

Good Friday Service 2023

Call to Worship (based on Isaiah 53)

See my servant shall prosper;

he will be exalted and lifted up.

He was despised and rejected by others;

a man of suffering and acquainted with grief.

He was wounded for our transgressions

and by his bruises we are healed.

By a perversion of justice he was taken away;

he was cut off from the land of the living.

Out of his anguish he shall see light;

my servant shall make many righteous.

Introduction to service

Today we remember the **passion** of Jesus – his suffering and death.

But today is also a day to reflect on the **vision** of Jesus – who brought **light, truth** and **love** into the world and who died that we might have **life**.

Our first hymn picks up the story from Palm Sunday and Jesus' joyful entry into Jerusalem. We shall then hear the story beginning after the arrest of Jesus, interspersed with brief meditations, prayers and songs.

Hymn Ride on, ride on, the time is right (to tune of TiS 348)

Ride on, ride on, the time is right:

the roadside crowds scream with delight;

palm branches mark the pilgrim way

where beggars squat and children play.

Ride on, ride on, your critics wait,

intrigue and rumour circulate;

new lies abound in word and jest,

and truth becomes a suspect guest.

Ride on, ride on, while well aware

that those who shout and wave and stare

are mortals who, with common breath,
can crave for life and lust for death.

Ride on, ride on, though blind with tears,
though dumb to speak and deaf to jeers.
Your path is clear, though few can tell
their garments pave the road to hell.

Ride on, ride on, God's love demands,
justice and peace lie in your hands.
Evil and angel voices rhyme:
this is the man, and this the time.

Words John L. Bell © 1988 The Iona Community

1. Jesus the political prisoner [John 18:12-14, 19-23]

(Image of trial)

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people ...

Then the High Priest questioned Jesus about his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the people come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.'

When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the High Priest?'

Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?'

Prayer for eyes to see. Let us pray ...

Jesus,

you didn't go behind people's backs.

You didn't gossip or hide your motives.

You spoke out for all to hear.

You taught what you heard from God – and you lived it out –

sharing God's offer of life based on God's great love for the whole world.

You healed people, you restored people to community,

you offered people new insight into the nature of God.

But those in power found your message too dangerous.

So they arrested you and announced you guilty of claiming to speak for God.

(pause)

They were face to face with God's love but they didn't recognise it.

Help us to hear your voice and open our eyes to see your face

in those around us. Amen.

[Reflection time with music](#)

2. Jesus and truth on trial [\[John 18:28-38a\]](#)

(Image of Jesus and Pilate in conversation)

Then they took Jesus from the High Priest to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. ... Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?'

They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jewish leaders replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?'

Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?'

Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.'

Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king then?'

Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'

Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

[Reflection about truth](#)

What is truth?

Jesus claimed that he came to witness to the truth.

And he has been on trial since the start of his ministry.

But what is truth?

The truth that Jesus spoke was hard for people to hear ...

that he was sent by God into the world to bring a message of life and hope ... a

message that was like light shining in the darkness ...

a message that would satisfy people's deepest needs ...

but also a message that called for faith in who Jesus claimed to be ... the longed for Jewish Messiah or King who would bring God's kingdom on earth.

It was a truth Pilate found hard to accept ... this man *a king?*

So what is truth?

In our world, solid truth is hard to find ... among all the lies and distortions and opinions endlessly repeated and repeated until people are willing to believe whatever they wish to hear.

What is truth?

God, help us to keep asking and to keep our minds open so that the truth about Jesus and the kingdom he brings can enter deep within our hearts.

Amen.

Hymn The kingdom of God (Taize) (sing three or four times)

The kingdom of God is justice and peace

and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Come, Lord, and open in us

the gates of your kingdom.

3. Jesus - King of the Jews [John 18:38b - 19:16a]

(Image of Pilate, Jesus and Barrabas)

After speaking with Jesus, Pilate went out to the people again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?'

They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face.

Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!'

When the chief priests and the temple police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jewish leaders answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?'

Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the mob cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the Emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the Emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called the Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. It was now about noon. He said to the people, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!'

Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?'

The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the Emperor.'

Then he handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Reflection

O God, help us!

It's so easy to go along with what others are saying.

We don't want to stand out. We want to blend in with the crowd.

So if we had been there in the crowd that day when the people cried 'Crucify!', would we have done the same– or just remained silent?

Pilate was a powerful ruler ... but he was also weak, giving in to a mob shouting for blood. He did get one thing right, though. Jesus was a king, but a king without earthly powers. He was like a clown to be dressed up as a king and then discarded on the city rubbish dump, dying like a common criminal on a cross.

Yet Jesus was a man filled with the power of God who came to change the world.

Come, Jesus, and change us.

Give us courage to walk in your footsteps and not to remain silent. Amen.

Song **TiS 356 Here hangs a man discarded (to tune TiS 339)**

Here hangs a man discarded,
a scarecrow hoisted high,
a nonsense pointing nowhere
to all who hurry by.
Can such a clown of sorrows
still bring a useful word
when faith and hope seem phantoms
and every hope absurd?

Yet here is help and comfort
for lives by comfort bound,
when drums of dazzling progress
give strangely hollow sound:
Life, emptied of all meaning,
drained out in bleak distress,
can share in broken silence
our deepest emptiness;

And love that freely entered
the pit of life's despair,
can name our hidden darkness
and suffer with us there.

Christ, in our darkness risen,
help all who long for light
to hold the hand of promise,
till faith receives its sight.

Words Brian Arthur Wren © 1975, rev. 1995 Hope Publishing Company,

4. Jesus the Crucified One [John 19:16b-25a]

(Image of Jesus on cross)

So the soldiers took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called 'The Place of the Skull', which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'

Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews." '

Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

'They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.'

And that is what the soldiers did.

Period of silence

Hymn TIS 345 *Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (vv. 1-3)*

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;
were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Based on an African-American spiritual

5. Jesus the Compassionate One [John 19:25b-27]

(Image of Jesus, Mary and John (painting))

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother

and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Reflection

Here hangs Jesus, the son of Mary, the Son of God, dying.

What is on his mind?

Rather than cursing his fate or questioning God, Jesus offers a deeply personal illustration of what it means to love one another.

(pause)

Take a flower and hold it in your hands.

Take a moment to admire its beauty –
its delicacy, shape, colour, texture.

Give thanks to God for its gentle beauty.

(pause)

This flower reminds us of the fragility of life.

It is easily broken, crushed, destroyed.

(pause)

On this day of sadness,
when Jesus' body was broken and his life poured out,
when it seemed like evil and death would have the last word,
hold the flower as a reminder of the life and the love that Jesus brings –
that was present in his compassion for his mother shown from the cross.
Hold onto the life that Jesus gives – however fragile it may sometimes seem.

Hymn TiS 232 O the deep, deep love of Jesus

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,
rolling as a mighty ocean
in its fullness over me.

Underneath me, all around me,
is the current of his love;
leading onward, leading homeward
to that glorious rest above.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus –
spread his praise from shore to shore;

he who loves us ever loves us,
changes never, nevermore;
he who died to save his loved ones
intercedes for them above;
he who called them his own people
watches over them in love.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
love of every love the best;
vast the ocean of his blessing,
sweet the haven of his rest.
O the deep, deep love of Jesus –
for my heaven of heavens is he;
this is my everlasting glory:
Jesus' mighty love for me.

Samuel Trevor Francis 1834–1925 *a/t.* Words © Hope Publishing Company. Used by permission.

6. Jesus' ministry is completed [John 19:28-30] [Peter]

(Image of Jesus on cross from above)

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.'
Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reflection

In John's account, it was always going to end this way.

Right from the opening chapter, Jesus is announced as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. For John's community, the cross is not a place of shame or hopelessness, but rather the place where God's **glory** and **love** and **power** are most visible. In the mysterious way of God, the cross was needed to bring **life** to the world, **abundant life**.

So Jesus died to bring us life, life in all its fullness,
life as children of God, loved and welcomed by God.

When Jesus says '**It is finished**' – we probably interpret these words to mean that his life is now over, finished, the end.

The Greek word is **telew** – which means to reach a goal or target.

The Message translation captures this by saying ‘It is done ... complete’.

So with these words Jesus indicates that his mission on earth has now been accomplished, fulfilled, completed – it has reached its intended goal.

From the time of his death onwards, everyone who believes in Jesus, even though they die, will live. That is the extraordinary claim of Jesus.

Prayer for Good Friday. Let us pray together ...

Gracious God,

we know that life is a gift.

**You give us all good things – including life and love,
daily bread and water that quenches our thirst,
friends and faith.**

In your Son, Jesus,

you meet us with a love that will never let us go;

you utter words of grace and forgiveness

that override the hurts,

and heal our brokenness.

**We give you thanks and praise
for the mystery of your suffering love
that gives us life.**

We give you thanks and praise

that you know our weakness

and hear our prayers.

**We give you thanks and praise
that all our dying and living
is held in your good keeping.**

We know that life is a gift.

We give you our thanks and praise.

Amen.

Hymn TiS 342 When I survey the wondrous cross

When I survey the wondrous cross

on which the Prince of Glory died,

my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts 1674–1748

7. Jesus dead and buried in a garden [John 19:38-42] [Peter]

(Images of Jesus being taken down from cross, sealed tomb)

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jewish leaders, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed the body.

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the Jewish burial customs.

Now there was a garden near the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Closing thought

There will be no benediction to our service today although you are invited to stay for a hot cross bun afterwards, if you wish.

Instead we will finish by listening to a song that reminds us why Jesus came.

Song God so loved the world (YouTube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLvthjDEUnQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbs6bxHU7a0>

Final image – three crosses at sunset