

An exhilarating Easter at Coro Valley

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Easter in the Parish of Coromandel Valley was exhilarating.

In the lead up to Easter, many parishioners took part in the Lent study, The Imaginary Doorway. This imaginary retelling of seven Gospel passages helped prepare us for the roller coaster of Holy Week.

On Maundy Thursday evening we gathered in All Hallows church for a service dubbed â??Blessing of the Towelsâ?•. This didnâ??t involve washing of feet, but emphasized *service*.

We folded our towels into thirds lengthways â?? like a waiter â?? symbolising the act of serving. The altar was stripped and the church made empty and bare before we all left. This helped maintain the continuum of emotion between the evening of the Last Supper and the morning of Jesusâ?? arrest.

On Good Friday morning we arrived inevitably reflecting on the utter despair and desolation which must have all but overwhelmed Jesusâ?? disciples and other followers. Of course, *we* know what was to come! The church at All Hallows was startlingly adorned with a network of bright red yarn, randomly enmeshed over two fishing lines strung across the church. Rev Woody played eerie music to create an intense and slightly menacing atmosphere.

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We had a service â??packageâ?• â?? an envelope with several items inside. On the front of the envelope was an image of the Ecce Homo by Jacob Epstein â?? his *uncompromisingly brutal depiction of the suffering Christ* at Coventry Cathedral.

Our packages contained:

- A small perfumed piece of cloth
- A bamboo skewer fastened to a piece of paper with an image of kissing lips
- A larger square of cloth, unperfumed
- A slip of paper with the words â??your vote countsâ?•
- A small pebble

The perfumed cloth represented the sweet aroma of Jesus.

The bamboo skewer represented the sword used by Peter to cut off the ear of the High Priestâ??s servant.

The paper with the kissing lips represented the kiss of Judas who betrayed Jesus.

The larger square of cloth we held to our ears and tore in two â?? representing the High Priestâ??s tearing of his robes.

On the inside of the folded â??your vote countsâ?• paper were the words: â??Your vote is important to us â?? Pontius Pilateâ?• with two squares alongside the names of Barabbas and Jesus. The square alongside Barabbas was filled with a red checkmark, **ï?¼**.

Music, quiet time and scripture readings interspersed each itemâ??s removal from our packs. Finally, we were invited to take the pebble from the envelope and exchange it for a brightly coloured heart shaped token from a basket beneath the wooden cross at the front of the church. Turning stones to hearts, to love. Some of the small hearts had holes by which we could cut a piece of red yarn from the symbolic display and tie to our wrists.

People left with a feeling of intrigue and anticipation, almost empowerment, in contrast to the mood as we arrived.



At 6 am on Easter Day we met around the fire pit outdoors at St Johnâ??s church in the valley. We passed the flame from our candles, one by one, arriving at the Pascal candle held by Rev Woody. As daylight broke, kookaburras laughed, and Holy Communion was distributed by the two (female) priestâ??s wardens â?? given that women were the first to see the risen Jesus.

The 8 am service was a traditional Eucharist. Woody preached using the imagery provided by a Cadburyâ??s purple-wrapped Easter egg (purple representing the robe placed on Jesus by the soldiers) and the story of the empty egg â?? Jesus is risen! Alleluia!

Easter at Coromandel Valley parish was exhilarating. People with traditional and contemporary worship preferences continue to reflect on the experience, as we strive to care better for each other, our communities and our environment in an uncertain world of abundant challenges. Our mission statement in summary: *God and people doing life together.*

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