

## Creative prayer ideas

### Journeying through Lent with symbols and prayer

*Geoff Hudd, a friend of the Sanctuary, approached us in the Autumn of 2011 to see if we could answer a question. Did we know of any liturgy that anyone had written to perform a similar purpose to the advent ring, but for Lent? He was hoping to find something short, and linked to visual symbols, which could be used at the start of each Lenten service... we agreed to work on something as we didn't know of anything in existence.*

*But meanwhile, Geoff managed to find an old sheet with some ideas for symbols, attributed to Revd. F. Barrie Heafford BA, and then expanded these with song suggestions and prayers himself. We liked the result so much that we asked if we could build on what Revd. Heafford and Geoff had created so far by introducing a couple more dates and some related intercessions for each slot. What follows is exactly that – true team work!*

#### Instructions

- Each service from Ash Wednesday until Easter **place a large wooden cross at the front of the church**. To it **at the beginning of worship** take **symbols** of Christ's coming, Passion, death, and Resurrection which act as both visual installations, and prompts for liturgy if desired. The **items needed for each service** are as follows:
  - Ash Wednesday – **a trumpet**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent – **a bag containing 10 pieces of silver**
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent – **a basin and towel**
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent – **a cup**
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – **a whip**
  - 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent – **a crown of thorns or similar**
  - Palm Sunday – **two branches (e.g. Lleylandi)**
  - Maundy Thursday – **a large black cloth to drape over the cross**
  - Good Friday – **three nails**
  - Easter Sunday – **Flowers with which the congregation can decorate the cross, and the other symbols previously used, to lay at its foot.**
- When each symbol is placed on or by the cross, **a short prayer is available** (usually to be said by the service leader), and then there are **song suggestions for a congregational response**.
- **Intercessions** linked to the relevant symbol, and images inspired by them that can be projected during prayer, are also provided.

*Feel free to use as few, or as many, of the dates listed, and also some, or all, of the elements provided in your service, or to adapt the symbols, prayers, and intercessions into prayer stations to use at a single event during Holy Week.*

*The images are available in both PowerPoint and pdf format, at*

[www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-seasonal.html](http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-seasonal.html)

*A related activity for individuals and families to do at home, using some of the same symbols in a creative way, is also available at [www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-seasonal.html](http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/whereworldandworshipmeet-seasonal.html)*

## Ash Wednesday

**Reading** Mark 1:1-13

**A trumpet** is sounded and after the fanfare, is placed at the foot of the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, as we remember that you left heaven's glory to find us, and bring us back to God, we pray that you would prepare our hearts once more to welcome you as king, and use us to help make straight your path for others too.

**Song sugg.** (seated) Charlie Hall, *Make straight*, available at [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk), chorus

Make straight the path of the Lord,  
Every crack shall fill up, every mountain brought low,  
Every crooked thing straight, every rough road smooth  
Make straight the path of the Lord,  
And all flesh shall see  
The salvation of God.

**Intercessions** *Display image 1 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for:***

- the church, that it would fulfil more fully its prophetic role in society
- all those who have received a tarnished or crooked message instead of the truth of Christ's love and call
- Us, that we might grasp the depth of God's love for us, and others, that he would send his Son to come and find us
- Us, that we might be challenged this Lent to follow Christ in leaving our places of safety or plenty to go and love those who are fearful or in need.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, would you once again raise up your people to prepare a way for you to come as we repent, return and lay down our lives to make a way for others to come to you. Amen.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

**Reading** Matthew 26: 14-16 & 27: 3-5

**The Bag** containing 30 silver coins is brought forward and thrown at the foot of the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, as we remember your betrayal by Judas we are reminded that we betray you, too. Forgive us we pray, and confirm in us the knowledge that you will never betray us.

**Song sugg.** (seated) Isaac Watts, *When I survey the wondrous Cross*, H&P 180 v 5

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small  
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

**Intercessions** *Display image 2 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for**:*

- all who have been betrayed by friends
- all who have been falsely accused by friends, family, the media or law courts
- breakthrough for some of the world's poorest communities, who have been betrayed by rich nations in climate, debt and trade legislation time and time again.
- ourselves, that we would value others, and their needs, highly, and guard our actions and our words to ensure that they protect, rather than tear down.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you understand what it is like to be isolated, condemned, and falsely accused, and we don't know how we will ever understand enough that you bore all this willingly, for us. Teach us, like you, to be a defender of those who are marginalised, and a befriender, and comforter to all still waiting for their vindication.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent

**Reading** John 13: 2-5 & 12, 14, 17

**Towel & basin** are brought forward and placed at the foot of the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, suffering servant to everyone, help us to follow your example. Give us the strength to seek out, and to perform acts of service for, those around us.

**Song sugg.** (seated) Richard Gillard, *Brother Sister let me serve you*, S of F 54 (abridged)

Brother, sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;  
I will share your joy and sorrow 'til we've seen this journey through.

**Intercessions** *Display image 3 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for**:*

- all those in our society, and particularly Christians, who are in serving or caring roles such as teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers and community magistrates
- all those who volunteer and work tirelessly to serve others whether in their family, congregation, church, community or by fundraising and campaigning for those in some of the world's poorest communities
- Ourselves to grow as servants, loving well and much through our words and deeds.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, remind us that the king who leads us does so with humility as well as majesty, and cause us to build your kingdom by your Spirit, rather than by might or power – that we might be channels for more love, peace, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in our world.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

**Reading** Mark 14: 32-36

**The Cup** is brought forward and placed at the foot of the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, this cup reminds us of your humanity. We thank you that whatever anguish we experience yours was greater, and that you will see us through.

**Song sugg.** (seated) Graham Kendrick, *The Servant King*, STF 272 v 2 + chorus

There in the garden of tears my heavy load he chose to bear;  
His heart with sorrow was torn, 'Yet not my will but yours', he said.  
This is our God, the servant king, he calls us now to follow him,  
To bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the servant king.

**Intercessions** *Display image 4 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for:***

- All who are mourning, or recently bereaved, and all who are anxious, afraid or stressed
- The 1.4 billion people in our world today who live below the poverty line, many of whom, are put and kept in this position through unjust global systems – and particularly for all who do not have enough food or water today
- A greater thankfulness to God for all the gifts he gives us, and a hunger to share these resources with others as he designed
- *Close with the following prayer:*  
Lord Jesus, you shared our humanity – our joys, but also our struggles. Help us to realise that this same humanity – made in your image, and further sanctified by your incarnation – is suffering, that we might again act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before you, our servant king.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

**Reading** Mark 15: 9-13 & 15

**The Whip** is brought forward and placed at the foot of the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, you were flogged; many innocent people suffer injustice. We pray especially for those being persecuted, even killed, for their faith; be with them, grant them your strength, and peace at the last.

**Song sugg.** (seated) Stuart Townend, *How deep the Father's love for us*, S of F 780 v 1

How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure,  
That he should give his only Son to make a wretch his treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss – the Father turns his face away,  
As wounds which mar the Chosen One bring many souls to glory.

**Intercessions** *Display image 5 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for**:*

- the persecuted church, particularly in Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Iraq and China
- them to be strengthened to stand for Christ, and to know his presence with them
- organisations and individuals, such as the Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation and Canon Andrew White (The Vicar of Baghdad) seeking to bring peace and understanding between different faiths
- Ourselves to be raised up to speak up for those who are persecuted.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, enlarge our view of your body so that we, as you, suffer each time another member suffers, and cause us to be watchful and active on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are denied a voice.

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

**Reading** Matthew 27: 27-31

**The Crown** of thorns is brought forward and hung on the cross, towards its top.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, we hate being humiliated, yet it is as nothing compared with yours on that first Good Friday. Enable all your people to withstand humiliation, but especially if it is for your sake, we pray.

**Song sugg.** (seated) Isaac Watts, *When I survey the wondrous cross*, H&P 180 v 3

See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e're such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Or

(seated) Matt Redman, *Once again*, S of F or available at [www.kingsway.co.uk](http://www.kingsway.co.uk), v1 and chorus

Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice, you became nothing, poured out to death  
Many times, I've wondered on your sacrifice, and I'm in that place once again,  
Yes I'm in that place once again.

And once again I think upon the cross where you died  
I'm humbled by your mercy and I'm broken inside  
Once again I thank you, once again I pour out my life.

**Intercessions** *Display image 6 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for**:*

- God's presence to be close to all, seen or hidden, who are making a courageous stand for him and are undergoing humiliation before others as a result
- teenagers seeking to stand for Christ at school, and young adults and university
- all whose careers or spheres of influence involve difficult issues against which they may be called to speak out against
- ourselves to go beyond our comfort zones and be willing to risk mockery, opposition and even lies as we stand for Christ, and follow him in loving others sacrificially and counter-culturally

- ourselves to keep forgiving and loving hearts to individuals and groups, as Christ did, knowing that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and principalities of this world

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, empower all your people to prize the glory of your name above our own reputations, statuses and success, and be close to us always, as you promised, in both the joy and humiliation that follow.

## Palm Sunday

**Reading** (all stand) Matthew 21: 6-11

**2 Branches** (e.g. Leylandi) are brought forward being waved, and placed at the foot of the cross.

**Prayer** (standing) Lord Jesus, the crowds shouted their hosannas; we, too, praise you because you are our king. Help us to persuade others to also acknowledge you as king.

**Song sugg.** (standing) Graham Kendrick, *Make Way, Make Way*, S of F 264 v 1 + chorus

Make way, make way, for Christ the king in splendour arrives;

Fling wide the gates and welcome him into your lives.

Make way.....for the king of kings.....

Make way.....and let his kingdom in.

Or

(standing) Martin Smith, *Did you feel the mountains tremble*, chorus

Open up the doors and let the music play

Let the earth resound with singing

Songs that bring your hope

Songs that bring your joy

Dancers who dance upon injustice.

**Intercessions** ***Display image 7*** and lead the congregation through each theme, inviting different individuals to ***pray aloud for:***

- ourselves to have courage and compassion to bear witness to who Jesus is to our friends, family and society, through acts of service, and through sharing our faith more widely
- your church to be bold and loving in its stand for Christ in your community in all its various activities
- the church as a whole in the UK and Ireland, and around the world, to stand together and to have an increased passion for mission beyond their walls
- our nation to recognise, and return to, Christ's authority and values.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, break the silence of your people and cause them to take to the streets again, proclaiming and demonstrating the joyful good news that you are king, and that you have made a way for us to know you, and love each other.

## Maundy Thursday

**Reading** John 16:19-28 and 17:20b-26

**A black cloth** is draped over part of the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, we would again watch and wait with you tonight, and share in the things that break your heart, as you continue to intercede to the Father for unity in your church.

**Song sugg.** (kneeling) Liz Baddaley, *We are in Christ*, available at [www.whereworldandworshipmeet.org](http://www.whereworldandworshipmeet.org), v2 & chorus

Broken we come, but the body will stand through the Spirit's healing power  
We'll lay down our pain, we'll forgive and restore, we will choose to love instead.

For we are in Christ, and Christ is in us  
Yes we are all in Christ, and Christ is in all of us  
It's all for him, so what else really matters?

**Intercessions** *Display image 8 and either invite someone to prepare and lead intercessions, or organise the congregation into small groups to **pray together, for:***

- ourselves, that any critical or judgemental attitude be surrendered to the cross, and that we might learn in action what it means to prefer one another
- your church, that any divisions – known or hidden – would be covered and restored by Christ, and that people's different gifts, personalities and viewpoints would be embraced and utilised for God's glory
- each church in your area, by name if possible, for God's blessing and a heart-felt desire to understand each other and work together for Christ.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, start with us and do not finish until your church is one as you so desire it to be, and until your people more fully make a way for people to see you, and themselves to love like you, rather than getting in the way with their divisions and differences.

## Good Friday

**Reading** Mark 15: 22-26 & 29

**3 Nails** are brought forward and [placed at the foot of/hammered into] the cross.

**Prayer** Lord Jesus, in our imagination we kneel at the foot of your cross. No words can express our feelings, and so we keep silence, in remembrance. (1 minute).

**Song sugg.** (seated) Cecil Fances Alexander, *There is a green hill faraway*, H&P 178 v 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.

Or

(seated) Vicky Beeching, *The wonder of the cross* available at [www.kingsway.co.uk](http://www.kingsway.co.uk), v1 and chorus

O precious sight, my Saviour stands, dying for me with outstretched hands  
 O precious sight, I love to gaze, remembering salvation's day, remembering salvation's day.  
 Though my eyes linger on this scene, may passing time and years not steal  
 The power with which it impacts me, the freshness of its mystery, the freshness of its mystery.

May I never lose the wonder, the wonder of the cross  
 May I see it like the first time, standing as a sinner lost  
 Undone by mercy and left speechless, watching wide-eyed at the cost  
 May I never lose the wonder, the wonder of the cross.

**Intercessions** *Display image 9 and invite people to kneel or sit in silence as they pray for:*

- themselves and others as they feel led.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Lord Jesus, again we look in wonder at your cross and the life you gave for us – we cannot grasp that we could be loved so much. Cause us to be a people who remember that this is how much we are loved, and that this same love was poured out for every person. And empower us to love, prize and treasure others as those you laid down your life for.

## Easter Sunday

**Reading** John 20: 1, 11&12, 14-16

**Posies** are brought forward (with music accompaniment) to decorate the cross.

**Prayer** (all stand) Lord Jesus, our long, dark walk through Lent is finished. This new day is bathed in your resurrection light! Thanks be to God. Amen.

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is risen! **All: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**Song sugg.** (standing) Thomas Kelly & Jeremiah Clark, *The head that once was crowned with thorns*, H&P 209 v 2

The highest place that heaven affords is his, is his by right;  
 The King of kings and Lord of lords, and heaven's eternal light !

Or

(standing) Tim Hughes, *Oh happy day* available at [www.kingsway.co.uk](http://www.kingsway.co.uk), v1 and chorus

The greatest day in history, death is beaten you have rescued me, shout it out Jesus is alive  
 The empty cross, the empty grave, life eternal, you have made a way, celebrate Jesus is alive  
 He's alive!

And oh happy day, happy day, you washed my sin away  
 Oh happy day, happy day, I'll never be the same.



**Intercessions** *Display image 10 and face each of the four compass points in turn, asking individuals to focus on the things in your community, nation, and the world, that are in that direction, and inviting people to pray for*

- the joy of Jesus' resurrection life to be made known to all
- and for breakthrough and transformation in situations and systems which seem beyond hope.

*Close with the following prayer:*

Risen Lord Jesus, may we live in the knowledge and reality of Easter as we spend our lives on loving you – for yours is the victory, the sovereignty, the power and the glory forever and ever, and there is nothing, and no-one, that you cannot reach and redeem.