



Dear Friends,

As we approach Holy Week it has struck me again how, on one level, we can become so familiar with the Gospel accounts of the final days of Jesus' earthly life that we miss out on so much. This can be a very busy time in our churches and we in Restoration Ministries have never wanted to cause split loyalties or take people away from their own faith communities especially at these crucial points in the Christian Year. However, we would like to offer something this year that might, perhaps, run parallel with the paths you are already travelling within your own faith traditions whether you live in Belfast or on the other side of the world. What we are planning is that Restoration House will be open for quiet reflection and prayer during Holy Week from Monday through to Friday from 11.00 am until 3.00 pm. On each of these days at 12 noon I will lead a short reflection on some of the events surrounding the final days of Jesus, leading up to the crucifixion as recorded in Matthew's Gospel. We invite you to be part of this, either in your own homes or work places or, if you live near enough and have a flexible timetable, to actually come and be with us. So that you may journey with us wherever you are, let me share with you the scripture passages and themes that will form the basis for our time together.

Monday March 29: Matthew 21: 12-17. A Cleansed and Renewed Church. Whatever branch of the church we belong to we need to acknowledge the collegiality of the feet of clay. We are members of the one body, sisters and brothers, part of the same family of God. We all stand in need of cleansing and renewal. Perhaps revival might be a better word. It is very significant that, according to Matthew, the first act Jesus does after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem is to go to the Temple and drive out those responsible for its defilement and those who were there for self interest. By his action he reinstates it as a place of prayer. Only then is he 'liberated' to heal those who come to him. Only then do the children and young people (tomorrow's church) become caught up in the wonder of who he is and are released into praise.

Tuesday March 30: Matthew 22: 23-33. God of the Eternal Now. In this final week the religious leaders were constantly trying to trap Jesus, to get him to say something that they could use against him to secure his death. This time it's a trick question about marriage and resurrection. Jesus is never caught out. He knows what they are trying to do. He quietly and courageously tells these experts that they don't know the scriptures especially in relation to resurrection! "Long after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died, God said, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' So he is the God of the living, not of the dead." What does that mean for us in terms of the communion of saints and the great crowd of witnesses? How is our awareness? Would people encountering us know that we are an Easter people, and that we are in the business of celebrating life? Is life, with its multi faceted dimensions, the first thing people notice when they enter our churches?

Wednesday March 31: Matthew 23: 39. God of the Broken Heart. Over a broken, divided, power seeking, violent world, God still weeps. He weeps for the hardness of heart that will not soften or listen. He weeps for the forgotten ones, the despairing ones, the sick and the dying ones, the lost and lonely ones, the impoverished and hopeless ones. He weeps for the few who are rich, greedy and lusting for more and more. He weeps for the silent majority in so many places whose refusal to speak out legitimizes terror and torture. He weeps for the wounds growing daily more visible on the whole created order. He weeps because he came and comes to give people a name and a sense of identity and belonging; he comes to claim them in love, but the world resists and does not hear or does not respond to the words and actions of a God whose love does not force itself upon us but simply offers.

Thursday April 1: Matthew 26: 47-56. Betrayed.

We can be hurt the most by those with whom we have been in close relationship, those whom we have trusted. When they break faith with us the result can be deep anguish. Judas, along with the other eleven disciples, shared a deep and intimate friendship with Jesus, yet he betrayed him to his enemies with the kiss of greeting. How do we deal with the dark mystery of shattered trust and severed relationship?

Friday April 2: Matthew 27: 32-56. Outside the Camp.

In the ultimate act of incredible irony God himself is killed outside the walls of the Holy City, the place where God was worshipped! Pushed to the edges during his life and in his place of death, Jesus is no stranger to marginalisation. According to Matthew those who were in his presence at the end were also a motley community of outsiders – Simon of Cyrene, pressed into service to carry his cross, Roman soldiers (pagans), two other criminals killed with him, a Roman centurion and a band of Galilean women. So it seems that where we find him today and are found by him is in those places of marginalisation. In fact, years later the writer to the Hebrews urges the early Christians to “go to him outside the camp and bear the shame he bore.” What would that mean for us?

In these days when there is so much confusion and disillusionment with the institutional church in all its branches, so much suffering and fear for the future in the wider world, and so much pain and anguish in individual lives, it is so important to focus our eyes again on Jesus who suffers and dies for the church, for the world and for us. He is our hope who has taken upon himself all that sin and death and evil could fling at him and has burst through to resurrection and new beginnings. But before resurrection there is obedience, humility, passion, endurance – and trust. And always he is the image bearer of the loving heart of the Father who never ever gives up on any one of us. When everything seems to be crumbling around us, even those things we felt would never be shaken, we can still have an alleluia in our hearts and know that because of him, all is well. May this Easter bring you such assurance and awareness,

Ruth

HOLY WEEK PROGRAMME

Each day during Holy Week the house will be open for prayer between 11.00 am & 3.00 pm.
At 12 noon each day Ruth will lead a reflection.

MONDAY MARCH 29 : Matthew 21: 12 -17.
A Cleansed and Renewed Church

TUESDAY MARCH 30: Matthew 22: 23 – 33.
God of the Eternal Now

WEDNESDAY MARCH 31: Matthew 23: 39
God of the Broken Heart

THURSDAY APRIL 1: Matthew 26: 47- 56
Betrayed

FRIDAY APRIL 2: Matthew 27: 32-56
Outside the Camp

MONTHLY MEETING

Monday 29th March at 8.00 pm

‘Journeying With Jesus’

Facilitator: Rev Ruth Patterson

RIP

Mr William Fitch, father of Michael Fitch one of our Directors, died in February. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Michael and the whole family at this time of great loss.

We are saddened to hear of the death of yet another of our friends, Rev Roy Lester. We pray for his wife Lorna, his sister Margaret who is one of our volunteers and the family circle, comfort and hope at this difficult time.

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