

Please note that this is a written version rather than a transcript.

Call to Worship

Let the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

(Psalm 19 .14)

That verse from Psalm 19, today's set psalm, is used by many preachers as a prayer of dedication just before they start their sermon. I thought it would be a good Call to Worship as we begin this week's reflection on how Christ, the Word of God is living and active among us. Let us pray.

Opening Prayer

Eternal God,
give us insight
to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Many years ago I visited Rome and The Vatican? The roads approaching The Vatican were thronged with other visitors. There are stalls and shops selling all manner of items of a religious nature; teeshirts with the Pope on, statues of saints from miniature to life sized, Pope on a Rope Soap (yes really) and pictures of various sorts. One slightly creepy one I once saw was one of those 3D images of Jesus' whose eyes followed you around the room!

The selling of religious items to pilgrims and tourists isn't new. In Mediaeval times pilgrims could buy badges, often in the shape of a scallop shell, the image of pilgrimage, and other keepsakes. Today even our churches and cathedrals have bookstalls within them. There's nothing wrong with all this. Books and other items can open up faith to people in new ways. But in today's Gospel reading a different kind of trading is going on, one that is excluding people from their worship of God.

John 2 .13-22 (NRSV)

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' 18 The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' 19 Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' 20 The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

What was going on in the Jerusalem Temple wasn't about pilgrimage souvenirs. It wasn't about selling things in a holy place either. Our bookshops and gift shops in Cathedrals and churches today are fine. Through what they sell they are opening up the faith. And purchasing from them is optional. What caused the anger of Jesus was something else.

The Judaism of the day had a sacrificial system based at the Temple, very different to Judaism today. To seek forgiveness a sacrifice at Passover was encouraged. The first thing someone had to do on entering the Temple was to change their money. Roman coins carried the image of Caesar, who claimed to be God - a blasphemous claim. They had to be changed for special Temple coins - and the exchange rate wasn't exactly favourable. Then those coins could be used to buy an animal for sacrifice. A pigeon was the cheapest, then doves, all the way through to sheep, goats and cattle. All these could be bought, again at inflated rates. But you couldn't bring your own. The animal for sacrifice had to be perfect and the Temple authorities would soon find a blemish or two on any brought in by pilgrims. It wasn't only sacrifice that had to be perfect. If you had a skin disease, were bleeding or had certain disabilities you weren't admitted either.

The practice was exclusive. The poor and sick were denied access to the customs and life of the Temple. That made Jesus angry.

It was on the Monday
that religion got in the way.

An outsider would have thought
that it was the pet shop's fire sale.
And the outsider, in some ways,
wouldn't have been far wrong.

Only, it wasn't household pets,
it was pigeons that were being purchased.
And it wasn't a fire sale;
it was a rip-off stall in a holy temple
bartering birds for sacrifice.
And the price was something only the rich could afford.
No discounts to students, pensioners,
disabled types or UB40 card holders.

Then he, the holiest man on earth,
went through the bizarre bazaar
like a bull in a china shop.
So the doves got liberated
and the pigeon sellers got angry.
And the police went crazy
and the poor people clapped like mad.
because he was making a sign
that God was for everybody,
not just for those who could afford him.
He turned the tables on Monday
The day that religion got in the way.

*from 'Stages on the Way', Wild Goose Worship Group
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This event occurs in all four Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke place it in the week leading up to the Jewish feast of Passover and the events of the Last Supper, after which Jesus is arrested, tortured and crucified. What happens in the Temple is the setting for the final conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities.

As we heard in the reading, John places this just before Passover too. But it's at least two years before the crucifixion. There are two more Passover's yet. This one Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem (2 .23), the following year he's in Galilee (6 .4), and then he's back in Jerusalem a year later (13 .1 ff) for the events that lead up to his death. There's another big difference between the Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke portray to Last Supper as being the Passover Feast, on the festival day itself. In John the timescale is different. Jesus dies on the cross on Passover itself. At the very moment that the sacrificial animals are slaughtered in the Temple, Jesus dies on the cross. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice - the Lamb of God - who takes away the sins of the world.

But we've skipped two years. Let's go back to that first of John's Passovers. The second half of our reading today hints at the conflict with the religious authorities who ask him for a sign to explain what he's doing. They didn't expect his answer:

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (*John 2 .19*)

Three days? It's taken a life time to build!, they reply.

Only later, after that third Passover in John's Gospel, do even the disciples realise what he means. His life, destroyed on the cross, after three days raised from the dead.

Jesus is referring to himself, his body, as the Temple.

The Jerusalem Temple, in the days of Jesus, was regarded as the dwelling place of God and for many the focus of faith. But it was just stones. Where is the focus of our faith? Is it focussed on bricks and stones of our churches? Systems and traditions, money changers and sacrifice sellers, got in the way of worship in Jesus' day. What obstructions and difficulties do our rules and traditions impose on those who seek to know God more?

God in Christ dwells, not in bricks and stones, prayer books and pews, but in each one of us. We are the Temples of our faith, let us worship the Christ we meet in each other.

Let us pray.

Closing Prayer

Just as we are

Lord, you know our hearts and minds
we don't need fancy words to speak to you
we don't need fine clothes to meet with you.

When we put conditions on how to worship,
when the instruction manual becomes our gospel,
when we put obstacles in the path of those who
would come to you,

forgive us.

Your anger in the temple shows us how much you care:
that everyone is welcome
that **you** are wherever **we** are.

You are love unlimited, always accessible.
We are grateful that we can turn to you
in the dead of night;
from the depths of our lowest moments,
and know that we will find love, understanding,
comfort and acceptance, just as we are.

Thank you

Amen

Ann Honey (from 'Conversations', URC Prayer Handbook 2021)

Thank you for being part of this reflection today. There's a written version of this reflection on the resource website.

Until next week: Take care, stay safe, and the best of all God is with us!

Call to Worship

Let us give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those he redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

(Psalm 107 .1-3)

Welcome to this week's reflection. Today we'll be focussing on the readings for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, rather than those for Mothering Sunday. Our readings focus on healing and, amid of the fear of death, new life. Although death comes to all, Jesus speaks in our Gospel of eternal life for those who believe in him.

Let us pray:

Opening Prayer

Mighty God,
most holy and most humble,
you have chosen to hear our cry
and share our poverty.
Come close to our world,
kindle our hearts
and melt our despair,
that with all your creatures
we may live in hope;
through Jesus Christ our King, Amen.

Taken from 'All Desires Known' by Janet Morley

Back in 2009, a couple of miles from where I was born and grew up, there was initially quite a mystery. In July, in the middle of a ploughed field, a number of portakabins had appeared. There were people in hi-vis digging holes and 'not to be argued with' security types on patrol day and night. Of course rumours were rife. Maybe a body had been found or they were looking for one. Why else would they be digging around in a field?

It wasn't until September that it became public knowledge. In a hi-profile news conference at Birmingham Art Gallery and Museum 'The Staffordshire Hoard' was revealed to the world. It was Anglo-Saxon treasure, discovered initially by a metal detectorist from Brownhills who'd then done the right thing and called archaeologists in. The hoard comprised over 5kg of gold and 1.5kg of silver. Some of the precious metal was inset with thousands of garnets, semi-precious stones that originally would have come from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, probably in Roman times. The Staffordshire Hoard itself was dated to the seventh Century. Most of the items appear to be military in nature, but there's a large gold Christian Cross, folded over presumably to make it easier to transport and bury and a strip of gold inscribed with a verse from Psalm 68.1 or Numbers 10.35. There are also items whose purpose is unknown. Such as three pairs of golden snakes. That's the link with today's readings where we hear of Moses making a snake, not of gold, but bronze. An event recalled by Jesus many centuries later.

More about the Golden Snakes: <https://historywm.com/films/5-the-gold-snakes>

Why was the hoard buried. We don't know. Presumably it was buried by someone passing through, maybe in a rush, who needed to travel lightly and swiftly. Presumably they intended to return and retrieve the hoard. But travelling, in those times particularly, was involved dangers and uncertainty. Clearly they never returned and the hoard lay in the ground for over 1,300 years.

Travelling in uncertain times is the context of our first reading today. Moses is leading the Hebrews out of Egypt but such is the hardship involved that some of them wish they'd stayed there. Now they had something new to contend with - snakes. But these ones aren't made of gold and they bite.

Numbers 21 .4-9 (NRSV)

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5 The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' 6 Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' 9 So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Moses made, not a serpent of gold like the ones in the Staffordshire Hoard, but one of bronze. This was mounted on a pole and lifted up and, we're told, everyone who looked at it was healed from their snake bites.

The symbol of a snake on a pole has become one of healing. You'll even find it at the centre of the badge of West Midlands Ambulance Service. Look out for it next time you see an ambulance.

In our Gospel reading Jesus makes reference to the Moses lifting the bronze snake. This time though it's not physical healing that Jesus talks about. Those bitten by snakes live, but one day will day, some like Moses even before they reach the promised land towards which he leads them.

In our Gospel reading Jesus is in conversation with a man called Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, who has approached Jesus under cover of darkness. They've just had an intriguing conversation about birth; physical and spiritual. Now the conversation turns to death. Jesus tells Nicodemus that, in relation to birth and death, he isn't speaking of earthly things but of heavenly, spiritual things. There is, says Jesus, a life eternal. All Nicodemus has to step out of the darkness he is hiding in, step into the light, and believe!

John 3 .14-21 (NRSV)

14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

At the beginning of that passage Jesus recalls Moses lifting up the bronze serpent on a pole in the wilderness. He speaks then of himself being lifted up. We can relate this to the events of the Cross - still two years away in John's Gospel but for us, midway through Lent, Good Friday is less than three weeks away.

Those who followed Moses just had to look at the bronze serpent in order to be physically healed. In order to gain eternal life we, like Nicodemus, are called simply to look to Jesus and believe in the love of God shown in his life, death and resurrection.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews said:

"Look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (*Hebrews 12 .2*)

In looking at Jesus, lifted on the Cross, we see a love that is the ultimate healing, that conquers even death itself.

Closing Prayer

If light is good and darkness is bad,
why do we have such
a longing to run to the dark
when we see the light of God
entering the world?

Could it be that we need to hide
and the darkness
is our only refuge?

Yet God persists in flooding the world with light
and focusing its intensity
through Jesus.

Is it any wonder
that a new flame
burns in our hearts
and fires our enthusiasm
when we emerge from the shadows,
as we finally recognize
how much God loves us?

Marjorie Dobson

Thank you for being part of this reflection today. There's a written version of this reflection on the resource website.

Until next week: Take care, stay safe, and the best of all God is with us!

Call to Worship

Jesus said,
'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat
falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain;
but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 12 .23, 24

Welcome to our reflection today, Passion Sunday. We enter Passiontide, the final two weeks of Lent, as the focus on The Cross intensifies.

Let us pray:

Opening Prayer

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the world:
lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion,
that we may know eternal peace
through the shedding of our Saviour's blood,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

An opera, or a musical, often starts with an overture. It's a piece of music that represents the different musical themes that occur in the work that follows. Today's Gospel reading is a little like an overture for Holy Week.

As we explored last week there are three Passover festivals in John's Gospel. John Chapter 2, where Jesus casts the money changers out of the Jerusalem Temple. John Chapter 6, where Jesus feeds 5000 people on the banks of the Sea of Galilee. Then the third Passover, the day on which John portrays Jesus as Lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of the world. Today's Gospel takes place five days before the third Passover. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem, fulfilling a prophecy that the Messiah would arrive riding a donkey. We'll return to that event next week, Palm Sunday.

Jesus reputation has preceded him and it's not only members of the Jewish faith who are jostling to get close to him. Some Greeks come seeking Jesus, who uses the opportunity to lay out what lies ahead for him that week. An overture for the Passion.

John 12 .20 - 33 (NRSV)

Video from Revd Phil Summers 'Perfect Little Gentleman' on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/HM6lvj-MZyo>

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks.
21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

23 Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.
24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.
26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

27 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' 30 Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. 31 Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

"We want to see Jesus". That's the request of the Greeks who presumably have recognised Philip as one of Jesus' followers. What do they mean by asking to "see Jesus". I think we can assume that they didn't just want to be able to look at him. It's a bit like when we say that we want to see the doctor. We don't just want to look at her, but to have a chat with her. The Greeks are requesting an audience with Jesus.

We never find out if their request was met because, in response to Philip and Andrew's news, Jesus sets out, like an overture sets out musically, the events that lie ahead. He speaks of falling and dying, but also of new life.

It will not be the end, because his followers will be called upon to continue work in the name of Jesus. He speaks in terms that anyone would understand, of a seed of grain, death, new life. When you have a moment look how Paul uses the same imagery in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus' followers must prepare to continue his work. They are the grains that are the abundant fruit from the one that dies and lives.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

If your name is preached
or in conversation
discussed,
a seed is sown
that may in due course
germinate,
grow
...and blossom
in the fertile ground
of a receptive heart.

For those who sow,
whether on well-tilled soil
or barren ground,
and for the lives
which now bear fruit
from that faithful service,
we give our grateful thanks.
Amen

Taken from The Act of Prayer by John Birch

In the Gospel reading Jesus goes on to speak of his “troubled soul”. It’s John’s version of a prayer that the other Gospels depict Jesus saying in Gethsemane after the Last Supper. In his humanity Jesus wrestles with the horrors he sees lying ahead. He is tempted to turn away. But instead with resolution and divine affirmation, he sets out on the task that lies ahead. To be lifted high on The Cross, and to die and rise again for the sake of the world.

What are we to make of all this as we enter Passiontide?

Look at it another way. Put yourselves in Philip’s position. What would you do if people came to you and said “We want to see Jesus”. They are not going to see Jesus the historical character. But where could they see Jesus at work? Where is the Risen Christ at work? Day by day

The end of lock down, whenever that turns out to be, needs to be a time to discern and nurture the new shoots that can emerge. Some things that we did before Covid19 need to stay buried in the ground. Whatever wasn’t working, or that we were simply going through the motions of because we always had, maybe needs to remain buried. But from death comes yield new life and new opportunities for God’s glory to be made known.

To our prayer:
Father, glorify your name.

God will reply:
I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.

Let us pray:

Closing Prayer

This is the truth (John 12:20–33)

This is the truth.

A grain of wheat
remains a single grain
unless it is dropped into the earth
and dies.

In the earth
its death
brings forth new life.

If you love your life
you'll lose it.

But if loving me
is more important to you
than loving your life in this world,
you will always be with me,
always.

Follow me
love me
serve me
love your neighbours.

Do this and God will honour you,
keep you
bless you
always.

Ruth Burgess ('Spring', Wild Goose Publications)

Thank you for being part of this reflection today. There's a written version of this reflection on the resource website.

Until next week: Take care, stay safe, and the best of all God is with us!

Call to Worship

Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!

Matthew 21. 9

Welcome to our reflection today, for Palm Sunday. We start with the Liturgy of the Palms, so if you have a Palm Cross to hand, you might like to have it with you for this part.

During Lent we have been preparing for the celebration of our Lord's death and resurrection. Today we begin this solemn celebration in union with the Christians throughout the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem in triumph to complete his work as our Saviour, to be rejected, to suffer and die, and to be raised from the dead. Let us go with him in faith and love, so that, united with him in his sufferings, we may share his risen life.

Let us pray:

Prayer of the Palms

We thank you, Lord, for these palm crosses,
a simple reminder of the love you showed for us.
As we have taken them into our homes,
may they remind us through this special week
that you gave your life for us upon the cross.
May they remind us of how deep and wide and high is the love you have for us.
As we take them into our homes,
so may we take your love into our hearts
and worship you as Saviour and King.
And like the people on that first Palm Sunday,
may we also cry, 'Hosanna,
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'
Amen

Simon Taylor (from 'Spring', Wild Goose Publications)

Mark 11 .1 - 11 (NRSV)

YouTube Video: by Phil Summers ('Perfect Little Gentleman')
<https://youtu.be/N2fZ7oqQShk>

¹ When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately." '

4 They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, 5 some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' 6 They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. 7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.

8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'

11 Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Prayer

True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
which is the path of glory. **Amen.**

The events that we celebrate on Palm Sunday occurred in Jerusalem at a very busy time. The Passover was five days away and crowds were already. But there's also some evidence that there was a tradition of celebrating the liberation of Israel some two centuries earlier - a celebration that involved palm branches and acclamations of expectation of the arrival of a great king, God's anointed one, a messiah. In an even older tradition, in the prophet Zechariah had said:

Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey" (*Zechariah 9 .9*)

The following words, by Avis Palmer, are set earlier on Palm Sunday morning.

An arrangement

I had known him a lifetime
or so it seemed
and we talked late into the night,
of friends and family,
occupation and freedom,
poetry and politics and God.
When the oil lamps flickered, we slept.
Usually an early riser,
this morning I woke to the sound
of other people's feet upon the road.

The menacing,
steady stamp of soldiers marching,
the unruly rattle of creaking carts,
the heavy plod of a loaded mule;
greetings and cries,
people heading for town,
market day in the city.
Saying goodbye,
a parting request confirmed my fears.
Ruler and Roman,
freedom fighter,
Pharisee and friend;
he had to show a different way.
Confrontation and affirmation!
'Of course, of course,' I nodded.
'Take the donkey, any day.'

Avis Palmer (in 'Spring', Wild Goose Publications)

Why would you gather in a crowd? What would draw you to take part in a gathering - at least in normal times? Protest, is a human right and, although we would hope that protests remain peaceful. Protests can be complex, particularly where different interests are represented. Sometimes the whole situation can be thrown into confusion.

There's a lovely passage in Acts of the Apostles where Paul's preaching has caused a riot. Although not everyone even knew why they were there:

Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together'
(Acts 19 .32)

It reminds me of a bishop who once said, "Wherever Paul went the passion of his preaching caused a riot. Wherever I preach they serve a cup of tea".

We do indeed need to ensure that our witness to Christ doesn't become so mild as to not cause offence to anyone. These words by Ian Cowie remind us of that danger.

Welcome to the city (but one wee word of advice)

Lord Jesus,
if only you would come to our city like you did to Jerusalem.
We've some great hymns to sing to welcome you!
Our guitars would be out to lead the singing;
we'd wave our scarves and dance.
You would get a red-carpet welcome -
five star treatment.
There would be a real religious revival.
It would be wonderful.
If only you would come here
to our country
to rescue us.

But in case you do,
just one wee word of advice -
stick to religion, but be careful.
Don't interfere with politics, or economics, or big business and all that,
and be careful not to make unpopular changes in the way we worship.

Save us from what might happen in the next life, yes,
but leave us to go our own way,
the way we are used to in this life.

If you get it wrong for our city,
who knows?
We, too, might have to liquidate you.

Ian Cowie (from 'Eggs and Ashes', Wild Goose Publications)

The crowd into which Jesus rode on a donkey were full of expectation. His ministry was well known. Regarded as notorious to some, immensely attractive to others. If the crowd expected a Messiah they doubtless expected a very different Messiah to each other. Some a religious revivalist, others a political leader, even a freedom fighter, some others even a King to retire the true monarchy of David line rather than that of the Roman puppet Herod.

Crowds can be fickle things and it appears that as the week progressed and Passover approached some turned on Jesus as he challenged everyone, from powerful to marginalised, rich and poor, Gentile and Jew.

How far are we prepared for Jesus to challenge us? How far will we walk with him this Holy Week?

Jesus needs his friends (a sending)

There is a tradition that sees the whole of Holy Week as one long service and so no benediction is pronounced.

The time is not yet,
but the darkness is gathering.

The time is not yet,
but the main players
are taking their positions.

Dither not,
but come back tomorrow
and wait with the Son of God,
for his friends are few
in this world of hatred.

The time is not yet,
but our time is now:
to be here
and trust a love
that will see this thing through.

Go,
but be back,
for Jesus needs his friends.

Roddy Hamilton, Spill the Beans (from 'Spring', Wild Goose Publications)

Thank you for being part of this reflection today.

There'll be a daily prayer each day this week on YouTube, including a Good Friday Service. There will also be Zoom services on Wednesday and Maundy Thursday. All details are on the resource website.

This Holy Week: Remember that the best of all God is that God is with us!