HOLY WEEK 2020

A reading from the gospel of Luke,
a reflection and a prayer for each day,
from Palm Sunday to Easter Day.
28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.” 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.”

Reflection

In this time of deserted neighbourhoods the image of a multitude, a jostling, excited crowd, seems delicious to me. It takes me back to theatre and concerts and to May last year when the throng of supporters of which I was part made its good natured progress along Olympic Way towards Wembley Stadium for the FA cup final. (Best not to mention the final score).

For now the football season has been paused and large gatherings postponed. The crowds have all scattered back to our homes. For some of us this means solitude and silence to be relished. For others of us it is more like emptiness to be dreaded. Still others of us, with diaries full of Zoom and
other conference calls or homes squashed full of people, long for some stillness amidst the accelerated noise.

As the crowd accompanying Jesus into Jerusalem cried out they drew disapproval from some of the religious leaders. Yet Jesus’s answer made space for their cries; ‘I tell you if these were silent, the stones would shout out’.

Physically separated as we are we are seeing acts of social solidarity as neighbours and strangers come together to call out, sing and clap for key workers together. Social media is full of the variety of means by which professional musicians and ordinary individuals, friends and families are raising their voices with determination and passion. ‘If these were silent, the stones would cry out’.

Looking inward to your core:
With what does your heart cry out – over what can it not keep silent?
I believe that God hears, God knows. So cry out – bring to God what is on your heart and mind.
Cry out too on behalf of those who are silenced, who cannot speak.
The Christ who endured the silence of the cross is listening.

Prayer

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

- Prayers from the Church of England
MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK


22 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.

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” 9 They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” 10 “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters 11 and say to the owner of the house, “The teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”” 12 He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” 13 So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 15 He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” 17 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20 And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. 21 But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. 22 For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” 23 Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.
Reflection

Food has perhaps become a more consciously present aspect of life at the moment, as we think about which essential items we can buy and what meals we can create in lockdown. For some the opportunity has arisen to bake cakes and homemade bread, some take food and provisions to self-isolating family and neighbours and foodbank organisers worry about stocks for the most vulnerable.

As the time for the festival of Unleavened Bread, the Passover, drew near Jesus ensured preparations were made for one final meal with his closest followers. This meal had its origins in the ancient deliverance of the Jews and their liberation from captive slavery. The nature of the bread as unleavened was a reminder of the drama and haste of their departure – no time was there to wait for bread to rise.

In the Upper Room Jesus tells them that he has eagerly desired to share the Passover meal with them one last time. That very night he would be betrayed, arrested, condemned and denied. The next day he would be put to death. Before all this unfolds he chooses his priorities carefully and eagerly – he wants to be with them and to eat with them. For many Christians a challenge of this present time is our inability to gather together to share fully in the sacramental meal of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. In this meal we find ourselves to be the recipients of the most profound of all hospitality as Jesus shares life and freedom, welcome and embrace in his giving of his very self.

In this time may every meal be to us a reminder of the profound hospitality of God and our connection with one another. We may be eating alone, we may be eating with others but know this, Jesus eagerly desires to eat with you and I. He is here. Come, sit and eat, for Love bids you welcome.

The next time you eat a meal, perhaps take a moment to give thanks and to attend to the Christ who is present with you.

And when this is resolved – with whom will you want to share a meal? Might we be even braver than we have been before? Might the neighbours who have clapped or sung together throw open our doors and eat together in the street?

In the meantime, with whom could you share a remote cuppa?

Prayer

Let nothing disturb you,  
let nothing frighten you,  
all things will pass away.  
God never changes;  
patience obtains all things,  
whoever has God lacks nothing.  
God alone suffices. Amen.

Lord, you are closer to me than my own breath,  
nearer to me than my hands and feet. Amen.

- Teresa of Avila
Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him.

When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed,

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.”

Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.

In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief,

“Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?”

When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?”

Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him.

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?”

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!”
Reflection

Early in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings trilogy Gandalf, the wise wizard, visits Frodo, the diminutive hobbit, who has been entrusted with an unenviable task.

‘I wish it need not have happened in my time’ said Frodo.

‘So do I’, said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.’

Today’s reading finds Jesus engaged in an epic struggle, a contest gladiatorial in its intensity. Early at the beginning of his ministry Jesus had been tempted in the desert. Then he had been presented with the option of an easy, self-serving, spectacular path to power, one he rejected. Now as the path to the cross intensifies will he remain steadfast? Will he accept the cup of sacrifice over self-preservation? Will he yield to the temptation to meet violence with violence? Will his choices now reflect who he truly is and shape his future?

Though his disciples sleep whilst he agonises, his struggle is seen. And Jesus makes his choice: ‘not my will but yours’.

Like Frodo, many of us wish that this present crisis had not happened in our times. But know that Jesus who faced a struggle beyond our understanding sees your struggle. You are not alone. In his struggle he chose to persevere for you. He is the great high priest of the book of Hebrews, who can fully empathise will our weakness:

‘Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need’ – Hebrews 4:16

Prayer

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

- From St Patrick’s Breastplate
Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” They kept heaping many other insults on him.

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.” All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!”

Reflection

Poor Peter. We all like to hope that we will be the courageous ones, the ones who will act well in a crisis. Peter’s response, though it stands in contrast with his previous pronouncements of loyalty to the end, is still understandable. What with the disorientation of the night time arrest, of Jesus’s unwillingness to let force be used to defend him and his silence before his accusers. Armed soldiers
and a turbulent packed city on knife edge made for a truly terrifying context. And Peter was brave to some extent – he hadn’t run away completely and he had stayed close enough to observe what was going to happen next.

What did happen next was exactly what Peter had had good reason to fear – he was recognised and called out. So, in the shadows of the courtyard Peter denied Jesus three times. In doing so he not only denied his Lord but lied about his own identity, denying his own self. Asked if he was a Galilean, one of the arrested man’s disciples, Peter is vehement: ‘I am not’.

Somehow in that moment, across the courtyard, Jesus saw him and looked directly at him. Jesus never lost sight of Peter and who he truly was, beloved.

There is a lot that each if us is going through presently and we are all doing the best we can in unique circumstances. Many of us are missing loved ones. Many of us are amazing ourselves by using new technology and finding our way around different ways of working. Many of us grieve over our changed circumstances, others worry about the future. Many find new ways of entertaining ourselves and brightening the day for others. Huge numbers have volunteered to help and many of us do well to just keep going. This has all happened so fast and if any of us have a few wobbles along the way that’s understandable. Jesus sees us – with compassion. And he will restore us.

**Prayer**

O gracious and holy Father,  
give us wisdom to perceive you,  
diligence to seek you,  
patience to wait for you,  
eyes to behold you,  
a heart to meditate upon you,  
and a life to proclaim you,  
through the power of the spirit  
of Jesus Christ our Lord.

- St Benedict
MAUNDY THURSDAY


23 Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. 2 They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” 3 Then Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.” 4 Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” 5 But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.”

6 When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. 8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. 9 He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. 11 Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. 12 That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

13 Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, 14 and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16 I will therefore have him flogged and release him.”

18 Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” 19 (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) 20 Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; 21 but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” 22 A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.” 23 But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. 24 So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. 25 He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

Reflection

In the olive grove garden of Gethsemane Jesus handed himself into his Father’s hands. Now these earthly rulers were passing him from one to another, mishandling him. Pilate seems to have no appetite for dealing with this drama and casts about for an escape, trying to leave the fate of Jesus first to Herod and then to the crowd. Pilate gives Jesus attention, but mostly the perfunctory
attention of a busy person who doesn’t want trouble. We may recognise it, that sense of powerlessness and overload.

But look again at Christ – the one apparently powerless in the middle of all this turmoil. He would have had no rest, no refreshment since he left the Upper Room. He whose hands had tenderly washed feet had been beaten and mocked at the hands of others. We see in him a profound revelation of the meaning and the nature of God and the exercise of power through choosing self-offering and to self-limit. He stands as a sign of God’s way in the world. Not alone, still in the hands of his Father, Our Father.

By this day, Maundy Thursday, some of us will have been in very restricted self-isolation for a while, all of us will have been contributing to an unprecedented effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 through our willingness accept limits being placed on our usual ways of living. For each of us this will come with a cost, bourn that we might take care of one another and especially the most vulnerable of us. This is a poignant reminder of the power of self-limiting and self-offering. I read someone put it this way for the present time:

“If we view ourselves as besieged victims who need to go into hiding, then we will cultivate fear and hoarding. If we view ourselves as a community working hard to protect the most vulnerable among us, then we will cultivate courage and helping”

- Len Niehoff.

Prayer

In you, Father all-mighty, we have our preservation and our bliss.
In you, Christ, we have our restoring and our saving.
You are our mother, brother, and Saviour.
In you, our Lord the Holy Spirit, is marvellous and plenteous grace.
You are our clothing; for love you wrap us and embrace us.
You are our maker, our lover, our keeper.
Teach us to believe that by your grace all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.
Amen.

- Mother Julian of Norwich
26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. 28 But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ 31 For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35 And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” 36 The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37 and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38 There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, 45 while the sun’s light failed; 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.”
Reflection

Today we arrive at the heart of the Passion as Jesus is led out to his death. Cicero, the Roman orator, described crucifixion as the grossest, cruellest and most hideous manner of execution. Partly this was due to its public nature as the condemned were ruthlessly paraded through the streets carrying placards declaring their name and offence. Perhaps intentionally to affront Jesus’ accusers, Pilate had caused to be written, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews’. This was displayed not only in Latin, the language of the Roman Empire, but in Greek (also universally spoken) and Hebrew too.

It seems to me that much of the storm centres around the question of who exactly this is hanging on the cross. Along with his body, his identity has been assaulted. Jesus has been made a pantomime king, dragging his cross-throne along the public way-fare, bedraggled and bleeding, with his comic crown.

At Golgotha, as he is nailed to and then labours on the cross, come further assaults on his deepest self:

from the leaders: ‘If he is the Messiah, let him save himself…’
from the soldiers: ‘If you are the King of the Jews save yourself…’
from the first criminal: ‘Are you not the Messiah – then save yourself and us!’

Jesus has been physically stripped of his clothing and left exposed; his dignity torn away. Those who taunt him now also seek to strip him of his identity.

Yet Jesus sets himself in relationship. In other gospel accounts he read of his words to his mother and to his follower, John. In Luke’s account we see him began and ended his torment on the cross in relationship with the Father

‘Father, forgive them…’ and ‘Father into your hands I commend my spirit.’

In and through relationship Jesus roots himself to his very deepest identity – Son of God - the identity pronounced over him at his baptism:

_When Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”_ (Luke 3:21-22).

And whilst some taunted him saying 'If you are…save yourself!' others recognised him for who he was. They understood that he had come, not to save himself, but them, us. Jesus didn’t respond to the jeering of the leaders, the soldiers or the first criminal but to the second criminal he speaks words of inclusion, promise and power.

Recognition dawns for others too, including the centurion who watched him die, even the natural world seems to shudder with the comprehension of just who this man is.

In our present circumstances, when our streets are emptier than many of us can remember, in the stillness of our watchful imaginations might we catch a glimpse of the crucified and risen Christ walking them? And ponder who he is to us?

In our present circumstances, might we take a few moments to rest in our own secure identity as beloved children of God.
Prayer

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul  
He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
my whole life long.

- Psalm 23
And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, 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. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 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. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Reflection

“Yes,” said the Lord Digory, “Its inside is bigger than its outside.” “Yes,” said Queen Lucy. “In our world too, a stable once had something inside it that was bigger than our whole world.

Later, the Faun, Tumnus, added

“The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets. The inside is larger than the outside”

C.S. Lewis, The Last Battle

Like the animal shelter which held Jesus at his birth, the tomb which held him in his death seems to have the same TARDIS-like quality of being metaphorically bigger on the inside than any of us can imagine.
We are told that Joseph of Arimathea placed the body of Jesus in an unused tomb which was hewn from stone. Meanwhile the women who had come from Galilee with Jesus were following behind. They took note of the tomb and how the body had been laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. And on the Sabbath they rested.

The Sabbath – the ancient day of rest with its roots in the stories about our earliest beginnings. On the seventh day when the work of creation was completed, so the story goes, God rested. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on that day he rested.

Of all the days in history, Holy Saturday, during which the body of Jesus lay in the tomb in silent mystery, was the day of God’s solitude.

It was the day on which the whole of creation waited in deep inner rest. The day on which no words were spoken, no proclamations made. The Word of God through whom all had been created, lay buried, silent, in the darkness of the earth.

We have much to learn about God’s resting in silence and solitude.

Some of us have more time on our hands than we would wish, whilst others of us long for a moment of silence and solitude in the middle of all the demands on us.

On this extraordinary Holy Saturday of 2020 might we find space for a tiny seed of God’s silence and solitude and allow it to bear fruit in us.

The rest of God is a deep rest of the heart and soul that can endure even as we are surrounded by the forces of death. It is the rest which offers us hope that our present hidden existence will become fruitful. It is the rest of faith that allows us to live with a peaceful and joyful heart even when things seem so out of sorts.

For this is a Sabbath like all the Sabbaths that have ever been, rolled into one. Jesus lay buried in the tomb and yet something was about to stir. Then as now, the whole of creation is waiting for all things to be made new.

**Prayer**

Late on Holy Saturday many Christians gather for the Easter Vigil and the lighting of the Paschal candle which marks the receding of the darkness before the light of the resurrection. The Exaltet, sung out by candlelight and thought to date back to the 4th Century, proclaims the beginning of Easter:

This is the night when you first saved our ancestors, freeing Israel from her slavery and leading her safely through the sea.
This is the night when Jesus Christ vanquished hell, broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.
This is the night when all who believe in him are freed from sin, restored to grace and holiness, and share the victory of Christ.
This is the night that gave us back what we had lost;  
beyond our deepest dreams  
you made even our sin a happy fault.  
Most blessed of all nights!  
Evil and hatred are put to flight and sin is washed away,  
lost innocence regained, and mourning turned to joy.  
Night truly blessed, when hatred is cast out,  
peace and justice find a home, and heaven is joined to earth  
and all creation reconciled to you.  
Therefore, heavenly Father, in this our Easter joy  
accept our sacrifice of praise, your Church’s solemn offering,  
Grant that this Easter Candle may make our darkness light.  
For Christ the morning star has risen in glory;  
Christ is risen from the dead and his flame of love still burns within us!  
Christ sheds his peaceful light on all the world!  
Christ lives and reigns for ever and ever!
EASTER DAY


But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 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.

Reflection

Within such a short time their whole world had been turned upside down. There had been hints, Jesus had told them that this was coming; he’d been preparing them, though they had been barely able to comprehend it. But who could have been truly prepared for this?

One day crowds had thronged to welcome him into the city with branches and singing, within a few days they watched him die the cruellest of deaths, his body hastily buried and they were themselves hiding away from sight behind locked doors.
But that first Easter, it was precisely when they were shut up indoors, bewildered, grief-stricken and fearful about the future that the Resurrection crept up upon them unaware.

It seemed to gradually dawn. The first response of the women was to be perplexed. Once they grasped something of the earth-shattering truth and ran to share it with others they were not believed. Eventually Peter goes to the tomb himself and returns amazed. I can’t help but delight in the messy, tumbling energy and wild joy of the unfolding story of the Resurrection.

This Easter Day 2020, unlike any we have known before, feels so messy. But even in these bewildering times, glimmers of resurrection hope and glory creep in beside us, drawing us forward. One day we will emerge, blinking, from the tomb of this experience, into bright sunlight. And what a day of rejoicing that will be! For today, we rejoice still, in gladness for all that has been accomplished and for all that will be. As you pause to reflect, know that you are in the company of billions of Christians worldwide.

Alleluia, He is risen!

Alleluia, He is risen!

Alleluia, He is risen!

Prayer

O Lord,
grant that we may be numbered among those chosen to be witnesses of your resurrection, not only by word of mouth, but in actions and truth, for your honor and glory; with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign as one God, now and forever.

- Ludolph of Saxony, d. 1378