

starters for Sunday

Saturday of Holy Week

26 March 2016

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Dr Kathy Galloway, Head of Christian Aid Scotland and member of Christian Aid's Worship and Theology Collective for her thoughts on the Saturday 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 Saturday

Between the No-longer and the Not-yet

[Matthew 27: 57-66](#)

This passage follows the other gospels in describing the burial of Jesus. The facts are outlined: the body of Jesus is given by Pilate to Joseph of Arimathea, a follower of Jesus, and a wealthy and respected man. Jesus is wrapped in a clean linen cloth, laid in the new tomb which Joseph had hewn from the rock for his own eventual burial, and a great stone is rolled against the door. All the gospels agree on these details. But Matthew adds more. In verses 62-66, he wishes to make it absolutely clear that the stories which soon began to circulate-that Jesus' friends had somehow stolen or otherwise spirited away his body-had no foundation. It was a tomb which had never been used before; his body was the only one there. The great stone could not easily be moved. And additionally, Matthew tells us that, at the request of Jesus' opponents, a guard had been mounted over the tomb, provided by Pilate's own soldiers. Matthew is making it clear in every possible way to the cynics and doubters that there was no deception involved in the empty tomb!



Sermon or Reflection notes

On the wall above my desk at home, I have a poster of a 13th century Russian icon. It came to me as an unexpected gift from a woman I had been talking with about a part of the Holy Week remembrances which is to me one of the most arresting and significant, perhaps because so little is said about it in the Bible. It's the part that is commemorated in the Creeds of the church in the rubric 'he descended into hell', and the icon is of Christ harrowing hell, releasing the tormented spirits from bondage.

The period to which this refers goes from the moment of Jesus' death on the cross until that part in the gospels which begins 'early in the morning of the first day of the week', which introduces the resurrection stories. I am drawn back again and again to this time, which the church has called 'Holy Saturday.' We are used to thinking of Good Friday as the longest day, the darkest day. But for many, many people, it is the day after which is the bleakest.

I am reminded of the devastating Ebola epidemic in West Africa, when family members, already traumatised by the ghastly, life-threatening illness sweeping through their communities, were forbidden to prepare the bodies of their loved ones for burial, because it was so contagious to do so. Even this last service, both a personal sign of love and respect and a vital funeral rite of their culture, and the comfort it brought them to 'do things properly' was denied them. I think of them when I read of the women preparing the spices which Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus used when they wrapped Jesus' body in linen. For them, the day after is the bleakest day.

I am reminded of the refugee families amid the mud and squalor of Calais and Dunkirk, or in vast Lebanese camps, whose children are sick and becoming sicker, with no apparent hope of release from their despairing situation; of the ones who have left war zones having seen loved ones killed, or who do not know where their loved ones are or what has happened to them. They are also living through the longest day.

Matthew's gospel tells us of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary waiting and watching by the tomb. To me, they stand for all the women who accompanied Jesus, and all the people who accompany their loved ones in presence and compassion, just being there, doing small, ordinary, important practical things. Now there is nothing more they can do. They can only weep and



watch. They are powerless paradigms of our own inadequacy and frailty in the face of the deep hurt of others, in the face of all that we cannot prevent or solve.

The story has moved from one of presence and action to one of absence and silence. It is the powerlessness of the poor of the world in the face of a catastrophically unjust world economic order which puts massive, unquantifiable resources into protecting the interests and profits of the powerful of the world and almost nothing by comparison into overcoming poverty and preventable or treatable disease. It is the powerlessness of being confronted with violence at every level – irrational, intractable, and unpredictable in its outcome, breeding only more violence. It is the powerlessness of a mother watching her child die, or indeed, of all of us watching anyone we love die.

We who are Christians give a special meaning to the suffering and death of Jesus – and here again I am brought back to the image of Christ harrowing hell, and to the notion that when Jesus died on the cross, he wasn't finished! It wasn't all over yet. He descended into hell, and harrowed it, cleaned it out, released the tormented souls from bondage. In the face of the powerlessness of the accompanier, here is an image of enormous power and agency. Not only, where did he go, but what did he do?

Where Jesus went, his friends could not ultimately follow. But **where** did Jesus go? Apart from a few rather overheated verses in Matthew, the gospels are resolutely and sensibly silent. The creeds tell us he descended into hell. This is not, I think, a Harry Potter quest against evil. None of us can really describe what the reality of suffering, of the descent into hell, is for another, even if that other is Jesus.

Can it be that the power which is the power of God is most active, is strongest, precisely in the absence and the silence? The absence and silence allow us to bring our own deepest reflection and responsiveness to bear, for though we cannot go there, we can read what it says to each one of us. The cross is a symbol of all that the worst of human violence and fear can do to goodness and innocence. But the descent into hell goes beyond even that; into the depths of my own potential for violence and corruption, into my nameless imaginings and my darkest fears of punishment, betrayal, abandonment, and the terror of the unknown, into the destruction of all life and love. Death is not the worst fear.



But Christ harrowed hell, and so there is nowhere in life or in death that is not God-encompassed, nowhere that is beyond the power of love to reach and touch, nothing and no one beyond redemption and the possibility of new life. ‘Why do you look for him among the dead?’ the angel asked. ‘He is not here. He is alive.’ This is not a story about time, or about location. It is a story about hope. Is hope related to the future? Yes. But even more, it is related to love. Hope is not a time-story. It is a love-story. Jesus dares to place love above time. All the healing stories of the gospels, and ultimately the confession of the faith that ‘he descended into hell, and on the third day he rose again from the dead’ point to this awesome truth. Hope is as impassioned by love as is every healing word and action of Jesus.

The first followers of Jesus only knew, on that longest day, about the No-longer. Jesus was no longer with them. But we who have the gospel know about the Not-yet. We have been, and are, set free from bondage, released to live out of our freedom and not out of our fears. In every given moment (and the moment, the now, is all that we know we have), we have this choice, the choice of death in us, or of life in us. Christ has set us free, and Paul asks ‘why therefore do you not live as free people?’ Always we live in that moment between the Not-yet. All around us, people choose life out of absence and silence. None of us can do it all or even most of the time, we are fragile and we falter. But every time we choose to live, we are living that moment between the No-longer and the Not-yet, because we trust in the Yet.

*Though hope desert my heart
Though strangeness fill my soul,
Though truth torment my troubled mind
You have been here before.*

*Though confidence run dry
Though weary flesh be sore,
Though conversation bear no fruit
You have been here before*

*There is no threatening place
No trial I could know*



*Which has not known your presence first
You have been here before.*

*I will not dread the dark
The fate beyond control,
Nor fear what reigns in threatening things
You will be there before.*

(John L Bell, CH4 464)

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed.
I have to cast my lot with those
who, age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power
reconstitute the world.

(Adrienne Rich)

Prayers

A Litany for Holy Saturday

Politics and power
Occupation and collusion
Fear and faithlessness
This is his story

His story is our story

The unsought glare of celebrity,
Buried conflicts and open challenge
And the expectations of a hungry crowd
This is his story

His story is our story



The profiteering of the pious,
The exploitation of the poor
And the indifference of the powerful
This is his story

His story is our story

Private devotion and public witness
Preparation for death and anointing for burial
The strange calm before the storm
This is his story

His story is our story

Holy ritual and religious identification
Intimacy and service
Bread and water and love
This is his story

His story is our story

Betrayal and rendition
Kangaroo courts and officially sanctioned torture
Judicial murder
This is his story

His story is our story

The desertion of friends
The silence of the grave
The closing in of the shadows
This is his story

His story is our story



Prayer of Petition

Living God,

Today we pray for everyone living in the no-longer

-no longer safe

-no longer loved

-no longer hopeful

For everyone living with loss

-of loved ones

-of homes or livelihoods

-of health and strength

For all who regret the past and fear the future.

God, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

As we watch and wait through our bleakest days,

May we remember that you have gone before us

That you wait beside us

And that your life awaits us

When we are open to receive it

And willing to share it.

In Jesus' name

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](#)



Musical Suggestions

CH4 384	The love that clothes itself in light
CH4 393	We turn to God when we are sorely pressed
CH4 417	Now the green blade riseth
CH4 726	When we are living, we are in the Lord
CH4 727	In the bulb there is a flower
CH4 773	Jesu tawa pano



Additional Resources

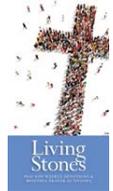
Resourcing Mission



[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 Kathy Galloway 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.

