



Morning Prayer

Palm Sunday

5th April 2020

An Order for Morning Prayer on Sunday

05 April 2020

Palm Sunday

Preparation

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you
and also with you.

This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We have come together in the name of Christ
to offer our praise and thanksgiving,
to hear and receive God's holy word,
to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Liturgy of the Palms

Holding palm cross up

During Lent we have been preparing by works of love and self-sacrifice for the celebration of our Lord's death and resurrection. Today we begin this solemn celebration in union with the Church throughout the world. Christ enters his own city to complete his work as our Saviour, to suffer, to die, and to rise again. Let us go with him in faith and love, so that, united with him in his sufferings, we may share his risen life.

Prayers of Penitence

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.

God shows his love for us
in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Let us then show our love for him
by confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

cf Romans 5.8

Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore to us the joy of your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessed is the Lord,
for he has heard the voice of our prayer;
Therefore shall our hearts dance for joy
and in our song will we praise our God.

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
creator and redeemer of all;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
From the waters of chaos you drew forth the world.
and in your great love fashioned us in your image.
Now, through the deep waters of death,
you have brought your people to new birth
by raising your Son to life in triumph.
May Christ your light ever dawn in our hearts

as we offer you our sacrifice of thanks and praise.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

Blessed be God for ever.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever.

Amen.



The Word of God

Psalmody

Psalm 31.9-16

- 9 Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am in trouble;
my eye is consumed with sorrow,
my soul and my body also.
- 10 For my life is wasted with grief,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails me because of my affliction,
and my bones are consumed.
- 11 I have become a reproach to all my enemies
and even to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
when they see me in the street they flee from me.
- 12 I am forgotten like one that is dead, out of mind;
I have become like a broken vessel.
- 13 For I have heard the whispering of the crowd;
fear is on every side;
they scheme together against me,
and plot to take my life.

- 14 But my trust is in you, O Lord.
I have said, 'You are my God.'
- 15 'My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
and from those who persecute me.
- 16 'Make your face to shine upon your servant, ♦
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now:
and shall be for ever. Amen.

First Reading

Isaiah 50.4-9a

The servant of the LORD said:

⁴The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain
the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens –
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backwards.

⁶I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

⁷The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
 Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
 Let them confront me.
⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me;
 who will declare me guilty?
All of them will wear out like a garment;
 the moth will eat them up.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The reading may be followed by a time of silence.

Old Testament Canticle

A Song of Humility

Hosea 6.1-6

- 1 Come, let us return to the Lord
who has torn us and will heal us.
- 2 God has stricken us
and will bind up our wounds.
- 3 After two days, he will revive us,
and on the third day will raise us up,
 that we may live in his presence.
- 4 Let us strive to know the Lord;
his appearing is as sure as the sunrise.
- 5 He will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.
- 6 ‘O Ephraim, how shall I deal with you?
How shall I deal with you, O Judah?’
- 7 ‘Your love for me is like the morning mist,
like the dew that goes early away.’

- 8 ‘Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets,
and my judgement goes forth as the light.
- 9 ‘For loyalty is my desire and not sacrifice,
and the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.’

Hosea 6.1-6

Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.

Second Reading

Matthew 26.14 - 27.66 [or Matthew 27:11-54]

¹⁴One of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ¹⁵‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

¹⁷On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ ¹⁸He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, “The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.”’ ¹⁹So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ ²²And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ ²³He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’ ²⁵Judas, who betrayed him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ He replied, ‘You have said so.’

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat;

this is my body.' ²⁷Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

³⁰When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

³²But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.' ³³Peter said to him, 'Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.' ³⁴Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.'

³⁵Peter said to him, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And so said all the disciples.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.'

³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' ⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; for the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' ⁴²Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' ⁴³Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking

your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' ⁴⁹At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' ⁵⁵At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

⁵⁷Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, ⁶¹'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days." ⁶²The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' ⁶³But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of

God.' ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you,
From now on you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your verdict?' They answered, 'He deserves death.' ⁶⁷Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, 'Prophesy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?'

⁶⁹Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.' ⁷⁰But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.' ⁷¹When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁷²Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' ⁷³After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.' ⁷⁴Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man!' At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

¹When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. ²They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

³When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴He said, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' ⁵Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.' ⁷After conferring

together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. ⁸For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.'

¹¹Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You say so.' ¹²But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?' ¹⁴But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?' ¹⁸For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹While he was sitting on the judgement seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.' ²⁰Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' ²²Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' ²³Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

²⁴So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' ²⁵Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood

be on us and on our children!" ²⁶So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

²⁷Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.

²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ³⁰They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

³²As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

³⁸Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, ⁴⁰'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' ⁴¹In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ⁴²'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. ⁴³He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." ⁴⁴The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

⁴⁵From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why

have you forsaken me?’⁴⁷ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’⁴⁸ At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink.⁴⁹ But the others said, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.⁵² The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.⁵³ After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many.⁵⁴ Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son!]

⁵⁵ Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.⁵⁶ Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

⁵⁷ When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus.⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth⁶⁰ and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

⁶² The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said,⁶³ ‘Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, “After three days I will rise again.”’⁶⁴ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, “He has been raised from the dead,” and the last deception would be worse than the first.’

⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as

secure as you can.' "So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

The reading may be followed by a time of silence.

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead

And Christ shall give you light.

You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead.

Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on the earth.

And Christ shall give you light.

When Christ our life appears you will appear with him in glory.

**Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give you light.**

Gospel Canticle

Benedictus

- 1 Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,
who has come to his people and set them free.
- 2 He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,
born of the house of his servant David.
- 3 Through his holy prophets God promised of old
to save us from our enemies,
from the hands of all that hate us,
- 4 To show mercy to our ancestors,
and to remember his holy covenant.
- 5 This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,

- 6 Free to worship him without fear,
 holy and righteous in his sight
 all the days of our life.
- 7 And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
- 8 To give his people knowledge of salvation
 by the forgiveness of all their sins.
- 9 In the tender compassion of our God
 the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
- 10 To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,
 and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1.68-79

Glory to the Father and to the Son
 and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
 and shall be for ever. Amen.

The Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
 creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;
 he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;
 he ascended into heaven,
 he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic Church,**

**the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

Amen.



Prayers

Let us pray to God,
who alone makes us dwell in safety:
For all who are affected by coronavirus,
through illness or isolation or anxiety,
that they may find relief and recovery:
At this time of need

We wait, we watch, we hope, we pray

For those who are guiding our nation at this time, and shaping
national policies, that they may make wise decisions:

At this time of need

We wait, we watch, we hope, we pray

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:

At this time of need

We wait, we watch, we hope, we pray

For all those of our congregation worshipping at this time,
that we may be supported by our common prayer
and soon return to worshipping together

At this time of need

We wait, we watch, we hope, we pray

For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:
At this time of need

We wait, we watch, we hope, we pray

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour
Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Collect is said.

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
 sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer is said

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**



The Conclusion

The Blessing

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

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PALM SUNDAY REFLECTION

Nicholas Henshall – Dean of Chelmsford

A prayer that speaks profoundly both to the journey of the Holy Week ahead and to the times we live in.

Living God,
deliver us from a world without justice
and a future without mercy;
in your mercy, establish justice
and in your justice, remember the mercy
revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Today we begin this extraordinary journey, this journey through the last days and hours of Jesus' life.

On Palm Sunday we hold together two narratives on this journey. The most obvious is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey – or if you read Matthew's text today carefully, two donkeys, but we will leave that for another time!

So **that** on the one hand: triumph: here comes the King! Here comes the King! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

And on the other is the account of the Passion, the death of Jesus, the death of the Messiah.

These texts are in an extraordinary dialogue. On the one hand triumph. On the other – in a way that all the Gospels speak of – is the discovery that the triumph of this king, the kingdom Christ inhabits, is an upside down kingdom where the first are last, the last first and the greatest is the servant. And the Messiah ends up dead on a cross.

A day of paradox. Indeed, a week of paradox, where the victory that we see turns out to be an upside-down victory. And how could it be different – for that is nature of the kingdom of God which the Lord places at the centre of all his teaching.

How do we enter into this? What does all this have to say to what we are living through now? This wide gap of time when we haven't yet been able to make room in our heads, our hearts or our lives for the impact of this worldwide pandemic.

This is precisely what Holy Week speaks to.

The God we know in Jesus Christ has come to harrow the reality of what it means to be human. To harrow the hell of our humanity. To enter into all that it means for God to share our life, to be "found in human form". To recognise our darkness and to lead us into light.

God's manner of doing this is only through the cross. Or rather through the death and resurrection of Jesus – not two separate events, but a single, saving event through which God is saving the world.

We know the betrayals of Judas; of Peter; the absence of the apostles. And yet at the cross we also know that the crucified God is gazing at us with great love; gazing at us with great love. And inviting us to share in the upside-down kingdom of his victory.

There is a word used again and again in the Passion Narratives, an ordinary word: "handed over". For the Gospel writers it is an important word because it locates something very important about what happens to Jesus in these last days.

Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified. Judas is rarely called "traitor" in the Gospels – though that is what he is. Instead he is called "the one who handed him over". It is used in the Gospel almost as a title for Judas, like "Thomas the twin".

So, for these Gospel writers, for these eyewitness accounts, the handing over is a crucial event in this series of events that leads to the cross.

And indeed Matthew – along with the other evangelists in different ways – spells this out in his text. Pilate "hands over" Jesus to be crucified. Jesus is moving from a place where action is possible to a place where action is no longer possible; from a place of capacity (a word used again

and again of Jesus in the Gospels) to a place of incapacity; from a place of freedom in his ministry to a place where that freedom is utterly constrained.

And that after all is what the word “passion” means. When we use the phrase “passion narrative” to describe the accounts of the death of Jesus, “passion” doesn’t mean “strong feeling”. It comes from the word meaning “being done to”, as in the words “patient” or “passive”. This is the account of Jesus “being done to”.

And it is precisely there that I think the promise lies.

For **we** find ourselves **handed over**; we find ourselves being done to; we find ourselves unable to act, incapacitated; even unable to go out of our houses, let alone gather for worship together.

And we know that that is the nature of the Kingdom of God. That we find ourselves constrained. Yet in that constraint, that incapacity, the Lord’s journey to the cross; our journey to the cross; his being handed over; our being handed over – being laid aside, stripped down, having to face our own triviality. God says “this is not the final word. Indeed, God shows us that this is what the journey to glory looks like, the place where we deeper with God.

I was in Ethiopia in 1985, during the great East African famine. Some 10 million people were on the verge of starvation in Ethiopia alone.

Even in that context of multiple overwhelms where millions of lives hung in the thread, the Bishop of Gondar led a pilgrimage to the rock hewn churches of Lalibela. And as they gathered in their tens of thousands in that bare landscape, he said simply: “There is no place so dark that we cannot sing praise.”

That is the invitation of this holy week, to know that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

A prayer from 1,400 years ago written by the great Irish monk,
Columbanus:

Kindle in our hearts, O God,
the flame of love which never ceases,
that it may burn in us, giving light to others.
May we shine for ever in your temple,
set on fire with your eternal light,
even your Son Jesus Christ,
our Saviour and our Redeemer.
Amen.