

# The Crown of Thorns



This Lent we will be looking at the things that happened to Jesus through the night of Maundy Thursday until crucifixion on Good Friday. Rosemary Roberts reflected last year that our Holy Week liturgies do not focus much on the events of this night and therefore wrote a series of reflections for her own use. We will offer an excerpt from her reflections each week alongside Biblical and theological texts, art, and music. The central image of The Crown of Thorns imagines each searing experience of that night as an individual thorn piercing Jesus. We have included 5 thorns in Jesus's crown, but maybe there are other thorns that you think we should add too?

Note: all biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

## WEEK ONE The first thorn: Betrayal

Judas

### Opening prayer

Reading: John 13: 21-22, 25-30

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me'. The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ... While reclining next to Jesus the disciple whom Jesus loved asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish'. So when he had dipped the piece of bread he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. After he had received the bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do'. Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival'; or, that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

### DISCUSSION

#### Starter questions

- Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus?
- Why did Judas experience such remorse and try to return the money?
- How has betrayal caused you personally or others to suffer? Can you think of examples in the corporate world, or in international relations?
- What does this passage reveal to you about Jesus's divinity and humanity?

### FOR REFLECTION

Art: Juan de Juanes: The Last Supper

Rosemary's reflection

I ask myself sometimes whether I truly feel that *my* sin causes other people to suffer, as the sin of Judas condemned Jesus to unimaginable suffering of body, mind and spirit. Do I feel implicated in the death of Jesus? Is my part in perverting God's loving will a hanging matter? The answer to these questions is that Judas and I are in it together. But the tragedy of Judas is that, unlike the prodigal son, he did not turn again to be healed. Far from setting off for home to throw himself on his father's mercy, he was a lost son who never returned, the crucified thief who refused to plead his way into paradise, the proud traitor who dared to decide that his treachery was

beyond the reach of mercy. The one who renounces the power and love of God to forgive commits the saddest sin.

These words were found scribbled on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child at Ravensbruck concentration camp.

"O Lord, Remember not only the men and women of good will  
But also those of evil will.  
But do not remember all the suffering  
They have inflicted upon us;  
Remember the fruits we have borne  
Thanks to this suffering  
Our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility,  
Our courage, our generosity  
The greatness of heart  
Which has grown out of all this  
And when they come to the judgement  
Let all the fruits that we have borne  
Be their Forgiveness."

Final thoughts and closing prayer

Additional Art and Music Resources for Week One  
Dürer: The Betrayal of Christ  
Mynheer: Mary comforts the mother of Judas  
Messiaen: Les Ténèbres

## WEEK TWO The second thorn: Injustice

### Trial before Caiaphas

#### Opening prayer

Reading - Mark 14: 55-64

Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands"'. But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus said, 'I am; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power", and "coming with the clouds of heaven"'. Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?' All of them condemned him as deserving death.

#### DISCUSSION

##### Starter questions

- Why did Jesus inspire such suspicion and fear in the religious authorities?
- Have you been wrongly accused of something? What did it feel like? Can you think of situations today where people, groups, international communities are being treated unjustly (eg post office workers) - how does that make you feel?
- What difference does it make to you that Jesus experienced such injustice?

#### FOR REFLECTION

Art: Gerard van Honthorst: Christ before the High Priest

##### Rosemary's reflection

Injustice of every kind is an affront to God, in whose image every one of us without exception is made. The spectacular farce of the hearings before the religious and political rulers, the casual violence and derision visited on Jesus by those under authority but left to their own devices, the judicial torture illegally meted out to him to appease the crowd - all those are acute first-century versions of chronic abuses that

still afflict poor people, trouble-makers, social revolutionaries, agitators, misfits, those who speak the truth to power. Our Lord had a purpose that they do not, a strength that they have not, but he shares with them the fate of facing his persecutors, unprotected and alone. He is not the only figure of composure, authority, integrity, truthfulness, and grace who has withstood the time of trial. But that the man who was God has borne those griefs and carried those sorrows is salvation.

#### DISCUSSION

- What do we make of divine righteous anger on behalf of the poor and the Divine suffering of injustice?

#### Bob Marley's Guiltiness

In "Guiltiness," Marley reflects on the struggles faced by the oppressed and marginalised communities, particularly in Jamaica. It presents a sombre yet optimistic outlook, urging individuals to confront their guilt and take action towards creating a more just and equal society. The song not only highlights the societal structures that perpetuate injustice but also calls for personal responsibility and self-reflection.

#### Archbishop Oscar Romero

"Christ invites us not to fear persecution because, believe me, brothers and sisters, those who are committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor, and in El Salvador we know that the fate of the poor signifies: to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive and to be found dead."

#### Final thoughts and closing prayer

Additional Art and Music Resources for Week Two

lythar Ghurab: Prayer

Dorothy Rudd Moore: Weary Blues

## WEEK THREE The third thorn: Abandonment

Peter

Opening prayer

Reading - Mark 14: 66-72

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, 'You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth'. But he denied it, saying, 'I do not know or understand what you are talking about'. And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, 'This man is one of them'. But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, 'Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean'. But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know this man you are talking about'. At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times'. And he broke down and wept.

### DISCUSSION

Starter questions:

- What might have happened if Peter had not denied knowing Jesus?
- In Luke's account, after Peter denies Jesus, 'The Lord turned and looked at Peter.' What do you think would have been conveyed in that look?

### FOR REFLECTION

Art: Gerard van Honthorst: The Denial of Peter

Francisco Goya: The Repentant Peter

Rosemary's reflection

What are we to make of Peter's presence in the high priest's courtyard? Back at the beginning, Matthew tells us very simply how Peter answered the call of Jesus to become a disciple ... 'Come, follow me', Jesus said. And at the very end, beside another charcoal fire, in answer to Jesus's threefold question, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter answers, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you'. In those shocking moments in the garden, when the darkness was suddenly harsh with shouting and bright with torchlight, Peter had turned tail and run with the rest, leaving the Lord standing calmly alone, encircled by strong-armed men wielding clubs and

swords. But as most of Peter's friends had run on, away from that place, he had hesitated on the brink of safety and turned back. For love, Peter cannot cease from following Jesus: the command 'Follow me' still holds, and Peter is still there as Jesus is marched into the city and delivered to the house of the high priest.

#### DISCUSSION

- What is it like to be abandoned by a friend?
- What does friendship and loyalty mean to you and how do you live it out with your own friends?

Gerard W Hughes Oh God, Why? A journey through Lent for bruised pilgrims

"We can look at Peter's denial as an event which happened to Peter two thousand years ago, a regrettable event at the time, but with a happy ending for Peter and for us, for it tells us of the possibility of forgiveness, even if we were to fail like Peter. While these thoughts are going on in us, a little voice inside is assuring us that we would never be capable of failing as Peter failed. If we hear such a little voice, we need to pray for enlightenment in order to know its falsity, for we are no better than Peter, probably a great deal worse."

Malcolm Guite

Impulsive master of misunderstanding,  
You comfort me with all your big mistakes;  
Jumping the ship before you make the landing,  
Placing the bet before you know the stakes.  
I love the way you step out without knowing,  
The way you sometimes speak before you think,  
The way your broken faith is always growing,  
The way he holds you even when you sink.  
Born to a world that always tried to shame you,  
Your shaky ego vulnerable to shame,  
I love the way that Jesus chose to name you,  
Before you knew how to deserve that name.  
And in the end your saviour let you prove  
That each denial is undone by love.

Final thoughts and closing prayer

Additional Art and Music Resources for Week Three

Bloch: The Denial of Peter

Brahms – Auf dem Kirchhofe

## WEEK FOUR The fourth thorn: Earthly powers

### Pilate and Herod

#### Opening prayer

Reading - Luke 23: 4-12

Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no basis for an accusation against this man'. But they were insistent and said, 'He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place'. When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

#### DISCUSSION

##### Starter questions

- Can you understand and identify with Herod's desire to see a sign?
- Why does Jesus stay silent?

#### FOR REFLECTION

Art: Derrick Baegert: Christ before Pilate

Music: Andrew Lloyd Webber: Herod's song in 'Jesus Christ Superstar'

#### Rosemary's reflection

We don't know what sort of encounter unfolds between Herod and Jesus, one of them prey to uncontrolled emotions, a weak, unprincipled, trivial, vulgar person, the other grave, thoughtful, secure in his authority, sure of purpose, attuned to his own and others' motives and urges, and wise as only those who are whole in every way can be wise. The world cannot bear the live presence of Jesus. Humanness that is complete is an unbearable offence to those weighed down by guilt, anxiety, ambition, fear and lust for power. Emptiness deals with fullness in the only way it can: it attacks.



## DISCUSSION

- What do today's "earthly powers" look like? How might it feel to be in conflict with them?
- Should the Church of England be disestablished?
- In this election year when AI, Fake News, social media influences, and concerns about a free press are in the news, how will we take responsibility for making our own free judgements?

Archbishop Oscar Romero

"When Christ confessed that he was the Son of God, they considered this to be blasphemy and sentenced him to death. The church continues to confess that Christ is the Lord, that there are no other gods. When human beings kneel before other gods, they are angry that the church preached the one God. Because of this, the church clashes with the idols of power, with those who worship money, with those that make the flesh a god, with those who think that God is unnecessary, that we don't need Christ, that the things of the world are enough. And the church has the right and the duty to cast down all these idols and proclaim that only Christ is the Lord."

Final thoughts and closing prayer

Additional Art and Music Resources for Week Four

Art: Romeo Temwa: Soft Power

Music: Górecki: Symphony of Sorrowful songs, 2<sup>nd</sup> mvt

## WEEK FIVE The fifth thorn: Pain

### Torture and death

#### Opening prayer

Reading - Mark 15: 15-20

Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

#### DISCUSSION

Starter questions:

- What made the crowd call for Barabbas to be freed and Jesus to be crucified?
- Do we, particularly in the Protestant tradition, tend to shy away from the physical pain inflicted on Jesus? If so, does it matter?
- How do we respond to accounts of those who have suffered profound pain unjustly?

#### FOR REFLECTION

Music: Giuseppe Verdi: Nabucco - Chorus of the Hebrew slaves (a chorus of pain and longing)

Art: Gerard van Honthorst: The Crowning with thorns

#### Rosemary's reflection

It is worth remembering that, by the time Jesus is condemned to death by Pilate, it is at least 12 hours since he last ate and drank; except for the time he spent kneeling on the hard ground in Gethsemane, since he got up from the supper table, he has been on his feet almost all that time. During a traumatic and sleepless night, he has been physically beaten, and then scourged - a vicious punishment that produced deep lacerations and considerable loss of blood. And since he left the upper room he has walked or been frogmarched at least two and a half miles. All this before he sets out for Calvary.

Dr Sheila Cassidy: 'Good Friday People'

"Perhaps it is important for all of us, from time to time, to share as deeply as we are able in the pain of others. It is part of the quest for truth and it makes us more available to comfort those who have suffered more than men and women *should* be asked to bear....there are doctors, and other health workers, who listen, day after day, to the sad tales of torture, depression and despair of ex-prisoners of conscience and who, in exposing themselves to another's pain, are part of the healing process. In the same way, hospice workers expose themselves to the terrible desolation of those dying of cancer. Pain is part of the human condition and sharing that pain is a deeply human task."

"What *should* we do about torture, I ask myself, and I don't really know the answer. I just know that we need to take the tears we shed for Jesus and use them to wash the blood-stained faces of the Good Friday people of our own day. We need to harness our grief and anger at the way Jesus suffered to try and end the suffering of our own people."

Gerard W Hughes: 'Oh God, Why? A journey through Lent for bruised pilgrims'

"In the Gospel accounts of the Passion, we see how God, IN Jesus, enters into human suffering, disillusionment, betrayal and death. There is no depth of human suffering where God is not present. We cannot enter into the sufferings of Jesus unless we enter into our own experience of pain and suffering, for we meet him, not in his suffering of two thousand years ago, but in the pain of our own lives."

## Final thoughts and closing prayer

Additional Art and Music Resources for Week Five

Art: Audrey Frank Anastasi: Stations of the Cross 11, Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Music: Hildegard von Bingen: O cruor sanguinis

J S Bach: St Matthew Passion - O Sacred head sore wounded

Messiaen: Minuit pile et face (pour la Mort)

