

# **Holy Week Reflections**

**2020**



**Written by Rev Dr André Groenewald ©**

## Monday 6 April 2020: God's walk/journey with us



Hymn: "Abide with me" verse 1,3,5

### Opening prayer ©Rootsontheweb.com

Lord God,

Sometimes life is good and sometimes it's not.

Help us to know that you are with us in all of it.

Where we have done wrong today, forgive us;

when we have felt sad, comfort us;

where we have been afraid, strengthen us;

When we feel we've had enough

Give us strength to try again.

For we are on an amazing journey of faith,

and we know that you never leave us.

Bless our homes tonight

And let your peace be known.

In Jesus name, we pray

Amen

## Bible reading: Matthew 4 (NIVUK)

### Jesus is tested in the wilderness

“4 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”[b]’ <sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”[c]’ <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”[d]’ <sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.<sup>9</sup> ‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”[e]’ <sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.”

### Some practical reflection



Hold a train-ticket/bus ticket in your hand and reflect on God's journey/walk with you!

What is your most memorable moment in God's walk with you?

Why is it so memorable?

What do you find is the most challenging in God's walk with you?

## Reflection



Jesus was "tempted" to give up His mission as the Saviour to the world. We are tempted every day to give up our faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ. Life is like a big puzzle and we do only see one piece but one day we will see the whole picture as God intended it to be. We need to persevere and keep our faith,

always remembering that although nothing makes sense now in the crisis of Covid-19, ONE day we will see God face to face. We should remember this HOLY WEEK that we share in the suffering, redemption and glory of Christ because we belong to Him in life and death through our faith alone (see Romans 5:3;8:17;1 Peter 4:12). Talk openly to your closest friends about God's walk with you and all the challenges that you face. A problem shared, is a problem halved! Take a PUZZLE piece in your hand and be reminded that your life too is a PUZZLE piece which one day will fit into the BIG picture when you meet God – so keep on with your journey of faith, you are NOT alone!

**Prayer**©Rootsontheweb.com

Send us out, Lord Jesus, to travel with you joyfully,  
to follow you faithfully, and to speak of your love  
to everyone we meet.  
Amen.

**Tuesday 7 April 2020: Life can be complicated**



**Hymn: “Trust and obey”**

**Opening prayer** ©Rootsontheweb.com

God of all that has been and of all that is yet to be,  
May we give the best of all we have in your service,  
may we with joy acknowledge your kingship,  
and may we, like Jesus,  
know when the time is right to fulfil our vocation,  
whatever the risks,  
whatever the opposition,  
however erratic the support of others may be.  
Amen

### **Bible reading**

Mathew 21:1-11

**21** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

<sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna<sup>[b]</sup> to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”<sup>[c]</sup>

“Hosanna<sup>[d]</sup> in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

### **Matthew 26:14-16**

<sup>14</sup> Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver.

<sup>16</sup> From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

### **Food for thought**

Matthew quotes from the Old Testament the prophecy of Zechariah chapters 9 and 14. In Mark, the reference to Zechariah is implicit. Matthew, when he treats Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem, makes the connection explicit by quoting the passage: “Tell the daughter of Zion, look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Jesus approached the capitol Jerusalem from the East, through the village of Bethphage where Jesus send two

disciples ahead to get him a donkey and its colt. Bethphage was a small village just to the east of Jerusalem on or near the Mount of Olives, which dominated the skyline of that side of town. Jesus is riding into Jerusalem from the East like you would expect a Jewish king to do. It must have been clear to the peasant Jews that something extraordinary is happening...people are putting down their cloaks on the ground, some cut off branches which they spread on the road. And then the crowds started singing "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!". This is partly a quote from Psalm 118 verse 26. Hosanna means "God save us...". No wonder Matthew makes the statement that the whole Jerusalem was stirred and asking just one question namely WHO IS this man!

We must ask ourselves – who is Jesus? If we confess HIM as Lord, we must acknowledge that He is Lord of our lives which means that He becomes the centre of everything that we are. Everything else needs to take a second place.

But we live in a society where WE want to be first. We live in times where we want to dictate to God what we WANT and if we do not get it – we are upset and rebellious against God. We live in a world where GREED is more important than love, peace and happiness.

Judas' thought that money will make him happy and when he realised his mistake, it was too late!

## Some practical reflection



Hold a coin in your hand for a moment and have a look at it. Consider it as a symbol of your “betrayal” of Jesus – of all the times that you have missed in proclaiming HIM as **Lord** in your life!

If you have one chance, one opportunity what would you like to tell others about who Jesus is to you?

Do you find it easy or difficult to acknowledge that Jesus takes priority of your life? Why?

## After thought



We must answer the same question that the crowd had to answer a long time ago namely: Who is Jesus? As followers of Jesus we are not allowed or excused to shy away from our faith that He is Lord of our lives. We need to proclaim that

He is our Lord in all situations - always with deeds that accompany our faith. When Judas came to his senses it was too late! So what are you going to tell people when they ask you, Who is this man? What are you going to answer when someone asks you what you believe? May you show others through God's walk with you that you acknowledge HIM as Lord in everything that you say, do or think! May God help us all in this time of crisis to find the right words to say, always accompanied by love. Look at this picture, it makes one think?



**Prayer**©Rootsontheweb.com

You are the Lord our God:  
you rescue us from ourselves.  
We have no other gods but you:  
you alone do we worship.  
You are steadfast in your love for us:  
we honour you by keeping your commandments.  
Amen.

## **Wednesday 8 April 2020: Waiting and praying**

### **Hymn 360: “Jesus Christ Is Waiting”**

**Prayer** ©Rootsontheweb.com

Come, let us spend time with Jesus.  
Just as Jesus went to pray where it was familiar,  
let us pray in this room.  
He went to find a place of peace, but it  
became a place of betrayal.  
Please Lord, give us strength when we are let down by our friends.  
Lord help us to stay with you in the dark night,  
in the difficult times, in the painful places,  
to watch and wait with you.  
Help us to stay awake to what is going on around us.  
When we are in a hostile crowd, give us  
courage to stand by Jesus.  
Come, let us find time for Jesus.  
Amen

### **Mark 14:32-34**

#### **Gethsemane**

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba,[f] Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not

what I will, but what you will.” 37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. 41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners

### **Food for thought**

The Garden of Gethsemane was at the west, or the city side, of the Mount of Olives, just outside of Jerusalem. Gethsemane literally means “press of oils”. It was a gardenlike enclosure in an olive orchard near the foot of the Mount of Olives. This secluded spot was one of Jesus’ and his disciples’ favourite meeting places, which explains why it was easy for Judas to find them there.

Jesus went there to pray. To earnestly ask God if he could be spared the suffering that lay ahead of him. He calls God Abba, a word young Jewish children used to intimately address their fathers. Just like a young boy who trusts his dad with his life, Jesus knows that God can change his fate, but he also knows that he doesn’t have to.

He asked this THREE times, which according to His culture meant that He asked it as many times as He could. If God wanted to grant his wish, he would do it after the 3<sup>rd</sup> time. Nothing happened. Jesus gets up and accepts his fate – He knows that God wants to use him, He knows that as

God's Son He needs to drink from the same cup of suffering that God just did, he can't just sent it along to the next person...

Nobody else could do what He was about to do. The three disciples He took along with Him to pray could not even stay awake, let alone die to save other people...

### **Practical Reflection**



Sit in your favourite chair or go into your garden and reflect .....

**If Jesus was standing in front of you, what will you say to HIM?**

**What gives you peace?**

**How can you share God's peace with others?**



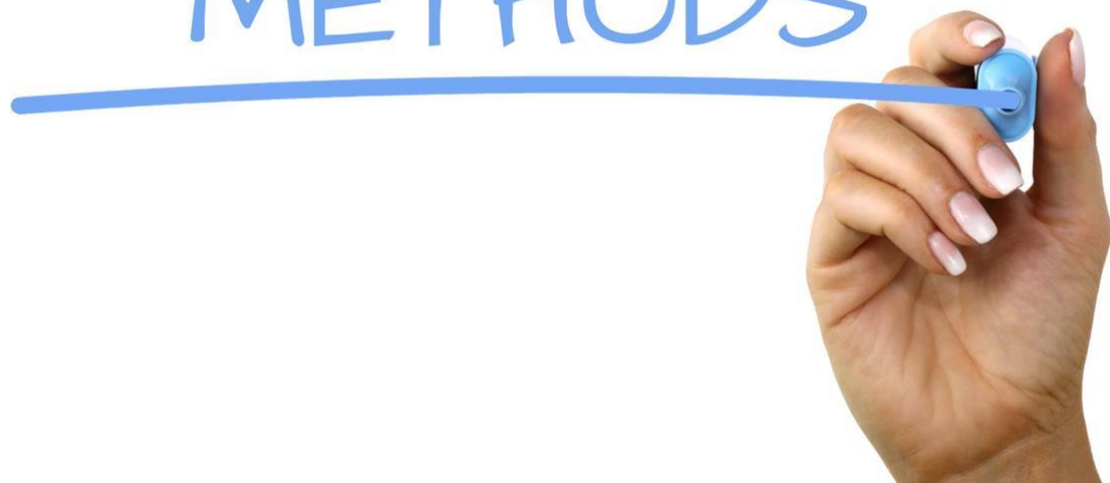
**After thought**

Covid-19 has in many respects taken away our “peace”. If we are honest, we can relate to Jesus’ words of His souls being overwhelmed with fear, sorrow and uncertainty.

Jesus knew what to do when He was feeling like this. He chose a quiet place – something that modern Psychologists fully endorse today for finding inner peace.

Let us apply what Jesus did a long time ago into our own context...

FORECASTING  
METHODS



Method 1: Finding A Quiet Place – sit in your favourite chair in your favourite space...

Method 2: Removing Distractions – switch off the television and radio ...

Method 3: Relaxing Your Body – close your eyes and think of all the places that gives you peace ....

Method 4: Speak to God – Speak to Him as if He is standing in front of you...

Method 5: Moving Beyond the Present Moment – believe that God is listening to you and imagine that His peace that surpasses all knowledge and understanding is with you!

**Prayer**©Rootsontheweb.com

We have met and journeyed together,  
let us go now on our separate paths,  
journeying onwards towards the cross.

Let us weep where Jesus weeps,  
speak out where Jesus speaks out,  
keep vigil where Jesus keeps vigil,  
and let us hope

for the rising of the Easter dawn.

Amen

**Thursday 9 April 2020: LOVE**



**Hymn 519: “Love divine, all loves excelling”**

**Opening prayer** ©Rootsontheweb.com

Holy God,  
you give us this meal of bread and wine  
in which we celebrate your great compassion;  
grant that we may work with you to fulfil our prayers,  
and to love and serve others as Christ has loved us;  
this we ask through Jesus Christ our Redeemer,  
who is alive with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen

### **Bible reading**

Mark 14:12-26

<sup>12</sup> On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” <sup>13</sup> So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. <sup>14</sup> Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ <sup>15</sup> He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” <sup>16</sup> The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. <sup>17</sup> When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. <sup>18</sup> While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who

is eating with me.” <sup>19</sup> They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?” <sup>20</sup> “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. <sup>21</sup> The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.” <sup>22</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” <sup>23</sup> Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. <sup>24</sup> “This is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. <sup>25</sup> “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” <sup>26</sup> When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

### **Food for thought**

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus enters Jerusalem twice, first on a donkey and then on the day of the preparation of the Passover meal. In Mark’s Gospel “meals” play an important part. Jesus bonded with his disciples and formed a community usually at meals. It is remarkable that before Jesus died, the disciples gathered twice as a community at meals/banquets.

In our reading Jesus sends two disciples to go into Jerusalem to find a room for them to celebrate the Passover. In Biblical times you always needed just two witnesses to convict or condemn you in a court of law. But then Jesus says they must follow a “man carrying a jar of water”. To us this sounds very complicated, but it would have been very easy for them to spot such a man because no man in that society would ever have carried a jar of water. It was solely the task of woman or slaves.

Jesus follows the practice of the usual feast but changes it – giving it new meaning. It is clear to all that this last meal is not a typical Passover meal. First, He says something very shocking at the very beginning of the meal namely that someone will betray him. They were shocked because in their society something like this never happened. Why? Well you invited only those who were your friends or who had the same honor that you had and sharing a meal represented mutual acceptance. In Mark's Gospel Jesus does not reveal who it would be. He allows the suspense to hang in the air.

The head of the household customarily gave thanks for the bread and wine before any meal, but special blessings were said over bread and wine at the Passover meal. In the last meal bread becomes a symbol for discipleship. When Jesus is speaking about his body, He is referring to his death. It is through the sharing of the bread that the disciples unite with Jesus in fellowship/discipleship and in his imminent death.

After the meal, it was customary to sing psalms from the Hillel, which consisted of Psalms 113–118. The walk to the Mount of Olives took at least fifteen minutes.

I think it would have been quite clear to Jesus' disciples that this Passover meal was different in so many ways. I am sure they must have thought what was going on and what was going to happen next?

But for us living after the crucifixion and looking back into the events we can indeed see a pattern.

Jesus practiced what He preached. He came and showed God's plan for humanity. A plan which included rather than excluded. His love was meant for everyone – the strange man who carried the water jar, and the rich man who provided a room for His last supper. He even had His enemy at his table. Although He knew that someone would betray Him, He did not expose Judas at this occasion.

And He gave them and us the hope of inheriting the eternal kingdom of God through the new covenant that was sealed by his blood.

And ever since the last supper of Jesus, believers came together and remembered what Jesus did a long time ago. But remembering is a strange thing. It can play havoc at times and totally ignore reality and often “memories” can also be very selective. The same can happen to us when we remember Jesus and what he has done. The only way we can keep our “memories” real is when we live and act in the way Jesus showed us. We need to re-enact His deeds of love – to all people.

### **Some practical reflection**

Take a piece of bread .....



Hold the bread in your hand for a moment and have a look at it. Consider it as a symbol of Jesus' love for you!

**How will you describe God's love for you?**

**How can you model/show God's love in everyday life?**



**What do you think can be a hindrance for not showing God's love?**



### **After thought**

The last supper is showing us God's love. His love will not allow us to stray away from Him and/or His presence. It is a love that we cannot comprehend or even begin to understand. It is a love that is bigger than ourselves. We need to accept this forgiving love with the openness and trust like that of a child. Jesus died because of you and me to save us all. We can go through life and be always assured of God's forgiving love. Jesus' love brought peace and harmony between God and humanity!

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, for us you were born,  
for us you healed, preached, taught  
and showed the way to heaven;  
for us you were crucified, and for us, after death,  
you rose again.  
Thank you for loving us.  
Help us to love ourselves and others like you loved us,  
Amen

## Good Friday 10 April 2020: Mourning



### Hymn 554: "Rock of ages cleft for me"

#### Opening prayer

My Lord,  
your son has suffered so much, shed so much blood.  
I was born with so many faults  
and my nature is so full of weakness,  
and yet your son Jesus has died on the cross.  
For me.  
I know your grace has the power  
to cleanse me of my many sins  
and to make me more like your Son.  
Thank you for your goodness and love for me.  
I ask you, Father, to watch over me - always.  
Amen

#### Bible reading

Luke 23:26-31, 44-49

#### The Crucifixion of Jesus

<sup>26</sup> As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. <sup>28</sup> Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed

are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ <sup>30</sup> Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!””

<sup>31</sup> For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

## **The Death of Jesus**

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” <sup>48</sup> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. <sup>49</sup> But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

## **Food for thought**

Luke gives us quite a different version of the crucifixion than the Gospel of Mark and Matthew.

Condemned criminals normally bore their own crosses (that is only the horizontal beam of the cross), but in this case someone else was asked to help. This might have been because of the severe torture Jesus suffered.

Devout Jewish pilgrims from throughout the Mediterranean came to Jerusalem during Passover, which explained why a Simon from Cyrene was in Jerusalem. Cyrene was in what is now Libya in North Africa and included a large Jewish community. “Simon” is a typical Jewish name. Roman soldiers could force anyone into service to carry things for them. But because it was during a Jewish feast and work was forbidden, Simon is not coming from “the field” (literally) as a worker.

Luke is the only Gospel who does not quote the famous saying “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*”. Instead he quotes from Psalm 31:5 “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” which was often recited at the period of the evening offering—about the time of Jesus’ death (see Funk 1998:363).

Jesus final hours was from the “sixth hour” that is shortly before midday, to the “ninth hour” that is shortly before 3 pm. In those days crucifixions rarely ended so quickly. Jesus dying moments was close to the time of the evening offering in the temple. Darkness came over the whole land and the curtain in the temple was torn in two. The “veil” or “curtain” was probably the one between the holy of holies—inhabited only by God, and where no mortal could enter except the high priest once each year—and the sanctuary where the priests ministered. It was a clear indication of the departure of God from the temple, as in Ezekiel 10–11.

In Mark’s Gospel the centurion says: “Surely this man was the Son of God!” while Luke says “Surely this was a righteous man” or in other words: He was innocent! To Luke it was very important to challenge not only “the Roman Courts of law” but also the Jewish court in Jerusalem.

All the people who witnessed Jesus' dying moments' walk away while beating their breasts as a characteristic sign of mourning. Jewish women bystanders would offer this as the only public mourning these criminals could get, because none was permitted after the disposal of their bodies. Luke do not tell us the names of the women as Mark and Matthew does. He just says: "the woman who had followed Him from Galilee". Maybe Luke wanted to be sensitive and protect their identities because in the eyes of their society they would have been regarded as "shameful".

There is a stark contrast in our passages between God and us humans. Unlike humans who struggles to forgive, God forgave the sinners. Jesus said in his final moments: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"

Unlike humans who stood and watched from a distance, God decided to come close to us through the dying of Jesus on the cross, so that we can live without the burdens of sin, death and hell.

Unlike the Palestinian Jews, who "labeled" the women who accompanied Jesus' group of disciples, Jesus included them in His journey of suffering, forgiveness and mercy.

Unlike humans God decided to love and have mercy for humans who could not save themselves.

Good Friday is only *good* because it saved you and me from the suffering and crucifixion caused by sin, death and hell. Jesus took our sins upon him and saved us.

## Some practical reflection



**Take a nail in your hand .....**

Hold the nail in your hand for a moment and have a look at it. Feel the sharp edge...

**What feelings does the picture of Jesus on the cross awaken in you?**

**Do you currently bear a “proverbial cross” of suffering? How are you coping with the threat of Covid-19?**

**Will you cope better by asking someone else to help you carry your “proverbial cross”? Who will you ask?**



### **After thought**

The Crucifixion of Jesus needs to remind us that He died for our sins. We must therefore look at our hands, because it was hands like ours that were nailed to the cross. We need to look at our feet because it was feet like ours that

stumbled their way to Calvary. We must look into the eyes of our neighbors, because it was for ones like these, that Jesus was crucified. We need to think of all people who are so thirsty because of the heavy proverbial cross of suffering that they are carrying. We need to be aware of our own sins, confess them to God and live in the forgiveness of His love and mercy. We should always express our sincere gratitude and thanksgiving to God for walking on our behalf the journey of pain, suffering and sacrifice. And while we are still on the journey from “liberation and homecoming” we need to take God’s hand and trust Him enough to know that He will not allow us to carry a proverbial cross that is too heavy.

### **Prayer**

Lord Give us, for light, the sunshine of your sorrow,  
for shelter, Give us the shadow of your cross;  
Amen

## Easter Sunday 12 April 2020: HOPE



### Hymn 419: "Thine be the glory"

#### Opening prayer ©Rootsontheweb.com

We approach you, living Lord, as you draw near to us.  
As you gave your life for us, so we give our lives to you,  
we remember tonight what happened on that joyful Easter morning  
we revel in your resurrection glory,  
and renew our promises to spread the good news and the living hope of  
your resurrection everywhere we go.

**Amen**

#### Bible readings:

##### 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

The Resurrection of Christ

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance<sup>[a]</sup>: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas,<sup>[b]</sup> and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

## **Matthew 28: 1-10**

### **Jesus Has Risen**

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

<sup>2</sup>There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it.

<sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.

<sup>4</sup>The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

<sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

### **Food for thought**

When Paul reports on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 he reports that Jesus appeared to Peter, the Twelve, more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, to James, then to all the apostles, and to him as well. He does not mention any women apart from the general depiction of “brothers and sisters”.

In Matthew 28:9 we read that the first witnesses who encountered the risen Jesus, were Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. In Luke 24:10 we read that the women were “Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James”. They also saw “two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning” (Luke 24:4). In Mark 16:1 the women were “Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome” and again “they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side”. So again it is only Matthew who reports that the first witnesses were women!

It is clear as daylight that Paul and Matthew had their own reasons and agendas which we need to explore.

Paul was a God-fearing Pharisee who met the Lord on the way to Damascus (see Acts 9). He regards himself as being disadvantaged because he became only a disciple after the resurrection of Jesus. He did not share the journey with Jesus as the other disciples did. But God “appeared” to him nevertheless and called him to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul presented a case like any other solicitor will do in a court of law, to state that the resurrection of Jesus really happened. To the Gentiles and the Jews this could have been too much to believe.

So Paul stresses 4 facts that could not be disputed namely:

- Christ died, for the sins of the world;
- He was buried;
- On the third day He rose again;
- He appeared to real people who is still living like “Cephas” or Peter and a lot of other people!

He made sure that none of his arguments could be challenged with any counter argument especially taking in consideration the tension regarding authority that already existed in the Corinthian church.

And because he was presenting a strong case, he did not want to compromise his arguments to include the women as the first witnesses of the resurrected Lord. He followed a tradition that Mark and Luke copied later. He did this because in the first century Mediterranean world women had limited roles and women were not regarded as reliable or competent witnesses (see Shin 2014:7, cf Visser 1981:71,79). The Gospel of Luke chapter 24 confirms this attitude when we read from verses 9-11 that:

“<sup>9</sup>When they came back from the tomb; they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. <sup>10</sup> It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”

The Gospel was written to Jews who converted to become Jesus followers and he challenged Judaism, the Jewish authorities and social system to include the Gentiles and those living on the margins. He is the only one who “blames” the mother of the sons of Zebedee for asking for an honourable position for her sons (see Matthew 20:20-28). Matthew changed the version of Mark 10:35-40, to portray the cultural position and status of woman namely that they were dependent on their husbands and that their status rested upon having sons and on how well they did or sons reputations. They did not have honour but theirs dependent on how well

their sons did (Matthew portrays the mother as someone who only cares for her own position). No wonder according to Matthew she was put in her rightful place.

Matthew knew the Jewish system, which included the Jewish custom that women were incompetent witnesses. Although Matthew was not a fighter for women's rights – he included them to make a statement against Judaism.

So what is the bottom-line? Paul silenced the voices of the first witnesses which happens to be women whom Jesus included in His ministry on earth. He chose to reveal Himself to them first because He thought that they were reliable and trustworthy!

We, as people of faith tend to have a lot of prejudices. We have prejudices against other Christian traditions, other people, other cultures. There is even a strong notion amongst some Christians to judge the faith of other people by means of a tick list or a "to do list".

It seems strange because we all know - Only God can see the hearts of people. Only God can judge between those who have faith and those who cling to religion. Only God knows the hearts of people who comes to church or who wishes to stay away. Our task as people who has faith is to do what Christ did namely to include rather than to exclude, to welcome rather than judge, to help rather to condemn or criticise.

So the bottom line is we cannot criticise Paul for excluding women when we do exactly the same in our society, in our fellowship, in our churches and at the places where we work.

The message of the hope of the resurrection goes beyond borders of skin, gender, abilities, language, culture, class, colour, sexual orientation and creed. It includes everyone who confesses that the Lord Jesus Christ died, was buried and was resurrected on the third day. The resurrection opened the door for all the believers to enter the eternal kingdom of God where there will be no more crying and no more suffering.

On this day there is no time or place to silence the voices of people who confesses that Jesus is risen!



**Some practical reflection**

**Take a mirror in your hand and look into it.....  
what do you see?**

**What does the resurrection of Jesus mean to you?**

**How will you use the message of the resurrection of Jesus to help others or yourself cope with Covid-19 illness, suffering, brokenness and bereavement?**



### **Reflection**

We need to ask God to help us to have faith to see that His grace, forgiveness, mercy and hope is for everyone. We need to share the living hope of the eternal kingdom of heaven with everyone we meet, even the

stranger, the one that is different, the one that is not laughing, the one that is always in the background, the bullies, the victims and those who is desperately reaching out for help! We need to go from here and pray that no culture, or prejudice will silence our voices of speaking out that our Saviour Jesus Christ is not dead but alive and reigns forever and ever! He is risen Amen, Hallelujah! Let us be reminded by 1 Corinthians 13:12 "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

### **Prayer**

There is darkness and death in our lives.  
We think dark thoughts;  
we do dark deeds;  
we walk in dark ways, to avoid discovery.  
We bring death into every area of our lives:  
the death of innocence;  
the death of love;  
the death of all that is noble and good.  
Lord, into our darkness, let your light shine;  
from our dead places, bring forth new life.

Help us to walk in the light and love of your resurrection,  
this Easter Day, and for evermore.

**Amen.**

