

Reflections and Prayers for Holy Week

This is the first of a series of weekly Reflections and Prayers which will be offered to the Norley Methodist Church congregation, temporarily dispersed. They will be sourced from a variety of people and places. You are invited to use them and share them as you wish while we are unable to meet together for worship. Some pieces will relate to the Christian calendar at the time: others will be more general, and you may wish to retain them for future reference.

A Prayer for the moment



Loving God,
If we are ill, strengthen us.
If we are tired, fortify our spirits.
If we are anxious, help us to consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air.
Help us not to stockpile treasures from supermarkets in the barns of our larders.
Don't let fear cause us to overlook the needs of others more vulnerable than ourselves.
Fix our eyes on your story and our hearts on your grace.
Help us always to hold fast to the good,
See the good in others,
And remember there is just one world, one hope,
One everlasting love, with baskets of bread for everyone.
In Jesus we make our prayer,
The one who suffered, died and was raised to new life,
In whom we trust these days and all days,
Amen.

The Revd Barbara Glasson, President of the Methodist Conference

Palm Sunday – what next?

‘When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”’ (Matthew 21: 10)

The storyline of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday, at the start of Holy Week, is the same in all four gospels. But it is Matthew who surely captures the overriding mood in this verse: the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘who is this?’ There was no hush of expectation or a quiet in the air (to quote the hymn): it was a full-throated clamour amongst the thousands of Jews up for the Passover. But what was it they expected? Possibly the new Messiah to liberate them from Rome, or was that too much to expect? What did Caiaphas and the priests expect? Whatever it was, they got what they wanted. What did Pilate expect when he got sucked in? More trouble from these rebellious Jews, indeed, more than he bargained for. What happened? Probably not what anybody expected, except perhaps Jesus himself.

John Bell, Norley Methodist Church Lent liturgy 2019

Gethsemane – a poignant reminder

If you have a bible to hand, look up Matthew's gospel chapter 26, verses 36 to 45 – the familiar account of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, about to be betrayed and arrested. Jesus, tormented by the awful prospect ahead, pleads with God three times for release, praying 'if it is possible, let this cup pass from me', but in unconditional obedience, 'nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt'. Each time, on the very edge of loneliness, finding his closest friends asleep, Jesus remonstrates with them 'could you not watch with me one hour?'

These words of Jesus have a striking and poignant resonance now. As many people across the world's nations to local communities around us develop symptoms of the coronavirus, perhaps they inwardly pray 'if it is possible, let this cup pass from me', though they cannot influence its course. For some, as health and life drain away, perhaps they implore their loved ones 'could you not watch with me one hour?', realising that, now, tragically, it cannot be.

We rejoice with all those who recover from illness but we remember in our prayers, with deep sadness, those who are denied the presence of family and friends to comfort and watch with them in their final hours: they may be on the very edge of loneliness, but they have an assurance that they are embraced in the arms of an eternal and loving God.

John Bell, April 2020

Sunset – a meditation for Good Friday evening

Waiting for the sun to go down.

The passers-by. Two joggers. A few family-groups.

Walking, stopping, looking, admiring, reflecting; struggling to take it all in. Pointing things out to each other: disagreeing about some small detail in this breath-taking grandeur of creation.

A young couple pre-occupied with a baby, not noticing anything special. A girl and boy, teenagers, hand-in-hand.

People speaking different languages. People from all corners of the world. People of many colours.

Women and men, young and old: all have gathered.

The wind brushes through the few trees, as it always does.

The sun sinks lower in the sky to the west. Yet still bright.

The sky still blue, though now a paler shade than at midday.

The air turns colder. People notice it, shiver and put on an extra cover.

The shadows lengthen as every minute passes.

Slowly.

It all happens so – slowly.

The sinking sun, the paler sky, the colder air, the lengthening shadows.

The outline of the rocks across the Canyon darkens, each rock less discernible than a few minutes ago.

Now, just the faintest silhouette.

Until the sun slips silently away beneath the distant horizon and the light has drained away.

The Grand Canyon is in gloom and gathering darkness.

The light has indeed gone now, from the Canyon, from the world.

Now it is dark and cold indeed. Then, suddenly, very dark and very cold.

This is Good Friday evening. Will it ever be day again?

John Bell: Grand Canyon, Good Friday, April 13th 1990



Quiet reflection

This is not the image of a cross in a distant land or great cathedral or taken from the internet, however powerful they may be, but the simple picture of our Good Friday cross in the church garden.

Look at it; it is an empty cross; and look forward to the moment when we shall again join in worship together to celebrate the risen Lord. Alleluia!

Photo by Martin Bell

Evening and morning

As o'er each continent and island the dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent, nor dies the strain of praise away.

John Ellerton, Singing the Faith 147 verse 3

A Prayer for the end of the day

Lighten our darkness, we pray thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; that, awake we may watch with Christ, and asleep we may rest in peace; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus. Amen.

Adapted from the Book of Common Prayer

Note and invitation to readers

I have gathered these reflections and prayers at short notice to prepare this first edition and they therefore include much of my own material. If you wish to offer pieces for inclusion in future weeks, please send them to me at johnabell@supanet.com My intention is to release each edition on a Friday so that it can be distributed for the following week. Next week's edition will celebrate Easter.

And, I would welcome any feedback as a guide to what is helpful and appreciated and what is not.

Many thanks,

John Bell