

Wednesday in Holy Week

8th April 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

***'Bring us back to Yourself, O Lord so that we may return to you;
Renew our life as in days before.'***

(Lamentations 5: 21)



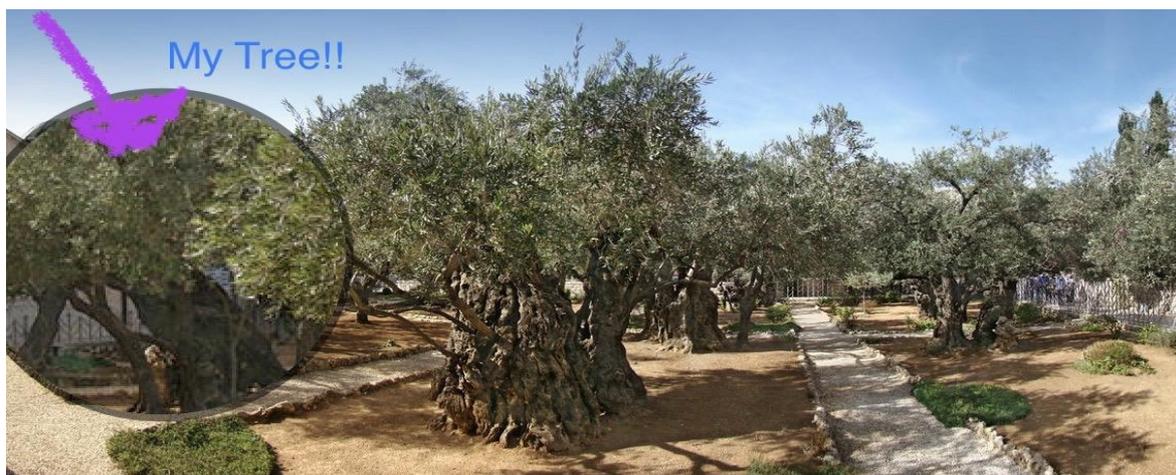
The Pink Moon

For those of you who did not manage to see it, here is a photograph of the April full moon which graced our skies last night. I rather like this Impressionist-style image of it, taken from my front garden overlooking Littleton Stud Farm. According to a physicist on Radio 4 yesterday morning, a large full moon in Spring sits low in the sky and appears to us a reddish orange, as it is being viewed through a greater thickness of the Earth's atmosphere. When light photons pass through the atmosphere, it produces a pink hue. As the atmosphere filters out the bluer wavelengths of white moonlight, more red tones enter our vision. What a wonderful, lipid, grace-filled image of *'God with us'* this Holy Week! His Creation lighting the darkness of our world in all its complexity, of which we are a vital part: reminding us of what is important and

lasting and drawing us back to the omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence of God.

As I stood in the garden, listening to the owls swooping across the churchyard and watching the Pink Moon rising; basking in its bright light and feeling held by God, my mind turned to another such night in the Holy City of Jerusalem when I truly felt I was in the presence of Jesus.

It was the beloved Bishop Michael Scott-Joynt who encouraged me to first visit the Holy Land. All that year, I had been testing my vocation to Ordination and had just passed my all-important National Bishop's Advisory Panel and was casting about to see where I would do my theological training. It was a turbulent time! Looking forward into the unknown felt hugely exciting. Looking back felt unsettling. In the present, I felt a fraud! How had I managed to kid all those Bishops into believing that I, of all people, could be a priest? And what was I *doing* giving up my successful career? And what of my family? How would the children cope? Had my husband *truly* understood the changes we'd need to make? So many thoughts whizzing through my usually calm mind! That's when the wise and wonderful Bishop Michael brought the words of Lamentations into sharp focus: *'Bring us back to Yourself, O Lord so that we may return to you; renew our life as in days before.'* He suggested I went off to Israel for a time of prayer and contemplation; a time to walk in the steps of Jesus and to hear His call on my life.



The Garden of Gethsemane

One of the places I was really looking forward to visiting was the Garden of Gethsemane. Situated at the base of the Mount of Olives beyond the Kidron Valley, Gethsemane means *'oil press'*, and we have many accounts of Jesus visiting this area – to teach or to spend time amongst the cool olive groves in retreat alone or with His disciples. On my pilgrimage, we had spent a morning exploring the Mount of Olives or *'Olivet'* as it is also known. At the top of the Mount, we visited the Place of the Ascension where Luke's Gospel describes Jesus being *'carried up to heaven'* (Luke 24:51). We walked down to Pater Noster Church, where Jesus taught the disciples The Lord's Prayer; and down the valley further to the beautiful Dominus Fleuit - a church designed in the shape of a tear to commemorate Jesus weeping over Jerusalem *'O pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they that prosper shall love thee.'* (Psalm 122: 6).

Though these places were fascinating, I confess I was really only marking time until I could escape into the wilderness of Gethsemane.

Imagine my dismay when we arrived there, hot and dusty from our walk down Olivet, to discover Gethsemane was not a vast, cool wilderness of olive trees into which we could roam but a very well-manicured garden with a low stone wall prohibiting tourist entry! Our tour guide, Shafik, a deeply intelligent Arab Catholic man, must have seen something in my face which told him all was not well with me.

Over dinner that evening, back in the Golden Walls Hotel (situated by the magnificent Damascus Gate), I had the biggest surprise. Unscripted, Shafik had reappeared at the hotel and asked us all to hurry and finish our meal. We were off on a mystery tour! Bless him, Shafik had quietly arranged with the monks of Gethsemane for us to have a private access to Gethsemane at night. Free to roam, I climbed into one of the vast ancient olive trees (see photo above) and lay back into the embrace of its branches. There, gazing into the star-studded night sky through the branches of the tree, with the sounds and smells of Jerusalem blowing across the Kidron Valley on the balmy night air, and the bright harvest moon shining upon my upturned face, Jesus spoke to me: *'My child, come to me. Let me refresh you. I am calling you to give your life to me and feed my sheep.'* A life-changing, life-giving moment I shall never forget. '

I pray in these times of isolation and solitude, that you too might make the time, *take the risk*, to rest in the embrace of Christ: return to Him that He might refresh you and renew you in the call He has on your life. He longs for us to turn to Him and He died for us to set us free. This Holy Week, may the passion of Christ bring you true peace.



Judas Betrays Him by William Blake

For Jesus, the sanctuary Garden of Gethsemane wasn't always a place of peace. Crossing from the City into the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane with His disciples after the Last Supper which we commemorate on Maundy Thursday, Mark's Gospel tells us how Jesus became 'distressed and agitated' in the Garden as He wrestled with his approaching hour of His Passion. He had been betrayed.

'Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.'

(John 13:21)

Uncomfortable as it is for us to hear, Judas' betrayal of Jesus has become an all too familiar episode in our Holy Week narrative. The theme of betrayal is steeped in our liturgy and frames our Eucharist Prayer: *'On the night He was betrayed, Jesus broke bread ...'*

John's Gospel offers us a description of events, loaded with projections, passive avoidance, denial and blame. He clearly identifies Judas as the bad guy. I wonder whether we do too? In contrast, John himself is *'bathed in light'* and described as *'reclining' next to Jesus*. We hear how the disciples are shocked when, in the midst of this intimate meal, Jesus tells them how *this night* one of their number is to betray him. They whisper to one-another 'Who is it? Who is it?' and nudge John to ask Jesus.

Judas comes as a neat package - an arch-betrayer and an instrument of Satan. One person to blame is *so* convenient – we are all off the hook! Yet what we hear of the other disciples' behaviours during Jesus' Passion doesn't exactly cover any of them in glory either! Isn't running away or falling asleep or denying all knowledge of Jesus just as much a betrayal? John seems to shift personal responsibility all too easily onto the tragic and suicidal figure of Judas - Even Gospel writers are not above the language of blame!

It is difficult to hear John's betrayal narrative in isolation either from the rest of the Chapter, the rest of the Gospel, or indeed as separate from the big picture we have of the life of Jesus in the New Testament. Mark's Gospel, for example, refers to Judas as *'always* one of the twelve' – one of the family. (Mark 14: 10) Jesus recognises how the bad sheep of the family so often gets *'scapegoated'* to mask the family's wider dysfunction. Notice how Jesus is truthful about what Judas (and later Peter) are to do, yet He doesn't blame either of them. Instead, just as He offers up His last breath at Calvary to welcome a sinner into Paradise, so Jesus uses His last precious hours in selfless giving: washing His disciples feet; sharing a meal with them, and teaching them through His actions and His words to live in love and peace.

Just as Jesus holds His beloved disciples, gently, He holds us too - helping us to see we are all flawed, all sinful: that we have *all* led Jesus to the Cross. One way or another, the reality of Jesus' Passion which we must contemplate as we enter into the Triduum of Christ's Passion, is that we are *we are all Judas*, we are all Peter. Yet through the Good News of Jesus Christ, God here with us, we are all loved ... for eternity.

*'Bring us back to Yourself, O Lord so that we may return to you;
renew our life as in days before.'*

This Lent and Passiontide, we have walked with Jesus as He shares, suffers and trusts God just as we too must learn to do. Let us then find time to quietly bow our heads as we ask Him to prepare us for these sacred days ahead; to help us recognise Judas

in ourselves and to give us courage to open our hearts and serve Him as He serves us.

With my love, on the journey,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Prayer for Wednesday in Holy Week

Judas

Written by Peter de Rosa, English Author and Jesuit Priest

Judas, if true love never ceases
How could you, my friend, have come to this?
To sell me for 30 pieces of silver;
Betray me with a kiss?

Judas, remember what I taught you:
Do not despair while dangling on that rope.
It's because you sinned that I have sought you,
I came to bring you hope.

Judas, let's pray and hang together,
You on your halter, I upon a hill.
Dear friend, even if you loved me never,
You know I love you still.

Amen.