



Place in the Crowd Course Book

Welcome

Welcome to the Place in the Crowd Lent Course. Taking part in this course leads us into a central paradox of living as the Church: we are called to be responsible disciples, stewards, heralds, leaders, agents of growth - and yet God's ways are never subject to our control. To be a Christian is to sit lightly to outcomes and objectives, whilst exerting our best energies in kingdom service and witness. Rather than produce a course that radiates optimism and exhorts us all to try harder, we have tried to enter into the mystery of the Passion journey and see where points of connection emerge for our own context. Vitality, there needs to be space for the Spirit to nudge, reveal, challenge and transform.

The six sessions follow the journey of Jesus from his public ministry to the cross, using as a lens the crowds who accompany different stages of that journey. The sessions use the Gospel of Matthew, which is the lectionary Gospel for this year. But we begin at the end of Matthew's Gospel, with the familiar passage from Matthew 28 sometimes called 'the Great Commission'. We inevitably approach mission and discipleship from a post-resurrection perspective, and that is where we start this Lenten journey. We end by the well-sealed and guarded tomb, waiting for the power of God to break shackles and end death's reign.

The course aims to celebrate what is already happening, to put new heart into God's people, and to acknowledge that it is God who is ultimately the one who is at work.

Our Conversation; Our Future

In the Diocese of Rochester, we are currently engaging as many people as possible in a conversation about our purpose and future direction. We have named this process Our Conversation; Our Future. These conversations will help us discern the will of the Holy Spirit as we seek to develop a new strategic framework – a vision, or set of goals, to guide us. We are actively seeking to hear from anyone with an opinion, not just those who currently worship in a Church of England church within the Diocese of Rochester.

Since the turn of the century we have collectively experienced 9/11, major wars, civil wars in big Arab states, the growing nihilism of religious violence, a global

refugee crisis, developing climate change, a severe banking collapse which revealed deep and endemic flaws in the global economy, an era of austerity and lengthening inequality, a vote to leave the European Union and, across the so-called developed world, the re-emergence of demagoguery and extremist politics. This is taking place against the panoramic scenery of a digital revolution which we imagine has taken place but which presently is no more than the slow taxiing of a plane to the runway. In the course of this century, which will belong to our children and grandchildren, they will travel to places so far away we could never imagine them. The two previous economic revolutions – agrarian and industrial – made unprecedented impacts on where and how people lived and related to one another. Our revolution in personal communication will alter the social architecture irrevocably, impacting upon lives more intimately than anything that has gone before. It is the biggest social experiment in human history.

But still we carry on as if nothing has really happened. For the Church this would be a mistake. Its historic calling is to a dual listening role. It should open its ears to the world: to make sense of the changes taking place. And to the Holy Spirit, to enable the Church to respond to these changes, that its people may live more fruitfully as disciples of Christ. The creation of a diocesan strategy is a response to the many remarkable things that are happening around us. In the midst of rapid and volatile change, we need to shape our mission – through evangelism and community action – in a way that demonstrates the coming Kingdom of God.

'Place in the Crowd' has been designed to encourage and enable engagement with this changing world around us, to look at these issues in a spiritual and reflective way. Once you have completed the course, we welcome you to respond to '*Our Conversation; Our Future*' by answering (individually or as a group) the questions in the back of this book.

You can find out more about *Our Conversation; Our Future* on our website www.rochester.anglican.org/strategy/conversation

Additional Material

All additional resources mentioned in the text, including stories to bring our modern context into focus, are available on www.placeinthecrowd.org.uk

Session One – Room for Faith and Doubt

Matthew 28. 16-20



Introduction

It would be naïve to go into a Lent Course without being honest about where we are struggling and what feels difficult. At the start of the course the opening activity is an opportunity to name some negatives and offer them to God as part of the reality of where we are.

The Bible passage for this week reflects the range of responses of the disciples as they gathered to receive Jesus' final commission; we are told that 'they worshipped him; but some doubted.' It will be the same for us, and it is important that we are sensitive to this, as well as being rightly expectant that Jesus will bless, inspire and guide us anew as we gather as his people.



Warming up: The Elephant in the Room

If the group has not met before and you may not know one another, allow time for names and hopes for the course to be shared.

It is often helpful to get some of our doubts and worries off our chests at the outset. Write any doubt or question you are coming with as you approach the course. It can be on the level of personal faith and life situation, to do with life in the church at local or diocesan level, or worries about the global situation.

You will be invited to place your note somewhere central – perhaps beneath a cross or around a candle.

When all are gathered, you may want to use your own words or the following prayer:

*Risen Lord, we lay all these things before you
at the start of our journey together through Lent.*

*By your Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see beyond our doubts,
And lead us into new places in our walk with you. Amen.*

Entering the story

This is a familiar passage, but we may not have spent time with all its dimensions. It is a passage which lends itself to a Lectio Divina approach in order that ignored details and words may surprise us again. Those that have used the Pilgrim course will be familiar with this approach; we've used it again here.

- Read the passage through once
- Keep a few moments silence
- Read the passage a second time with different voices
- Invite everyone to say aloud a word or phrase that strikes them
- Read the passage a third time
- Share together what this word or phrase might mean and what questions it raises

Living it out

Read or watch our stories from Christians across the Diocese of Rochester, living out the Great Commission in different contextually appropriate and creative ways. We celebrate the big and small, and everything in between.

Praying it in

Become still, perhaps with some reflective music or breathing exercises. Imagine Jesus standing in your church building, with the local congregation gathered to listen to his final words before leaving.

Spend some time in silence, being aware of the presence of God, and listening for any words, images, flashes of insight.

You might like to use creative means such as paints, coloured pencils, modelling-clay, to explore your sense of what Jesus might be saying and what it might mean. Share your thoughts, however unformed.

Offer all that has been said and unsaid to God, and spend time reflecting on Jesus' final promise to be with us until the end of the age.





Going further

*'When they saw him, they worshipped him;
but some doubted.'*
(Matthew 28.17)

The disciples are back in Galilee. The place where Jesus had first called them is now the place of their final instructions. God has given all authority to the Son to make disciples of all nations, yet after all they had witnessed, after all they had seen and heard whilst walking alongside Jesus, some of the disciples still doubted. Surely then, there has to be hope for the rest of us? And there needs to be hope. We live in the uncertain reality of our time, with all of its contradictions, brokenness, hatred and greed.

How, in this time, do we respond to the command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations?

Rowan Williams describes part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus as being in a state of *awareness*: 'The disciple is where she or he is in order to be changed; so that the way in which she or he sees and experiences the whole world changes.¹ To follow Jesus is to care for the poor, to live our lives with integrity, to love our neighbour, to forgive those who wound us, and to show compassion to others; especially those who are different from us, or indifferent to us. The disciple, by God's grace, is an agent in this process of change and changing; change of self and changing the world around us.

A helpful exercise can be to remind ourselves that we are not starting from zero in our desire to respond faithfully to Jesus' command. Consider the following:

What are the stories in your community of past mission and action?
What's the legacy?

¹ Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life*, p3

Can you think of a time when something new came in (something that's now an accepted norm, such as having coffee in church, all age services, chairs not pews)? What were the feelings and concerns at the time? How has that worked out since?

Imagine that in 20 years' time, the Christian community in this place is writing to thank you for what you did today which has left a lasting legacy. What would they say? Try writing the letter together.

Session Two - Food Given Out

Matthew 14. 13-21



Introduction

Before moving on to Matthew's Passion narrative, it is important that we spend some time in the earlier chapters where Jesus' ministry of word and deed unfolds. Chapter 14 marks a significant point in the Gospel: Jesus has taught the crowd (Matthew chapters 5-7); healed the sick (chapters 8-9); sent out the twelve disciples to proclaim the kingdom (chapter 11); and delivered a series of parables about the nature of the kingdom of God (chapter 13). All the while, opposition has been rising. At the beginning of chapter 14 we have the narrative of the execution of John the Baptist, which is the catalyst for Jesus withdrawing by boat to a deserted place to be alone. Crowds follow him, and he has compassion in them. It is in that context that the first feeding miracle in Matthew's Gospel occurs (the second is Matthew ch15.v32-39).



Warming up:

It's the little things...

Here's a little story to set your thoughts going. In one not very wealthy parish, one street was notoriously off-limits because it was patrolled day and night by sex workers. The issue seemed much too big for the small local church to do anything about it. But two ladies decided that they would do something. They made coffee, and took it out each evening to the sex workers on the street. From that grew relationships and an expanding ministry. When asked how they had had the vision to begin with, the two ladies replied, "We just had two flasks, so we did what we could."

We all have the equivalent of two flasks, we will all be making a difference in our own small ways, and that is worth celebrating.

Think of one thing that you're involved in which you can then share as a small good news story. Then listen and be encouraged!

What sort of hunger?

In the light of Matthew ch5. v6 ('Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled'), ask what we are hungry for: personally, locally, nationally?

Explore some of the wider social, justice and cultural issues around where we search for meaning and satisfaction, food for our soul-hungers.

Entering the story

With this passage, reading with the imagination is recommended, so that submerged feelings can come to the surface.



Imagine being part of the crowd. You have heard word that the healer from Nazareth, the carpenter's son, is in the area. He is said to be someone who demonstrates both wisdom and deeds of power. Who else is around you? How far have you had to come to be here? Where is 'here'?

What makes you leave whatever you were doing and join others in seeking Jesus?

Who do you want to bring to Jesus? What are you desiring and expecting?

Now imagine you are the disciples. It is getting late. Darkness will soon fall, it is a fair walk to the nearest villages. There is weariness, hunger. You didn't particularly choose to have all these people here, it was not in the plan. They just showed up, needy and demanding, and Jesus needs some space from them.

You ask Jesus to send the people away. He tells you that you have the resources to deal with the situation. You respond: this is all we have.

How do you feel about the crowd and its needs?

What is going to change the situation?

Imagine again that you are one of the crowd. There is some disquiet at how late it is getting, and what provision, if any, is going to be made

before you all disperse. You don't have the resources to feed yourself, let alone anyone else. What feelings are bubbling up within you?

What changes? What goes through your mind as you watch the carpenter break the bread? How do you feel as you go back home afterwards?

Living it out



As a group, prepare an act of simple hospitality for your next meeting. Invite each person to bring just one item for a simple shared meal, trusting that there will be more than enough.

OR

Extend a warm welcome. Invite someone to dinner, or to a family occasion.

Read or watch our stories from Christians across the Diocese of Rochester, seeking to serve others in different ways. This week our focus explores responses to people with dementia.

Praying it in



Spend some time with verse 19. Have several people read it in turn, so that you hear different voices and different emphases.

What does Jesus want to be shared with the communities we belong to?

How does that sharing happen?

Going further



Jesus said to them, 'They need not go away; you (yes, you), give them something to eat.' (cf Matthew 14.16)

The story of the feeding of the multitude from St Matthew's Gospel was so important to the early Church that it appeared in all four of the Gospels. It was important because it revealed Jesus as the fulfilment of God's promise: as the one who continues to feed his children in the wilderness. In this meal we, the followers of Jesus, see the echoes of the Last Supper shared with his disciples and of the meal we eat with one

another every Sunday where bread is taken, blessed, broken and shared. We, who share at this table where Christ feeds us with himself, share in a relationship that can never be broken.

'The Eucharist is the perfect sacrament of the Lord's passion inasmuch as it contains the very Christ himself who suffered'².

'The self-giving of God's Son for the reconciliation of the world with God is communicated to us in the Eucharist, in the form of bread and wine. By making present the Passion of Christ in word and sacrament, the faith is evoked which believes in God for Christ's sake: the God of Jesus Christ, whom we call Abba, dear Father.'³

For the hungry who stand at our door, whether in a Kent village or the global village, for the earth whose resources we continue to abuse by our seemingly insatiable appetites, for future generations as yet unborn who will live with the consequences of the choices we make today, Jesus Christ stands at the altar and says: '**You** (yes, you) give them something to eat.'

Multi-Media

The short script *Cana Caterers* is an imagined monologue of a household servant from the wedding at Cana and picks up theme of host and guest, hospitality, and crowds. Read it together.

Many stories and films take food, meals and hospitality as a lens for raising spiritual questions. You might want to watch *Chocolat*, *Babette's Feast*, *A place at the table*, *The hundred foot journey*, *The lunchbox* or *Ratatouille*.



² St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, The Eucharist

³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fulness of Life*, p39

Session Three – Listen To Them Shout

Matthew 21. 1-17



Introduction

As we move to the start of the Passion narrative, it is worth remembering that chapter 21 comes after the clear warning in chapter 20 from Jesus to the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to be killed (ch20 v18-19). It is important also to recognise that Jerusalem at Passover was a complex city, just as our contexts are complex, formed by multiple strands of history, culture, religion, and shifting power structures. Jesus entered a fraught and explosive situation where it did not take much for crowds to riot and violence to erupt.



Warming up

Being part of a crowd can be both frightening and comforting. Scientists can now model pedestrian behaviour according either to principles of physics (people as particles) or cognitive science models, and will use algorithms to try and anticipate potential problems when large crowds are present. Yet, for all that, it remains a mystery as to how a group or crowd can switch its mood.

Share any experiences you have had of being in a crowd, either positive or negative.



Entering the story

This passage splits into a number of separate sections. Get into smaller groups or pairs to take each section and look at it more closely. For each section, you might like to consider the following:

- What are we being told here about Jesus?
- What are we being told about how various others respond to Jesus?
- How would you sum up your section in a short simple headline?

Sections are as follows:

Matthew 21.1-5

Matthew 21.6-11

Matthew 21.12-17

Living it out

The children in this passage seem to get who Jesus is much better than do the adults. Examples from around the Diocese this week focus on the energy and enthusiasm of young people.



Praying it in

This week or next, or indeed over the next three sessions, you might want to make stations of the cross by cutting pictures out of magazines and newspapers. Jesus is utterly present within the conflicts, aspirations, and politics of Jerusalem in this section of Matthew's narrative. The stations can be found in *Times and Seasons p238ff*, and via the Church of England website following *Times and Seasons, Lent, The Way of the Cross*. You may want then to write your own prayer to go with it. Share the stations in a time of prayer at the end.



Going further

*'Rejoice greatly, o daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey'
(Zechariah 9.9)*



'Your king will not frighten those who look upon him; he is not an overbearing kind of person or an evildoer. He does not come with a bodyguard, an armed escort, at the head of hosts of cavalry and foot soldiers. Nor does he live by extortion, demanding taxes and payment of tribute and ignoble services, hurtful to those who perform them. No, he is recognised by his lowliness, poverty and frugality, for he enters the

city riding on a donkey, and with no crowd of attendants. Therefore, this king alone is just, and in justice he saves. He is also meek, meekness is his own special characteristic. In fact, the Lord's own words regarding himself were: *'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart.'* (Matthew 11.29)

He who raised Lazarus from the dead enters Jerusalem as king, seated on a donkey. Almost at once all the people, children and grown-ups, young and old alike, spread their garments on the road and taking palm branches - symbols of victory. They went to meet him as the giver of life and conqueror of death. They worshipped him and formed an escort. Within the temple precincts, as well as without, they sang with one voice, *Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!* This is a hymn of praise addressed to God. It means: Lord, save us.'

Gregory Palamas, Bishop of Thessalonica (1296-1359), *Homily XV*

Multi-media



Watch or read aloud the script for *Casting Stones*, a dramatic retelling the story of the woman caught in adultery, which picks up the theme of crowds changing, and perceptions of Jesus.

Session Four A – Peter Down And Out

Matthew 26. 57 – end



Introduction

From last week's passage we have fast-forwarded to the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. In the intervening chapters, Jesus has been teaching in the temple, and it is in this section that many of Matthew's parables of judgement are to be found (the wise and foolish virgins in ch25 v1-13, the sheep and the goats in ch25 v31-46). We are told at the start of chapter 26 that plans are afoot for his arrest, with the caution that timing is important so as not to cause a riot among the people (ch26 v3-5). The verse immediately prior to the narrative of Peter in the courtyard is the stark: 'Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.'

There are many groups of people involved in the ensuing Passion drama: soldiers, the religious leaders, the Roman authorities, the crowds in the streets, the scattered disciples. Each will have their own perspective on what is happening to Jesus - if indeed they give him more than a passing glance. These next two sessions encourage us to hear afresh some the many voices of this story.



Warming up

If it is possible, meet in a different space, preferably a public space such as a coffee shop or pub, so that you are surrounded by a different group of people. What do you learn about the community of which you are a temporary part? Do you feel at home or out of place? How might you be modifying your behaviour as a result of being in a different setting?

It can be easy to become so accustomed to being in a church 'bubble' that we forget that our customs, habits and language may be very alien to outsiders. More than that, when deprived of the security of the church fellowship, we may find that we struggle to hold on to our distinctive identity as disciples of Jesus. We may flee, or fail to speak up when challenged.

Entering the story

We are familiar with the story of Peter's denial, which is all the more painful because of his assertion of loyalty to Jesus in ch26 v33-35. Both Matthew and Mark create extra tension by describing Peter positioning himself in the courtyard, and then giving an account of the council meeting before returning to Peter. Jesus is an increasingly isolated figure from this point on. He offers little resistance to his accusers.

This week you will approach the passage from three perspectives: that of the chief priests, scribes and elders; that of the guards, servants and onlookers; and that of Peter.

Reflect together on what emerged from this exercise.

Living it out

Failure is a reality for all of us as disciples. We are not immune from it at any level, whether as individuals, congregations, parishes, dioceses. It is easy to criticise and point the finger, but in this Passion narrative, no-one except Jesus manages to respond with selfless obedience to the Father's will. There are many judgements, many voices clamouring in these chapters. Our task is to look at Jesus.

One place where some of these truths are hard to avoid is in prisons. Prison chaplains in the Diocese work with restorative justice projects to enable those who have committed crimes to find a way forward. Read about some of our local prison chaplains and their work on the website.

Praying it in

We have come at the text indirectly through the various characters, recognising parts of ourselves in them all, but the central figure is of course Jesus. We cannot presume to know how Jesus felt, but we can remain still and silent before the depiction of him in this passage, wondering at the Son of God submitting to this treatment. Spend a short time in silence in order to do this.





Going further

Write a prayer for your own congregation, and for the wider diocese, which goes through the stages of confession, repentance and the hope of restoration.

Going Further - Session 4a and 4b - Matthew 26.57-end; 27.15

An article in the Los Angeles Times (28 March 1991 edition) attempted to analyse the beating of Rodney King by a mob of Los Angeles police officers on 3 March 1991. The incident gained national and then worldwide attention because it was filmed by an onlooker (before the advent of social media). The LA Times journalist, Janny Scott, in compiling the article, interviewed sociologists and psychologists and reported their findings. Scott noted: 'There is a tendency for tightly knit groups to devalue and dehumanise outsiders and, under certain conditions, to commit terrible violence against them.' Scott went on to highlight three main points made by the social and psychological experts, in cases such as the Rodney King attack: 'The larger the group of attackers and the fewer the victims, the more savage the attack. The presence of multiple bystanders in an emergency appears to reduce the chance that any one of them will step in. A witness is less likely to step in when (as in this case) the victim is Black.' A person witnessing an act of collective violence is less likely to intervene when the victim can be readily distinguished as an outsider or alien, 'It is as though the desire to conform outweighs the urge to help. Whatever the degree to which an empathy for victims might have been awakened, in the presence of group violence there is aroused a countervailing phenomenon that tends to eclipse this empathy.' Brian Mullen, Associate Professor of Psychology at Syracuse University, was one of the experts interviewed for the article and he observed further that, 'members of a group tend to focus on whatever is unusual or different, just as one's eye is drawn to one part of a picture and the rest blurs. A group's attention centres on the rare thing, the outsider.' Mullen explained that during the victimising of the lone individual, the attackers pay a great deal of attention to the victim and might notice the 'sounds that he makes or the dirt and blood on his

clothing.' Significantly, according to Mullen, the members of the group do not recognise that, 'I John Smith, am a father and a husband. I have a job where I am sworn to uphold these rules, and the behaviour that I am engaging in violates that person that I am'. The identity of the individual is consumed by the 'mob in action' and any sense of self is abandoned. However, by the next morning when the anonymity of the mob begins to fade away, Mullen indicates, they wake up and say, 'How could I have done that?'

It would seem that conventional culture exists in the interim period between the act of mob violence and the time when the social beneficiaries begin to find the event morally problematic. Does this mean that Christianity began when Peter, having been drawn into complicity with Jesus' tormentors, heard the cock crow - as early as the next morning?

The scapegoating mechanism allows a community struggling in the midst of a crisis to recover its equilibrium, but this can only be achieved if the community is able to deceive itself as to the true nature of what it is doing. Communities and individuals may feel that they make decisions on the basis of autonomy, so much so that they are not aware of the violent process they take part in to maintain it. Importantly, for the scapegoating process to be enabled, the attackers have to be ignorant of the innocence of the victim and ignorant of the mimetic attraction that draws them together for the purpose of eliminating the victim.

(For further reading: René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, and Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*)

Multi-media

Watch or read "Who do you say you are?", a dramatic imagining of a servant in Caiaphas' house, reflecting on the arrest of Jesus.



Session Four B – Pilate Seeks A Get-Out

Matthew 27. 11-26.



Introduction

There is no getting away from the human propensity to suspend individual judgement under peer pressure, and this session forces us to confront that capacity within ourselves rather than just projecting it out onto others. We are the crowd baying for blood; we are Pilate washing our hands of a decision which we have allowed ourselves to be pressured into making against our better judgement. The response can only be repentance.



Warming Up

Respond to the Stanford story your leader will share, and the conclusions about human nature. Have you ever seen that kind of behaviour? Have you ever felt yourself behaving in ways you aren't happy with?



Entering the story

Read the whole of Matthew ch27 v15-54 aloud in dramatized form, then focus on verses 11-26.

You may find the following questions helpful:

1. Look at verses 11-14. What is it about Jesus' silence that the chief priests and elders find so infuriating, and Pilate so astonishing?
2. Look at verses 15-23. In this and the previous section, Pilate asks a number of questions (vv13, 17, 21, 22, 23). List them, and explore where the balance of power lies in this scene. Who is really in control? Who has input into the final decision to crucify Jesus? (John gives a slightly different account which echoes his major themes in John 18.28-40. Matthew chooses his details with care to reflect his particular themes.)
3. Look at verses 24-26. The reception history (ie how the Gospels have been read, interpreted and applied over the centuries by Christians)

of these verses and their equivalents in the other Gospels is deeply problematic. They have been read at times as an endorsement of persecution of the Jews as those who killed Christ; in John's Gospel, which constantly uses the term 'the Jews' rather than just 'the people', this is even more pronounced. As Christians we need to be very aware of our history of anti-Semitism when reading such passages, and to understand how for Matthew and his community, in bitter conflict with their host Jewish community, the rejection of Jesus by his own people was a raw and perplexing puzzle.

What does Pilate hope to achieve by washing his hands? Could he have made any other decision than to condemn Jesus to death?

Praying it in

Have a time of prayer in three sections: lament, confession, and prayer for courage.

- Lament states the wrong that is going on all around, bringing it to God for God to act. Encourage very short one sentence or single phrase prayers, perhaps beginning, 'O Lord, we grieve to see...'
- Confession acknowledges our part in the misery and injustice of the world. You may want to offer brief prayers of corporate or individual confession.
- Prayer for courage and grace takes the step of asking God to act and to use us in the transformation of situations.

OR

Write your own psalm of lament, or confession, use a stone to dip into water as a physical act of sins being washed clean, or write in a sand box and then wipe away. You might like to draw the places or times you need courage in your life.

Going Further

The Going Further text for session 4a is also for this session.



Session Five – What Might New Life Be About?

Matthew 27. 55 – end



Introduction

We are intentionally leaving this course in what looks like a desolate place - Easter Eve not Easter Sunday. What is hard for our human minds to grasp is how cross and resurrection are simultaneous realities, rather than the latter acting as the happy ending to the former.

Different theological traditions place different emphasis on how it is that Jesus' saving work on the cross is accomplished. We know that the defining work of atonement is complete as Jesus commends his spirit into the Father's hands, however we understand that mystery. In this session, the Warming up activity draws on the tradition which some patristic theologians developed as a way of expressing that all-sufficiency, namely the harrowing of hell. If Christ's death enables the defeat of death and the liberation of all held captive by evil, that truth can be portrayed and symbolised by his leading of humanity, represented by Adam and Eve, out of darkness into light, from slavery to God's freedom.



Warming up

Look at the images of snowdrops in winter and share any experiences of hope being born amid hopeless-seeming situations. Are we ready to be surprised by hope?

You might then like to move on to look at one or more examples of icons of the Anastasis, as a stimulus for discussion.



Entering the story

The crowd at the beginning of this final passage, which has included a centurion and various bystanders, now focuses on a group of women. They seem to correspond with the women Luke mentions in Luke ch8. v2-3 who helped sponsor Jesus' ministry in practical ways. So they are not merely passive; these are women who have resources, material and

spiritual, and who have been proactive disciples. There has been no sign of the twelve male disciples since they fled at ch26.v56, but the women are there 'looking on from a distance'.

1. Humanly speaking, there is a lot going on in this passage. 'Map' all the human activity, observe who does what, who stays and who goes, and what that tells us.
2. Why do you think Matthew includes the detail at verses 62-66, which none of the other Gospel writers include? Look also at ch28 v11-15. Why is this important?
3. We know next to nothing about Joseph of Arimathea (who is named in all four canonical Gospels) other than this incident. Some scholars have cited Isaiah ch53.v9 and seen Joseph's intervention as the fulfilment of prophecy. Look together at Isaiah 53, reading it slowly with pauses between each verse. Do any other verses seem to foreshadow the events of Matthew's Passion narrative?
4. The women seem to be doing nothing. What is important about their presence?

Praying it in

What disappointments, deaths, betrayals, are kept in the dark and carefully guarded by us? What might resurrection look like for those well-sealed parts of our own lives and the life of our churches?

Take a stone and imagine it representing some disappointment, unfulfilled hope or hidden wound. It could be something very personal, or something that relates to an area of local or global pain and conflict.

During a time of quiet, lay down your stone by a central focus. You do not need to say anything about what it represents if that is too intrusive.

Leave some quiet space, and then read the first verse of Matthew ch28: 'After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.'



End with a short prayer. You might want to use the Collect for the Easter Vigil or your own prayer.

*God of glory,
By the raising of your Son
You have broken the chains of death and hell;
Fill your Church with faith and hope;
For a new day has dawned
And the way to life stands open
In our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

(Times and Seasons, The Archbishops' Council 2006)

Living it out



This week's stories from around the Diocese look at some of the ways in which people have come alongside those who find themselves in difficult circumstances and been part of a journey to new life and hope.

Taking it further



You will have got to know one another more deeply as the weeks have gone by. Discuss together how you would like to celebrate Easter as a group: attending the same service on Easter Sunday; exchanging gifts;

meeting again after Easter as a group; undertaking some act of missional generosity in your community.

Going Further

'There is one particular day in Western history about which neither historical record nor Scripture make report. It is a Saturday. And it has become the longest of days. We know of that Good Friday which Christianity holds to have been that of the Cross. But the non-Christian, the atheist, knows of it as well. This is to say that he knows of the injustice, of the interminable suffering, of the waste, of the brute enigma of ending, which so largely make up not only the historical dimension of the human condition, but the everyday fabric of our personal lives. We know, ineluctably, of the pain, of the failure of love, of the solitude which are our history and private fate. We know also about Sunday. To the Christian, that day signifies an intimation, both assured and precarious, both evident and beyond comprehension, of resurrection, of a justice and a love that have conquered death. If we are non-Christians or non-believers, we know of that Sunday in precisely analogous terms. We conceive it as the day of liberation from inhumanity and servitude. We look to resolutions, be they therapeutic or political, be they social or messianic. The lineaments of that Sunday carry the name of hope (there is no word less deconstructible). But ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday. Between suffering, aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other.'

From *Real Presences*, III.7

George Steiner (1929—present)

Multi-media

Read and reflect on the monologue "Judas' Story".

Read the meditation "Come into the Desert with Me, my Child".



Our Conversation; Our Future response page

At the end of the course, please share your insights as part of the Diocesan Our Conversation; Our Future engagement. You can respond online, or complete this form and send it to the Diocesan Office. Individual and group responses are both welcome.

What may the Holy Spirit be saying to us about our area?

What do we currently spend our energy and resources on?

What do we need to change about who we are and what we do?

Answering these additional questions will help us, but are optional.

Your Name

Your Role

Your Parish

If you are responding on behalf of a group, how many people took part in your conversation?

If you are responding on behalf of a group, what is the name of your group?

We would love to hear how you found the conversation and process. Would you like to tell us anything extra about your conversation?

If you would like to receive occasional email updates on *Our Conversation*; *Our Future* please enter your email address here

If you have photos, video or other media you'd like to share, please email them to Claire Boxall, Strategic Framework Manager at claire.boxall@rochester.anglican.org

Place in the Crowd is a collaborative work created for the Diocese of Rochester by the Revds. Jeremy Blunden, Helen Burn, Susanne Carlsson, Mandy Carr, Lusa Nsenga Ngoy and Mark Montgomery, with additional input from Cheryl Trice, The Ven Simon Burton-Jones, and Canon Chris Dench.

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