

Dear friends,

Note: Sent early because of Holy Week information included!

Holy Week got under way with our celebration of Palm Sunday. All three churches received more people than usual and thankfully for the procession up the hill from the Green in Otterton, the sun was shining! What Holy Week symbolizes is a week of confrontation between the Kingdom of God, represented by Jesus and the earthly Kingdoms of this world represented by Rome and the Jewish authorities. On Good Friday, Rome and the Scribes and Pharisees thought they had secured a great victory by getting rid of Jesus once and for all. On Easter Sunday we celebrate the event that turned that victory upside down and has sustained the Christian church ever since.

On Monday Tuesday and Wednesday, we celebrate the ancient and simple service of night prayer known as Compline at 7pm in the Lady chapel at St. Peter's. For the accompanying readings I will be using Mark's gospel account of what happened on each particular day because Mark provides the only chronological account of what happened day by day.

On Maundy Thursday we have a Eucharist at St. Peter's with the traditional foot washing – a sign of humility. "Maundy" comes from the Latin "Mandatum" or commandment after John's account "A new commandment I give unto you"

On Good Friday

12 Noon we have the "cross of Christ" – a lovely service of readings, hymns and choral pieces performed by the Benefice choir at Midday in St. Michael's Otterton.

3pm at St. Peter's we have the moving service of "Good Friday reflections" given by characters involved in the narrative plus hymns, choral pieces all in the shadow of the cross.

Easter Sunday sunrise service. This annual event where we gather on Budleigh beach by the long boat café is preside over by the Methodist church but is ecumenical drawing people from all denominations. We gather this year at 6.30am (Don't forget the clocks go forward on Saturday night!)

Bacon baps and tea and coffee is available at Wesley's café afterwards and then we begin the Easter day service arrangements which all take place at their usual times.

31st March - Easter Sunday

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's, Rev. Margaret Scrivener will preside at All saints and Rev. Jean Burrows will preside at St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively. From Easter onwards the reading from Acts must be used as either the first or second reading so will normally displace the Old Testament reading.

Acts 10: 34-43. This speech by Peter marks a step change in the spread of the gospel. Cornelius was not Jewish but a gentile Roman. The content of Peter's speech is universal in scope but has its roots in Israel. It contains the nub of all Christian beliefs about Jesus and that the apostles were unique witnesses to all that he was telling them was true.

1 Corinthians 15: 1-11. Paul pointedly places his own experience on the road to Damascus on exactly the same footing as the resurrection experiences of Peter (Cephas) and the rest of the disciples. He makes no mention of the empty tomb or the women who went to anoint the body. This extract is the build-up the next argument from verse 12 onwards that Christ's resurrection is the guarantor of our own resurrection. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all are made alive" (15: 22)

Mark 16: 1-8. Although pre-dated by some of Paul's letters, Mark is the earliest gospel to be written (circa 70AD) and verse 8 is the original ending. Verses 9-19 were added by editors later because Mark's original has no resurrection appearances. The last line of his gospel end "and they were afraid". The original is masterful in capturing the confusion and uncertainty and trepidation that the empty tomb must have engendered.

Thought for the Day

Mark's gospel goes out of its way to offer a day-by-day account of what happened in the last week of Jesus' life as follows.

Sunday: "when they were approaching Jerusalem (11:1)

Monday: "On the following day" (11: 12)

Tuesday: "In the morning" (11:20)

Wednesday: "It was two days before the Passover" (14: 1)

Thursday: "On the first day of unleavened bread" (14: 12)

Friday: "As soon as it was morning" (15: 1)

Saturday: "The Sabbath" (15: 42, 16:1)

Sunday: "Very early on the first day of the week" (16:2)

The events of Good Friday are similarly logged in three hourly intervals.

6am – "As soon as it was morning" (15:1)

9am – “It was nine O’clock in the morning” (15: 25) – Jesus Crucified.

12 Noon – “When it was noon” (15:33)

3pm – “At three o clock” (15:34) – Jesus died.

6pm – “When evening had come.”(15: 42)

In other words Mark has almost deliberately provided us with a Holy Week liturgy that goes from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday. Unfortunately, Church liturgy has started to collapse the last week into the last three days and to try and re-name Palm Sunday as “Passion Sunday” which is why I resist all attempts to read the passion narrative on Palm Sunday and retain the shape of the week as Mark originally intended.

The Prayer for Today is an early Easter prayer written by Hippolytus of Rome circa 190 – 236 AD.

Christ is risen:

The world below lies desolate

Christ is risen:

The spirits of evil are fallen.

Christ is risen:

The angels of God are rejoicing

Christ is risen:

The tombs of the dead are empty.

Christ is risen:

Christ is risen indeed from the dead,

The first of the sleepers.

Glory and power are his forever and ever.

Love and peace,

Martin