



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

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.

Collect Two

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.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

See intercessions below

POST COMMUNION

No Post Communion is provided for Good Friday.

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 agonizing 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

BY THE REV. ROB GIESELMANN

[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.

— *The Rev. Rob Giesemann is the interim rector at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Belvedere, California. Originally from the Diocese of East Tennessee (serving at St. Luke's, Cleveland), he also served in the Diocese of Easton (St. Paul's Church, Chestertown). Before entering the ministry, Rob practiced law for ten years. Rob is the author of [The Episcopal Call to Love](#) (Apocryphile Press, 2008), and is the father of two wonderful children.*

SERMON 2

Longing to rescue

BY KATERINA K. WHITLEY

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>

Unforgiving Jesus on the Cross - By David Henson

In the midst of his crucifixion, Jesus looks down and forgives his torturers, his crucifiers, his executioners.

Jesus, in the midst of the unimaginable and intolerable injustice, musters the courage to forgive the unforgivable.

It is a moment, at least according to how traditional Christianity teaches it, of overwhelming mercy and unfathomable forgiveness.

Except, that's not exactly how it happens, is it? Jesus, in fact, doesn't forgive his captors.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/davidhenson/2012/04/unforgiving-jesus-on-the-cross-an-unconventional-good-friday-reflection/#sthash.wbGh7k8B.dpuf>

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

<http://lectionarylab.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/year-b-good-friday.html>

"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

"For Us," John Jewell,

<http://www.lectionarysermons.com/apr21.00.html>

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.

FURTHER LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Easter Vigil readings

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

Prayers

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

http://www.wesleychurchgeelong.net/w_resources/

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

Good Friday service

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

GOOD FRIDAY: THE NAILS OF THE CROSS

www.spirit-net.ca/sermons/b-gdfr-su.php

It is a series of readings, responses, and silent reflection and *prayer* designed to help us enter more deeply into the meaning of *Good Friday*. Everyone is ...

Taize Good Friday

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

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*)