

**CHORLEY AND LEYLAND
METHODISTS**



Sacrificial Love



LENT 2021 - REAL LOVE

Welcome to the start of Holy Week, which begins with crowds welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, hailing Him as King, and will see some of the same voices shouting 'Crucify Him' in a matter of days. How fickle the crowd, how turbulent this week of all weeks.

So, this week's Real Love theme is 'Sacrificial Love'.

Nowhere else in scripture do we capture more fully the sacrificial love of God than in the narratives of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is seen to go 'as a lamb to the slaughter', silently, except for words of grace and forgiveness, of care and love upon the cross - 'today you will be with me in paradise', 'Mother, this is your son', 'Father, forgive them, for they don't understand what they're doing'.

Truly, the offering of Jesus on the Cross, His death and His resurrection offer us Love Divine, all loves excelling, perfect, all-encompassing love. By focusing on these scriptures this week, may each one of us gain a great understanding and awareness of the height, depth, width and breadth of God's amazing grace and love for us. A love which NOTHING can separate us from. An all-powerful, all-conquering, all-redeeming love.

A thank you to you for joining in on this Lenten journey through so many different aspects of love, Real Love.

Thank you, too, to Kathryn Townson, our Administrative Assistant, for creating these booklets, and making the online Lenten Calendar possible.

With our love and prayers for you -

Phil.

Our Covenant Love for God

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Monday 29th March 2021

Holy Week



Readings

Matthew 21: 12&13 (Jesus overturning the tables in the temple)

John 12: 1-11 (Mary anointing Jesus with expensive perfume)

Reflection by Rev'd Gill Welsh

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild is the image that many of us have of Jesus, but in this first story, Jesus was angry. By causing a scene in the temple, by upsetting the authorities, Jesus wasn't going to make any friends, but that wasn't his aim or purpose, he was there to teach them the truth about God and if that meant ruffling a few feathers, then so be it.

Is there something happening around us that we know is wrong, and are we brave enough to sacrifice our reputation, our relationship with others to point it out and speak out in love, real love, sacrificial love?

In the second story, Jesus was relaxing at the table with friends. When we are with those we love and trust we are often different, more relaxed, more prepared to share our views. This is a sacrifice in itself.

How often do we put on a mask to hide ourselves from others, to protect ourselves from getting hurt? When Jesus was anointed with the special perfume, he was made vulnerable and yet he was prepared to make that sacrifice. Letting others see the real us is a sacrifice, it makes us vulnerable, and yet it is the only way we can experience real love.

What masks do we wear that we need to lay down, and what risks do we need to take in order to do God's will and know God's true love this day?



Let us Pray

Loving God, you gave us Jesus
as the ultimate example of sacrificial love.
May we be prepared to sacrifice
whatever we need to,
in order to do your will,
and may we be open and honest with ourselves,
with one another
and with you
so that we may truly experience
real love.

Amen

Tuesday 30th March 2021

Holy Week



Reading - John 12.20-26

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. **21** They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” **22** Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. **25** Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

Reflection by Phil Robinson, Student Minister

As often seems to be the case, Jesus appears here to be answering a question that he hasn’t been asked. But what if, in an albeit unexpected way, Jesus was answering the question? What if he was saying that, in order to truly see him, his followers would have to be prepared for death? Not necessarily the physical loss of one’s life, but more often the need to cast aside aspects of our life - habits, customs, maybe even relationships - in order that we may follow him more closely.

The events of the past twelve months have meant that we all have had to cast aside some aspects of our lives - some with a heavy heart and a sense of grief, some with perhaps a certain amount of relief. As we start to look tentatively at being able to resume activities, it is worth considering whether there are things in our own lives, and in the life of the church, that need to be allowed to die in order to let us see Jesus more clearly, and be able to follow where He is leading. Just as pruning a plant is essential to it bearing fruit, what we may see as loss may in fact enable new life.



Let us Pray

Loving God

We pray for a new and clear vision
in our lives
and in the lives of our communities
Help us to see what
needs to die in ourselves
so that we may live more fully.
We pray for the grace
to see what we need to do,
and the strength
to be able to do it.

Amen.

Wednesday 31st March 2021

Holy Week



Psalm 22 v1,16-18

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?...

Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.

All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

Reflection by Deacon Sylvie Nicholls

I remember hearing a bible tutor say 'a text taken out of context can be a con'. Not meaning that a piece of scripture is false, but we may miss its fuller meaning by not considering its wider context. I used to think that the first line of psalm 22, uttered by Jesus in his dying throes on the cross, was simply an accusation against his Father God for abandoning him in his greatest hour of need.

Later I came to understand that by using those particular words, both he and his hearers would be powerfully reminded of the whole message of the psalm, with its amazingly prophetic words about what would happen to him on that day. Far from an accusation, the words were a defiant act of faith in the face of evil and pain, affirming that, whatever it felt like in that moment, his Father God knew all he was going through and was present with him, still.

In our moments of pain and fear, what words of scripture comfort and strengthen us?



A time of reflection

Find some psalm words which express your deepest feelings towards God today (whatever they might be) or simply reflect on these beautiful words by Julian of Norwich:

‘God is our clothing,
who wraps and enfolds us for love,
embraces us and shelters us,
surrounds us for his love,
which is so tender
that he may never desert us.’

Thursday 1st April 2021

Maundy Thursday



Reflection by Deacon Ellen Monk-Winstanley

This Scripture is one of my favourites. I would say that, because I am a Deacon and the bowl and towel, symbols of the servant heart Jesus showed to his disciples, is an important symbol for Deacons! But this story is so simple, so profound that each of us should find ourselves in it. It may help us to remember the context of this story. They had just finished the Passover meal, that meal where Jews celebrate God's salvation offered to them from the oppression of the Egyptians. And the other Gospels tell us that it was during this meal that Jesus took the bread and said, "This is my body broken for you." And then later in the meal he took the cup and said, "This is my blood shed for you."

Powerful stuff. You can imagine that the Disciples were already a little confused and shell shocked. What could he mean? I think they may have been asking each other what the other thought he meant. You know how you do when you don't quite understand what the speaker is saying? I imagine they were nudging one another and looking confused. You can imagine the scene.

And then he gets up, takes off his robe and begins to wash the Disciples' feet. What? How crazy is that? So, take a moment...If you were to imagine yourself in this story, where would you be? Would you be one of the Disciples who let his feet be washed? Would you be like Peter who protested because this was such a radical act? What would you be thinking and feeling? How would you feel when Jesus begins to explain why he has done this?

And that is what we need to recognise here. This was a radical act. One that was contrary to all customs, but Jesus performs it precisely because it challenged everyone's assumptions. As Christians we are called to serve, to get down and dirty with those who need to hear of the love of God the most. The Last Supper shows us intimately the kind of God we serve, and this act seals the deal. Our servant king wants us to wash one another's feet, to serve one another, to be willing to sacrifice even when it is hard so that other people might know how much they are loved.

This is the most radical claim of the gospel, we serve a servant king and only when we serve others, do we live out the call that he has on our lives. What does that look like in your life? I have a new favourite song for Holy Week. It is called "All the Room was Hushed and Still" by Graham Kendrick.



Let us Pray:

These words encourage and challenge me every time I serve others. May they be our prayer today.

"This is what I want my Church to be,
this is what I want the world to see
– who it is you follow...love each other,
one another, love each other,
in the way that I have loved you.
Walk together and whatever comes,
love each other
in the way that I have loved you."
May it be so for you and for me.

Amen.

Friday 2nd April 2021

Good Friday



Reflection by Rev'd Tony Simpson

I want to just think about three words uttered by Pilate - 'What is truth?'.

Say them out loud to yourself. How do you speak those words? Is it a question or is it said with a sense of exasperation, the cry of somebody who has sought the truth but failed to find it? Or perhaps it is said in anguish as if by somebody who has held on to a belief that has now been proven to be untrue?

How we say words or phrases can radically alter their meaning.

The full truth, of course, was not going to be revealed on Good Friday, it would have to wait until Easter Day or even, for some, beyond that.

So what of today, for us here and now? What is truth?

As people of faith the truth is that Jesus died on the Cross and we remember that truth today on Good Friday. We also remember all that He went through before His death – the betrayals, the insults, the punches, whippings and beatings. The humiliation of being made to carry the instrument of torture, and ultimately death, through the streets before being nailed, naked, to it and hearing the taunts of those who had come to mock and scoff, to pour scorn on what Jesus came to tell them was 'the truth'.

And then the final humiliation – recorded by Matthew and Mark – reading from the King James Version of Matthew:

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Forsaken by God. The Son of God deserted and alone. No depth of human suffering was now unknown to Jesus. This was the lowest point anybody could be.

It was, indeed, finished.



Let us Pray

Jesus, light of the world, You came to our world to bring Your light, the light that brought our world into being and the light that guides our steps.

You came into our world to bring Your Word of truth, a truth that teaches, rebukes and corrects.

Yet you were asked 'What is truth?'

You had preached in the synagogues.

You had walked the streets and preached to the crowds.

Yet still You were asked 'What is truth?'

Was it a question - 'Could You explain Your truth to me?' -

or was it said in exasperation - 'How can I tell what the truth is?'

Pilate, afraid of those more powerful than him left the decision to the crowd yet You are more powerful than any power on earth.

You are more powerful than death itself.

Yet in the final moment You said 'It is finished.'

You had finally been betrayed by Judas, Peter, Pilate, the crowds and even by God.

Your love had brought You to the deepest depths of despair and rejection.

Death as a common criminal and a borrowed tomb.

Yet even as the end was near Your love encompassed those You loved and Your love ensured that death was not the end.

That is the truth.

AMEN

Saturday 3rd April 2021

Easter Saturday



Reflection by Rev'd Karen Hilsden

Today is a day of waiting, a day of living in the in between times. Imagine it for the first disciples, they had travelled from the heights of Palm Sunday, of the hosannas and now they have seen their close friend Jesus tortured in the most awful of ways. Now they were in a place of grief, lament. They didn't know they were in a place of waiting, but that is what it turned out to be, yes Jesus had told them he would rise again, but they hadn't grasped this.

In many ways this time of waiting is what we are inhabiting at the minute as we see signs of hope and wait for a new way of living to emerge from this global pandemic. We too live, grieving for the pain and loss within our world, in hope that this too will pass. We live in certain hope that the love given on the cross will wipe away every tear, for pain and suffering will be no more. We live in hope that the hope of the vaccine and treatment of COVID19 will bring healing to our world and allow us once more to meet with loved ones and know new and fullness of life.

And for those who we love but see no longer we commend to God's love, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. For Jesus' love is stronger than the grave and will one day raise us all to new life where we shall have eternal life forever.



Let us Pray

God of waiting,
Be with us on this day,
That we may be still and know the cost of your love,
Love that is stronger than the grave,
Love that will overcome death,
But for today, help me to wait,
To wait in hope,
In the full and certain hope of all your promises fulfilled,
Through Jesus Christ, the one who died
and who tomorrow will rise,
but who today waits, watches,
that we will celebrate more gloriously,
new life and love that is victorious.

Amen

Ideas and questions for personal reflection or for group conversation.

1. Which of the events of Holy Week speak most directly to you as things are for you today? The triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The overturning of the tables in the temple. The daily debates with the religious elite. The anointing with expensive perfume. The Last Supper, footwashing and Judas's betrayal. In Gethsemane Garden. Peter's denial. The case against Jesus. The crucifixion. The tomb. Resurrection Day.
2. Where, in this week of weeks, do you see most clearly the sacrificial love of God? Or the sacrificial love of others in the story?
3. When did you last sacrifice something for another, and how did you feel about it? Or when did you feel others had sacrificed for you?
4. How has this Lent been marked for you? What aspects of God's REAL LOVE, and ours for God / others / self have you found particularly challenging or helpful?

There are so many hymns and songs which speak of God's 'Sacrificial Love' for us:

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

*When I survey the wondrous cross, On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss, And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

JESUS CHRIST, I THINK UPON YOUR SACRIFICE

*Jesus Christ, I think upon Your sacrifice; You became nothing,
poured out to death. Many times I've wondered at Your gift of life,
and I'm in that place once again, I'm in that place once again.
And once again I look upon the cross where You died.
I'm humbled by Your mercy and I'm broken inside.
Once again I thank You, once again I pour out my life.*

read the words of these hymns / songs and reflect upon their meaning - what images or thoughts particularly strike you as you read them, and what other hymns / songs come to mind?