

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Good Friday 2025 The Revd Andy Braunston

Note

This is the saddest day of the Church's year. We follow Jesus from the garden to the tomb, ponder things through the eyes of Peter, Pilate, and Mary and wonder how we might have reacted if we'd been there. Through song, reading, silence, reflection and prayer we join Jesus at the cross, marvel at the love which held him there and the evil that always fights against good, sometimes seeming to win, but always ultimately defeated.

Suggested Opening Hymn

Come Wounded Healer

Opening Prayers

Holy God, holy and vulnerable One, **have mercy on us.**

We come to worship today, Eternal Majesty,
wondering at humanity's wickedness,
at how injustice, torture, degradation, and death remain with us;
at how evil, banal and dreadful, continues to stalk the earth,
and at how we collude with it.

Holy God, holy and vulnerable One, **have mercy on us.**

We come to worship today, Lord Jesus, following You to the Cross,
watching You bear unimaginable pain,
sharing in the grief of Your mother and friends,
seeing you punished for truth-telling, hated for love-sharing,
killed for disturbing the powers of Your age,
and bringing judgement to unjust power everywhere.
Holy God, holy and vulnerable One, **have mercy on us.**

We come to worship today, Most Holy Spirit,
with all our interpretations of Jesus' death,
mixed with our dis-ease at the pain, injustice, and suffering of it all.
We long for Easter but must endure today's pain and tomorrow's waiting.

Holy God, holy and vulnerable One, **have mercy on us.**

So, we come to worship, Eternal Trinity,
with our pain and our prayers, our patience and our protest,
our stumbling questions and partial answers,
and stand at the Cross, beholding mystery, love, and eternity.

Holy God, holy and vulnerable One, **have mercy on us.**

We hear again the account of Jesus' passion in John's Gospel.

Gospel Reading, Notes & Prayer

The Lectionary sets St John's Passion for Good Friday and you can have it read for three voices (Narrator, Jesus, Other). For the service I suggested dividing the reading up into three parts, the first reflecting on Peter, the second on Pilate and the third with Mary at the cross watching Jesus die and offering a SHORT reflection after each passage and then having a hymn between each passage.

St John 18: 1 - 27

Notes to help reflect on Peter

Pete is a big character who jumps in, sometimes literally, with both feet but doesn't always think things through. He hurtles in the water to meet Jesus but then sinks. A few hours before this episode he promised never to deny Jesus and now he's denied him thrice. Full of bluster but crumpling under pressure; supposedly the leader of the apostles but he has, almost, the greatest failures. It's easy to judge. How often have been in situations afraid to speak up? How often are we men drawn into sexist comments or we white people assumed to open to be drawn into racist conversations? Do we, like Peter, collude or speak up? How easy is it to tell the truth when ruin is a real consequence? Commentators marvel at how American Republican politicians know that Mr Trump is wrong on so many issues but won't speak against him. Peter found speaking the truth when he was in danger impossible. It's part of the tragedy of Good Friday – in his most desolate hour Jesus' friends deserted him.

Prayer

Forsaken God, help us to speak Your truth,
truth to power, truth when it's inconvenient
truth even when it is uncomfortable, edgy or dangerous,
that Your truth may set us, and the world, free. Amen.

Suggested Hymn

Here Hangs a Man Discarded

Gospel Reading, Notes & Prayer

St John 18: 28 – 19:16

Notes to help reflect on Pilate

I wonder if Pilate gave any thought to Jesus after this episode. Imperial administrators wouldn't normally have bothered with a tiresome spat but he'd have been aware of the heightened atmosphere in Jerusalem with it being Passover; he knew custom dictated the release of a prisoner and he was shrewd enough to know the established hated Jesus. But would he have given any lasting thought to this poor unfortunate preacher? Well maybe...Jesus was very curt with Pilate. Those at risk of losing their lives tend to be very polite! They debate truth but Pilate has no truck with that; truth is whatever is expedient. They debate power and Jesus reminds Pilate his power comes from above, not from Rome. Heaven only knows what Pilate would have made of that; the elite, then and now, don't like being reminded of their limitations. Then Jesus simply refuses to deign to speak to Pilate again. He'd have not been used to that level of rudeness, assertiveness, and dignity. How are we when people insist on telling us the truth? How are we when another's assertiveness and dignity puts us in our place? How good are we at remembering the important incidents in our lives rather than the ones we prefer to remember?

Sorely pressed Lord, no one turned to help You,
yet You held Your dignity, spoke Your truth, and kept Your silence;
help us to act with dignity in the face of wrath, love in the face of hate,
and to know when to keep our silence. Amen.

Suggested Hymn

We Turn to God When We are Sorely Pressed.

Gospel Reading, Notes & Prayer

St John 19: 17-42

Notes to help reflect on Mary

Mary's presence at the Cross makes our hearts ache. We can't imagine how a mother would feel watching the slow, painful, execution of her son. Helpless to do anything other than just be present, she must have had so many emotions swirling around her. Jesus,

even here at the end, seeks to provide for her and a new family is made for her with his friend John. We think of Simeon's prophecy that a sword would pierce her own heart even as we wait for the spear to pierce Jesus. Her own prophetic song of revolt must have sounded hollow as she watches her son, helpless, suffer torture and shameful death. Here, in this moment, our theologies stand silent. Here, in this moment – made present to us every time we celebrate Communion – we see both the boundless love of Jesus and the hopeless love of Mary. Both are present in our own discipleship as we take up our crosses and stumble after Him.

Sometimes we tap into the boundless love of Jesus and do wonderful things, show amazing care and service to those outside our walls, and point to the coming Kingdom where all wrongs will be righted and justice finally made manifest in our world. But at other times we stand with little we can say, nothing we can do, and where all we have is our presence. When we keep vigil with the bereaved, wait with the terminally ill, and stand powerless against the horrors of the world we, like Mary, have nothing but our love and presence. Mary must have felt powerless and useless; Jesus must have felt profoundly grateful that His mother was there at the end as she was at the start.

Sometimes, for us, our powerlessness and uselessness blind us to the comfort that we can bring by simply being present.

Comforted God,
help us to know when simply to be present,
to understand that words are not always necessary,
and that love has many ways of bringing comfort. Amen

Suggested Hymn

My Song is Love Unknown.

The Reproaches

The Reproaches are a liturgical text from the 9th Century Church used on Good Friday, or in some Eastern Churches on Holy Saturday. This version has been adapted for use in the Presbyterian Church of the USA. You may want to have two readers with the congregation joining in the response (pop the light words in the service sheet or on the screen with the darker words as the response)

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.

Suggested Hymn

Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery

Intercessions

You may wish to have two people lead these, one with each introduction and then, after a pause, the other for 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
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.

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.
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.

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 languish in prison this day
and those who work to rehabilitate them, those on our hearts this day.

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...

Suggested Hymn

When I Survey The Wondrous Cross

Closing Prayer & Dismissal

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Philippians 2: 3-8

Do not hurry away from the Cross.

Linger near
to survey,
to stand,
and to ponder Jesus' suffering and death.

Consider carefully and well,
how evil fights good,
how defeat becomes victory, and
how weakness becomes strength.

Then depart from Golgotha confidently,
knowing that the Holy Spirit helps you
as you take up your cross and follow Christ. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
Come Wounded Healer ¹			271	
or Praise to the Holiest In the Height ⁴	103	378	334	563
Here Hangs A Man Discarded ²	225	385	273	
or O Sacred Head Sore Wounded	220	382	280	520
or This is your Coronation		391		
We Turn to God When We are Sorely Pressed ³		393	640	
or Were you there when they crucified my Lord?	227	403	285	745
Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery		401		
or There is a Green Hill Far Away	223	380	284	674
My Song is Love unknown	207	399	277	478
or Sing My Tongue, how glorious battle (Sing My Tongue The Saviour's Glory)	457	398	268	
When I Survey	217	392	287	755
or What Wondrous Love is This?		395		

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

¹ If the tunes offered don't seem easy, I've used it in the URC podcast service with *Slane* | *Lord of All Hopefulness*

² I suggest following the Methodists and set this to the *Passion Chorale* by doubling the verses if not using *O Sacred Head Sore Wounded* or *This is Your Coronation*.

³ I suggest following the Church of Scotland and singing this to *Eventide* | *Abide with Me*

⁴ Newman has the beautiful verse "O Generous Love" which is tricky to render in inclusive language. The editors of Singing the Faith have "O generous love! That he, who came | as man to smite the foe | the double agony for us | as man should undergo."