

# *Death and New Life*



Above is a picture of a palm cross, and a flower made up of small individual buds and blossoms. It illustrates something of the past week, when we as Christians journeyed together through the Holy Week services and came to Easter Day. Along the way, we observed a number of events in which both suffering and joy, and death and new life, were embraced, deepening our love for God and others.

On Palm Sunday we received palm crosses, symbols of Jesus' painful death and love. At the evening service on Maundy Thursday we recalled the farewell meal Jesus shared with his disciples before Passover. We were told in John's Gospel that Jesus loved his disciples 'to the end,' but that Judas would betray him, and Peter would deny knowing him. At the end of the meal, Jesus acted as a servant.

He took a towel and some water in a basin and washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus then urged his disciples to serve others and love one another as he loved them. Loving and suffering were mixed together.

Next came Good Friday. This was the day Jesus was flogged, mocked and died

nailed to a cross, and yet we call this day, 'good'. It was a day of pain and grief for Jesus and his disciples. We read that many of the women followers of Jesus watched him dying, and saw his body placed in a tomb. It was not a 'good' Friday for them, but for one of the criminals dying alongside of Jesus it was indeed 'good'. He asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. Jesus replied, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43.)

After Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus showed respect and reverence for Jesus' body by obtaining permission from Pilate to take it and place it in a tomb. The next day was the Sabbath, so all rested.

In Matthew's Gospel, Mary Magdalene and another Mary are identified as the first followers of Jesus to go to his tomb on Easter Day. Having witnessed his death and burial, they now went to the tomb with spices to anoint his dead body. There they experienced an earthquake, and saw an angel roll back the stone from the tomb and sit on it. The tomb was revealed as empty. The women were terrified but the angel told them not to be afraid, and to go and tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. In Luke's Gospel, the women gave the message to the disciples, but were not believed. Later the women and many of Jesus' disciples actually met the risen Jesus in various places, were frightened and then filled with joy. The risen Jesus was not always recognised straight away, his body was changed but bore the marks made by the nails and spear, proving his identity.

Turning to our own lives, we also, but not usually so dramatically, experience death and life, fear and love, suffering and rejoicing. God created us as free human beings and not robots who are forced to act in certain ways. Even as Christians believing God is with us, we are not assured of a calm and peaceful life. We follow Jesus and like him we suffer pain, and become anxious and stressed at times. But all is not lost. Not only at death are we changed and transformed by God, but often in our daily lives when we work through difficulties and discover we are experiencing, in some form, new life in God. Strangely, suffering can and does enable our spirituality and love for God and others to deepen.

There are often times when I find that everything seems to be going wrong. Recently my phone refused to receive messages, then it was stolen. I had to buy a new one. I am still struggling to use it, but with the help of another person I did manage to put the photo I needed on to page 1 of this leaflet! About the same time the lawn mower broke down allowing grass to grow unchecked until a neighbour did some mowing for me. I was also helped when I, in turn, assisted someone else in need. I believe that God is with us when we both receive and give help.

At times, God's love which surrounds us can be a resting place for us, diminishing our anxieties and fears, and drawing on the power of the Holy Spirit in us. Further, I find that peace, light from darkness, and life from death, can come when we stop to look and appreciate God's presence in God's beautiful world, with animals and nature, around us.

Even when we are upset because we have hurt others, or we ourselves have been hurt by others, we can remember that the risen Jesus did not punish Peter who denied him, but enabled him to accept forgiveness when he asked him, three times, "Do you love me?" On being told that Peter did indeed love him, Jesus then replied, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:15f). Peter was to give himself to help others.

Rowan Williams writes in '*God With Us*', pp. 102-103, "The resurrection is not about the wiping out of our history, pain or failure, it is about how pain and failure themselves—humanity marked by history— may yet be transfigured and made beautiful."

Death is transformed by God into new life, not taken away.

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April 2026*