**Sharing your story**

Holy Week is a tremendously important part of the Christian Calendar, but it should also be an important part of the life of every Christian. It is the chance to walk with Jesus to the cross and ultimately to resurrection and new life and that means it is the chance to examine ourselves once again to see what it really means to us.

Each of us have a story to tell – as part of a family united together, our life and faith stories are important to each other, but so often, we don’t know those stories.

The idea of a testimony is not one which has been common in the Church in Wales. In some Free Churches a person standing up and delivering their testimony to the congregations happens regularly. Delivering a testimony is simply telling our story of faith – how did it happen ? what does it mean to us ? how does it change us ? when has it been particularly helpful ? what do we find tough ?

Perhaps you will never stand up in church to speak in this way, but knowing our story is still important because it really challenges us to ask ourselves what our faith means to us and how we show that faith to others. The Bible tells us that ‘*if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.****16****But do this in a gentle and respectful way’ (1 Peter 3: 15,16)*

Through Holy Week, using some of the set readings for the day from the Eucharist or the Daily Prayer services, along with a series of questions, you’re invited to think about your faith. Maybe it is a story you will want to tell others, maybe it’s something that will just make you feel more secure in your faith or maybe it will be an encouragement to dig a bit deeper and commit yourself to knowing more of Jesus.

Enjoy the journey, treasure the questions, pray about the answers and know God’s blessing is always upon you. Finally, of course, never be afraid to speak to someone who can help if you’ve got more questions to ask.

*Some practicalities*

*Try making some notes of your answers and later try putting them together to see what it looks like and, if you feel comfortable, show it to someone. Testimonies don’t need to tell dramatic conversion stories and massively changed lives – they need to be honest and authentic, telling real stories which people can relate to.*

**PALM SUNDAY**

**Mark 11: 9b-10 :** *Then those who went ahead and those who followed (Jesus) were shouting,*

*“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
10Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

**Reflect :** The crowds were ready to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem. Who knows what they were expecting ? It certainly wasn’t his death on the cross. For many of that crowd their faith, their cheering, may have been superficial. It raises all kinds of questions for us as we examine our own faith.

**Questions :** What led you to faith ? Or when did you really begin to ‘recognise’ your faith ?

Was it a sudden experience or a gradual recognition ? Is it something that came later in life or something you feel has always been part of you ?

**MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK**

**Luke 22: 19-20 :** *19Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*

**Reflect :** Later in the week we will commemorate Maundy Thursday, the day associated with the institution of the meal that we often call the Eucharist. But today these verses (which appear in the Daily Prayer service) offer us a chance to really think about how well we are spiritually fed in our lives today. As with physical food it is essential that we are fed regularly and that the food we receive is a good balanced diet !

**Questions :** How are you spiritually fed in your life ? Where do you find the strength to sustain you and to help you grow in your faith ?

Is it through attendance at church and fellowship with others – if so, what is it about that church attendance that really strengthens you ? Is it through Bible reading or Daily Prayer ? Is it through fellowship with others ? Hopefully it will be a combination of different things but what is important to you and how well do you make sure you receive it ?

**TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK**

**Galatians 6: 14 :** *May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

**Reflect :** The Apostle Paul is often portrayed as a fairly strong, perhaps even arrogant character at times, but, whether that’s true or not, one of the things that can’t be questioned is his commitment to sharing the gospel as widely as possible. And in the sharing there was often a good degree of both humility and compassion. In this verse he recognises that the main thing in life that he can boast of is the cross of Jesus and his salvation through it.

For us as Christians, character matters. People will rather scarily judge Jesus sometimes by our actions. This of course represents a real warning to seek to live our lives as Jesus would want but it also perhaps leads us on to the questions for today.

**Questions :** What is different in your life because you are a Christian ? And taking that a little further, or perhaps just phrasing it differently, what difference does Jesus make in your life day by day ?

**WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK**

**Hebrews 12: 1,2 :** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Reflect :** Sometimes life is tough ! That is a reality, I suspect, for us all. Yet as we read our Bibles, we are told so often to lay aside our worries, our concerns, our fears and place them into the hands of Jesus. So many people have gone before us and there are so many today, who are living out lives of amazing faith. But we’re not all like that – we are human after all, and we do get troubled by things and we do allow those things to keep us awake at night sometimes or even to distract us in our relationship with God.

**Questions :** Have you let go of something in your life and just trusted God ? How did that work out ? How did it feel ?

Are there things today that need to be handed over – things that are weighing you down ?

**MAUNDY THURSDAY**

**1 CORINTHIANS 11: 23-26 :** For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

**Reflect :** We’re returning a little to the thoughts from Monday here, but also looking to reflect a little more deeply about how we are changed because of our faith.

In this passage the Apostle Paul retells the words of Jesus from the Last Supper. On Maundy Thursday we think of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot, Jesus washing the disciples feet, the Last Supper and of course the waiting in the Garden of Gethsemane for Jesus as he knew that his arrest was coming. So many things to think of, and each of them really important. But it is the bread and wine that we are so often focused on and rightly so because Jesus tells us to share this together. Its actual meaning has caused enormous theological debate over centuries but what does it mean to us ?

It’s so easy to take the Eucharist for granted in ‘normal’ times as most of our churches seem to provide it often as the only option for a service, but how does it change us ? Is it in meeting with other people, praying with them, being nourished together ? Is it in the closeness of Jesus in the Eucharist ? Jesus’ teaching came with so many other things as well. It wasn’t a simple, ‘head for a Eucharist service and your life will be fine whatever else you do’, but an invitation to draw closer to him, to be fed by him, that we may grow closer to him, but also to each other and to others whom we are called to love.

**Questions :** What does the Eucharist mean to you ? How does it change you and how does it change how you care for others ?

**GOOD FRIDAY**

**JOHN 19: 30 :** When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

**Reflect :**  Jesus on the cross raises so many questions for us. The questions about his betrayal, arrest and trial; about him dying for the sins of others, including us; about how he offers forgiveness for the very people who have put him on the cross and for the way in which he offered hope and peace, even at the last, to the dying thief next to him. Maybe it’s the thoughts of his compassion towards his mother as he was dying. All kinds of thoughts.

But there’s also a danger that we ‘sanitise’ this, that because we’ve heard it so many times, we ignore the very real impact and meaning of this. However, we are to live in the knowledge of God who loves us so much that Jesus died on the cross for us, and that he wants us to be transformed into people who constantly seek to share his love with others.

Jesus went to incredible lengths and took on incredible pain and that has to change us if we take it seriously. He doesn’t want us to be burdened with guilt over the crucifixion, but with the kind of thanksgiving that says, ‘we want to change, we want to constantly strive to be better, to be more like Jesus’.

**Questions :** How does this fit into your story ? How do you understand what Jesus has done for you and how does this make you feel ? Again, back to a question that we’re often thinking about, how has it changed you ?

**HOLY SATURDAY**

**John 19: 38-42 :** After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

**Reflect :** Holy Saturday is a day of waiting and reflecting. It’s a day when we think of Jesus in the tomb. Good people took away his body and offered him a place of burial. I wonder what they thought ?

‘Ah well, it didn’t quite work out as we hoped’ ? ‘He was a good man though, and made a lot of sense with his teaching, and he cared for people too’ ? ‘What happens next’ ?

Perhaps these were some of the thoughts. I wonder which of the people gathered at the cross or taking the body away for burial really believed that this was only going to be a short term burial site for Jesus ? That he would, as he promised, rise from the dead, signalling the start of a whole new piece of history.

**Questions :** As you spend some time in reflection on this Holy Saturday, ask yourself what you’d have been thinking in those times ? And what you think today ? How real is the experience of new life for you and how do you feel that and show it to others ?

**EASTER DAY**

**John 20: 18 :** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”…

**Reflect :** Easter Day is, without doubt, the greatest day in the Christian Calendar. It is the day when the world changed forever, when darkness and death were defeated, when new and abundant life became a possibility for anyone. We think of days to come as the start of the church, but this is really it ! Without this day, there is no church, there is no new life, there is no victory over darkness and death. The church, as we call it, didn’t begin on Easter Day, but it is the day of resurrection, the day that gives us a constant reminder of the reason to praise God day by day.

Our life as Christians may not be easy. Things will not always go as we hope or plan. There will be tough times, but amidst these we can celebrate that God is with us and will never leave us and that however hard things get, however impossible some situations might seem to be, Jesus has overcome far worse and will journey with us in whatever we face.

**Questions :**  How does your life help to reveal the new life that Jesus gives to others ? Think of some examples of your life being changed ? Think of some examples of how you are thankful or filled with praise ? Think of some examples of when you have been particularly aware of Jesus travelling with you through some dark days ? Think of his presence with you always - how does that change life for you ? How does your fellowship with others help to share the story of new life, hope, peace and love ?

**‘HE IS RISEN’ and we shout ‘ALLELUIA’**