

Jesus was preparing his friends for what was to come. Their fear and confusion in the face of his death. Their not knowing where he was going, or the way. Jesus was also preparing his friends for a future where death is not the end. Shockingly, Jesus was confident of the promise of resurrection, such as his intimacy with God.

Currently there are many who have, and who will travel the journey to their death with COVID-19. Our hearts break for them and their families. Grief is hard enough, and even harder in these times. How can they and we know the way? How can we be sure of where we are going?

Last night I lit a candle outside my house, as a sign of solidarity with those who are in mourning, and out of respect, and in memory of the many who have and will die. My prayer is they find the light home to God's dwelling place where there is room for everyone.

The image of an expansive heaven, is a typical extravagant expression of love that we see from God, whose desire is to dwell in us, to love us extravagantly, recklessly, even to death.

So, do not let your hearts be troubled.

Believe that God has prepared a place for you.

Let's pray...

Loving Father, I know there are times when I feel troubled and afraid, where death stalks me and those I love, where the way ahead seems uncertain, where worry has stolen my joy.

Come dwell in me. Take me as I am. Calm my troubled heart; that I may know your way, truth, and the fullness of life. So you may be glorified. Amen.

Extract from "Christ our All in all" by Christina Rossetti.

If I should say "my heart is in my home,"
I turn away from that high halidom
Where Jesus sits: for nowhere else
But with its treasure dwells
The heart: this Truth and this experience
tells.

O Lord, Whose Heart is deeper than
my heart,
Draw mine to Thine to worship
where Thou art;
For Thine own glory join the twain
Never to part again,
Nor to have lived nor to have died in
vain.

If I should say "my heart is in a grave,"
I turn away from Jesus risen to save:
I slight that death He died for me;
I, too, deny to see
His beauty and desirability.

The reflection for today is on John chap 6 v 1 – 15, the feeding of the five thousand. This is one of the best well known miracles performed by Jesus and it is the only nature miracle to be recorded in all 4 gospels.

As Martin and I are still in 'self isolation' my mind is often drawn to food and how to make our supplies of 'loaves and fishes' last longer. It's been amazing how far I have been able to make the constituents of a 'normal meal' stretch, with just a little thought, and no need for a miracle. All of us can so easily over use our resources of any kind without thinking. We only have to look the waste we put out in our dustbins as an example but hopefully much of that can be recycled. When the worry of this virus is a memory we still have the problems of global warming to contend with so maybe we do need to think more and use a little less.

We have no family living near us but feel so lucky to live in Barwick, the Barwick Post Office and Stores are giving such a wonderful delivery service we can stay safely at home and we are very thankful as supermarket delivery slots are like gold! We are also very fortunate in not having to worry about where the money is coming from to pay for it.

The disciples in the Bible reading did not have that luxury and neither do many people in the here and now, for example, the elderly and infirm in many villages, towns and cities. If they have no family living near them they have to rely on neighbours or charities to get the food they need -or go without. There are also those trying to manage on Universal credit, worrying about paying bills, coping with rising prices and having children at home to feed.

Fortunately the disciples had Jesus to turn the donation of 5 loaves and 2 fishes into enough to feed the 5000 hungry people on that hillside. He provided so much food that there was plenty spare as the people only took what they needed.

I have to confess to enjoying shopping but, all too often, confusing the difference between 'I want' and 'I need'!

In the passage from John's gospel it is Jesus who is able to provide the food the people needed, he gave thanks for the bread and the fishes and shared them with the people, as is done with bread and wine at the Eucharist. He provided physical food but also food for the spirit. The people listening saw this as a sign he was 'the Prophet' so it says in verse 15 - but, may be, this story is saying more about who Jesus is. In the book of Exodus, chapter 16 verse 8 it says

'Then Moses said 'it is the Lord who will give you meat to eat in the evening and as much bread as you want in the morning.'

I believe the Lord will provide but, I also believe, that does not mean we need to do nothing, we have to use the gifts He has given us, and be like the disciples in the miracle story, be part of His distribution team, then, in the way we live our lives, we can show His, and our care for our fellow human beings in as many ways and places as we are able. Thank you and stay safe Pat Rogers

Reflections for Tuesday 28 April 2020. John Ch.6 v.30-35

At the beginning of today's passage, Jesus is once again pursued by a crowd. The previous day, he had fed five thousand people on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the second of the great miracles detailed in St John's gospel. That very same night, Jesus and his disciples had travelled over to the opposite shore of the lake and the disciples had witnesses him walking on water.

Of course, the following day the crowd found them again, and this time the crowd are expectant. They demand another miracle, another show of wonder from Jesus. According to John's gospel, they made the point to Jesus that, during the exodus, Moses had given them bread from heaven to eat. Perhaps they thought that the miracle they'd witnessed the previous day wasn't impressive enough. After all, Jesus may have fed five thousand people but Moses had liberated an entire nation from slavery and then led them (and fed them) through many years in the wilderness.

So they challenge Jesus. "What will you do?" they say to him.

At first, Jesus rebukes the crowd, reminding them that it was not Moses who provided them with bread from heaven during the exodus, but God himself. He then goes on to say "*the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*". That seems to capture the crowd's attention and they ask Jesus to give them that bread.

It's at that moment, that Jesus make the first of seven "*I am*" statements which are recorded in John's gospel. "*I am the bread of life*" he says "*he who comes to me will never be hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty*".

It's an extraordinary and powerful statement. In making it, Jesus points directly to the fact that he is the son of god. He is the messiah that the crowd have been searching for.

But the statement also tells us something else about the nature of our faith in God. The crowd who had pursued Jesus wanted a miracle to fulfill their most basic of human needs. To eat and be nourished. But like most human needs, it provides

So they ask "When did you get here?" Jesus ignores their question, being aware of why they are following him. Instead he says "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles."

Now he goes on to explain what has happened and why. "Do not work for food which goes bad: instead work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father." But still they do not understand.

"What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?" They ask. Jesus replies, "What God wants you to do is believe in the one he sent." But they need to see more miracles and they compare what Jesus has done with Moses and the manna from heaven. But as Jesus points out it wasn't Moses that produced the manna, it was God. Only God can give the real bread and since Jesus comes from God he can give that bread.

Now they ask for this bread and Jesus says that he is the bread of life. Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty. Here we have an obvious reference to the bread and wine at communion.

Refer back to Ephesians In the epistle

Monday 27th April 2020 Christina Rossetti, poet, 1894 [Commemoration]

Christina Rossetti was born in 1830 and was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, of which her older brother, Dante, was a prominent member. Her elder sister became an Anglican Religious. Christina's own fame rests upon her poetry, which dealt mainly with religious subjects but also the sadness of unrequited or disappointed love. Her first recorded verses, addressed to her mother on the latter's birthday, were written on 27 April 1842. She was the author of the Christmas carol In the bleak mid-winter. She died on 29 December 1894.

Reflection Monday 27th April 2020, John 14:1-1

Jesus is on the road to his own death, but instead of fear; he has a deep confidence in his Fathers love. With these words and those to follow, he challenges and comforts his friends.

In this lock down, we face many challenges.

We might wish for a mansion, as many of us have little personal space.

We might be worried about those we love. We might be contemplating using a newspaper for toilet paper! Like me, I am sure you have thought of things you wish you had done in preparation for the lock down.

I was brought up with the Scout motto; "Be prepared!" Whether it is our nation desperately preparing to care for those in dire need, or our own preparations in the face of our fragile mortality; preparedness seems to be the key to coping with any major change. This is especially true as, like Thomas we wonder where on earth we are going!

This chapter, Mark 13, comes at the end of what is generally agreed is the original gospel of Mark. What follows is the Passion narrative and that was probably added at a later date. In this chapter Mark has collected together some of Jesus teaching on the end of times.

The resurrection is the start of the building of God's Kingdom on Earth. The end of times will be the end of this process when paradise is established and we are fundamental to it. We are powered by the spirit to spread the word of God and be examples of the Christian life.

The book of Revelation talks about how we as God's people will be with Him in paradise, where we will have every tear wiped away from our eyes. We will have new bodies and be with our loved ones in the faith. The final words of this chapter tell us to stay awake for there is work to be done and because God has great things planned coming our way. Keep safe in the risen Christ

There is a story told that when Christ had finished his work on earth, and had ascended into heaven, the angel Gabriel met him. 'Lord,' said Gabriel, 'is it permitted to ask what plans you have made for carrying on your work on earth?' 'I have chosen a few men and women' said Christ, 'They will pass on my message to the whole world'.

'But', said the angel, 'What if these people fail you- do you have another plan?' Jesus smiled 'I have no other plan'. I love and trust them.

We are those people!

Let us look at the people in the gospel reading and see if we see any resemblance to ourselves.

This section follows on from the Feeding of the 5000 that John preached about last week. If you remember he said that we had been following a series of readings from Mark, but for the next 5 weeks all the readings come from John. He also said that instead of what Jesus was doing, we are now looking at why.

So let us look at what happened. Jesus had performed the miracle and then gone up into the hills to be alone. The crowd didn't know where he was. Meanwhile the Disciples had taken a boat across the lake to Capernaum. Word has got around about what had happened and the people started to believe that Jesus was the Messiah that had been predicted by earlier prophets and that he would become their leader and free them from the rule of Rome. Hence they go searching for him to make him their king. Eventually they get boats and go across to Capernaum. But since there were no other boats they cannot understand how he got there. Remember he had walked across the water!

only temporary fulfillment. Eat now and you'll be hungry again in just a few hours. Not only that, but however much you eat, you'll eventually want more.

What faith offers us is something different. It fulfills a greater and everlasting need. And what Jesus promises us is that if we believe in him, if our faith becomes the focal point of our lives, we will never be hungry or thirsty again.

We live in challenging times. It's easy at the moment to look at the things we don't have or the things we can't do right now and to think that if only those things were available to us then our lives would be better would be more fulfilled. And the current crisis will pass. Over time our lives will return to normality. But, if we spend the time we have now focusing on all the things that are absent from our daily lives then, just like the crowd who pursued Jesus, we are in danger of missing the point. What Jesus is telling us is that the route to true fulfillment lies through faith. Fortunately for us, that's something that the lockdown can't take away.

REFLECTION on LUKE 24 35-48

I'm sure we've all said it – the reality of our daily lives today, would have been almost unimaginable just a few weeks ago. Coronavirus has changed so many things across the world, in our society, and our individual lives. We can't leave our homes unless it's essential, we can't see close family and friends, schools, churches and parks are closed, and you can't buy toilet roll and pasta for love nor money. Everything has been turned upside down, things we took for granted have been swept away, the goalposts have moved, the rule book has been torn up. We've been shaken to the core, taken out of our comfort zones, we're struggling to create a new normal, and at times we feel a bit scared, But all this is nothing, compared to what we have just read in today's reading. Let's take ourselves back into the reading and try and put ourselves in the disciples shoes.

Just a few days ago, they've seen their best friend and teacher, tortured and put to death. They've seen him die on a cross, in front of their very eyes, and his body laid in a tomb. It's very early days in their grieving process, as they try to come to terms with their loss, and start to think about rebuilding their lives without him. And then, he's there, right in front of them, and there's no mistaking that it's Jesus. It's not a ghost, it's Jesus in the flesh and blood, and he's having a normal conversation with them. Literally, they have just seen somebody come back from the dead. I don't know about you, but I can't imagine how I would react in such circumstances.

It's one of those readings we are quite familiar with, and I think sometimes we skip over the details and lose some of the impact.

When I was re reading the passage this week, I was struck again by how Jesus deals with the disciples.

He knows that the disciples won't be able to take it all in, that they will struggle to get their heads round the fact that he is alive. His first words to them are "peace be with you" – he tries to calm and reassure his fearful and doubt filled friends; he knows that they need some of that peace which passes all understanding.

And Jesus is so practical and so sensible – not something you would necessarily expect from the Son of God, or somebody who has been dead for a few days!

He knows that the disciples will demand proof, that they will want to see the evidence. He knows that they will be thinking he's a ghost. So he allows them to touch him, to feel his flesh and bones. He lets them see the marks of his crucifixion on his hands and his feet.

Not surprisingly, the disciples are emotional wrecks. Yes they're overwhelmed with joy to see him, but they're not sure if they really can believe their eyes, and they're frantically trying to work out what is going on.

But Jesus has got such a good understanding of how people tick – if in doubt, just eat! Food is the great leveler – he calls for some fish and they share a meal together.

And again Jesus goes on to show how well he understands human behaviour and human psychology. He knows to strike whilst the iron is hot, so to speak. He reminds them that what has happened has happened to fulfill the scriptures. And he also reminds them that the job isn't finished. He tells them that the message of repentance and forgiveness needs to be shared throughout the world – and he needs them to do this for him. He has commissioned his disciples.

So I have 2 reflections for us

We've been thinking about how Jesus handled the disciples in these extraordinary circumstances, and how he knew exactly what they needed. In the same way, he knows exactly what we need as individuals to get through these difficult days. I know for myself that he has given me a new desire to pray. Holy Island has been a special place for me in my adult life – you might be able to see the painting behind me. And he has drawn me again towards Celtic spirituality, to go deeper into its daily rhythm of prayer and meditation. And I've found that so helpful. I wonder how Jesus is dealing with you, and how he is bringing you his peace at this time ?

And my second reflection is around joy. This is such an amazingly joyful passage of scripture. But are we really allowing ourselves to be caught up in the joy of the resurrection ? The joy that comes from knowing that Jesus is a living reality, that he has conquered death, that he walks alongside us, that he lives amongst us, that he will never desert us.

We are resurrection people - let us ask for the grace not to be afraid of joy. Amen

John 20:11-18 Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?'

She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'

When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?'

Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'

Jesus said to her, 'Mary!'

She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).

Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."'

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Don't touch that!! Its hot and you'll burn your hand!" "Don't eat that! It has been on the ground!" "Look both ways before crossing the street so you don't get hit by car!" Have you ever told someone these warnings? Have you ever been told these warnings? As a child, my parents would tell me these warnings although now they seem like common-sense, or at least they should be. As parents or caretakers, we give warnings like these to children because we love and care for them. We give them warnings like these to protect and prevent them from serious harm. We give our children warnings to help guide them on the right path and to help them become cautious and alert. We do it for their good and in order to teach them. In this reading Jesus gives us a general warning about the end times.

Don't let other people deceive you

Don't be troubled by wars and battles

There will be earthquakes and famines – and of course pandemics

These things are the birth pangs of the New Kingdom

You will suffer for preaching my word

But the gospel must be preached to all people