

“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. It was on the slopes of Gallipoli that the depths of humanity were destroyed and shown to be full of giving.

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!
