



## Worship resources

There is not a lot that needs to be said about Good Friday. But perhaps that's exactly why we need to work so hard to avoid over-familiarity and complacency. The good news, though, is that the Scriptures provide such a richness that a sermon is almost unnecessary. The Scriptures can be allowed to speak for themselves. In addition, the worship can be allowed to flow gently and meditatively, and spaces can easily be created for people to engage with the cross for themselves. At all costs, though, as with the resurrection, this day must not be allowed to become simply an intellectual exercise.

May we be moved and transformed as we gather at the cross again this year.

### READINGS

**Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12**: A song of the suffering servant, who is persecuted and dies for the sake of others (“us”).

**Psalms 22**: A Psalm of lament, grieving the suffering and abandonment of the writer, but celebrating the inevitable rescue that will come, and praising the God who brings this salvation.

**Hebrews 10:16-25**: We have confidence to approach God, because of Christ's sacrifice for us, and can now live in hope, in intimacy with God, and in love-in-action.

**John 18:1 – 19:42**: Jesus is arrested, tried, crucified and buried – and through it all, reveals the brokenness and lack of integrity of those who face him, while revealing his own truth, integrity and divine character.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

[http://bible.oremus.org/?show\\_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%2052:%2013%20-%2053:%2012%0Acw%20Psalm%2022%0AHebrews%2010:%2016-25%0AJohn%2018:1%20-%2019:42](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%2052:%2013%20-%2053:%2012%0Acw%20Psalm%2022%0AHebrews%2010:%2016-25%0AJohn%2018:1%20-%2019:42)

## COLLECTS OF THE DAY

### Collect One

Almighty God,  
we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family,  
for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed,  
and given up into the hands of wicked men,  
and to suffer death upon the cross,  
who now liveth and reigneth with thee  
and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

and/or

Almighty and everlasting God,  
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church  
is governed and sanctified;  
Receive our supplications and prayers,  
which we offer before thee for all estates of men  
in thy holy Church,  
that every member of the same,  
in his vocation and ministry,  
may truly and godly serve thee;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Almighty and everlasting God,  
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church  
is governed and sanctified;  
Receive our supplications and prayers,  
which we offer before thee for all estates of men  
in thy holy Church,  
that every member of the same,  
in his vocation and ministry,  
may truly and godly serve thee;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### Collect Two

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who, in your tender love towards the human race,  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
Grant that we may follow the example  
of his patience and humility,  
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty Father,  
Look with mercy on this your family  
for which our Lord Jesus Christ  
was content to be betrayed  
and given up into the hands of sinners  
and to suffer death upon the cross;  
who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

### **Lent Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who, in your tender love towards the human race,  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
Grant that we may follow the example  
of his patience and humility,  
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty Father,  
Look with mercy on this your family  
for which our Lord Jesus Christ  
was content to be betrayed  
and given up into the hands of sinners  
and to suffer death upon the cross;  
who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made

and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:  
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,  
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

See intercessions below

### **POST COMMUNION**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant  
and in obedience died on the cross for our salvation.  
Give us the mind to follow you  
and to proclaim you as Lord and King,  
to the glory of God the Father.

### **PRAYERS**

1

We veil our faces before your glory,  
O Holy and Immortal one,  
and bow before the cross of your wounded Christ.  
with angels and archangels,  
we praise you, our Mercy,  
and we bless you, our Compassion,  
for in our brokenness  
you have not abandoned us.  
Hear us as we pray through Jesus, our high priest:  
heal all division,  
reconcile the estranged,  
console the suffering,  
and raise up to new life  
all that is bound by death. Amen.

2

Grieving God,  
on the cross  
your Son embraced death  
even as he had embraced life:  
faithfully and with good courage.

Grant that we who have been  
born out of his wounded side  
may hold fast to our faith in him exalted  
and may find mercy in all times of need. Amen.

3

Christ Jesus you hung upon a cross and died for us  
so that we might live for you.  
Your body was broken and your blood shed  
so that we might be healed and made whole.  
You were faithful unto death  
so that we might be faithful unto life.  
Your last command was that we might love one another:  
one family together from every tribe and nation,  
a new creation united through your sacrifice,  
redeemed by your blood,  
healed by your love,  
united by your covenant of peace.  
In your death may we find life  
—*Christine Sine*

4

On this day, God of all tears,  
you call us in the midst of our busy lives  
to look at the suffering and death  
of the One who came to carry  
the pain of the world into your heart.  
Give us eyes to see your love this day.

On this day, Grace of Calvary,  
you would gather everyone  
to your side,  
but we leave you  
to carry the cross alone.

You came simply as love incarnate,  
but hate and bitterness  
were the gifts we offered to you.

You poured out your love  
so our emptiness might be filled.  
Give us ears to hear your pain

this day.

On this day,  
you would pray for us,  
for we cannot find the words on our own,  
Shattered Spirit.  
Hear the cries of those in need.  
Listen to the lament of the lonely.  
Cradle the whispered hopes of children.  
Set free the dreams of prisoners and captives.  
Give us hearts to pray with you  
this day.

God in Community, Holy in One,  
we lift our prayers to you in the name of the One  
who suffered and died for us this day  
and who teaches us to pray, saying,  
Our Father . . .

5

Prince of Peace, redeemer of us all, crucified God, we have gathered at the  
foot of the cross, and at  
the entrance to the tomb, and we have rolled the stone across it.  
The world sometimes does it's worst, even to those who don't deserve it. You  
know that, because  
you once lived as one of us, loved as one of us, and died as one of us.  
Tonight we leave, as your disciples did centuries ago, knowing our friend is  
gone, and that a good  
man has died.  
The ones who knew you and loved you could find no consolation that night.  
They mourned. Just as  
there have been nights when we have mourned. Just as there have been  
nights we have looked for  
mercy that didn't seem to come.  
And yet, some would dare to look for hope...  
God, as you send us out into the world tonight, stay close to us. As we  
wrestle with the big  
questions; as we ask why there is pain, why there is suffering, why there is  
loss, do not leave us  
alone. Help us to find you in our hours of greatest doubt.  
And at the right hour, draw us back together. To gather at the tomb. To look  
for the light. To look for

you. For hope, for you, we will be waiting. Amen.  
O God, you hold a mirror before us  
and we see love and we see hate.  
We see crucifiers and we see the crucified.  
Forgive us where we have crucified love –  
your love for ourselves, for others, for you.  
Do not abandon us where we have abandoned ourselves,  
where others have abandoned us,  
where we know the pain of crucifixion and rejection and being forsaken.  
Take us from the cross to hope and new beginning.  
— *William Loader*

6

In this holy time,  
as we remember the sacrifice of the cross,  
we offer the prayers of our hearts,  
that through them we may be transformed  
to be servants of justice, love and peace.  
Make us steadfast witnesses of our Savior's reign,  
that we may live in the pattern of Christ,  
who was faithful in all things,  
even death,  
and whose darkest hour gives light and hope. Amen.

## INTERCESSIONS

1

On this holy day, as we remember God's generous self-giving,  
we come to worship the Lord our God. We remember with sorrow  
and pain, how vulnerable Jesus was to the taunts, the aggression,  
the blinkered vision, the wilful ignorance, and the apathy of people.

Gracious God, you created us to live together in relationships,  
but there are many people who know pain and sorrow with their  
relationships broken through selfishness or thoughtlessness.

Today we pray for vulnerable and suffering people: especially children  
who have been abandoned; for the victims of rejection and violence;  
for people in relationships that have turned sour by rumour or innuendo;  
for all parents, especially those whose children have failed to meet their  
expectations, hopes or dreams; and for the children who feel let down  
by their parents or their society. May your love heal their wounds.

Father God - may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth. Generous God, you created your world to be a place where people could live in peace and harmony, but because of greed and the thirst for power, there are many people who suffer untold agonies. We pray for: nations whose leaders are corrupt; for people who are the victims of torture and violence; for nations where corrupt leaders have misused their people's resources; for people who have been deprived of life's necessities and for people; and families separated by exploitation.

Father God - may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth. Compassionate God, you created us to live and grow in health and strength, and to enjoy the richness of your creation. However, many adults and children are deprived of these basic human needs, and so their life is diminished. We pray for people who lack strength due to inadequate food; for people who are neglected, forgotten or ignored; for people deprived of equal opportunities regardless of their age, gender or nationality; for people who want to die, and for people desperate to live. Father God - may your kingdom come and your will be done on earth. Amen.

- *Joan Stott*

2

If the cross tells us anything, O Lord,  
it is that You know and share our suffering:

You are with us, and all those who are victims of disease,  
of the violence or abuse of others,  
of our own ignorance, foolishness or sin.

**Help us and restore us, O Lord, we pray.**

You are with us, and all those who inflict pain on others and on our world,  
through our selfishness or greed,  
through our brokenness or anger,  
through our rigidity or need to be right.

**Help us and restore us, O Lord, we pray.**

You are with us, and all those who are fearful of threats  
to this world we call home,  
to our safety and survival,  
to our sense of community and togetherness as people.

**Help us and restore us, O Lord, we pray.**

*Silent personal prayers may be offered here.*



Christ of the Cross,  
See our need of Your grace,  
Hear our prayer for Your mercy,  
**And come to us again, to help and restore,  
because we cannot heal ourselves.  
Amen.**

- *John van de Laar, in A Communion Liturgy for Good Friday*

3

This Good Friday we join our voices  
to the words of Jesus on the cross,  
and the cry of all who are abandoned,  
“My God, why have you forsaken me?”  
Before we race in quickly  
with the triumphant answer,  
or the desire to set things right,  
we need to stand alongside  
this ancient cry of dereliction.  
So today we place ourselves  
with all those who cry out  
for food and justice, for work and healing,  
for hope and love, for faith and for meaning:  
we hear their pain and the pain of Jesus Christ.  
And because we know that in two days we will be back  
celebrating and singing,  
do not let us deny the suffering  
of Christ and of this world.  
Today we cry out about:  
*(world and local situations may be named here)*  
O God, our God, we cry out to You  
do not forsake us.

**Amen.**

- *Ann Siddal*

4

Lord, standing at the foot of your Cross on this Good Friday,  
we look back to see all those things that led you to the Cross  
and how you remained undeterred.

When you declared that you came to announce freedom  
to the poor from their chains of poverty,

the affluent among the pious deeply resented it.

When you spoke about God's inclusive love  
and reminded a worshipping congregation  
about the widow of Zarithath and of Naaman the Syrian,  
those who took pride in their election and Covenant  
sought to kill you then and there.

Your attempt to point out the original meaning of the Sabbath  
by indulging in forbidden acts of healing on the Sabbath  
earned the wrath of fastidious religionists.

Your proclamation of the nearness of the Just Reign of God  
and your criticism of all audacious and indulgent authority  
incurred suspicion from the powers-that-be and their collaborators.

It became clear to you that those powers-that-be and their collaborators  
would do away with you.  
They would have you killed on a rugged cross.

You were deeply troubled. Yet you remained undeterred.  
You retained your confidence in God:  
that God would vindicate you  
that God would turn this most hideous act of human rebellion  
into a means of redemption for those very same rebels.  
Lord, we are amazed.

2000 years hence, O Lord, our sin is to assume  
that those powers and those religious and cultural values  
which inspired the conspiracy to have you removed  
were strange and unusual phenomena.

We say that if **we** had been there, we would not have done this to you.  
But we too resent your bias towards the poor.  
We find loving people of other faiths difficult.  
We erect barriers of fear and suspicion.  
We do not accept inclusivity and justice as Gospel values.  
We continue to indulge in all that sent you to the Cross.

Forgive us Lord.

Our only solace is that you prayed for our forgiveness,

understanding that we are blinded through an ignorance of which we are seldom aware.

May the acceptance of your forgiveness lead us to follow the path you set before us. Remember us in your Kingdom. Amen

5

Lament *based on Psalm 22:1-21a*

Leader: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far away?

I cry out to you by day, but you do not answer; and at night, I find no rest.

I am scorned and despised, all who see me mock me and shake their heads.

**People: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Our ancestors trusted in you, cried out to you, and you delivered them. They enthroned you with praise.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

Yet you took me from the womb, and from my birth you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near.

My troubles surround me like lions ready to pounce.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are dust; my heart is like wax, melting inside; my tongue is dry and I cannot speak; my limbs are nothing, and my ribs are bare.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

My enemies encircle me; they stare and gloat; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**

But you, O Saviour, do not be far away!

**O my Help, come quickly to deliver me!**

6

Blessed are you, LORD God of all creation: Today we remember Jesus whom you sent to be our Suffering Servant.

In his Passion, he was marred beyond human semblance.

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.

Yet as the Suffering Servant for the whole human race, he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

His sacrifice on the cross has atoned for the sins of the world. Today we stumble on our words—for they fall far short of comprehending the enormity of our Crucified God's suffering; and the extent of his saving work accomplished on that first Good Friday, long ago.

Jesus, may we always remember your love for us on the cross:

**Have mercy, and hear our prayer.**

Blessed are you, LORD God of all creation: Long ago the psalmist cried out in an agonising prayer: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" On the cross,

Jesus in his suffering also cried out those same words; expressing his excruciating pain of mind, body, soul and spirit.

Yet, in his aloneness, and feeling abandoned; it was to you he spoke those words.

In our times of suffering; of feeling alone and abandoned; may we always remember that you are with us Jesus.

Today we especially remember those in our midst and around the world who are left alone and abandoned—

give them the assurance that you are with them Jesus; and deliver them from their forsakenness.

Jesus, may we always remember your love for us on the cross:

**Have mercy, and hear our prayer.**

Blessed are you, LORD God of all creation: Today we praise and thank you for making a covenant with us through the suffering and death; the sacrificial body and shed blood of Jesus.

He has forgiven our sins and opened the curtain to give us access to the sanctuary of your Holy Presence.

In response to his abundant love for us; may we consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds as we meet together to worship and serve you and our neighbours.

Jesus, may we always remember your love for us on the cross:

**Have mercy, and hear our prayer.**

Blessed are you, LORD God of all creation: We are all participants in the Passion of your Son;

We along with Judas, the soldiers, police and political and religious leaders betray you and arrest you.

We, like Peter deny you. We, like Pilate place you on trial, judge and sentence you to death; when, in truth, you are our Judge.

We, like the soldiers and the crowds mock and taunt you and yell  
"Crucify him!"

Forgive us in our sinful exploitation and oppression of the world's poorest, weakest, and most forgotten of peoples—for you are present in them and their suffering. Jesus, may we always remember your love for us on the cross:

**Have mercy, and hear our prayer.**

(Other thanksgivings and intercessions may be offered here, ending with:  
Jesus, may we always remember your love for us on the cross:

**Have mercy, and hear our prayer.)**

Blessed are you, LORD God of all creation: Have mercy and hear our prayers that we pray in the name of Jesus our Suffering Servant. ALL: **Amen.**

- *Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson*

7

Jesus, though crucified, is raised from the dead and now draws alongside us as we offer prayers to

God for the world, the church and all for whom Jesus died on the cross.

We pray for the church of God on this Good Friday that all who are disciples of Jesus will be given

the grace and strength they need to walk in the way of the cross speaking words of love and truth in places of hatred and lies.

We pray for God's world on this Good Friday that the dying Jesus on the cross and the living Jesus

of resurrection will draw all people to himself, the source of eternal reconciliation and salvation.

We pray for the communities in which we live, work and worship that bonds of love within families and between friends will be healed where they are broken and strengthened where they are weak.

We pray for all those who are experiencing their own Good Friday darkness that all who suffer pain of body or mind will be held by the hands of Jesus which bear the marks of his pain and the promise of restoration and resurrection.

Heavenly Father, at the foot of the cross on which Jesus died we offer you these prayers in hope, trusting in your promise to hear us and in your power which raised Jesus from the dead. Let your grace, mercy, love and peace surround us and all those for whom we have prayed in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.  
- Katharine Smith

8

Prayers of Confession and Intercession for the Affliction of the World

This prayer is meant to be customised for the community in which your congregation is situated.

For example, the neighbourhood or street where your community's homeless population is most visible?

Name that neighbourhood or street. If you have a particular relationship with a congregation in a developing country, name that congregation.

Between after each refrain of "How have we forsaken you, O God?" insert an appropriate-length moment of silence.

Leader: How have we forsaken you, O God?  
Where there is suffering, we turn our eyes.  
Where there is exclusion, we turn our backs.  
Where there is need, we turn our hearts.  
And yet, we know that you are among the injured,  
and the lonely, and the hungry, and the poor.

People: **How have we forsaken you, O God?** *Silence*

For the people of countries who have experienced distress, Holy One, we pray: Haiti, Chile, Japan, etc.

How have we forsaken you, O God? *Silence*

For those whose lives are torn apart by war, the civilians and the soldiers and the

families who are waiting for loved ones to come home, Holy One, we pray: people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and international military personnel, drug cartel victims, Sudanese and Congolese and Rwandan and Eritrean refugees, etc.

**How have we forsaken you, O God?** *Silence*

For those whose stomachs ache with hunger, Holy One, we pray: refugee communities without food, children whose only meal is school lunch, etc.

**How have we forsaken you, O God?** *Silence*

For those whose bodies have no shelter from the elements, Holy One, we pray:

people living in tent cities in Haiti, the homeless sleeping under bridges, stray and abandoned animals, etc.

**How have we forsaken you, O God?** *Silence*

For those who are imprisoned, justly or unjustly, Holy One, we pray: prisoners of war,

inmates in the local prison, people awaiting sentencing, , etc.,

**How have we forsaken you, O God?** *Silence*

For those whose minds or spirits seek comfort and cannot find it, Holy One, we pray: those who are grieving, in transition, mentally ill, jobless, etc.,

**How have we forsaken you, O God?** *Silence*

Leader: Now is the acceptable time!

Help us to be your hands, Holy One,

**reaching out to heal the hurting of this world.**

Help us to be your ears, Holy One,

**hearing and understanding to the cries for justice and mercy.**

Help us to be your arms, Holy One,  
**embracing the sorrow and offering comfort.**

Help us to be your feet, Holy One,  
**walking with those who suffer and guiding the journey toward peace.**

Let us not forsake you any longer, O God.  
**Now is the acceptable time!**

### **A LITANY FOR GOOD FRIDAY**

Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?  
**Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow. [Lamentations 1:12]**

The Lord says:  
My people, what have I done to you?  
How have I offended you? Answer me!  
I led you from slavery to freedom,  
but you led your Saviour to the cross.  
I brought you out of Egypt,  
but you handed me over to the high priests.  
**Holy God,**  
**holy and mighty, holy and immortal One,**  
**have mercy on us.**

My people, what have I done to you?  
How have I offended you? Answer me!  
I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud,  
but you led me to Pilate's court.  
I bore you up with manna in the desert,  
but you struck me down and scourged me.  
**Holy God,**  
**holy and mighty, holy and immortal One,**  
**have mercy on us.**

My people, what have I done to you?  
How have I offended you? Answer me!  
I gave you a royal scepter,  
but you gave me a crown of thorns.  
I raised you to the height of majesty,  
but you have raised me high on a cross.



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

My people, what have I done to you?  
How have I offended you? Answer me!  
I gave you saving water from the rock,  
but you gave me gall and vinegar to drink.  
For you I struck down the kings of Canaan,  
but you pierced your Saviour with a lance.

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

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.  
**By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him.  
**If we endure, we shall also reign with him.**

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.  
**By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

*- A Litany for Good Friday' from Uniting in Worship, adapted from the  
Reproaches for Good Friday*

## **LECTIONARY NOTES**

### **REFLECTIONS ON THEME:**

Good Friday is a tough day to prepare for. The story is so familiar, that the shock and impact of it can easily be lost in a “same old, same old” ritualism. However, with a little creativity and thoughtfulness, some powerful themes emerge. First is the question of Jesus’ purpose – did he live to die, or did he die in order to live and bring life to all? This is more than semantics. It opens up our faith to the reality that what Jesus came to do was not about death so much as it is about life in all its forms and possibilities. Jesus died because he refused to allow a lesser life – evil, compromise, expediency – take him over. He died because he embraced a life of love fully and completely, and would not be moved from it. And in so doing, he lived fully, and gave an example for us to follow and a way for us to enter life. The second theme is that of our response. What Jesus did was not simply to give us a ticket to bliss in heaven. Rather he opened the door for us to be forgiven – which requires us to face our darkness and brokenness – and to live fully, as he did, if we will also die to everything that keeps us from real, abundant life, and

embrace a life of love. Good Friday, then, confronts us with what life is really meant to be, and with the price we must pay to find it – which, in the end, turns out to be much smaller than it may at first appear.

**CONNECTING WITH LIFE:**

**GLOBAL APPLICATION:** In so many ways religion has come to be irrelevant to the big issues of our world. However, what Jesus did in his death goes to the heart of the crises we face. In a world of war, Jesus refuses to take up arms, and gives himself to death. In a world of corruption in the halls of power, Jesus exposes expediency and manipulation, and dies with his integrity intact. In a world of poverty, Jesus gives up everything in order to offer life to others. Jesus makes it clear, whatever the situation, practical, sacrificial, cross-bearing love, is the greatest confrontation and challenge to the broken systems of our world. And, while some view love as ‘wimpy’, the Sunday that is coming reveals it’s true, death-defeating power. What does this say to us about being Easter people in our world today?

**LOCAL APPLICATION:** A Christianity that is about nothing more than a guarantee of personal forgiveness and a life of eternal bliss is the antithesis of what Christ came to do – it is selfish, escapist and unloving. It removes us from any cost, and deceives us into believing that all we have to do is agree to a set of ideas and sit back until we get to heaven. Good Friday does not leave us with this delusion, however. Jesus confronts selfishness and self-protectiveness at every turn. He challenges us with his willingness to give his life in order to practically love even his enemies. He disrupts our comfort by mirroring back to us the extent of our depravity and collusion in the evil systems of our world. But, he also opens a way for us to find a new life now. He leads us into the abundant life that comes when we embrace the cross, commit to love, and refuse to settle for less than true, authentic, generous living.

**SERMON 1**

What makes death oddly beautiful

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#); [Psalm 22](#); [Hebrews 10:16-25](#) or [Hebrews 4:14-16](#); [5:7-9](#); [John 18:1-19:42](#)

Holy dying. There is a truth about the phrase “holy dying,” which seems to come from the title of Jeremy Taylor’s work, *The Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying*, written in the 1600s. The truth is this: dying is often holy – from time to time, when dying becomes beautiful, when it is astonishingly a part of life, when the person dying is unsure, but also unafraid, when the family does not hide from death.

When dying is holy, it is a bright light, the colour spectrum fully present.

Sue Pilert's death was holy. Sue had five daughters, and innumerable grandchildren. All were musical, playing various instruments well, even the youngest.

As Sue closed in on her last breath, Steve, her husband, and this wonderful and large family turned her living room into the bedroom. They placed the hospital bed in the middle of the ruby Karastan Oriental rug, and they kept vigil. As is the way with death, the space between each breath grew, Sue's strength ebbing with each exhale, time becoming irrelevant.

Sue was a person of faith. She trusted, but not completely. Her trust was at times like that of Mother Theresa: unsure, unsteady, but she exercised her faith nonetheless – by prayer, and God for his part had poked and prodded and challenged her over the years. God hadn't made it easy for Sue.

So although Sue trusted, she did not always believe – not the way we tend to think of belief, anyway. She died with questions unanswered, but in the person and beauty of God she still trusted. When all was said and done, she trusted.

As she was dying, Sue's family kept vigil, like many churches do overnight between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday – the vigil of the dying. Some would read to her, some would pray with her, some would hold her hand.

Steve, who didn't know what he would do without her, kissed her gently. Steve, who didn't understand her, didn't get her faith, who was sometimes angry with Sue – Steve, who would be completely lost without her, kissed her gently.

And to a person, this family offered Sue music. Several of the children together played classical pieces, sang, or even played hymns. The piano, the flute, the guitar. They played music to ease Sue along.

All of this gift made for beautiful dying – but her dying was made holy by embrace.

Life embraced Sue as she died. The energy of life, and the Holy was invited into the moment. The respect for life was established firmly in the process of dying.

In her autobiography *Dust Tracks on a Road*, the writer Zora Neale Hurston describes the death of a woman: “Just then, Death finished his prowling through the house on his padded feet and entered the room. He bowed to Mama in his way, and she made her manners and left us to act out our ceremonies over unimportant things.”

Death personified, death as a person, inviting, pulling, taking.

And so Sue died. After Sue died, her five daughters bathed her body themselves. They dressed her – they didn’t want strangers to do this. They put on the simple dress that most reflected her.

Death is intimate. It is the most intimate act, the most intimate time. It is intimate for the person dying, and for the family. Completely vulnerable, and embarrassingly honest. There is no falsehood in death. No props – not one’s fame nor success, one’s wealth nor superior intellect, none of this – strengthen one in death. None, that is, save faith. Perhaps faith is the only element that divides rich from poor in death – rich in spirit from poor in spirit. Besides faith, there is nothing to ease the transition from this life to the next.

And so it is: death renders its victim completely honest, absolutely vulnerable, and without protection.

A priest’s job is to perform ritual: baptisms, marriages, and funerals. Each of these three rituals is attended at some level by untruth, even lying. Priests marry people who intentionally hide drinking issues or cheating.

They baptize babies whose parents promise to raise their children in faith – knowing they won’t. Priests conduct funerals in which the heroics of the deceased exceed truth.

But at the moment of death, at the sacrament of death, there is raw humanity. A person is rendered completely helpless, like a baby at birth, dependent on forces outside of herself. God, the process of dying, the universe – often for the first time in decades, the person and family are dependent upon forces outside of the self. That is what makes death oddly beautiful.

Dean Karnazas is an endurance runner. A few years ago, the guy ran 300 miles – straight. No sleep between. He also decided to run 50 marathons in 50 states on 50 consecutive days. When asked about it all, Karnazas said this: “A great run definitely involves suffering. I think any adventure athlete will

tell you that there's honesty in suffering. ... There's magic in misery. I talk to God out there."

Closer to death by running to death, one experiences the failure of the body, after all, and the nearness of it all to God. Instead of relying on his strength at this point, the athlete becomes vulnerable, and honest – honest, or at least as much as one can be.

Consider the scene of Jesus' arrest, and his early morning trial before Annas and Caiphas, the high priest, and the former high priest. Peter had warmed himself and then run off in despair. Jesus is now before Pilate, and the scene seems ethereal and monochromatic.

Black and white, observed through some blue lens – surreal, and perhaps that is the curse of unholy death – there is no truth in the moment, no honesty. Death is present with hooded robe and sickle, and completely devoid of hope or life.

There is chaos in this scene. No one seems in charge, people are lying, and the scene is tainted with evil – evil men yielding to evil impulses. And the scene is monochromatic.

In this story, of Jesus before Pilate, Pilate utters what at first appears to be an innocuous, throw-away line:

"Truth, what is truth?" For indeed, there is no truth here, in this scene, at this moment.

But later, by the time Jesus carries us as the cross to Golgotha, the scene becomes honest – raw honesty supplants monochromatic chaos – for Jesus is dying, and his death is holy.

At first, evil as death appears to be winning, its trump card played. There is instantly order; chaos does not reign, for Jesus' life has not been taken from him, he has given it voluntarily. Jesus has given himself away, spent himself by choice.

Jesus as Christ, and God on the Cross, and in that moment of death there is complete vulnerability by God – naked, bloody, exhausted, complete truth.

Complete truth – for here at the intimate cross is a man in whom there is no falsehood, and God exists completely. And even in this scene, one intuits

somehow that life itself emanates from death, and is the reason for the cross. Life you can access.

Which is the irony: God becomes completely vulnerable to evil and death. Truth has been placed on trial, convicted, and sentenced; but truth cannot be killed, can never be killed, and life radiates from the scene and moment of death. Not just because you know Easter is two days away, but because a new reality emerges from the horrific and violent scene. That new reality is this: death is a portal, not an end. The cross is a doorway, and not a wall. Not something of which to be afraid, but an object of embrace.

Life and love and grace and goodness have triumphed behind the cross, and in all locations of the cross – at Auschwitz, Sudan, San Quentin; but not just in the obvious locations, in the little places, too – your places, the location of despair and agony in the soul itself. Through these windows and doorways you find life.

Acknowledging this, death becomes holy.

There can be holiness in dying; not for the beauty of the death itself – it is never for the beauty of death, for death itself is not beautiful, nor to be glorified – but for the emergent life, the bud, the seedling rising.

And so it is – the cross of Christ becomes your cross. And God in this Christ has not abandoned you – or anyone – to the cross.

We have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us.

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## **SERMON 2**

Longing to rescue

**Isaiah 52:13-54:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:79; John 18, 19**

*“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).*

Good Friday comes to us each year with a nearly unbearable weight of remembered pain. We know what will happen. The desperate human heart that always longs for salvation, despite its knowledge of the end of tragedy, longs to change the ending, to move it from death to rescue. How many times have we wished for the same when watching Romeo and Juliet, Antigone, or Hamlet? We want to shout to the protagonist, “No, no, don’t believe the lie. Don’t kill yourself. There is hope yet to come if you only don’t give in, if you only stay alive.”

When Judas comes into the garden for the arrest, we want to cry out, “How can you, Judas? Go back, don’t betray the one who loves you.” When Pilate acknowledges that Jesus is without the guilt of political insurrection, we cry out, “Why then did you have him flogged? Why are you allowing them to choose Barabbas instead of this innocent man? Why do you give in to the cries of ‘Crucify him’?”

And even as we weep at the injustice, we know that nothing can possibly change what came to pass in that distant first century. And we are sad but grateful. What if it hadn’t happened? What if Jesus had not been arrested, unjustly condemned, and crucified? Would he have lived a fairly long life only to be remembered as a good man?

It is the tragedy of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday that assured the cosmos that Jesus would never be forgotten, no matter how misunderstood he was during his lifetime and in the centuries that have rolled since then. Every year during Holy Week, we read these two chapters in St. John’s gospel marveling at their simplicity, at the quiet unfolding of the greatest drama in humanity’s history, at the startling details, at the dignity of the prisoner and the folly of those accusing him, and we wait for the unbearable weight to be lifted, for the darkness to be dissolved, for us to reach Easter Sunday.

During these hours, between Thursday night and Sunday morning, as we reenact the tragedy of the Cross, we also need to be aware of other tragedies: we need to feel the weight of humanity’s sorrow, of the injustice being perpetrated against so many of our brothers and sisters around the world; we need to share the guilt of those who kill the innocent, we need to be made aware of those befriended by Jesus during his lifetime – the strangers, the outcasts, the unclean – and not avert our faces. We cannot experience the sorrow of Good Friday without experiencing humanity’s sorrow also. This



is the meaning of this sacred night. The writer of Second Isaiah knew all this without actually knowing the story we reenact tonight.

Surely he has borne our infirmities  
And carried our diseases ...  
But he was wounded for our  
transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that  
made us whole;  
and by his bruises we are  
healed.

How else can we, weak human beings, bear the sorrow we witness around us? How can we read newspapers and listen to the news of the world – so much deceit, so much injustice, so many killings, so many wars – without the assurance that God is suffering with us?  
This is the night that gives meaning to what seems meaningless.

He was oppressed and he was  
afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the  
slaughter ...  
By a perversion of justice he was  
taken away ...  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in  
his mouth.

All of you who mourn tonight, remember this: He too knows what suffering means. This is not a God removed from the world. Listen once again to the words of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.”

— *Katerina Whitley is the author of [Walking the Way of Sorrows](#) (Morehouse, 2003) among other books of Biblical monologues. She lives and writes in Boone, North Carolina.*



## ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

### **Good Friday: Being With Jesus at the Cross - By Diana Butler Bass**

The following is a Good Friday sermon for St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia, a town across the river from Washington, D.C., the seat of politics and power.

*(H McK notes - I have had the good fortune of worshipping at St Paul's periodically over three years recently and hearing Diane preach on occasion. A google of her writings will repay.)*

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/dianabutlerbass/2012/04/good-friday-being-with-jesus-at-the-cross/#sthash.5zyBLhiD.dpuf>

### **The Lectionary Lab by the Rev'ds Dr. John Fairless and Delmer Chilton**

<https://lectionarylab.com/2012/03/28/year-b-good-friday/>

### **"God of the Mountain, A Reflection on the Meaning of the Cross," by William R.G. Loader.**

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/mountain.htm>

**Good Friday**, by AKM Adam (Download is one long PDF file for book of sermons.)

<http://akma.disseminary.org/images/FleshBones.pdf>

**The Seven Last Words Sermon Series**, by Pastor Edward F. Markquart, *Sermons from Seattle*: [Golgotha](#), [Father Forgive Them For They Know Not What They Do](#), [Today You Will Be With Me In Paradise](#), [Here is Your Son - Here is Your Mother](#), [My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? I Thirst](#), [It Is Finished](#), [Father, Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit](#), [The Seven Last Words](#).

[http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/lenten\\_series\\_golgotha.htm](http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/lenten_series_golgotha.htm)

## CHILDREN

[Worshipping with Children](#), Good Friday, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

[worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/year-b-good-friday-april-6-2012.html](http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/year-b-good-friday-april-6-2012.html).

## FURTHER LITURGICAL RESOURCES

### **Easter Vigil readings**

Scroll down

<http://in-formatio.com/?p=3171>

### **Prayers**

A truly wonderful list of resources

<http://re-worship.blogspot.ca/2012/03/good-friday-resource-index.html>

### **Prayers and other resources for Holy Week and Easter**

A comprehensive collection of well organised downloads from the UCC (United Church of Christ) based on the RCL

<http://www.ucc.org/worship/worship-ways/>

### **Good Friday service**

A complete service with readings, prayers and hymns - a good basis for a service of the word which will need little emendation.

<http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/GoodFriday.htm>

### **GOOD FRIDAY: THE NAILS OF THE CROSS**

Another service with a series of readings, responses, and silent reflection and *prayer* designed to help participants enter more deeply into the meaning of Good Friday. Readily adaptable for local use.

[www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/b-gdfr-su.php](http://www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/b-gdfr-su.php)

### **Taize Good Friday**

<http://www.kingsnorton.org.uk/taize-prayer-sheets/download/tp18.pdf>

## **POETRY**

He leaves the bright heavens  
comes again  
condemned to hang  
between heaven and earth.  
And there he remains  
he absolves the guards  
lets the tortured forget  
makes hatred subside  
teaches the weary to breathe  
the trembling to sleep  
the dreamers to act

the doers to dream.  
*Dorothee Solle*

## **HYMN SUGGESTIONS**

[When I Survey The Wondrous Cross](#)

[O Thou Who Camest From Above](#)

[Beneath The Cross Of Jesus](#)

[Alas! And Did My Saviour Bleed](#)

[Jesus Keep Me Near The Cross](#)

[The Wonderful Cross](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Amazing Love](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Amazing Love \(You Are My King\)](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[Once Again](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[See His Love](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

[This Place](#)

[Above All](#) (*Link to YouTube video*)

## **1st Reading Isaiah 52: 13– 53: 12**

215\* Ah, holy Jesu, how hast thou offended

404 Broken for me, broken for you

219\* From heav'n you came, helpless babe

268\* Hail, thou once–despisèd Jesus

417 He gave his life in selfless love

273 Led like a lamb to the slaughter (omit v.2)

275 Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious

227\* Man of sorrows! What a name

230\* My Lord, what love is this?

231\* My song is love unknown (omit vv.4–6)

235 O sacred head, sore wounded

107 One day when heaven was filled with his praises

239\* See, Christ was wounded for our sake

## **Psalm Psalm 22**

671 Jesus, thy blood and righteousness

361\* Now thank we all our God

233 O dearest Lord, thy sacred head

537\* O God, our help in ages past

240\* Sweet the moments, rich in blessing

247\* When I survey the wondrous cross

## **2nd Reading Hebrews 10: 16–25**

218\* And can it be that I should gain  
220\* Glory be to Jesus  
382\* Help us, O Lord, to learn  
222\* Here is love, vast as the ocean  
431\* Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour  
619\* Lord, teach us how to pray aright  
638\* O for a heart to praise my God  
227\* O my Saviour, lifted  
166\* O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness  
341\* Spirit divine, attend our prayers

**Alternative Hebrews 4: 14–16; 5: 7–9**

2nd Reading 218\* And can it be that I should gain  
65 At evening when the sun had set  
319\* Father, of heaven, whose love profound  
226\* It is a thing most wonderful  
652\* Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  
431\* Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour  
228\* Meekness and majesty  
291 Where high the heavenly temple stands

**The Gospel John 18: 1– 19: 42**

215\* Ah, holy Jesu, how hast thou offended  
216 Alleluia, my Father  
561\* Beneath the cross of Jesus  
220\* Glory be to Jesus  
221 Hark! the voice of love and mercy  
417 He gave his life in selfless love  
222\* Here is love vast as the ocean  
226\* It is a thing most wonderful  
132\* [Lo! he comes with clouds descending]  
275 Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious  
227\* Man of sorrows! What a name  
229\* My God, I love thee; not because  
231\* My song is love unknown  
102\* Name of all majesty  
232 Nature with open volume stands  
233 O dearest Lord, thy sacred head  
234 O Love divine! What hast thou done?  
237\* O my Saviour, lifted  
235 O sacred head, sore wounded  
236\* On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross

557\* Rock of ages, cleft for me  
239\* See, Christ was wounded for our sake  
241\* Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle  
240\* Sweet the moments, rich in blessing  
285\* The head that once was crowned with thorns  
243 The royal banners forward go  
244\* There is a green hill far away  
245 To mock your reign, O dearest Lord  
248\* We sing the praise of him who died  
246\* Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (omit v.6)  
247\* When I survey the wondrous cross