



This year's Good Friday meditation is inspired by the much-loved hymn, *There is a green hill far away*.

The service starts by listening to a sung version of the hymn. Next, five different people explore their thoughts about the Cross and passion. Each was asked to look at one verse of the hymn and explore what it says about Good Friday.

**Verse 1** *The dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all* (Lucie Reilly)

**Verse 2** *We believe it was for us he hung and suffered there* (Jane Hyde)

**Verse 3** *Saved by his precious blood* (Rosie Kingham)

**Verse 4** *Good enough to pay the price of sin* (Pete Haslam)

**Verse 5** *Dearly, dearly has he loved* (Paul Monk)

# The Gathering

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**All Amen**

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God,  
who in your tender love towards the human race  
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ  
to take upon him our flesh  
and to suffer death upon the cross:  
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,  
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

## Sentences from scripture

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.' *Matthew 16:24,25*

Once we were far off, but now in union with Christ Jesus we have been brought near through the shedding of Christ's blood, for he is our peace. *Ephesians 2:13,14*

**Hymn** [There is a green hill far away](#) (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

## Verse one

The dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all

**1 There is a green hill far away,  
without a city wall,  
where the dear Lord was crucified,  
who died to save us all.**

A cross on a green hill far away sounds more peaceful, tranquil and picturesque than what we hear the Gospel referring to 'The Place of the Skull' or Golgotha.

Jerusalem considered itself to be a holy city and its holiest place was, of course, the Temple. Being holy meant that certain things could not take place within its walls. Everything impure should be cast out, disowned, and kept outside its walls. That's why the Gospel emphasises Jesus being taken outside the city to be snuffed out. He was executed outside the city walls because that's where they put everything unclean: 'outside' is where you put rubbish dumps, outcasts, and graveyards.

The Jewish leaders ordered that Jesus be taken **outside the city wall** and (no doubt) thought they were cleansing their city of blasphemous impurity. **He died** so the sin would die with him. Ironically, Jesus took *their* impurity on himself when he was crucified. That was his way of satisfying God's love for us all.

Hebrews 13 draws parallels between Jesus and rituals from the Old Testament, where the carcasses of sacrificed animals were taken outside the city, especially on the day of atonement.

<sup>11-13</sup> The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

That Jesus died outside the city caused an alarming inversion. If Jesus died on an unclean hilltop and thereby made it clean, then the hilltop was cleaner than Jerusalem. The outside was better than the inside. Jesus was healing those of us outside the Temple.: placing the Cross in a dirty graveyard is a visual metaphor for the truth that anyone can have access to God: Christians and Muslims, Jews and atheists, those who don't know. It doesn't matter where we start from because in a sense we all start from the same place of uncleanness. All can be saved through the blood of Jesus. **The dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all**

**1 There is a green hill far away,  
without a city wall,  
where the dear Lord was crucified,  
who died to save us all.**

Let us pray:

Lord of all life and power,  
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son  
overcame the old order of sin and death  
to make all things new in him:  
grant that we, being dead to sin  
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,  
may reign with him in glory;  
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit  
be praise and honour, glory and might,  
now and in all eternity. *Collect for Easter Day*

## Verse two

We believe it was for us he hung and suffered there

**2 We may not know, we cannot tell,  
what pains he had to bear;  
but we believe it was for us  
he hung and suffered there.**

Contrary to what the hymn writer says, I think that we have a pretty good idea of the suffering and pain that Christ bore on the Cross. His contemporaries would certainly have witnessed the agony of crucifixion, after all it was intentionally a very public and humiliating way to die. The Roman authorities wanted those who were subject to their rule to see, hear and feel what would be their fate if any chose to break the law.

Nowadays we can search the internet to discover the physical effects of crucifixion. We *can* know what happens to the body, and how death occurs as the victim—already weakened by beatings and the exertion of having to carry the instrument of their torture to the place of execution—is slowly and painfully asphyxiated over many hours.

The Bible itself contains prophesy of the kind of pain and suffering that the Messiah will undergo. Isaiah contains passages used by Handel in his great oratorio *The Messiah*.

*He gave his back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off His hair:  
He hid not His face from shame and spitting. (Is 50:6)*

*He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the  
chastisement of our peace was upon Him. (Is 53:5)*

As well as the physical pain, however, Jesus also suffered emotional pain. The pain of seeing his little band of followers in all their human frailty, weakness and misunderstanding. Those closest to him who could not stay awake with him at Gethsemane ... the betrayal of Judas ... the denials of Peter ... the absence of all but one of his disciples at the foot of the Cross. Again Isaiah prophesies: *'He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief' (Is 53:3)*

But we, ourselves, also know at times, physical pain and the pain of sorrow and grief ... of disappointment and humiliation ... of despair and hopelessness. To live is to experience the ups and downs of life, so I think it is hugely important, therefore, to recognise that we *can* know at least something of our Lord's suffering otherwise we would not be able to see (in his real, fully human, life) experiences

like our own. His humanity is a vital part of our response to him as God. *'Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!' (Is 53:4)*

We do believe **it was for us he hung and suffered there**. And in him we are called to see a mirror of our own lives and how we can live as a reflection of his love and willing sacrifice.

**2 We may not know, we cannot tell,  
what pains he had to bear;  
but we believe it was for us  
he hung and suffered there.**

Let us pray:

God of Life,  
who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son  
to the death of the cross,  
and by his glorious resurrection  
have delivered us from the power of our enemy:  
grant us so to die daily to sin,  
that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his risen life;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Post communion Collect for Easter Day*

## Verse three

Saved by his precious blood

**3 He died that we might be forgiv'n,  
he died to make us good,  
that we might go at last to heav'n,  
saved by his precious blood.**

The idea of sacrifice for sin was well-established in Jewish law and history. In Egypt, the Jews had to sacrifice a lamb without blemish and smear its blood on their door so the Angel of Death would pass over. Aaron and other priests sacrificed bulls and goats as sin offerings in the temple. They also laid the sins of the people on a goat then set it free in the desert, so it took their sins away (hence the word 'scapegoat'). But it wasn't enough—humankind, even God's chosen people, had got so far away from God that the relationship was broken, and we couldn't reset it on our own. Heaven was out of reach. It wasn't enough because the sacrifices were all wrong—how could our sin be made clean by killing something else?

So God sacrificed Himself. In human form, without blemish, he let Himself be killed, so the sins of humankind could be cleansed, and the relationship between God and humankind could be restored. The blood He shed, that we drink at the altar, is a constant renewal of that relationship. And as He died, alone, he became the scapegoat, the innocent bearer of all our sins. As a result of His sacrifice, we can come to Him sinful and go away cleansed, refreshed, reset in His service—good again. And again, and again, as often as we need, because the perfect Lamb has brought us back to God and restored the path to Heaven.

**3 He died that we might be forgiv'n,  
he died to make us good,  
that we might go at last to heav'n,  
saved by his precious blood.**

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing you have made  
and forgive the sins of all who are penitent:  
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts,  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,  
may obtain of you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen. *The Collect for Ash Wednesday*

## Verse four

### Good enough to pay the price of sin

**4 There was no other good enough  
to pay the price of sin;  
he only could unlock the gate  
of heav'n, and let us in.**

Question: 'What is the definition of sin?'

The word 'sin' has been used both in the titles of a recent BBC drama and was used earlier in the title of an 1980's pop song by the *Pet Shop Boys*. But yet the answer: is described in the Bible as transgression of the law of God and rebellion against God. Sin had its beginning with Lucifer, probably the most beautiful and powerful of the angels. Not content with his position, he desired to be higher than God, and that was his downfall, and the beginning of sin. Renamed Satan, he brought sin to the human race in the Garden of Eden, where he tempted Adam and Eve with the same enticement, 'you shall be like God.' Genesis 3 describes Adam and Eve's rebellion against God and against His command. Since that time, sin has been passed down through all the generations of mankind and we, Adam's descendants, have inherited sin from him. Romans 5 tells us that through Adam sin entered the world, and so death was passed on to all men because 'the wages of sin is death.'

Through Adam, the inherent inclination to sin entered the human race, and human beings became sinners by nature. When Adam sinned, his inner nature was transformed by his sin of rebellion, bringing to him spiritual death and depravity which would be passed on to all who came after him. We are sinners not because we sin; rather, we sin because we are born sinners. This passed-on depravity is known as inherited sin. Just as we inherit physical characteristics from our parents, we inherit our sinful natures from Adam. King David lamented this condition of fallen human nature in Psalm 51:5, 'Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.'

Another type of sin is known as imputed sin. Used in both financial and legal settings, the Greek word translated 'imputed' means 'to take something that belongs to someone and credit it to another's account.' Before the Law of Moses was given, sin was not imputed to man, although men were still sinners because of inherited sin. After the Law was given, sins committed in violation of the Law were then accounted to them. All humans, from Adam to Moses, were subject to death, not because of their sinful acts against the Mosaic Law but because of their own inherited sinful nature. After Moses, humans were subject to death both because of inherited sin from Adam and imputed sin from violating the laws of God.

God used the principle of imputation to benefit mankind when He imputed the sin of believers to the account of Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for that sin—death—on the cross. Passing our sin to Jesus, God treated Him as if He were a sinner, though He was not, and had Him die for the sins of the entire world. It is important to understand that sin was passed to Him, but He did not inherit it from Adam. He bore the penalty for sin, but He never became a sinner. His pure and perfect nature was untouched by sin. He was treated as though He were guilty of all the sins ever committed by the human race, even though He committed none. In exchange, God forwarded the righteousness of Christ to believers and credited our accounts with His righteousness, just as He had credited our sins to Christ's account.

A third type of sin is personal sin, that which is committed every day by every human being. Because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam, we commit individual, personal sins, everything from seemingly innocent untruths to murder. Those who have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ must pay the penalty for these personal sins, as well as inherited and imputed sin. However, believers have been freed from the eternal penalty of sin—hell and spiritual death—but now we also have the power to resist sinning. Now we can choose whether or not to commit personal sins because we have the power to resist sin through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, sanctifying and convicting us of our sins when we do commit them. Once we confess our personal sins to God and ask forgiveness for them, we are restored to perfect fellowship and communion with Him. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness'.

We are all three times condemned due to inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin. The only just penalty for this sin is death, not just physical death but eternal death. Thankfully, inherited sin, imputed sin, and personal sin have all been crucified on the cross of Jesus, and now by faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour who has opened the gates of Heaven 'we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace'.

**4 There was no other good enough  
to pay the price of sin;  
he only could unlock the gate  
of heav'n, and let us in.**

Let us pray:

O God, whose beauty is beyond our imagining  
and whose power we cannot comprehend:  
show us your glory as far as we can grasp it,  
and shield us from knowing more than we can bear  
until we may look upon you without fear;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Post Communion Collect for Trinity 3*

## Verse five

Dearly, dearly has he loved

**5 O dearly, dearly has he loved,  
and we must love him too,  
and trust in his redeeming blood,  
and try his works to do.**

Jesus understood how the petty jealousies and the execution he would soon suffer were a symptom of the greatest problem besetting humankind—we do not love.

Having seen to the core of the problem he responded by giving the new and greatest commandment, ‘Love one another as I have loved you.’ That’s why Jesus himself loved. **O dearly, dearly has he loved.**

But let’s not put the cart before the horse. Jesus didn’t love simply to please God. He loved (and commanded love) because the divinity in his soul knew God *and God is love*. Because God is love, every time a human heart dares to love it allows entry to God. Our love is, then, a demonstration proof positive of God living at our core. Every glimmer of love is a symptom of God displaying Himself through us. Someone will see a glimpse of God each time we dare to love. That’s the first reason why we’re told to love. As the Carmelite Jessica Powers said,

The soul that walks where the wind of the Spirit blows  
turns like a wandering weather-vane toward love.

**Dearly, dearly has he loved ... and we must love him too.** Most of us who love seem to prefer loving in a half-hearted, luke-warm way. I speak for myself: my love is an insipid thing; it’s a limp parody of his. It’s like the light of a candle beside an arc-light, or a match beside an oxy-acetylene torch so we need our love to grow.

Every child enters school to learn things. He or she starts with sounds, then letters, then words, then sentences, and will continue till they master a thousand and one things and concepts. The simple sounds taught to a three-year old are the instilled means; thought and learning and betterment are the exalted ends. In just the same way, the love that is God is the means and full-scale knowledge of God is the intended end. We love in order to know God. And we actually get to know Him through learning how to love. Jesus tells us to love because he wants us to know God.

But loving God is still quite hard. How do we do it? One of the better spiritual writers of the sixteenth century said, ‘Go to the places where there is no love and love will be found there’. He meant that God lives in our souls and actually accompanies us, so everywhere we go has the potential to become a place of love—God’s love—*because* we’re there. Christianity becomes a way of allowing God to act

through us; and the response He propels us toward is always an expression of love.

Exploring God like this requires trust. Our discipleship grows when we truly **trust in his redeeming blood and try his works to do**. So will our love. Jessica Powers again: 'To live with the Spirit of God is to be a lover. It is becoming love.'

A loving God would not tell me to love Him merely as a way of me knowing Him, though it is a good start. An infinite God would want more than that. God wants everyone to love Him. He therefore wants maximal visibility. To that end, God wants all of us to love. That love needs to be prodigal, maxed out, showered, lavished, indiscriminate, spread painfully wide. In short, it needs to be entirely Christlike.

It's time to revisit our beginning and see it for what it is, maybe for the first time. We create a different pattern when we turn the kaleidoscope of faith. It turns out that we don't love because we don't have God in our souls. Jesus died to create for us a new way in which God can finally dwell in us. The dynamo of atonement creates forgiveness. God lives in us in response to that forgiveness. God loves through us in response to that living in us. Jesus new commandment to love is therefore, in reality, telling us to be filled with God: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that you be as filled with God as I am'.

**5 O dearly, dearly has he loved,  
and we must love him too,  
and trust in his redeeming blood,  
and try his works to do.**

Let us pray:

Christ, who bitter agony  
was watched from afar by women:  
enable us to follow the example of their persistent love;  
that, being steadfast in the face of horror,  
we may know the place of resurrection,  
in your name.

Amen

*Collect for Good Friday, All Desires Known, Janet Morley*

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the coming of Christ's Kingdom using the words our saviour taught us:

**All Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ  
delivered and saved the world:  
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**All Amen.**

The Lord be with you

**All And with you.**

May God bless us,  
that in us may be found love and humility,  
obedience and thanksgiving,  
discipline, gentleness and peace.

**All Amen**