

Breaking Open the Word

The Day of Resurrection
20th April, 2025



The Towel and the Cross

A weekly reflection and
sermon, with study and
prayer guides following the
RCL Lectionary

Dennis Webster



Revised Common Lectionary
The Day of Resurrection

Acts 10.34-43

The Hymn to the Risen Christ

1 Corinthians 10.34-43

Luke 24.1-12

Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collect

Introduction

Reflection

Discussion Questions

Five Days of Meditation and Prayer

O God,
who for our redemption
didst give thine only-begotten Son
to the death of the cross,
and by his glorious resurrection
hast delivered us from the power of our enemy:
Grant us to die daily unto sin,
that we may evermore live with him
in the joy of his resurrection:
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Get ready to dive into the exciting themes of the towel and the cross during Easter! ✨ This sermon is all about service, suffering, and the amazing hope that comes with resurrection!

Maundy Thursday: The Towel of Service

- Jesus washed his disciples' feet—how cool is that? 🙌
- The towel is a call to serve everyone, even those who are tricky to love!

Good Friday: The Cross and the Depths

- The crucifixion shows us the strength of Christ's love and suffering. ❤️
- He's right there with us through all our struggles—what a comfort!

Easter Day: Hope from the Empty Tomb

- The resurrection means hope and love win over death! 🎉
- The empty tomb is a promise for everyone—let's celebrate!

We Are Resurrection People

- Renewing our baptismal vows ties us to service and hope—let's live it out! 💪
- We're called to show love and compassion in everything we do—let's go for it!

Prayer Prompts

- Ask for prayer requests first.
- Pray for God to help you embody the towel of service in your daily interactions.
- Seek strength to bear the crosses in our lives, knowing we are not alone.
- Ask for boldness to share the hope of resurrection with those around you.

God of Creation, breathe into us, made of clay,
your gift of life so that we, made in your image
may become your eyes, ears, hands and voice.

“The Towel and the Cross”

Text: Luke 24:1–12 (NRSV)
Easter Triduum Service

□

Introduction:

On this Easter morning, as we stand on resurrection ground, we reflect on the holy days we have just experienced—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and now Easter Day.

This three-day journey, known as the Triduum, is not merely a remembrance of past events; it is a living invitation. It unfolds a story not only of Jesus but also of us—a story of towel and cross, of descent into pain, and of a love that does not remain buried.

I want to speak to you about this one phrase that has been a key focus for me this Eastertide:

“The towel and the cross aren’t just relics of the past; they’re tools we can use right now to make a difference.”

□

1. Maundy Thursday: The Towel of Service

On Maundy Thursday, we sat with Jesus in the Upper Room. And what did he do, knowing full well that betrayal was near, that suffering lay ahead? He picked up a towel.

Jesus, our Lord and Teacher, knelt to wash his disciples’ feet. It was a low task reserved for the servant at the bottom of the pecking order. And yet, Jesus made that towel his badge of honour.

He tells his disciples—and us—“I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”

This is not just about hospitality. It’s a complete reimagining of greatness. It says: True authority looks like service. True power stoops low. True discipleship starts with a towel in hand.

And so we learn: The towel is not just a symbol but a tool. It is how we kneel beside the broken, bind the wounds of others, and choose compassion when we are tempted to look away.

This coming Friday, many of us

will gather at the Cenotaph at 5:50 a.m., where mateship is valued and recalled as we sadly remember those whose deaths occurred on foreign soil. And where the “fair go” is unevenly distributed, the towel of Christ calls us deeper.

It invites us to serve not just our friends but our enemies, not just the easy cases but the complex stories.

On that fateful day in 1915, many acts of service occurred as each Anzac did their best to protect one another. Such was the bravery and humility of the Anzacs that today, in modern-day Türkiye, admiration for the soldiers is still held high, even though the cost was so great. On the slopes of Gallipoli, the depths of humanity were displayed and shown to be full of received.

2. Good Friday: The Cross and the Depths

We rewind one week to Good Friday, the darkest day. The day the sky turns black and the temple curtain is torn. The day Christ was crucified.

Some say it’s the day love died. But actually, it’s the day love showed its full strength. Because in the crucifixion, we discover something breathtaking: There are no depths that Christ has not been to. No hell so deep,

no wound so raw, no shame so secret, no suffering so intense, that Christ has not stepped into it.

He is the God of the pit as well as the promise. The God who does not hover above our pain, but bears it. He knows the refugee’s cry, the addict’s shame, the parent’s grief, the elder’s loneliness, the teenager’s torment.

When we bear our crosses—be it sickness, failure, depression, or loss—we are never truly alone. Jesus stands with us; He is the God of the long Friday, the God of silence, and the God who comprehends our pain. Jesus walks beside us through our struggles, offering support and understanding through every trial we face.

Embrace the truth that we can find strength in our darkest moments with him.

We hope that even in death, Christ has not abandoned us. Even in the dark, he holds our hand.

3. Easter Day: Hope from the Empty Tomb

And then—then!—comes the day that rewrites all the others. Luke 24 tells us that the women went to the tomb on the first day

of the week. They expected to find the body, so they brought spices, grief, and finality.

But instead, they find emptiness. The stone has rolled away. There is no corpse. Two dazzling messengers pose a question:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen." And suddenly, everything changes.

The towel of Maundy Thursday is not worthless in a world that ends in death. The cross of Good Friday does not represent the final word.

Because Christ is risen. And if Christ is risen, then hope is alive. Then mercy holds the last word. Then justice is not a fantasy. Then love conquers.

And here's the wonder of Easter: this hope is not just for Jesus—it's for us. Paul later says, "If we have died with him, we will also rise with him." **Resurrection is not merely an event—it's a promise.**

In our culture, where hope is scarce and people are dying of spiritual thirst, the empty tomb shouts: There is more. More than trauma. More than climate anxiety. More than social division. More than death.

4. We Are Resurrection People: Marked with the Cross, Holding the Towel
This brings us to Easter Day, the day of joy and renewal.

Today, many of us will renew our baptismal promises. We may remember the waters poured over us and the

moment when the Spirit came with power for some. But above all, we remember that we were signed with the cross in baptism. We were marked as Christ's own forever. We took on the badge of the crucified and risen King. And what does that mean?

It means we are people of the towel who serve not to be noticed but because we are loved. It means we are people of the cross who are not ashamed of suffering but find Christ in it. It means we are people of the resurrection. People of radical hope, stubborn mercy, and defiant joy.

Traditionally, we are called on to renew our baptismal promises and vows at Easter. So as we renew our vows today, we are saying:

"I will gladly wear the badge of the cross.

I will gladly pick up the towel.

I will serve the Lord in my neighbourhood, workplace, school, and family.

I will proclaim Christ crucified, risen, and ascended—not just with my lips, but with my life."

Conclusion:

Dear friends, the story of Easter is not finished. It is being written in our lives. The towel and the cross are not merely ancient artefacts. They are tools and gifts that help us live the gospel in this land and now.

There are no depths Christ has not entered. And there is no height he has not reached.

He is risen—and so we rise with him.

He served—and so we serve with him.

He suffered—and so we do not fear to suffer with him.

He reigns—and so we follow him with joy.

Let us take up the towel.

Let us bear the cross.

Let us walk in resurrection hope.

Χριστός Ανέστη! Christos aneste!

Christ is risen!

Αληθώς ανέστη! Alithos aneste!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Discussion Questions

How does the image of Jesus washing His disciples' feet with a towel challenge our understanding of greatness and authority?

- Jesus used the towel to serve, indicating that true greatness is found in humility and service.
- In what ways can you serve others in your school or community to demonstrate this idea of greatness?

What do you think is the significance of the phrase 'He is not here, but has risen' from Luke 24:1-12?

- The moment when the women discovered the empty tomb and the angels' message, symbolised hope and the reality of resurrection.
- How does this message of hope affect the way you view challenges or difficult times in your life?

Reflect on how the cross represents both suffering and strength. What do you think it means to embrace suffering as part of the Christian experience?

- Christ endured suffering and that we are never alone in our struggles; Jesus understands our pain.
- Can you identify a time in your life when you faced a hardship and felt supported? How can you provide that same support to others?

Why do you think it's important to remember both the towel and the cross in our faith journey?

- The towel represents service, while the cross represents sacrifice, both essential to living out our faith.
- How can you balance serving others while also accepting challenges or sacrifices in your own life?

What does it mean to you to be a 'person of the resurrection'?

- Being marked by the cross and holding the towel, which embodies hope, mercy, and joy in our lives.
- In what ways can you live out being a person of the resurrection in your daily life or interactions with others?



Walking Gently on Sacred Land

This five-day devotional will take a deeper dive into the sermon from the sacred Three Days (Triduum).



Day 1 Luke 24:1–12

On Maundy Thursday, we are reminded of the significance of service through Jesus washing His disciples' feet. This powerful imagery emphasises that true greatness is found in humility and serving others rather than seeking recognition. Our call as believers is to embody this spirit by picking up our own towels of service, reaching out to those in need, and demonstrating love in tangible ways. As we serve, we reflect the heart of Christ, who showed us the ultimate example of selflessness.

Consider the environments in which you operate daily. Are there opportunities to serve where you may have looked the other way? The call to serve is not limited to those we know and love; it extends to everyone around us, including those we might consider difficult or unworthy. In embracing the towel, we learn that each act of service is a way to express our love for Christ and our neighbour, transforming our communities one act at a time.

- What holds me back from serving those outside my immediate circle?
- How can I demonstrate servant leadership in my community?
- What is one practical way I can pick up the towel this week?
- Pray for the humility to serve as Jesus did.
- Ask God to open your eyes to opportunities for service in your daily life.

Day 2 Luke 24:1–12

Reflecting on Good Friday, we face the stark reality of pain and suffering. It can be easy to view this day as one of despair, but within the depths of sorrow lies the promise of Christ's presence. Jesus entered our pain, giving us hope that we are never alone in our struggles. Understanding that He knows our suffering intimately allows us to find strength in vulnerability and assurance in our trials. Good Friday marks not the end, but the beginning of new hope.

When we are faced with our crosses—be it in personal crises, grief, or challenges—we have the opportunity to rely on Christ, who walks with us through every situation. In our trust and surrender, we find a deeper connection with Him. Let's embrace this hope, knowing that our pain can lead us to unexpected places of renewal, transforming our darkest moments into testimonies of resilience and faith.

- In what areas of my life do I feel lost or abandoned?
- How can I lean into Christ's comfort during my struggles?
- What steps can I take to find strength in my pain?
- Pray for a deeper understanding of Christ's suffering and presence in your life.
- Reflect on moments where you felt God's comfort amidst your pain.

Day 3 Luke 24:1–12

Easter Day signifies the ultimate victory over death and despair. The resurrection didn't just bring new life to Christ; it also brought hope to all humanity. As the women discovered the empty tomb, they were faced with the stark realisation that death was not the end. Instead, it marked a powerful transition from despair to hope, illuminating that with Christ, there is always more—more to life, more to love, and more to hope.

This day invites us to reflect on the resurrection as a past event and an ongoing promise that we can stake our lives upon. Embracing the resurrection means living in the reality of hope, no matter our circumstances. It empowers us to speak life into death, joy into sorrow, and light into darkness. As resurrection people, we share this life-changing truth with others, urging them to seek the same hope that transformed our lives.

- How does the hope of the resurrection impact my daily life?
- What fears might I need to confront in light of the resurrection?
- How can I share the message of hope with others?
- Pray for opportunities to share the hope of Christ's resurrection.
- Reflect on the transformative power of hope in your life.

Day 4 Luke 24:1–12

As we embrace our identity as resurrection people, we are called to live out our commitment through the symbols of the towel and the cross. Our baptism marks us as belonging to Christ, inviting us to live lives reflective

of His love and service. Being marked with the cross signifies that we carry Christ's mission within us, responding with love to a world in need. We are reminded that our identity in Christ translates into a service life characterised by mercy, hope, and joy.

Renewing our baptismal promises each Easter reconnects us to this profound reality. We are called not just to remember Christ's suffering and love, but also to embody these traits in our everyday lives. This reminder allows us to recommit ourselves to serving in our communities, sharing light in dark places, and living in hope, no matter how daunting the challenges may seem. We are empowered to walk in faith, trusting that our efforts matter in the kingdom of God.

- How can I more fully embody the identity of being a resurrection person?
- What does it mean for me to carry the cross in my daily life?
- In what ways can I serve others while reflecting Christ's love?
- Pray for the strength to live out your baptismal promises.
- Reflect on how you can serve Christ in your community.

Day 5 Luke 24:1–12

As we conclude this devotional journey, let us reflect on the ongoing story of Easter that we partake in. The towel and the cross invite us to courageously engage with our world. Jesus' resurrection empowers us to step into our faith with boldness, understanding that our lives can impact those around us in powerful ways. This journey doesn't end; it is continuously written as we allow Christ to guide us.

Sharing the message of hope, love, and service not only transforms our own lives but also echoes into the lives of others, creating pathways of grace in the world. By embracing our roles as resurrection people, we can embody the ongoing story of Easter, living out our faith with purpose, joy, and resilience, knowing that Christ is with us every step of the way.

- What have I learned during this devotional journey that I want to carry forward?
- How can I actively participate in God's ongoing story in my community?
- What new commitments do I want to make in serving others as a reflection of my faith?
- Pray for the courage to continue being a beacon of hope and service.
- Reflect on how you can carry the Easter message into everyday life.

End notes and further reading

Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke (St Paul's Press)
 The Gospel of Matthew
 The Gospel of John

Rev Dr Andrew McGowan: Andrew's Version: <https://substack.com/@abmcg>

The following authors as featured at The Woship Cloud
www.theworshipcloud.com

N. T. Wright,
Jane Williams,
P James Woodward,
Paula Gooder
Mark Pryce,
David Perry



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This is produced on
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