

starters for Sunday

Wednesday of Holy Week

23 March 2016

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr Craig Gardiner, Tutor in Doctrine at South Wales Baptist College and member of Christian Aid's Worship and Theology Collective, for his thoughts on the Wednesday of Holy Week.

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Quick Guide...

Helping people prepare for reading the Bible in worship can make a real difference. Overcoming nerves, reading in ways suitable to the text, speaking clearly etc.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

Holy Week Wednesday

[Isaiah 50: 4-9a](#)

[Psalm 70](#)

[Hebrews 12: 1-3](#)

[John 13: 21-32](#)

Introduction

My young children were excited to discover that sometimes this day in Holy Week is known as Spy Wednesday. For them it conjured up images of Special Agents, going deep undercover against a nefarious enemy, all in the name of some higher good. As we know, the reality was somewhat different. It was on this day that Judas Iscariot began his betrayal of Jesus, when he offered himself as spy for the Jewish leadership and sold out Jesus for the price of a slave, thirty pieces of silver. No doubt popular history has been unkind to Judas. He may well have acted out of good intentions. It probably wasn't about the money. More likely it was an attempt to force Jesus to act in a certain way, but it reminds us that there is often a thin line between faithfulness and treachery. As disciples it can be difficult to navigate the paradox that we can exercise both fidelity and betrayal at the same time¹. So this day asks questions of our journey through Lent. Has our discipline of obedience enabled us to resist the temptation of Judas-like betrayal? But it also raises the question of whether in our enthusiasm to proclaim the gospel we have sometimes betrayed it. And perhaps it presents an even greater challenge; are there times when we might genuinely need to betray some attachments to our religion in order to be faithful to the deeper truths of Christian discipleship?



¹ The imagery of this paradox is taken from Peter Rollins, *The Fidelity of Betrayal: Towards a Church of Unbelief*, (London: S.P.C.K., 2008).



[Isaiah 50: 4-9a](#)

The Isaiah passage raises the possibility that on Spy Wednesday that we too might betray the gospel by seeking to be faithful to it. When a friend calls in panic or despair to inform us of some accident or tragedy that has brought suffering to their door we will of course offer to do anything that we can do to ease their burden. We will come and cook for them or pray, or simply sit in compassionate silence. What we will not do is say that this time of suffering is deserved. We will not trot out platitudes that say this suffering will no doubt yet serve a higher purpose.

Of course, in time, good may come of it, but this is not the time or place to say so. Unless we are in Holy Week and alongside their pain we read these words of Isaiah, with the knowledge that what we believe about Easter is exactly that, that out of Jesus' suffering and death comes hope, healing and new life.

In Isaiah we hear a future echo of the Passion story with the insistence that vindication comes for those who are innocent and yet have turned their back and offered their cheeks to be beaten, mocked and shamed. And here, as potential spies, lies the danger of our betrayal through fidelity. In seeking to proclaim the gospel, the Church has often turned the ongoing struggles of human experiences into some meritorious activity.

We have sought to justify the suffering caused by gender based violence, racist abuse and even the tragedies of happenstance as somehow being necessary to bring us closer to God. How often has such been said to victims like Saint Enoch who was raped and then punished by her father for it? Whatever pain we face, is nothing compared to that of our Lord, and so we should set our faces like flint, submit to the trials we face and await our final vindication. But says William Goettler, *'imagining ourselves to proclaim a gospel truth, we have instead preached submission to the evil powers of this world, mistaking them for God's purpose in human history.'*²

Might it not be a betrayal of Jesus as tragic as that of Judas to suggest that the suffering of those in Bolivia, whose water resources are disappearing because of global climate change, should just grin and bear it, because their suffering will make them more like Jesus who once cried out on the cross 'I thirst'. The gospel of Jesus Christ will tolerate no such submission to the

² William Goettler in David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Talyor, eds., *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Common Revised Common Lectionary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p235.



fallen powers of this world or the suffering they cause and if we are to create ‘safe homes’ for the suffering of the world, neither will the church.

Instead we might need to deny our attachment to simplistic and potentially abusive theologies of suffering and rediscover a fidelity to a very different God. In truth, there is nothing redeeming about the abuse faced by the suffering servant of Isaiah 50. Recalling the suffering simply names and shames those who have caused it. It is not sent from God.

Instead, as the Judas of Spy Wednesday would have learned on Easter Sunday, had he not rushed to kill himself after the crucifixion of Friday, God will not betray all those in pain. Instead, God stands faithfully alongside every afflicted person, weeping with their tears, hurting with their pain, until every home is safe and until the kingdom comes.

Song suggestions

CH4 258	When the hungry
CH4 259	Beauty for Brokenness
CH4 565	How can I keep from singing
CH4 570	When the storms of life are raging
CH4 537	We do not hope to ease our minds

[Psalm 70](#)

The Psalm is spoken from the heart and voice of the poor and outcast, those who feel betrayed by life. It stands in the great tradition of Lament, which represents about a third of all the Psalms. These are words offered from the pit of despair and yet, paradoxically also spoken in faith. The cry for deliverance is made in defiance of the present experience of suffering, but is offered because of the lamenter’s ongoing faith in God, the Deliverer.

Thus, as Walter Brueggemann reminds us, the cry of prophetic lament *‘is not carping and denouncing. It is asserting that false claims to authority and power cannot keep their promises, which they could not in the face of the free God.’*³ Thus the opening and closing verses of this

³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p11



Psalm affirm such faith in a free God through its calling out for help and salvation- 'Please God deliver me from this.'

Anticipating Christ's own cry of dereliction from the cross, the Psalm is honest about the paradox of faith in the face of suffering. And yet the core of the lament offers us space to expose the false promises made by the powers and authorities of the world and name the depths of suffering they cause. This offers opportunity for the church to speak truth to power, (and acknowledge that in doing so we might become our own accuser).

It means hearing the cry of lament from those in situations of dramatic climate change. For example, it offers the space to acknowledge how the radical retreat of mountain glaciers in the Andes put the lives of indigenous communities at risk. It offers space to join our voices with their lament, but it also offers space for us to acknowledge our complicity in the problem and the urgent need for our own deliverance.

So the Psalmist's words come, not so much a litany of complaint as an expression of feeling, an outpouring of pain, and a longing for change. Again this is where Spy Wednesday invites us to betray some of the popular superficialities of the Christian faith: the easy triumphalism that insists we continually inhabit (or pretend to) Sunday's victory before we ever enter into Good Friday's pain or the liminality of Holy Saturday. Fidelity to God, scripture and to the human experience demands something more of us than that.

Faithfulness to the reality of our brokenness may mean our betrayal of a Western society that expects us to 'get over' trauma as efficiently as possible. It certainly rejects a simplistic theology that says God is going to make every little thing all right. In a Western culture that offers little time or space for us to grieve the pain of events and experiences, the power of symbolic and spoken lament becomes a powerful counter-narrative.

For those who suffer, it offers a legitimate space to name injustices before God, the Deliverer. For those who are more comfortable, it prompts the opportunity both to stand in solidarity with those in pain and ask how we might become part of their liberation.

Words and actions of lament allow us to overcome the apathy and numbness that can come in the face of overwhelming injustice and suffering. They allow us, as dissidents in society and



disciples of Christ, to name what is wrong, to inhabit a space to grieve and discover the energy of the Spirit needed to imagine a better reality. If we are ever to offer safer homes for all those burdened with suffering then it will surely begin by blessing the honesty of our hearts and the brokenness of our lives.

Songs suggestions

There are a number of recent songs not in CH4 that have dealt with lament.

Tim Hughes	'When the Tears Fall'
Geraldine Latty	'Lord, why does it seem'
Stuart Townend	'How long' (We have sung our songs of victory)
Matt Redman	'Blessed be Your name'
Graham Kendrick	'Who can sound the Depths of Sorrow'
Fischy Music	'Bad Times won't last' 'Why, oh why' and 'Bring it all to me.'
John Bell/Graham Maule	'As if you were not there'.

In CH4

CH4 253	Inspired by Love and Anger
CH4 360	Jesus Christ is waiting
CH4 721	We Lay our broken world
CH4 724	A touching place
CH4 710	I have a dream

There are a number of classical pieces that might also be used in the context of lament

William Byrd's	Miserere Mei Deus
Arvo Part's	Adam's Lament
Zbigniew Preisner	'Lacrimosa' from 'Requiem for a Friend'



[Hebrews 12: 1-3](#)

The writer to the Hebrews wants to remind them that the way of Christ requires perseverance. Here we are asked to believe in the purposes of God, even if it does not appear that there is much hope of things working out. Here we are, almost half way through the journey of Holy Week, nearly at the end of Lent, we have ‘kept on keeping on’ and yet the darkest days are yet to come.

Before us lie the tensions of the final supper, Judas’s betrayal of his master with a kiss, the sweat and tears of Gethsemane and the Via Dolorosa that stumbles towards the cross and finally death. These last few days feel less like a race to be run and more like a funeral procession. This final lap knows no crowd of witnesses, other than those who are there to mock and jeer. All other support, (apart from the women) has vanished in betrayal, denial or fear.

Even when we know how the story ends, even as we know the certainty of resurrection, still like those early Christians, sin and suffering can entangle us and weigh us down. A world that seeks only immediate success and instant gratification knows little of perseverance. Similarly a church that seeks only converts and does not make disciples is equally uncomfortable with long haul or the bigger picture.

A feel-good spirituality that leaves no room for failure and pain will not wait long enough to persevere until healing and a new beginning comes. Here too it seems we must be willing to betray some of the cultural affectations that shape much of contemporary Christianity, if we are to be truly faithful.

How would the story turn on this Spy Wednesday if Judas had ignored the expectations of the Zealots and persevered with Jesus’ plan? Maybe that’s an unfair question. Perhaps Jesus needed Judas to do exactly what he did for heaven’s plans to be completed, we will never know. But had Judas persevered with life, even in the despair that came after his betrayal, then maybe like Peter after his denial, Judas would have survived to finish the race marked out for him.

Two things help us in this final leg of the race. First is the assurance that however lonely we may feel there is a communion of saints, a crowd of witnesses, gathered close around us. The Celtic saints like Mungo and Enoch inhabited a world where that invisible community was tangibly close. Caim prayers of protection invoked the protection of a variety of saints. St. Patrick’s Lorica



is perhaps the most famous, but the Scottish collections from the *Carmina Gadelica* assure us that this is a deep part of our spiritual heritage. These saints remind us that we are never alone. They remind us that we, like them in their time, stand on the shoulders of those who have run the race before us. Some of them will have names and stories we remember, Andrew, Margaret, Ninian and Columba. Others will be known only in heaven. But all will have persevered in their faith and so passed that faith on to us. In time others will believe because we have too preserved. We will do so not just because of this crowd of witnesses around us but because ahead of us runs the pioneer and perfecter of our faith – showing us the way and calling us to follow. Fix our eyes on him and we will yet finish the course.

Song suggestions

Helen Lemmel	Turn your eyes upon Jesus
CH4 517	Fight the Good Fight
CH4 536	May the mind of Christ my saviour
CH4 593	Enemy of Apathy
CH4 211	Today I awake, (contemporary Loric)
CH4 577	Christ be beside me, Trad. (St. Patrick's Breastplate)
CH4 576	Circle Me, Lord (Caim prayer)
CH4 539	I want Jesus to walk with me
CH4 543	Christ be our Light
CH4 547	What a Friend we have in Jesus
CH4 743	Behold, what witnesses unseen



[John 13: 21-32](#)

This passage brings into focus the two main characters of Spy Wednesday, Judas and Jesus. Gathered in an Upper Room with friends, Jesus is deeply troubled in his spirit, knowing that Judas will betray him. The motivation behind Judas' betrayal has been a recurring source of speculation. Was he no more than a pawn in God's plans for salvation, or chosen by Jesus from the beginning as one who might be able to carry out what needed to be done? Perhaps he was trying to protect his community from what he thought to be a messianic pretender. Did he try to force the hand of Jesus into a more political revolution? Did he feel betrayed by Jesus? Or was Judas just a calculating, even Satan possessed villain.

Attempts to defend or rehabilitate him never fully convince, but questions of motivation will be on the hearts and minds of a congregation as this passage is read. And the narrative offers the opportunity to help worshippers address some equally complex motivations in their own lives. Many people will carry with them stories of having been betrayed. Their pain may be too deep to demand it be expressed in public and yet our worship may offer a place for healing to begin. Others may come carrying the guilt of betraying another and for some there may even be a repeating pattern of behavior. This too may need an opportunity to be placed in worship. Many may identify both with Jesus and with Judas. They have been both betrayer and betrayed. They may carry the burden of both.

Some may carry stories of when they, like the disciples, had no idea of the betrayal that was in their midst, but feel responsible for not seeing it earlier and preventing it. Clearly the passage raises issues that are theologically difficult and pastorally sensitive. There are tough and interwoven questions about pain, responsibility and forgiveness. The temptation for the preacher is to offer a definitive answer to such questions. This ought to be avoided. The challenge here is to resist a monophonic exegesis of the passage and instead offer the congregation to engage with the complex motivations of the story in the light of their own experiences.

Skilled facilitation of such a conversation with the text might lift the hearts and minds of the congregation beyond their own experiences and invite them to consider the wider implications of the story for the world. Who are the people in our immediate communities or in distant parts



of the world who feel betrayed? Who might have betrayed them and how? This might develop into reflections on diverse issues such as climate change or economic justice. Together the congregation might consider how society and the church been complicit in betrayal? Through conversation and in silence the people should be encouraged to seek what God might be saying into the shared space.

Song suggestions

CH4 400	When we are tempted
CH4, 534	Make me a captive Lord
CH4 538	God be in my head
CH4 539	I want Jesus to walk with me

Other suggestions for worship

- 1) It might be that on this 'Spy Wednesday' that we encourage a congregation to consider the tensions within us over our fidelity and betrayal of Christ. We might do this corporately in discussion and, on a cut out silver coin, write the down occasions when the church has been less than faithful to the gospel. These then might be gathered together and prayers of confession or intercession offered. A similar action might be undertaken quietly by individuals. Alternatively the congregation might be offered a piece of silver to hold (a 10p coin would work well) as they consider where they have been less than faithful to the call of Jesus in their lives.
 
- 2) If considering lament it might be that an image of tears is used on which to write or draw those things for which we weep. These 'tears' might be suspended on cords which drop into a chalice. And after a while a suitable prayer or reading offered.
 



3) Although it is more usual to celebrate Communion on Maundy Thursday, the gospel passage does gather us with the disciples in the Upper Room. Clearly Jesus knew what was going to happen and yet still shared table fellowship with Judas. Each member of the congregation might be invited to echo Jesus' actions by taking a piece of bread which they dip in a dish, offering a prayer for forgiveness for some ongoing feelings relating to betrayal.



Prayers

Call to Worship

Today we will decide

For one side or the other

**There is often a fine line
between fidelity and betrayal**

Today we will decide

For honesty or pretense

**There is often a fine line
between fidelity and betrayal**

Today we will decide

For perseverance or indifference

**There is often a fine line
between fidelity and betrayal**

Today we will decide

For Jesus or for Judas

**There is often a fine line
between fidelity and betrayal**



Prayer of Confession

We come to you this day, O God
complex and conflicted:
both wounded and wounding,
carrying the burdens of betrayer and betrayed.

We come seeking to be faithful
To you and your people and all of creation

We come seeking forgiveness for where our actions bring harm
We come seeking healing where others cause us pain
We come seeking the strength to resist
And the power to change

We come, dependent on your promise
Seek and you shall find.

In faith we ask
And in faith we now receive
Amen



In addition to the above prayers, prepared by our contributor, other prayers may be found in *Living Stones* which is the theme for this year's Pray Now. It was also the theme for Heart and Soul 2015. *Living Stones* is available from [St Andrew Press](#)



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. If there is something you'd like to see on this new site, please [contact us](#) via the website.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. [Living Stones](#) is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music pages [Different Voices](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might preach this Sunday. [Preachers Perspectives](#) is a resource where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.

Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots in the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) may give you helpful material if you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism.

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Dr Craig Gardiner for providing us with this Sunday's material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

