



THE ANGLICAN
PARISH OF MANUKA
ST PAUL'S MANUKA
WITH ST DAVID'S RED HILL

Holy Week 2025



Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet. Ethiopian folk art.

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Introduction

Patterns of Discipleship in Holy Week

This booklet contains the addresses given by Bishop Stephen Pickard during Holy Week in the Anglican Parish of St Paul's Manuka in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in 2025. Each address is linked to an image relevant to the readings and theme for the address. At the end of each address is a question for reflection together with the full text of the Gospel reading and a list of other readings for that service.

The theme for the addresses was Patterns of Discipleship in Holy Week. Each address highlighted a key character or persons who appeared in the Gospel reading for the day. The question was simple: What might we learn about being a disciple of Christ for today? The answers differed depending on the character chosen. Simon of Cyrene carried the cross; Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus for burial; the Greeks at the feast were seekers of God; Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus; the thief on the cross reached out in desperation; Mary Magdalene met the resurrected Christ outside the empty tomb. The actions of each of these characters provoked a question for reflection at the end of the address; a question which might be useful for individuals and groups to ponder.

To my mind it is Maundy Thursday that highlights something fundamental to discipleship. It is encapsulated in the image of Jesus washing his friend's feet. This act of humble service epitomises what it means to live with Easter Eyes. This is why the image of the foot washing appears on the front cover of this booklet. The disciple trained in the way of the cross has a threefold calling: to seek, to see and to serve. This is the way of the One who came to serve and give his life a ransom for many.

Grace and Peace for the season of Easter 2025.

Bishop Stephen Pickard

Palm Sunday

**The disciple of Jesus carries the cross beam
of the neighbour**



Today is the Sunday of palms; signs of joy and welcome on the road. A Sunday to begin the journey of Holy Week. I remember as a curate in my first parish each year we would cut down palm ferns from around the church and tie them to the end of the church pews to make a grand entrance for the donkey. Of course, you had to be careful with the donkey (I won't go into details). But the palms themselves had sharp spikes and one year the other curate (those were the days; though it was a large country parish) received a nasty spike and a poisoned hand. The palms came with a danger warning. So too this Feast day to conclude the season of Lent; it comes with a warning. Red stoles and red altar frontal. There is a red hue that hangs over the Palm Sunday welcome.

So, what do we have in the passion reading from Luke's Gospel for 2025? A mixed bag. Pilate and Herod collude in a cowardly manner and become besties. Not uncommon when reputation trumps character and justice. There's the hapless crowd swept along by the social influencers of the day and baying for blood; the political and religious authorities (the make Jerusalem great again party) set on keeping their place secure and playing the crowd; local enforcers from the military; other riff raff, onlookers and curious; and some devoted supporters keeping a low profile.

Each day in Holy Week I want to briefly highlight a figure in the set reading that gives us a glimpse of the pattern of discipleship that shines a light for our own journey of faith.

As you will see from the front cover of your service today my chosen ideal disciple is one Simon of Cyrene. 'As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him' (Luke, 23:26). That's it, a single verse, hardly worth a mention. He appears from nowhere, enters the stage of Messianic history then disappears. Simon is coming in from the country (released from work, minding his own business, grateful for a brief respite, on his way to the festival). We know little of Simon of Cyrene. In Mark's Gospel it says they compelled a passer-by. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus'. Simon was most likely a Jew of African background from what is now known as eastern Libya. He was seized/compelled; dragooned into carrying the cross. Why did Simon attract the guard's attention? Was he the victim of racial prejudice; an African in Jerusalem? Or was he someone so insignificant that no one could possibly object to his being treated in this manner. All we know is that he was there; at the wrong place at the wrong time. And that he was capable of carrying the cross of a condemned man. Yet this blow in from nowhere has stayed the course; over the centuries the Christian Church has recognised that Simon of Cyrene has unwittingly done exactly what we are all called to do: 'Whoever does not carry the Cross and follow me cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:27).

When we hear 'carry the cross' just remember it isn't the whole cross as depicted in art as we have before us today or in popular understanding. Rather it is the cross-beam; it rests across the shoulders behind the neck. The Roman way of crucifixion entailed a public humiliation. The accused had to

bear the cross beam through the streets to the stare of the crowds and passer-by. For Simon of Cyrene he takes the place of Jesus and thereby undergoes a public humiliation as well.

In our three artist's impressions of Simon of Cyrene, we have three quite different perspectives. On the front of our service sheet we have a painting by the late 19th century German artist Gebhard Fugel. In this painting Simon is off centre, slightly in the shadows bearing the cross and following Jesus. This Jesus looks directly into the eye of the beholder, he's being pulled by ropes and a threatening whip is above him as if the soldier is about to strike. But he looks strong and serene. This depiction of Simon follows Luke's Gospel wherein it states: 'They laid the cross on him and made him to carry it behind Jesus'. Simon is 'to carry' but Luke adds 'behind or after Jesus'. Luke intends this as an act of discipleship. Not out in front, not lagging behind, but just behind in the footsteps if you will. Here Simon's kind of following is archetypal. He carries the cross bar immediately behind or after. For the gospel writer carrying the cross after Jesus is precisely what being a true follower is about. And it would have resonated deeply in the years that followed when Christians were strung up on crosses and martyred.

In the second painting on the front page of the Passion Narrative, Simon bears the weight of the cross, offering relief to Jesus who wears the crown of sharp thorns. It's closest to the Gospel of Mark. Yet what is striking about this impression is that Simon is clearly of a different ethnic mix, an African labourer. He exudes a certain strength with his

right hand on the cross beam. Jesus appears shorter, weaker and the task seems beyond him.

Finally, the painting by the 19th Century Dutch painter, Romke Hostrea. It doesn't take long to notice something unusual in this depiction of Simon and Jesus. The Cyrenean is no longer walking behind but is out in front bearing the cross. Jesus is slumped low with his right hand on Simon's left shoulder and his left hand on the shoulder of a child. This is such a touching and intimate painting.

So there we have three different depictions of Simon of Cyrene: The strong African assisting the weaker Jesus but both holding the cross; the diminutive Simon not centre stage but in the shadows labouring under the weight of the cross as he duly follows Jesus; and Simon out in front leading the way bearing the cross and supporting the flagging body of Jesus at the same time. Three ways to carry the cross beam. Three portraits of the ideal disciple in the passion narrative for Palm Sunday.

How do we carry the cross beam? What has it looked like for us in our journey of faith? Even more pointedly: Who have we carried the cross beam for? Did we organise, deliberate and plan to do this? Or was it simply something we felt inwardly compelled to do? The Australian Roman Catholic theologian, Anthony Kelly, who died not so long ago aged 93, composed his Meditations on Holy Week, perhaps one of the final pieces he wrote. He remarked that 'No time is ever the right time for any of us to be pulled out of ourselves by the demand to follow Christ. His Cross is offered in the face of the suffering

other who meets our eyes, and permits no escape from the question, “What will you do now when you are the only one here to help me?”. Our plans and calculations are interrupted with the dreadful otherness of God’s will and the demands of our suffering neighbour. If the Cross came to us only as something we could plan, only as a demand we could accommodate, only as enabling us to maintain our present undisturbed self-sufficiency, it would not be the Cross at all; nor would it be love for others on the terms they need us ... It is a burden and a demand taking us beyond where we would plan to go. The call to take up the cross so often interrupts our life. Maybe we, like Simon, have finished our work and looking forward to some rest and festivity, and the call to be a cross bearer for the neighbour in need ‘confronts us with the demands of a love that will not let us rest and rejoice until we act’.

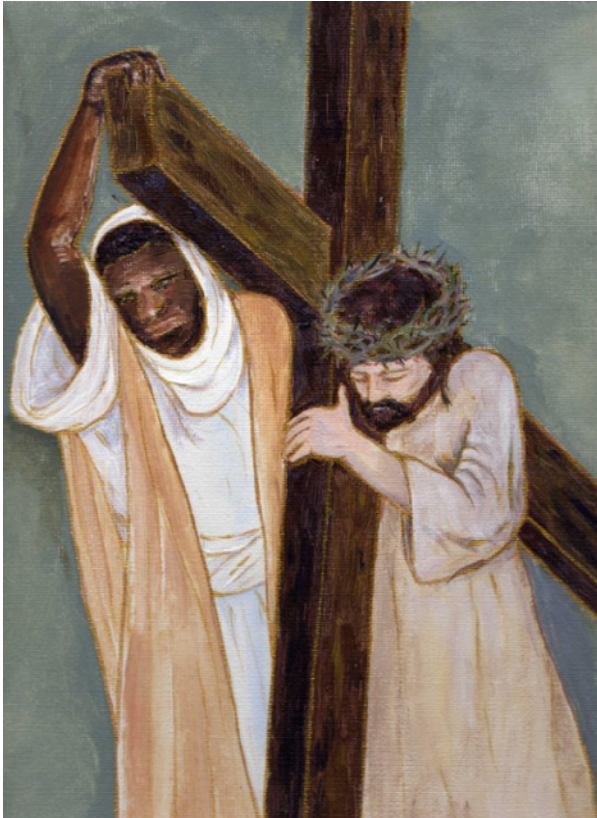
Simon of Cyrene took up the cross of Christ literally; Christ was the neighbour he did not plan to help but did so under duress. I wonder whether Simon, the unexpected cross bearer for Christ ever discovered an even deeper reality. ‘Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest; for my cross-beam is easy and my burden is light’. This is the secret that sustains all who would take up the Cross and follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Question for reflection:

Who have we carried the cross beam for?

Appendix

Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 31.9-18; Philippians 2.5-11



Luke 23.26-43

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'



Painting by Romke Hostrea cropped and used under creative common license

Monday in Holy Week

**A remarkable display of generosity:
Mary's story**



Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee
Peter Paul Rubens c. 1618-1620

Tonight, we have another portrait of a model disciple. The scene is a feast, perhaps think dinner party. John's Gospel is structured around feasts: beginning with a wedding at Cana, then a picnic in the wilderness (feeding 5,000!), then in the last week of Jesus' earthly life a feast at Bethany to celebrate the raising of Lazarus (tonight's reading) and then on Thursday a dinner at Jerusalem and then foot washing, and then post resurrection a breakfast on the beach with Jesus and the disciples.

The feast at Bethany in tonight's reading was hosted by Lazarus' family to honour Jesus who raised Lazarus from the dead. Martha serves at table. But Mary is the host, she's not an uninvited intruder as in Luke's Gospel; and she has a name Mary, unlike Marks Gospel. In the community of the first century that was influenced by the Apostle John, Mary is an important person and is specifically named.

We all enjoy going to dinners hosted by friends. On such occasions, stories are told, there is often laughter indeed hilarity; sometimes disputes and arguments arise, important conversations occur. It is no surprise really, that in the Gospels meals were often occasions for revelations unexpected, surprising, confronting. Home truths of heaven!

Now the memorable action of the dinner at Bethany is the anointing of Jesus by Mary; a quite extraordinary and brazen act especially in that culture. 'Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair'. The amount of perfume is absurdly over the top. It was an eastern ointment made from the pistachio

nut. About 12oz, pure and of high quality. Certainly not something you expend in one go; it has to last for a long time. Frankly it is excessive. Only in John's Gospel do we hear that Mary wiped Jesus' feet with her hair. Normally Jewish women never unbound their hair in public since loose hair was a sign of loose morals. Evidently Mary's devotion and sense of grief at Jesus' impending fate, overrode her sense of propriety. It would have been easy for Mary to anoint Jesus' feet. The guests undoubtedly reclined on mats on the floor with their heads and hands close to the low table and their feet extending out in the opposite direction. The table set up and attire of people in the Rubens' painting we have for tonight, obviously depicts a later time and culture.

The fragrance of the perfume filled the whole house. A sign no doubt of how lavish Mary's display of love was. In middle eastern culture of the time when the male head of a household died and left only female survivors, the women usually had great difficulty making ends meet and often became destitute. If this was the situation that Lazarus' death created for Mary and Martha, we can appreciate how grateful they must have been to Jesus for restoring their brother to them. Even if they were rich, and the cost of Mary's ointment suggests that they may have been, the restoration of a loved brother was reason enough for great gratitude and festivity.

Of course, even the least savvy person in financial affairs can see a difficulty here. Clearly the cost benefit of expending such an expensive amount of perfume on one person doesn't stack up. Judas, in the story, is just doing his thing. His job is

the money business; the small time CFO of the Jesus group. Judas is the voice of practical reason and common sense. Why, we could get 300 denarii for this and give it to the poor. In the culture of that day 300 denarii was a full years' wage for a working man. You can hear the unspoken thought 'but this woman has wasted it'. Poor Judas, like so many, he knew the cost of everything and the value of nothing. And his words rang hollow; he cared little for the poor. In fact, we are told he was a thief. His selfishness contrasts sharply with the generosity of Mary.

Mary's anointing of Jesus' body was a prophetic act, a sign of his coming death and burial. Mary gives abundantly of what she has; a sign and foretaste of the life that Jesus will give for all. Mary of Bethany correctly grasps the right praxis of discipleship.

This dinner party on the eve of the fateful Passover provides us with another portrait of the model disciple in the figure of Mary. Mary's action prefigures Jesus' a few days later at the last supper. There is the dinner, serving, the wiping, Judas, all parallel the last supper. Mary anticipated and enacted what Jesus was to command a few nights later. She did what Jesus taught his friends to do. Indeed, in this second-to-last supper Mary plays the role of Jesus, kneeling, wiping, pouring out substance of great value. Mary is the host, the one who knows what is to come, the one who anticipates Jesus' example of foot-washing and symbolically washes him to prepare him for death and burial. The story of Mary's anointing eloquently proclaims Mary's authority and

leadership in the memory of the community that gave birth to John's Gospel.

Mary becomes the type of the church of Jesus Christ. A church called to minister the fragrance of the good news upon a world that is suffering; a world where in the natural order of things and in the violent disorder of things there is decay, dying and burial. The ecclesia of God has indeed an ointment to comfort broken bodies, broken lives and broken spirits. As individuals we are in need of just this kind of perfumed fragrance in our lives; as a church we are in need of such an anointing of the Spirit; as a society we are in need of such acts of kindness and generosity. Mary's gift is a sign of the greater gift of the eternal Spirit of Love seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The portrait of Mary offered in our gospel for today offers us a portrait of what it means to live generously as a church of disciples. It leaves us with a question? Who are we called to anoint with the generosity of God's love?

Question for reflection:

Who are we called to anoint with the generosity of God's love?

Appendix

Isaiah 42.1-9; Psalm 36.5-11; Hebrews 9.11-15

John 12.1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.' When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Tuesday in Holy Week

The cost of seeing Jesus: the Greeks at the Feast



"Sir, we would see Jesus."—St. John xii. 21.

Some Greeks said to Philip, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus'. Now that's a problem. In the first place it's a problem for the religious rulers. Just before our gospel reading today, we are told of the despair of the Pharisees about Jesus who raised Lazarus from the dead and the crowds who went after him. 'The Pharisees then said to one another. "You see, you can do nothing. The whole world has gone after him". The whole world indeed! Jesus beyond Israel; Jesus beyond Judaism. Jesus for the world. Jesus amongst the Gentiles; the Greeks no less. By contrast with the stubborn resistance and bone headedness of the leaders of Israel some Greeks appear on the stage. No names; just an empty set; the Greeks prefigure the rest of the world; you and me. And their desire was simple: 'Sir we wish to see Jesus". And that's another problem for the Greeks. The fact is Jesus does not accede to their request. It's too late; that train has left the station. The Greek word for 'see' *idein*, means something like an interview, literally to meet with someone; to see someone not at a distance but up close and personal. But for Jesus the time for talk has passed.

The Greeks appear as figures of the curious world; the world of seekers; those who have a sense that there might be something here worth pursuing; those who have been of more recent times referred to as 'inquirers'; 'seekers not dwellers'; religious and spiritual tourists en route to becoming pilgrims. The Greeks at the Feast are there at the dawning of the gospel. So, what will it cost to have an interview with Jesus? What is involved in truly seeing up close and personal?

The Greeks at the feast offer us a portrait of the seeker. Jesus' message to the Greeks, indeed to all, is that only after his death and resurrection can he be truly seen. Moreover, to see with the eyes of faith will be costly. And that too is a problem for the Greeks and therefore a problem for us. Something profound, disturbing yet life giving is required of us.

Jesus explains with a parable how his death will enable the Gentiles to see him. 'Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.' The grain of corn must be planted, and afterwards rot away (break open), if it is to be fruitful. Otherwise it remains alone and cannot reproduce itself. This somewhat sunny analogy with wheat becomes a window into the nature of the transcendent source of our being and all existence; the God who comes up close and personal in Jesus; who travels into the darkest places in order to draw us into God's light and life. This is serious territory. It involves forgiveness and that is a costly business.

Unfortunately, the Church often treats these words about wheat falling to the ground and dying as simply a nice way to talk about stuff in a sanitised manner. And when we do this, we entirely fail to grasp the profound ethical claims made upon would be disciples of Jesus.

But it's all there in embryo in the gospel for tonight: 'Those who love their life will lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life'. It does not come naturally to we human beings to lose our life so that we might keep it. It goes against the grain of our natural

instincts for preservation, to see our lives and the life of the church as having to fall to the ground, break open in order to be fruitful and add value to the world. It's counter intuitive. And in truth this is what happening to the church in the West even though it is resisted. But here's the thing. To truly see with Easter eyes will require something of us. The road of faith is not smooth, more like a track with ruts and potholes to be negotiated.

As we know, people come to church for a range of reasons. Some value community, some tradition, the music, others are seeking some spiritual experience in secular times. And some come like those Greeks at the feast, to see first-hand if there's something there for them; something of spiritual substance that will be sustaining and trustworthy. And what will they find? They'll find St Paul's Anglican Church Manuka. They'll find a motley gathering of people assembled to hear the Word, joined in prayer and song, with thankful hearts at the Eucharist. And it is in this strange place, an outpost of the sacred, a sanctuary, in an increasingly secular society where the seekers for something more will have a good chance to see Jesus; if he's to be seen anywhere.

The Greeks looking for Jesus in today's Gospel were about to get far more than they bargained for. The Jesus they were about to meet would disrupt their notions of worldly security and stability; he would challenge ideological certainties and withhold an entirely satisfying closure to unfounded prejudices. The seeker's life would be turned upside down. They would never be the same again. Maybe you've known just such a time when God has come up close

and personal and you found yourself walking through the cupboard door into Narnia; a new way of seeing and being. And it usually has involved something costly.

For the seeker, the curious, for the religious tourist to become a pilgrim, for the church desiring to be repaired and renewed, for all who wish to get a glimpse of the life of the world to come; to have an interview with the Lord up close and personal there will be a costly journey ahead; something will be required of us that we had not imagined but it will be our ticket to freedom.

The Greeks at the feast; not so much a portrait but a snapshot of the seeker. The tribe of seekers is growing these days. The seeker is not far from any of us for we too carry in our hearts unfulfilled longings for something more. A question for us tonight. What would we like to see more clearly, know more truly, feel more closely in our pilgrimage with the Holy One of God?

Question for reflection:

What would we like to see more clearly, know more truly, feel more closely in our pilgrimage with the Holy One of God?

Appendix

Isaiah 49.1-7; Psalm 71.1-14; I Corinthians 1.18-31

John 12.20-36

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. 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. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.' After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Wednesday in Holy Week

The sin that clings so closely: The despair of Judas



The Thirty Pieces of Silver
János Pentelei Molnár, 1909

Judas the would-be; wannabe follower. Judas; the name itself has come to mean betrayer; What went wrong, and why? I believe there is a clue offered in the reading tonight from the letter to the Hebrews: 'Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Hebrews 12:1-2). Other translations: 'let us rid oneself of every impediment and the sin which besets us...or the much weaker and poorly attested variant 'the sin which easily distracts us'.

The image is drawn from the athlete running a race. Maximum capability requires jettisoning any weight that encumbers. So too in the race of Christian life, the disciple is enjoined to put away the sin (hamartia – those things that cause us to miss the target; the word is taken from archery) that clings so closely. This suggests danger; easily distract us (weaker sense). Yet how is the sin which clings so closely a danger? Perhaps because as someone suggests, such closely clinging sin is deeply 'distressing' and 'hostile'.

At this point I recall a conversation with a friend, and professional psychologist with a deep interest in the neuroscience of behaviour. He regularly reminds me regarding the human proclivity to stuff up; what the apostle Paul said: 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate' (Romans 7:15). ... 'For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do'. Here is the conundrum of being a human being and

moreover a reality of the mature Christian life. As my friend reminds me, 'Stephen remember the things that drag us down, that distress us, that are dangerous to us and overwhelm us internally, they stick like Velcro. The things that enliven, energise free us and bring peace and joy, they slip off like Teflon.' How true! The primitive parts of the human brain designed for dealing with unwelcome contingencies or opportunities for survival and increasing our power exert great influence on our behaviours. The sin that clings so closely is precisely that which trips us up not once but repeatedly; it distresses us. It also has institutional and corporate forms as we see in corruptive and soft corrosive behaviour which end up leading into games of deceit and self-delusion to cover over the sin that clings so closely.

Judas offers us a portrait of one in whom we see the depths to which our baser motives, like Velcro, stick. In Dante's *Inferno* Judas is condemned to the lowest circle of hell where he is doomed to be chewed for eternity in the mouths of the triple headed Satan. In the Gospels Judas' actions cause him to despair of life itself. Indeed, John's Gospel gives little credence to the Jesus Christ Superstar image of Judas as the tragic hero. In more recent years the figure of Judas has received a more sympathetic hearing. Even a certain rehabilitation. Judas has been viewed as an instrument of God's providential ordering of salvation. I am reminded of Bob Dylan's lyrics, 'You'll have to decide whether Judas Iscariot had God on his side'. Judas it is presumed wanted a Messiah who would free the people from the Roman authorities; and he was bitterly disappointed. And in that

disappointment was an easy target to be bought off with 30 pieces of silver (the image tonight depicts that fateful transaction). The 30 pieces of silver continue to be a potent symbol of those who trade their moral sense for immoral gain. It's probably not too far of a stretch to see an underlying malignant narcissism in Judas; a two-faced liar, driven by self-interest with a brittle ego.

One the other hand it is a truism that we are all more than capable of playing the part of a betrayer. We are also familiar enough with the pain of betrayal together with all the emotions that may flow; hurt, anger, rage, and revenge. As much as the gospels try to paint Judas as other, as evil ("the devil incarnate")—and the Gospel of John does this particularly well!—we cannot, must not, avoid the reality of our own shadow, our own complicity in evil, our own betrayals, our own failure to choose the good.

The portrait of Judas of which we have but a snippet tonight needs to hang in the gallery of portraits of disciples. In this sense Judas belongs within the ecology of God's providential ordering of the world. In another sense Judas appears as the 'the intractable surd element in the scheme of things', where God in Christ experiences a measure of defeat in redeeming the world. In short Judas embodies a certain tension between God's providence and the tragedy of human life. As one commentator suggests: 'Judas should be understood as caught up in the suffering and cost of salvation, not as one to be vilified and scapegoated'.

To exclude this portrait of failure is to risk remaining in the dark about our own proclivities to act in a Judas like manner. Holy Week takes us more deeply into our own struggle between shadow and light. And the story of Judas lays out before us starkly the choice between good and evil, life and death. Judas, in this moment, chooses evil and death. His attempt to return the thirty piece of silver and his suicide though, speak of his remorse and despair. Would it be too much to talk of his repentance? And hope for his redemption? I hope not, for all our sakes. It was the great 20th century theologian, Karl Barth, who said if Judas cannot be redeemed then no one can.

Judas confronts us with our own failures as disciples and reminds us that the secret of our life lies beyond us in the loving arms of a merciful God. What is the sin that clings so closely, that sticks like Velcro? A matter for personal reflection in Holy Week.

Question for reflection:

What is the sin that clings so closely, that sticks like Velcro?

Appendix

Isaiah 50. 4-9a; Psalm 70

Hebrews 12.1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

John 13.21-32

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

Maundy Thursday

Re-memembering the Body of Christ and our neighbour



Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet.
Ethiopian folk art

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread – this is my body. The Greek is clear, it is my soma i.e. myself. Jesus does not say my sarx i.e. my flesh. When he held the bread before the disciples it was more akin to ‘here is my whole self, all I am for you and for the world. The bread is the very stuff of life. That is what I am for you’.

When you eat this, or as Luther said, ‘when you munch on me’, remember all that I am for you. In the Eucharistic Feast remembering is never simply a past recollection but rather a past event becomes alive again as a present reality. We are familiar with this kind of remembering from other parts of our lives where often something in the present can trigger memories and emotions from a distant past that come alive again as if it were only yesterday that something occurred. It is as if past and present merge. The time gap is erased. It’s more than a mental thing; more than mere thinking something; it has to do with our very self; our memory is the home in which we are formed, and it is always present to us. In the same way in the Eucharistic liturgy remembering a past event releases the energy of the Spirit of God to make present in the now time the presence of the living God. God is ever new. The Last Supper is an ever present and continuous Supper of the Lord. And in this act, we are literally re-membered; our broken and fractured selves are put back together, repaired and glued by the Spirit of Christ. We experience our finite being embedded once again into the life of infinite Being, God transcendent source of all life. We enter the house of God as individual members of the Church. We leave the eucharist as re-membered faithful of

the household of faith. In truth a great consolation and energy for our pilgrimage.

And this eucharistic remembering does not just appear on the stage of human history out of nowhere; manufactured and promoted by some wily advertising agency. The lineage of this Holy Meal stretches into the deep history and memory of Israel. Our celebration recalls the Exodus reading for tonight. And it is not surprising for us to locate the deepest origins of the Holy Supper we share in the Passover traditions of Israel. We are children of God and our lineage reaches back to Abraham and the prehistory of Israel.

Wherever there is oppression; wherever there is a longing for freedom; wherever the Pharaoh's of the world laud it over their people in brutal manner or covertly through manipulation and deceit; wherever people suffer under the yoke of injustice; then in such times and such places the Passover meal is alive and rich and full of symbolic power. And we are heirs of that tradition in our Holy Meal.

So, where do we go from here? Is that it? Answer: not if you heard the Gospel tonight. John's Gospel is absolutely clear and focussed but not on the Passover meal and the institution of the Last Supper. Not a word of this in John's Gospel. At precisely the place that the other gospels have the Passover meal John's gospel speaks of 'an evening meal' before the feast of Passover. Instead of bread being taken, offered, broken and distributed; what do we have? A towel and a basin of water. This is a second remembering and its symbol is a towel. So, we have this stylised Ethiopian

painting on an animal hide. In this painting the one who washes the feet of others is the pattern for all disciples to imitate; this one is not simply a model disciple but the model for all disciples.

It was common in ancient Palestine to wash the feet of guests in one's home as an act of courtesy, especially if they had journeyed a distance. But this washing was normally done by a non-Jewish slave at the moment of entry, not at the end of a meal. On occasions a group of disciples might do it for their rabbi as a sign of respect. But here it is Jesus who intentionally acts as a slave-servant to his disciples. Peter is offended. 'You must not demean yourself by such a lowly act; that's slave's work'. He misses the point and not for the first time. 'But Peter this is what it is all about if you want to be with me'. 'Well in that case not just my feet but the whole body, or words to that effect'. He kind of gets it but in truth he proves he doesn't yet understand. So later that same night: 'Aren't you one of his disciples? I am not, I am not, I am not, and the cock crowed. Peter's Judas moment. A case of selective memory loss.

In a church still divided over the sacrament of the altar and always, it seems in contest about the word, and even in baptism not entirely unified, perhaps the only sacrament that unites us is the sacrament of the towel. The sacrament of the towel; if you like the third great sacrament. The symbol of the towel is surely the sign of the diaconal character of the church. The symbol of the towel points us beyond our selves to others; to our neighbours, i.e. those in

need. We hear the words of Jesus: 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you'.

And this sacrament of the towel is precisely the way in which others are put back together again; that they too are remembered, and not forgotten by God. Truly it is said that the Eucharistic feast is not complete until the Passover has literally passed over into the life of service symbolised in the towel.

We eat, we drink, we serve. The monastic theologian of the 4th century, in what is now modern day Turkiye, Basil of Caesarea, puts the issue simply and bluntly: 'whose feet will we wash?' A good question for us this night.

Question for reflection:

Whose feet will we wash?

Appendix

Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116 1-2, 11-18; I Corinthians 11.23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.'

When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

Good Friday

**The wisdom of God was nailed to the cross
on Good Friday**



Christ on the Cross between the Two Thieves,
Peter Paul Rubens, 1619

The great need of our times; the great challenge of our times; the great human project: how to live wisely on this planet beloved of God. More than ever in this country, we need wisdom to navigate the dangers and remarkable opportunities these turbulent times of transition offer to us. On this holy day, a crack opens up in the heavens; we glimpse in the strange new world of the Bible; a secret clue to the getting of wisdom: 'we proclaim Christ crucified ... the power and wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1: 23-24). Not a program with 7 steps to wisdom; not a magic formula or mantra, or a pill, but a life in the flesh on the road to Golgotha and a tomb of burial.

Good Friday reminds us that wisdom is often born in the crucible of suffering. There is no such thing as cheap wisdom. Look at the life of Jesus. His victory over the grave was costly. From the innocence of the carpenter's house in Nazareth to the innocent victim at Golgotha. 'They crucified him, and with two others, one on either side'. Whatever wisdom Jesus had as a child it was a kind of naïve and innocent wisdom, a knowing and sense of the presence of God. But this wisdom of innocence was sorely tested, strengthened and enlarged through the course of his life. What emerged was a habit, a disposition of turning towards God. As the writer to the Letter of Hebrews says: 'In the days of his flesh (i.e. mortal life) Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission'. As one writer states: Jesus 'is beset with weakness ... he fully shared in the doleful conditions of human life, the conditions to which his followers are

exposed'. The Letter to the Hebrews goes on: 'Jesus, though God's Son, learned obedience through the things he suffered, becoming a perfect High Priest and the source of eternal salvation for those who obey him'. I immediately think of Gethsemane where he prays, 'Father let this cup pass from me ... yet not my will but yours be done'. He became the exemplar par excellence of the way of wisdom through his trials and tribulations. Very human, very grounded, very authentic, referring everything that came his way to his heavenly Father. And this is the way of God's wisdom in the world. And the Apostle Paul takes this to the next level: Jesus Christ is both the power and wisdom of God. And God's wisdom was nailed to the cross on Good Friday.

As we follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we too can find wisdom through our own sufferings and challenges. In this respect I was struck by the words of the Orthodox philosopher and apologist David Bentley Hart: 'Wisdom is the recovery of innocence at the far end of experience; it is the ability to see again what most of us have forgotten to see'.

Through the eyes of faith, we are enabled to recover the innocence of the deepest and most enduring wisdom of our lives at the far end of experience. There are no detours around Good Friday if we would find such wisdom. As we shine a beam of light from Good Friday back through the life of Jesus in the Gospels, we see the shape of a life who helps us see with fresh eyes what is involved in finding wisdom for life; a life not floating aimlessly above the stuff of life but rather one fully immersed in the everyday struggles, temptations and joys.

Wisdom is not a pill you take; nor a band-aid solution to cover over ailments; nor a few handy hints in the latest self-help manual or You Tube video. Rather wisdom is like a healing medicine. Wisdom works in a similar way to what in medical terms it is known as granulation. In granulation theory the healing begins in the body beneath the wound. Wisdom is to be found just beneath the wounds of our society; it is embedded in the very things that perplex, confront and divide us: asylum seekers and people migration, indigenous reconciliation, ethical leadership, health and education, gay marriage and gender issues, controversies over the environment and climate change. Wisdom calls us not to flee from such things. Rather go deeper into them because that is where the healing wisdom and its sister courage will be found.

In truth wisdom is betrayed daily. Thirty pieces of silver will buy Judas' loyalty and complicity in subterfuge and violence – in truth nothing has changed. Both Judas and Peter in the Gospel today represent figures who let wisdom be trampled over out of fear, or self-interest. We may be living in the twilight of wisdom and its sibling, compassion. When the room of our lives and nation is filled with fear, wisdom exits by the back door. Fear and insecurity have so invaded the moral landscape of our lives that wisdom and the courage it requires of us is simply squeezed out.

In my life I have found the deepest and most compelling wisdom to be found at the ground beneath the cross. I mean the ground of my life; the place of tears, of fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, shame, bewilderment, distress. We have to

become familiar with the contours of our ground; the place we inhabit. Why? Because that is precisely where the cross of Christ is firmly planted. He died for us and for our salvation on that ground.

On this Good Friday can we find a word of wisdom from mere mortals? Can we find a portrait of a disciple on Good Friday? I can think of no better candidate than the thief on the cross. Christ most assuredly gave his life for both thieves at Calvary. But on this day, I have in mind what the Christian tradition has called 'the good thief'. He is a portrait of the desperate disciple. We have some images of this thief in sacred art like the one on our service sheets today by Rubens. One thief turns away, but the good thief is turned towards Jesus. I began to wonder about this thief's life; how did it unfold; what disappointments did he endure; what led him to a life of crime? What wisdom if any did this thief find at the far end of experience; at the end of his existence? Did he recover a gem of primal wisdom from an earlier innocence? On this most solemn day in the Church's year we place ourselves with the good thief on the cross in the ground next to Christ. We dare not rush to Sunday. Instead we listen to the wisdom that he utters: 'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom'. Can this be our prayer this Easter?

Question for reflection:

**'Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom'.
Can this be our prayer this Easter?**

Appendix

Isaiah 52.13-53.12; Psalm 22; I Corinthians 1.18-31

John 19:16-30.

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of

hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Easter Day

I have seen the Lord: The testimony of Mary Magdalene



icon of Christ's appearance to Mary after the Resurrection

The great gift of Easter is to see everything new; to see the world with Easter eyes. And I do mean everything new: our personal lives, the ordering of society, money, sex, power. Everything has a new light shed upon it. Easter eyes for everything. Not I hasten to add rose coloured glasses for everything! But Easter eyes for what is good, true and beautiful; Easter eyes to recognise the shadow side of life as well. Easter people walk by the light of faith, the inner eye of faith, following the Light of the World.

Today's Gospel offers a portrait of Mary Magdalene (Mariam from the village of Magdala); the first to see with Easter eyes; the first to feel the joy of heaven in her soul. Mary is the final person in the line of portraits of disciples we have explored this Holy Week: Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross behind Jesus, Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive oil; those anonymous Greeks at the Feast of Passover desiring to see Jesus, the despair of Judas, the wisdom of the thief on the cross.

On the front cover of our service booklet we have Magdalene; an icon in the Basilica of Saint Giovanni Battista of the Florentines, in Rome.

Mary is the first evangelist, first on the scene; first to bear witness to the resurrection. She has rightly been called the Apostle of the Apostles. Peter peered into an empty tomb and left. Mary hung around, in grief, peered into the tomb, not quite empty (two angels). Then this gardener chap appears. And then the moment of recognition. The gardener calls her by name: Mary! Isn't it amazing how voice recognition works!

Our eyes often fail but voice recognition remains. Mary tells the disciples. And their reaction? Excited, speechless, overjoyed? Not a word in John's Gospel. The text is silent. Nothing. The text simply says, 'the next day when the disciples were gathered together Jesus appeared to them'. It is as if Mary's witness has been silenced – a clue here to the fate of Mary of Magdala. In Luke's Gospel when Mary and other women conveyed this startling news they were dismissed; nothing but an idle tale; they did not believe them'.

Although Mary Magdalene holds a place of pre-eminence as witness to the risen Christ, the Gospel of John betrays a certain ambiguity about her. This reflects the culture of the day regarding a woman's testimony. Put simply, it doesn't count. And John's Gospel finishes with a focus on the men, especially Peter. Mary's witness seems to have been eclipsed. Very soon in the early centuries of Christianity and under significant cultural pressure men take over most aspects of the public ministry. The Mary tradition goes underground and reappears on the stage of history from time to time. But the writer of John's gospel has left for us some remnants of a primitive and original tradition of Mary; at the headwaters of something startlingly new in the world. The rising of Jesus is opened first to a woman and this cannot be taken away. At a time in our public life when the voices of women are often muted or ignored the figure of Mary Magdalene is a poignant reminder that it was the voice of a woman that signalled something entirely new and life changing for the history of the world. I imagine she had absolutely no idea what a radical

transformation would take place in human lives, society, cultures and civilizations when she met the gardener outside the tomb.

Mary is not only the first evangelist; she is also a seeker after God; a seeker after wisdom. She represents all those who hunger for the truth and the deeper meaning of life. Mary's life is a life of journey to wholeness, a journey of redemption from illness, a journey into freedom and joy. There are so many on the search for God these days. A recent report from McCrindle research using Australian census data and extensive surveys examines movements in society both towards Christian faith and away from it. The report finds what it terms an undercurrent of faith, with many exotic varieties of spirituality. This is not so surprising. But the real issue is whether that undercurrent of faith can find a home; a community where trust and authenticity are valued. In truth we are all seekers; hungry for the deepest reality of our lives. Sometimes the search seems fruitless or futile; some give up, some feel abandoned. But because we are made in God's image and bear God's image in our lives there remains a flicker of the Spirit and a primal spiritual hunger. St Augustine said that perseverance was the greatest gift; the seeker of God perseveres till they find that which is sought. Though it's actually more interesting than that isn't it. Seekers, like Mary, more often discover that they have already been found by God. God is the great seeker and never gives up on us. Mary bears testimony to that in her life.

Mary, first evangelist, seeker of God; she offers us a portrait of the true disciple of Jesus. Mary, spiritually awakened at hearing her name, realising that God had come close; Mary unable to contain her joy telling the story of Easter; Mary who knew what it felt like to be silenced and erased; Mary the faithful follower in the footsteps of the saviour no matter the cost.

Mary was the first to receive Easter eyes. But here's the good news. She was not the last! My brothers and sisters, I am wondering who have been like Christ the gardener standing at the tombs of your life; those who have turned out to be people who have called you by name; given you back your life; surprised you when you least expected it and given you a song to sing; those who have offered the very voice of Christ unknown in the midst. In such times and experiences, you too may have been touched by the unseen God made known in the face of Jesus Christ; you too may have found the eyes of faith; you too may have echoed the words of Mary: 'I have seen the Lord'. Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed.

Question for reflection:

Who have been like Christ the gardener standing at the tombs of your life?

Acts 10.34-43; I Corinthians 15.1-11**John 20.1-18**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went towards the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the

disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.





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