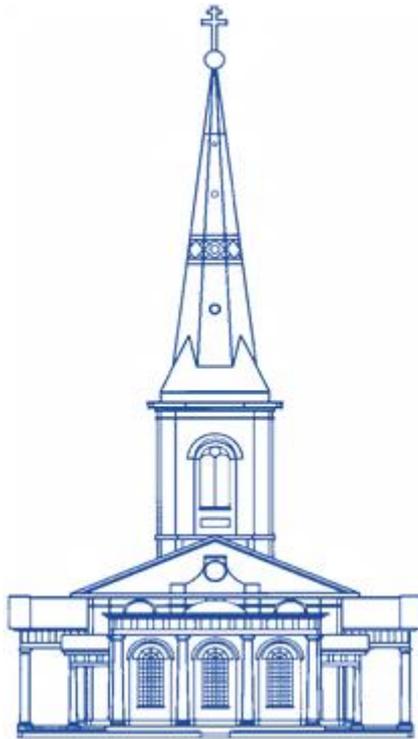


**ST JAMES' CHURCH, KING STREET,
SYDNEY, NSW**



**HOLY WEEK AND
EASTER SERMONS
2019**

**BY THE REVEREND DR GREGORY SEACH
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THE REVEREND DR GREGORY SEACH



The Reverend Dr Gregory Seach has been Warden of Wollaston Theological College in the Diocese of Perth since 2015. Before that, he was Dean, Fellow and Director of Studies of Clare College in the University of Cambridge. While Dean of Clare, he was also an Affiliated Lecturer in the Faculty of Divinity in the University, co-convenor of the University's 'Vocations Group' and, consequently, the Bishop of Ely appointed him as an Assistant Director of Ordinands for that Diocese.

A cradle Anglican who was born and raised in Sydney, he began attending St James' in 1988 and sang in the choir for some years. After teaching English, history and drama at Trinity Grammar for ten years, he moved to Melbourne and in 2002, was ordained in the Diocese of Melbourne. Archbishop Peter Carnley awarded him the Sambell Scholarship in 2005, and he also received the Wordsworth Studentship from the Faculty of Divinity in Cambridge, which allowed him to complete a PhD.

Dr Seach's chief role and passion remains the oversight of Wollaston's offering of theological education to all in the Diocese of Perth. In addition to teaching at Wollaston, he lectures at Murdoch University and at the University of Notre Dame. He is a member of the Doctrine Commission of the General Synod of the national Church, a Fellow of Council at Guildford Grammar School and serves on the Board of the Anglican Schools Commission.

INTRODUCTION

It was a great privilege and joy to spend Holy Week and Easter at St James', King Street and to be with all the faithful people there, immersed in all that is the greatest week of the Christian year. It was also rewarding and fulfilling to be provided with the stimulus (and the necessary discipline) to think and reflect again on all the events, and all that has been written in Scripture (though little else that has been written, sadly!) again. That being said, underlying everything that follows are some extraordinary stimuli to thought in the profound insights – only partially glimpsed I suspect (as is the usual response to Easter revelations!) – offered by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Nicholas Lash, Vladimir Lossky, John Zizioulas and, above all, Rowan Williams.

This booklet comes with a preparatory 'caution', however: I rarely write, and never publish, sermons. This comes from a firm belief that a sermon is an event, not a text. A sermon truly exists only in the context of a liturgy – a liturgy that, in the course of Holy Week, is a eucharist, and therefore entails both Ministry of the Word, and Ministry of the Sacrament. To that end, the readings upon which each of the sermons is based are placed at the beginning of each text; and the reader of these sermons is strongly encouraged (I would do more if I could!) to read those passages of Scripture before attempting to read the sermon. Likewise, the reader is equally strongly encouraged to imagine herself in the context of a eucharist, because the proper, though unwritten, 'conclusion' of each of these sermons is the sacrament itself!

This last is the reason I am always reluctant to publish sermons. Given the remarkable demands this week makes on every human imagination, and all aspects of that imagination – even for those people fully immersed in the liturgies of the week – a little 'preparatory' imagining is probably helpful in reading what follows.

Finally, I should add some notes of thanks: to Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy, for giving me permission to spend the week away from the Diocese of Perth. I am very grateful to the Rector, Fr Andrew Sempell for his invitation to be at St James', and to him and Rosemary, as well as to Fr John Stewart, Associate Rector and Jan, for warm and generous hospitality. Thanks, too, to all the servers, readers and parishioners of St James' for their welcome and encouraging comments throughout the week. It would be utterly remiss not to mention especially the ministry of the remarkable choir, under Warren Trevelyan-Jones: they do much more than any preacher can in engaging the imagination of worshippers in this week. Above all, Christopher Waterhouse, Director of the St James' Institute, provided constant assistance in the preparation of these addresses and, in a number of conversations, reasons for continuing reflection on all that was being written. I am convinced that further reflection is still needed; but that is simply to admit that, obviously, no human person can ever grasp the full depths and wisdom of the mystery of this week, this side of the eschaton.

Palm Sunday
(14 April 2019)

Palm Gospel: Luke 19: 28 – 40;
Isaiah 50: 4-9a, Psalm 31: 9-18; Philippians 2: 5-11, Luke 23: 1–49.

‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’

“Christianity”, Professor Nicholas Lash rightly says, “is not an ideology or a system of ideas.” It is not even, he goes on to say, *primarily* “a ‘world-view’ or system of beliefs” (though, as I hope we come to see throughout this week, it certainly affects the way we view the world). “It is a people with a memory and, for all the world, a hope.”¹

We meet this morning at the start of the great week of the Church to enter more deeply into that memory which shapes and determines our hope – the memory of a specific set of events, actions, words, shouts and stunned silences, which occurred during this week in Palestine two millennia ago. It begins, as our liturgy this morning began, in a time of triumph and exaltation, as Jesus enters Jerusalem with shouts of ‘hosanna’ resounding along those ancient roads – ‘resounding all the day “Hosannas” to their King!’, as the famous hymn so beautifully puts it. It might be nice, on this first day of Holy Week – Palm Sunday – to stop there: to stay with the palm-waving and the triumphant entry, if only for a day or so: “Sufficient to the day are the troubles therein”, as Matthew’s gospel has our Lord famously say. But, as our liturgy and the readings we’ve just heard forcefully remind us, we don’t stop there. Because, as Jesus knew and the Church has discovered ever since, human reaction to what Jesus proclaims, and to who he is, doesn’t, *won’t*, end there:

Then ‘Crucify’ is all their breath,
and for his death
they thirst and cry!

It ends in disaster – with Jesus betrayed, denied or deserted by many of his friends, with even those brave women who remained till the end only looking on from a distance. Jesus dies, surrounded only by thieves and mockers: a political prisoner executed to make a political point. A blasphemer, killed as fit punishment for his crime; and, by being hanged on a tree he is, according to Jewish law, especially cursed of God. Here is that extraordinary humbling of which Paul speaks – humbling himself to the point of humiliation, obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross!

In his letter to the Church in Philippi, St Paul urges them to “let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus” (2:5). What Paul means by this is given by the verses before our reading began – it is an encouragement to the community to be united in mind and love, putting aside selfish ambition for the humility seen in Christ. But surely some of the sense of what Paul is calling for in having ‘the same mind... as was in Christ Jesus’ also means

¹ Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God*, 2nd ed (London: S.C.M Press, 2002), p. 60.

beginning to *see* the world, those in it, and events that occur, in the same way that Jesus did and does: looking at the world, you might say, through Jesus' eyes, as Jesus might see it. That is something of what I hope we can do this week: or, as Paul puts it elsewhere, that we can be open to the 'renewing of our minds', that our minds might be conformed to Christ. But it isn't just about our minds: though what and how we think about these things are important. So, to use the terms of St John's gospel – which is the focus of our readings at all of the eucharists this week – Jesus is the light *by, with and in* which we learn to see the world.

Now the word Paul uses, translated as 'mind', is *nous*. I don't know whether it is still the same, but when I was growing up, I often used to hear my father talking of some people having a deal of 'nous'. Now, although my father didn't have any Greek (and I'm sure it's also true of those from whom he learned the expression), I think there's something about *that* word that gets closer to what Paul is talking about than we moderns think of when using the word 'mind'. "Nous", as my father used it, conveyed the sense of intelligence, understanding and knowledge, but in almost an 'instinctive' way – certainly going beyond what we might mean by 'clever' head knowledge. (I'm reminded, too, of D. H. Lawrence's definition of 'Thought' when, in the poem of that title he says, "Thought is a man in his wholeness, wholly attending.")

I want to begin our reflections on the great mystery of salvation that we recall this week by drawing attention to these palm crosses because they help us to recognize that other elements of creation have rôles to play in the drama that unfolds this week: it isn't all about human beings! Palm branches are used to deck the way of the triumphant entry of the king, and a young donkey, bears the One who comes in the name of the Lord. And, as we hear in Luke's account, when some of the Pharisees castigate Jesus for all the noise, he tells them that if the people "were silent, even the stones would shout out." (Lk 19:40). The events we remember involves the whole of the created order.

Let me read to you from the opening chapter of the epistle to the Colossians, part of what the lectionary sets as the second reading at Evening Prayer on Good Friday night:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;
for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—
all things have been created through him and for him.
He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church;
he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
so that he might come to have first place in everything.
For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1: 15–20)

In some of its descriptions of Jesus, it is very similar to what we heard this morning from Paul in his letter to the Philippians – especially in the intimacy it suggests exists with the invisible God, the One Jesus calls ‘Father’, an intimacy that existed before the creation of the cosmos: “in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”.

One difference, however, is the focus on all things created. Now, in some ways, it may seem odd that one of the readings the lectionary appoints for that most sacred day in Holy Week has so much to do with ‘creation’. But this passage, and especially its invocation of creation, brings concentrated focus to many of the issues which, as I’ve said, I wish to think about with you during the course of this week.

Listen again: “through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” This week is about the reconciliation of all things; *all things* – not just those who like to talk of themselves as the “saved”, not just human beings, not even – and that’s the really extraordinary thing – not even just those things on earth: ‘all things whether on earth or in heaven’. The whole creation, the whole cosmos, is reconciled by the events we commemorate and celebrate this week. And that has important implications for us, too.

While the problems and potential catastrophe consequent upon global-warming make it seem that the degradation of the planet, and our awareness of that, are particularly modern phenomena, the origins of this problem go back to the origins of human sinfulness – to the Fall, as the Church calls it.

“In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible... – all things were created through him and in him.” This belief, which we recite in slightly different form in the Nicene Creed every Sunday, is as much an article of *belief* as anything else in the Creed. It is a statement of *faith*: faith in the doctrine the Church teaches as *creatio ex nihilo*: creation from nothing. It is a statement of *faith* because it demands a belief in a Creator – a Creator who is distinct from the creation. Belief in a God who is “the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen, and who is the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord... through whom all things were made”.

Belief in *creatio ex nihilo* also entails belief that, because the creation is not the Creator, is not God, therefore it is mortal – it begins in time, and its *natural* fate is, at some point, to *end* in time, to die. The Church has never taught (despite what many Christian now believe!) the Church has *never taught* belief in the immortality of the soul. An immortal soul would be, in and through its immortality, another GOD! But, the Church *has* also always taught that the *natural* fate of creatures and the creation – an end-point in time, death – was never God’s desire or intention. God’s desire was for the whole creation to live in constant communion with God – the life-giver, the source of all life and light, and therefore to be *kept* from its *natural* fate.

And that was the rôle and purpose of humanity in the creation. Because the chief function of humans was to praise and give thanks to God for the *gift* of creation, the *gift* of life, so humans would be in constant communion with God and, in being so – because of our materiality, because we are comprised of so many of the elements, chemicals, the stuff that comprises the material creation, we would maintain unity for the whole creation with the life-giving source of the creation. Humans, if you like, were to be ‘priests’ for the whole creation: continually offering praise and thanks to God for His remarkable gift of life in creation.

So, human beings were created to unite all creation to God. But humans refused to accept that that was our purpose. Humans decided to devise another plan – where either elements of the creation were worshipped as gods, or where *we* claimed to be gods, which (human history proving so obviously that that *wasn't* true) led to a denial of belief in any god. Human beings said – and continue to say – “No” to the loving relationship of communion that God planned for all creation to be in with God’s-self!

The great Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, describes the Fall in this way:

Adam succumbed to the temptation to declare himself ‘God’ and set out to redirect creation from the uncreated God to his own, created self. In deciding that everything should refer to him, Adam’s fall was also the fall of creation.

Related to God, creation would have life without limit. But Adam turned creation from God to himself. The first consequence was that humans came to believe that we could rule creation as though we had created it ourselves. We set nature against ourselves and created a conflict and, because we were no longer in harmony with it, nature became a cause of misery to us. Persons were set against nature, so we could survive in this world only by struggling against it.²

Or, ultimately, as we now see, not so much by struggling against it, but by dominating, controlling and exploiting it – until we threaten not only it but ourselves. And, as we shall see through the rest of this week – and especially on Good Friday – that exploitation and control is used not only against creation, but against each other. And the exploited and tortured creation will play its role, too, in the events of this week, not just on Palm Sunday.

But this state is not God’s desire, either – and God would not let it remain so. So, the One through whom all things were created becomes fully human, becomes the second Adam, does not cling to equality with God but humbles himself and becomes fully human. And, by his obedience unto death he reconciles all things. In dying – in suffering the fate that befalls all Creation when it is out of communion with God – he defeats death. And all Creation is raised with him. *All* creation – things visible and invisible, humans, animals, vegetables and minerals. But, to concentrate briefly again just on humanity for a moment,

² John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Douglas H. Knight, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2008), p. 98.

the ‘things visible and invisible’ means that, even those things we hide from ourselves, that we try to treat as if they are ‘invisible’ – even those things are reconciled to God.

The One through whom all things are created is the eternal Son of God, and is God. Therefore, there is ‘no trace of self-interest nor self-defence’,³ ‘no element of... insecurity, and has literally nothing to defend’⁴ in what he does and offers. When he goes to death – a death in which elements from all parts of creation are involved – he undoes or, in the marvellous word first used by St Irenaeus in the third century, he “recapitulates” the whole of human life. His Incarnation, birth, life and ministry, death and resurrection establish a new paradigm for humanity, and restore God’s original plan – a man who reconciles all creation with God the Father, who therefore brings all creation into communion with the eternal source of life, and therefore bestows upon the whole creation life everlasting.

“A people with a memory and, for all the world, a hope”: we come now to that greatest of the Church’s acts of re-membering. In so doing, we work with what Cranmer calls ‘these Thy *creatures* of bread and wine’. As those other great prayers remind us: ‘Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to share, which earth has given and human hands have made’ and ‘fruit of the vine and work of human hands’ – created things, used by humanity in our greatest act of worship of God. Here, indeed, all creation is reconciled and restored: may God renew our minds and give us the eyes of faith to see it.

³ Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust*

⁴ *eadem.*, *Christ the Heart of Creation*, (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018) p. 11

Monday in Holy Week

(15 April 2019)

Isaiah 42: 1-9; Psalm 36: 5-11; Hebrews 9: 11-15; John 12: 1-11

Yesterday we began a journey where our minds, our '*nous*', becomes transformed, to be 'the same *nous* that was in Christ Jesus'; we began learning again to see all things, through Jesus' eyes, in the light of Jesus. And this involves us 're-remembering' elements of our faith that we may have forgotten. The readings we've heard tonight help us further in that re-remembering.

Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah now naturally calls Jesus to the minds of Christians. The early Church quickly recognised that this 'servant' Isaiah speaks of could be identified with Jesus. And though it is the image of the 'suffering servant' – the reading we will hear on Good Friday – that we more usually link with Jesus this week, we need to recall that Isaiah's servant songs begin in what we heard tonight. So, as the week slowly unfolds, we begin with the servant God upholds, in whom God delights, who is God's chosen one, on whom God has given the Spirit, and who will bring justice to the nations. As importantly for our reflections this week, the One given to us as "a light to the nations" is one who will "open the eyes of the blind": will give to us, by God's Grace, a new way of seeing.

Isaiah then seems to go off on a tangent, however: we get a lot about God, "the Lord who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes from it, and gives breath" to all people. But that is precisely what we began remembering yesterday morning: this is the God who creates all things out of nothing; who speaks all creation into existence, and who continues to call humanity to live and dwell in righteousness, to live and dwell in full communion with God.

The opening chapters of Genesis remind us that creation, as God created it, is an act of God's loving will and is 'very good'. Creation is a movement of God's love. God is love, we say. And this love, which exists eternally in the communion of persons we call the Holy Trinity, God wills to overflow into the act of creation. Jesus' Incarnation is the same movement of love – and in the process of coming into creation, Jesus demonstrates most fully the nature of God's love. It is not a 'grasping' or 'clinging to equality with God', but an emptying, self-giving love, which reaffirms that the whole creation is very good.

Yet, there is a shadow, a hint of menace in tonight's gospel reading. While, as Michael Horsburgh so wisely reminded you last Sunday, there is something in this episode which marks the move from an odour of death to the luxurious odour of the perfume, our gospel begins with mention of Lazarus's death, albeit as something Jesus raised him from. More significantly, the gospel ends with human plotting and scheming: plotting the death, not only of Jesus, but of Lazarus as well. There are also references to human dishonesty, betrayal, fear and jealousy. Yet we also find hospitality, exuberant generosity of

welcome and devotion. The generous welcome of grateful friends in their home. Almost the full range of human possibility is present.

And again, non-human elements of the creation have their role to play: the costly nard, with its glorious scent. Jesus' comment shows that, too, however, is overshadowed by death: the perfume was bought for the day of his burial.

Again, as Michael reminded you, this is anointing: this is Jesus being recognised, in action if not yet in mind, as Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ. And for some of the first hearers of John's gospel, that anointing in close relation to the mention of the chief priests and the setting just before the Passover, would be a reminder that a significant occasion of anointing for Jews was the anointing of the High Priest, following his elaborate ritual of washing, as the essential preparation for conducting the Passover sacrifice, and, more significantly, before he entered the Holy of Holies in the temple on the day of atonement.

This is the imagery that occupies much of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus comes, we hear tonight, as "high priest of the good things". You'll recall from yesterday that part of humanity's role in Creation, as God planned it, was to be priests of and for all created things. Well, that is what Jesus does. And when he, the fully human and fully divine second Adam enters into that Holy Place - a place *not* made with hands, *not of this creation* and, therefore, into full union with the God he calls Father. Thus, through him, the second Adam, the new priest of the new covenant, we too are brought into the place where we may, again, be joined in right praise, worship and thanks to God.

This Epistle, like the prophecy of Isaiah, calls us to plunge ever more deeply into our memory: remembering the actions of the loving God of Israel for and with our ancestors in the faith, those from whom Jesus was descended according to the flesh. And as we recall elements of our ancestors of the faith, we also hear, tonight, that this anointing happens "six days before Passover". "Six days" should resonate for us: it is the time in which, according to Genesis 1, God creates God's "very good" creation. What we are hearing and seeing this week is about the renewing and transforming of creation. But more of that throughout the week...

Tonight, we hear of Jesus as guest. But what we recall throughout this week is that we are the guests: Jesus offers to us and for us his very self and, like Lazarus, what he gives to us is the overcoming of death. He plunges into the midst of death, human scheming, dishonesty and betrayal. But what John's gospel will continue to remind us throughout the rest of this week is: in going to death, in plunging into all that this entails, he shows forth God's glory: a glory God does not give to other things, but only shares with God's beloved Son. This is the great High Priest, who shows us, truly, what God is like: a God who has no need to cling to power, but can be seen in such things as the loving gratitude of friends, the offering of generous hospitality, the breaking of bread and sharing with one another a meal of gratitude, of thanks, of eucharist.

Tuesday in Holy Week

(16 April 2019)

Isaiah 49: 1-7; Psalm 71: 1-14; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31; John 12: 20-36

*‘Walk while you have the light so the darkness may not overtake you...
While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light’*

Our readings tonight take us yet more deeply into the way of this week. From its very beginning, John’s gospel is at pains to stress that in Jesus is life, and that that life is ‘the light of all; the light that shines in darkness but which the darkness has not overcome’ (John 1: 4b–5) Or, as the Authorised Version wonderfully puts it ‘the darkness comprehendeth it not.’ Jesus is the light *by, with which and in which* we see the world: the *whole* world. As the prophet Isaiah says, God gives this ‘servant’ as a light to the nations, so that God’s salvation may reach to the end of the earth. The promise, the reality of covenant relationship, of mutual love and trust, that God gives to Israel is, Isaiah recognises, too great to be confined to one people, one place, one time. God’s self-giving love will not be confined by our tribal, cultural, nationalistic nor time-bound limitations. As Pope Benedict put it, “the message God utters in God’s Word addresses all times and places, languages and cultures.... There is no time or place, no culture nor circumstance that does not form part of the company that God’s Word keeps.”⁵ Other nations wish to see by the light that is Jesus. Or, to put it another way, as tonight’s gospel does, even Greeks come to see Jesus! And, as the same gospel has Jesus say, when he is “lifted up will draw *all* people to” himself.

The gospel also makes clear this ‘lifting up’ “indicates the kind of death” Jesus is to die: crucifixion. But John’s gospel also stresses that it is in the cross that we *fully* see God’s glory. And though he doesn’t use the same terms, it is what Paul means. Seeing with, in and by the light of Jesus allows Paul to recognise the Cross as a sign of the power and wisdom of God. The Cross reveals the glory of God, the glory God gives to no other (as we heard last night), because only God can be so fully and unreservedly *self-giving*.

But this Word of God, this Jesus, as well as being the eternal Beloved Son is fully human. And so, “now is my soul troubled”! There is, all of the Passion narratives hint, some fear in Jesus’ during the trials of this week. And that is the deep fear that all sentient, created nature experiences in the face of death. In the Western Church, for too long (I think) we’ve tended to think of the Cross of Jesus as God’s answer to a *moral* issue: humanity sinned, did something wrong, and so Jesus comes to prevent us from being punished. I well recall – how could I forget? – at a funeral service held in St Andrew’s Cathedral for my cousin, her husband and their three little children, the then Dean of Sydney, Philip Jensen, saying from the pulpit that ‘Of course, we all die because God’s angry with us!’ But the Eastern Church reminds us that, at least as important a way of seeing this is as an

⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*

ontological problem: a question of our very being, the confronting issue of death - the natural fate of the created order when communion with God is breached.⁶

So, the fully human Jesus is troubled to the depths of his soul - the same verb is used as when Jesus comes to the tomb of Lazarus. Confronted with the reality of death, Jesus shares our fear of it. We well recall Dylan Thomas's words (from perhaps the *only* poem of his worth remembering!): "Do not go gentle into that good night/But rage, rage against the dying of the light". In other words, a possible response to Dean Jenson might be, 'No: we should be angry when we die; recognising that God is equally angry when we die, because that is not God's plan for us.'

But for Jesus it goes further, we might say. Because he is also the eternal Son, possessing the wisdom and insight of God, Jesus sees the *full* horror of death and sin; the whole foul flood of evil, all the power of lies and pride, all the cruelty of evil that continually masks itself as life, yet constantly strives to debase, destroy and crush life. The vast power of sin and death must be taken on, so that it can be disarmed and defeated. This is, humanly speaking, terrifying. And for Jesus, the fear is more radical, because it is the cosmic collision between light and darkness.

All too often, as we've already touched on this week, human beings have attempted to be masters (and mistresses!) of our own fates: we try to be like God, and to *be* God. Jesus doesn't. "What should I say - 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour." Or, as we hear Jesus say in the Synoptic gospels, "Father, not my will, but your will be done" - words he gives us to pray also!

And this, too, is how Jesus will glorify God's name - "hallowed be your name". It is Jesus' utter willingness not only to take on all that it is to be created, but to face the ultimate ontological horror of death, being made nothing, that becomes the glorification of God's name. It is Jesus' refusal to "be like God", his acceptance of the horror of the Cross; of being stripped of all dignity and suffering a shameful death - humbling, humiliating himself, and being obedient unto death, even death on a cross - that allows the cross to be seen as the wisdom and power of God.

Through and by this "lifting up on the Cross", God is made manifest as God truly is: the God who, in the unfathomable, eternal depths of self-giving love, sets the power of that love, which is the original source of Creation and life, against the power of evil, sin and death.

Because Jesus is the one person who, as the Council of Chalcedon reminds us, is "fully divine and fully human, without separation and without confusion", he can do this. For him, too, this becomes a voluntary self-giving that is entirely natural. His human will,

⁶ My thinking on this has been much shaped by reading Vladimir Lossky's *In the Image and Likeness of God* and John Zizioulas's *Lectures on Christian Dogmatics*. As it happens, I think Lossky's attribution of the origin of this thinking in the West to Anselm is unfair: in *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm is still, as I read him, concerned with a restoration of balance on the 'cosmic' order and scale - it isn't 'all about us' for Anselm. But what the West *did* (and continues to do) with Anselm is problematic.

created by God, is united and ordered to the divine will. And, in becoming uniquely attuned to his Father's will, his human will experiences its true and real fulfilment, *not* annihilation. He is a human being as human beings were meant to be.

In this Eucharist, our "now" is taken up into Jesus' now, Jesus' hour. What Jesus proclaims about "drawing all people to himself" occurs here, as we are drawn, to him, as we are drawn at every eucharist. And just before we receive the sacrament, we will make his words and life and action *our words* (and, by God's grace, our actions and lives too): "hallowed be your name, your will be done". Again, tonight, grains of wheat that have fallen to the earth and been gathered, will be lifted up and draw people to the Christ, and to this sign of the exuberant, self-giving love that reveals God as God is, and which reveals the power and wisdom of God, the light for all the nations, and the glory the Son receives and offers back to the Father.

Wednesday in Holy Week

(17 April 2019)

Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12: 1-3; John 13: 21-32.

“After receiving the piece of bread, Judas immediately went out. And it was night.”

We began last night to look at some of the agitation and distress which, in all the gospel accounts, befell Jesus in the final days and hours leading to his death. Last night, I spoke in more general terms of the very real fear of death that faces all humans, all of those who recognise their creatureliness, and that, therefore, Jesus also faced.

Tonight, we hear again that Jesus was “troubled in spirit”, and it is the same word “troubled” we heard last night, and which we remember is how John describes Jesus feeling at the tomb of Lazarus. Tonight, Jesus faces the very real anguish and heartache that comes from betrayal by a friend. The personal, deeply human anguish of betrayal is clearly present in this gospel reading; but the evangelist also places it in *cosmic* dimensions: Satan enters into Judas after the bread and, when he goes out, when he breaks communion with the group of Jesus’ friends and companions, it is night!

Jesus, the teacher of these disciples, who sustains them with his words as he teaches them, now must give his back to this who are against him, who will strike him, and who will be led against him by one who is, literally, a com-panion: one who shares bread with him.

“And it was night”. As we reminded ourselves last night, Jesus is the light of the world, the light that shines in darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it; and yet it is night. And, let us remember what we heard last night: “Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going.” As Christians, we are able to confess, and hope, that the light dawns, that darkness is not, ultimately, triumphant: ‘the darkness comprehendeth it not’.

And yet... we hardly need reminding, do we, that in the severe hardship and difficulty of their lives, in the darkness in which they are forced to live, our statements of hope and faith can, indeed do, appear meaningless. For too many in our world, the night *is not* over. The nightmare of cruel acts of inhumanity to fellow humans and fellow creatures, of physical, emotional and economic oppression and abuse continue. The threatening darkness of global warming and continuing extinction of innumerable species are ever present.

We need, perhaps, only to mention the words “Christchurch”, “Syria”, “Myanmar”, or remember, 25 years on, Rwanda, or that ever present memory: Auschwitz, Belsen, and the word “holocaust” to know the night is still present. (It is entirely appropriate that carved at the entrance to the holocaust museum in Jerusalem are the words “Never forget”!) And here Jewish people, our ancestors in the faith, are so vital for honest

Christian responses to the world. A Jew looks at the world and insistently asks a Christian: “Look at the world around you. How can you say, ‘Messiah is come’?”

That question reminds us that so much of our memory this week must involve a recollection of the darkness of night, of Tenebrae. The pioneer and perfecter of our faith endured the cross and its shame, gave his back to the smiters, endured shame, spitting, hostility and mocking from sinners - even from those he called “friend”. This, too, is all part of what we remember this week.

Christians need to be reminded by Jews, by the suffering hundreds we see in our own country and city, as well as the suffering millions of the world, that the night is still present. And we should in this week also be willing to acknowledge the darkness of betrayal, jealousy, anger, hatred and violence in our own hearts and lives. All this reminds us that God’s appearing still lies ahead of us, that it is a hope, as well as something we remember: a hope we must have this and every week.

We are *not* promised that we will live in sunshine. As we heard this morning at Morning Prayer, Jesus tells his disciples in John’s gospel: “You have pain now” and “in the world you face persecution”. But we *are* promised that the pain is like that of a woman in childbirth: that it *will*, eventually, give way to joy. We are told that the darkness will not overcome the light. As disciples of Christ, we need to be students, we need to be schooled in an attitude of expectation, in attentiveness throughout the length of the darkness that precedes the dawn, so that we will recognise the light when it comes; yet knowing the night is not over.

What form might such schooling, such attentiveness, such continuing discipline (the same root word, obviously, as disciple) take? That question brings again the recognition of who it is we’re claiming to follow; who actually *is* “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”. He is the living Word of God made flesh, and our great High Priest. And that means we recognise that the fundamental form of *all* our words, all our speech concerning God is, at heart, as address to God, in prayer. And all prayer, all worship, all life lived in the discipline of discipleship, when conformed to Jesus, is, at its heart and centre, dispossessive. It is the *true* handing over of ourselves to God. This is a handing over that is not like Judas’s - who hands over his friend in expectation of human gain. It is a handing over that expects nothing... except the faithfulness of God.

We need continuing and *exacting* schooling in the discipline of discipleship because, left unschooled, then at every level of behaviour, language and imagination - from the political world to private life, from business to religion - we instinctively seek some safety, some security, through ownership and power: we want to hold on, even if only a little, to being God in our life and world. In the school of discipleship that is the Church, that is liturgy and prayer, we slowly learn to *give back* our language (“as our Saviour has taught us, so we pray”) ... as a beginning. From there, we may learn to give back our understanding and, ultimately, our very selves: “*All things* come from you, O Lord, and of your own do we give you.” We learn patience and the surrender of security - we learn,

in short, to be creatures, dependent on the sustaining word and gifts of our living Creator. We learn it, just as Jesus does, for the hope and joy set before us.

To believe in Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, as Lord, is to confess him as the one who, in his created human flesh continues to do what he does through all eternity: offer himself back in a loving eternal communion to the Father. And now he does it, as one of us, for us and for *all things* in God's creation. Because he submits to the night, to the darkness, to all the worst humanity can throw at him, so we can learn, and especially this week can remember, that we do have a hope for the world. It may be night; the darkness may be present; but the darkness does not comprehend what is truly happening, and does not have the last word. At a personal level, the horror and anguish of human betrayal, being handed over, is overcome by the faithfulness of the Father who remains the faithful One who helps and sustains us all, and all elements of God's creation.

Maundy Thursday

(18 April 2019)

Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116: 1-2, 11-18;
1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

Being creatures, and the iconic transformation of creaturely things

This evening's liturgy is extraordinarily rich in all the many things it offers – offers us materially, musically, spiritually and emotionally; and also what it offers in terms of all we have been reflecting on this week. I can't begin to speak about all of them. But amongst those things we are given this evening is another opportunity to reflect on the way in which *all* aspects of creation are involved and used by God in God's reconciling work through Jesus.

I want to begin, however, by focusing on the gospel we've just heard, and in which we will soon movingly partake. At the very beginning we heard that Jesus knew "that the Father had given *all things* [those resonant words again!] into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God" (13: 3). Here is the One who is with God from the beginning, through whom all things were made, and to whom *all things* have been given. Yet, this One shows how God works – not forcefully overwhelming humanity. (God waits, we remember, on Mary's "Yes", her "be it unto me according to your word" before God acts. In the time of 'me too', it is worth remembering God is *not* a rapist!) Here we see again the One who unites in himself Creator and created, without division or confusion, serving those he loves. As we heard, he takes a towel and kneels to wash the feet of his friends – the action of a slave. And we remember those words of Paul from last Sunday: 'he humbled himself, taking the form of a slave'. Serving, waiting on 'his own', those he loves to the end. Loves them, even though he knows one will betray him, one deny him, and all forsake him and flee.

And poor Peter can't cope! Peter asserts the all-too human need to be in control. Confronted by the utterly unconditionally overflowing love of God – a love that is incarnate and embodied in Jesus – Peter says, "No, you won't wash me." And when he's threatened with missing out altogether, he urges Jesus to wash all of him. It is another example of a human being not willing to allow God to be God – Peter has to be in control, deciding for himself how much or how little he will be washed.

Before we rush to judge Peter, it has to be acknowledged we're all a bit like that. Because unconditional love is just a little too hard for us to cope with. Oh yes, it is perfectly all right to talk about it – it is a rather lovely idea. But, like Peter, if we're confronted with it, it can be just a little too much. It means that someone takes me, in the words of the hymn, "Just as I am", without any of the normal self-protecting images of myself I like to present to the world: or, in fact, loves me *despite* seeing through those images. Without those self-protecting images – images which, most of the time, I actually fool myself into

accepting as the *real* me - without those images we are extraordinarily vulnerable. What if, when faced with and by the *true* me, the me I think I know better than anyone else, the other person decides it has all been a terrible mistake? That I'm really *not* worth loving? Or, what if God, who knows all and sees all sees all those parts of me I try to keep hidden – the 'invisible things' we called to mind on Palm Sunday – and it turns out they're too horrible even for God to cope with?

Peter's responses are those of all fallen humanity – an attempt still to be in control, to refuse to acknowledge our creaturely dependence – to be God, in short. In thinking of this, I'm often reminded of the letter written by the great English novelist, D. H. Lawrence to the not-so great (in my opinion) English philosopher, Bertrand Russell: "For goodness' sake," Lawrence wrote, "stop being an ego and have the courage to be a creature!" Tomorrow we shall see the 'dark side' of this attempt to be in control. Rejection of the relationship God wants to re-establish, is also a rejection and refusal to expose ourselves – a refusal built on fear, in many cases – to God's will, to what God, in Jesus, offers: an unconditional and over-flowing love. But even in Peter's seeming modest rejection, and then enthusiastic acceptance, we see another refusal to accept that love as it is offered in a way God knows is best for us. Peter, like all human beings (apart from Jesus), doesn't have the courage to be a creature, but wants to be an ego, controlling the way he receives God's outpoured love. But, as we also hear, quietly and calmly, Jesus shows Peter that his attempt to be in control, his attempt to play God, can be transformed by the patient outpouring of a loving, serving, 'friend'.

What we remember tonight, and what we're called to recall in the great school of discipleship that is the Church at prayer, is what the church has tried to proclaim from the beginning: there is only one way to respond to this gift – only one way to accept it. With humble thanksgiving. Our response to this love, like our response to other clear examples of it – in recognition of the beautiful and "very good" creation - is to be thankful.

And that brings us to the other central element this evening. *Eucharisto*, the Greek word from which we get one name for the liturgy that forms us tonight, literally means 'I give thanks' – or, more prosaically and directly, "thank you". Every eucharist is, at its core, a thanksgiving. Tonight, we commemorate the institution of this supreme thanksgiving meal! And in light of the reconciliation of *all things*, which has been our focus for some of this week, it is an opportunity to consider how creaturely things become transformed into icons of God's presence and love.

The Orthodox Fathers – especially St Maximus the Confessor (and, in a different way, the Western St Thomas Aquinas) – argued that, while we can't see or know all there is to see and know of God, nevertheless in the manifest and interweaving forms of the entire material universe – just by it being part of God's "very good" creation – we encounter the loving action of God. They argued, as Rowan Williams reminds us, that

the relationship of the invisible, unknowable God to the material, [created] world, ... was not simply the relationship of a self-enclosed divinity, infinitely distant from all material reality. It was the relationship of an active, outpouring, self-diffusing God, whose action... ‘soaked through’ the material so that there was indeed a ‘Real Presence’ – and I use the words advisedly – of God within creation, and by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, an intensified presence of God – a presence supremely intensified in Jesus.⁷

The active, out-pouring God, the one who pours himself out for us supremely in Jesus, pours out his love on all creation such that, by the power of the outpoured Spirit, the material world is transformed, and we can see and recognize that, through the grace of God, some elements of creation are brought “in communion” with God – the communion God desires to have with all creation. Of course, it begins with certain elements – bread, wine, water, baptized people. But as the wonderful prayers I quoted on Sunday morning make clear: “Blessed are you Lord, God of *ALL* creation – through *YOUR* goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of heaven. Blessed are you Lord, God of *ALL* creation, through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become for us the cup of our salvation.”

This transformation is the promise of what will happen to *all* creation in the last days: a promise and hope we *remember* until the Lord comes, as Paul reminds us. But God gives us a foretaste of that reconciled transformation *NOW*. It is why the Church doesn’t see the eucharist *solely* as a *memorial* of the meal Jesus instituted with his friends at the Last Supper, though it is that. It also needs to be seen as strongly (if not more so as) a foretaste of that heavenly banquet we will share at the end. As Orthodox Christians often wonderfully say, the eucharist is a memorial – or more strictly, a *remembering* – of the future! We taste and see, here and now, communion between the loving Creator and his loved creation. And as we are invited into that communion, so we, too, go from here as icons – signs – to and in the world of the reconciled communion God desires with *all things*. We become people with a memory, and a hope for the world. What achieves that communion, of course, as tonight’s gospel makes clear, is love. And it is the new commandment that we are given – to love even as we have been loved. “By this the world shall know” God’s plan and desire for the whole creation – to live in eternal communion – a life-giving communion with the Creator and sustainer of all, reconciled by the one “to whom all things have been given” and who, in returning to the One he calls Father, while loving his own to the end, takes all creation into that communion he shares and creates anew.

⁷ from Rowan Williams, ‘Icons and the Practice of Prayer’ – a lecture delivered to the Royal Academy of Arts as part of the Byzantium lecture.

Good Friday
The Liturgy of the Cross
(19 April 2019)

Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12; Psalm 22; 1 Corinthians 11: 18 - 31; John 18:1 - 19:42

Last Sunday, we held palm crosses, and I said then that the palms they symbolised, together with the donkey Jesus' rode, showed that other elements of creation have a rôle to play in the great drama of this week. The Synoptic gospels, in their accounts of this day, make much of the reaction of all elements of creation. For them, darkness descends, the earth heaves. The One through whom, in whom and by whom all things are created can't be killed, can't die, without that having major consequences. As Mother Julian of Norwich was shown: "The firmament, the very earth itself, began to lose their nature with sorrow at the time of Christ's dying.... All creation capable of feeling pain suffered with him." Or, as John Donne wonderfully puts it:

*What a death were it then to see God dye?
It makes his own Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
It made his footstool cracke and the sun winke...*

Creation itself, it appears, is traumatised.

And of course, we are also confronted with the reality of human cruelty and violence this day. Included in that is the human abuse of elements of creation to assist in their torture and murder of a fellow human being: again, in the Synoptics, a reed is used to strike Jesus. Thorns are taken and twisted - literally, but also from their natural purpose of protection of a plant - to become an instrument of torture. The mockery by the soldiers is exactly the kind of mockery we still see used too frequently to those who are "different" or hold a different world view. What little power Roman legions had in a hostile environment, they now use with impunity against one of a "different" race. It is small wonder that Isaiah's words from the song of the suffering servant came so quickly to be identified with Jesus: despised and rejected, a man of suffering, wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, victim of a perversion of justice.

The tortured one is brought forth: "Behold the man!" See what a human is, when subjected to the inhumanity of which only power-grasping humans are capable to one another, and to the creation, in the disordered, distorted world where we think we're in control!

And then there is that ultimate abuse of nature. Wood and iron are taken and fashioned into one of the most effective means ever devised by the cruelty of humanity for the abuse, torture and death of a human victim. Jesus is, we must also remember, not just a victim of religious disputes. He is executed by the Romans, and in the very public and brutal way the Romans saved for their political enemies and political prisoners. Jesus is put up outside the walls for all to see on their way into the city. And Pilate makes his

political point, too; writing in three main languages - so no one misses his point: “This is the King of the Jews”! This one, hung up on a gibbet, accursed in both Roman and Jewish law, *this* is your King. No wonder the leaders want him to take down a sign that humiliates them, too. But Pilate won’t, because in the puerile power games that so often make up human politics, that shows his power.

Faced with the shock and horror of this day, as we heard and enacted last night, many of the first disciples fled and left Jesus alone. After 2,000 years, the memory of this day and all it contains is painful, as we recall all the suffering Jesus endured for our sake, and for the sake of all creation. And, like the first disciples, we look to the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures to help us make a sense of that. The passages from Isaiah we’ve heard; the first verses, those we’ve heard sung, from Psalm 22.

And yet, and yet.... In looking at these texts, it didn’t take long for the Church, in the light of its Risen Lord, to see a different perspective in these events, alongside the darkness we contemplate today. So, we take note that Isaiah’s desolating images begin with the promise that “my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high”, and as our passage today concludes, “out of his anguish he will see light”. Those words we heard last night and again this morning, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, are placed in Jesus’ mouth by Mark and Matthew. Today, perhaps, we see them as words of desolation. Yet the writers of those gospels, knowing *all* the words of the psalm, know it goes *beyond* those verses we heard a little while ago, and involves the remarkable transition that leads to the recognition that God “has saved my life”, and the psalmist will cry, “O praise the Lord... for he has not despised nor abhorred the poor man in his misery.” And so Paul can see in the cross the power and wisdom of God. And before long, those instruments of torture, the wood and the iron, have been transformed, in the hymns of the Church, into “Tree of beauty, tree of light”, and “sweetest wood and sweetest iron”, not because of any intrinsic worth in themselves (albeit they are parts of God’s good creation), but because of the “sweetest weight” that was hung on them. Creation having been traumatised, has been transformed!

As we might expect, the most extraordinary example of this is in John’s gospel, the Passion we hear every Good Friday in this school of discipleship that is the Church’s liturgy. For John, the crucifixion, Jesus’ lifting up, is the moment of God’s glorification, because it is the Son’s glorification. So, John tells the Passion in a very different way.

This, the sixth day of the Jewish week, begins... “in a garden”. And Jesus, who in this gospel has earlier replied to his critics that his Father is still working, so he is still working (c.f. John 5: 17). It is, indeed, night; but it is those who come to arrest Jesus who must bring light - lanterns and torches. Jesus, it seems, has no need of light. “The darkness and the light,” the psalmist reminds us, “are both alike” to God. And Jesus remains in control throughout. He comes forward of his own will, makes the grand claim “I am he”; and soldiers, police and others armed with weapons fall to the ground.

At each of his “trials”, Jesus remains in control and bears witness to the truth of his own teaching. Pilate, the source of putative political power (as we’ve heard), is the one who, as John tells the story, goes running in and out of his headquarters: Jesus remains, in T. S. Eliot’s wonderful phrase, “the still point in the midst of the turning world”! Pilate’s understanding of rule, of kingdom as a place of “power” is shown to be false by the One who initiates God’s reign as a realm of truth. “Jesting Pilate’s” question, “What is truth”, we see uses the wrong relative pronoun. “*Who* is truth?”, John’s gospel shows is the real question; and the answer is standing in front of Pilate, in front of us all. This is, we might say, powerlessness as the world sees it, but in the light of Christ, we see this as wisdom and strength.

As in the synoptic accounts, Jesus is robed in Imperial purple and given a crown of thorns. But in John’s gospel, the Imperial robe is never removed: he goes to Golgotha dressed as a king. And while Jesus is flogged, no Simon of Cyrene is needed here to carry the cross for him. In John’s vision, this is a triumphal procession, where the victorious hero marches on. Worldly power does its worst - “Behold the man!” - but John presents that power being overcome.

Most remarkably of all, even *on* the cross, Jesus is still in charge, still “working”, doing his Father’s work: so he creates a new set of family relations: a mother and a son who are tied, not by blood - or, at least, not their own blood - but by the command of the One reigning from the tree. And that is a reminder to us gathered here that, for and in the family that is the Church, water is thicker than blood: the ties of baptism makes us reconsider what “family” means. Because the last work that is done is, indeed, this forming of a new community; a new way of existing in and as community, is brought to birth. And as at every birth, blood and water flows - the water of baptism and the blood of the eucharist, as a new creation flows from the side of the second Adam, just as the first human community was drawn from the side of the first Adam.

John’s gospel, we recall, begins with those famous words: “In the beginning” – a direct allusion to the opening of Genesis. And here too, as we remember, this last great work begins, and ends, in a garden. The work of recreation is, John’s Jesus recognises and says, “finished!” It is accomplished. What John shows is that in the Passion and on the Cross, a new creation has been accomplished - creation as God desires it: restored to communion with and in God. And so, on this sixth day, Jesus finishes the work he shares with the Father. The work having been accomplished, creation restored, Jesus can rest, in the garden, on the seventh day. And, we remember from Genesis, when God saw everything that God had made, God saw that, indeed, it was very good. No wonder we call today *Good Friday*.

Easter Vigil

(6.00am - 21 April 20198)

Genesis 22: 1-18; Exodus 14: 10-31, 15: 20-21;
Zephaniah 3:14-20; Romans 6: 3-11; Matthew 28: 1-10.

Throughout this week, the two things we've been focussing on are the way in which we are called to see all things anew, in the light of the risen Jesus; and how, by doing that, we can re-member our memories, our story of faith, so that we are emboldened to share it as a hope for the world.

This morning, that happens quite literally. We see all things in the light of the Paschal Candle. Not so long ago, in the light of the Paschal Candle, you'll remember these words were sung:

O Universe *dance around God's throne!*
Jesus Christ, our King, is risen!....
Rejoice, O earth, in glory, revealing the splendour of your creation,
radiant in the brightness of your triumphant King!
Christ has conquered! Now his life and glory fill you!
Darkness vanishes forever!

And the Exultet – the Great Easter proclamation – concludes with words that echo those that have been another focus all week: Easter, we remember, is a time “wherein heaven and earth are joined, and humankind partakes with the Godhead!” Even the bees are involved in the worship of this morning, and *all* creation becomes re-united with the Triune God in the communion that God has always desired to have with creation.

The essential linking of creation and redemption is shown clearly in this liturgy, when, usually, the first reading is the entire story of Genesis 1. In the light of the candle, we hear episodes from the whole of salvation history – or, rather, hear them again, in the light of the resurrection. This linking of creation and redemption, which we heard in the Gospel on Good Friday, is expressed starkly in the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. At the end of Good Friday, as the church turns towards Holy Saturday, and the “resting in the tomb”, these words are sung: “Moses mysteriously foretells this day, saying: *and God blessed the seventh day*. This is the blessed Sabbath, this is the day of repose. For on this day the only Son of God rests from all His works.” It is an insight shaped by the Passion we heard on Friday – the Passion according to John – where as he breathes his last, Jesus says, “It is finished”. Having been lifted up, and “drawn all things” to himself, Jesus’ work is accomplished. What dawns now, as our gospel this morning reminds us, the “first day of the week”. Above all else, it is the “first day” of the *new* creation – creation as it was always intended to be, reunited in eternal communion with the Creator.

The readings we hear, therefore, allow us to remember and partake again of *all* the aspects and events of God’s saving and recreating work. They are, and I use the word

deliberately, a *Recapitulation* of salvation history. As we've heard earlier this week, recapitulation is a word of considerable theological significance. Rowan Williams rightly reminds us that

[w]hen Christians talk of salvation, we don't *just* mean the crucifixion. We mean the whole series of events around the crucifixion and Resurrection. The whole life of Jesus, in fact.⁸

Jesus' saving work is accomplished, as the many verbs in our Creed remind us, because of *all* that he does. He is 'conceived' and 'born'; he has a whole life, including a ministry, as well as 'suffering', 'being crucified' 'died', 'buried' and 'descended to the dead'. All of this is, as we've been remembering all week, a human life lived according to a new pattern: a new paradigm of creaturely obedience to the God he calls Father, not as one who determines to be in control.

So, the reconciliation of all things we celebrate this morning is achieved through *all elements* of Jesus' life. And, having descended to the dead, we recall that, today, he tramples down death by death! In his own person, the *created* – the fully human being, born of Mary – lives eternally, because he is also the *uncreated* the only- and eternally-begotten Son. And because neither he, nor the God he calls Father, nor the life-giving Spirit, is willing to allow a rupture of the communion they share eternally, Jesus is raised from death by the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father! As we saw during the week, in the person of Jesus the created and the uncreated dwell together without distinction and without confusion. So, he is joined to the Father; one who is, in his humanity *created*, partakes of the Godhead and lives eternally – "heaven and earth are [indeed] joined" in him!

This 'recapitulation', this hearing of salvation history, is not just a hearing of nice and pious memories. They are, as I keep repeating, heard in the light of the risen Christ: so in that sense, they are read in the context and from the perspective of God's in-breaking eternity. The Risen Christ once dead, dies no more and death has no more dominion over him; so his story can only be 'remembered' in the sense of being 'remembered from the future'.

It is a wonderful insight given to us as we hear this morning's gospel. The women arrive to the dramatic action of the creation in league with God: a great earthquake is followed by a descent of the angel of the Lord. The women are told, 'He is not here'; they will not find Jesus where they look for him, where he was placed in the past. He is going ahead of his disciples. Just as (we've heard) God goes ahead of the people of Israel in a pillar of fire in the Exodus, so Jesus goes before us now. This is, we understand, the *same God* at work: the God of Israel, who saved God's people from slavery, now saves us from death. And just as that pillar of fire or the pillar of cloud will, occasionally, stop,

⁸ *Tokens of Trust*,

to allow the people to ‘catch up’, so Jesus comes to meet the women, only to repeat the message: go to Galilee, go forward: it is *there* you will see me.

The extraordinary open-endedness of this gospel means it becomes our story. We, too, must follow the Lord who goes ahead of us into God’s renewed, reconciled future. In other words, if this is a memory, it is a memory that is still being shaped, still unfolding, a living memory. So we should no longer ask (as too many often do): ‘how do I make this story, this faith, relevant in my life?’ That’s putting us at the centre again; making us the ‘subject’ of the sentence. No, the question we must ask this and every morning is: ‘How is my life made relevant, conformed to this story?’ How does the life-giving Spirit work in us to make us conform to this memory, this new way of being human, revealed in the Jesus who always goes ahead of us?

That is why what we come to do now in this service is *so* significant. In renewing our baptismal vows, we remind ourselves, as Paul tells us, that we have died and been buried with Christ to the old order of sin and the broken communion sin with God that sin means. Instead, we’ve been raised with Christ into a new, transformed life: a life lived to God. We have been raised into God’s coming and future reign: citizens of a new Kingdom. And that brings with it new and reconciled relationships – with God, who we are now free and bold, in the power of the Spirit, to call Father (as Jesus does). And new relationships with one another: with our *new* sisters and brothers in the Church.

And we then come to partake of what St Ignatius of Antioch, one of the earliest of the ancient Fathers of the Church, called “the medicine of immortality” – the Eucharist. That partaking here and now of the heavenly banquet, the future remembered and made manifest in the present. With bread which earth has given and human hands have made, wine which is fruit of the vine and the work of human hands – yet which are, for us, truly a partaking of the body and blood of Christ, such that we are joined to his body, the Church universal, and to His body – risen, ascended and glorified – that through communion in and with him, we may have communion with the One who creates, redeems and loves us – even the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom be all glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Easter Day (21 April 2019)

Acts 10: 34-43; Hymn to the Risen Christ; 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11; John 20: 1-18.

Throughout this week, two things we've been focussing on are the way in which we are called to see all things anew, in the light of the risen Jesus; and how, by doing that, we can re-member our memories, our story of faith, so that we are emboldened to share it as a hope for the world.

This morning, we do, quite literally, see things in the light of the Paschal Candle – that new light which is the light of the risen Jesus. At this morning's remarkable Vigil liturgy, in the light of the Paschal Candle, these extraordinary words were sung:

O Universe *dance around God's throne!*
Jesus Christ, our King, is risen!....
Rejoice, O earth, in glory, revealing the splendour of your creation,
radiant in the brightness of your triumphant King!
Christ has conquered! Now his life and glory fill you!
Darkness vanishes forever!

And the Exultet – the Great Easter proclamation – concluded with words that echo those that have been our focus all week: Easter, we remember, is a time “wherein heaven and earth are joined, and humankind partakes with the Godhead!”

On Good Friday, you may recall, we began to consider the way John's account of the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus presents those events as a re-remembering of the account of creation that occurs in the opening chapters of Genesis. John's perspective is taken up in the liturgy of the Orthodox Church. At the end of Good Friday, as the church turns towards Holy Saturday, and the “resting in the tomb”, these words are sung in Orthodox churches: “Moses mysteriously foretells this day, saying: *and God blessed the seventh day*. This is the blessed Sabbath, this is the day of repose. For on this day the only Son of God rests from all His works.”

Now, as the gospel we've just heard reminds us, this is the “first day of the week”. So, early in the morning, Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb: she seeks Jesus in the tomb in the garden, where he was placed on Friday. She looks back, we might say, to the past. Later, she bends and looks into this empty tomb. And there, as we heard, she sees two angels, sitting ‘one at the head and the other at the feet’. In between them are the empty linen wrappings: in short, between the two angels there is an empty space.

If we remember the insights of our ancestors in the faith, this gives us quite a lot of thinking to do. In their utter rejection of idols, of any graven image of the God they worship, the people of Israel build, at God's command (according to Exodus) an ark: which holds and marks the covenant relationship they have with the God who led them

out of Egypt. And, on the top of that ark of the covenant is a lid, with two angels: one at one end, the other at the other end. And, between them, is an empty space – the name of which is best translated as ‘the mercy seat’. So, while though her tears Mary can’t see it yet, what we, in the light of the risen Christ, are brought to see in the tomb is the God who makes covenant with Israel, the God who creates from nothing by speaking things into being, is at work again.⁹

And this is also the God whose Spirit hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation in Genesis 1. So it is no coincidence that the first reading we heard in this liturgy is in the context of God’s Spirit being outpoured again – this time on the household of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. The same Spirit that, according to the writer of Acts was poured out on Jesus at his baptism (and which the same writer says ‘overshadows’ Mary as Jesus is conceived), is now poured out on all people. Thus, Peter recognises that this same God is no longer to be confined to one nation, one ‘elect group’, but is the saving God of every nation. In the words we’ve been using all week, that all creation is to be reconciled to God, as God intended from the beginning of Creation.

That is a reconciliation achieved through Jesus, now revealed as the anointed, the Christ of God. And today, in the light of the Paschal Candle, we hear again, as if for the first time, echoes of all our salvation history, echoes that are made new. For we recognise that Jesus, raised from the dead dies no more: death has no more dominion over him. He tramples down death by death! He becomes the first fruit, the *new* fruit of the Tree of Life – the tree of the Cross, that is likewise transformed as we see it in the light of the risen One.

It isn’t surprising, therefore, that John’s gospel wants to keep us, at least for a little while longer, in the garden. In the garden, Mary, through her tears, sees Jesus – but, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke’s gospel, she doesn’t recognise him. Instead, as this gospel wonderfully puts it, she supposes ‘him to be the gardener’. And now, perhaps, we’re back with Genesis 3, where God likes to meet Adam and Eve walking in the garden! But, while Adam and Eve hide themselves from God, Mary confronts this ‘gardener’ – timidly, or boldly, we don’t know. (And, if we want to extend the insight of the folded grave clothes being left in the tomb, perhaps *this* man is unashamed to walk the garden naked!) As in the Creation story of Genesis 2, the second Adam *names* this woman, because, like the God he calls Father, he speaks into being renewed and restored relationships: first, with Mary Magdalene. Then, as this gospel continues, with his other disciples, with Thomas, with Peter. Ultimately, with us, his disciples today. As the renewal of our Baptismal vows reminds us: *we too* are named into new life, into new relationships with God and with one another as sisters and brothers of the one Heavenly Father and Creator. That’s why, as we heard again in our first and gospel readings, the Peter who denies Jesus is present with the other disciples – restored to fellowship with

⁹ This remarkable insight is best explored in the essay ‘Between the Cherubim: The Empty Throne and the Empty Tomb’ in Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). Williams acknowledges that the first instance he has found of this insight is in the commentary on John’s gospel by B. F. Westcott, later Bishop of Durham.

them – and then the one who speaks most fulsomely of all that has been achieved to the household of Cornelius, as he prepares to baptise them.

Today we recall that Jesus, the second Adam, the fully human one, who is also the only- and eternally-begotten Son of the Father, is raised. Because neither he, nor the God he calls Father, nor the Spirit, is willing to allow a rupture of the communion they share eternally, Jesus is raised from death by the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father! As he tells Mary Magdalene, he is ascending to his Father, so that one who is, in his humanity *created*, lives eternally – “heaven is, indeed, wedded to earth” in him!

The resurrection shows that God is not willing to allow death to get the upper hand, to destroy God’s ‘very good’ creation. And that is why, this resurrected life isn’t – and was never intended to be – confined to Jesus. Again in the *Exultet*, we heard this morning that ‘the bonds of death were loosed and Christ harrowing hell rose again in triumph.’ In Orthodox icons of the harrowing of hell, we traditionally see Jesus, standing with the gates of hell under his pierced feet. And, he grasps Adam in one hand and Eve in the other. Grabs them by the wrist, and brings the first woman and the first man, and thereby all human beings, out of the realm of death: a realm whose gates lie smashed under him. “A second Adam to the fight, and to the rescue came”, as blessed John Henry Newman puts it.

But there’s something else that our gospel reading forces us to recognise: we can’t leave this ‘rescue’ to our ‘souls’ or our ‘spirits’. The salvation, the reconciliation, Jesus achieves isn’t just about souls – it is, as we’ve been considering all week, about the whole material creation. God has, if you like to think of it this way, already got a heaven full of spirits – the angels who sit at the head and foot in the tomb, for instance. God’s desire is for the reconciliation and salvation of *all* creation, and that means souls, bodies, minds from all nations, and all things as well.

Now, what a resurrected or ‘glorified’ body might actually be or look like, everyone since St Paul has struggled to articulate with any clarity! And I don’t propose to attempt that now. But we hear that Mary Magdalene must have attempted to ‘hold on’ to Jesus. Well, whatever else we might say about a ‘soul’ or a ‘spirit’, you certainly can’t ‘hold on’ to it!! It is a body that can’t, initially, be recognised. And, as we’ll hear in the Sundays that follow this one, it is a body that can enter rooms through locked doors, and yet will eat broiled or barbequed fish (depending which gospel we’re hearing) with the disciples.

Thus, the *new* creation, of which this resurrected body is the first sign, is a *transformed* creation: there are new relationships, relationships no longer built or founded on divisions of race, nation, gender, age, religion or sexuality: all forgiven, all reconciled, all restored to the communion with God that was God’s plan from the beginning.

At the end of this remarkable week, let me end where we began on Palm Sunday, with a quotation from Professor Nicholas Lash:

The resurrection – Jesus’ resurrection and, in the *light* of the Easter *hope*, of ours and every human being [and, we might add, of all creation] – means we can say that the story of human history is ultimately to be told in terms, not of death, but of life, not of chaos, but of God’s unconquerably effective love.

It follows that... nothing whatsoever, no circumstance, no suffering...no betrayal, no oppression, no collapse of sense... or relationship can justify despair, can justify the admission that, at the end of the day, darkness has the last word...¹⁰

We will soon come to partake of what St Ignatius of Antioch, one of the earliest of the ancient Fathers of the Church, called “the medicine of immortality” – the Eucharist. By that we take into our bodies, as we see through the eyes of faith and in the light of the resurrection, the body and blood of Christ. In doing so, we are joined to his body, the Church universal, and to His body – risen, ascended and glorified. This is, indeed, a fully renewed communion – a communion we understand most fully in the light of Christ, knowing that thereby we have a memory of God’s coming future, and a hope for the world. A hope that is our communion with the One who creates, redeems and loves us – even the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to whom be all glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

¹⁰ Nicholas Lash, ‘Easter Meaning’ in *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, (London: SCM Press, 1986), pp. 184-5.