

worship notes



from the United Reformed Church

Good Friday
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Note

John suggests short reflections and prayers to follow each reading. Notes after each reading will help you craft the reflections for your own contexts.

Call to Worship

God so loved the world that he gave his own dearly beloved Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. On this day of remembrance and hope, we declare with joy:

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it.

Opening Prayer

O crucified Jesus, Son of the Father,
conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
eternal Word of God,
we worship you.

O crucified Jesus,
holy temple of God,
dwelling place of the Most High,
gate of heaven, burning flame of love,
we worship you.

O crucified Jesus,
sanctuary of justice and love,
full of kindness, source of all faithfulness,
we worship you.

O crucified Jesus,
ruler of every heart,
in you are the treasures
of wisdom and knowledge,

in you dwells all the fullness of the Godhead,
we worship you.

Jesus, Lamb of God, **have mercy on us.**

Jesus, bearer of our sins, **have mercy on us.**

Jesus, redeemer of the world, **grant us peace.**

Silence

Almighty God, look with mercy on your family
for whom our Lord Jesus Christ
was willing to be betrayed
and to be given over to the hands of sinners
and to suffer death on the cross;
through him who now lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

Reading

St Luke 23: 13-25

Notes for a Reflection

In Luke's account Pilate is portrayed as being, at best, reluctant to condemn Jesus or, at worst, weak – giving into the pressure and thinking nothing of having an innocent man flogged as it would have been expedient.

Luke shows his awareness of the contexts surrounding Pilate and Jesus – empire (in the person of Pilate), politics (in the unruly nature of the crowds who might have revolted), and religion (in the presence of the religious leaders in the background urging the crowds on). A heady mix of empire, religion and politics is quite something. Differing institutions – the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate – all want to rid themselves of this problem; the accusation of treason seems to do the trick.

In our own age charges of treason can be used to weaken political opponents – the powers that be don't want the people stirred up (unless of course they can control them once stirred).

Then there's Jesus' attitude – Herod treats Jesus with scorn but Jesus did not deign to speak to this murderous puppet king. In this passage Jesus is silent as events go on around him, in St John Jesus does speak with Pilate but his words were to remind this representative of Empire that such power he had came from God's grace not from a human emperor. Heady stuff!

Then there's more politics in this stirred up crowd expressing "the will of the people". Or were they? The crowds were worked up by other actors and, being fickle (they'd cheered Jesus on a few days before) they now bayed for his blood.

We see laws made based on public outcries but rarely question if these outcries are, themselves, the result of manipulation. We're more aware of the power of AI and social media to change public opinion and, with an election coming, we may need to be more aware of how the "will of the people" can be manipulated. Regardless of evidence, of the rights and wrongs, of the context, the crowd cried for Jesus' death – a lesson for us all. How might we have behaved if we were part of that crowd?

Post Reflection Prayer

Loving God,
we give you thanks and praise that Jesus was like us in every way, but without sin.
That he put himself in the place of a sinner,
condemned as a criminal,
that we might be freed from sin and death.

We pray for those who administer justice and who wield power.
Grant them wisdom and insight.
May they resist the voices of popular opinion and seek only the true and the good.
May they be upheld by your Spirit,
that they might exercise servant leadership, like that of Christ.

We pray for those falsely accused and imprisoned,
and we pray for those who seek justice on their behalf.
Grant patience, perseverance and hope. Amen

Reading

St Luke 23: 26-43

Notes for a Reflection

Cyrene was an ancient Greek and later Roman city near present day Shahhat in Libya. Simon is often depicted as a black man but the Gospels are silent on his ethnicity. As is often the case in brutally ruled outposts of empire the passers by can get drawn into injustice. Fearing Jesus would die before they nailed him to the cross (he'd been up all night and subject to torture) assistance was needed and Simon was compelled to help. The Romans weren't given to mercy - the spectacle had to continue and we see that none of the religious leaders intervened.

Jesus' warning to the women of Jerusalem are often seen as a prophecy of the cities' later destruction by the Roman Empire.

The two thieves and their varying reactions to Jesus are worth reflecting on – would we curse or convert in these circumstances? Even after all Jesus' words there was an expectation that the Messiah would be a political liberator – hence the taunts about saving himself. Jesus perhaps saw himself more as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah but this was not the type of freedom the people wanted; they wanted a more worldly king not one who moved from donkey to cross.

The repentant thief, however, still moves us. Jesus, the innocent one to whom no mercy is shown shows mercy to a guilty one next to him. This is God's way in the world, this is God's way with us.

Post Reflection Prayer

Loving God, we give you thanks for the people who wander into our lives only briefly, but who make a real difference. Those who have helped us bear our crosses. Those who have seen who we really are.

We give you thanks for the mercy of Christ – who offers us a place in paradise with him, even though we are guilty and he is innocent. For this great love beyond words, we thank you.

We pray for those facing death. Grant them peace. Grant them knowledge of your loving kindness. Grant them the ability to recognise their sin, and the hope we all share that Christ has created a place in paradise with him for us. Amen.

Reading

St Luke 23: 44-56

Notes for a Reflection

In the midst of the defeat of death the Centurion testifies to Jesus' innocence, and Joseph does what he could; maybe open opposition to the Council was impossible but he ensured the dignity of a burial for Jesus rather than letting his body remain for carrion.

Luke notes the crowds returned home beating their breasts – were these the same crowds that brayed for Jesus' blood? The same crowds who acclaimed him as king? A day, after all, is a long time in politics!

Jesus' cry from the Cross takes us into the heart of the Trinity; the experience of human death is drawn into the Godhead. At the foot of the Cross God has died, hope is extinguished, the darkest hour in history. God's own self was rejected, tortured, despised, and killed for upsetting both religion and politics. Weak, insecure, leaders collude with the evil at the heart of empire – as all empires have evil at their heart. Only the women remained faithful – all others fled – as God died on the Cross.

And yet, the deeper mystery is that at the moment of death the Spirit of Christ is with God the Father. The world may have rejected and killed God's own self but God was not dead. We know the end of the story and so that which doesn't make sense is real for us. But for those at the foot of the cross all was desolate and despairing. Many of us know such moments of gloom and despair; many of us know the turmoil of politics (if even just office political manoeuvring). Many of us know the despair of being abandoned by loved ones. Many of us know the fear and helplessness as we look at the world and seeing nothing but destruction and despotism,. In our fear and helplessness we hold to the fact that God knows. Nothing we experience has not been experienced by God in Christ. We know the story isn't over but, today, we stay at the Cross.

Post Reflection Prayer

Living God, in death upon the cross,
Christ brought hope for the world.
In death upon the cross,
Christ won a victory over death
that we are invited to share.
In death upon the cross, Christ
became a mediator for us
who knows the darkness of human life in this world.
In death upon the cross,
Christ takes the darkness of humanity,
and refashions it by grace.
For this we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Giver of life, we wait with you to offer the hope
that comes from the cross to earth's darkest places.
Where pain is deep and affection is denied: **let love break through.**

Where justice is destroyed,
let sensitivity to right spring up.

Where hope is crucified, **let faith persist.**

Where peace has no chance, **let passion live on.**

Where truth is trampled underfoot, **let the struggle continue.**

Where fear paralyzes, **let forgiveness break through.**

Eternal God, reach into the silent darkness of our souls with the radiance of the cross.

O you who are the bearer of all pain,
have mercy on us.
 Giver of life,
have mercy on us.
 Merciful God,
have mercy on us. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions				
	RS	CH4	StF	MP
There Is A Green Hill Far Away	223	380	284	674
Ah, holy Jesus, how has thou offended?	215	381		
O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded	220	382	280	520
When I Survey The Wondrous Cross	217	392	287	755
Praise to the Holiest in the Height	103	378	334	563
Heaven Shall Not Wait		362	701	
When Mary Was Watching		383		
The Love That Clothes Itself in Light		384		
Here Hangs A Man Discarded	225	385	273	
At the Cross Her Vigil Keeping		387		
This Is Your Coronation		391		
We Turn To God		393	640	
What Wondrous Love Is This?		395		
Sing My Tongue How Glorious Battle	228	398	268	
My Song Is Love Unknown	207	399	277	478

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