

A Month of Sundays

April 2025



Preston Ribble Circuit

Sunday 6th April 2025

Call to worship

Come into this space of welcome
where we matter most to the God of love.
Come into this space of rest
where we can lay our burdens down.
Come into this space of peace
where our suffering can be eased.
Come and meet the God of love, rest and peace.

Bible reading

John 12: 1-8 Mary Anoints Jesus

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'

Hymn: Singing the Faith 545

- 1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;

be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century *translated by* Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880–1931)
versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860–1935) (*alt.*)
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Reflection

In some traditions, today is known as Passion Sunday. The word 'Passion' comes from the Latin 'passio' meaning suffering, and next Sunday, Palm Sunday, some churches will read what is called the 'Passion narrative', which is a summary of all the events in the last week of Jesus' life. So today is a time when we think about Jesus' suffering for us, and how God's love for us is so 'passionate' that Jesus was prepared to die for us.

This time we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, which also used to be called the 'Pascha', from the Jewish word 'Pesach' or Passover festival. We'll hear more about that story in the week leading up to Easter Sunday, when we remember Jesus and his disciples sharing their last meal, as they celebrated the Passover together.

These are big, emotional themes we're thinking about in these days up to Easter Sunday – love, passion, sacrifice, suffering, life and death. They are huge themes about what really matters most to us and our world. In today's Gospel, Mary recognises this; in one extravagant gesture, she emphasises the enormous importance of Jesus and what he is about to do.

During baptisms, some churches anoint people with the sign of the cross on their forehead with the accompanying words: 'Christ claims you for his own', as a sign that they are joining God's family. What special purpose might God be inviting you to fulfil? These last days of Lent are a prompt to review our 'passions'. What are our goals and priorities?

Prayers of intercession

We think first of all the good things around us and the blessings we have received this week using the following refrain:

Leader: Lord, we long to live thankfully

All: **Help our thanks to pour out.**

Lord, we thank you for all the goodness we have seen around us this week: for kindness of friends and strangers; for signs of spring bursting forth in our

gardens, parks, fields and hedgerows; for sunshine and warmth.

We think, in silence, of a particularly special moment this week and thank you.

Lord, we long to live thankfully

Help our thanks to pour out.

We turn our thoughts and prayers now to the needs of the world around us, both far away and close at hand. Using the following refrain:

Lord, we long to live lovingly.

Help our love to pour out.

Finally, Lord, we commit the week ahead to you. We ask that you travel with us in our work, our play, our joys and sorrows. Help us to find space to breathe your fragrance and offer ourselves and all we have to you for you to make whole, strong and beautiful.

Lord, we long to live with you with thankfulness and love.

We ask you to pour out your blessings

So that we can pour them out to others.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

We ask for your grace
To help us live out our faith,
To follow in the footsteps of Jesus
And to be His witness in the world.

Amen

Sunday 13th April 2025 – Palm Sunday

Call to worship

Come and give thanks to the Lord who is good:

his love lasts for ever!

Give praise to the Lord who welcomes us:

his love lasts for ever!

This is the day the Lord has made:

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord:

his love lasts for ever!

Bible reading: Luke 19:28-40 Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it."' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

‘Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!’

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’^o

Reflection

The symbolism of the colt, or young donkey, carries a lot of weight in today’s Gospel reading. There was a system in Roman times called *angaria*, thought to have been passed down from sixth-century Persia, of a compulsory duty on communities to provide a courier and transport service – sort of Uber and Evri combined! So, it wouldn’t have been unusual for an imperial officer to demand the use of a colt to transport something; perhaps the disciples saying it was for royalty allayed any concerns. This seems to emphasise Jesus’ kingly status.

But why the detail that this colt had never been ridden? It’s not the obvious choice for an important job! Perhaps it harks back to 1 Samuel 6:7, when the Ark of the Covenant is carried by two cows who have never been yoked before; or the requirement for ‘pure’ animals to be used for Temple sacrifices.

Still, mules or donkeys had had important jobs before. King David was given a donkey to ride on when he was on the Mount of Olives, defending his kingdom from Absalom (2 Samuel 16:2). This emphasis on Jesus as king is picked up in the chant of the crowd, changing the word of Psalm 118:26 to ‘Blessed is the king who come in the

name of the Lord.’ Even the spreading of cloaks is associated with kingship, such as the anointing of Jehu as king of Israel (2 Kings 9:13). Perhaps the modern equivalent is rolling out the red carpet?

These unexpected details seem to be telling us that Jesus is entering Jerusalem as a king, and we might expect the same level of ritual and richness as King Charles’ coronation in 2023. Do you have a special memory from then? The richness of the crown, orb, sceptre and ceremonial clothes? The coach and horses, and guard of honour as well as the crowds en route? But, Jesus has a very different kind of kingship, involving suffering and even death.

God seems to have a way of calling people who are not the obvious choice – think of the disciples, who were a motley bunch of fishermen, a tax collector, a traitor. I wonder what God might be calling us to do, in the service of this humble king?

Hymn Stf 264 Make way, make way

- 1 Make way, make way, for Christ the King
in splendour arrives;
fling wide the gates and welcome him
into your lives.

*Make way (Make way), make way (make way),
for the King of kings (for the King of kings);
make way (make way), make way (make way),
and let his Kingdom in.*

- 2 He comes the broken hearts to heal,
the prisoners to free;
the deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance,
the blind shall see.
- 3 And those who mourn with heavy hearts,
who weep and sigh,
with laughter, joy and royal crown
he'll beautify.
- 4 We call you now to worship him
as Lord of all,
to have no gods before him,
their thrones must fall!

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Say the Lord's Prayer

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Father God, you sent your Son to earth to establish your eternal kingdom.

He came without blemish, the perfect sacrifice.

We give you our heartfelt thanks for the gift of your Son.

Lord, you were not the people's obvious choice of a messiah.

You didn't come with an army behind you brandishing weapons.

No, you came with a mantle of love, riding a colt, a symbol of your peace.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for putting aside your divine privileges

to travel to the cross.

We give you our heartfelt thanks for your ultimate sacrifice.

Holy Spirit, you strengthen us as we build our lives with Jesus as the cornerstone and seek to emulate his example of humble obedience. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, no words can adequately express our heartfelt thanks.

We praise your glorious splendour and celebrate your faithful, eternal love. **Amen.**

We pray for all those in our world who are downtrodden, forgotten, unloved and homeless. We pray for refugees and all those fleeing pain, war or persecution, particularly the people of Ukraine. May they all know you especially close to them this week.

Blessed is the King who comes in God's name,
May he bring blessings to his people.

A sending out prayer

Hold up your crosses as you pray together:

Let us journey on, people of the cross,
following a king riding on a donkey.
Servant of the world, let us serve with love
Jesus, our Saviour,
as we follow you on the stony way
to the cross. **Amen.**

Good Friday 18th April 2025

A Good Friday meditation

Jesus carries his cross based on Luke 23.26-27



A meditation

Look at the picture.

Imagine that you are one of the people in the crowd.

You watch as Jesus carries his cross.

Then Simon is forced to carry it for him.

Jesus is hurt from the whippings he's had.

The cross is heavy.

This is your Lord they are taking away.
This is the one you thought would save the world
He is going to die.

Think:

- Who might feel hopeless today?

Prayer activity

Light a tealight and place it on a wooden cross. Think about Jesus knowing he was going to die.

Sunday 20th April 2025 – Easter Sunday

A call to worship

Come and join the celebration –
Jesus Christ is risen today!
Come and hear the amazing news –
Jesus' death is not the end!
Come and share the joy and freedom –
our sins are forgiven in Jesus' name!
Alleluia!

Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25 The Glorious New Creation

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,

and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a
youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered
accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

Luke 24:1-12

The Resurrection of Jesus

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Reflection

One of the reasons Easter is associated with lambs and chicks is because we celebrate it at the time of year when lambs are born – and what better symbol is there of new life? It helps us to understand that the good news of Easter is not just that Jesus came back from the dead, but that God invites us all to share in that new life. The association with lambs and chicks can make Easter feel

safe, cute and fluffy, but really these are dramatic and disruptive events: the disciples are in disarray – their leader has been killed and there hasn't even been time to bury him properly. Then it looks like his grave has been robbed – his body has gone – what can it all mean? Suddenly, angels appear and there is Jesus himself, looking like a gardener. Can it be that he is alive and going to be with God the Father? It can be hard to comprehend and make sense of it all.

Shepherds will tell you that lambing time is one of hard work and emotion; sometimes lambs are lost, most often in the first 48 hours of life. The Easter lamb is an image of vulnerability and suffering, as well as the joy and promise of new life. This speaks into our daily struggles with hope, and an insistence that things can change. War, injustice, poverty, disaster, climate change – we face many challenges in our world that don't have simple, straightforward solutions. We need voices of hope and transformation, which disturb and disrupt the status quo and bring us closer to the new life of love, peace and justice that God longs for us all to experience.

So, the Easter story is one of disturbing and disruptive energy. We have moved from the suffering of Good Friday, through the silence and emptiness of Saturday to new life bursting in and disrupting everything, even death itself. As shepherds do, Mary kept watch, and so became the first to notice the amazing events. And the news she brought disrupts everything. As Peter explains to Cornelius, Jesus overcame death, fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah and brings forgiveness to all who follow him.

Where does this story lead us next? Where do we find God, this disruptive spirit, in the world today? Mary's example shows us the importance of watching and waiting, so we recognise the signs. And we can look to Jesus' teachings and ministry for some clues. Do you see what I see? Today is a day to celebrate new life and then to go and look for signs of it and that disruptive spirit of God in our daily lives.

Hymn Stf 297 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing

- 1 Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.
The cross stands empty to the sky.
Let streets and homes with praises ring.
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.
- 2 Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
but saving, healing, here and now,
and touching every place and time.
- 3 In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn or wealth divide,
Christ suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, where even hope has died.
- 4 Women and men, in age and youth,
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,
and find the way, the life, the truth,
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.
- 5 Christ is alive and comes to bring
good news to this and every age,
till earth and sky and ocean ring
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.

Brian Wren (b. 1936) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 297 Words: © 1969, 1995, Stainer & Bell Ltd, 23 Gruneisen Road, London N3 1DZ <www.stainer.co.uk>

A prayer of praise

Do you see what I see?
The tomb is empty, the stone rolled away.
Jesus is alive!
We give thanks and praise you, Lord.
We see you in nature, we see you in people.
Do you see what I see?
Jesus is living!
We give thanks and praise you, Lord.
Evidence abounds.
We see you in changed lives and hearts.
Share the good news – Jesus is alive!
We give thanks and praise you, risen Lord.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus, thank you that you went to the cross for us.
Thank you that you love us so much that you willingly
suffered all the pain and horror so that we might have a
relationship with God. We rejoice that the curtain of
separation was torn in two as you died, reconciling us to
God. Thank you for love beyond measure. For us.

Yours is the glory; risen, conquering Son.
Endless is the victory over death you've won.

Thank you, Lord, for the tremendous victory of the
resurrection. Thank you for the hope, the joy, the
fulfilment, the everlasting life that your rising brings.
Words cannot fully express the amazing triumph of that

silent moment in the garden when you once again began to breathe.

Yours is the glory; risen, conquering Son.

Endless is the victory over death you've won.

A sending out prayer

We've seen the good news –
the tomb is empty, Christ is risen!

Hallelujah!

We've heard the good news –
death is disrupted, God is on the loose!

Hallelujah!

We'll take the good news
and share it far and wide.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Amen.

Sunday 27th April 2025

Call to Worship

Come and find the hide-and-seek God,
the one who breaks down doors,
who looks for us wherever we are,
who loves us whatever we do.

Come and join the God of surprises,
who unlocks doors in our lives
and opens our hearts to love.

Bible reading: John 20:19-31

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

Jesus and Thomas

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

The Purpose of This Book

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Reflection

Can you remember a time when you had something important to report, but no-one would believe you? Doubt is natural, and often understandable, such as when the disciples tell Thomas that Jesus has come back to life. I think we can all understand why he found that hard to believe. Often, we expect proof in order to believe that something significant has happened. This is the basis of our civil justice system, which requires evidence that it's 'beyond reasonable doubt' that something happened. We probably agree that it's fair to require evidence. But doubt can also create barriers between us and truth.

It can be devastating for victims not to feel believed; one church abuse survivor wrote, 'The worst thing, when I reported my abuse to the church authorities, was that their responses made me feel that no-one believed me, that my truth was invisible, that I didn't matter.'

That's why child protection training teaches us to look for the signs; rarely will the neglect or abuse itself be witnessed, but we can recognise the physical, emotional and social signs of neglect and distress of trauma. It's also why it's important, if someone discloses to us that they were abused, that we receive what they say without judgement, take it seriously and offer our support and compassion. That initial response when someone tells us

something difficult to hear is so important – it's like a doorway that be opened leading to the support that's needed or be shut again, with the difficult truth locked away. Jesus invited Thomas to come close and touch his hands and side, to feel the wounds. We don't know if he did actually touch Jesus. Perhaps the power of that truth was overwhelming. Perhaps we think God feels safer buried in a grave or behind a locked door?

Maybe like Thomas, we find it hard to believe that God really loves us, despite our faults; hard to believe that Jesus was prepared to die for our sakes; and even harder to believe that Jesus came back from the dead to offer us new life with him. Our doubts and fears are a threshold between us and God. We don't need to ignore them or brush them aside. Like Thomas, we can be honest about our doubts and fears. In facing up to them, we might just find that God shows us the signs we need to strengthen our belief. We might step through the doorway to a closer relationship with God, receiving the forgiveness and peace that Jesus spoke of. What signs can we recognise of God's presence in our lives?

Hymn: StF 569

- 1 An Upper Room did our Lord prepare
 for those he loved until the end;
 and his disciples still gather there
 to celebrate our Risen Friend.
- 2 A lasting gift Jesus gave his own —
 to share his bread, his loving cup;
 whatever burdens may bow us down,
 he by his cross shall lift us up.

- 3 And after supper he washed their feet,
for service, too, is sacrament;
in him our joy shall be made complete —
sent out to serve, as he was sent.
- 4 No end there is! We depart in peace;
he loves beyond the uttermost;
in every room in our Father's house
he will be there, as Lord and Host.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

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A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

A prayer of confession

Lord God, you call us to be witnesses for you
but very often fear holds us back —
fear of speaking out and being made to look a fool, or,
even worse, imprisoned, as many are in other countries.
Lord God, we're sorry when we allow our fears to
dominate.

Sometimes, like Thomas, we need to see evidence of your
promises before our fears subside.

Lord God, locked doors mean nothing to you but we often
hang on to the key, not wanting to face what lurks on the
other side of the door;

sometimes unable to forgive ourselves for past actions.

Lord God, unlock any areas of our lives that we may not
have dealt with.

We're sorry, Lord. Fling wide the doors.

Breathe on us afresh with your peace, we pray.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Our Saviour hung on a tree, shed his blood and freed us from our sins. Repentance and forgiveness are ours through his life blood poured out for us. Receive what he died to give us.

Thank you, Saviour God.

Amen.

Lord, you came into that upper room, into a place full of fearful people and brought the beauty of your peace. We pray for all those we know who need your peace at the moment: those who are sick; those who are anxious and troubled; those who are sad or grieving; those who are dying; those who are facing exams soon; those who are afraid.

**Lord Jesus, breathe your peace deep into their hearts:
and fill them with the knowledge of your presence.**

Say the Lord's Prayer

We pray for peace in places of war and violence.

A sending out prayer

Let us go out with laughter
to spread God's joy.

Let us go out with passion
to spread God's truth.

Let us go out with compassion
to spread God's healing.

Let us go out with love
to spread God's peace.

Amen.