

Daily Bible Reflections, April Week 1 - David Shirtliff

5th April Palm Sunday : Matthew 21: 1-11

There is no doubt about it, Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the King of the Jews. But he is a king who comes humbly and not armed for war.

At the start of this holy week I invite you to ponder what titles you prefer to use for Jesus ... King, Lord, Saviour, friend ... and why?

6th April : Matthew 21: 12-14

Did you notice what Matthew tells us about when Jesus enters the Temple? After turning the tables he heals the lame and the blind. That's significant. In 2 Samuel 5: 6-10 we read of King David's conquest of Jerusalem and how, in response to a taunt, there is prejudice against the blind and the lame. King Jesus is different, he heals them.

What does this action say to you about Jesus?

7th April : Matthew 22: 15-22

This episode is one of the better known encounters between Jesus and the religious authorities as they try to trap him. So keen are they to trip him up they are even prepared to bring the hated Roman coinage into the temple precincts. Jesus' reply astounds them. A coin bears the stamp of the emperor, but human beings are made in the image of God, we all bear God's stamp.

So what are the things that belong to God? How good are we at giving them?

8th April : Matthew 26: 6-16

What a contrast. A woman uses a jar of costly ointment to anoint Jesus. Such devotion. Judas on the other hand slips away and accepts just 30 pieces of silver as the price of betrayal.

What signs of devotion and generosity amongst God's people have you noticed recently?

9th April Maundy Thursday : Matthew 26: 20-35

The contrast continues. Jesus breaks bread and shares wine and speaks of his self-sacrifice. Meanwhile Judas plots betrayal and the rest of the disciples will desert Jesus, despite their words of loyalty. How often our words fail to match our intentions and our words.

Marvel at the truth that Jesus chose to work with frail human beings then, and that he continues to work through frail human beings today. Give thanks for the ways he's used you, and will use you.

10th April Good Friday : Matthew 27: 27-37

We began the week as Jesus entered Jerusalem as King. Now that title becomes a means of mockery 'Jesus, the King of the Jews' is his title on the cross. Mockery, but we know the truth; the Kingship of Jesus is of a very different kind.

Think about Jesus on that Friday. What words would you use to describe him? Give thanks for our Saviour.

11th April Holy Saturday : Matthew 27: 57-61

The regular disciples have fled. Other disciples now come to the fore. Joseph of Arimathea buries Jesus and two Marys watch to see where he is laid – these women are lined up to be the first witnesses of the resurrection. But for now they wait until the Sabbath is over.

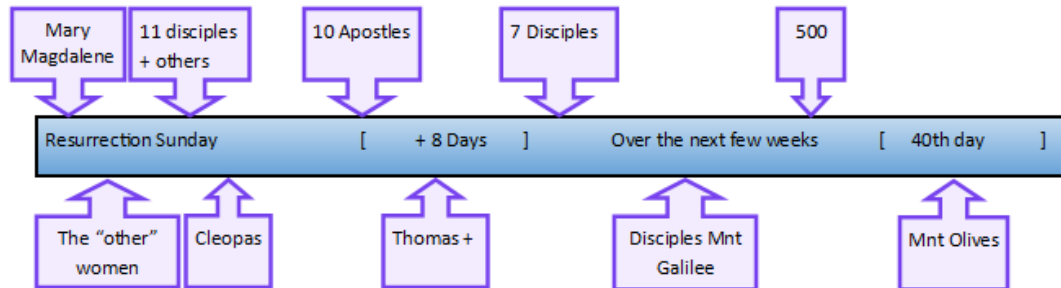
How good are we at waiting, waiting and praying that God will work his purposes out? What works of grace are you waiting for God to do? Offer them again to God in prayer.

Daily Bible Reflections, April Week 2 - Louise Whitelegg

I hope that you find this week interesting, stimulating and comforting. Please use it to help you delve into the topic, challenge yourself and discover how the Word is here to inspire, strengthen us and grow in these difficult times. Stay safe, Louise x

12th April : Overview

The diagram (adapted from Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell) shows a time line of the post resurrection appearances, with the table giving the relevant passages.



To Whom	Reference
Mary Magdalene	John 20:10-18
The “other” women	Matthew 28:8-10, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10
Eleven disciples and others	Luke 24:33-49, John 20:19-25
Cleopas & another disciple on the road to Emmaus	Luke 24:13-32
Ten Apostles and other (no Thomas)	John 20:19-23, Luke 24:36-43
Thomas and the other apostles	John 20:26-30
The seven disciples	John 21:1-19
Disciples Mount Galilee	Matthew 28:16-20,
To 500 people, inc other appearances & Paul	1 Corinthians 15,
Apostles on the Mount of Olives before his ascension	Luke 24:50-52, Acts 1:4-9

Easter is a time of mixed emotions. We see the worst of human behaviour and the strength of human faith. We feel the pain of loss and the joy of salvation. This week we are going to explore the post-resurrection appearances. To question ourselves, to look at how these passages continue to affect each of us in our modern lives. To start our journey together read John 19. Assign yourself a role in the passage and consider your motivation, what emotions would you have felt? What choices you had to make? Why it had to be so. Then change roles and see from a different perspective.

13th April : “Rabboni!” (teacher) : John 20:10-18 & Matthew 28:8-10

Thought: The anguish and pain of loss. We are stripped bare of who we think we are, the concept of self we have built. As Mary, we cycle through grief, anger, confusion, lack of clarity. Once we understand, we have hope and a new path and with that understanding comes purpose and joy.

Question: Who has been a teacher in your life? Have you lived up to their expectations? What do we cling to in our concept of self? Do we hang on to the right things? After this crisis has passed, are there things you will let go of? Or what will you pick up?

Act: Write a ‘to do’ list for how you will live your life after the crisis has past, think self, think community, think globally.

14th April : A walk to clear your head : Luke 24:13-49

Thought: Whilst walking away from Jerusalem, after witnessing terrible things, walking in their own world, hearts heavy with sorrow and disappointment, the two disciples met Jesus, yet didn’t recognise Him. The anticipation! they had seen his works, holding high hopes for the King of Israel, of the long-promised Messiah. They even had information of what had happened from their womenfolk and their tale of finding the tomb empty. Just like us, they had all the information, yet did not fully believe and trust.

Question: The definition of faith is complete trust or confidence in someone or something. Where is your faith in Christ from?

Act: Share your faith story. Take this opportunity to write down the moment you were born from above, to savour or to share.

15th April : “I don’t believe it!” (think Victor Meldrew) : John 20:19-30

Thought: We are all familiar with the phrase “doubting Thomas”, but this could have quite easily have been Doubting Peter or Doubting John as neither believed when they were first told. It seems to be a theme running through all the resurrection stories, each person who saw Him, first doubted. Yet these are the very people who saw first-hand the miracles. For ourselves, all we have is the testimony in the Bible. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John 20:29

Question: How brave are you in telling of your faith? How do you deal with doubters and naysayers?

Act: Pray for those souls you know are struggling with their life path. Light a candle and take a moment to meditate on the light. Pray the light of Christ is brought to those your heart worries for.

16th April : Being Grounded : John 21:1-19, Matthew 28:16-20

Thought: We have been sent to our room to think about things (at least that is how it feels to me). Being told off is horrible, but sometimes it is what we need to stop our behaviour and refocus. This is OUR 30 days and 30 nights. We (particularly as Christians) need to use the time wisely. Throughout the bible there are stories of forgiveness and repentance, Peter’s is one of the most memorable. Three times Jesus asks “do you love me” and gives three instructions; Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep. How glorious is the taste of forgiveness!

Question: How can you feed the lambs (youth)? How can you take care of sheep(adults)? How can you feed the sheep?

Act: Local businesses, self-employed and charities are all struggling at this time. Who can you help today?

17th April : Who are we? : Luke 24:50-52

Thought: Methodist teaching is sometimes summed up as the ‘four alls’. All need to be saved (original Sin), All can be saved (Universal Salvation), All can know they are saved (Assurance) and All can be saved completely (Christian perfection). For me the four alls perfectly describe the faith required to stride forward through hard times. Currently, we cannot ‘stay at our temple and worship with great joy’. But we are believers, we are blessed, and we are Methodists!

Question: How can we keep everyone connected? How can we continue our conversations and good works?

Act: Do you count your blessing? Grab an empty jar, every day write down things that you are grateful for, empty the jar each Sunday and give thanks!

18th April : Conclusion : 1 Corinthians 15

This week we have looked at Jesus’s post Resurrection appearances. This is the greatest story of the Bible! Easter and the resurrection underpin our faith, the truth that He is the Messiah, the risen Son of God. By the stories of the resurrection we are encouraged, and we are reminded how to live our lives, as were all his disciples, in faithful obedience. The disciples’ stories tell us of the times they stumble in their faith, we are all human, we question, we doubt. This Easter we have been given the gift of time, may we use the time wisely. Let’s rejoice in the earthly Jesus, let’s continue to read, enjoy and share the Gospel, enrich our own spirituality and share the light through our own personal ministry.

Question: The Corinthians passage reminds us that if there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body. How are you exercising spiritually?

Act: Make a commitment to grow spiritually, every day, fix a routine for reading or prayer or meditation. Carpe Diem!

Daily Bible Reflections, April Week 3 - Pauline Corlett

19th April : John 11: 1-2

Jesus had been causing quite a stir. People were talking and gossiping, they had heard all sorts, even about “one woman who poured expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet then wiped it with her hair!”

The woman was called Mary. She lived in Bethany, with her sister Martha and brother Lazarus. They had become friends and they were special to Jesus.

Question: Can you imagine being a close friend of Jesus? No need to imagine you are! He is as close to you now as a breath. Stop and feel His wonderful presence.

20th April : John 11: 3-6

Lazarus had become ill. In their desperation they sent a message to Jesus telling Him of their situation.

Question: Maybe there is something you would like to tell Jesus about your situation at this time. You can talk freely with Jesus and He will listen. He has known you all your life so nothing you say will shock Him.

For Jesus there was no knee-jerk reaction to this news of his friend’s illness. He knew that God was going to use this situation to bring glory. To show the people that God rules here on earth.

Question: There are times when we want our request heard and answered there and then. But God has perfect timing. Sometimes He will hold things, sometimes He will answer pray in an unusual way, but in every case, He is doing things that will turn out the best or better than you ever thought they would. Do you trust God’s timing in your life?

21st April : John 11: 7-16

Two days later and Jesus announced to the disciples “Let’s go back to Judaea”. What!!! They thought He was mad. The people of Judaea were still hopping mad about His last visit, they had threatened to stone Jesus, and now here was Jesus determined to go back there.

Question: When it comes to Godly things there are times people do not like what you say, but sometimes you have to stick by what is true no matter how unpopular it makes you. With God’s help maybe you can persuade them to see things need to change to bring God’s Kingdom here on earth.

God’s power was in every miracle that Jesus did, and Jesus was pleased that His disciples would be privileged to see first-hand how God would use this upset and loss to show how nothing is impossible for God. They set off, and Thomas who always makes me think of Eeyore from the Pooh Bear books, says “Let’s go with Him and die”. Positive thinking and Thomas seldom go in the same sentence. How could you encourage someone today? Why not go do it now.

22nd April : John 11: 17-27

Lazarus had been dead for four days now. Martha went to meet Jesus, she still hoped Jesus could do something. She held on to that hope and now He was here, and in the seriousness of that moment Jesus told her face to face, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and who ever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Jesus looked for confirmation that Martha believed that He was the resurrection. There was no humming and haring in her reply, “YES, Lord!”

Question: Resurrection is a big word, it means a raising up, to cause to stand or rise up from sleep or from the dead, it comes from the Greek word ANASTASIS. Why not take a moment to think about this. Think of how sure Martha was. Think of how straight speaking Jesus is. All we can say is Thankyou and Amen.

23rd April : John 11: 28-37

Jesus waited in this same spot and Martha went to fetch Mary. She left so quickly that those who had come to grieve with her thought that she was going to the grave side, so they followed her. Lazarus must have been a very popular man; his death was such an upset to so many. Jesus could see this, and He too felt their pain.

We often forget that Jesus was fully human, and fully God. For Him the pain is great too as He shares in our sorrow. He is not listening from a distance but right up close with us. Maybe you have felt His presence helping you to find joy when your hopes are dashed. You have seen a robin or caught glimpse of or heard something that has just helped at that moment, to lift your spirits. God is with us in all the little things as well as the big.

24th April : John 11: 38-44

This was a big ask, but Jesus knew that God was there. First Jesus thanks God, (we sometimes forget to thank God in all situations). God was listening and Jesus asks that Lazarus come out. We all tend to have a box, the size that we think God fits into, have you ever thought that your box is too small? Our God is the same one who made the Heavens and the Earth and all that is in it. You're going to need a seriously bigger box than you ever thought of. Awesome is the word to use here, take a moment to appreciate what Jesus did for us so that we could know a Heavenly Father like this.

25th April : John 11: 45-53

The whole episode had the Council jumping. They didn't know what to do, these miracles were spectacular, but if they let Jesus go on, he would steal their thunder, they had credentials and He was a builder's son from Nazareth of all places. The political balance of Romans towards Jewish leaders would be jeopardised. That could destroy the temple. The best political solution was to get rid of this bothersome rabbi as soon as possible, to save the Nation. Caiaphas was the High priest, and it is somewhat strange that he prophesied that Jesus was going to die, and this would bring together all the scattered people of God. It is as if Caiaphas had got insider knowledge. Could God have given him this info?

Question: When God has a plan, nothing will stop it. Have you ever seen God's hand guide your journey in life? Would it be a story to encourage others in your church if you told them about it? Are you brave enough to tell?

Daily Bible Reflections, April Week 4 - Andy Fishburne

This week we are going to look slowly at the passage for next Sunday - John 10.1-10.

26 April : John 10.1-2

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

To help picture the scene that Jesus describes, experts think that had in mind a large house with a yard in front of it, with stone walls and maybe briars growing on top. There was one correct way in. This whole section comprises Jesus warning people about dangerous influences.

Question: Picture yourself in the sheepfold as described. What does it mean to you to be aware of people creeping over the wall, through the briars?

27 April : John 10.3-5

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

There are classic Old Testament references to God being a shepherd, leading his people out. Have a look at Ezekiel 34.13 and Numbers 27.17.

Question: Do you see God as leading you out - taking you somewhere new?

28 April : John 10.6

Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Here we have the author of the Gospel giving an aside. Jesus often used ‘figures of speech’ - word paintings, to help get his message across, even if people didn’t universally get it.

Question: How do you use art or creativity to pass on the Good news?

29 April : John 10.7

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

We hit a little problem here - is Jesus the shepherd or the gate? Some experts think that a copying error might have been made here, as this doesn’t sit well with verse 14 that follows. But maybe Jesus being the gate is the original intention - normally editors try and make things more sensible, but this is a pretty strange metaphor! Some people have suggested that Shepherds might sleep in front of the opening of the sheepfold at night, so perhaps they are both shepherd and gate.

Question: Do you ever think of Jesus as a gate - protecting you as you sleep?

30 April : John 10.8

All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.

We think Jesus was describing the Pharisees as thieves and bandits. The Pharisees believed that God was unhappy with the nation of Israel and would only release them from the Roman occupation if they became more ‘holy’, so they insisted that people obey the Jewish laws in their entirety. They added more and more layers of laws just to make sure that they were doing it right. In a way they were the religious fundamentalists of the day.

Question: Are there the modern day Pharisees within Christianity?

1 May : John 10.9

I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Again, Jesus call himself the gate, and says that we the sheep should pass in and out through him.

Question: What do you think this means for you?

2 May : John 10.10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

The word ‘kill’ really means slaughter in Greek - and it may be a little dig at the Temple system of sacrificial worship. Jesus contrasts this approach with his gift of abundant life.

Question: How can we shift from a Pharisaical religion of death and laws towards a Jesus-centred one of abundant life?