

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? words from the prophecy of Isaiah, the 43rd chapter, the 19th verse. May I speak in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's difficult to believe that we're reaching the end of Lent. It seems to have flown by this year! I think this is partly as we've begun to return to a more normal pattern of life post-pandemic, and partly as it's my first Lent here at St Peter's.

Even though it's flown-by, it's been a rich and rewarding season in the life of our church family. Wednesday evening's have been a particular highlight in the week for me. Romee, Dorothy and Hope offered wonderful reflections on particular stations, and Sarah and Charlie from St Mary's Islington and Grace Church Hackney joined us to share their reflections and lead us in the stations. The last Wednesday in Lent will feature a reflection from our churchwarden Anna. Romee's reflection on how we are called to let ourselves fall into God's hands. Hope's message on we are called to share in Jesus' ministry like Simon of Cyrene. Dorothy's focus on the crosses each of us are called to bear as we live the Christian life.

Likewise, on Sunday's our sermon series on 'new life and resurrection at St Peter's' has provided us all with a rich diet of reflection. Mae's unpacking of what the resurrection means for us as a community, Amanda's encouragement to embrace change and new life, and to step into new areas in our parish life. And who could forget Stephen's recipe for his spiritual semolina pudding...

A key ingredient in the make up of all of our spiritual semolina puddings is prayer - the subject of our talks after each Sunday in Lent, which conclude immediately after this service. Prayer is the bedrock of our life as a church family - no matter how often or how-ever we pray.

One new opportunity for prayer we've enjoyed in Lent has been our Holy Hour on Wednesdays. It's intended to be an hour of silent prayer in the presence of Christ on the altar, between evening prayer and stations of the cross. In fact, the whole hour is something of a holy hubbub. The sounds of people coming and going, the murmur of children's groups and community users ascending from the crypt, mingles with the rising incense used to symbolise our prayers. I've found myself each Wednesday gazing upon Jesus in the Sacrament on the altar amidst this bustle, and realising afresh his presence at the centre of all the hurley and burley of our lives. Christ's presence with us in the sacrament reminds us of his presence with us in the midst of all we do. Each week, I discovered afresh his invitation to a deeper silence which transcends the noise around us - that peace which passes all understanding which only he can give. Each week, I was reminded of the presence of Christ at the

heart of our church family and at the centre of all the relationships we are seeking to build with our community.

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This morning we enter Passiontide. The season of the Church's year in which we call to mind Christ's suffering and death as we approach the events of Holy Week. Our images are covered as we focus our attention on Christ, and what he is about to undergo for our salvation. The events of Holy Week are tumultuous. Jesus is acclaimed noisily and triumphantly as king on Palm Sunday. We celebrate the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, the gift of Holy Communion, the Mass. We watch with him in the Garden of Gethsemane until we too like the disciples leave him alone in the altar of repose. We mark his death on Good Friday through devotion to the Cross and hearing his Passion. We celebrate with joy his Resurrection on Holy Saturday with our evening vigil and Easter party. We celebrate the new life he is calling us toward each and every Sunday.

Christ is at the centre of this story, and is calling us to make our relationship with him central to our shared life here at St Peter's, and central to our lives at home and at work. This is the relationship we heard about in our second reading. Like Paul, we are invited to make the most of Holy Week as we press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

The journey of Holy Week through Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday is a wonderful opportunity to encounter Christ afresh. Each of these services offers us a different way to prepare ourselves to encounter Christ anew and again at the centre of our lives, just as Mary's anointing in our Gospel prepares Jesus' body, foreshadowing the Resurrection that comes at the end of Holy Week and the end of all time. Make the most of these services of Holy Week.

How is Christ calling you to encounter him afresh this Passiontide? Where in your life and in our church family and community is Christ making himself known? Where in your life is God preparing a new thing? Where is the new life to which God is calling us all about to spring forth?