

Reverend Jo Farnworth writes....

Walking the Week

My favourite season in the church's year is Holy Week and Easter. Not just the celebrations of Palm Sunday and Easter Day but the days in between too - for without them the week as a whole just doesn't make sense. Walking every day of the week in the steps of Christ means embarking on a roller coaster of emotions from celebration, to unease, to fear, to darkest despair, to celebration beyond our wildest dreams. I love the way we strip our churches bare on Maundy Thursday and leave them this way until we gather to celebrate the Easter Liturgy on Saturday evening and the church is full of flowers and light and joy.



I still remember my first Church of England Holy Week. I had left church as an 18 year old and didn't return until I was 26 and I attended my local parish church. I was utterly amazed by the worship that took place that week – the highlight being a massive bonfire outside the church on Easter Saturday as we prepared to herald the resurrection. I had a deep sense that I was entering into something deeply symbolic, echoing centuries of Christian worship.

It is still uncertain when Christians first began to make an annual memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ but it is thought to date back to the mid 2nd century. At first there was just a night-long vigil, followed by the celebration of the Eucharist at cock-crow. Over time, this developed into services through Holy Week and Easter. Through participation in the whole sequence of services, Christians shared fully in Christ's own journey, from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to the empty tomb on Easter morning.

Some significant events of that week that we still mark today include:

- The procession with palms (which was being observed in Jerusalem in the fourth century) marking Jesus arriving in Jerusalem welcomed enthusiastically by the crowds but overshadowed by the knowledge of what comes later in the week.
- Maundy Thursday with its different themes enacted out of humble Christian service expressed through Christ's washing of his disciples' feet (practiced since the 2nd century), the institution of the Eucharist, the perfection of Christ's loving obedience through the agony of Gethsemane .
- After keeping vigil (living out Jesus' words to his disciple: 'Could you not watch with me one hour?') Thursday passes into Good Friday with its sombre remembrance of Jesus' suffering and death. The church remains stripped of all decoration.
- It continues bare and empty through the following day, which is a day without a liturgy: there can be no adequate way of recalling the being dead of the Son of God, other than silence and desolation. But within the silence there grows a sense of peace and completion, and then rising excitement as the Easter Vigil draws near.
- Finally, on Easter Day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus joyfully.

As we worship through the week, we are still using some of the most ancient services of the Church and carrying out rituals from early Christianity as we live out the deepest and most fundamental Christian memories. There are plenty of opportunities throughout the week in our United Benefice to walk closely with Jesus and details can be found elsewhere in this magazine. This year, Fr Dennis

from the Community of the Resurrection will be with us which I am sure will be a blessing to us all. Do join us for as much as you can so that you can make the most of this time. If however you are unable to get to church, there is a booklet available in church with prayers and Bible Readings for you to use.

God as we walk through Holy week may we remember,
Beyond sin there is love inexhaustible,
Beyond death there is life unimaginable,
Beyond brokenness there is forgiveness incomprehensible,
Beyond betrayal there is grace poured out eternally,
May we remember and give thanks