

Here – and there



Reflecting on the global pandemic in the context of Jesus' journey to the cross



Introduction

These resources are an opportunity for adults and young people to explore in a biblical context, the challenges and changes to everyday life we have experienced during the pandemic. Six scenes take us through Mark's account of Jesus' journey to the cross (chapters 14 and 15). Each scene makes a connection between 'here', our world today, and 'there', the world of the Passion narrative. The connecting points are brought to life through voices talking about experiences in the pandemic, contrasted with a voice from a character in the Gospel. Questions for conversation and reflection, an image, a prayer action, and suggestions for music to listen to, offer different ways for individuals and groups to consider how the pandemic has affected lives today alongside familiar passages of Scripture.

The six scenes connect these themes and Bible passages:

- 1 **Healing presence** – Simon's house, Mark 14.3-9
- 2 **Provision** – the upper room, Mark 14.17-25
- 3 **Isolation** – the garden of Gethsemane, Mark 14.32-42
- 4 **Living with tension** – the courtyard, Mark 15.6-15
- 5 **Anguish** – the cross, Mark 15.33-39
- 6 **Hope** – the tomb, Mark 15.42-47

How can the resources be used?

The six scenes could be used weekly through Lent, or grouped together to make one or two longer sessions. They could be used as daily reflections during Holy Week. The materials are suitable for groups meeting online, as a face to face group with social-distancing (and appropriate preparation of any handouts and equipment), or by individuals/households on their own. Select from the suggestions for exploring the connecting points between 'here' and 'there' to suit your situation.

You could ask different people to read the Bible passage and the monologues for the voices that connect 'here' and 'there', or record them beforehand. Decide whether to send out the materials in advance, or share them on screen during the session. Some people like to follow a text as it's read; others may prefer to close their eyes and listen. There are suggestions for music to listen to, which you could play while you show the image, and leave space for stillness and reflection, or invite people to consider the questions before sharing their thoughts together.

There is a follow-up activity for each scene to encourage individuals to continue engaging with the theme beyond each session. If you use the materials with a group, you could suggest that participants do it between sessions. You could open each session by talking about it.

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About the writer

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Photographs by Samantha Burgoyne



Scene 1 Healing presence

We are sometimes guilty of focusing so much on the immediate needs around us (particularly in the crisis of pandemic), that we forget to be still and be present with Jesus. We consider the importance of finding a healthy balance of 'being' and 'doing'. Might we be in need of a healing touch from Jesus ourselves?

Simon's house – Mark 14.3-9

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'



Voices

Here Minister experiencing burnout

It's been a long year. I never imagined when all of this started last March that I'd still be organising distanced worship and Zoom meetings. It's incredible how far we've come to be honest, but Lord, I'm so tired. My working week has become all about the admin – finding worship songs without copyright restrictions, recording video messages for those who are shielding, sending out Zoom links left, right and centre for meetings I can normally just rock up to and see other human beings face to face. The spirituality has gone out of the window. I'm drained. I thrive on company, on contact. My sermons build in enthusiasm when I feel the body language lift in the people around me, the Holy Spirit makes me buoyant as the words trip out – that doesn't happen so much on a screen. I'm proud of the congregations for rolling with the changes (mostly), for turning up online when they'd rather be in church, for phoning one another and showing love despite the circumstances. But Lord, I'm tired. I miss having the energy to pray, to read and study for my own fulfilment. I miss spending time with Jesus, there's nothing else like it.

There The woman who anointed Jesus

I've never experienced anything like this. A rowdy room full of chatter and activity, that went quiet when I came in and moved towards Jesus. I was holding the jar close to my chest – I was afraid of dropping it or that someone might grab it. It was so quiet when I knelt at his feet. He looked at me – he's got bright, warm eyes. I felt he could see right inside me, it was like he knew everything about me. I broke the jar and bathed his forehead with ointment. The sweet smell went all round the room. I'd never felt so close to someone, even my family – this closeness, I felt I was touching the face of God. He closed his eyes but it still felt as if he was looking at me. I forgot there was anyone else there, everything I'd thought or worried about during the day vanished, there was just me and him. I felt so good, like a weight had been lifted. I hadn't felt so peaceful for years. I was whole, connected, loved. It was like nothing else.

Conversation and reflection

- 1 What has your experience of 'being' and 'doing' been like throughout the months of pandemic? Have you found time to spend with Jesus during the past weeks and months?
- 2 Consider the atmosphere in the room when Jesus was anointed by the woman at Bethany. What kind of emotions and conversations can you imagine going on, and where would you be in the scene?
- 3 How might we be more mindful about self-care in the coming weeks and months, allowing Jesus to restore and heal us through his presence?

Listen

[Alabasta](#), Rend Collective

[Lord, we come to ask your healing](#) recorded by at St Laurence's Church, Chorley

Prayer action

Beforehand, ask people to find a fragrant hand cream, perfume or essential oil, or something else pleasant (e.g. fresh herbs) to rub into their hands and smell.

Invite each person to rub fragrant ointment into their hands and smell it, as you pray together:

Loving God, this time is a struggle in so many ways, but help us to spare the time and energy to consider those going through more immediate peril and desperation. We pray for those who have to flee from places of insecurity and fear, and the places that receive them. Help us to be open-hearted, and proactive in our response to need on our doorsteps. Amen.

Follow-up activity

Make space each day this week to sit with Jesus and talk or listen. You could light a candle to mark your time together, and use a photo or statue which reminds you of peace and stillness.

Scene 2 Provision

Some people responded to the pandemic by excessive panic buying, perhaps revealing a desperation to find security in surrounding ourselves with things. By contrast, there are many people facing financial difficulty and the need to rely on providence from others. Here, Jesus offers exactly what the disciples need – opportunity to commune and to remember. We reflect on different ways we've had fellowship and meal-sharing through the pandemic, and consider who provides for our needs and what Jesus offers us.

The upper room – Mark 14.17-25

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.' They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?' He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.' While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'



Voices

Here Supermarket checkout worker

An hour into my shift and I've had enough already. Piles and piles of groceries, tins, booze – oh, and don't forget the blessed toilet rolls! There's been a real change around the tills since the pandemic started. Suspicion, anxiety, peering over shoulders to check people aren't standing too close, and of course, checking what others have in their trolleys. Some people make more of an effort to talk to me – asking how I'm doing, am I managing to take time off, all sorts, and I'm incredibly grateful for those who take the time and bother to ask. Others treat me as an inconvenience, one of the hurdles between them and the safety of their car. They glare over their mask if I have to check something about one of their items. They feel better with stuff, I suppose – enough food and supplies to hunker down and know they'll be all right. But I wonder if there's more to it. I wonder if feeling safe is about knowing we're all in this together. Shared struggle alongside others, and all that. Even at a distance – there's a thought we wouldn't have had a year ago! The nice ones nod, and their eyes show they're smiling behind their masks. There's more hope there than a multipack of long-life milk!

There Servant girl in the upper room

It was no different to a normal Passover meal to start with, the usual noise, a pile of filthy sandals in one corner, a group of men laughing and joking, sharing stories, as I came and went serving meat and bread. But as it went on, the atmosphere changed. Only one of the men was talking, holding up the bread in front of the others and tearing it up, passing it around. He called me forward with a smile, took the wine jug I was holding and poured out a little into their cups, telling them to drink and remember him. The men were silent, just staring at him, amazed, some a bit confused maybe, but they did as they were told. It was like he was preparing them for something – giving them really important instructions, like his life depended on it. When his eyes filled with tears, mine did, too – I hung on his every word, he was mesmerising. The men ate the bread like it was all they'd ever need. They didn't want anything more after that, though they'd been stuffing loaf after loaf into themselves minutes before. It was different from any other meal I've served at, but it made me feel – hopeful – like I wanted to join in, really join in. And when they were preparing to leave and I began to clear the table, the man held out a piece of bread to me, smiled again, then left. That bread was like something else, like something of him had spilled over into it. I've never forgotten that meal, or the special man.

Scene 2 Provision

Conversation and reflection

- 1 Spend time sharing or reflecting on experiences of provision, need or grace (during the pandemic or otherwise).
- 2 If you had been there, how would you have felt receiving the bread and wine from Jesus?
- 3 What might we take forward with us from Jesus' style of sharing meals and our changed patterns of fellowship at the moment?

Listen

[My Shepherd will Supply my Need](#), Isaac Watts

[How about Lord, for tomorrow and its needs I do not pray \(just for today\)](#) sung by choirs of the Diocese of Leeds

Prayer action

Make a small display somewhere you walk past or see often, to remind you of blessings and provision during the pandemic, e.g. a tin of food, a toilet roll, a supermarket receipt, a card from someone you care about.

Prayer for the 'providers'

Strengthening God, thank you for all who are able to give of themselves, whether through time, energy, or resources. Replenish what they give out, and teach us to emulate your generosity through our words and actions. Show us how to rely on your grace and strength, not our own. In your name, Amen.

Prayer for those in need

Generous God, at one time or another we have all been in need, whether emotional, financial or physical, and in so many other ways. Please would you surround those in need with people able to support them, whether by providing for physical needs, or comfort and encouragement. Enable them to feel empowered and needed. In your powerful name, Amen.

Follow-up activity

Through the week, remember occasions when you have been in need of some kind – financial, medical, emotional, physical, or any other need. Reflect on who or what helped you, and think about any ways you can 'pay it forward' and help others who may be in need of some sort.

Scene 3 Isolation

Each of us have had extended times of being away from those we love because of the pandemic. We reflect on the experience of Jesus feeling isolated and alone in the garden of Gethsemane, and we explore what it means to truly 'be there' for someone – in alternative and creative ways – through times of separation.

The garden of Gethsemane – Mark 14.32-42

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.' And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.' He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'



Voices

Here Relative making a Covid-secure visit to a residential home

I keep hearing the phrase, 'We stay apart so that when we can meet again, no one is missing.' Doesn't make it any easier in the meantime. But we're doing this because we love each other and want to protect one another. It's for the best – keeping our distance, relying on phone calls and letters. It's frustrating – I want to be there for you, just as we always have been, but it's impossible right now. We're both exhausted, you and me, it's been a long road since this virus first started. We don't know when respite is coming – the vaccine is out there but the timing isn't in our hands. It broke my heart to hear you upset on the phone, begging me to come and see you when the first lockdown lifted, but I knew it still wasn't safe. It's tough on all of us, but I know you feel cut off, isolated from the rest of the family. But you're doing great – the staff tell me you're keeping your spirits up for the most part, you always have a smile for them. Don't worry, please, we're almost there. We just have to keep each other going. We have to trust, believe, that we'll see each other properly soon. You're in safe hands, I'm carrying on keeping everyone else going. I'd do anything to be there for you, I really would, but this pandemic divides us, physically. But not in spirit. No, not in spirit.

There Disciple in the garden

Lord, I want to be there for you, just as you asked, but it's so hard. We're exhausted, it's been such a long day – a long week – a long road since we started out on this journey with you. We don't know when the next rest is coming, it's draining, and when we do lie down, we're asleep as soon as our heads hit the ground. It broke my heart when you got angry with us, shouted at us, pleaded with us to stay with you. I want to. If willpower alone was enough, I'd always be there, by your side, day and night, ready to act, ready to defend, be whatever you need me to be. I know you're struggling, I hear the distress in your voice, see the look in your eyes. Is it fear? Doubt? This is tough on all of us, and I know it affects you more than us, you're cut off in a way, isolated, taking the brunt of all this. But you're doing great – did you hear those crowds the other day?! We just have to keep each other going. Don't worry, Lord, please, we're almost there. I'd do anything to be there for you in this moment, I really would, but my body won't let me.

Scene 3 Isolation

Conversation and reflection

- 1 Invite one another to talk briefly, or reflect on your own about the sacrifices you have made during the pandemic to keep one another safe, and how it has felt.
- 2 How have you felt or experienced Jesus' presence during times of isolation?
- 3 Share some 'good news' stories about new and creative ways people have found to support one another in the last few months.

Listen

[I am Here for You](#) Stuart Townend

[Can you hear me?](#) Thomas Hewitt-Jones, sung by the Choir of Royal Holloway

Prayer action

Suggest that people look through a window, stand facing a wall, or hold a family photograph, as you pray for those in care homes, still unable to see loved ones regularly and 'normally'.

Caring, compassionate God, it's not easy for those who are far from family. Those in residential and nursing homes have been particularly affected by this pandemic. They have lost friends and relatives, and haven't been able to see their family. As we age, communication can become more difficult and we adapt less easily to new technologies. We ask your blessing on each person living in a care home, and for each of the staff looking after them. We pray for their families and friends. God grant that we may feel connection despite distance. Amen.

Follow-up activity

During this coming week, contact someone who may be feeling especially isolated at this time, and/or consider sending a gift to care staff at local residential and nursing homes, to encourage them at this time.

Scene 4 Living with tension

In this scene, Pilate washes his hands of the responsibility for Jesus' fate, and leaves a decision up to the crowd. In this pandemic, we have experienced being under government regulations and guidelines, and also been trusted to use our judgement. This week, we consider how to respond in times where we may not agree with decisions made by others on our behalf, and how we respond when others seem to flout or bend the rules. How have we found ways to live with this tension?

The courtyard – Mark 15.6-15

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.



Voices

Here Family member of someone shielding

I can't understand what goes on in people's minds. When all of this started, we were all in this together – clapping for keyworkers, wearing our masks, staying home to protect one another. How quickly things can change, though this last year's been a hard one. It's all very well to say forget the rules, that officials don't know what they're talking about, we'll do what we want, it's a free country! What about those of us who have someone vulnerable to protect? No immune system means no defence against the common cold, let alone a deadly virus! Weak chests, cancer treatments, bowel disease, old age – there are so many people having to be so careful. This is the most crucial time – relaxing the rules, letting our guards down, breathing a sigh of relief because the worst is over – not for those with chronic illnesses! It's been difficult all the way along, let's be honest, having to abide by rules set by other people – whether you agree or disagree with them, it's not always been easy for anyone, we all have a lot to lose but for some of us, the odds are stacked against us. When people say a mask isn't just to protect you, it protects others from you, it really is galling when that one's ignored! I've had to find some sense of rhythm in all this, some way of coming to terms with living under constant risk – the strain of worry is draining – although some precautions now are second nature after all this time. I no longer have to think about sanitising my hands when I enter a shop; I automatically pat my pocket for keys and face-covering when I leave the house now. But dealing with other people's decisions and the consequences of them, that's more difficult to live with.

There Widow of Barabbas' victim

I can't understand what goes on in people's minds. When all of this started, we were all in this together – I was there with the rest of them, waving palm branches, laying cloaks on the road and shouting to welcome the newcomer into town, what was it – a few days ago? Oh, how quickly things can change. Now the crowd is baying for that man's blood, and what's he done? Upset the Pharisees? Said a few things they don't like? What's that compared with murder? Compared with tearing lives apart, taking husbands from wives and fathers from children? Barabbas killed my Saul. He was eventually put away for it – took long enough – but I thought I could finally sleep at night knowing he was locked away. But no, they chose him over that man Jesus – they chose to release a murderer over a religious teacher! I would laugh if it didn't hurt so much. Now no one's safe, and me and my children have to live with whatever happens next because of someone else's poor judgement! What were they thinking?! Are they just going with the crowd? Trying to please – who? Is this a political statement against this Jesus character? What could possibly justify setting a known killer loose? It's hard enough to be grieving for my husband, but dealing with the consequences of other people's decisions, that's more difficult to live with.

Scene 4 Living with tension

Reflection and conversation

- 1 How do you personally respond to: a) government guidelines you may not agree with; b) other people flouting restrictions; c) people you disagree with in a wider context?
- 2 What do you think may have been the implications for anyone who stood up against Pilate's judgement in the crowd?
- 3 Can we or should we find ways of trusting and living with other's decisions?

Listen

[Behold he comes](#) Rend Collective

[Man of sorrows](#) The Celebration Choir

Prayer action

If you have a disposable face mask, consider writing 'I wear this to show I care' across the front, and display it on a mantelpiece or somewhere prominent, to remind you that in part the reason we wear masks is to protect others as well as ourselves. Reflect on other areas of your life where your actions protect or care for others, and how this may adapt or develop once restrictions are lifted.

Wise and all-knowing God, we cannot fathom how others think, and we cannot see the full picture that you can see. Please guide us, give us discernment and courage as we learn when to stand up and contest something, and when to try and live together with tension. Give us your heart for justice, and your patience to make it happen, we pray. Amen.

Follow-up activity

Create a 'worry box'. Through this week, write down anything playing on your mind on a slip of paper, fold it up and pray over it, then place it into a worry box and entrust it to God. You may end up placing the same worry in the box again and again, but practise giving your concerns over to God.

Scene 5 Anguish

We think about sacrifice, sitting with the heartache and suffering of Good Friday before the relief and rejoicing of resurrection on Easter Sunday. Can we appreciate the hills without the valleys? Could Jesus have related to humankind unless he endured suffering? In this week's character monologue, the thief on the cross reflects on Jesus' stepping down from glory in order to relate to him.

The cross – Mark 15.33-39

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'



Voices

Here Bereaved member of a congregation

If you'd told me a year ago that this is where I'd be, well... disbelief is an understatement. Losing someone who meant the world to you, someone you took for granted would always be there. It's true what they say, you never imagine it will really happen to you, but this virus doesn't discriminate – even the young and fit can be taken. Worlds can fall apart. No words can make it better. I flip between feeling God holding me and feeling a long way from faith. Coming up to Easter – let's just say Good Friday will have a whole new meaning for me and my family this year. The suffering, the pain, the crying out to God in anguish, the emptiness and loss, confusion, disbelief that someone so loved could ever really leave this world. I wonder sometimes, in that moment when Jesus breathed his last, did God feel the anguish I feel? Or was it a reunion for them, rather than a loss? Do I understand now how Mary felt, how the disciples felt that day? I believe my loved one is in heaven, but that's not helping me much right now. I've just got to have some hope that we will see each other again. I wonder if Jesus' friends had a sense of hope, or if – like now – everything felt lost and out of kilter. Does God really understand what I'm going through, because of the events that happened that Easter time? Am I closer to the heart of God because of the pain I feel? I wonder...

There Thief on the cross beside Jesus

If you'd have told me a year ago that this is where I'd be...I'd probably be surprised I wasn't caught sooner. I've lived my life on thin ice. Stealing to eat, stealing to live, to keep a roof over my family's heads. Day to day living has been such a struggle, I'd never really given much thought to the big questions – spirituality, God and all that. Until my final day, my final hours – beside this man, Jesus, who has done no wrong yet still ended up between two thieves who got what they deserved. They say your life flashes before your eyes when you're dying – mine wasn't much to speak of, other than the love in my family. I've never done anything noble or heroic, I've always been the taker not the giver. I felt entitled to what I took, but I didn't deserve it, not really. And yet, this man Jesus – as crazy as this sounds, I felt that he was there for me – those final words he said to me, Today, you will be with me in paradise...they gave me something I'd never felt before – purpose, meaning. There is more to life than food and shelter and clothing and things – this man, this incredible, innocent man showed me so, by the look in his eyes, the determination and belief in his face. He didn't just believe, he knew where our souls were going after our bodies had given up. I truly believe this man was the Messiah, the Son of God, and yet he chose to step down from his glory and die on a cross, next to a thief like me. Somehow, he found forgiveness and generosity in his heart to offer me a place in his paradise. I knew he was there for me, to suffer and bleed and die with me, so he would know how it felt, so he could release me from the all the trouble I'd made for myself all my life. With my final breath, I gave thanks to God for sending his Son to die beside me, to understand, to truly relate to me. Am I closer to the heart of God because of the pain I feel? I wonder...

Scene 5 **Anguish**

Conversation and reflection

- 1 What do you feel or think about the idea of Jesus being able to relate to our personal pain and suffering because of the crucifixion, and all that came before it?
- 2 Discuss the conversation between Jesus and the thief on the cross, and what it may mean to you.
- 3 How might Jesus' suffering and death speak to someone who has been bereaved?

Listen

[Christ Crucified](#) Lou Fellingham

[And Can it Be?](#) recorded for Songs of Praise

Prayer action

If you feel comfortable to, say the names of people out loud whom you know who have died or been adversely affected during the pandemic. Pray together:

Loving God, we hold our friends and family before you. Words are not enough, but you hear the silent prayers in our hearts. Bring comfort and peace, enable us to support those left behind, and give us hope of life everlasting in your kingdom. In your name Jesus, Amen.

Follow-up activity

Make space this week to sit down with a pen and paper or some simple craft materials. Sketch or make the cross in whatever form or style, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you – whether it is basic or complex. Write words or prayers in or around your cross, if you wish.

Scene 6 Hope

Where do we see ourselves spiritually at this point in the pandemic in relation to the Easter story? Are we – in pandemic terms – Joseph mourning Jesus' death and ensuring that he is buried appropriately; or the angel watching and waiting ready to reveal the truth and joy for others, or the women, possibly in denial about what's happening, coming with trepidation perhaps daring to hope that something good is imminent? Are we in mourning, denial, or anticipating? Is there a place for all three? And can we envisage hope on the horizon, in this Bible story and in our own lives?

The tomb – Mark 15.42-47

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.



waiting to anoint his body and say goodbye. I can't bear to look Peter or John in the eye, there's so much suffering and loss – and guilt. Judas is dead, too, but it doesn't feel the same as losing Jesus. And yet... is it really the end? When he told us he'd die, he also said he would rise again. That was just as far-fetched as the idea of him leaving us. But I've seen him do so many impossible things, he's changed my life in so many inconceivable ways – could he really do it? Dare I hold onto the hope that I might see him again? Part of me wants to bury that memory away with his body, to forget he ever spoke those words. To hope and to be disappointed would be too much, I couldn't bear it. And yet, he doesn't feel truly *gone* – could he really come back to us? Might he really come and set things right? Is it possible to leave this sadness and bitterness behind and rebuild a new life with Jesus at the centre? I feel like hope is there, just over the horizon, silent and still, but there.

Conversation and reflection

- 1 How hopeful do you feel at this moment for the future?
- 2 Reflect and talk about what the atmosphere may have been like among the women and the disciples in those days, between crucifixion and resurrection.
- 3 How might we as a fellowship/church continue to support those struggling while being a signpost for hope? See 'Follow-up' activity below.

Listen

[See what a morning](#) Stuart Townend

[The Best is Yet to Come](#) North Point Worship

Voices

Here NHS vaccine-giver

It's begun! What we've waited and hoped for ever since this catastrophe started a year ago – the cure to this awful virus. There's scepticism, naturally, all of this has happened so fast and it's totally unprecedented, but there's still cause for hope. The possibility that soon we'll be able to meet, to hug, to find a semblance of normal, whatever that looks like. That perhaps we can put the majority of this strange time behind us. Of course, for so many families and friends who've lost loved ones, normal isn't an option, they've lost too much and it's too difficult to comprehend just now. We're still in the midst of suffering and loss. It's seemed never-ending, especially for those in the thick of it – hospitals, nursing homes, supermarkets, undertakers. Dare I trust that we can rebuild life again, with all we've learned here? Hope is there, peering, tantalising, just out of sight over the horizon.

There Mary or a disciple at the tomb

It's happened. The worst. We've lost our Jesus. He warned us, but when he was there, with you, being amazing, you couldn't believe what he was saying. Death – taking Jesus? It seemed impossible. And yet, here we are, by his tomb,

Prayer action

This prayer aims to speak into where your emotions are at this moment. If you are mournful and struggling, lay your palms gently on your knees. If you feel some denial and want to 'bury' away the pandemic situation, ball your hands into fists. If you are feeling hopeful towards the future, open your palms face up and lay them on your knees. Be sensitive to those around you – not everyone will feel the same as you.

Loving God, we come to you as we are – broken, weary, afraid, sad, hopeful, optimistic. Please meet with each of us in this moment, minister to us and those we love. Assure us that you are with us, and will never leave us. Show us how to heal, how to come to terms with loss, how to assist others, how to rest, how to slow down, how to look ahead with confidence in your goodness. Thank you, God. Amen.

Follow-up activity

Consider how your church and/or fellowship might be or continue to be, a beacon of hope for your community as the pandemic situation continues. As and when appropriate, arrange a further conversation to discuss how to take ideas forward.