

# starters for Sunday

## **Good Friday**

**3 April 2015**

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Nigel Robb, Presbytery Clerk of St Andrews and former Secretary to the Committee on Church Art and Architecture, for his thoughts on Good Friday.

### **Contents**

John 19: 17-30 .....	2
Prayers.....	6
Musical Suggestions .....	9
Additional Material for Good Friday .....	10
Additional Resources.....	12



## 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](#).

### **The Cross – Good Friday**

#### **No Gospel Without Tragedy**

#### **[John 19: 17-30](#)**

When they were making the film of the book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood, they used the campus of Duke University in North Carolina for some of the dramatic scenes as a primary location. There was a scene in which the women were to be put to death using gallows. The gallows were set up in front of the chapel. The Dean was the recipient of numerous telephone calls protesting at what was called this violation of 'the sacred beauty of our chapel'. There were also letters to newspapers, and much heated conversation about the inappropriateness of the gallows in front of the chapel. A member of a local congregation wrote to the editor of the student newspaper: 'I do not understand what the fuss is about. Maybe the people who are upset have not noticed the cross at the centre of the chapel'.

Every religion in the world has had a central symbol around which its thought revolves and from which its outreach takes its character. For some it was the moon; for others the sun; and for others the winds or the stars. Christianity, as Archbishop William Temple remarked is 'the most materialist of all the great religions'. The central symbol is a wooden cross – heavy, splintery, with iron spikes, which has stood for more than 2000 years as a declaration that God loves us like this. Christianity or any other religion will not secure its particular identity if it loses its grip on the central fact that made it.

The message of the cross is central to Christianity and is critical to our understanding of the life of Christ and the message he came to proclaim. The cross may be seen by some as a symbol of cruelty and devastation. Perhaps rightly so, as it was believed in the ancient world that crucifixion was the most awful and dreaded form of execution. The cross itself is regarded by



some as not a symbol that the Church should espouse, but the fact that it is central to our faith cannot be denied. The cross itself is not the crucial point – it is the instrument where Jesus declared his love and compassion for humanity. The principle of the cross and the crucified one is the core and essence of the Christian faith.

Some treat the cross as a triviality, or an ornament. There are stories of the sales person in the London store who asked a customer seeking to purchase a cross, ‘Do you want a plain one, or one with the little man on it?’ Recently 88% of those polled in Australia, Germany, India, Japan, and USA recognised the golden arches as representing McDonalds. When the cross was presented, only 54% said, ‘Jesus’. Worse, 46% of those in the five nations did not know what the symbol was.

Crosses are seen in tattoos alongside all sorts of emblems and images from a variety of sources unknown to the Bible, round the necks of people as a piece of jewellery, or gleaming gold in the sunlight on top of the lovely churches of the Kremlin.

Others reject the use of the cross as it is not congruent with the idea of success which so strongly pervades our culture. It seems to proclaim failure, and that some people find utterly unacceptable.

A programme made by the BBC was recently on the USA TV network. It presented the success story of a popular American TV preacher. The camera shows the extravagant church he has built and the throngs who came to hear his positive and affirming sermons. The preacher came across as a warm and engaging person who dared to dream dreams of what God could accomplish through him. He was asked what he thought about Jesus. He replied, ‘Jesus was the most successful religious figure of all Time. Just consider it. He began in obscure surroundings amid poverty and despair; today his followers outnumber those of any other of the world’s religions. That is astounding!’

The interviewer interjected, but I thought he ended up on a cross’. ‘Oh, no!’ the preacher answered. ‘He was raised from the dead. The cross was something he had to endure just as any successful person must endure hardships. But he overcame the cross and put all that behind him.’ Then the camera moved on to highlight another feature of the preacher’s establishment.



The indictment is provocative. How easily does the life and teaching of Jesus sit comfortably with the ethos of the 21st century, particularly in the western world?

There are those who see it as an object to idolise, and who see it almost as a talisman, and appear to be infatuated with a symbol of death, without serious consideration of its demand for human change, moral discovery and social betterment. Henrik Ibsen in Peer Gynt presents Peer Gynt as listening to a soft and harmless sermon at the funeral of a man with a wretched reputation, and came away saying, 'There was nothing in it to make us feel uneasy.'

Others see the Cross as a symbol or reminder of a long past event of biblical history and hence they can avoid its involvement with them in their daily lives. They will sing hymns that elevate the cross and the crucified one, and find them comforting, if sentimental. What they fail to do is struggle with the impact of the cross and the crucified one on the cross.

What does this mean for us?

Frederick Buechner, the novelist and clergyman remarked that 'There is no gospel without tragedy. 'The cross is a tragedy that brings us good news'. An act of God to address the human experience of alienation, isolation, spiritual famine, and insecurity. An action that confronts us with the nature of God and God's love and concern for us even when we are living lives that are not reflective of the will of a loving Heavenly Father. Men and women yearn for forgiveness, moral strength and courage, freedom from the fear of death, and deliverance from our sin to be right with God. We are, at times, at a loss to understand how an event on a hill 2000 years ago affect us in our time.

There are some who interpret the Cross and the crucifixion as a legal contract to purge humanity from sin. This tradition has influenced the Christian faith and theology for more than a 1000 years, and has influenced our hymns, such as 'There is a Green Hill far away' which says:

*There was no other good enough  
To pay the price of sin*

Some would argue, perhaps with some merit, that this is sheer legalism and reduces what happened on the Cross to an transaction of the marketplace, and which some people believe lets them off the hook.



Emil Brunner, the Swiss theologian, remarked, 'We cannot live *without* God. But also we cannot live with God as long as our sins have not been removed.' This is what is critical. There is an alternative perspective on the cross, which would challenge and reinterpret the verse as

*There was no other good enough  
To meet the cost of love*

In that crucial hour, Jesus gave himself as our representative, interceding for us and assuring us forever of that forgiveness without which none of us can ever be free. Judgment and mercy met at the Cross and emerged in freedom and forgiveness for us. This is how salvation works in the Christian religion. This is what gives Christianity that integrity which no worldly force or tyranny has been able to destroy.

One of the most impressive modern statues of Christ is that by Thorvaldsen which stands today behind the altar of the Protestant Cathedral in Copenhagen, Denmark. He worked on it for weeks and at last surveyed the finished product with satisfaction. A Christ with his arms outstretched, raised high in gesturing command, and a fine shaped head, thrown back in triumph. He was pleased and announced that he had created a powerful and majestic representation of Christ.

He shut his studio and left the work to set. When he returned he opened the door and stared in horror and disbelief. There had been a storm. Dampness has invaded the studio and affected the statue. No longer were the arms outstretched; now they fell low. The moisture had caused the once proud head to bend. Gone was the triumphant Christ; he looked defeated now. For a long time the artist had no heart for the work, but finally he went with a friend to the studio to see if they could do something to repair the damage and recapture the likeness of the strong Man of Galilee.

They stopped and gazed in awe at the statue. Bathed in light, the lowered arms no longer depicted defeat; instead, they reached out with the compassion of God to sinful sorrowing, suffering humanity. The head no longer seemed to droop; rather it was bowed low with contrite countenance as if to say, 'Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest'.

This is the principle of the Cross.



## Prayers

### Collect

Almighty God,  
look graciously, we pray, on this your family  
for whom our Lord Jesus Christ  
was willing to be betrayed  
and given up into the hands of sinners  
and to suffer death upon the cross;  
who is alive and glorified with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

or

Almighty God,  
your Son Jesus Christ  
endured the cross for our sake.  
Remove from us all coldness  
and cowardice of heart,  
and give us courage  
to take up our cross and follow him;  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Approach

Our forebears trusted you, O God, and we would have our children trust you. For the only life we know is the life we have in you.

For the good earth, rich in mineral wealth and resplendent in its natural beauty.

For the ties of blood and memory and tradition that link the passing generations to each other;

For the signs and gestures of love that work their magic in our hearts and keep us from becoming the machines we operate;



For the sheer excitement of being present at this point in history when what we struggle with is going to be vital in the future of the Church's witness to you.

We praise and glorify your name.

### **Confession**

We have forgotten that you love us in spite of our sin.

We recall your unqualified love which reaches us in our greed, our quarrels, our selfishness, and our indifference to the needs of those around us.

We are chastened by how easy it is for us to pass by on the other side of the road, and cry 'Hosanna' while crucifying with neglect the poor, the hungry, and the powerless that have no voice.

We acknowledge that we participate in the destruction of creation.

We have conceived, spoken and acted in ways unworthy of our calling.

We have not lived as the redeemed, forgiven disciples of Jesus.

### **Petition**

Lord in the quiet of this hour, we pause to ask for a surer knowledge of who we are and what we are about.

If we can recall a time when we loved more, restore

If we have become good friends with some favourite sin, rebuke.

If the flame of our commitment to the world's immense needs flickers dimly, rekindle.

If along the ways our relationships to our brothers and sisters in the faith are endangered through some wrong, real or imagine, reunite.

Show us the relevance of Christ for the life we live within and the world we make for others, that we may no longer live to ourselves, but unto him whom we call Saviour, Lord, and Friend, in whose name we ask it. Amen



## Thanksgiving

We thank you for shaping us in your image and for keeping us in your steadfast love.

We praise you for calling us to be your people, for revealing your purpose in the law and the prophets, and for dealing patiently with our pride and disobedience.

We praise you for the gift of courage, conscience, confidence in the face of conflict.

We praise you for not only letting us come to you as we are, but also for allowing us to lead other stop you in spite of ourselves.

We give thanks for the witness of countless men and women of faith through whose devotion and labours.

We are grateful that the knowledge of your love and grace has reached the furthest boundaries of the earth.

## Intercession

Gracious and Loving God,

In silence we name those known to us who are struggling at this time with:

The brokenness of families...

The loss of dreams and illusions...

The problems of ill health and frailty...

The lack of forgiveness and sense of acceptance...

The desolation of grief and feelings of abandonment...

The pathetic and the powerless who indulge in manipulation and malevolence to demonstrate their importance...

Hear our prayers for them, and in mercy give them the necessary resources to go on in faith, relying on your power.

O God of glory and wonder,



We pray for our world that you might impart to the leaders of the nations and those in positions of responsibility, peace and calm judgment.

May the self-centred and selfish of the world be softened, remade, remoulded by the outpouring of the love of Christ through us?

Expose the pretentious and self-righteous in our society to the warmth of your love

Encourage the desolate and those afflicted by depression.

Enable the members of the church where it is persecuted, reviled, or apathetic, to claim their responsibilities as your children.

Open the hidebound to the wonderful possibilities of change and transformation.

Enlighten those locked in a dark tomb of passivity and desperate hopelessness,

Through Jesus Christ whose life and love had demonstrated to us the meaning of service, the supreme quality of obedience, and the true way of love? Amen

### **Musical Suggestions**

CH4 380	There is a green hill far away
CH4 381	Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended?
CH4 382	O Sacred Head sore wounded
CH4 392	When I survey
CH4 396	And can it be
CH4 402	Take up your cross



## Additional Material for Good Friday

Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy

*(Woodbine Willie of the First World War)*

### The Unutterable Beauty

When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged him on a tree;  
They drove great nails in hand and feet and made a Calvary.

They placed on him a crown of thorns; red were his wounds and deep,  
For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap  
When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed him by;  
They never hurt a hair of him; they only let him die.

For men had grown more tender and they would not give him pain;  
They only just passed down the street and left him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do,'  
And still it rained the wintry rain that drenched him through and through.  
The crowds went home and left the streets without a sod to see,  
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary.

*(from Woodbine Willie: A Biography of Studdert Kennedy by William Purcell, London Hodder and Stoughton, 1962)*

### Contrasts

He was born a human being,  
Yet he is God.

He came to bring Good News,  
But many thought it was bad.

He did good, fed the hungry, cured the sick,  
But they said he was evil.



He taught from the Scriptures,  
Yet was called a heretic.

He lived among men,  
But his allegiance was to the Kingdom of God.

He was friend to many,  
And they turned their backs on him.

He lived a life of love,  
Yet he was hated.

He came to save the world,  
But would not spare himself.

He despised evil;  
He loved sinners.

He had the universe at his command,  
But would rather be with the poor.

He harmed no one,  
And in return was harmed.

He was innocent,  
Yet was declared guilty.

He came bringing peace,  
And was given a cross.

He showed God's love,  
But it brought out the worst in many.

He died for us; what shall we do for him?



## 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. [Revealing Love](#) is available now 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 Nigel Robb 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.*

