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Going deeper

Prayers and readings – Week 6



THE UNITED PARISH
Christ Church & St John's

This week's devotions

Unlike other weeks where we have specifically prayed for aspects of the life of our Parish, this week, each prayer will focus on the devotion and our need to come before God as we focus on his pain and willingness to face the cross for us.

Our services during Holy Week

Mon 26th March Youth & Uniform Service 7:00pm St John's

Wed 28th March Holy Week Communion 12 noon St John's

Wed 28th Mid Week Reflection 7:30pm Christ Church

Fri 30th Good Friday Service 7:30pm St John's

Sun 1st April Dawn Service Sunday 6:45am Ballyeaston

Sun 1st April Easter Celebration 10am Christ Church

Sun 1st April Easter Celebration 11:30 St John's

Introduction

Jesus' call to 'Follow me' is an invitation to all kinds of people – men, women, young people and children from every conceivable race, nationality and background. Following Christ doesn't stop with baptism and confirmation, with a conversion experience, or with belonging to a church community. That's just the beginning. And from that point on, it's our responsibility to do all we can to ensure that we grow and deepen our faith, and to encourage the faith of our family and others around us. The period of Lent gives Christians an opportunity to assess our spiritual walk, confessing our shortcomings and making decisions to go forward living a more God-focused life. During this Lent, be encouraged to set aside time each day to come closer to God, reading his Word, and praying for different aspects of the life of our Parish. Each Sunday will be a day where the prayers focus on ourselves.

Grab a booklet each Sunday, or download from the Parish website www.theunitedparish.org.uk

Revd Jonny

Sunday 25th March (Palm Sunday)

Reading : John 12:20-33, Philippians 2:5-11

WHAT PARADE DO WE FOLLOW?

Most of our Bibles have the title of this passage as 'The triumphal entry'. Jesus however comes on a borrowed donkey; a symbol of peace for his rule will be one of humility, serving and gentleness. There is irony in the title, for Jesus begins his final journey to the cross. Listen to their shouts: 'Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming of the Kingdom of our ancestor David!'

Pilate would have paraded into the city on a war horse with his troops. The Bible doesn't tell us about that parade or what they shouted, but you can probably bet it wasn't, 'Blessed is the coming of the Kingdom of our ancestor David.' One parade 'controls', the other parade 'serves'. What does it mean for us to serve?

Daily Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, who, in your tender love towards the human race, sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: Grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Pray

Father, I thank you that you gave your Son, Jesus, for me as a model of what the Christian life should be like. I thank you that he comes in gentle peace and yet gracious power. Teach me what is needed to welcome Jesus more into my daily living, into my home, into my church, and into my town. Amen.

Monday 26th March

Reading : Mark 14:36, Mark 11:12-33

A CRY FROM THE GARDEN

The garden of Gethsemane (which means olive press), is Jesus' favourite place of prayer. What a fitting place for Jesus to be pressed down with agony and to pray with a heavy, broken heart. In Gethsemane, we see Jesus praying for relief from this great trial. Yet, he submitted to the Father's will. This is the highest measure of practical godliness and holiness. The surrender of my will to God's will in all things is godliness.

To obey God is the best thing you could do in your life. What area of your life are you truly willing to surrender to God right now?

Daily Collect

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy, but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of his cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pray

Father, I want to know your will but most of all I want to have the willingness to do your will. I confess that I am weak but with your help I will obey you. Give me the grace to surrender this area of my life to you. Amen.

Tuesday 27th March

Reading : Luke 23:34, Mark 12:1-44

A CRY FROM THE CROSS

We hate people telling us to forgive. What do they know about my situation, my pain or years of suffering? It is not that we are unwilling to forgive - we just want some justice to be done. If I'm being honest today I can think of one such situation where I have forgiven, but I'm still hoping for justice. And so the question is, have I truly forgiven? True forgiveness frees us from the bitter demand of restitution. It frees our hearts and restores our joy. It leaves the offender in God's hands, allowing God the judge to act as he pleases.

Is there somebody in your life who has caused you so much pain that you are not willing to forgive yet? Can you recount the incident before God and pray for strength to forgive? Is there someone that you have offended but you have refused to ask for forgiveness

Daily Collect

O God, who by the passion of your blessed Son made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer pain and loss for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Pray

Father of Mercy and Grace, I lay bare before you my pain and suffering. Give me your divine strength so that I can forgive. Grant me obedience so that I will forgive. Forgive me if I am desiring justice as a means of revenge. Search my heart and see if there is someone from whom I should seek forgiveness. Give me peace as I obey. Amen.

Wednesday 28th March

Reading : Luke 23:43, Mark 13:31-37, Mark 14:1-11

A CRY FROM THE CROSS (continued)

When I was a child growing up in Lisburn, I would listen for the Fire Brigade Sirens going off from the other side of town. It was a call to all firefighters to come quickly to the station. I would then grab my bike and try to get to the Station before the Fire Engine would leave the station. Sometimes I would get down extra quick to see the firefighters stepping into their gear. A few minutes before they were going about their daily business, and now with the uniform on comes a consciousness of responsibility and a willingness to face whatever.

For Jesus, his mind is not on yesterday or tomorrow, but on the task at hand. Two men hung on crosses next to Jesus. One sought Jesus' power to escape. The other took the opportunity to reflect. He turned to Jesus pleading, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' How much do we put into today's moment rather than think about what we have just done or what we are going on to do? Our awareness of the presence of God now, in any circumstance, brings in my view a greater sense of his will and love for us. Do you need to quit rehearsing yesterday and stop worrying about tomorrow so you can find the fullness of Jesus today?

Daily Collect

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters, and did not hide his face from shame: Give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time, with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

Pray

Heavenly Father, forgive me for spending so much time trying to live in the wrong moment. Such living costs me your presence in this moment. Open the eyes of my heart to you right now. Amen.

Thursday 29th March

Reading : Luke 15:34, Mark 14:12-72

A CRY FROM THE CROSS (continued)

The scene of Jesus' crucifixion must have been painted, and depicted in films countless times. The image is of a broken man, arms outstretched, nails driven into flesh,. But do we really understand the anguish that Jesus endured? Jesus' cry of dereliction, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' gives us some sense that we can never fully comprehend his anguish. Something far deeper is going on. In that dark hour, Jesus is separated from his Father.

Since eternity they had experienced unbridled communion, complete delight and love for each other. But on the cross, as a modern song of worship says, 'The Father turns his face away.' Jesus experienced not just utter physical pain, but utter spiritual agony. Why? Put simply, Jesus cries 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' so we wouldn't have to. Take some time today to consider the sheer sacrifice that Jesus made for you.

Daily Collect

God our Father, you have invited us to share in the supper which your Son gave to his Church to proclaim his death until he comes: May he nourish us by his presence, and unite us in his love; who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Pray

Lord God, thank you for the cross. Thank you that you did not withhold your only beloved Son, but gave him freely so that I can be called your child. Help me to grasp the depth of your love, and never take it for granted. Let your love for me in Jesus, shape my service to you and others. Amen.

Friday 30th March (Good Friday)

Reading : John 19:30, Mark 15:1-40

A CRY FROM THE CROSS (continued)

There's a picture I have when I was 11 of me coming over the finish line after the Lisburn Fun Run – 10 kilometres of what I certainly would not describe as fun. I am not a runner, and for me it would not be a case of 'It is finished', but 'I am finished', I am afraid. With Jesus it was different. Although he suffered extreme pain and torture on the Cross, he wasn't finished – IT was finished. It was a cry of victory.

What Jesus was referring to was the penalty for sin. Up until that time, the Jewish law required atoning sacrifices such as animals. The animal became a substitute. Jesus became the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. The complicated sacrificial system ended that day. The word 'finished' can be translated as 'paid in full'. Jesus paid the price so that you and I don't have to. We can say also of the power of sin in our lives – IT IS FINISHED. A question for you today – do you accept the full payment for my sins, or are you still trying to earn my salvation? This Good Friday, which of my friends and family can I pray for that they would know the saving power of Jesus Christ?

Daily Collect

Almighty Father, Look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross; who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Pray

Father, I take hold of the free gift of salvation. I receive your grace and forgiveness. Speak to me, by your Spirit, about the finality of your work at Calvary. And, this Easter, help me to spread your love to others, so that they too may be able to declare, "it is finished!" . In Jesus Name, Amen.

Saturday 31st March

Reading : Luke 23:46, Mark 15:42-47

JESUS WILL NEVER LET YOU DOWN

As I write these words, I have just come back from a Saturday morning football match with Nathan. Whilst I will be very biased as his father, I see Nathan as the best player on the squad, with huge potential. His style of play means that he often looks for his other team mates to pass the ball onto them. But I often think that his friends let him down by not being there when he needs them – a ball played and the opposing squad steals it. As fallible and fragile human beings, we all let each other down. At his crucifixion, his male disciples let Jesus down. He was alone.

On the cross, the last words of Jesus were to his Father. The obedient and faithful Son commits himself to the Father in death as in life. When your time comes, and it will, to part this planet, into whose hands will you commend your spirit? The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism is 'What is your only comfort, in life and in death?' And the answer, 'That I belong — body and soul, in life and in death — not to myself but to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ.' As you move today from Lent to the celebration of Easter Sunday, I pray that your comfort in life and in death is to your Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Revd Jonny.

Daily Collect

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.

Pray

Almighty God, I rejoice that the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus means that nothing 'will be able to separate us from the your love in Christ Jesus'. By your Spirit give me the faith to share this good news, to have courage as I face my future. In Jesus' name, Amen.