



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

2026
Holy Week
Sermon Series



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Contents

Palm Sunday	p. 2
Monday of Holy Week	p. 5
Tuesday of Holy Week	p. 8
Wednesday of Holy Week	p. 11
Maundy Thursday	p. 13
Good Friday, Solemn Liturgy	p. 16
Good Friday, Contemplative Eucharist	p. 19
Easter Day	p. 22

PALM SUNDAY

22 March 2026



The Entry into Jerusalem, c. 1305, Giotto di Bondone (d. 1337)

[Back to Contents](#)

A city crowded with pilgrims. A time of heightened expectations.

A mob looking for signs, for excitement; for entertainment.

Two men. Two processions... two birds to follow: the eagle of war, the dove of peace; one choice to make.

It's Jerusalem, in the early thirties of what we now call the first century of the common era.

Pilate is coming to Jerusalem, as always, for the Jewish festivals. There could be trouble in the city thronging with Jews from all around the Mediterranean. Keeping the peace is Pilate's job. More honestly described, imposing the *pax Romana* by as much force as needed, is his job.

Pilate doesn't *live* in Jerusalem. Of course not. Pilate lives in Caesarea Maritima, the port city Herod the Great built to gain favour with the emperor.

Pilate likes the sea breezes, the green of the coastal region of this province the Romans call Palestine. He dislikes the heat and dust of the noisy Judean city.

But duty calls. Pilate must be in Jerusalem at Passover, in the Antonia fortress, at the north west corner of the Jewish Temple that dominates the small city. Herod built this fortress and named it for his patron Mark Antony, to *protect* the Temple.

Mmm... well, it's a valuable watch tower. Pilate can look out over the Temple mount where any trouble is likely to begin. Rebellion, easily triggered by this spring Passover festival of so-called freedom, would likely break out in the forecourt.

And, the fortress has a pavement large enough to hold any trials, if it comes to that.

Even in its ruin today, the Temple mount is still a troublesome place, a 'contested space' as we say these days. Even now, it is here that trouble in Jerusalem is most frequent. The Temple Mount is currently closed by order of the Israeli government.

So, mounted on a horse, Pilate, the middle ranking prefect with only auxiliary troops to keep the Judeans under control, rides off in procession south to Jerusalem, to deal with who, at this stage, knows what? As he rides, he trusts the local intermediaries among the people to keep things in order; those who enjoy the wealth, the prestige and the power that collaboration with the Roman occupier brings them.

These intermediaries collect the taxes. They keep an eye on wandering rabbis, and other likely rebels. These people report to Herod Antipas who knows well how to deal with anyone who speaks out against the way things are. Herod has sent Pilate a warning about a Galilean rabbi who can't be frightened even by his cousin's beheading, so the message said.

Rome appointing the high priest and other Temple officials from among the Sadducees, ensures that the Judean elites have a great deal invested in the status quo, and everything to lose in its overthrow.

The roads are thronged. Whole villages, family clans, bands of disciples with their rabbis, clog the way. Many come early to immerse themselves fully in a ritual bath in the holy city, so that when they enter the Temple, they need only wash their feet. They are in high spirits. The closer they get to the city the louder they sing despite the steep inclines up from the valleys they've walked along.

People step back as Pilate's military procession overtakes them.

They fall silent. The only sound is the horses' clatter over the stones. It is said, God could raise up children to Abraham from stones, but even God seems to remain silent at the sound of these Romans.

Jesus, the rabbi from the Galilee is in Bethany, in a village over the ridge to the east of Jerusalem. He now has, as we say, 'a target on his back.' People are looking for him; the

curious and the hostile both. Some of the Judean leaders want to arrest Jesus along with that Lazarus who is claiming to have died and been brought back by Jesus. That's just the kind of stunt Pharisees would fake to convince people of their crazy new teaching on 'resurrection'. It's best knocked on the head as publicly as possible.

The curious want to visit Lazarus; sniff out the truth about him. Surely, it's not possible to be raised by anyone, is it? Only God has such power; who has ever seen such a thing! And yet, there are plenty of people now convinced this Jesus is the one promised. They can't all be wrong, surely?

The hostile want to test Jesus, this inconvenient man, whose goodness is a reproach and who claims that God is his father. Let us see, they are saying, if his words are true, but their jury was back in long ago, and no appeal is contemplated.

Mary and Martha think Jesus is making a mistake in going to Jerusalem. He cannot be persuaded not to go. He says, 'the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'. Wasn't Mary's anointing enough 'glory'? Surely that was just like Moses taking specially prepared oil and acting as a priest, anointing the tabernacle in the wilderness? Isn't it enough that Mary has recognised that in Jesus' flesh, God tabernacles among us.

So, Jesus sets off to walk the couple of miles to the city.

These days Jesus could catch the 236 bus and be there in twenty minutes or so, depending on any impromptu checkpoints that would delay or prevent his journey. Bethany is in the West Bank, in Palestinian territory, you understand.

Jesus has barely left the village streets when the crowds see him. They greet him as they long for him to be a nationalist king getting them ready to throw off the hateful yoke of the pagan Romans occupying lands that belong to God. The crowd grabs palm branches to wave; it's just like the time when David was king, or when Simon the Maccabee triumphed over the yoke of Gentile invaders.

'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord – the king of Israel,' the crowds yell, hoping to make it true. But never one to give into temptation, Jesus grabs a donkey and rides it, looking ridiculous given the acclaim he is receiving.

Later, some said Jesus planned it, had sent disciples ahead to arrange for a donkey. A few said they remembered the meaning of the words of the prophets Zechariah and Zephaniah, 'Look your king is coming sitting on a donkey's colt,' but they didn't want to contradict the mob's hopes for an uprising. It's probably just prophet imagination again.

The Pharisees jeer at the crowds; they say, 'It is as if the whole world is going after him' and Pharisees are learned men who understand these things.

The Temple priests, the Sadducees don't come out to greet him, but they would, wouldn't they, if he *was* the one?

Two processions; two men coming to the city, one to dominate, the other to die.

Two processions in our world: it is still a choice in our world between the eagle of war or the dove of peace.

Two processions within our poor riven hearts as we search for the light, the wisdom, and the love that only one of these two ways of living can bring us.

Monday of Holy Week

30 March 2026



Mosaic, Monreale Cathedral, Sicily

It was a common practice for pilgrims to arrive in Jerusalem well ahead of the Passover. After all, there were things to be done. Chipping in with others to buy a lamb to sacrifice, then making arrangements for somewhere to gather for the meal. There was the ritual bathing to make a person clean before entering the Temple, and there were relatives and friends to catch up with.

Those three feasts bringing pilgrims were a busy time, and the little city of Jerusalem would be crowded, noisy, and exciting.

Jesus and his disciples also arrived well in advance; six days before, but not yet in the city. They would have reached Bethany where they lodged even earlier had they not delayed to give Lazarus time to die.

The little company of Jesus and his closest friends were well aware that the Judeans – the Jews who lived in and around Jerusalem – were ready to stone him if he turned up again in their territory. This troublesome Galilean from up north had fewer friends now in the south than he had enemies.

No doubt the disciples were anxious not only to keep Jesus from going to the city, but also did not want to get caught up in trouble themselves.

With beloved friends in the village of Bethany, well outside the city, over the ridge to the east, Jesus went to the home of Mary, Martha and the soon to be temporarily dead Lazarus. Not that Bethany was a quiet hideaway, quite the opposite.

The death of their brother brought many Judeans to the house to console the sisters. Martha met Jesus as he approached. She reproached him for not coming sooner, but was she also trying to head him off, knowing the hostility towards him?

Leaving without coming to their home would not have made any difference by now. Lazarus had been dead for four days. And Jesus was a man with a price on his head. Later we will discover exactly how much.

Did the sisters hear that the chief priests and pharisees convened a council to decide what to do about Jesus? The raising of Lazarus would one sign too many. John's narrative is blunt: they took counsel *so that they might kill him*.

Now, why did Mary have a pint of pure nard to hand? Was it left over from burying Lazarus, or left out of his burial? Nard was an oil made from a species of honeysuckle that grew way off to the east in the Himalayas. Traded along the many caravan routes from India, it had been used for centuries in the ancient world before Mary picked up her flask that evening in Bethany.

With prophetic insight, Mary anoints Jesus' feet with the precious oil. The aroma filled the house, John tells us. It certainly got up the Judeans' nose, most especially Judas. He complained about the cost; said the money would have been better spent on the poor, but he did *not* say give it to me, and after I take my cut, I will see it gets to them.

The aroma filled the house. What a beautiful image! It is evocative of the building of the tabernacle Moses made according to God's directions. For six days there was the presence of God's glory in a cloud on Mount Sinai before Moses was given instructions about how to proceed. Once completed, Moses was told to anoint the tabernacle with oil. (Ex.40) The aroma filled the house. It evokes the glory of the Lord filling Solomon's Temple, the house he built for God to dwell among God's people. (I Kgs 8)

These village houses were not so big, often just a few rooms around a small internal courtyard. The beauty of the smell of Mary's anointing is in sharp contrast to her purpose. She intuits, and Jesus accepts, that he will soon be returning to his father's house – entering once and for all as the high priest whose dying and rising ends the sacrificial system of the Temple made with hands.

[Back to Contents](#)

Just as Moses acted in a priestly way to anoint the first tabernacle, so now, Mary of Bethany, first born among women priests, anoints Jesus whose flesh is now the tabernacle of God's presence.

The raising of Lazarus has shown Mary that the grave need be no final destination, but a bed of hope.

Mary's anointing was extravagant. To act as she did, Mary was indifferent to criticism in a cultural world where conformity and the maintaining of honour was a particular burden on women's lives and constraint on our behaviour.

Jesus' rebuke to her critics ought to ring through the ages in the ears of all who would limit and control women's lives and ministries: Leave her alone!

Mary alone among all the disciples and friends of Jesus at the dinner that evening recognised Jesus' true identity, and looked ahead unflinching, and with tender love, to the cost of it.

Tuesday in Holy Week

31 March 2026



Agnus Dei, c. 1635-1640, Francisco de Zurbarán

The crowds of pilgrims had been speculating about whether Jesus would come to Jerusalem for the Passover festival or not. More curious about him than intent on killing him, though that will change, they had seen him ride into the city and greeted him as they wanted him to be: a national, political liberator who would make the freedom of Passover a new reality this year. Such is their limited hope.

Clearly, they failed to notice, as John tells us, he 'sat' on the ass.

Not rode, not mounted, just sat. This is a king, but not the one the crowds imagined they were greeting. Prophets might speak of God welcoming many nations to Zion, but then, as now, a much less generous vision of God's dominion over the land of Israel holds more popular appeal.

The corrective to their expectations in Jesus' action is missed. He is a king, but not the one they think they are greeting. Even the disciples do not, at first, understand.

As ever in every religious festival the crowds comprise the faithful, the inquisitive, and those along for the excitement. There were 'some Greeks among those going up so they might worship,' John tells us (Jn 12.20). Greeks by birth, these people – why do we assume they were only men- were known as 'God -fearers.' Such Greeks admired and lived Judaism as best they could within their limitations. Such people were found in synagogues around the dispersed Jewish communities of the Mediterranean.

Their desire to see Jesus makes true what the Pharisees are so disturbed by. 'The world has gone after him', (Jn 12.19) they complained to one another.

These Greek speakers approach Philip, a disciple with a Greek name. He was from Bethsaida, a town in the Greek Decapolis. The Decapolis was the eastern region of the Roman Empire, the ten Hellenistic towns in what is now Syria, Jordan, and modern Israel. Mark, then followed by Matthew and Luke, tell us Jesus went into that region and cured a man of his demonic illness. Who knows, perhaps these Greeks had been told that a herd of pigs had drowned one day when a Galilean rabbi was in the area. Could this be that wandering teacher?

The Greeks' request signals to Jesus that *the hour*, so long spoken of, has now arrived. Jesus' parable of the seed that must die before it bears a rich harvest says that he recognises that hour is now. So significant is the arrival of these Greeks, that for the first time in this fourth gospel the heavenly voice of Jesus' father is heard. As ever, it is heard, and not heard. Some said they heard thunder. Others asserted it was the voice of an angel. Jesus interprets the voice to the crowds and speaks of his imminent dying as a gift for the whole of humanity.

He then speaks of his death as the sowing of the seed of a harvest. And the narrative of this fourth gospel shifts from being the book of signs, to the final sign, to a book of glory. Now the last great sign will be given us as to who this Jesus truly is. We will be shown how he reveals to us the one we so inadequately call 'God', the mystery at the heart of human existence and all creation.

What a rich image the seed gives us. When seeds are planted in the earth, they lose their familiar form as the new life already within, but unrealised, begins to grow. It is beyond our sight until the shoots push through the soil into the light. There the shoots can thrive until the life of the seed is multiplied and abundant, and a harvest become possible.

The earliest Christian teachers will say that Jesus, Word of God became as we are, mortal, that we might become as he is, immortal. Centuries later German Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart will say that the seed of God is in us; just as pear seeds grow into pear trees, and nut seeds grow into nut trees, so God seed grows into God. These days we might image this truth as saying the DNA of God is in every cell of our being, in all of creation, and so we participate in the life of God which is called *eternal* since it is without limit, and without end.

In a paradox which applies to the 'seed' of our mortal bodies, we grapple with the mystery of life that emerges from death. How can such a ridiculous, impossible reality be true? Yet

[Back to Contents](#)

we know that the seed of our own lives is first nurtured in the darkness of the womb and watered by the silent sea that must break open before we take our first breath of air.

In the final scene of Jesus' public ministry, he cries aloud that whoever believes in him believes in the One who sent him. Whoever places their trust in Jesus to be the fully human face of God, sees God.

From now on, Jesus will only teach his friends in the intimacy of an upper room, though not everyone will receive it, as we shall see tomorrow.

Wednesday in Holy Week

1 April 2026



Mosaic, Monreale Cathedral, Sicily

Have you read the Gospel according to Judas? There are two versions. One was written in the second century, the other in ours. Needless to say, neither is canonical, though the Jeffery Archer novel published in 2007 is informed by the scholarship of the late Australian biblical scholar, Frank Moloney.

Poor Judas: he gets, as they say, a bad rap. He is blamed as the wicked betrayer of Jesus. He is vilified as the unbelieving disciple despite all that he had experienced with Jesus. Even when compared with Peter the three times denier, he comes off worse.

But is it this simple? Is Judas the one who takes the initiative in the betrayal, or is it another?

People have long puzzled over Judas' motive. Christians have speculated about his intentions, about his purpose, and the consequences of his behaviour for him ever since. To call another a 'judas' is to imply they are beyond contempt, and even beyond God – though who are we to know?

The best clue lies in plain sight in John's narrative. That gospel writer says, 'The devil had already made up *his* mind, that Judas should betray Jesus' (Jn 13. 2).

But what is in the devil's mind that leads Judas to betray Jesus?

And what is the betrayal? Is it bringing Roman soldiers and Temple guards sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to the garden across the Kedron *wadi*, that living water that flows only in winter? This was a familiar place where Judas could be confident Jesus would be found?. Only an insider's knowledge makes this betrayal possible.

Or, is it in accepting the morsel of bread from Jesus' hand and chewing on it, just as the crowds had chewed on the bread given to them beside the sea of Galilee before another, earlier Passover (Jn 6.1ff)? Just like the crowds that day, Judas' understanding is partial as he eats the bread.

So, is it the betrayal of one who has been given the encounter that leads to faith but cannot abide it? Is Judas like the people in the synagogue in Capernaum who failed to understand Jesus when he taught them, or tried to, that he himself is the living bread come down from heaven?

The manna that appeared in the wilderness was fleeting and could not be kept for tomorrow. In contrast, Jesus is the new manna that will last for all eternity, but as those disciples said that day, 'This word is hard; who can listen to it?' (Jn 6.60).

So, the devil, the ruler of this world, decides that those opposed to Jesus' teaching, those who reject him, are right: this Jesus must be done away with. And Judas is the means by which, what the devil conceives in his own heart, is put into Judas' heart and takes root. Almost commanded, certainly prompted by Jesus no less, Judas acts.

Jesus knows who will be his betrayer, yet he washes his feet, he shares his bread with him, and if, as Jesus will later pray, none of them is lost, neither then is even the betrayer lost.

Maundy Thursday

2 April 2026



Mosaic, Monreale Cathedral, Sicily

Abraham was said to have done it himself. Abraham was said to have washed the feet of his unexpected guests *himself*. The official Genesis account differs. It says Abraham only called for water to be brought (Gen.18). Genesis says he provided a bowl of water and a towel for the strangers he was welcoming so that they could wash their own feet.

By the time of Jesus, the Genesis story had been embroidered. The Aramaic targums, those imaginative retellings of the Hebrew scriptures in the language spoken every day, said that Abraham himself knelt in gracious hospitality and washed those unexpected visitors' feet.

And what Abraham does, the children of Abraham should do. Except that they did not, of course, if they could leave it to someone else.

If you have ever been in a dry and dusty country, you will appreciate why washing feet is a necessary courtesy. For the Judeans of Jesus' time, it had become more than a just a gesture of hospitality and welcome.

It was a ritual to be performed before entering the Temple courts.

Moses and his sons provided the precedent. God instructed them to wash hands and feet before entering the tent of meeting, or approaching the altar of God. And so, it continued in the custom of the mikvah, the ritual bathing before offering a sacrifice, and the recovery of ritual purity after losing it in the many possible ways Torah and the elaborations of the Pharisees described.

It was an act both homely and intimate, and it was preparation for encountering the holiness of God. But it was not something a teacher would do for disciples, or the master of a household do for the servants.

So, for Jesus' disciples, gathering with him for a meal that will become their last supper together, foot washing was associated with entering a house, *and* with entering God's house. It was about preparing to encounter the holiness of God.

But this time it is not the beautiful Temple building that the disciples will enter. This time it will be the beauty of Jesus' own life and his unbroken intimacy with God into which the disciples will be brought.

This time, the act which is the humblest of tasks, will become the sign of the humility of God's love.

Jesus gets up from the couch where he is reclining, and lays aside the clothing that would impede him, just as the Word of God, the Logos of John's prologue, has laid aside his glory in taking on our mortal flesh.

Jesus gets up from the couch where he is reclining, and lays aside the clothing that would impede him, just as the good shepherd Jesus has earlier called himself, is able to lay down his life, and take it up again (Jn 10).

Peter objects, not to his feet being washed, but to Jesus doing it. Peter does not yet grasp that this is an invitation to enter, not just this upper room, not merely the earthly Temple, but the heavenly house of Jesus' father through Jesus himself.

Peter's words as he struggles to comprehend what Jesus is doing are a warning to us that having a part with Jesus means to be part of his self-giving love; to love one another as he loves us.

Peter's objections to Jesus' act of washing feet shows that he knows the order of this world is being subverted, and he neither understands why, nor accepts it. As Jesus dresses and returns to the table, he asks, 'Do you know what I have done to you...?'

Aware that they do not, Jesus answers himself. 'I have set you an example...you also should do as I have done to you.' So, why do we not wash one another's feet every Sunday? Why do it only this on evening of the year? What Jesus does, the friends of Jesus must also do. But what IS it that we should be doing?

The example we are given is Jesus' offering of his life in loving, ceaseless listening to God. It is his example of what it is to die to selfish desires, and to desire what God desires, that we are given. It is this we are invited to follow, even as imperfectly as we do.

The foot washing was never an end in itself. It is the beginning of the pattern we are called to live as followers of the risen Christ. Jesus says, that knowing what to do must be followed by doing. 'If you *know* these things, blessed are you if you *do* these things.'

The invitation is to *enter the mystery* of life made known to us in the risen Christ, the human face of God, the one human in whom the fullness of God is pleased to dwell.

John the evangelist makes it clear to his hearers - that is to us - that Jesus is now fully aware that his 'hour' has come. So long anticipated, so frequently referred to by the Johannine narrator, the 'hour to depart' is Jesus' purpose and his meaning in life.

Now, 'the hour' has come.

The events of their last evening together will be well remembered, but the disciples will only understand the glory of these last hours with Jesus when it is ultimately revealed to them in his dying and his rising.

We, the friends of Jesus in this generation, continue to grapple with the meaning of this night.

The example, the paradigm, of Jesus' life which is to become ours, is a life that challenges so much of what we accept as 'just the way things are.'

Look upon the world God loves. Has the refusal to act justly and walk humbly as mortal beings ever been so blatant, or so global in our lifetimes?

Thanks to modern media – or perhaps we want to say 'no thanks' – we see and we hear daily of the exploitation of people and the earth itself and abuses of power from bedrooms to boardrooms. The news brings us stories of the violence of individuals and whole nations for our evening entertainment or our morning's reading. Daily, we are shown the corrupt and shameless pursuit of selfish gain no matter the harm to others. We have repeated for us the empty words of so many 'leaders' keener to hold their place in the pecking order rather than see genuine changes for the common good. It is the way things are.

Now, more than ever in our lifetimes, the blessing and the spending of our baptised lives is needed. Yet, we are no different, if we are honest than the frailest disciples among those whose feet Jesus washed that last evening. But we are the ones Jesus speaks to this evening.

Speaking to us from that upper room, on that last evening, Jesus gives us an example, a model of love that is the essential dynamic in the household of God into which we enter with him, as we dwell in him and he in us.

Good Friday

SOLEMN LITURGY OF THE PASSION OF OUR LORD



The Crucifixion, Piero Lorenzetti (c. 1340), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

[Back to Contents](#)

Someone asked me once, "Why did Jesus die?"

I said, "Because he had been born."

I wasn't trying to be flippant. That is an answer to the question. The Word becomes flesh, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone and subject to death, just as are we all.

Of course, the question was about the *meaning* of Jesus' death.

And that meaning, beloved friends in Christ, continues to unfold as you and I still reflect upon it today. The meaning, the reason, the purpose of Jesus' death has been prayed about and pondered ever since that first Friday we call 'good'. As John's gospel tells the story of Jesus, the cross is the long anticipated 'hour' when we see the full truth of his life, and the glory of a human life fully alive to God.

Jesus' acceptance of the cross as part of his unbroken attention to God makes his suffering, which seems to us to be passive, into an active engagement with evil that allows God's redeeming love to flood the whole creation in a way that transforms all that we know of this world.

It took some doing for Jewish women and men to be convinced that the appalling, public punishment of death by crucifixion was something very different from what it appeared. The shocking cruelty of crucifixion was regularly on display along the roads of Roman Palestine. Even as a boy Jesus would have seen the consequences of revolting against Roman tyranny. Thousands of crosses were set up along the roads in the Galilee to demonstrate Rome's power over life and death. In violation of Jewish law which required prompt burial, the crucified were left on display for days after death. It was an early and crude form of highway advertising.

We are accustomed to seeing crosses in our churches, in our homes, around our necks. We barely 'see' them anymore. What is to us a uniquely Christian symbol, a commonplace object, was a sign of horror and profound suffering for people in the first century Roman Empire.

So, when Jesus told his disciples that following him meant 'taking up a cross' he wasn't talking about 'soldiering on' when life just gets a bit difficult!

It has been customary on Good Friday to read the fourth gospel, the gospel according to John, since the fourth century. John's particular perspective brings us both the horror of the cross and the triumphant glory and the victory seen in the crucified Jesus.

The coming *hour* of which Jesus has spoken throughout John's narrative finally arrives with Jesus' arrest and trial. He is brought before Pilate on that useful pavement in the Antonia Fortress overlooking the Temple. Pilate will squander his power to release or condemn for the sake of expediency. Three times Pilate will say, 'I find no case against him,' but innocence proves to be no protection from our human refusal to allow God to be God and come to us as one of us.

The coming hour has arrived and is seen most fully in Jesus' unjust execution. It is given voice in his final words, 'It has been completed.'

But what has been completed? And what has been shown us in this sign? Jesus had said earlier that when he was lifted up, he would draw everyone to him. So, to what are we drawn yet again today, gathering to retell the story and venerate the cross?

The cross is not only a sign of imperial power – just as today a bullet, a missile would signify – but *the* sign of God's reconciliation of a broken world to God's unbroken love for us.

From the inexhaustible exploration of meanings, let's consider those very last words of Jesus on the cross. His dying is the consummation of his birth, of his coming into the world so

that we, his own – we humans that is - to whom he came, might be reborn as children of God.

Here is the consummation of the beginning of John's narrative. The promise of the prologue is now seen in the new community Jesus creates. In the giving of his mother *as mother* to the disciple whom he loved, and his disciple *as son* to his mother a new relationship is created.

A new community is born from above. It is a community that transcends the bonds of family; a newly created community into which we are all drawn as the siblings of the crucified one when Jesus gives *the Spirit* to this community, gives it *down* from the cross.

This is God's love for the whole creation drawing us in, enfolding us into the completion of the life of Jesus. We are this community now, gathered here now and millions more around the world this day, just as millions will gather around next Friday when the Eastern churches keep Holy Week.

If we have any doubt that we are a community reborn through and into the love of God we have only to contemplate the image of blood and water flowing from the spear-pierced side of Jesus. Unique to John, this cannot be other than an image of birth, the same water and blood which flows during labour, which flowed when each of us was born, and it signifies the labour of Jesus upon the cross.

It is a labour in Jesus' mortal flesh, the flesh the Word took to dwell with us. This sign blurs our gender distinctions and says that our common humanity, the humanity we share with Jesus, is where the holy is brought to birth.

Just as in Genesis, God's work in creation is completed on the sixth day, so on the cross, Jesus' work is completed. A great sabbath follows his burial. Not any sabbath, but a sabbath in Passover, the Judean celebration of God's liberation from slavery in Egypt.

John wants us, his hearers, to know that in looking upon this cross we see the lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. Taking away, not simply the individual sins you and I so readily commit, but sin, the captivity of the whole cosmos to evil. This is the evil that enslaves and holds humanity, and creation itself captive to hostility to life, hostility to neighbour and stranger, hostility to God.

John would have us understand and trust that in the coming of 'the hour' when the Lamb of God is slain, when the Passover lambs are likewise giving up their lives, we see the glory of God's defeat of all that destroys life as God creates and desire our lives to be.

This is the meaning of Jesus' death as John portrays it. What appears to be defeat is in truth God's victory; what appears to be humiliation is in truth an exaltation, a revelation of a truth beyond human imagining as the good shepherd lays down his life freely, as he foreshadowed.

His words, 'It is completed' speak to us even today as we place our trust in the God of life. The salvation of creation is accomplished in this one faithful life. All has been achieved. We have yet to fully experience it, though new and eternal life enters into us now...

Jesus is buried according to custom. Though Nicodemus and Joseph from Arimathea do not yet know it, the seeds of resurrection are already sown into Jesus' linen shroud, along with the kilos of spices they have brought for their task.

But to hear that story we must wait in the emptiness of Holy Saturday.

Good Friday

CONTEMPLATIVE EUCHARIST



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

The apostle Paul was at first convinced that Jesus could not be the saviour promised by God, the anointed One, because Jesus had died a criminal's death. According to the law of Moses, Jesus' death was a cursed death and shameful; a defilement of the holy land given by God to the Israelites (Deut. 21.23).

Not before Paul had persecuted followers of Jesus, and held the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen to death for his following of Jesus' way, was Paul's belief changed, and changed radically.

Paul grappled for years with the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. He is one of the earliest interpreters after Mary of Magdala and the other women who first brought news of it to the male disciples.

Certainly, his writings are the earliest reflections on the events that the later gospel writers will give us as narratives. Learned in his Hebrew scriptures, the only scriptures then existing – there was no 'new testament' and would not be a settled collection of writings for four hundred years - Paul revised his understanding of God's purposes in so radical a way that he revised his whole world view. He argued for it forcibly, and defended it with his life.

After his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Saul the violent persecutor became Paul the itinerant evangelist, but not before he had pondered and prayed for a very long time over the death of Jesus as a sign of triumph, not shame.

We ought not to speak of his *conversion*, as if *nasty* Jewish Saul became *nice* Christian Paul. The assumption underlying that common misunderstanding assumes that our faith in the God made known in the risen Christ is a new religion. In truth our faith is the fulfillment of the earlier revealing of God to one people among many in a particular way, but which was at its prophetic best, was believed to lead to the enlightenment of all peoples.

Paul was well aware that the shock, the scandal of the cross was not how badly Jesus suffered. Crucifixion in the Roman world was for non-citizens. The cross says that in a world where non-citizens can be mistreated and even slaughtered with impunity, then God chooses to be a non-citizen.

But the cross is also the gateway to a new community, not founded in the power of power, but the vulnerable power of love, of God's love and longing for us which when we admit to it, is reciprocated in our longing for God.

The cross is the sign of an unbreakable, irrevocable covenant between God and humanity. It is the creation of a new community, beyond mere kinship, based in the relationship we each have with the crucified one who gives us to each other so that this new community has visibility in our world. We look upon the body of the crucified and we become his Body; his Spirit is given down to us from the cross, with us even now.

Paul found himself in the company of people he would never otherwise have embraced – rough fisherman Peter, with whom he argued fiercely but with whom he laboured in proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus as God's work. Phoebe, Junia and other women called by Paul his co-workers, to whom he entrusted his precious letters to be taken and read in the new communities of believers, Jew and Gentile together.

No, Paul's experience of life in Christ was no mere conversion, a mere changing of his mind.

Paul's experience was a radical transformation of his whole being.

[Back to Contents](#)

It is into this same grace at work in us that God invites us, not just each Good Friday, but each time we make the sign of the cross upon ourselves, each time we open the scriptures to read, each time we gather to break bread, each time we profess our trust and express our gratitude to the God of Jesus, risen Christ.

EASTER DAY

5 April 2026



Mosaic, Monreale Cathedral, Sicily

My beloved friends in Christ, my new beloved friends in Christ here in Manuka, I come this morning to tell these are the last days. We are living in them now. Now, before you think I have lost the theological plot, or turned out to be a crackpot preacher, let me assure you these last days began on a cold and dark morning in Jerusalem.

Mary Magdalene and the other women friends of Jesus knew exactly where he had been buried. They had watched from afar. They had seen the large stone rolled across the entrance to his tomb. They had left that place of their deepest sorrow believing that the only resurrection now would be way off in some future time.

So, when they came and found the tomb open, no body lying inside, and angels telling them he had been raised, just as he promised, they do not at first grasp the enormity of what they are being told.

As they run to announce the odd news – thank God those women did not keep silent – they meet Jesus transformed and fall at his feet. Their future hope, the sure and certain hop of resurrection, has become a present reality, though they will need time to comprehend what God has done.

There is a beautiful ambiguity in the various stories of encounters with the risen Christ in the scriptures. Sometimes his friends recognise him immediately. At other times they fail to see who is present with them until there is a moment of disclosure. And every time, there is astonishment, belief and struggling belief, and deep joy. It is no different for us. We also make this journey of faith over and over as we too comprehend the enormity of what God has done, still does, will do, in and through the risen Christ.

The earliest followers of Jesus came to see that in him the glory of God is made fully known and available to us. In the life, the dying and the rising of Jesus, all that God is and all that God intends is now disclosed. That is why we can say we live in the last days. The fullness of God's loving purpose in recreating a broke and divided humanity is now given to us.

In dying in unbroken trust in God, Jesus has undone the 'no 'to God we so readily express. In his continual obedience to the voice of God, he has undone the disobedience we so readily embrace. For this reason, the s=apostle Paul is able to call the risen Christ a second *adam*¹ whose faithfulness reconciles us to God and to one another, just as the faithlessness of the first *adam* undid the original unity of God and God's creation.

Paul will later write to the Corinthians,

since through a man, death, then through a man resurrection of the dead.
For just as in Adam all die, so also in the Anointed all will be given life.²

To say that the risen Christ brings us into the last days is to say – this is it! There is now no fuller way of seeing Good except through the lens of the risen One who took our flesh upon him, died our death and transformed our mortality. Later the early church will say, he became as we are, that we might become as he is.

In these last days, every generation knows Jesus as our contemporary. We do not rely on memory alone to know him, though we have the writings of Christians over many centuries to inform and strengthen our faith.

¹ Hebrew *ha'adam* is best translated as *the earthling* or *the earth creature* and represents humanity in the Genesis creation stories.

² 1 Corinthians 15. 21-22 *trans. David Bently Hart.*

[Back to Contents](#)

We know him in every gathering in his name; in hearing the scriptures that witness to him; in every breaking of bread and sharing of the common cup; in every welcome to the newly baptised as we have done here today; in every reconciliation to God and to one another; in every time we assure others that they too are invited to trust in the God made fully known in Jesus, risen Christ.

The resurrection assures us that the risen Christ is the seed of sown in every human heart, recognised or not. The seed accomplishes God's purposes as we become what God has always intended from the dawn of creation.

Just as the first to meet the risen Christ needed time for the new reality to unfold, to understand what they were experiencing, so too we grow into the eternity of these last days as we receive the Spirit of God poured into our hearts as the love of God draws us deeper into the mystery and the joy of Easter Day.

Christ is risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!**



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