

## Take the slow train .....

Geoff Oates

Even as a hardened City commuter, always anxious to get to my destination as quickly and efficiently as possible, I often glance through the window at the villages and suburbs as the semi-fast rushes through, and wish I knew more about the houses, the people and the activities that make up the homes and communities.

Holy Week, the days that lead us from Palm Sunday to Easter Day, is one of the most densely populated parts of the Christian year. And yet it is all too easy to rush through it on the fast train. Stop to wave our palm crosses on Palm Sunday, then back into the busy week, emerging from the carriage at the end of the journey on Easter Sunday morning, having managed at best a quick glance out through the window as Good Friday rushes by.

The Church knows the pressures we're under. Our Palm Sunday liturgy deliberately includes the Passion Narrative because we don't want anyone to miss out. But we also encourage people to take the slow train. To pull up and spend some time at each of the stations along the journey, and meet the characters and share the events that happen there.

On Palm Sunday we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and sense the approaching climax of the great Gospel drama. But before that there are many dark twists to the plot.

Stop with us a while on Thursday evening, and commemorate the Last Supper in the Upper Room with the disciples, the commandment to break bread and share wine in His Name whenever we gather together. The rich intimacy of the simple ceremony of washing feet – I know that doesn't come easily to everyone, but try it!

What did Jesus say to Peter? *'If you do not let me wash your feet, you cannot be my disciple.'* The recollection of the hours of agony in Gethsemane – can you not watch for an hour for the sake of your Lord? And the poignant symbolism of the stripping of the altar, as the last trimmings and decorations are taken from the Church as the choir chants the starkly beautiful tones of Psalm 22.

Stop a while on Friday morning, for a simple family service retelling the story of Good Friday and preparing the tomb that will become our Easter garden. Hear of Pilate and Herod and

the Priests, and the crowd who shout for Barabbas. And move a short way down the line to Bircherley Green, as the passion drama, like Christ carrying his cross, comes out into the open as we proclaim His passion and salvation to our town and our world.



Stop a while on Friday afternoon as we gather for a quiet meditation of music, prayer and poetry, sharing the wonder and pain of the faithful few who gathered around the dying Jesus at the foot of the cross and followed his broken body to the tomb.

Stop again on Saturday night. As darkness falls and opens the promise of a great new light when the sun rises again, and we wait in expectation of a wonderful joy ahead. Let us share that wonderful anticipation together, surrounded by ancient music and liturgy that binds us in unity with our fellow believers across endless centuries, all united in the great confession of faith: Jesus is Risen, He is Risen indeed.

If you can at all find the time this Holy Week, take the slow train. There's so much to see. And you'll still get to Easter Sunday morning right on time!

If you're travelling on a family ticket, there's even an extra stop for you at Messy Church on the 17<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 pm (two weeks before Easter) where we will also be exploring the Easter story in arts and crafts, songs and stories and tea and friendship. Or if on a day excursion you can take the 'loop line' and sing through the Passion Story, the Resurrection and the founding of the church at the 'Bring and Sing' Messiah part 2. Rehearsals start at 15:00 – see flyers at back of church. Either way you can hear/experience it at 6:30 pm.