

Good Friday Pilgrimage 2023

Rendcomb
North Cerney
Bagendon
Baunton
Stratton



A Celtic style of worship is now used regularly within our group of churches. The experience will be enhanced for some during the planned Benefice trip to Iona in 2024. The meditations for this year have been drawn from the publication *"The Sun slowly rises"* by Neil Paynter, which is published by the Iona community.

Celtic worship is informal, relaxed and meditative, and often features shared leadership. There is little concept of a "formal approved liturgy", allowing considerable variation in services. The slow pace allows time for silence, encouraging personal reflection. While Scripture holds a central place in the worship, space is also made for secular readings, poetry and music.

Our devotional music this year is drawn from a series of albums by *"Celtic Expressions"*. Both well-known and more modern (lesser known) tunes are played in a form that would be familiar in Celtic folk settings.

Each of our meditations begins with a Scripture reading. The reflection that follows will not be read aloud, but is included for private reading and contemplation if desired. A few minutes of the devotional music will be played at this point. A relevant prayer follows, which may be said aloud by all.

Each session ends with a section from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The text is well known - the English hymn *"Great is thy faithfulness"* is based on the first two verses. The setting used here though is sung in Latin. It was composed by the Mexican baroque musician Manuel de Zumaya (1678 - 1755) who was of mixed native American and European ancestry. The verses are sung by *Chanticleer*.

The images in this guide come from a wide variety of sources, generally freely available on the internet. The attributable one is by the German artist Sieger Koder.

*The version of the Bible used for the Scripture readings is the
New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised)*

St Peter, Rendcomb - Jerusalem

Reading Matthew 25, 35 - 40

Reflection

You came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, hearing the crowds and cheers welcoming you into the city. The palm-waving and the hosannas. You must have been left with the noise of it all ringing in your ears. Yet those who said they loved you and understood what you were trying to do were soon too scared to stand with you. Too scared to stand up for you; even to be seen with you.

It is easy when everyone is on your side. Far harder to be the only voice, the one who stands out in the crowd. You embraced those who were different and spoke up for those who were outcast, even when it meant you were in danger from those who tried to stop you.

We all want to be accepted, and so we surround ourselves with those we know and understand and who are like us. Yet unless we step out of what is comfortable, take the risk to meet those who are not like us, we will never see the truth. The truth that whatever the colour of our skin, or the language that comes from our lips or the name we give to our God – we are all the same.



You knew that love is what unites us, and that love is the only thing that lasts. Love can ride the waves of hope and the depths of despair. Love has the power to move us to act with compassion. Love calls us to walk the path of peace and to seek light in deepest darkness.



Are we brave enough to raise our voices and open our hearts and shout that love is stronger than hate? To embrace those who are different to us? To make our voices heard, and to keep shouting – even when we are scared, even when we have to challenge the mighty and powerful? Do we have the courage to be the only voice?



Sieger Koder

Reflective music: O righteous God (Dave Bilbrough)

Prayer

Loving Father, Let me have the courage to stand with you and stand for you. Let me use my place of privilege to act in ways that show that what we have in common is far greater than what makes us different.

Let me believe that love has power, a power that can change hearts, change minds, and give me courage to stand face to face with those who are broken and know I am broken too. Let me not stand silent.

Amen.

Lamentations 3, 22-23

*Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.*

All Saints, North Cerney - *Bethlehem*

Reading Luke 19, 37 - 42

Reflection

I was at the “Tent of Nations”, a few miles outside of Bethlehem in the West Bank. Here the Nassar family runs an educational and environmental farm *“to help build bridges between people, and between people and the land”*.

I became fond of the olive trees. I was trimming the errant lowest branches so the trees would grow well. It was an easy metaphor for, and expression of, prayer for Palestine and for myself. “Like the trees, peace will grow from the ground up” I was told. I remembered hearing, time and again in different places in the Holy Land, Palestinians say, “Of course the settlers will stay; we would not turn them out as many have now known nowhere else. We just want equality and justice, an end to occupation and oppression. There is plenty of space for Palestinians and Israelis.” At Tent of Nations, the principle is that *“faced with great injustice, we know that we should not hate, despair, or flee. We can refuse to be enemies and channel our pain and frustration into positive actions which will build a better future.”*

It was a delight to be on that land and with those trees, but such connections are now denied to so many Palestinians. From the hilltop, every view was past Israeli settlements, which overnight cast their harsh orange glow. The stars and so many more of creation’s gifts were hidden. Under occupation, it is even illegal for Palestinians to collect rainwater; the water supplies and electricity grid that pass so close by are, like some roads, the “sterile” ones, unavailable to Palestinians.



Olive trees are symbols of life, land and community. They grow slowly. Some of the oldest in Palestine, which had been passed down from generation to generation, were uprooted and destroyed when the Separation Barrier was built. Others are now inaccessible. I heard it claimed that some in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the Mount of Olives, were 2000 years old.

Up the hill from the Garden of Gethsemane is a Church from where the view is of the Kidron Valley, and beyond to the Old City of Jerusalem. Gazing through the window, the stones that came to my mind were ones that shouted, but not in praise: more than 1000 'Palestinian-owned structures' had been seized or demolished in 2016, according to the UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

I pondered where I had felt most in touch with the Resurrection on this journey: not in the huge clericalised Church of the Holy Sepulchre – but with people who, while being so oppressed, had reaffirmed in word and deed that we can only be human together; with those who focused on making a difference now, where they are.

Reflective music:

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus
(tune: Ebenezer)*



Prayer

*I pray for these people, that their faith, hope and courage be sustained.
I pray for more miracles in this land of miracles: that there be respect for all its people, that the earth's resources be shared, that the dark oppression of the occupation fades with the dawn of a new era.*

I pray that this Easter I might be drawn a little further outside my comfort zone to, in some small way, engage in and not merely observe, struggles for justice and integrity. I pray that the barriers we encounter in ourselves and in our communities might be overcome by a renewed closeness to Christ. Amen

Lamentations 3, 24-25

*“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“Therefore I hope in Him!”*

*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,
To the soul who seeks Him.*

St Margaret, Bagendon - *Bethany*

Reading Mark 14, 1 - 9

Reflection

In Bethany, Jesus reclines at table with a leper (an excluded person) when another marginal character, a woman, enters with a jar of costly perfume. Breaking off the neck of such a jar means its whole contents have to be used, a point not lost on the other dinner guests. The disciples and dinner guests rebuke the woman, thinking better use could have been made of probably a year's wages. Characteristically, Jesus sees things differently, suggesting that "practical" use of funds may not always be the best use of them.

What Jesus sees is a woman who deeply understood what it means to be his disciple. Jesus takes the part of the woman, seeing a gesture of love and prophetic action. The dinner guests do not see beyond the material; Jesus sees the spiritual implications. The action follows another story – "the widow's mite", in which Jesus warns against ostentation, false piety, attempts to cover greed by outward displays of devotion, and hypocrisy to hide injustice. Jesus commended the widow for putting in everything she had.



These accounts occur in the last week of Jesus' life, and anticipate His own self-giving. He, too, put in his whole life. This last week is a difficult one on which to accompany Him in His struggles. Christian life does not proceed from triumph to triumph. In following Jesus there is a lot of being hungry, angry and confronted, a lot of wandering around in the unfamiliar, dirty places, of being misunderstood by one's friends, family and religious authorities. And Jesus' week (and sometimes our good work?) seems to end on Friday at Golgotha.

And yet. In Bethany, Jesus finds fellowship and friends who had him over for a meal. Somebody else cared for him with individual, extravagant and exacting attention. She realised, however obliquely, who he was and where he was headed. The centre of Holy Week is illuminated by an act of extravagant love.

It brings into brilliant focus what Jesus has been doing throughout his ministry: pouring out his life for his friends. It also offers the great challenge of discipleship: to make of our capabilities, weaknesses and failures and our very lives, an extravagant gift of love for others and, through them, for Jesus, himself.



*Reflective music: I heard the voice of Jesus say
(tune: Kingsfold)*

The anonymous, anointing woman knew (perhaps subconsciously) what is required of disciples is extravagant love. With God's extravagant love in Jesus Christ at the centre of all we are and do, we will be able to endure our High Holy Days, Gethsemanes, betrayals, trials, suffering, and even death – and that we might experience all this in the unlikelyst of places: in company with the poor, the afflicted, the lepers, and the uncomprehending.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I pause to thank you for the unlikely people who provided its consolations for you. Encourage me by their wisdom and goodness to walk the whole way of the cross with you. Remind me that frugally "counting the cost" can deform and make the soul ungenerous and miserly. Help me to see differently and to act gently, to defend the unjustly accused and misunderstood. May I see shining through this good material world, the beauty of the spiritual. In the midst of life's darkness and difficulties, give me courage and let me be consolation for those around me. Strengthen me to make of my life an extravagant gift of love to you and to others, knowing I can only do so by the power of your death and resurrection. Amen

*Lamentations 3, 26-27 It is good that one should hope and wait quietly
For the salvation of the LORD.
It is good for a man to bear
The yoke in his youth.*

St Mary Magdalene, Baunton - *Jerusalem*

Reading Matthew 26, 69 - 75

Reflection

The Street Pastors came across “JP” one night; a young man, hunched on a pile of flattened cardboard boxes in the shadows. With gentle coaxing, and ignoring his comments – “I don’t want anything; I don’t deserve anything – give it to someone else who hasn’t been drinking,” – Elaine managed to coax out his life story.

JP’s mum and dad had never been together, and he hadn’t got on with his mum. At the age of fifteen she “kicked him out” and he went to live with his dad; he hadn’t seen his mum since. JP’s dad was not an easy man to live with, but their shared love of alcohol enabled them to get along together: JP soon became the alcoholic son of an alcoholic dad.

Then JP’s dad died, and the young man was alone. Social services stepped in, and JP was allocated a social worker. They found him somewhere to live and, with their help and support, he was able to give up drinking, and felt valued for the first time in his life. He started a college course, was making friends and felt his life was turning round.

“Two days ago my social worker died,” JP said. “I’ve got no one now. I don’t know what to do, I can’t cope. I went a bit crazy, and I had a drink. The place where I was living said I can’t stay if I’m drinking, and kicked me out. I don’t blame them: they’ve got the others there to think about. But the worst is, I’ve let them all down: my social worker, my dad. They tried to help me and I’ve let them down.”



“I’m still drinking,” JP said, “I can’t let you help me: I’ll only let you down too.” They sat together in silence for a while, in the stinking shadows, on soggy cardboard. “Will you let me pray with you?” Elaine asked, unsure how JP would take this. But he looked at her in wonder, a faint light in his eye. “Will you, really? No one’s ever done that! Yes, please.” So there they prayed: for JP’s social worker and for his dad, and that JP would find peace and somehow know that he is loved.

Thursday night Elaine Gisbourne

The man edged closer to the glowing brazier,
but the hiss and spit of a girl's accusation
sent him scuttling back
into the dark.



Whispers chased and caught him,
and the black fear in his belly
spewed from his mouth
in a filth of lies.

But his poisonous words betrayed him,
and the whispers turned to shouts;
he rained loud curses on himself,
like stones.

The stars dissolved as the sky paled
to grey,
and a cock-cry woke
the memory
of his loved one's words.

With bitter-salt self-loathing
he ran,
out into the cold.
Alone with his misery,
he hid
in the stinking shadows.

*Reflective music: Be thou my vision
(tune: Slane)*

Prayer

Lord, beloved, we lose our way; again and again we let you down, with our words, our lies, our fear. We betray your love, and stain your image in us. Lord, beloved, often we find ourselves out in the dark night, where deep shadows overwhelm us, whispers taunt our minds, where we feel far from your love for us.

Lord, beloved, we get afraid, and we betray you; we feel ashamed, and we reject you; we despair, and we shun you. Lord, beloved, when we are lost, come to us; when we are afraid, strengthen us; when we despair, reach out to us with your love, and your words which say, "Do not be afraid: you are mine. You are my friend and I love you. Forgive yourself as I forgive you." Amen

Lamentations 3, 28-29

*Let him sit alone and keep silent,
Because God has laid it on him;
Let him put his mouth in the dust—
There may yet be hope.
Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him,
And be full of reproach.*

St Peter, Stratton - Golgotha

Readings Luke 22, 41 - 44; Matt 27, 45 - 46; Luke 23, 44 - 46

Reflection

The temple curtain, of finest white linen with a blue, purple and scarlet pattern, protected the “Holy of holies” where God’s presence, was said to be, and which could only be accessed by the High Priest once a year.



“One day a few years ago when I was in the Abbey church on Iona, I wandered down from the nave to the altar. A Bible had been left resting on that glorious great slab of white marble, veined with serpentine. It happened to be open at the story of the Crucifixion and my eyes were drawn to the passage about the curtain of the temple being torn. And there I was, in the temple, with no curtain separating me from the altar. The Abbey church is one of the few Christian places I visit regularly where there is no rail or barrier between people and altar. It is open, inviting, welcoming. Jesus’ death and transformation through death opened an uncluttered Way to the Father. The tearing of the veil is symbolic of a new relationship for all in God. Jesus’ death removed any separation from God and the people of God.”

When we think of the brutality inflicted upon Jesus that day, “Good Friday” seems wrongly named. Yet Good Friday was God’s day when something very powerful was happening. It is, paradoxically, a day of hope. Jesus, hitherto only available to those who met him, is about to undergo a transformation into the Christ consciousness to be available to all, unlimited by time and space. Did Jesus know this? Only hours before he had knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane in terrified prayer, so terrified that he sweated blood (a rare physiological phenomenon that can occur in conditions of extreme fear), and asked God if it wasn’t possible for him to avoid his fate.

Did he know that he must trust God and that somehow he would pass through death? Many stories in all traditions – Gandalf, Aslan, Obi-Wan Kenobi – involve the hero in dying before they can fulfil their destiny. Perhaps Jesus received from his “strengthening angel” the one thing he needed – hope, thereby enabling him to hand over in trust to God – *‘not my will but Thine’*. One of the themes that the spiritual seeker encounters in both New

and Old Age thinking is that fear must be overcome. In this, Jesus encourages us. If he can be scared, then how much more so is it alright for us to feel fear. Jesus thus normalises fear, making it alright to be human and weak, but relying on God's strength.

Jesus' descent into Sheol is therefore full of paradox, for only by descending is he elevated, transformed from a bodily presence trapped by time and space into an eternal presence available to all. It is often said that Iona as a place where the veil between realities is thinnest. Perhaps the reality is that there is really no veil at all. Jesus set us free from that. Such a belief in non-duality, non-separation is at the heart of the Iona Community's values, for just as we reject any barriers between God and the people of God, we reject any veils that create barriers between people.

Reflective music:

Here is love (William Rees)

How deep the father's love for us (Stuart Townend)



Prayer

Father. Help me to be with Jesus in his time of suffering, and to know that in my times of suffering the light shines in the darkness. Help me to be open to that light. Help me to see in that light where I keep veils between myself and others, between myself and You, and between those parts of myself that are not healed and whole. Help me to strip away the veils of separation so that I may see You in all things and myself. In Jesus' name. Amen

Lamentations 3, 30

For the Lord will not cast off forever.

Though He causes grief,

Yet He will show compassion

According to the multitude of His mercies.

For He does not afflict willingly,

Nor grieve the children of men.

The Blessing

*Thank you for joining us on the Good Friday Pilgrimage
Do stay and enjoy some refreshments*