



Monday in Holy Week

6th April 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

'Do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and your children.' Luke 23:28

Yesterday, as a worshipping community on Palm Sunday, we began what feels like a very unusual journey through Holy Week. As Archbishop Justin Welby writes *'The journey of being a Christian is not an easy one, especially as we follow Christ along the agonizing route towards His death, but it is not one we take alone.'* This year, however, the global isolation into which we have been placed, feels an agony in itself. Yet it is also a God-given opportunity! Rather than lamenting our not being able to worship together at this profoundly important time, let us rejoice in the space we have been given in Lockdown, to pray and deepen the relationship we have with Jesus. He calls us to follow Him, whoever and wherever we are on our faith journey. Jesus never gives up calling us to know His love.

This week, I intend to send out some short reflections, which I pray will enable you to feel connected as the body of Christ, as we traverse Christ's Passion together. I have been lucky enough to have made several pilgrimages to the Holy Land, both as a pilgrim and as priestly guide to others whose feet trod the sacred way of the Cross. Each day this week, I will bring you a memory of my very first pilgrimage, as the bible was opened up to me in the vivid reality of Christ's earthly presence and the truth that He died for me ... and all of you.

On that first visit, many of the sacred sites in Jerusalem left me cold – far too many tourists! Yet don't doubt that I met Christ there. As it often is in life, as we traverse unknown depths, I felt Jesus' presence, unexpectedly, in the dark shadows and smells of heavily spiced and ancient alleys of the Old City. Here, where my feet found purchase on cobbled paths made smooth by centuries of wear, I met my Lord, and scripture came alive.

On the Via Dolorosa (Latin for the *'Sorrowful Way'*), the route along which Jesus was led from judgment before Pontius Pilate to Calvary, and weighed down by the heavy cross from which he was to be crucified for love of us, Jesus rebuked a group of 'professional' mourners: *'Do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and your children.'* These were women who were wailing crocodile tears as He passed by them. Importantly, these words are the first He speaks from the time of His trial before Pilate until now. He has kept silent through it all. But *now* he speaks.

Even at this stage, and so close to death, Jesus was calling these *'women of Jerusalem,'* as Luke describes them, to repent. His words are not mere words of self-deprecation along the lines of *'Don't worry about me!'* Instead they are urgent words, spoken forcefully to jolt these women into realising who He is and to proclaim Him as the Christ. *'Weep not for me,'* He says, *'but for yourselves!'* Jesus speaks to each of us as He begs us to think carefully on the sins of the world which have nailed Him to the Cross. His words, so profoundly important, are directed at all who fail to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, or in acknowledging Jesus, failing then to steward His world or care for His people.

On this Monday of Holy Week, Jesus calls us afresh to think carefully about the sincerity of our Christian faith and how we live it out: about our personal relationship with Him and about what His agonising death on the Cross truly means to each of us in the dark recesses of our hearts.

With my love, on the journey,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Prayer for Monday in Holy Week

Lord Jesus, the women of Jerusalem wept for you;
Move us to tears at the plight of the broken in our world.
You embraced the pain of Jerusalem, the City of Peace.
Bless Jerusalem this day, and lead it and all places in our world which know enmity
and war, to the path of profound peace.
This day we pray for your healing love to pour upon all who are suffering with
Coronavirus, especially for our Prime Minister and for his pregnant partner.
We give thanks for our Queen, whose grace-filled conversation with her people last
night has shone to all the light of your love.
To you, Jesus, the King of Peace,
Be honour and glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.
Amen.