

KEEPING CONNECTED 3

Palm Sunday 5th, Maundy Thursday 9th, Good Friday 10th April



PALM SUNDAY

LET'S CONSIDER
HOW JESUS IS THE
KING OF KINGS.
REMEMBER HE IS
BRINGING
TOGETHER GOD'S
PURPOSES, EVEN,
OR ESPECIALLY
WHEN, IT DOESN'T
LOOK LIKE IT!

READINGS:

PSALM 118

GIVE THANKS TO
THE LORD

ACTS CH25 V13-23a

FESTUS TALKS WITH
AGRIPPA



the many promises he has made will be ours to share. One of Jesus' promises is to live in our hearts if we trust in him. Imagine that, the greatest king ever, would live in our hearts!

Pray: 'Father God, just like the crowd that day, we praise your Son, the Lord Jesus. Help us to remember that he is the greatest ever king and help us to put him first in our lives. We are sorry when we forget him or hurt you with our sins. Over this Easter time prompt us to love and serve Jesus more and more. Amen'

PRAYERS

Father God, Jesus rode into Jerusalem not as a conquering king but in humility, the Servant King, ready to complete the task for which he had walked this world. Forgive us for those times when we think too highly of ourselves and remind us always that you ask from us lives dedicated to service, to you and to our neighbours, wherever and whoever that might be. Enable us to take off our cloaks of self-righteousness and lay them down at your feet. Help us to sing Hosanna from our hearts, giving you all the glory

Take a moment to pray for NHS staff, key workers, those affected by coronavirus, vulnerable children, the elderly or lonely, the sick, our government officials, our families and friends, the world and church near and far, our church family of Cregagh- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

*"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Mark ch11 v10*

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

A party fit for a king! Imagine a king is coming and prepare for his arrival. This can be as real or as pretend as you like. Dress a table or living room floor, get out the best of crockery and cutlery- toy or otherwise. Sit around and snack with pretend or real food. However you do it make sure there is a space, the best space, a seat of honour left at the party.

Think about it:

Jesus is the greatest of all kings, but do we always give him that place in our lives? What other things get in the way of putting Jesus first and how can we use this time, of having to stay in the house, to rebalance how we live for Jesus?

◆ On Palm Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The people shouted 'Hosanna to the Son of David' because they knew he was the king they had long waited for, the king that would bring together all the old promises given to David many years before. The empty space we leave at the party is a symbol of our desire to remember who Jesus is and put him first in our lives, so that



DEVOTIONAL

Behind the picture

What an interesting conversation, the chat that took place between Governor Festus and King Agrippa. They were both fascinated and puzzled by Paul, these two men of power found themselves in a situation where their authority and influence made little difference. Paul presented something greater, a power that was not from him, yet one that clearly shaped and fashioned all that he was and wished to be.

We're always told not to judge a book by its cover, and this is certainly the case when it comes to Agrippa. In some ways he was a man of supremacy, as King of Judea he was custodian of the temple and could also appoint the High Priest, but his journey to Governor Festus is very telling. Agrippa was to be the last ruler of the Herodian dynasty, his realm small in comparison to those preceding him and his throne kept in place by a delicate balance between having a good relationship with the Romans and keeping the Jews on side. Here was the king calling on the governor, behind the pomp and ceremony, to ensure his own political survival. Agrippa was, and had to be, a shrewd operator. He had developed a reasonably secure popularity with the Jews by playing to their whims, yet he was tolerated rather than loved. The people of Judea were simply not that excited by a monarch who was little more than a puppet of the Romans, never mind a man who was sleeping with his sister Bernice, no matter what his bloodline.

It's amazing what is behind the picture, what we don't see. We make up our minds based on what is placed in front of us but rarely do we fully comprehend the hidden nuances. Agrippa looks like a mighty king, Festus a commanding governor, yet when we look behind the curtain we see the folly, the pretence and the pantomime. Both these men are only as powerful as the world allowed them to be, faced with the might that Paul could call upon they shirk into insignificance. The beauty of Paul's power is it is entirely the opposite to their understanding of strength, how could Paul be so strong, after all he was nothing more than a prisoner in chains?

The reason of course is because Paul's strength was vested in Jesus, the King of Kings. This Jesus, having all the power and might of heaven humbled himself, the word became flesh and entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as the people shouted Hosanna- Save us! Jesus was bringing to a conclusion his earthly ministry, one that pointed to the power of God that was not in might and force but in sacrifice and love. Jesus who the prophet Isaiah points to as he who looked like nothing special, gives the greatest demonstration of God's power and wonder in his humility. Paul speaks of what is seen being temporary and what is unseen being eternal, in Jesus on Palm Sunday we see a glimpse of that greater realm and we are therefore reminded that Jesus is still king no matter how the world around us may look.

There is no doubt that times are difficult, and that there may well be even more challenging days ahead but we like Paul can place our trust in Christ, knowing that when all the world looks like it has lost all sense, Jesus is still Lord. In these days that greet us we do see the work of God in the small things, for truly there is nothing bigger- a phone call, some shopping, a kind word, no virus can take that from us, that sense of while we appear to be apart we are being pulled closer together, while we appear to be weakened we are strong, because our strength is in Christ who will work out his Father's purposes no matter now things look just now.

***What a wonderful Saviour is Jesus,
what a wonderful friend is He,
for He left all the glory of heaven,***

***came to earth to die on Calvary:
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!***

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Love God and Love our Neighbour'

MAUNDY THURSDAY

LET'S CONSIDER
HOW JESUS IS THE
PERFECT SACRIFICE,
HOW THE LAST
SUPPER SHOWS US
THE DEPTH OF
GOD'S LOVE

READINGS:

ISAIAH CH55

INVITATION TO THE
THIRSTY

ACTS CH25 V23b-
CH26

PAUL'S AUDIENCE
WITH AGRIPPA



PRAYERS

Lord God, You sent your Son into the world and while you had given all things into his hands, before his hour had come, he washed his disciples' feet. He was their teacher and their Lord, yet he washed their feet.

Lord God, help us learn from his example; keep before our eyes the image of your Son, who, being God, became a Servant for our sake.

All glory be to him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever.

Take a moment to pray for NHS staff, key workers, those affected by coronavirus, vulnerable children, the elderly or lonely, the sick, our government officials, our families and friends, the world and church near and far, our church family of Cregagh- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Luke ch22 v19

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

Don't leave anything undone!

Get something that can be easily cleaned- like a whiteboard covered in marker or an item with general dust on it. Make sure it really needs a good clean! Join the kids in cleaning the item and afterwards but the dirty tissues in the bin and whatever else you have used away. Wash your hands! Make sure you 'don't leave any bit undone' so that all that remains is the clean item.

Think about it:

Have you ever left anything undone? Have you ever been unable to finish something? Have you ever had anything that couldn't be cleaned? Isn't there something sad about things that are left unfinished or dirty?

◆ Jesus shared the Last Supper with his friends before he was arrested and crucified. While they ate together Jesus used bread and wine to show them that he would give everything, his body and his blood, to save those who would trust in him from their sins. Sin is everything that we think, say and do that breaks God's laws and it makes us dirty in his eyes. Maundy Thursday reminds us that Jesus took that dirt away, he gave up everything as a perfect sacrifice so that we could be washed, so that we could be as white as snow in God's sight. By saying 'sorry' for our sins, 'thank you' for the cross and 'please' come into my life and be my friend, we find the best friend who gave up everything for us and left nothing undone! **Pray:** *'Thank you Father that Jesus is the best friend we can ever have. That you that he can wash us clean from our sin so we can know you and your wonderful love. Write that on our hearts today we pray. Amen'*



DEVOTIONAL

That you might be as I am

Aside from the difficult situation that we all face, perhaps this time of the year is generally a good opportunity for us all to ask ourselves some serious and soul searching questions. An important question to ask is- 'When I am honest with myself, am I actually a Christian?' Paul through his testimony to the king and the officials that he stands before prompts Agrippa to ask 'do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian?' Paul answers by saying that he prays that not only the king but all those who hear him would come to be such.

Being a Christian is not about going through the motions of church life, it is not about being a good moral person, it is not appearances, it is about the heart. Of course following Jesus ought to lead us to committed church attendance (which at the moment we ought to miss), seeking to do good and be held in high renown, but those things follow on from a committed belief and reliance upon Jesus, who he is and what he has done. Jesus came, died for our sins and rose again, from the tomb, on the third day. Being a Christian is being a disciple, putting our eggs in one basket, believing in Jesus and trusting him with our future in this life and the next. This leads us to see transformed lives with a new purpose and meaning, no longer do we live just to survive but we live to live, as followers of the King.

A question that follows from that is- 'What is your story?' Every Christian must have one. We will not all have a Damascus Road experience like Paul but when searching our hearts we ought to be able to point to the work of God in our lives and answer the question- 'Am I following Jesus now?'. The idea was once described to me like this- imagine you fly from Belfast to Dublin as your friend takes the trip by car, you have no idea when you cross the border, but as your friend crosses over it is beyond clear, the road signs change and the speed limits alter, your journey was different but you both crossed the border. The same is true for faith. Some of us know the day and the hour, maybe even the minute of our conversion, some others, I would suggest most others, don't have that, yet they know that they trust in Jesus now. Both are equally as wonderful, both just as newsworthy.

Our stories are grafted into the story that God is telling through his Son the Lord Jesus. A story of redemption and hope, a story of joy despite the darkness that surrounds. At the Last Supper Jesus showed the depth of his commitment to his people, that he would give his body and shed his blood for them, not a half measure, but an expression of deep commitment to a needy and broken people. Paul very much identifies with Jesus and sees his life, as he sees the life of every believer, as a reflection of the Saviour's earthly existence, a life that knows rejection and difficulty but also the unfailing power and presence of the Almighty.

Throughout Paul's letters he paints the picture that what is true of Jesus is and will be true of his followers, the resurrection, life everlasting and joy that carries us through today and whatever tomorrows may bring. Jesus therefore offers us great hope, beyond anything that the world can give. Thinking about all that Jesus has given for us, the question that remains is- 'What will you give to him?' Your half-hearted efforts? What's left after everything else of greater importance is sorted? Or will you believe and trust in him, giving him your heart, that he may remake it and give it back to you with a different beat, the beat of a story, a story of a lost sheep who has heard and responded to it's master's voice.

***What can I give Him,
poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would give a lamb;***

***if I were a wise man
I would do my part;
yet what I can I give Him —
give my heart.***

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GOOD FRIDAY

**LET'S CONSIDER
HOW JESUS DIED ON
THE CROSS FOR US
AND THAT HE NOW
JOURNEYS WITH US
BY THE POWER OF
THE HOLY SPIRIT**

READINGS:

ISAIAH CH52 V13-CH53

**THE GLORY OF THE
SUFFERING
SERVANT**

ACTS CH27 V1-12

PAUL SETS SAIL



is like and how he called people to follow him- to walk in the light.

- ◆ Go on to tell of how there were some people, who didn't like Jesus and conspired to have him killed. Jesus was falsely accused and died on the cross for our sin- **turn the touch off and talk about how the light went out of the world and people were afraid.**

The good thing is we know that Jesus went on to rise from the dead, but on Good Friday it is important to remember that he died for us. **Pray:** *'Thank you Father that Jesus went to the cross for me, thank you for that he shines a light into my heart, that his love for me is real and because of what he did at Calvary the darkness will not win. Amen'*

PRAYERS

Lord God, Jesus cried out to you on the cross, "Why have you forsaken me?" You seemed so far from his cry and from his distress. Those who stood at the foot of the cross, wondered where you were,

Lord God, we, too, ask where you are, when there is trouble and suffering and death, and we cry out to you for help. Be near to us, and save us

Lord God, we wait, on Friday, for the resurrection of Sunday and sometimes our lives seem a succession of Fridays and we cannot see what is "Good." Teach us to call your name as Jesus did. Help us to trust in you and your plans like little children.

Take a moment to pray for NHS staff, key workers, those affected by coronavirus, vulnerable children, the elderly or lonely, our government officials, our families and friends, the world and church near and far- lift to God the people and places that lie heavy upon your heart

'When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John ch8 v12

CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY

The light and the darkness

Sit in a dark room, maybe even under the stars, or make a den! Huddle together in the darkness.

Think about it:

Why is light so important? How does light help us in life? What would the world be like without light?

- ◆ As you huddle together talk about how the world was dark because of sin and how Jesus was sent as a light- **light a touch in the darkness!**

- ◆ Chat about what Jesus did, how he showed people what God



DEVOTIONAL

A travelling companion

On Good Friday the disciples ran, they ran in fear and distress. Jesus Christ hung on a cross, dead. They ran to a little upstairs room of a house and bolted the doors. They were scared, they were on their own- "How could he have died?" "How could this have happened?" As they wailed to one another they thought, 'This man was meant to be our Saviour! He came to lead us and now he is dead!', 'What will become of us?', they hid, afraid of what would happen to them as

followers of Jesus, they had no hope, they were lost, their world had fallen apart around them and they simply had nowhere to turn.

The disciples thought about the last three years, how they had followed him, how they had witnessed great miracles and even performed miracles in his name, they thought of all he had taught them, but as that stone was rolled over the mouth of that tomb that held the body of Christ all of their hopes for the future were lost.

We know that the story doesn't end there. The tomb couldn't hold him and three days later Jesus Christ, God the Son, rose from the grave defeating darkness, sin and death. Through this the disciples renewed their hope and they finally came to understand the words spoken to by Jesus before he went to his death. They understood that God had become flesh, that Jesus was God in human form. He was not a ghostly figure or sort of man; he was man, bone, blood, muscle, skin. This man was beaten, flogged and hung on a cross to die the most horrific death the culture could provide. Yet through this death he pathed the way for them, and us to follow. Though his death is not the end, through him this world is only a poor shadow of what he has for us in the place he has went ahead to prepare.

They also understood that because of the suffering of body, mind and soul endured by Jesus that cross became a symbol, a place for their suffering. We like them can find that to be a place where we take our anger, our pain, our grief, there we can take those things that we don't really understand, there we can take it all to Jesus because he understands, in him we can find comfort and strength for he who died for us understands our pain, he understands us and what troubles our hearts, he understands us and loves us enough to give us peace and rest from a world that doesn't love us, a world that doesn't understand, a world that isn't fair and doesn't really care about us.

The third important thing to remember is that not only does Good Friday offer us hope and give us a place to take our suffering, it also provides us with a travelling companion. Jesus promises that he is with us by the power of the Holy Spirit that he went away so that other Counsellor could come and live within us. Jesus is our friend and guide, walking with us through the unpredictable path that is life. This gave Paul great confidence, he didn't know precisely what was ahead as he bordered the ship, even as the centurion wouldn't take his advice about the bad weather, there was even more unpredictability, yet he knew that Jesus was with him and that he would not face what was ahead alone. Good Friday can give to us that very same assurance.

Jesus our Redeemer, our Saviour, our Friend, the light of our lives!

<i>Light of the world, You step down into</i>	<i>And here I am to worship</i>
<i>darkness</i>	<i>Here I am to bow down</i>
<i>Opened my eyes let me see</i>	<i>Here I am to say that you're my God</i>
<i>Beauty that made this heart adore you hope of</i>	<i>You're altogether lovely</i>
<i>a life spent with you</i>	<i>Altogether worthy</i>
	<i>Altogether wonderful to me</i>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CREGAGH KEEPING CONNECTED

Each Friday morning I will email out an update like this one, which will include a devotional, children's activity, prayer points and readings. These can be hand delivered or posted if necessary if you hear of anyone who is not receiving a copy, or if you know of someone outside of our congregation who might benefit from receiving one please let us know.

PRAYER

The fortnightly Prayer Link will be sent out again this week, if you have any prayer requests please pass them on, if you do not receive the Prayer Link but would like to via email or printed copy please let me know.

OPEN CHURCH AND GIVING

Due to emergency legislation passed by the NI Executive church buildings are no longer allowed to be left open for 'solitary prayer' and must be closed.

Therefore we will not be able to have 'open church' on Fridays.

This also means that we can no longer provide a facility for people to drop off their envelopes, even to leave the box out could now be interpreted as encouraging folk to make 'unnecessary travel'.

Please feel free to post cheques to the church, envelope addressed to me, or speak to Gordon Dunlop about electronic payment options, other than that please keep filling your envelopes and place them on the plate when we finally return to services.

BIBLE STUDY

If you would be interested in joining our Zoom Bible study group please email me. We meet on Monday evenings at 7pm, however another time can be arranged, or another group formed if required.

EAST BELFAST CORONAVIRUS COMMUNITY SUPPORT

07783631110 This number is available should you require any advice.

CALL TO PRAYER

The Moderator of the General Assembly, Rt Rev Dr William Henry invites everyone to join in private prayer on Palm Sunday between 3-4PM taking the time to be quiet to lift to God our land and all effected by this present crisis. As part of this time of prayer we have been invited to use the Lord's Prayer as a symbol of our unity in Christ and our hope for better days ahead.

GET IN TOUCH

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can be of any help whatsoever, if you need messages or even if you would just like a chat.