

**Worship for**

**Good Friday 2023**

**The Rev’d**

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**Note**

Good Friday is the saddest day in the Church’s year. Make the service simple and reflective. Use the power of image and silence, sermon and music to mark Jesus’ death. Help folk ponder ***some*** of what that death might mean. We have many theologies and explanations of the Cross but today realise that, in the face of the God who died, they are all partial. You may wish to project an image of the crucifixion if you have a screen. Find Dali’s Christ of St John of the Cross or Chagall’s White Crucifixion as stunning pieces of art to aid reflection. If possible have a large cross in a central place in the church. Traditionally all table cloths, flowers, cushions on presiders’ chairs etc are removed making the church look as stark as possible. I know one minister who overturns chairs around the edge of the church to make the disruption of the Cross echo with resonance in the church. (if you do this tell the Elders not to put them right until after the service!)

**Call To Worship**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, **who is making heaven and earth.**

**Readings**

*Isaiah 52: 12 – 53: 12* **|** *St John 18:1-19:42*

This Passion reading from John is powerful when set for three voices: Narrator, Jesus, and Other. You can buy this in the Jerusalem Bible translation from Waterstones or Amazon – search for “The Passion Readings for Three Voices” (You’ll need three copies). You can also find John’s Passion reading here

http://oremus.org/liturgy/lhwe/john.html

which you could cut and paste into a new document. This site

https://www.lectionarypage.net/Resources/PassionGospelsInParts.html

allows you to download each Gospel’s version of the Passion, set for three voices, as a Word document.

**Sermon Notes**

*(you may wish to download and project an image of Chagall’s White Crucifixion)*

In our age Good Friday services can be moving but we often forget some of their antecedents. In Medieval Europe Good Friday was not a good day to be Jewish. On Good Friday, however, the liturgy whipped up antisemitic feeling and crowds would stream out of Church ready to beat, and sometimes murder, Jewish folk in revenge for Jesus’ death. It makes little sense to us now; we hear John’s Gospel and understand his words were written in an early battle for legitimacy between Synagogue and Church but aren’t intended to imply guilt on Jews forever more. Yet antisemitism is still with us and for millennia was fed by the Church which chose to forget Jesus’ own Jewishness.

In 1938 the Jewish artist Marc Chagall produced his painting *White Crucifixion.* He was living in Paris at the time and created this art in response to the Nazi state-sponsored destruction of Jewish businesses often called Kristallnacht (from the sound of the glass of shop windows shattering.) Synagogues were burned, businesses destroyed, Jewish people beaten and made to clear up the mess the Nazi criminals had caused. Chagall’s works are normally filled with colour, *White Crucifixion* is devoid of colour. Jesus is represented on the Cross but, if you look carefully it’s a very Jewish Jesus. Gone is the traditional loincloth to be replaced by a tallit, a Jewish prayer shawl. Gone is the Crown of Thorns, to be replaced by a headcloth. The mourning angels, often represented in Christian depictions of the Crucifixion, are replaced by three figures - Biblical patriarchs and a matriarch. A menorah stands at the foot of the Cross; a figure in green, who is often seen in Chagall’s work, might be a representation of Elijah. The most noticeable thing about the painting, however, is that Jesus is at the centre of an anti-Jewish pogrom. Jesus is another Jewish martyr and around him are scenes of oppression and horror. On the left of the Cross is a village is pillaged and burned, refugees forced to flee by boat. Three figures on the bottom left – one who clutches the sacred Torah scrolls - flee on foot. On the right, a Synagogue and Torah Scrolls are destroyed by fire while below a mother comforts her child. So what was Chagall’s point? He located the crucifixion in the contemporary events of Europe in the late 1930s. By linking Jewish suffering and Jesus’ crucifixion, by juxtaposing Nazis with Christ’s tormentors Chagall makes a powerful point about the moral implications of their actions. Neatly turning the table on the Christians of the Middle Ages who saw Jews as Christ killers, Chagall shows that Christ killers kill other Jews too.

The Cross which we focus on today is a mystery. A cruel instrument of torture and repression, a means of an agonisingly slow death, yet a symbol of compassion and sacrificial love. Both cross and crucifix are needed – a memory of Christ crucified and a saving faith in the power of the Cross to defeat the powers of evil and injustice which seek to rule this world.

On the Cross the powers of sin, death, and the Devil were defeated by the paradox of Jesus’ victorious death. The powers of evil drove Jesus to the Cross. The Empire, in the weak person of Pilate, wanted him gone. The religious establishment found Jesus unsettling – he challenged their authority, he risked the wrath of Rome if the people followed him into revolt or if the authorities got wind of his teaching. Herod, the puppet ruler had already murdered Jesus’ cousin. Jealousy, perhaps, got into Judas; Peter almost succumbed to murderous rage. All the poisonous powers of politics swirled around Jesus ending in his inevitable death.

The Cross is the central point in the war between good and evil. It’s the turning point of history where Jesus’ death is the turning point in the battle of the ages between good and evil. On the Cross, Jesus overthrew all the ideas of shame and division in religion. God’s Eternal Majesty vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead and so overthrowing all the powers of sin, death, and shame that had enslaved humanity. Jesus entered human misery and took it upon himself. Jesus identified with all who are oppressed, tortured, and condemned but, on the Cross overthrew all that drags humanity down.

Perhaps Chagall got this. Perhaps Chagall saw this overthrow of evil in the Cross even as he situated It in the horror of murderous pogrom. The irony, of course, is that on the day when Christians were to reflect on Jesus’ sacrifice to free us – we often turned the memory into an excuse to perpetuate the murderous nature of the powers of evil. As we are called to respond to Jesus’ sacrificial love and turn towards good we are always pulled back to evil.

The Cross is a paradox; an instrument of torture yet a symbol of evil’s ultimate defeat. A sacrifice of unimaginable love yet a symbol of fear for many. A Jew crucified by gentiles yet through that victorious death sets aside all that divides, all that shames, all that holds us back. A trap that sets us free.

**The Reproaches**

*The Reproaches are a liturgical text from the 9th Century used on Good Friday, or in Eastern Churches on Holy Saturday. This version has been adapted for use in the Presbyterian Church of the USA.*

O my people, O my Church, what have I done to you, or in what have I offended you? Answer me.

I led you forth from the land of Egypt and delivered you by the waters of baptism, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

I led you through the desert forty years, and fed you with manna: I brought you through tribulation and penitence, and gave you my body, the bread of heaven, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

What more could I have done for you that I have not done? I planted you, my chosen and fairest vineyard, I made you the branches of my vine; but when I was thirsty, you gave me vinegar to drink and pierced with a spear the side of your Saviour, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

I went before you in a pillar of cloud, and you have led me to the judgment hall of Pilate. I scourged your enemies and brought you to a land of freedom, but you have scourged, mocked, and beaten me. I gave you the water of salvation from the rock, but you have given me gall and left me to thirst, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

I gave you a royal sceptre, and bestowed the keys to the kingdom, but you have given me a crown of thorns. I raised you on high with great power, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

My peace I gave, which the world cannot give, and washed your feet as a sign of my love, but you draw the sword to strike in my name and seek high places in my kingdom. I offered you my body and blood, but you scatter and deny and abandon me, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

I sent the Spirit of truth to guide you, and you close your hearts to the Counsellor. I pray that all may be one in the Father and me, but you continue to quarrel and divide. I call you to go and bring forth fruit, but you cast lots for my clothing, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

I grafted you into the tree of my chosen Israel, and you turned on them with persecution and mass murder. I made you joint heirs with them of my covenants but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour. **Holy God, holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy upon us.**

I came to you as the least of your brothers and sisters; I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.

O my people, O my Church, what have I done to you, or in what have I offended you? Answer me.

**All Age Activity**

Invite people to bring up a pebble and lay it at the Cross as a sign of leaving our burdens there.

Or you might want people to write a short prayer on a post-it note and bring and stick to the Cross.

**Intercessions**

*These intercessions have been adapted from the traditional ones used in the Catholic Church on Good Friday. They work well when led by two people, one reading the introduction, the other the prayer.*

We bring our prayers to the Eternal One, Everlasting Majesty, Crucified Word and Abiding Spirit.

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God,

that they may continue to grow in the love of God’s most holy Name

and in faithfulness to God’s everlasting covenant.

*(silence)*

Almighty and eternal God,

long ago you gave your promise to Abraham, Sarah, and their posterity.

Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own

may arrive at the fullness of redemption. Amen

*(pause)*

Let us pray for the Church throughout the world, that God will grant us peace,

and, as we stand before the Cross, we may work for unity.

As we remember the torture and death of Jesus,

we remember all who suffer persecution and oppression.

*(silence)*

Almighty and Eternal God,

You pour out Your Spirit on the Church,

and call all people to find their fulfilment within it.

Listen to us as we remember the love that drove Jesus to the Cross,

help us to work to end oppression in our world,

especially hatred fuelled by religious fervour.

We pray for the Church, that it might,

through sensitive evangelism, nurturing worship, loving service and credible witness,

be a sign of your coming kingdom. Amen.

*(pause)*

Let us pray for those who don’t believe in God,

that by searching for truth and beauty, for justice and freedom,

they find God at work in their lives.

*(silence)*

Almighty and Eternal God, we confess our failures

in bearing true loving witness to You; forgive us.

We ask that those who seek You, will find You,

that Your loving kindness will seek out those who yearn for You,

and that we may not be stumbling blocks to belief. Amen.

*(pause)*

Let us pray for all who serve in public office,

that God may inspire them to offer loving service,

and concern for the common good.

*(silence)*

Almighty and Eternal God,

as this day we remember the weakness of Pilate,

we pray for all who hold elected or appointed office in our world,

that they may always seek the common good,

strive for right, administer true justice, and lift up the poor.

We pray, in particular for the leaders of our nations,

that they may work for sustainable prosperity,

better health, peaceful policies and true freedom. Amen.

*(pause)*

Let us pray for those in need this day,

those known to us and those known only to God,

that our hearts may be stirred by compassion,

and we may seek to change the world.

*(silence)*

Almighty and Eternal God, we pray today for those in agony,

mothers watching their children die,

the earth itself pillaged and polluted yearning to be clean,

those who die this day and those who mourn them,

those who language in prison this day

and those who work to rehabilitate them,

those on our hearts this day*.*

*(pause)*

Give us the grace, Eternal One, to both love this world,

and to seek to change it. Amen.

We join our prayers together as we pray as our Crucified God taught us… Our Father…

**Closing**

Much of the Church observes a custom of the people departing quietly at the end of the service with no blessing. It’s good to do different things on Good Friday so after the last hymn why not play some music and then move to the door to greet people as they leave with no blessing or sending words.

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| **Hymn Suggestions** |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| *When I survey* | 217 | 392 | 287 | 755 |
| *My Song is Love Unknown* | 207 | 399 | 277 | 478 |
| *This is Your Coronation* |  | 391 |  |  |
| *Praise to the Holiest in the Height* | 103 | 378 | 334 |  |
| From Heaven You Came | 522 | 374 | 272 | 162 |
| Meekness & Majesty |  | 356 | 362 | 465 |
| There Is A Green Hill Far Away | 223 | 380 | 284 | 674 |
| O Sacred Head Sore Wounded | 220 | 382 | 280 | 520 |
| The Love That Clothes Itself In Light |  | 384 |  |  |
| Here Hangs A Man Discarded | 225 | 385 | 273 |  |
| We Turn To God |  | 393 | 640 |  |
| What Wondrous Love |  | 395 |  |  |
| Were You There | 227 | 403 | 285 | 745 |

RS – *Rejoice and Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

**Suggestion for Opening Music** *What**Wondrous Love https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acOZB3u5\_Gk*

**Suggestion for Closing Music** *Crown of Thorns*

written and sung by Danielle Rose with the Notre Dame University Folk Choir

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1tS\_A-3hvA