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Dear friends,

A Holy Week as never before.....

As we launch into Holy Week with so many memories of Palm Sundays, Maundy Thursdays and Good Fridays from years gone by we realise that our preparations for Easter are going to be very different this year. Shopping for Easter eggs, buying our lamb, gathering with friends or family and reflecting on the last week of Jesus' life on earth will never be the same again.

Just as I prepared to write this letter and look back on the week gone by a darling friend texted to ask if the family is OK. She tells me that she is "fine, stuck in the house, which is very strangeI just worry that I might never want to leave". Just as we have all experienced this last week in different ways so will we experience the next one differently. Some of us are enjoying time alone with our spouse or family, others feel bereft and isolated. Some of us miss our children or grandchildren like crazy and others, as one parishioner said, are enjoying a "busman's holiday from child care duties!" I wonder whether more babies will have been conceived in recent weeks, but I also wonder whether counsellors and divorce lawyers will be busier than ever when we return to what was once called normality.



My week has been spent calling local people and grappling with digital technology. On Monday I attended my first Chapter (local clergy) meeting by Zoom. Seeing and chatting to clergy on my iPad was a revelation - but the struggle to upload YouTube services and reflections for adults and children has been a steep learning curve. Our cars sit on the driveway, a child has worn through her wellies from walking, the deliveries of milk, meat, fruit and vegetables sustain us. Thankfully our bins are still emptied and those supplying our food and health care continue to work whilst risking their own health. We should be thankful. Our lives will never be the same again and we are learning what really matters. Let's hope we emerge from this renewed by the experience.



Some 15 years ago when I was a naive and newly ordained curate, a slim dark haired man called Jeremy used to be a very occasional worshipper in our church. In the run up to elections he became a regular church goer. We knew he was ambitious. Some years later as my sons became medics I'm afraid to confess that during the junior doctor dispute over pay and conditions Mr Hunt acquired a new name in our household, as

he tried to negotiate new contracts that would affect both financial remuneration and patient safety. Now many who once vilified greedy junior doctors are clapping at the roadside and encouraging their children to chalk rainbows on their driveways or stick painted rainbow thank yous for the NHS in their windows. Many doctors still feel the betrayal keenly.

In Holy Week we enter into the roller coaster of sin, guilt and forgiveness... whilst we cannot gather together during this time I hope you will pause to reflect and pray. We will be sending YouTube links for Evening Prayer from Monday until Wednesday, services for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day and reflections both within this newsletter and on YouTube that I hope will give both adults and children opportunities to ponder the mystery of death and resurrection.

Betrayed by a kiss

Each year on Palm Sunday we listen to two gospel readings. Firstly we hear the Liturgy of the Palms (Matthew 21:1-11) and then the long Passion Gospel (Matthew 26:14-66) - the stories take us from the hosannas of Palm Sunday when the crowds proclaim a humble preacher and teacher riding on a donkey to be their king to the lifeless body of an innocent man in a sealed tomb. We are on a rollercoaster as we listen to the stories for we know deep down that had we been there we would have been swept along just as the crowd was. We know that even if we had been one of Jesus' closest friends we would probably have behaved just as his friends did.

Sin, guilt and forgiveness stalk us....and whilst we know what it is like to feel betrayed by others we don't much want to think that we too have the capacity to betray those whom we love, care for and value.

Jesus is betrayed both by his friends, his enemies and those who hardly knew him. Judas, one of Jesus' friends, the equivalent of the disciples' treasurer, betrays him firstly in his heart and then by his actions. We will never know why. Had he longed for a warrior like Messiah, was he scared that he too would be condemned by association with this man? Who knows?

Peter, James and John, who were the equivalent of Jesus' senior leadership team, go with Jesus to pray after they've shared a last supper together. Despite the fact that Jesus made it clear in the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine that they will never share another meal together they cannot even be with him in the agony of his final night. Their sleep betrays them. When they awaken to find themselves surrounded by an angry mob they think only of their own safety and run away. Peter is a little braver. He follows Jesus but at a distance to see what would happen next. As the night wears on Peter betrays Jesus again and again so that when the cock crows he is brought face to face with his own sinfulness.



For others betrayal is not so personal - the Jewish authorities, the crowds who barely knew him, the onlookers who just happened to see another man accused of wrong doing, and the bandits beside him ...none truly knew the man as a friend, so that, with Pilate, they collude with Roman injustice. Pilate should have known better, not because he had his wife's words ringing in his ears but because his role was to effect justice. The religious people know their rules and follow them rigorously - they cannot murder. Therefore, they try to keep their hands clean by asking another person to do their dirty work. They realise Pilate hates them but they love their own power too much so they use Pilate for their own ends.

We do not know what happens to all the bit players in our story but we do know about Peter. He will never be the same again. He was there with Jesus from the beginning, sometimes opening his big mouth and getting it badly wrong and sometimes seeing the truth before the others did. He's seen Jesus preaching, teaching and caring for the unloved. He's stood on a mountain top and seen him in a new light and he's even hailed him as the Christ. Peter even offered to die with Jesus and yet on that fateful night self-preservation kicked in - he tried hard to be faithful, following Jesus at a distance into the courtyard but in the end he can go no further. As the cock crows he knows his brokenness, his vulnerability and his shame and he breaks down in tears of desolation knowing that Jesus is more precious than his own safety. It seems he has discovered the truth too late. But not so - it is this self-awareness, this sorrow, this opening of his own heart to God that enables him to receive forgiveness - soon after he returns to carry on the story.

Unlike Peter, who later accepts the offer of forgiveness and tries to follow in his friend's footsteps, Judas goes down in history as the vilified betrayer. Judas simply could not live with himself. His betrayal is perhaps deeper than that of Peter. Judas is unable to accept the deep down truth about his own behaviour - he would rather die. Could there have been another ending? Peter, the betrayer, becomes "Peter the rock" on whom our church, our faith is built. Judas' greatest betrayal was to believe that God's love and forgiveness did not extend to him. A salutary thought.

I have blessed an overflowing basketful of palm crosses for you to receive when we can safely meet again - they speak of the abundant and overflowing love of God for every sinner.

Wishing you every blessing this Holy Week

Vicki
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**The Reverend Vicki Burrows
Vicar of The Parish of Radyr**

