

# Good Friday - Service of Reflection

*Good Friday is the turning point in Holy Week. If you are using this reflection at home, you might do it at 3pm, the time of Jesus' death after six hours on the cross. In the church (Widecombe, 3pm), the silences will be about 5 minutes long.*

## **Hymn – Forty days and forty nights**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWEYJHxkNfc>

Forty days and forty nights  
thou wast fasting in the wild;  
forty days and forty nights  
tempted and yet undefiled:

Sunbeams scorching all the day;  
chilly dew-drops nightly shed;  
prowling beasts about thy way;  
stones thy pillow, earth thy bed.

Shall not we thy sorrows share,  
and from earthly joys abstain,  
fasting with unceasing prayer,  
glad with thee to suffer pain?

And if Satan, vexing sore,  
flesh or spirit should assail,  
thou, his vanquisher before,  
grant we may not faint nor fail.

So shall we have peace divine;  
holier gladness ours shall be;  
round us too shall angels shine,  
such as ministered to thee.

Keep, O keep us, Saviour dear,  
ever constant by thy side;  
that with thee we may appear  
at the eternal Eastertide.

# 1. Separated from God

*Reading – Isaiah 52. 13-53*

The Lord says:

See, my servant shall prosper;  
he shall be exalted and lifted up,  
and shall be very high.

Just as there were many who were astonished at him  
—so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance,  
and his form beyond that of mortals—

so he shall startle many nations;  
kings shall shut their mouths because of him;  
for that which had not been told them they shall see,  
and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
and like a root out of dry ground;  
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;  
and as one from whom others hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities  
and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have all turned to our own way,  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

By a perversion of justice he was taken away.  
Who could have imagined his future?

For he was cut off from the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people.

They made his grave with the wicked  
and his tomb with the rich,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.

When you make his life an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;  
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

Out of his anguish he shall see light;  
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.  
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;  
because he poured out himself to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

## ***Meditation***

He was despised and rejected, led to the slaughter .....

I guess for most of us, it's not hard to think of times when we have felt without God. Lost, lonely. On our own.

For some Christians there seems to be a determination to always be cheerful. To pretend that bad things don't happen. To look away from pain.

I feel very uncomfortable when people who are planning a funeral say something like "we want it just to be a celebration. Just to be bright and cheerful."

That's impossible. In the light of tragedy and loss we feel sad. It's part of the human condition.

What perhaps we forget is that just because we are desolate, it doesn't mean that God doesn't care.

What father (or mother, for that matter) will see a son or daughter suffering and not suffer with them. There may be little that helps, and they might be almost unreachable in their pain, as Isaiah says, “crushed with pain”.

But as a Father, God understands and, amazingly, suffers too. Not just when tragedy strikes us, but also when we’ve caused the problem ourselves.

We suffer when we have sinned. We might feel we’ve gone too far, we’ve done something unforgiveable. But if we feel that it separates us from God, that’s a separation of our making, is not of his making. It’s not his doing. It’s only on our side.

When everything seems too awful, we may feel bitterness against God, rail against God, but ultimately it doesn’t destroy our relationship – and when the suffering is over, we’ll find a new bond of closeness.

Just as, by imagining the sufferings of Jesus during this Holy Week, we can enter more fully into his triumph on Easter Day.

*Silence*

Incline your ear to me;  
be swift to answer when I call.

Lord, hear my prayer,  
and let my cry come before you:  
**be swift to answer when I call.**

Hide not your face from me  
in the day of my trouble:  
**be swift to answer when I call.**

You, Lord, endure for ever,  
and your name from age to age:  
**be swift to answer when I call.**

You will arise and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to have pity on her:  
**be swift to answer when I call.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

**Incline your ear to me;  
be swift to answer when I call.**

## **Hymn 346 – My Song is love unknown**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNN9DBobCdw>

My song is love unknown,  
my Saviour's love to me,  
love to the loveless shown  
that they might lovely be.  
O who am I  
that for my sake  
my Lord should take  
frail flesh and die?

He came from his blest throne  
salvation to bestow,  
but men made strange, and none  
the longed-for Christ would know.  
But O my friend,  
my friend indeed,  
who at my need,  
his life did spend.

Sometimes they strew his way,  
and his strong praises sing,  
resounding all the day  
hosannas to their King.  
Then "Crucify!"  
is all their breath,  
and for his death  
they thirst and cry.

Why, what hath my Lord done?  
What makes this rage and spite?  
He made the lame to run,  
he gave the blind their sight.  
Sweet injuries!  
Yet they at these  
themselves displease,  
and 'gainst him rise.

They rise, and needs will have  
my dear Lord made away;  
a murderer they save,  
the Prince of Life they slay.  
Yet steadfast he  
to suffering goes,  
that he his foes  
from thence might free.

Here might I stay and sing,  
no story so divine:  
never was love, dear King,  
never was grief like thine.  
This is my friend,  
in whose sweet praise  
I all my days  
could gladly spend.

## **2. Getting it wrong**

*Reading: John 18.15-27*

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken

wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

## ***Meditation***

It's one thing getting it wrong. It's quite another knowing how to put it right. It's one thing to blunder into a mess, it's quite another facing up to people afterwards.

Embarrassment. Shame. The feeling of letting people down. Of getting it wrong. Of facing ridicule. Peter knew it all.

I guess we know it all as well. Who hasn't said the wrong thing and brought conversation or a relationship to a halt. Who hasn't denied something and felt that blush of shame starting up.

And afterwards? Two options.

- To face up to people and accept feeling foolish
- Or to hide away, and withdraw.

Withdrawing is not a solution, but facing up is hard – except that it depends on who you have to face. The person you are facing also has two options:

- To make it easy for you
- Or to make it hard.

Turn the tables, and think of a time when someone was caught out by you. Did we make it easy or hard? As Christians, we should never make it hard for someone to say sorry – and I know, for one, I sometimes do. May I be forgiven.

Did Jesus? Of course not.

Had Peter blown it? Of course not.

*Silence*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we confess we have failed you as did your disciples.  
We ask for your mercy and help.  
Our selfishness betrays you:  
Lord, forgive.  
**Christ have mercy.**

We can see what's wrong and yet do nothing about it:  
Lord, forgive.  
**Christ have mercy.**

We fail to take responsibility for addressing the ills around us:  
Lord, forgive.  
**Christ have mercy.**

We fail to take responsibility for our own actions:  
Lord, forgive.  
**Christ have mercy.**

### ***Hymn 549 – When I survey the wondrous cross***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRgEOtNSG20>

When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
save in the death of Christ, my God.  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
sorrow and love flow mingled down.  
did e'er such love and sorrow meet  
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
that were a present far too small.  
love so amazing, so divine,  
demands my soul, my life, my all.



### 3. Pressure from the crowd

*Reading: John 18. 38 – 19. 16*

Pilate asked Jesus, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

## *Meditation*

It's one thing behaving well on one's own. It's quite another trying to persuade others of the right thing to do. Trying to sway a crowd.

Pilate failed.

I guess we often fail. I know I do. I see the right thing to do. I know it's right. I try persuading others. They don't listen. I try again. They won't engage with the issue. I tend to become annoyed, even angry. Surely they understand!

No – the pressure of the crowd, of the masses, of “the way it's always been done” is too strong. So I back off.

Pilate backed off - reflected. Took Jesus aside. Tried to get Him to compromise. Tried to work a way of freeing Jesus that wouldn't rebound on him as governor.

Pilate appears to be doing his best? Is he?

His bottom line is that he won't give up his credibility and status – not even to save an innocent man.

That's why it's so hard to pursue an unpopular cause, even the cause of right. It damages our standing, our status, our comfortable relationships with those around us.

So we back off, and leave others to their fate.

## *Silence*

Blessed are you, God of pain and mercy,  
Through your Son Jesus Christ:

Surely he has borne our griefs;  
**he has carried our sorrows.**

He was despised, he was rejected,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief:  
**he has carried our sorrows.**

He was pierced for our sins,  
bruised for no fault but ours:  
**he has carried our sorrows.**

His punishment has bought our peace,  
and by his wounds we are healed:  
**he has carried our sorrows.**

We had all strayed like sheep:  
but the Lord has laid on him the guilt of us all:  
**he has carried our sorrows.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

**Surely he has borne our griefs;  
he has carried our sorrows.**

### ***Hymn 389 – O sacred head surrounded***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrqpQIlodx0>

O sacred head surrounded  
by crown of piercing thorn;  
O bleeding head, so wounded,  
reviled and put to scorn:  
death's pallid hue comes o'er thee,  
the glow of life decays,  
yet angel hosts adore you  
and tremble as they gaze!

I see thy strength and vigour  
are fading in thy strife,  
and death, with cruel rigour,  
bereaving Thee of life;  
O agony and dying!  
O love to sinners free!  
Jesus, all grace supplying,  
O turn Thy face on me!

In this Thy bitter passion,  
Good Shepherd, think of me,  
with Thy most right compassion,  
unworthy though I be;  
beneath Thy Cross abiding,  
forever would I rest,  
in Thy dear love confiding,  
and with Thy presence blest.

## 4. It is finished

### *Reading: John 19. 16-30*

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfil what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

(He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

### ***Meditation***

Making a decision to do something really hard is one thing. Seeing it through is quite another.

The decision can be an intellectual, almost abstract exercise. But seeing it through involves every emotion we possess.

Think for a moment of the feelings when facing a difficult doctor's appointment. Or facing a really tough job interview. The sense of misery when having to break bad news to someone.

And then think of something far worse than that – facing one's own painful death in only a few hours. Jesus would have felt every emotion imaginable, and more I'm sure we can't begin to imagine.

I've met some Christians who seem to deny their emotions, even to feel ashamed of them. But emotions are what we share with everyone else – how we empathise.

Some people seem afraid to link their faith, their spirituality with their emotions – as if worship and emotion were separate things. As if pure, ascetic spirituality is a negation of emotions.

It isn't – they are inextricably linked.

Being honestly aware of our emotions is part of becoming whole, integrating them with our faith in God. Without feeling, of course there would be no pain. But also there would be no joy. It would be like death, without resurrection.

### **Anthem – God so loved the world (Stainer)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5Akz6J8Rw0>

*Silence*

Father, you loved the world so much that you sent your only son to die that we might live through him. For his words from the cross, we bring you thanks and praise:

‘Forgive them...’

He forgave in the face of bitter hatred.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

‘Today you shall be with me in paradise.’

He promised heaven to the forgiven sinner.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

‘Woman, here is your Son...’

He loved his mother to the last.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

‘I am thirsty.’

He shared in our physical suffering and longing.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

‘Why have you forsaken me?’

He entered into our testing and desolation.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

'It is finished.'

He completed his saving work,

And made a new covenant of love between God and his world.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

'Into your hands I commit my spirit.'

He won the victory over sin and death for ever.

We give you thanks:

**We praise your holy name.**

### ***Hymn 159 – Glory be to Jesus***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpycU85DLWY>

Glory be to Jesus,  
who in bitter pains  
poured for me the life blood  
from his sacred veins!

Blest through endless ages  
be the precious stream  
which from endless torment  
doth the world redeem!

Abel's blood for vengeance  
pleaded to the skies;  
but the blood of Jesus  
for our pardon cries.

Oft as it is sprinkled  
on our guilty hearts,  
Satan in confusion  
terror-struck departs;

Oft as earth exulting  
wafts its praise on high.  
Hell with terror trembles,  
heaven is filled with joy.

Lift ye then your voices;  
swell the mighty flood;  
louder still and louder  
praise the precious blood.

## **5. Conclusion**

We have been crucified with Christ  
and live by faith in the Son of God,  
who loved us and gave himself for us.

**Amen.**

May he send us out to glory in his cross,  
and live no longer for ourselves but for him, who died and was raised to  
life for us.

**Amen.**