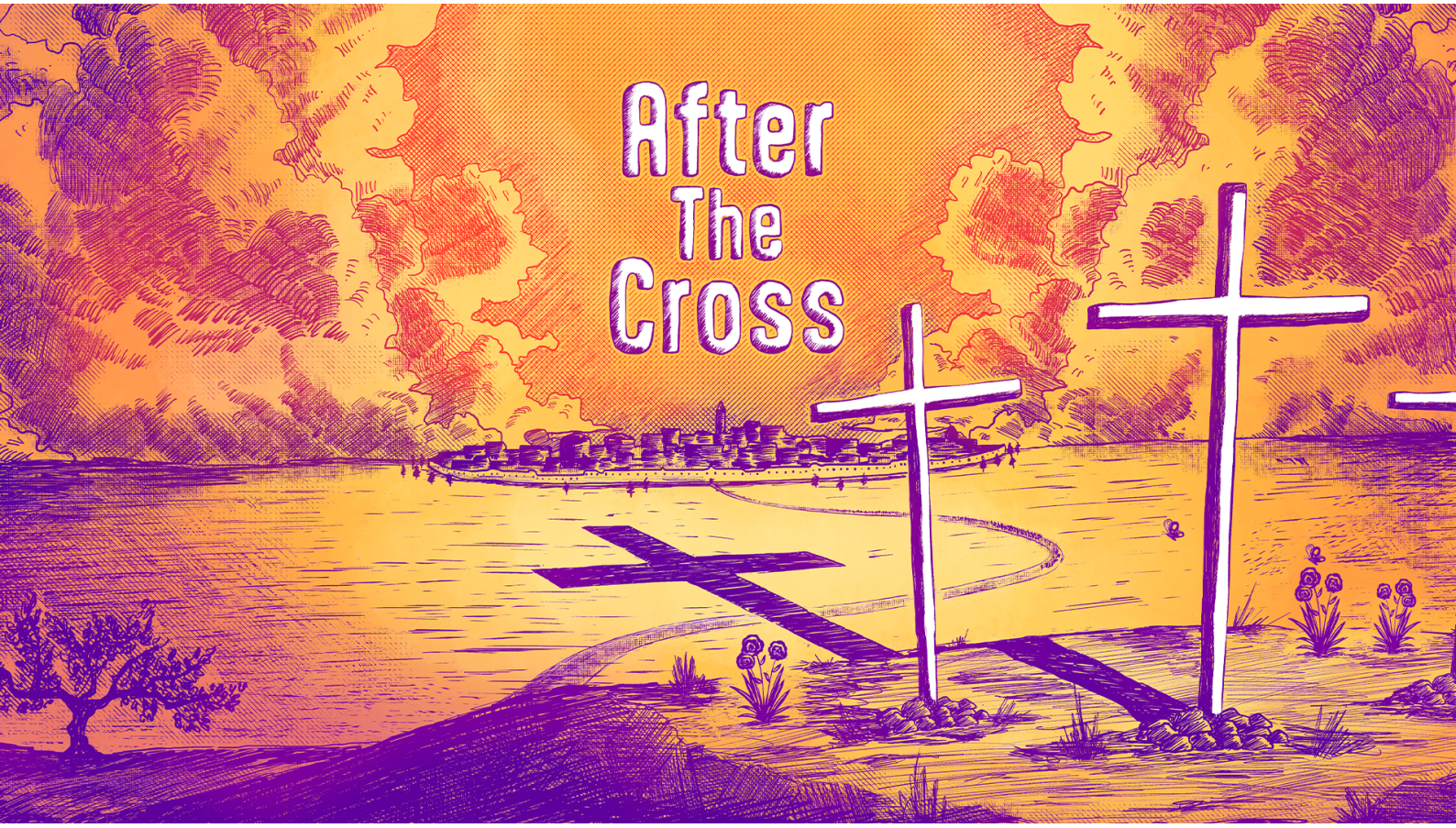

Theme Resource Pack
Easter 2026
(5 April - 2 May)

Introduction

Jesus has risen! After the cross what's next? This month we use the story of the two disciples walking to Emmaus in Luke 24 to explore four different ways of responding to the cross. We can: **flinch**, **shrug**, **kneel**, and **leap**.

Week one — Flinch. We turn away from the cross like the two disciples leaving Jerusalem. It's too much, too sad, too painful. This is a valid response to the grief of the crucifixion, indeed we might not be able to grasp the significance of the resurrection if we don't confront the cruelty of it. If we keep it always at arm's length the cross becomes a picturesque postcard — not a brutal reality.

Week two — Shrug. It's a lot to take in. The cross can feel very far away and long ago. Like the two disciples we can shrug it off. 'What's it to me? Can I buy it? Can I take it seriously?' Once again, this is a reasonable response to the questions the cross asks of us. If you have never shrugged, scratched your head, and been frustrated by the cross — is it actually the cross you are looking at? Or just a convenient logo?

Week three — Kneel. When the power of the cross hits us it can bring us to our knees in wonder, in fear, in awe, in gratitude, just like the two disciples inviting Jesus to spend the night. If we don't take the time to bow the cross can become a distant historical artefact.

Week four — Leap. Our final response is to take the leap, to bound on to our feet, to follow after Jesus and set out on the adventure of living out the gospel! Just like when the two disciples suddenly recognise Jesus when he breaks the bread. When the heart of the cross grips our lives it can change everything as we leap into the Kingdom!

For many of us our reactions to the cross will be a mix of **sorrow, scepticism, awe** and **hope** — just like it was for the first disciples. Indeed, each response is intertwined. They are also all **wordless**. We are operating on the *gut level* here! These are physical reactions not intellectual statements. They are not mere metaphors to describe what we 'think' about the cross — they are actual physical responses our bodies make. The death and resurrection of Jesus was a deeply physical event and our responses to it are deeply physical too.

Each week, with the help of insights from theologians Martin Luther, Karl Barth, Donald Baillie and John Zizioulas, we will explore what it means to flinch, shrug, kneel and leap After the Cross…

Format

This theme will run 4 weeks taking us from Easter Sunday to 2 May. Over the course of 2026 we are going on a journey that we began in Advent 2025 — of coming round the table with God.

Our themes drawn from Revised Common Lectionary and additional readings shape our Daily Worship, live streams and all sorts of other creative things we get up to! Each week runs Sunday - Saturday and each has a series of daily Bible readings and prompts for reflection.

After The Cross: Flinch (Week 1, 5 April)

Introduction: Understandably, the cruelty of the cross can make us turn away, like the first disciples did. To truly see the cross is to see pain, horror, and torment. There is no resurrection without death, no Easter without Calvary. To embrace Easter involves facing the cross. The resurrection does not 'undo' the cross — Jesus still bears the wounds afterwards. Each week of this theme we will read a section of 'The Walk to Emmaus' that the two disciples make in Luke 24: 13-35. We begin with Cleopas and his unnamed friend, leaving Jerusalem disheartened after the death and burial of Jesus. It has been a traumatic and tumultuous week and they are now literally walking away from it all.

Martin Luther, the 16th century German theologian argued that God is most truly found 'hidden in sufferings' rather than in things that seem traditionally powerful and omnipotent. In the sometimes counterintuitive domain of grace: out of death comes life, from suffering comes power, and from shame and failure comes glory and victory. In the cross we encounter a love that knows no bounds and no limits. Even enormous suffering can't break this love.

Seeds to sow: If the cross never makes us flinch — is it the cross we're looking at? Or just an empty symbol?

1. **John 20: 1-18** **After the Cross.** Our God is a God of before and after, Alpha and Omega, an enduring love through all time. Our lives are shaped by the fundamental hinge point of the universe: the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let's gaze at the cross, overcome the flinch and take a second look — like Mary at the gardener.

2. **Luke 24: 13-7** **Responding to the Cross: Flinch.** It is natural to flinch from the cross, to be overwhelmed by grief and detachment, to feel the sorrow of the cross — that an innocent peaceful man should suffer so. Indeed can we really grasp what it means if we don't face the sadness? Some though, flinch and never look back. But Jesus encourages us to take the next step, and so, like he did for these two disciples, he comes alongside us.

3. **Acts 10: 34-43** **After the fact.** Peter's summary of the facts is concise and compelling. How many listening flinched? Shocked by this story — the scandal of the cross — a potent symbol of shame and horror at the time.

4. **Jeremiah 31:1-6** **I have loved you with an everlasting love…** There is no escaping the pain and brutality of the cross, but they are not the end of the story. There is an everlasting love that coursed through Jesus's veins as he hung on the tree.

5. **Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24** **The stone that was rejected.** Rejection as part of the story of incarnation.

6. **Colossians 3: 1-4** **The things that are above.** It is understandable that we turn away from the horror and sadness of the cross but Jesus invites us to hold our heads high and look up — not just to the cross but beyond it to the life ever after. When the disciples set out to Emmaus their heads are bent against the prevailing winds, they can only look at one foot in front of the other. It takes a sudden stranger to change their perspective — to look up.

7. **Isaiah 50: 4-11** **Game face.** Flint not flinch! In these verses Isaiah is getting his 'game face' on.

After the Cross: Shrug (Week 2, 12 April)

Introduction:
Many shrug at the cross — it's too good to be true, a fairytale, a metaphor, a bizarre historical footnote. It is understandable that the cross frustrates and stretches us. It is a puzzle, a mystery, a step into wonder, an event that cuts across the grain of history. For some the shrug will lead to rejecting the faith, dismissing the cross, and for others it will be the question that draws them deeper, that makes them linger there.

Donald Bailie, in his book 'God was in Christ', suggests the cross is the ultimate answer to the anxieties of our modern age. The cross was a profound 'Paradox of Grace'. The reason why we shrug at the cross is we have not realised — God in Christ was living out our suffering and shame. Baillie was speaking to a generation that had faced the trenches and the horrors of the Second World War. He was speaking into the existential despair of that era, a despair that for many seems to be returning in the 21st century. His theology bridges the gap between two different ideas of the cross: Christ died to satisfy the law or Christ dies to show us God's love. Bailie taught the cross goes beyond all this — it changes the human heart. It invites a personal encounter with God, both as judge and saviour.

Seeds to sow: Really confronting the cross means confronting the strange reality of it. If the cross hasn't ever made us shrug, scratch our heads, or sigh in frustration are we really looking at the cross? Or just an empty logo…

1. **John 20: 19-31** **After the Resurrection.** In the shrug of Thomas's shoulders there is room for each of us, for all our scepticism, doubts and unease. He squints, he scratches his head, he shrugs, 'I hae my doots'. The New Testament doesn't edit out Thomas's faith, the inconvenience of his reticence is foundational to the movement.

2. **Luke 24: 18-26** **Responding to the Cross: Shrug.** The disciples can't believe Just doesn't know all that has happened (Has he been living under a rock? No but he has just rolled one aside…). They are weary, spent, sad — and now this stranger is inviting them to relive the last week! All they can do is shrug. They had hoped for more, they have heard rumours, but it was all too good to be true. The cross invites a critical sincere faith, like that of Thomas in John 20. Doubting the cross — being frustrated by it — is not a barrier to faith, it's *part* of faith.

3. **Psalm 16** **The LORD is my chosen portion.** Psalm 16 is not just an outpouring of emotion, there is critical engaged thinking going on. The psalmist here has worked through 'the shrug' to contemplate what really matters. How often in our faith are we scared of the 'shrug' so we keep our feelings surface level, unwilling to ask the searching questions?

4. **1 Peter 1: 3-9** **Although you have not seen him, you love him.** The shrug of puzzlement is part of a living faith as it is tested and strengthened over the years. A faith that never thinks through things, challenging itself to grow, may not survive the refining!

5. **Matthew 8: 22-33** **Peter shrugged.** Peter shrugs, he wobbles, "This can't be happening!" But I mean, wouldn't you? Jesus knows the limitations of our faith and this reading is more about demonstrating who Jesus is, rather than a test of Peter. We are all Peters whol sometimes shrug in the face of the incredible.

6. **Matthew 28: 16-20 Having your doubts.** Verse 17 is a fascinating wrinkle in this triumphant end to the gospel. Proximity to Jesus is no guarantee of immediate faith. Once again the New Testament leaves room for the 'slow burn', the gradual conversion, 'the path of shrugs'.

7. **Mark 6: 6b-13 The Holy Shrug.** Exploring the art of the 'Holy shrug!' Sometimes there's nothing for it but to shake it off!

After the Cross: Kneel (Week 3, 19 April)

Introduction: For some of us coming face to face with the cross will make us kneel. It is a physical and often wordless emotional response. The cross has enormous power. It is a huge event that resounds throughout history. It happened once, but — like sound waves reverberating outwards — the cross continues to happen, ringing through the centuries. For the cross is at once deeply universal and deeply personal. Often, as it was for the two disciples in Luke 24, it is during Communion that we recognise the power of the cross.

John Zizioulas, the eminent Orthodox theologian, saw the cross as the ultimate act of love that teaches what it means to be alive. For him kneeling in gratitude is the first act of entering into what he calls the 'Eucharistic' way of life itself. The act of Communion is not just a memory, it is even more than an encounter with Jesus' presence, rather it is an encounter that reconfigures our whole identity. For Zizioulas the revelation that comes through Communion doesn't just *change* who we are — it *makes* us who we are. It may be that wee see the cross most clearly during Communion. Kneeling before the cross is like the 'heart burning' in Luke 24: 32. It is the moment where our understanding turns into adoration and worship and we become, in Zizioulas's words, 'ecclesial persons' born again members of Christ's body.

Seeds to sow: Kneeling (literally or figuratively) before the cross, before Jesus, stops the cross becoming a mere historical artefact and roots it in our lives… Discuss!

1. **Acts 2: 14, 36-41** **After the testimony.** Deeply moved by Peter, "cut to the heart" by his testimony, the people want to 'do' something. In baptism we come to our knees before God to be born again. In baptism is humility and honesty.

2. **Luke 24: 27-32** **Responding to the Cross: Kneel.** The disciples have been metaphorically kneeling at this stranger's feet as they walk along, so moved that they invite him in to stay with him. They want to stay in this space a little longer, their eyes are open, they want to take more in. The disciples on the road were mourning a 'failed' Messiah. Yet, in the breaking of the bread, they encountered the Exalted Lord. What is the difference between 'thinking' about the Cross, (which might lead to a shrug) and 'kneeling' before the Crucified One? How does the act of Communion help move us from the head to the knees?

3. **Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19** **The kneeling times.** Those times we come before God and kneel through the pain and suffering can be hugely transformative times in our lives.

4. **1 Peter 1: 17-23** **Afterwards, born anew.** Kneeling before the lamb to love anew

5. **Psalm 95: 6-7a** **Come, kneel!** The place of kneeling isn't just about us as an individual and God, it can be a hospitable place where we invite others to kneel alongside us.

6. **Philippians 2: 5-11** **Every knee should bow.** Kneeling is an elemental response to Jesus in his glory.

7. **Hebrews 8** **An approachable throne.** We do not not need to kneel cowed by fear, but rather we kneel in honour of the holy ground at the Cross and our great High Priest.

After the Cross: Leap (Week 4, 26 April)

Introduction: Sometimes coming face to face with the cross leads to people leaping into life following Jesus. It's the start of an adventure that physically moves people, motivating them to catch up with where Jesus is working in the world. The cross is life-changing not because it draws us to stay there, but because it turns us to face back out to the world, to where Jesus is now, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Karl Barth, one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century, saw the cross as the most important event of all time. He calls it a 'Cataclysmic event'. You could say he saw it as the beginning of a new adventure for human kind. God breaks the closed systems of time and breaks us into a new freedom. A turning point of human history. The cross speaks of the grace of God that frees us from our endless failure, because Christ has faced our judgement. In Christ we are never in a static state. We live in a dynamic movement of grace. The cross is for the whole world not just the church. Thus the adventure is to go into every space, politics, art, and industry and discover Christ is already there.

Seeds to sow: Jesus is no longer on the cross, no longer in the tomb; while returning to the cross inspires and shapes our faith — we are not meant to spend our lives here — we have to look to where Jesus is calling us now… Discuss!

1. **Acts 2: 42-47** **Leaping into a shared life!** The early followers of Jesus responded to the cross by throwing themselves into shared life together! They weren't just thinking a new way, or believing a new way — they were *living* a new way.

2. **Luke 24: 30-35** **Responding to the Cross: Leap.** It can come through long walks, deep conversation, Bible study, shared meals, through Communion — but in some times and places the cross suddenly hits us and brings us leaping to our feet. No longer flinching, or shrugging, or kneeling — but leaping into action. We are told, despite the day's walking and the late hour that they immediately head back. There's no time to delay!

3. **1 Peter 2: 19-25** **Leaping after Jesus.** Following Jesus' example.

4. **John 10: 1-10** **Leaping into abundant life with Jesus!** Sheep leaping after the shepherd!

5. **2 Corinthians 5: 1-10** **Leaping by faith!** Living by faith we leap after Jesus

6. **Romans 13: 8-14** **Practicing for eternity.** In Church Dogmatics IV/1, Barth uses a powerful metaphor:"The Church is not a museum of the past, but a school of the future." For Barth, the Resurrection isn't just a past event we look back on. It is the future breaking into the present. The Church is the "school" where we learn how to live in that future right now. What does it mean to live in 'a school for the future'?

7. **2 Corinthians 5: 16-22** **New creations, taking the leap!** Come be reconciled — be an ambassador!