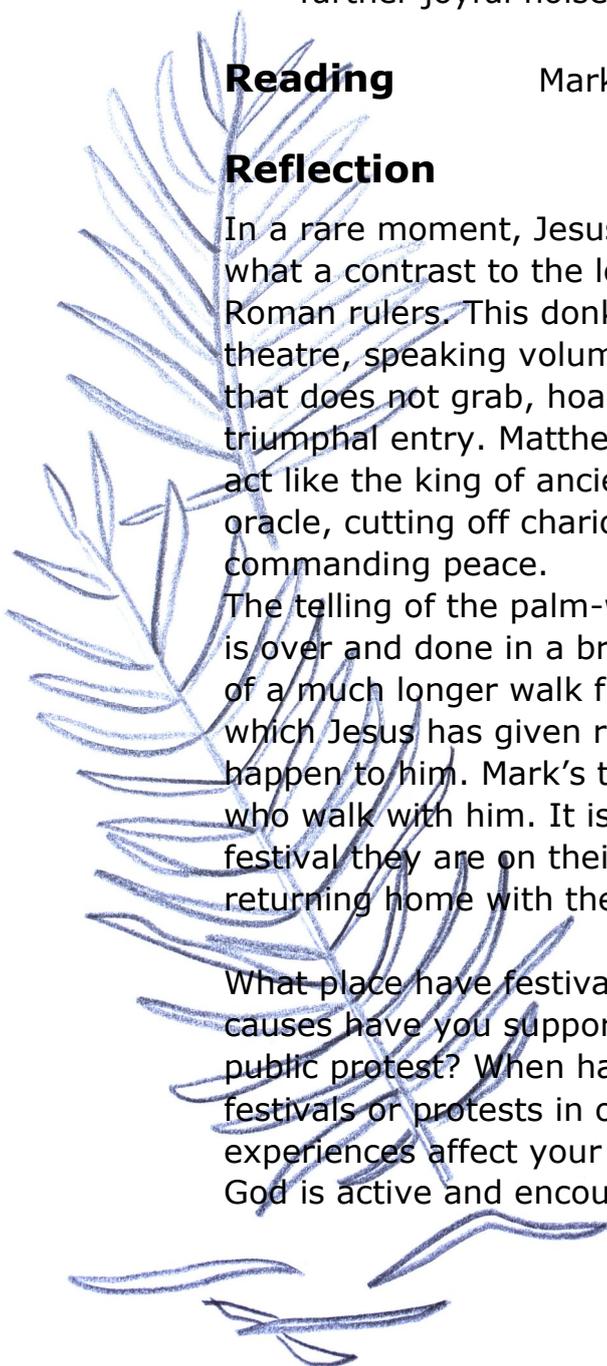
Reflection

In a rare moment, Jesus seems to encourage adulation! But what a contrast to the look of power as demonstrated by the Roman rulers. This donkey ride is pure parody and street theatre, speaking volumes of the alternative order of power that does not grab, hoard and conquer. It is truly a non-triumphal entry. Matthew's gospel spells it out as a prophetic act like the king of ancient times described in Zechariah's oracle, cutting off chariots, war horses and bows, and commanding peace.

The telling of the palm-waving and cloak-throwing procession is over and done in a brief few verses. It happens at the end of a much longer walk from Galilee to Jerusalem, during which Jesus has given repeated warnings about what will happen to him. Mark's telling says there is fear in the group who walk with him. It is the beginning of the end. After the festival they are on their way to celebrate, Jesus will not be returning home with them.

What place have festivals had in your faith journey? What causes have you supported by joining a march or outdoor public protest? When have you been moved by seeing festivals or protests in other countries? How did those experiences affect your understanding of where and how God is active and encountered?

They spread their cloaks on the road



Palm Sunday Liturgy

Cheers, Jesus!
Cheers to you, champion of the poor.
Cheers to you, lifter up of the downtrodden.
Cheers to you, fearless voice of truth to power.
It's your green carpet day!

Send up pomp and ceremony.
Send up military prowess.
Send up the tyrants' parade.
Your glory is trotted out!

Here's to you, Jesus.
We salute you with flung down coats
and brandished branches.
Lead us on
in your way,
Amen

Song Travelling the Road to Freedom

God of justice,
hear our cries.

Listen to the ones pleading, "No"
and the ones insisting, "Enough"
and the ones demanding, "This must change".

Hear our impatience, God.
How many more strikes must be called?
How many more placards must be held?
How many more flowers must be laid
and candles lit
and ribbons tied?

Hear our anger, God.
Why not democracy instead of despotism?
Why not safety instead of vigilance?
Why not carnivals instead of carnage?

Hear our yearning, God,
to be a happy throng,
to make a joyful noise,
to see your Kingdom come.
Amen.

Song Ride On

They spread their cloaks on the road

Monday

Embrace & Exclusion

Embodying

Overturn a table and some other small items of furniture and leave them in the middle of the room for the day. Pay attention during the day to the soundscape where you are: what noises stand out to you? What might this tell you about where you are physically or emotionally? You might also like to try imagining the soundscape to today's story - what noises particularly resonate with you? Why?

Readings

John 2:13-18

Matthew 21:12-14

Jeremiah 7:1-15

Reflection

How might our actions contribute to excluding others from the blessings of holiness? The Temple of Jesus' time was a complex institution—the religious inextricably entwined with a secular political power further complicated by Israel being a land under occupation. The action takes place in the Court of the Gentiles which for many, since it was the furthest they were allowed to go within the temple precincts, was the nearest they could approach God; hence it functioned as a religiously and economically guarded 'holiness' gateway. Whatever the specific cause of Jesus' visceral anger, the outcome is a deep and radical symbolic act which stands in the tradition of the Old Testament Prophets. Jesus quotes from Jeremiah declaring worship has an imperative of social justice - a linkage which runs like a thread through the prophets and their denunciations of those who oppress, exclude, exploit, or fail to care for others. Jesus' words and actions very publicly pronounce judgement on all systems - religious, political or economic - which oppress and oppose the full and flourishing life, and rich experience of the Divine, which is God's holy will for all people.

Are there different ways of framing holiness? Who is excluded and who is welcomed under such definitions? Are there attitudes or activities of mine, or of an organisation I am part of, which might place or keep others outside of holiness? Does this matter? Which contemporary table turners are speaking to or for me? How can I best support them?

Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out

Monday Liturgy

You might like to remove your shoes before you begin the liturgy as a way of consciously connecting with the holiness in your own home and life

Reaching out

you could if you wish, light a candle with each invocation

God
the centre and source of holiness -
hold and fill
this present moment;

Jesus
the inhabiter and opener of holiness -
hold and expand
this present moment;

Spirit
the revealer and energiser of holiness -
hold and enliven
this present moment

that
through this moment of Presence
the beauty of holiness
may increase in me.

You are invited to keep a time of silence

Recognition and reshaping

You might like to use the recorded Kyrie as part of this prayer

Jesus
your words and actions in the Temple precinct
challenge and overturn
our ways of defining and demarcating holiness...

Where my understandings
have drawn lines excluding others
based on a limited idea of holiness
forgive me
and help me to grow
into a richer understanding
of its generous dimensions.

Where my words
have deliberately or unthinkingly
kept others away from holy ground
forgive me
and help me grow
into a more generous sharing
of its beauty and bounty.

Where my actions
have upheld or reinforced systems
which prevent others from flourishing
forgive me
and help me to grow
into a more Christ-like determination
to proclaim and uphold
the life of your kingdom.

Amen

Reflection

Use the passages, reflections and questions to think about how we might understand holiness in the light of Jesus' words and actions here and throughout his life.

Response

Go to your disrupted space and slowly and deliberately restore it to order. As you right each item draw on your responses to today's questions to pray for particular situations or issues which have come to light. If you plan to leave the disrupted items as an ongoing reminder then simply touch or focus on each in turn as an anchor for your praying.

Reorientation

Song Jesus Christ is Waiting

Jesus
May my journey with you -
through this week
this life -
be a journey
into a richer, deeper encounter
with the holiness
at the heart of your Kingdom.

Tuesday

Plotting & Pricing

Embodying

Place a large plate in a clearly visible, central position in your sitting room or kitchen. Put money and associated items in the plate... coins, notes, bank cards, bank statements, other financial paperwork, wallet and so on. A few times in the day, hold some coins in one hand as you do other tasks.

Reading

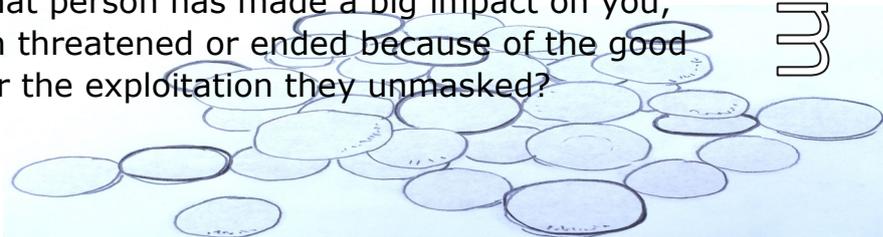
Luke 22:1-6
*[see also Matthew 26:1-5;
Mark 12:12 & 14:1-2; Luke 19:47,48;
John 7:40-46 & 11:45-47]*

Reflection

The threats against Jesus' life do not begin at this Passover in Jerusalem. There have been murmurings of disquiet much sooner than this. But his protest against the Temple economy is the last straw. Now there is a price on his head. Money is unholy. Or is it? Jesus has never minced his words about debt, wealth, tax and greed. He has said far more about money than about prayer. He has drawn attention to the generosity of the poor and shown up the uncaring indifference of the comfortable. More than that, he stands in the Temple and tells a parable about greedy vineyard tenants unleashing murderous behaviour against the rightful owners of the produce, in order to keep it themselves. The authorities know it is a searing indictment of their system of collaboration with Rome. Only Jesus' popularity with the crowd saves him from instant arrest. Those who oppose him await the right moment away from the people, when they can seize him by stealth. It is only a matter of time.

When have you seen the use of money succeed or fail to be aligned with justice and the common good? When have you known of payment being given or received for harmful ends? In your lifetime, what person has made a big impact on you, whose life has been threatened or ended because of the good they stood up for or the exploitation they unmasked?

They kept looking for a way to kill him



Tuesday Liturgy

Jesus,
you saw money issues so clearly.
You saw a neutral means of exchange
abused as an instrument of extortion and exploitation.
Give us your imagination
to bring about a world
where money serves wellbeing;
where wealth is distributed fairly;
where the standard for all is to have enough.
Thankyou for what we see
of the good that money can do.
Help us bring our money matters
into a transparent conversation with you,
so that we can be confident
of which master we serve.
in your name we ask it,
Amen.

God of justice,
you saw the forces
that rose against your own dear Son
and desired his downfall.
We ask for your protection
on the heads that have been priced today.
You have counted the hairs on each one.
Send your angels
to stop in their tracks
those about to close in on their target;
those about to accept a bribe;
those about to stalk or troll
or ruin a reputation;
those gathering ammunition of lead or lies.
Break in on their direction of travel,
waylay them and stall them,
frustrate and disempower them.
For your love's sake,
Amen.

Song Lay Down Your Head

They kept looking for a way to kill him

Wednesday

Beauty & Anger

Embodying

Choose and clear a space with a natural boundary (such as a rug, shelf, windowsill, tabletop). On it place, in close proximity, one item you find beautiful or comforting and one you find unsettling or distracting. During the day alter their positions a few times to change their prominence or visibility with respect to each other - you might even totally hide one with the other. Look at these whenever you pass and notice your reactions to the different arrangements. Spend time consciously exploring the different scents of your home and any other places you visit: what memories or emotions are evoked by the different smells?

Readings

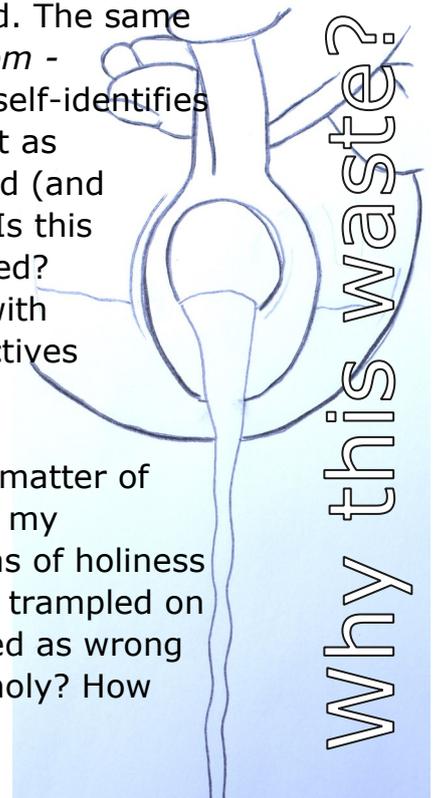
John 12:1-8
Matthew 26:6-13

Reflection

What happens when different ideas about holiness collide? The story reveals two competing understandings. Mary's action creates a profoundly intimate connective space with Jesus and its tenderness and emotional power have resonated down the ages. It produces a very different response in the onlookers - anger, disgust, frustration and aggression all appear. For Mary and Jesus, the anointing is beautiful and deeply appropriate; for the disciples it is wasteful and woefully misplaced. The same action on the one hand brings the riches of *shālôm* - that intrinsic quality with which God so strongly self-identifies (Judges 6: 23-4) - on the other it is seen and felt as disrupting *shālôm* by denying aid to those in need (and recall Jesus' actions in this respect on Monday). Is this a case of resources well spent or resources wasted? Interestingly Jesus' rebuke is more concerned with the way the disciples handle the clash of perspectives than with the different viewpoint itself.

What makes something holy - is it absolute or a matter of perspective? How do my own perspectives affect my decisions about what is or is not holy? What areas of holiness in my life do I want to affirm? When have others trampled on a moment I felt to be holy? When have I regarded as wrong or profane something which someone else calls holy? How should I approach these points of tension?

Why do you trouble her?
Why this waste?



Wednesday Liturgy

Before you begin find something which has a pleasurable smell. You might also like to remove your shoes as a way of consciously connecting with the holiness in your own home and life.

Reaching out

Before each invocation take a deep inhalation of your chosen scent.

God
source of Creation's beauty
fill this time
with the fragrance of your presence

Jesus
sharer of our human beauty
fill this time
with the fragrance of your presence

Spirit
shaper of the Kingdom's beauty
fill this time
with the fragrance of your presence

Holy and Beautiful Three
be present now
and fill this place
with the fragrance
of your life.

You are invited to keep a time of silence

Recognition and reshaping

You are invited to use the recorded song 'Listen Lord' as a response between the sections of this prayer.

Jesus
following you can bring tensions
which are sometimes not easy
to negotiate
reconcile
or resolve.

Why do you trouble her? easte
why this waste? siht yuW

Where there are clashes of perspective
which I find difficult to manage
help me to grow in patience
and to live with that discord
until better understandings can be grown.

Where there are clashes of belief or understanding
and I am tempted to trample
another person's sacred ground underfoot
help me to grow in love
and to live with those differences
while richer conversations are nurtured.

Reflection

Use the passages, reflections and questions to think about
how we can deal with the tensions raised by colliding ideas
about holiness.

Response

In the space you set up earlier:

Use your comforting object as a focus for thanksgiving for
those things in your lives which you want to name and
celebrate as places or occasions of holiness.

Use the disconcerting object as a focus to bring any
questions or situations about which you are confused or
troubled to God.

If you wish - place them in particular relation to one another
as a way of leading into prayer about a specific situation -
or articulating a prayer which you can't put into words.

'Listen Lord' could also be a helpful part of these responses.

Reorientation

Song Judas and Mary *or* God of Peace and Justice

Jesus

May my journey with you -
through this week
this life -

be a journey into a richer, deeper appreciation
of the multifaceted holiness
at the heart of your Kingdom.

Why do you trouble her? Why this waste?

Thursday

Hosting & Serving

Embodying

Go barefoot for some or all of the day. Do some menial tasks that get you on your knees (weeding; washing a floor). If you go walking, do some litter picking. At home, sit on the floor for a while instead of in your usual comfy chair. Later in the day, take time to wash your feet (or each other's feet if there are two or more of you). Do this with real care and attention.

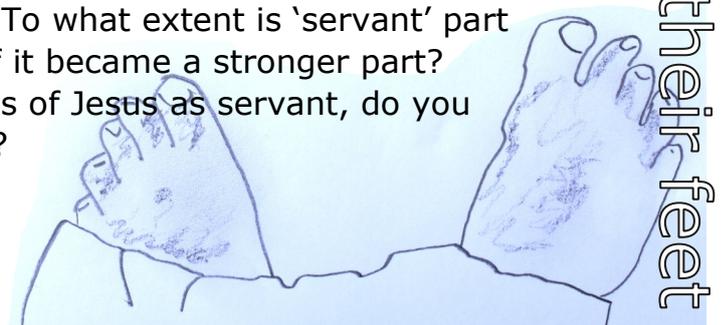
Reading

John 13:1-17

Reflection

If we only had John's gospel to go on, Jesus would come across as someone who did more talking than anything else. Here is one of the very few moments when the focus shifts entirely from the verbal to the physical; to what Jesus does. The way it is told makes it easy to imagine a stunned silence in the room as it happens. It is so not the done thing that anyone at a festive meal—and especially not the host—would get up from the table and perform the task of a slave. But here at this last meal, this last occasion of being with his closest friends, John uses not spoken words but the graphic illustration of Jesus half-naked and kneeling to bathe the dirt of the day from all their tired feet. Hasn't he said it many times? "Whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of all." In bread and wine he has symbolised his self-giving and the new community being opened up to them. Here is the final added emphasis to what they must recall when he is gone. "Remember me."

What is the most unglamorous work you've ever done? What, if anything, did it teach you? To what extent is 'servant' part of your faith identity? What if it became a stronger part? Which depiction in the gospels of Jesus as servant, do you feel drawn to at the moment?



he poured water into a basin and began to wash their feet

he poured water into a basin and began to wash their feet

Thursday Liturgy

Footwashing Jesus,
today as every day,
your call is the same -
"Follow me."

So beckon us down beside you
to work with our hands,
to play among children,
to give ourselves away.
So may our hands get dirty
and our feet get dirty
and our bodies sweat and tire
and the needs of your world
be better served.
Amen.

Song Jesus' Hands Were Kind Hands

God,
send out a blessing today
on the cleaners of floors
the attenders of toilets
the sweepers of streets
the collectors of rubbish
the pushers of trollies
the carriers of luggage
the disinfectors of handrails
the greeters of neighbours.
Amen.

Song And Did You Know

Friday

Constrained & Unbounded

Embodying

Put some self-imposed limits on your day today. Live within a few constraints. Some suggestions—stay in one room; fast; keep off tv and social media; resist your usual go-to escape activities.

Later in the day, find two jugs of very different sizes and fill the larger with water. Pour it out into the smaller, refilling and repeating, observing and relishing all the sensations associated with the overflow.

Readings

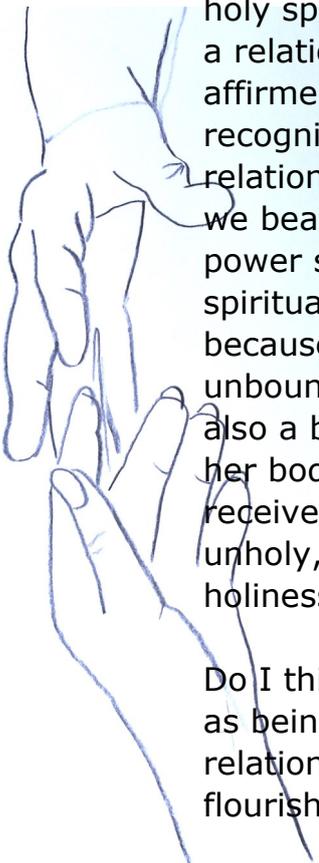
John 19:26-27

Luke 23:42-43

Reflection

Here is a scene Jesus' contemporaries would have thought completely outside holiness: a tortured naked body, an instrument of execution on a rubbish tip outside the city boundaries, a blasphemous inscription and a jeering crowd. And yet amidst all of this we see Jesus creating a profoundly holy space: even as he is constrained in every way, he makes a relational space for someone else to be seen, heard, valued, affirmed and supported. In these two interactions, Jesus recognises and responds to the deep human need for relational connection, an integral part of God's image which we bear. He is able to do so not because some superhuman power shields him from the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual noise battering him as he hangs *in extremis*, but because his whole life has been lived out of a centre of unbounded love, hospitality, and care for others. There is also a beautiful mirroring here: Mary once offered a space in her body (undoubtedly regarded as unholy by some) to receive and shelter Jesus; now, in a place that seems equally unholy, he offers the same gift to her. Hospitality and holiness go hand in hand.

Do I think of my ordinary everyday interactions with people as being holy places? Why or why not? How can I build relational spaces which allow others to feel safe and to flourish?



"Today you will be with me in Paradise."
"nos jnoy si eareH"

Friday Liturgy

You will need a bowl and a large jug full of water. You might also like to remove your shoes as a way of consciously connecting with the holiness in your own home and life.

Reaching out

take and raise the jug

Jesus
born as one of us
you chose a small space
in which to be contained

slowly pour the water out into the bowl

Jesus
living and dying as one of us
you showed
that a small space
faithfully inhabited
is unable to limit
life or love

immerse your hands in the water

Jesus
be with me now
in this small space
that is my life
that I too
may overflow
with life
and love

You are invited to keep a time of silence

Recognition and reshaping

you are invited to use the recorded song 'Take, Oh take me as I am' as a response in this prayer.

Jesus
Where I find it difficult
to think beyond
my own perceived shortcomings -

revive my confidence
rekindle my joy
and remind me that I am held in your love.

Where I find it difficult
to move beyond
my own perceived limits -
expand my understanding
enliven my imagination
and energise my living and loving.

Where I find it difficult
to see beyond
my own perceived smallness
teach me to faithfully inhabit
my own life - as you did -
in ways which are rich
generous
and expansive
as befits the life of your Kingdom

Reflection

Use the passages, reflections and questions to think about how we can open up holy spaces in which other people can flourish and be more safely and fully themselves.

Response

Bring to mind people with whom you share relational connections. Slowly pour water from your jug into your bowl as you say their names before God.

Reorientation

Song We Belong to God

Jesus
May my journey with you -
through this week
this life -
be a journey
into a richer, deeper appreciation
of the holy, hospitable, love
at the heart of your Kingdom.

“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”
“nos jnoy si ereH”
“Here is your son.”

Saturday Sabbath & Shame



Embodying

Dress all in black today. As far as possible, keep silence for the day. Spend a while in a cemetery or at a war memorial if there is one near you. At your evening meal, set an empty place with a name card for Judas. At a time you choose, perhaps when you shower, take time pampering any parts of your own body which you tend to ignore. Use a face or body scrub to exfoliate those dead cells.

Reading

Matthew 27:3-10

Reflection

The suicide of one of Jesus' disciples is a tragic and overlooked story. Only Matthew writes of it, crafting it with some sympathy. Yet both Judas himself and the silver he was paid are portrayed as forever tainted, unfit for the purposes of God. The money buys a burial place for outsiders. Nothing is ever said of a proper burial for Judas. His death was hidden while Jesus' death was public. Both had lonely deaths, beyond the reach of solace. Both may well have felt like failures.

Today we stay with the emptiness and numbness of these endings. We can barely guess what kind of day it was for the disciples, losing Jesus and on top of that devastation, losing one of their tightknit community. On the darkest of days, can the loneliest, least welcomed places become holy ground?

When have your attempts at restitution been received coldly? What came of it? Imagine a different outcome for Judas. What if he too had felt able to come back to Jesus even after betraying him? When have you been faced with a loss that carried stigma of some kind? How have you made peace with it, or how are you bearing with it so far? How has God met you in it?

he threw down the silver and went and hanged himself

Saturday Liturgy

Jesus...
you lost a brother
in the worst way.
On the day when you were gone,
he was gone too.
His story ended here.
Traitor.
The one who betrayed you.
The story rewritten in hindsight,
erasing the young man you knew,
the disciple you chose,
the Judas you loved.
Forgive us when all we see in someone
is the worst thing they've done.
Forgive us when we lock them in that awful hour
and throw away the key.
Forgive us our own most damaging behaviour
and let us find rest
on this saddest of Sabbaths,
as we trust that Judas rested too,
in your nearer presence.
Amen.

Song Just As A Lost And Thirsty Deer

Compassionate God,
cradle in your arms today
all who grieve.
We think especially of those
whose loved one lies
in an unmarked grave;
or whose loved one's body
has never been found.
We remember those prevented by Covid
from sitting by a bedside
or saying a fonder farewell.
Come near, good God,
soothe the pain and torment
of deaths that haunt the living
and bring your deepest peace.
Amen.

Song When Finest Aspirations Fail

Easter Sunday **Inside & Outside**

Embodying

Open some doors that are usually closed! Open as many as possible—some kitchen cupboards, hall cupboards, back door! Leave them open throughout the day.

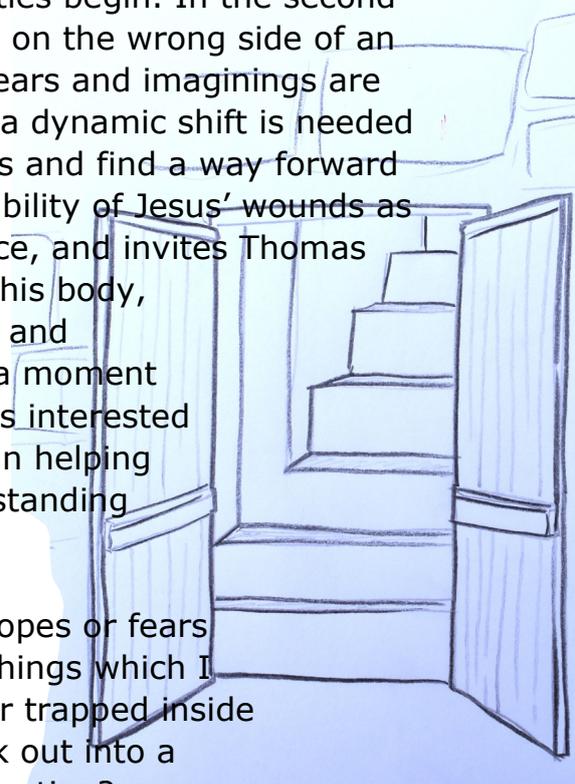
Readings Matthew 28:1-8
 John 20: 19 -28

Reflection

The tomb with its rolled away stone is one of the most vivid images of the Easter story. However Matthew's account gives the lie to our reflex assumption that the stone is rolled away primarily to let Jesus out: as the angel makes clear - he has already gone! Instead the rolled back stone allows Jesus' followers to go *in* to the tomb and find it different to what they had imagined: the feared place containing a despoiled corpse and the end of a story, turns out to be a place where different understandings and new possibilities begin. In the second story the disciples are once again on the wrong side of an obstruction - but this time their fears and imaginings are keeping them *inside*. Once again a dynamic shift is needed if they are to escape this paralysis and find a way forward into a different narrative. The visibility of Jesus' wounds as he offers them peace and presence, and invites Thomas more explicitly to reconnect with his body, are a recognition of how complex and risky this is. We often make this a moment of shame for doubting but Jesus is interested not in blaming, but in liberating, in helping them enter more fully into understanding the life of the kingdom.

Which of my ideas, imaginings, hopes or fears might be keeping me outside of things which I need to explore and reimagine; or trapped inside things from which I need to break out into a larger field of understanding and action?
What might I do to change any of these situations?

Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace..."



Easter Sunday Liturgy

Do this liturgy near to one or more of your unusually opened doors.

You might also like to remove your shoes as a way of consciously connecting with the holiness in your own home and life.

Reaching out

Make a gesture of openness as you pray.

God

opener of primordial chaos
fill this space with your presence

Jesus

opener of constraining places
fill this space with your possibilities

Holy Spirit

opener of closed potentials
fill this space with your power

Recognition and reshaping

Jesus

you broke open places -
sometimes so that people could go in
sometimes so that they could come out

and always to help them
towards better understanding
deeper faith
fuller life.

Help me to recognise
those places in my life
which need to be broken open
to let me in
or let me out
so that new life
can take hold.

Reflection

Use the passages reflections and responses to think about areas of your life, or that of something in which you are involved, and how they affect - positively or negatively - the way in which you live out your commitment to following Jesus.

Response

Stand on one side of a doorway. Think back over the journey of this week. What one thing has spoken to you which encourages a new area of growth. As a sign of commitment to going forward with God's help, step across the threshold.

Reorientation

Song Christ Has Risen While Earth Slumbers

Jesus
may my journey with you
through this season
this life
be a journey onwards
into a deeper understanding
and a fuller inhabiting
of the vibrant possibilities
of your Kingdom's holy life.

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