

Jeremiah 31.31-34; Hebrews 5.5-10; John 12.20-33

Humans love stories. I wonder what stories are near and dear to your own hearts and experience. We love to immerse ourselves in tales and fantasies, in imagined lives and others' experiences. We love to be in a world other than our own. This is the magic of the big screen at the cinema - that you feel immersed in the movie, swept along in the adventure.

Growing up, I was an avid reader, and loved losing myself for hours in the stories of Narnia, The Hobbit, Harry Potter, Little House on the Prairie, and countless other worlds and characters.

When I wasn't reading, you could often find me and my older brother playing games with our collection of sea shells, or crafting intricate neighbourhoods for our marbles out of lego and cardboard boxes.

It draws us in, this tantalising storytelling, and it can also be very enriching. We learn to empathise, to see other points of view, to appreciate our own lives in the light of others' which are very different. And human beings love drama! We are interested in other people, especially those who seem unusual or charismatic. We

revel in the sensationalist world of celebrities, we love finding out fun facts about sporting personalities or actors or podcasters. And in Jesus' time, he was as close as you could get to our modern sense of a celebrity. Word of this unusual man spread abroad, and people from foreign countries wanted to see him for themselves.

We don't know why the Greeks wanted to see Jesus - had they heard that he was wise? That he could do miracles? That he was causing political unrest? - but whatever the reason, they come and request an audience. They want to be part of this drama.

Ultimately, it seems that they didn't get the personal interaction they were looking for. Instead, Jesus begins speaking to the disciples, and the crowd around him (presumably including the Greeks!) hear the strange sound of God's voice coming from heaven. They find themselves part of the unusual story, but not in the way they were looking for.

Today, we embark on the last full week of Lent, before Holy Week begins in a week's time with Palm Sunday. We are on the cusp of the biggest story of all time, about to dive headlong into a liturgical remembrance

and celebration of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, his last Passover supper, his trial, death and resurrection.

Throughout Lent, we too, have been drawn along in the drama of Jesus' life. Lent echoes Jesus' experience of being in the wilderness for 40 days, being without food or comforts for an extended period of time before he began his ministry. Our faith, our church calendar, our liturgy and worship is like another world that we enter into. It is another one of those immersive practices that enriches our own personal lived experience. It's a story, a true story, that we become part of.

This is why our practice of celebrating Holy Week is such a gift, and so powerful. Walking the week from Palm Sunday to Easter with Jesus can bring it alive in a new way, make us see it like we've never seen it before, allow it to speak to us and mean something to us that is perhaps new, or perhaps refreshed.

So I want to invite, encourage, and ask you, to come to whatever Holy Week services you can this year, because the experience of entering into this world, this experience, can be intense, beautiful, moving, and

deeply joyful. Come and be immersed. Come and walk with Jesus.

Holy Week is a gift. On Maundy Thursday experience your feet being washed as Jesus' washed his disciples' feet. Kneel to wash someone else's feet and feel what it is to serve with grace. See the altar be stripped, our finery reduced to simplicity of bare wood and stone. Then spend some time in the Garden of Repose during the vigil, which mirrors the garden on the Mount of Olives where Jesus spent the night in prayer, asking God that the cup of suffering be taken away from him, where his disciples were tired and fell asleep. Sit in the Garden and stay awake for an hour with Jesus.

On Good Friday we are with him in death. The curtain is torn, the sky is dark, the body on the cross is weeping water and blood. God himself dies and we are there, watching. The story carries us with him, and it is sombre, even shocking, and for a moment we perhaps forget what comes next, as we dwell in the moment of grief.

On Holy Saturday we are waiting. We hold our breath. The tomb is sealed.

Then after sunset, it is the beginning of the third day, and we embark on the most dramatic, glorious and joy-filled service of our entire calendar. The Easter Vigil begins with fire and stories. We hear the journey of God's people through the Old Testament, and woven through it is the story of God's promises and covenant. The story of how God has always been at work among God's people. The story of the waiting for the promised messiah. The story of anticipation.

In song and words we listen and hear and live for ourselves the breath-baiting, nail-biting, eye-widening wonder of life, death, and resurrection. Jesus will not be held down by death because God is more powerful than that. The tomb cannot hold him, the stone is rolled away by angels. Bells ring, the organ plays, the people rejoice and celebrate. It is wondrous, and we enter into Easter joy.

On Easter Sunday as we bring our flowers to transform the cross, the New Covenant has been made, and written on our hearts. We now know God for ourselves, we experience the risen Christ and see his glory in each other's eyes.

This richness is yours for the taking. Don't shy away from the sombre, because it lends beautiful depth to the

joy that follows. Jesus' death and life are the most important things to ever happen to us. So come. Come and see. Come and join in.

We are already on the journey. We are nearing the end of Lent. We are already being carried by the story of the man who was God, so why not grab it with both hands, as we yearn to lean in even further.

Amen.