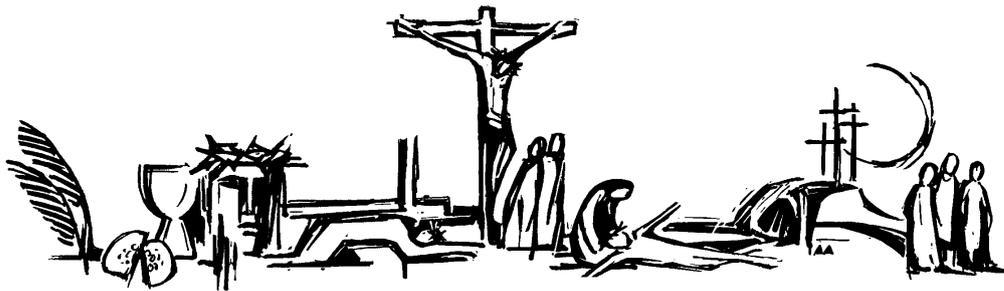


The Benefice of Yarm with Kirklevington with Picton and Worsall



It's often said that with God, there are no coincidences. So the overlap of the explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic with this year's Holy Week should give us cause to engage in some serious reflection about what this unanticipated juxtaposition signifies.

Our Christian hope always rests in God — yet as we recall throughout Holy Week, this hope did not arise in the context of comfort and security. It arose from Jesus Christ's victory over sin and death, purchased for us through His passion and death on the cross, abandoned and almost entirely alone. But out of that seeming disaster came the resurrection of Easter, the reason for our hope both here and in the hereafter.

This hope can never be shaken by any physical disease, not even one so serious as the coronavirus. As believers, it's our responsibility to manifest this hope to the many others in our society who, lacking faith, might be drawn toward despair by the advance of the coronavirus. Roosevelt famously remarked, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." and we know that with God there is no fear!

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus entered Jerusalem for the final time during Holy Week, to embrace his cross on behalf of all humanity. Near the end of his passion, as Our Lord's earthly strength drained away, Simon of Cyrene stepped forward to help him shoulder the weight of the cross of salvation. Today, as the cross of the coronavirus is weighing down so many in so many different ways, afflicting Christians and non-Christians without distinction, it is now our turn to try to serve as contemporary Simons of Cyrene, by bringing the faith, hope and love of Jesus to others in these most challenging times. As you do so make sure you keep yourself and others safe and be assured of my prayers.

I hope that you will walk with the Lord through His Holy Week to Easter and have produced this to help you walk through our Holy Week of COVID-19 to the risen life in Christ.

John Ford

Some Reflections for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Day during the COVID-19 virus pandemic 2020

For many of us Holy Week, and in particular Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday, is a very special time when we meet together to recall the passion and resurrection of Our Lord. As we do so we walk with him through the darkest of times to the wonder and glory of Easter Day when the risen Lord shines with a brilliance which can never be extinguished.

However, this year will be different as we find ourselves housebound or locked down in the current COVID-19 crisis, and we may feel sidelined and lonely.

But remember two things.

First, we are part of a body and we cannot be detached; when we pray we **never** pray alone and the union we experience when we pray is as deep if not deeper than that we often enjoy face to face. If we give ourselves to prayer at home, especially around the themes which others are reflecting on we are deeply bonded with these brothers and sisters.

Secondly, we live in exceptionally dangerous times from a medical emergency perspective; we try to protect ourselves and others, but we are not entirely clear what we need to do or how to do it. We have been asked to stay at home, or to self-isolate, not because we have been told to do so but voluntarily as **AN ACT OF LOVE** towards other people. As we maintain a physical distance from other people, we should not be wallowing in self-pity but recognising that doing what we are doing is simply what loving our neighbour requires.

So this year we will all be spending Holy Week, and in particular Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday on our own or with very close family rather than with our Christian family. I have prepared these notes to help us all to make our time as meaningful as possible whether on our own or with others remembering that all of us can remember, worship and pray and as we do so we find that we really do **BELONG!**

Preparation

If at all possible the time of prayer and meditation will be most productive if you plan and prepare.

- Identify a place where you can pray quietly, and set it aside. This will help you to focus because when you go there, it will say to you, 'This is where we pray.' You may like to set up a candle, some flowers, a little cross, your Bible and prayer book, and a photo of your family or your church, to make that space 'special'.
- Look for music that you can listen to in the times of reflection, different for each day, eg sombre for Good Friday and uplifting for Easter Day
- Plan your time. You don't have to fit in with any suggestions in these notes; your family arrangements, load-shedding or your personal routine will dictate the programme. But it will help to try to have regular slots for prayer so there is a kind of rhythm to your weekend. Maybe look through the notes in advance so that you can get things ready for the sessions that need them – like music or a hand towel.
- Look online for services you can join in with; the Church of England has a page on its website which can be found at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-liturgy-and-prayer-resources>

These notes are a resource, so there is probably too much material for one person at home alone to use all of it; have a look in advance, and decide what you would like to use, and to skip.

MAUNDY THURSDAY - 9th April 2020

Churches normally gather in the evening, but you can start whenever it suits you.

Have a bowl of water, soap and a towel ready in your place of prayer.

Settle down and read John's Gospel, chapter 13 verses 1-35.

Imagine yourself as the guest on the end of the row, and watch Jesus coming round with the bowl and the towel. He loves you and wants to serve you, now and through this weekend. However, instead of having your feet washed I'm asking you to wash your hands as a symbol of Jesus washing your feet

When you are ready, wash your hands as we have learned to do during this pandemic – slowly and thoroughly. As you do so recite the Lord's Prayer

Then, pray for yourself,

- that the Lord may draw close to you this weekend and reveal his love to you afresh; that any area of your life which needs to be cleaned up and forgiven may be; give thanks for your health and safety, the love of your family, your connectedness with others even when you are alone.

When you are ready to move on, wash your hands a second time – slowly and thoroughly. As you do so recite the Lord's Prayer

Now pray for someone close to you

- a family member whom you would normally meet at Easter, but will not be able to this year. Bring the pain of separation to God. Ask for healing if they are sick. Pray around the whole family, for wellbeing and safety in time of danger.
- someone you know locally, in your street or community, who is in need. Think of them sitting at the table at Jesus' last meal and being washed by him.
- your church, the place where you wish you could be at this time with your friends. Pray for the priests and ministers, especially in the risks they may be taking to minister to other people in this time of uncontrolled infection. See the Lord washing their feet as they go around in his name. Pray for the congregation but also for the others who, like you, cannot congregate but are stuck at home alone. Remember those on the fringes of the church who may 'get lost' while normal activities are suspended.

When you are ready, wash your hands a third time – slowly and thoroughly. As you do so recite the Lord's Prayer

- *Now pray for someone who is foreigner in the UK maybe a refugee or Asylum seeker seeking refuge in Britain. You may feel cooped up at home, but they would give anything to be at home with family at Easter. They may live among neighbours who are unfriendly, who do not speak their language, who insult them and resent their presence. Think of Jesus walking down their street with his towel to care for them.*

Finally, close with the Kyrie

**Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy**

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.**

GOOD FRIDAY - 10th April 2020

Traditionally the high point of this day is a reflective service of between 3 hours and 1 hour when we focus on the last hours of Jesus' life. I have prepared some thoughts based on the Seven words from the cross which you might wish to use as a basis for prayer and meditation. Alternatively, you may just like to be quiet for a time and enter in spirit into what would be done in church, if we could.

I have put the readings and some reflections on them together in one batch in the 'Three Hour' space but you can use them however you like – maybe look at one or two in the morning, the central events of the crucifixion at midday, and the last one or two in the evening. Do what works for you.

1 *“Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing”*

(Luke 23:32-34)

The theme of this first word from the cross is Forgiveness. Forgiveness the major theme of Jesus whole ministry is how he begins his agony and passion. Again and again throughout his ministry Jesus had insisted on our need for forgiveness, both God's and that of our neighbours. He even incorporated this need into the prayer which he taught his disciples and which forms the basis of prayer for every Christian even today

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive them that sin against us”

Today is a day to think of those who have wronged us and release them in our hearts – so that we are not locked into ongoing bitterness.

Reflection:

- What about COVID-19? If someone in China unleashed the COVID -19 virus, resulting in worldwide disease and social disruption,
- What are our hearts saying today about them?
- Did they 'know not what they did'?
- What could be the consequences of referring to it as 'the Chinese virus', as President Trump does?

Pray not only for the sick today but for all those who are anxious and aggressive as a result of what is happening, or what is being expected of them, or of shortages of goods that they want.

The Lord's Prayer

2 “Truly I tell you: today you will be with me in paradise”

(Luke 23: 39-43)

The second words speak of Jesus’ compassion and love for others even when he is in great pain and dying. It is astonishing – and humbling – that Jesus is still paying attention to other people while in horrible anguish himself. Traditionally this moment is taken as a picture of the human race, some turning towards Jesus and some away. In any event Jesus is busy serving this man who is anxious and fearful as well as physically agonised.

These words also allow the man to look into the future with hope: however we understand it, the conversation is about a life beyond this one, beyond physical death. Part of Jesus’ service to us is to open that door and as the Prayer Book puts it, prepare us ‘for death and for the life to come’.

Reflection:

- This Pandemic has caused us all to recognise our own mortality: to realise just how fragile life is and how easily our regular pattern of life can be disrupted. We all feel the fear and uncertainty but we can rest in the assurance that Jesus will be with each one of us whatever the future holds for us.
- Rest in the peace of that truth and give thanks for it.

Pray for the many who are facing death today, especially those who are sick with the virus and may be battling to breathe.

The Lord’s Prayer

3 “Mother, there is your son” “There is your mother”

(John 19: 25-27)

Here is a lonely woman mourning the pain and inevitable death of her only son and an equally lonely man who can see nothing in the future for him. Two people in deep need and Jesus looks down and reaches out to them in their need. Mary and John needed comfort, hope and companionship. Each needed a reason to carry on – and if that sounds familiar I am not surprised for I think that that’s how each of us feels in bereavement. In the case of Mary and John the start of their healing lay in themselves to be there for each other and Jesus sees this and gives them the gift of one another. I find these words both moving and practical and they have a deep meaning for all of us. Bereavement is probably the most painful thing that can come our way and it is so easy to slip into a slough of despond and self-pity. This story of Jesus’ ministry to Mary and John from the cross points us in the direction of a healing answer to our trouble.

“Find someone in need and look after them”

In Italy, many who have died of the virus have been carted off for cremation without families saying goodbye or holding a funeral. In the UK funerals may only take place in a Crematorium or at the graveside and only immediate family may attend (typically 5-10 people)

But even for those of us who have not lost loved ones the isolation creates a form of bereavement - the normal patterns of family life have been broken - no longer can we visit one another and share meals together; we cannot hug our grandchildren. We cry out to be together as we face the unknown. This Easter many will feel separation acutely.

But Jesus steps in, filling the gaps in our families and healing the lonely just as He showed how His mother could care for His friend and His friend for His mother

Reflection:

- Make a note to call your family over the weekend and then to call someone you know who will be alone - you can be the Jesus who cares for family members and heals their separations.

Pray for family life, starting with your own and then reaching out to others you know, before praying for all those who are separated from family this Easter.

The Lord’s Prayer

4 “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27: 45-49)

Here on the cross is perhaps the greatest mystery of all. Here the one who was sinless passes from the sin of earth to the purity of heaven carrying the sins of the world. That load of sin became too much to bear even for Jesus and its weight momentarily blots out his consciousness of the presence of God. Without the presence of God there is sheer stark dereliction and desolation and for a split second God and man are separated for the last time. God sweeps away the mess of sin which we have allowed to wreak havoc in the world and the enormity of the event blots out God for a moment in time. Can we wonder that what happened and how it happened is a mystery? We can dare to look and wonder and adore a God who is so selfless.

In these words we see Jesus expressing his humanity as he cries out in honest human doubt in the darkness of despair the cry of “MY GOD” or “WHY?” or “WHY ME?” or “WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” which we all shout in the depths of despair. Such a cry simply admits our humanity with its necessary limitations of sight and understanding and its longing to penetrate the darkness and break out again to the light. We cling on by our finger tips – we pray, if only the prayer of the father who sought healing for his son “Lord I believe, help my unbelief”

These words from the cross challenge us to take Jesus humanity seriously to understand that he really has suffered as we do—that in Him God really does know what it is like for a Human and he really does feel as we feel.

In every life there comes a moment when the sense of dereliction threatens to overwhelm, when faith is tested to the extreme. It is easy to believe when all is well, spring is in the air and everyone smiles with and on you; but there are winter moments in our lives when all seems dark and God is hidden from our view and we cry out “My God my God why have you forsaken me?” But the promise remains that he will never leave us even to the end of time because of that desolation he suffered on the cross

Reflection:

- Recall times when you have felt alone and desolate, perhaps its a feeling you have right now and offer those times to God

Pray for all those who feel lost and alone, as you sit in prayer reach out one hand to someone who is suffering, alone and afraid and the other to Jesus. Make yourself the bridge bringing God’s love into their lives.

The Lord’s Prayer

5 “I am Thirsty” (John 19: 28-29)

Here is the One who just recently offered ‘living water’ to the thirsty! No cry captures the humanity of Jesus more than this. Here he is sharing the physical helplessness of the weak, the sick and the tortured down the ages.

In these days when we are exhorted to wash our hands in an attempt to reduce the possibility of transferring the virus from one to another, water has become even more significant in all our lives. Suddenly we realise that even us in the first world cannot survive very long with out water. So think how hard it will be for those who live in places where water is scarce. So too we cannot really live without the living water offered by God, and I think that here on the cross Jesus echoes the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 42/43 when he says: “*As a Deer pants for the water so longs my soul for You*” – I think that Jesus is saying that he thirsts for God! He thirsts so much for God that he remains obedient even to death, death on a cross. In a way Jesus is repeating the words from Isaiah “Here I am ... Send me” or of Samuel in the temple “Speak Lord for your servant is listening” both acknowledge God and the person’s readiness to obey.

Reflection:

- Give thanks for everything God has accomplished in your life, your family, your church and our society through the death and resurrection of Jesus and that you have received the Water of Life and can live forever in the Love of God

Pray that we all will do our part in maintaining clean hands to reduce the spread of the virus. Pray also for those who need to maintain clean hands in places where water is scarce.

The Lord’s Prayer

6 It is accomplished" (John 19: 30)

Jesus did not give into temptation even though the temptation went on throughout his life. Although there was no let up Jesus' response was always the same negative to the tempter and positive to the father. So as his physical life came to an end his penultimate words were not of defeat but of triumph.

In this cry "It is accomplished" we see in the darkness of the passion and the first bright rays of Easter. In these words the final triumph is signalled, these are not words of defeat but words of a king facing victory albeit a king on a cross.

"It is accomplished" is a rallying cry which the Church needs to hear. We follow Christ and Him crucified; we would follow no other, but we follow a Christ who at the very moment when men thought that they had defeated Him cried out

"It is accomplished" - In this is our Hope; so while our heads are bent over the world's pain and sickness and sin and our backs ache in doing our part in alleviating them our hearts are sustained by the triumph of faith the rallying cry from the cross -- "It is accomplished"

Reflection:

- We can only reach the point where we can declare that we have overcome the present situation, if we all follow the guidelines and respect one another.

Pray that in these difficult times when COVID-19 threatens to overcome us, we will "Stay at home, wash hands often and keep physical distance between one another".

Pray that we will not give into the temptation to put self first so that we will overcome adversity and defeat this threat to humanity, knowing that as we do so Jesus will be with us whatever happens.

The Lord's Prayer

7 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' (Luke 23: 44-48)

The last words from the cross speak of surrender, not the kind of surrender which takes place when at the end of a terrible war one the leaders of the defeated forces hard faced and bitter in the presence of the victorious generals sign terms of surrender - terms which may well contain the seeds of yet another war. Rather, this surrender can be likened to the surrender of a married couple one to another; they come together for better for worse, for richer for poorer in sickness and health. There is costliness of course but no bitterness in this surrender, the cost of giving oneself to another and in this there is the surrender of peace.

In these last words from the cross we see Christ surrendering himself in love and peace to the father.

In these times of fear and uncertainty we can feel weak and helpless, suddenly we are no longer in control and we feel dependent on others which can feel humiliating. In the isolation there is the sharpness of separation from those we love and the natural grief that goes with it. But there is nothing to fear if we simply surrender ourselves to the one true and living God and say "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"

Reflection:

As you commend your own spirit to God, pray for those who are anxious and fearful, in pain or grief. We cannot solve all the challenges that face us but we can surrender them to God and listen for God to lead us to play our part, small as it may seem to us.

The Lord's Prayer

Final Prayer:

***Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.***

HOLY SATURDAY - Saturday 11 April 2020

The Church traditionally has 4 thoughts on this day.

Mourning:

On Holy Saturday the Church is in mourning, in monasteries and convents the monks and nuns will traditionally maintain silence throughout the day until the Vigil in the evening. This year across the country there will be an unusual eerie silence as people stay at home because of the COVID-19 virus, perhaps our mood for today can also be a reverent quiet.

Cleansing:

Holy Saturday is the day when traditionally congregations meet to spring clean the church in readiness for Easter and prepare the Easter Garden ready for the celebrations on Easter Sunday.

As we remain at home we could still enter into the spirit of spring cleaning, either by cleaning part of the house or making an 'Easter garden' somewhere as a celebration for Easter Day. Or you could just spend an hour clearing out your inbox or the old messages in your mobile phone, getting rid of old stuff which clutters our lives before the Lord comes!

Victory:

In 1 Peter 3: 18-20 we read this:

'For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah...'

Yet for centuries the Church has believed that between his death and resurrection, Jesus travelled to the place of the dead and made known the victory of the Cross.

Whatever the case, it is entirely sensible to believe that the victory of Cross and Resurrection has been in some way declared in every dimension of reality, for the dead as well as the living, and that this is part of what we celebrate at this time. It can surely be part of our prayer on this day.

Preparation: There is a tone of excitement on this day, looking forward to the great celebration of Easter Sunday. Even if all we do is prepare the food and send some greetings, it is fine to peep into Easter Day and be ready.

Reflection:

During these difficult times we feel all four of these thoughts

- we mourn the loss of our freedom;
- we cleanse our hands to keep the virus at bay;
- we look forward to the day when the virus will be overcome
- we prepare for that day when we can rejoice.

Pray for yourselves as you work through these dark times;

Pray for those who have contracted the virus and succumbed to it;

Pray that we may all trust in God and come to a joyful resurrection in Him

The Collect for Holy Saturday

**Grant, Lord,
that we who are baptized into the death
of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
may continually put to death our evil desires
and be buried with him;
and that through the grave and gate of death
we may pass to our joyful resurrection;
through his merits,
who died and was buried and rose again for us,
your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Bible passages you might find helpful are:

Job 19:23-27

Psalms 103, 136

Colossians 3: 1-4

Matthew 27: 57-66

EASTER SUNDAY - Sunday 12th April

A happy and blessed Easter to you – Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

Take a moment to recall the presence of the risen Christ with you, and to think of times you were able to celebrate Easter with others – either in church or at a dawn vigil, or some other moment which was special in your experience.

Readings:

Acts 10: 34-43

Colossians 3: 1-4

Gospel: Matthew 28: 1-10

Reflection:

- ✦ *Imagine yourself as one of Mary's helpers*
- ✦ *Carrying some of her equipment to the tomb*
- ✦ *Hearing the voice of the angel*
- ✦ *Stepping into the tomb and seeing what has happened*
- ✦ *Running to tell the disciples*
- ✦ *Meeting Jesus on the way: which words of greeting would you use?*
- ✦ *Taking hold of his feet and worshipping*

On Thursday, Jesus was serving you by washing your feet;

Now you see the risen Lord resolve to serve Him - stay there for a time: speak to him, be still. Be with the living Lord.

Prayers:

We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.

Jesus, light of the world, bring the light and peace of your gospel to the nations ...

Jesus, Lord of life, in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, bread of life, give food to the hungry ... and nourish us all with your word.

Jesus, Lord of life, in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life, be with us and all who follow you in the way ... Deepen our appreciation of your truth and fill us with your life.

Jesus, Lord of life, in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the sheep, recover the straggler, bind up the injured, strengthen the sick and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.

Jesus, Lord of life, in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life, we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you ... Raise us with them to eternal life.

Jesus, Lord of life, in your mercy, hear us, accept our prayers, and be with us always. Amen.

The Collect for Easter Day

**Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit
be praise and honour, glory and might,
now and in all eternity.
Amen.**

Today Celebrate!

Even if you are on your own, lay the table, and set an extra place for the Lord to sit with you. We may be isolated and alone for a time but better times will come again

Meanwhile let us all shout

***“Alleluia, Christ is risen.
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!”***