

# *Journey to Easter*

a time of prayer and reflection

# *The Journey Begins...*

Welcome to *Journey to Easter: a time of prayer and reflection*. Our journey today is a journey of the heart. Although we will be moving physically from station to station, this is simply a reflection of the inner journey we are embarking on. There is no time frame for this journey. The most important thing is to take however much time you need. The journey is divided into four stages, each of which has several thoughts and questions for reflection and prayer. Take your time reading through these prompts, and only move on when you feel ready. There is no rush. Take the time you need to slow down, calm your heart, and meet with God. If you feel the need to sit and think, sit and think. If you feel the need to journal, then journal. Feel free to respond in whatever way God is prompting you.

You don't need anything other than this booklet to embark on this journey, but a pencil, journal, and Bible could also be helpful.

For those who are participating at home, the four stages of this journey lead us through the Easter story: the supper, the garden, the cross, and the tomb. You might want to find a symbol or choose a location for each of these stages, but that is not necessary. Create a peaceful, quiet space, then read, reflect, pray, and journal as you wish, and when you are ready for the next stage in the journey, continue to the next page.

*The Supper*

Take...

# Love

Jesus and his disciples gathered to eat a meal together, as they had many times before. This was specifically a Passover meal, a special meal celebrating God's deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt many generations before. The disciples would have grown up celebrating the Passover every year with their families, and they had already celebrated the Passover with Jesus at least a couple of times. They knew how it was going to go. But they didn't.

Instead, Jesus did something shocking. He showed them his love by taking the position of a servant, kneeling and washing their dirty, dusty feet. It was completely unexpected. No great teacher or rabbi would do something like that. No self-respecting person would do something like that. Peter absolutely protested. *Jesus, you should never wash my feet!* But Jesus insisted. He was showing them his indescribable, selfless love, and he didn't want them to refuse it. He wanted them to accept his gift of love, and in turn to show that same selfless love to each other.

Have you encountered the love of Jesus? Often it appears in the simple, everyday moments when we least expect it. The Lord of All gave himself for us and came as a servant. Can we allow him to serve us? Does it feel weird or wrong? Do we feel ashamed, unworthy of accepting his love?

This Easter season we may have certain traditions and plans, we may have expectations for how things are going to go, but are we expecting Jesus to show us his love? Are we willing to accept Jesus's unexpected, shocking love for us? Are we willing to show love for others in the same way?

John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:5-8

# Understanding

Jesus knew his disciples. He knew their weaknesses, their fears, their motivations. He knew that Judas was going to betray him and that Peter was going to deny him.

He washed their feet anyways.

The disciples didn't want to face the truth about themselves—and it wasn't just Judas and Peter, although their failings take center stage. Jesus told all his disciples that they would fall away from him and abandon him, and they all protested that they never would. They couldn't accept what Jesus was telling them about themselves. They wanted to be better than that, to be steadfast and loyal and courageous.

It can be so hard to face our weaknesses and failures, but that does not keep them hidden from Jesus. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and all that he sees does not stop him from loving us. Are we willing to accept just how intimately Jesus knows us? That protest as we might, we cannot change what he perceives in us? Like Peter and the other disciples, we can be so determined not to fail. Do we feel like Jesus' acceptance of us hinges on our ability to do so? Or can we find rest and comfort in his gift of understanding?

Jesus knew all too well what his disciples were like in their fearful, desperate hearts. He still washed their feet.

Mark 14:26-31; Hebrews 4:14-16

# Relationship

*Take. Eat. This is my body.*

Jesus offered himself to his disciples in an intimate, irreversible way. The bread that symbolized his own body, broken and given for them, was offered as a gift that could be eaten. It wasn't a relic to be placed in a shrine or hung on the wall, but edible, perishable bread. Bread to be eaten, again and again, as a ritual of remembrance.

When we eat something and it is digested, it becomes an inseparable part of us. How amazing is it that Jesus referred to himself as bread, the very Bread of Life! It is in him that we find life and our life is sustained.

*Take. Drink.*

Through his blood, Jesus instituted a new covenant. A binding agreement that he will be our God and we will be his people. A covenant based not on keeping the law, but on the saving power of Jesus. He invites all of us into this new covenant, a blood covenant that lasts forever. What an incredible gift.

Jesus invites us into intimacy, into a close, inseparable relationship with him. Have you accepted his invitation?

Matthew 26:26-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34

## *Reflection*

As Jesus shared supper with his disciples, he offered them precious gifts of love, understanding, and an intimate relationship with himself. What is Jesus offering you today?

*The Garden*

Watch...

## With Me

When supper was finished, Jesus took his disciples out of the city to one of their favourite places, a garden where they often spent time together. Judas, the betrayer, would be expecting them to go there. They just had to wait.

Jesus asked his disciples to wait and watch with him.

Waiting is hard. Whether we are waiting for the test results, the reply to an email, the package to arrive in the mail, or anything else, waiting can become unbearable. Waiting was hard for Jesus too. He knew what was coming, that he would be betrayed, arrested, condemned, and crucified. It was so close, but not yet. First, he had to wait for Judas to arrive. This was a very difficult time for Jesus. The anticipation of what was to come left him in agony, sorrowful to the point of death, crying out to his Father. Once Judas arrived, Jesus stepped forward into the plan laid before him, with courage and compassion. But waiting was hard.

*Watch with me.*

Jesus desired the presence of his closest friends. Even though he moved away from them to pray alone, he wanted to know that they were awake and close by. In Jesus' request for his disciples to watch with him, we can see the longing that we also have, to not be alone in our hard times of waiting. What are you waiting for today? Is there someone who needs you to watch and wait with them?

Matthew 26:36-38; Psalm 69:1-3

# Pray

Not only did Jesus pray, he urged his disciples to pray too. Unlike his own prayers, which begged his Father to divert the coming suffering, and through which he laid his own will down in order to obey his Father's, Jesus told his disciples to pray that they may not enter into temptation. He knew how hard those next three days were going to be for them, and that they still didn't understand that he had to die and come back to life again in order to fulfil the Great Rescue that he came for. He had already told them that they were all going to abandon him and that Peter himself would deny that he ever knew him.

*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*

Temptation for what? To abandon Jesus? To succumb to despair and hopelessness as they watched him die? To forget his promise that he would come to life again? We don't know what temptation Jesus was referring to, but we do know that the struggle was real. This was a pivotal moment, with eternal consequences. Jesus wanted his disciples to be as prepared as they could be.

*Pray.*

Prayer is hard. The disciples found it impossible to keep their eyes open. They had good intentions, but even though the spirit is willing, the flesh can be so weak. Prayer wasn't just important for them at that time; prayer is important for us, at all times. The Bible urges us again and again to pray without ceasing, pray in all circumstances, pray about everything. There is so much more going on around us than meets the eye, and there is an enemy that is just as real now as he was that dark night when Jesus was betrayed.

We need to pray.

Mark 14:37-38; Ephesians 6:10-18

# Stay awake

The disciples were tired. They were confused, and sad, and didn't really understand what was going on. It was late at night. Jesus urged them to stay awake, to watch and pray, but they couldn't help it—they fell asleep.

*Are you still sleeping?*

Again and again Jesus returned to his disciples to find them sleeping. You can almost hear the frustration in his voice. They were on the cusp of the most important event in the history of the world, and there they were, snoring. There is a time for sleep and rest, absolutely. In fact Jesus had said, "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28) But now it was time to stay awake.

*The hour has come.*

It's crunch time. The betrayer has arrived. Wake up and get going. In our own lives, do we know when it is a time for rest and when it is time to stay awake? Self-discipline is hard. Living in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ is hard. Even though we can rest in the grace of Jesus and know that his love covers all our failures, that does not mean we have the freedom to do whatever we want whenever we want. What is Jesus asking from you today? Is he inviting you to rest or urging you to action?

Matthew 26:40-46; Romans 13:11-12

## *Reflection*

Watch with me. Pray. Stay awake. The requests Jesus made of his disciples were comparatively simple. He didn't ask them to fight the Romans or perform miracles or make an impassioned speech to Judas and his mob. He just wanted them to be with him, to prepare their hearts for the ordeal to come, to remain present and alert. It was simple, but it wasn't easy. What is Jesus asking of you today?

# *The Cross*

# Silence

After Jesus' arrest, he didn't say anything else to his disciples, except for a brief instruction to John to care for his mother. After weeks and months filled with Jesus' words—teaching, praying, encouraging, reprimanding—suddenly there was nothing. Jesus spoke very little at all, and the words he did speak were brief, to the point, and not for his disciples' encouragement.

Jesus had spoken words of comfort and assurance to them before. He told them what was coming, and showed them his love and care. Now there was nothing. Nothing they could do. Nothing they could say. They watched Jesus suffer and die a cruel, humiliating, painful death, with nothing to comfort their breaking hearts.

Silence can be very painful. The silence of a broken relationship. The silence of death. The silence as we keep waiting to hear God's voice. Silence can feel like abandonment. Silence can feel like the end.

Don't rush on to the "But—". The disciples had to stay there for three long days. Silence hurts, but sometimes silence is what Jesus gives us.

Mark 15:22-41; Psalm 22:1-11

# Weep

The disciples are noticeably absent from the crucifixion story. It's not necessarily that they weren't there, but the focus of the story is elsewhere—on Jesus himself. What the disciples were doing during this tragic scene of death is left to our imagination, but it is not hard to imagine how they would have been feeling: confused, shocked, numb, heartbroken, overwhelmed with grief.

Jesus knew what grief was like. He cried when his friend Lazarus died—even though he himself was The Resurrection And The Life, the one who knew that “this illness does not lead to death but is for the glory of God”. He still wept. He felt the pain and brokenness and grief, and he cried.

*Weep.*

A crowd of women followed Jesus as he was led through the streets. They wailed and lamented his approaching death, but Jesus turned to them and told them not to weep for him, but to weep for themselves and their children. Jesus knew the total destruction that was coming upon Jerusalem in just a few years' time. He knew the brokenness and sinfulness that had changed a crowd waving palm branches and shouting “hosanna” into a mob demanding his crucifixion.

*Weep.*

Weep for yourselves and your children. Weep for a world that is so cruel and sinful and broken. Weep for the pain and grief that so many suffer. Weep for the hearts that are lost and alone. Weep for the broken relationships, for our own sinful, selfish hearts, for every life that refuses to turn to the Lord of Love. Jesus invites us to weep. What do you weep about today?

Luke 23:27-31; John 11:17-37

# Forgive

*Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing.*

One of the few things Jesus said while he was hanging on the cross was to request forgiveness for the very people who were responsible for his suffering. The one who showed such love and compassion for everyone he met continued to do so until his very last breath. The whole mission of the cross was a mission of forgiveness, and there on the cross he continued to forgive.

Forgiveness is hard. When we have been hurt it is so much easier to feel resentment, anger, self-pity, and hatred. It can seem nearly impossible to show the kind of love and forgiveness that Jesus shows. And yet, that is exactly what he wants us to do.

*Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

We have all sinned. In many ways, large and small, we have pursued our own agendas, refused to obey God's promptings, lacked love for our neighbour, and worshiped things other than God. We have been selfish, hurt others, and taken the glory that only belongs to God. We are completely unworthy of his forgiveness. And yet, Jesus offers it to us, and offers it to all. How can we withhold forgiveness when we ourselves have been forgiven for so much? How can we withhold forgiveness from someone when Jesus has offered his forgiveness to them?

Is there someone that you have been withholding forgiveness from? What is hindering you from freely offering them forgiveness? Will you accept the forgiveness that Jesus offers you, and in turn show forgiveness to them?

Luke 23:32-38; Ephesians 4:31-32

## *Reflection*

We all experience seasons in our life when it feels like God is silent. What is something you have learned about the silence of God? Is there anything that God wants to tell you right now?

# *The Tomb*

GO...

# Do Not be Afraid

Early in the morning on the day that would become known as Easter, a few women made their way to the tomb where Jesus was buried. To their astonishment, they found the stone rolled away from in front of the tomb, no dead body, and an angel with the news that Jesus was alive! In a moment, everything was turned upside down. His death, which had seemed so final, had come undone. Despair was turned to joy and fear.

Why were they afraid, when something so wonderful had just happened? Perhaps because it was so outside of what they had expected or even thought possible. Maybe they wondered if anyone would believe them, or if they would be laughed at as delusional or untrustworthy. Maybe they knew that their lives were about to change dramatically, and change forever.

*Do not be afraid.*

Jesus himself appeared to them, greeting them and telling them not to be afraid. Again and again throughout his ministry, Jesus told his followers to not be afraid. He was with them. God would provide for them. They could trust him.

It is a theme throughout the whole Bible, this call to not be afraid. Fear is ingrained deeply within us, and the number of things we worry about can seem limitless: health, work, finances, relationships, opportunities. Even good things can make us feel afraid. Like the women at the empty tomb, sometimes the best news possible can change our world and our life so dramatically that it can be quite terrifying. But Jesus himself tells us, “Do not be afraid.” He is with us, and we can trust him. Why should we be afraid?

Matthew 28:1-10; Isaiah 12:2

## Do Not Cling to Me

Mary Magdalene wept at the tomb. Confused. Alone. Jesus' body was gone and she didn't know who had taken it away. Suddenly there he was, standing before her. He spoke her name and she knew who he was. Falling at his feet, she clung to him, tears of joy falling down her face. He was alive. It was true.

*Do not cling to me.*

What an odd thing for Jesus to say. Wasn't it a good thing that she clung to him? Didn't it show how much she loved him? Why would he tell her to stop? The rest of what he tells her gives us a clue. He hadn't finished his work yet, and neither had she. Jesus still needed to ascend to his father, and Mary Magdalene had a job to do—to go to the disciples with a message from Jesus. This was not the time for her to simply sit and enjoy his presence. He had a task for her to do.

Sometimes we have amazing moments where we find ourselves in the presence of Jesus. We bow before him and worship him and find such joy and peace. Even though we may want to stay in those moments forever, there comes a time when Jesus tells us to go. It is time to move on, to do what he has told us to do. We can enjoy the moment, absolutely, but we shouldn't cling to it. Is there a moment that you are holding onto? Is Jesus telling you that it is time to move on?

John 20:11-18; Mark 5:18-20

# Tell My Brothers

The very first people to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus were the women who went to the tomb. The people they were sent to? Jesus' disciples. Long before Jesus said, "Go unto all the world," he told the women, "Go and tell my brothers". Jesus' scattered, fearful, disillusioned followers needed to hear the wonderful life-changing news: Jesus was alive! He was alive, and he was going to meet them in Galilee.

The message the women brought to the disciples was life-changing. Not only were they told about the wonderful victory of Jesus, but they were told how they could find him.

*Tell my brothers to go to Galilee. They will see me there.*

The work of missions is vitally important, but have we considered that our first mission field is to our own brothers and sisters in the faith? You don't have to look for long to see the number of Christians who are scattered, fearful, and disillusioned. Discouragement and brokenness are just as easy to find inside the Church as outside of it! Maybe what the Church needs to hear today is that Jesus is indeed alive—he is alive and he wants to meet with us. This is a message for every person, and those who know Jesus need to hear it too. As a family of faith, may we direct our hearts back to our risen Saviour, and let us meet with him once again.

Matthew 28:10; Ephesians 4:11-16

## *Reflection*

On Easter morning the world changed forever. Imagine that you are there at the empty tomb. What is Jesus saying to you?

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1. Edition, 2021

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