

Lent and Easter

prayers and meditations for Holy Week

AIM

To provide some prayers and meditation that can be used by individuals or groups during the second part of Holy Week. Another document contains ideas for the first part of the week.

INTRODUCTION

'Getting under the skin' of some of the biblical characters can bring new insight to well known passages. This meditation attempts to see things from the point of view of Jesus' mother. Mary knew Jesus so well, she loved him, probably wanted to protect him from harm but somehow knew she could no longer do that. What would that feel like to a mother? That was what I was thinking as I wrote this.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

The Last Supper: Mary looks on

Oh my child, I know you're special;

I knew that before you were born!

How much joy and excitement you've brought us! (pause)

But what a hard life you've had.

Others may not realise it, looking at you.

They see the patient, loving, teasing, story-teller and healer.

But I know when you've had a hard day.

When you haven't had enough to eat - or time to rest.

And I know something's wrong now –

Something's hurting you.

There's rumour flying round,

People are excitable and edgy...

I wish I could hold you safe in my arms again,

But I know what you would say –

"Mother, you know I must do my Father's will"...

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Yes, I do know, but it doesn't make it any easier

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP

Of course, you might have a very different idea of what Mary may have been thinking or feeling at this time. Or maybe another character in the story appeals to you more. How about having a go at expressing your thoughts somehow? There are many possibilities - talk to someone, write, sing, dance, draw, act it out etc. Once you start, you might be surprised just how involved in the character you become!

In a group setting, read out the above paragraph and give some time to ponder. The group could split into two or threes to share what they think Mary or another character may have been going through. Or you could supply plenty of paper, pens, colours – even clay – and ask folks to express their response to this meditation. There may even be some who would like to put a dance or sketch together. For those who deny any artistic talent, it's worth remembering that God is the creative one and will enable anyone who is willing to be creative once in a while! A man once said to me (with his huge arms folded over his huge chest, his chin stuck out, square and belligerent) "I'm not creative and never will be." Half an hour later, everyone was bowled over by the poem he had written – it was a blessing to us all. So encourage everyone to try something – there may be some surprises!

GOOD FRIDAY

INTRODUCTION

Good Friday was a gruesome day for Jesus. This meditation doesn't gloss over that fact. Some may find it uncomfortable or challenging, but don't let that put you off. Scripture says "the truth will set you free" – or another translation is "reality will set you free". Facing squarely what happened and how we react to it can be a very profound experience.

Why did Jesus go through with this? This meditation follows my thoughts on the subject and whether you agree with them or not, maybe they will help you dig out what you really think about it all and what it means for you.

The Scandal of the Cross

The scandal of the cross is lifted high –
put on display for all to see.

Jesus: broken and abused,
battered, shamed, dirty and disfigured;
in pain from torture,
in agony from grief,
dirty from humiliation,

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is displayed as a sign for all.

A sign of what?

A warning not to challenge the authorities?

An example of the consequences of religious mania?

Perhaps that's what the Romans intended.

But the scandal of the cross is more than that.

It's more than injustice, torture and grief.

It's God being willing to submit to our judgement

so that we need not suffer God's judgement.

What injustice!

How ridiculous! ...

What a scandal!

That God should willingly submit

to our barbarous, wicked and short sighted attack

when, at any time he could have said,

"ENOUGH!

"YOU are guilty

and deserve MY judgement!"

He could have raised his arm

and ended the whole gruesome process

in a flash of power (pause)

But he didn't. (pause)

He chose ... to submit ... willingly ... (pause)

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He chose ... to speak forgiveness ... (pause)

He chose to watch his friends and family suffer

as they had to deal with the shame of such a death,

and the agony of watching him ...

and the grief of hopelessness, lost dreams and lost life. (pause)

Jesus chose all this ...

Because ...

He chooses us.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP

Allow your initial reaction to this meditation to be expressed. You may like to share your thoughts and feelings or record them somehow. If you're on your own, being real with God in prayer can be very liberating. Then take a little longer to ponder and allow any deeper response to surface. Is there anything different there? Can you share this too?

If you're stuck, try reading the meditation again slowly and see if a certain phrase or word jumps out at you. Then tease out what it means to you. Eg being chosen means a lot to me. It means I belong somewhere. I was one of those who was never on the sports teams – except as the last one left! Knowing Jesus chose me is therefore very special to me.

These suggestions can be used in a group setting by giving folks the opportunity to share their initial reaction aloud – be prepared for anything! Then move on to a time for quiet reflection. Have some paper and pens available and copies of this meditation for those who wish to re read it. Allow time to share the results of their reflection and finish either with open prayer session when anyone can voice their prayers or a led prayer that incorporates or sums up the thoughts shared. If you don't want to do this yourself, at the beginning of the meeting ask someone whom you know is both pastorally astute and comfortable with leading extemporary prayer.

HOLY SATURDAY

INTRODUCTION

Jesus is in the tomb now. He's given everything. Easter Sunday hasn't yet happened. But as I pondered this, I realised Jesus gave up everything right from the beginning of his human life. Phillipians 2 : 6 - 8 was the springboard to these thoughts.

'Giving all you've got' ...

Lord, what was that like for You? (pause)

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How could you even contemplate making such a sacrifice?

To limit Yourself to human ways!

How frustrating was that? (pause)

To willingly give up Your place in Heaven with Your Father.

To accept life as a human with all its limitations –

How could you do it?

What did it cost You?

I will never fully know. (pause)

Your sacrifice started

the second the choice was made, didn't it?

You didn't just sacrifice yourself on the cross,

You sacrificed yourself in the womb,

in the manger,

in the house in Egypt,

in the Temple, talking to the scribes,

in the carpenter's workshop,

and all the time you were training the disciples

and ministering to others.

How You shared our humanity! (pause)

I thank you Jesus for all you did.

I don't really appreciate the half of it –

but even the little I know

is bringing me to my knees

in gratitude and amazement,

awe and humility,

joy and love!

"Thank you Jesus" is a poor response, I know –

but I mean it!

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I offer you all I am because it's all I've got ...

and it's what you gave to me.

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP

You may like some silence or to play quiet instrumental music for a while. Don't try to process your response with words, rather, let your heart or spirit be stirred. Can you offer these stirrings to God? He understands the language of the heart and the spirit – even if we aren't quite sure exactly what's going on! When you decide you've finished, rather than analysing this prayer session, simply ask for God's blessing and continued presence.

This suggested follow up may be difficult to do in a group setting as we normally expect to share our responses, but sharing requires words. However, this difficulty can be acknowledged and folks given permission to be silent together without awkwardness. After a period of silence, perhaps with some quiet instrumental music playing, you may decide all that is required is to sing an appropriate song or ask for God's blessing on the group.

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

If you want more seasonal items for Lent and Easter please revisit the website.

Acknowledgements

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If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email:

Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk