

Walking Through Easter

Along Purton Footpaths



A Route Along the Footpaths of Purton

Reflecting on The Easter Story

For Individual walkers or groups to take at some point during the Easter Holiday.

Please Note

Walkers are responsible for their own safety as they use this route

Reflections might be read whilst walking between directions or while stopping briefly close to significant places

Revised April 2022

PART ONE – Especially connected to the events of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Saturday.

1. From The Village Hall walk 50 or so yards down Station Road into Willowbrook. Take the footpath on the left across the end of Waitemeads Close - then the path on the left 80 or so yards in between numbers 15 and 16. Cross the stream bear left at the fork back across the stream through the chain gate over the stones and up the field towards the High Street.



REFLECTION



Walking up the path towards the houses you are conscious of a village set on a hill. Jerusalem was frequently known as the City built on the Hill. Pilgrims wound their way up to the city for the Passover. During his last week Jesus's went up to Jerusalem each morning from Bethany where he was staying. As you approach the stone buildings of the late Vic Cook's farmyard at the top of the hill and look to the right it is easy to imagine the rectangular flat roof stone houses of first century Palestine

2. Turn right at the High Street walk a few yards and cross the road into the layby. Stop here for a moment and look back at the cream walls of the Vet's Surgery.

REFLECTION

Above the vet's surgery is a flat – for many years home to the owners of the shop beneath. It is approached (by those who lived there) from an outside staircase through the brick archway and could be imagined as like The Upper Room – a place where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples.



This was the Jewish Passover and in celebrating it Jesus changed the familiar century-old words and added some new and extraordinary statements about himself – This (bread) is my body. This (wine) is my blood given for many. Try to put yourself in the shoes of others present at this meal. They expected to hear something old, tried and familiar. They didn't. It was all *supposed* to be about the Israelites escaping from Egypt and the lamb that was killed and eaten the night before they left. What could this man now possibly be saying about what was shortly to take place?!

3. *Walk up to the other end of the layby and stop for a moment either on the pavement or in the layby if no traffic.*

REFLECTION

On the left and the right you are amongst gardens – one visible over the wall of Ivy Lodge, Cyprus trees behind you lining the entrance to Northcote, and the memorial garden across the road. Jesus left the Supper at the Upper Room and went to the Garden of Gethsemane. The olive trees there were not too different in size and shape to the laurel bushes on your left and the evergreen across the road. It was in The



Garden of Gethsemane, just outside the stone walls of the City, that Jesus sweat great drops of blood in anticipation of what was to come. Contrasting to his grief he found his disciples had fallen asleep.

A WIDER ACT OF REFLECTION IF YOU WISH

Jesus prayed hard in Gethsemane. We remember all who are in grief at this time. For those that are worried about themselves and members of their family, especially those stranded in Ukraine. May they feel the comfort of knowing they are not alone. The thoughts and prayers of many are with them. May they know the inner strength of the one who knows so well what it is to grieve – for the violence of one to another, for our abuse of creation, and for the cruel treatment of those we see as different to ourselves.

4. *Walk for a short way up the High Street and take the first left into The Peak. (Beside another recent garden) Take the school entrance for 50 yards – then the footpath to left behind St Mary's Primary School. Some passing places possible on left.*

REFLECTION

Purton's two schools which you walk beside might remind of other centres of learning. In Jerusalem the big one was The Temple – a building that served as law courts and University as well as centre of worship.

During his last week Jesus spent much time there teaching his followers and debating with the legal and academic experts. In fact at his arrest Jesus asked 'Did you have to come at night with swords and clubs. I was with you everyday in the temple and you did not try to arrest me.' You may also see flowering Hawthorn common in Palestine and thought to have been the material of the Crown of Thorns placed on Jesus' head by the Soldiers.

Interestingly like St Mary's School, demolished and rebuilt in 2011, the present Temple was not the original one. It had had to be rebuilt twice – most recently by King Herod. At his trial Jesus was accused of threatening to destroy "this Temple" and rebuild it in three days! John tells us that after Jesus had thrown the money changers out of the Temple he was asked for a sign to prove his authority to do that. Jesus referred, as people sometimes do, to his own body as a temple. The sign was – tear down this body (temple) and in three days it will rise again. This saying carried great significance to the Disciples following the first Easter. And like a number of things Jesus said – the mention of three days probably did not mean too much at the time. It did later.

TO GIVE THANKS AND REMEMBER AT THIS TIME

Remember in whatever way you choose the teachers and assistants in our Schools.

5. Turn left at the end of the path down Collage Road and stop in the wider part outside number 12 (20 yards from the layby)

REFLECTION



Look to your left across the main road. You see the stone walls of College Farm House with its chimneys against the skyline. Jesus was taken to a house in many respects not terribly different to this. It belonged to the High Priest. Jesus was subjected to a secret late night trial before the High Council. Witnesses could not agree about the accusation. Jesus was eventually condemned from his own lips by the Council, ruling he had spoken blasphemy. Notice the walls

around the house. It was in a courtyard such as this that Peter waited incognito trying to get a glimpse of what was going on inside. Three times when challenged he denied knowing Jesus.

TO REMEMBER AT THIS TIME

All those in the world today who are falsely accused and have had concocted crimes pinned upon them. Remember those who are made to deny friends, family and beliefs out of dreadful fear.

6. Turn right along the High Street for a few yards and then take the path to the right alongside the Angel car park. Stop at Old School Mews.

REFLECTION

Think of the time this building was opened at as a School. It brought many benefits. But try to imagine the foreboding of a small boy seen guilty of a serious misdemeanour, an embarrassment to his superiors, waiting outside the study of a strict Victorian Headmaster. The power and extreme methods of a Roman Governor were a thousand times greater. Jesus suffered them brutally. And the accompanying mockery and sarcasm were those reserved for one hailed as The King of a people almost every Roman Soldier held a grudge against. (A headstrong troublesome lot inhabiting the last place most ever wished to be posted)



TO REMEMBER AT THIS TIME

All those across the world who suffer torture and imprisonment and unjustified punishment for their beliefs.

7. Continue along the path running between the old school building and the back of the house on the corner of Playclose. This path is narrow but there are three or four hidden passing places along its length at T junctions. Please look ahead here and wait for any walking in the opposite direction (It is generally not heavily used coming that way)

REFLECTION

This narrow path between junctions is reflective of the narrow streets of Jerusalem along which Jesus had to carry his cross. Some would take every opportunity to hurl abuse at any shackled prisoner. Many others would just be waking - thoroughly shocked that the one for whom they had had such hopes was now carrying his cross to the place of execution. Following him were a number of women who wept.

A WIDER REFLECTION OR A PRAYER IF YOU WISH – Written by Roy Blake for Purton's Traditional Good Friday Walk of Reflection – We remember our country, our village, our world. We remember all who weep today. For those who weep for loved ones they have lost. For those who weep because those they love have turned against them. For those who weep because their future looks bleak. Might tears of sadness in the night be turned to tears of joy in the morning.

8. *When you get to the open field bear right at 45 degrees towards the gate in the hedge to your right. Once through the gate turn immediately left beside School Sports Field.*

REFLECTION

Look through the green metal fence at the goal posts on the school field. Think of the goals we all set ourselves – to stay alive and healthy for as long as possible, to successfully defend ourselves against infection, misrepresentations, and unjust treatment. One of the challenges of this part of the Easter story is to do with the goals Jesus, the central character, seems to be firing at. There seem key points where he could easily have changed the course of events – saying less to the Chief Priests, saying more to his Roman Governor trial judge - or just not going into Jerusalem at such a sensitive and volatile time. Jesus did the opposite of what everyone would normally expect. This baffled and wrong-footed his disciples. But afterwards looking back they saw Jesus achieving a prize goal which millions go on to celebrate two thousand years later. What that goal was is at the heart of Easter - and something that takes much more exploring.

9. *At the end of this when through the hoop-gate take the footpath again bearing right at 45degrees. Follow footpath down the dip across the flat bridge and up the hill towards phone mast between two pylons. Stop by the farm gate.*



REFLECTION

A heavy cross was carried up the hill above the city. It was laid on the ground. Jesus was stretched upon it and great nails were driven through his hands and feet. The hill was very visible. It was meant to be. The aim was a stark warning to all against challenging authority. However in seeking this a poignant new image was created - a cross on a hill. To all Jews or any readers of the "Old Testament" this carried reminders to all of Jewish influence of a healing symbol raised up during historic wanderings in the wilderness. (A serpent on a pole) Later this 'lifting up' carried significance across the world.

Jesus was left to die – slowly. Crowds gathered round and mocked 'He was very keen to save others – but when it comes to it he can't even save himself!' His friends had deserted him. His enemies had got him. Earlier at his arrest Peter pulled out a sword. Jesus commanded 'Put your sword away.' Then he divulged 'Don't you realise I could have called on my father and he would have sent twelve legions of angels to rescue me BUT ... That BUT seems to be at the centre of the Faith that grew out of the first Easter. CS Lewis the great Oxford thinker and fellow novelist of J R R Tolkien suggest it had much to do with changing places – God not only sharing our suffering – but taking a major part of that suffering upon himself – God exchanging before the court of heaven the soiled reputation of the human race for the blameless record of his own Son. On a hill above our everyday world the message to many has been that heaven seemed to touch earth via that cross with forgiveness and love. A special place.



10. After you have spent a little time here turn left from the direction you have come walk along the ridge gently down hill in the direction of the Church spire – following the path through the two sets of gates. (The cows in the field seem well accustomed to walkers along the path. But, as always, deviate slightly should you need to in order to avoid coming between a mother and a calf - take care)

REFLECTION

During the recent time of social isolation we became well accustomed to things we looked forward to — being cancelled. To the followers of Jesus leaving that place (some at a distance) everything would seem cancelled – hope, understanding, meaning. The walk down the hill would be a very long one.

11. When through the second gate and out of the field with the cattle take a moment to look around.

REFLECTION

This stretch of the route moves from an open and sometimes bleak ridge down towards a collection of planted trees – surrounding gardens – those of the Manor House and beyond. Walking down this path the stone buildings of The Pear Tree become more prominent. This extended former vicarage could well be imagined as a country house - the house of a rich family.

Roman law allowed the family of an executed criminal to claim the body. Otherwise it was left to the vultures and scavenger dogs. Jesus's family lived in Galilee. They had no means to give Jesus a burial in Jerusalem. Joseph, hailing from the nearby Judean town of Arimathea, was a member of the Jewish Council, The Sanhedrin who had condemned Jesus. It is likely to be from him that we get the report of Jesus's trial. He had great respect for Jesus and it must have been heart rending for him to see the tide of committee opinion weighing so heavily towards their verdict.

He, probably quite bravely, went to ask for the body and laid it in his own burial cave. Many Purtonians might have poignant memories of nearby processions following a hearse from The Church to The Cemetery. Here we might give a thought for those early followers who had not deserted their master carrying the body of Jesus down from the hill of Calvary.



A WIDER REFLECTION IF YOU WISH

We remember all those across the world whose loved ones have been taken from them with no notice, memorial or helps towards closure. We remember to those at this present time who are not able to attend the funerals of their families and close friends. May the recall of past lives provide rich memory and the hope of seeing loved ones again become a growing reality.



12. At the end of the path cross the road and turn left using the footpath. Cross the Church End "T" junction and turn right following the path between the Box Trees towards The Church

REFLECTION

Mark tells us, as was the custom, a large stone was rolled across the entrance to Jesus's tomb. The rounded shape of these box trees, and maybe the size of the smaller ones, might remind us of this stone which famously later was found rolled away.

13. Follow the path into the Churchyard and stop under the yew tree beside the Church's south door.

REFLECTION

In this part of the Churchyard there are several large chest tombs. Underneath several are vaults in which the deceased were placed. The impression created by the weight of stone above might well be of closed cold solidity. Life and achievement during time on this earth are recorded on the side. But that life is now finished.



PART TWO – Especially connected to the events of Easter Sunday and Monday

14. Continue now along the Church Path and stop at the other end of the Churchyard

REFLECTION

Early on Sunday morning three women went to the tomb of Jesus to complete the spice embalming custom. They found it empty. They heard a message 'Why look for the living amongst the dead?' They left the garden convinced they had then seen Jesus – Alive. They ran to tell the disciples. As you look through the open Lychgate, at this time of year often with new leaves and flowers blossoming at the other side, perhaps it is possible to imagine something of the mixture of consternation and elation as those women took away the image of the tomb open and empty combined with the extraordinary experience of Jesus again being with them.



SOME MUSIC TO HELP REFLECT HERE

If you have the means, here listen to the classic piece *Jesus is Alive* from *The Passion* by Adrian Snell with The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and many famous musicians & singers Youtube link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nstf6Uwy0e0>. Or download via Amazon. Listen through the short pause to the end of the piece.

15. Then walk on turning left along the coble edged footpath and stopping outside the corner house on the left.

REFLECTION

The House we have stopped beside is built on an incline with much on the living space on the upper floor. The downstairs rooms look darker. Perhaps we can imagine the frightened disciples holed up in such a house fearing the knock on the door by the temple police. The three women who had been to the tomb came and told the disciples what they had witnessed. But they were not believed. It was too incredible. Later everything changed. But first we need to continue on with our journey

A WIDER REFLECTION IF YOU WISH

We remember all in the world who live in fear of persecution torture or death because their Faith or conviction. May they find places of freedom to express their beliefs openly and where they wish to worship without danger.

16. Continue along the road past Purton House and turn right along the track to the cricket ground - then read as you walk

REFLECTION

On the Sunday evening following Jesus's crucifixion two people were walking back from Jerusalem to their home in the village of Emmaus – deep in discussion. Someone joined them on the road. He broke into their conversation enquiring what they were discussing with such intensity and sadness. Perhaps we can almost overhear their conversation as we walk down a similar road “Are you the only person in Jerusalem in the dark about what's been going on there this weekend?!” “What sort of goings on?”



“Everything about Jesus of Nazareth of course!! A Prophet – we believed – we thought The Messiah had come – then he is betrayed – shafted – handed to Romans – wild accusations – sentenced – crucified – frightening speed – body disappeared – rumours floating everywhere.”

“Any more complaints?! You are good Jewish believers like me. You know the scriptures. Isn't this what you expected to happen to The Messiah.? Look through the scriptures – Moses – Isaiah – Micah – Hosea – King David – Daniel – Jeremiah – Zachariah. How many more do you want!”

17. Shortly after passing the house on the left leave the track and take the path to your left into the wood beside the stream

REFLECTION

Beside the stream next to a makeshift bridge is often a tyre suspended by a rope from a tree. It is used by children to swing on. It then acts like a pendulum swinging from one side to the other. Imagine how the thoughts and feelings of those two followers of Jesus must have swung during the previous three days – from delight as Jesus made fools of the accusers who constantly tried to trap him - to disbelief and despair as they woke to see him at his enemies' hands – crucified. The pendulum was then about to swing again.

18. A hundred or so yards further on, with the more substantial bridge on your left, take a right turn up a slight hill and then a left through the gate and along the right hand side of the cricket field.

A PASSING THOUGHT

Purton cricket ground is perhaps one of only a few anywhere that is the shape of an upturned dome - glorious to bat on but a nightmare for fielders! In all directions the ball accelerates as it is chased. We often equate Jerusalem's Dome of The Rock with the Mosque that has been built around it. But the dome has much earlier origins – going back to the times of King David and in tradition to the time of Abraham. The location of Mount Moriah where the Old Testament commends Abraham for being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac to God (something not uncommon in the general culture of the world at the time). He was stopped. God did not want this.

However God's own sacrifice of His Son to save humanity – something at the heart of Christianity and central to the service of Holy Communion, could well have taken place within a stone's throw from this site.

19. Take the path at end of ground by practice nets and through the wood into the open field. Perhaps read as you walk

REFLECTION

During most winter months here in late afternoon you are walking into the setting sun. The two on the road to Emmaus invited their fellow traveller to stay with them as evening was coming. "Its getting dark, stay, eat with us." And then - lo and behold, the man they had been talking to, but had hardly looked at – they recognised. Jesus himself! "We must tell someone!" They were so convinced by what they had experienced that they immediately ran six and a half miles back to Jerusalem. Imagine them here, swinging an oil lamp, hurriedly running over less than even ground to tell their news.

20. At the road turn right and walk the 50 or so yards to the Tithe Barn.

REFLECTION (AT THE TITHE BARN)



Look up at the windows of the Tithe Barn on the right. Imagine the disciples in hiding here (They may well have changed locations for security). The two from Emmaus rush in to break their news to the holed up followers. Before they have chance to spill their news they are greeted with 'The Lord is Risen! He has appeared to Simon!' While the scene on the road was explained something else happened - seen by all - confirmation of something extraordinarily convincing to believers and a challenging mystery to cynics. Jesus appeared to the whole gathered company at once – as he did

later, we hear from one of St Paul's letters – to 'more than 500 people at one time – most witnesses then still alive'

21. Cross road and walk behind signpost along Church Path through line of trees.



REFLECTION ON CHURCH PATH

If you take the detour through the two cemetery gates and look at the head stones the most common image seen is that of the cross – a mark etched in stone at a time when fundamental issues of life and death are given central place in people's thinking. The events we have sought to imagine on this walk surround the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross. It would seem no single act by one person can have had such a profound effect upon human experience or expectation of life to come. That is the challenge of Easter.

22. Follow Church Path along to the High Street. Once there turn right back to the starting point at the Triangle.

REFLECTION

As you pass The Methodist Church on your right consider how many churches, housed in a whole range of buildings sprang up so quickly during the years immediately following the events we have considered on this walk. Archaeological and historical evidence shows a most dramatic spread of Christian places of worship – many hundreds across a wide area in just a few decades. It was not only two travellers to a village in Palestine that felt these events were of such significance that they must be shared amongst all.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- For any questions about this walk call David Martin on 01793 770171 and for comments or suggestions please email davgramart@gmail.com
- For any questions about the Christian Faith or to ask for prayer, call Revd Ian Tweedie-Smith on 01793 770077 email vicarage@stmaryspurton.org.uk alternatively Revd Judith Wells on 01793 770627 email judithwells36@googlemail.com
- For further reading: Two Classic Easter Books – Adults - *Who Moved The Stone*, Frank Morison. *Families – Lion, Witch, Wardrobe*, C S Lewis
- If you would like to make a contribution towards costs of producing this booklet donations can be made by bank transfer to St Mary's Church account number 67015549 sort code 602140.
- Please Remember - Walkers are responsible for their own personal safety as they use this route
- For more details of future events or services see www.stmaryspurton.org.uk

HAPPY EASTER

