

## Written prayers

### Daily Meditations and Response prayers for Holy Week

*In the lead up to Easter 2011, our good friend Nigel Varndell, who works as the Director of Church Partnerships at The Children's Society, wrote a series of meditations as part of an act of worship to pray for the children and young people of our nation during Holy Week. And then, in Lent 2012, he sent these beautiful meditations to us in case the Sanctuary could make them more widely available alongside some response prayers.*

*We have long been fans of Nigel's writing – for its challenging honesty and humility towards others as well as God, and on reading these meditations we felt that others would be inspired by their self-questioning and heart-felt commitment to follow Jesus to where he is always to be found; among the lost, poor and broken – and with the child.*

*Nigel wrote us a fourth meditation for Easter Sunday, and we were delighted to answer each day's reflection with a response prayer, and publish each pair daily from Maundy Thursday to Easter Sunday 2012 on the Sanctuary's blog. Here they are provided as a complete set.*

#### Maundy Thursday – greatness redefined

##### Meditation

Why did you wash their feet?

I don't understand, it makes no sense.

Why did you do something so demeaning,  
so distasteful,

when you did not have to?

Why humble yourself and wash the feet of your own disciples?

You are the Messiah,

it makes no sense for you, of all people,

to do something that should be done by the least of all people,  
not by the greatest.

It is not what we want our Messiahs to do.

Unless...

unless we have got it wrong and that,  
somehow this is a measure of what Messiah means?

Not that it is defined in greatness

but that somehow, in your world the first will be last,  
and the greatest, least and servant of all?.

But if we are to follow you,

does it mean that we must follow your example too?

Are you suggesting that we too should make ourselves humble?

That we must wash the feet of the people whom we would rather ignore,

or scapegoat,

or deride?

Must we too become the servants of the least among us?  
the refugee,  
the disabled,  
the homeless,  
the addicted,  
the anti-social,  
the child?

Was that what all of this was about?  
To try and put us in our rightful place,  
not at the centre of our own world,  
but at the centre of yours,  
where we are no longer the most important person?  
Is that it?  
Were you trying to teach us this simple truth,  
that other people,  
all other people,  
should matter too?

Is that why you washed their feet?

### **A prayer of response**

Messiah I come,  
Brought to my knees by astonishing grace.  
In the presence of such humility  
From one so great  
What can I do but kneel and praise?

Messiah I come,  
Challenged to bow to the King who kneels.  
I want to pour out mercy and bring tender healing,  
But I am proud, judgemental, and self-absorbed  
And you are the only one who can lead me to first-becoming-last greatness.

I would wash and serve, wash and love,  
Like you do.  
But first Lord Jesus,  
Wash my feet, cleanse my heart  
Till I am – like you –  
Humble and ready on my knees.

### **Good Friday – shifting blame**

#### **Meditation**

It was the Romans who killed you,  
who nailed you to a cross  
to punish you for thinking differently.  
Murdered for daring to challenge the might of Imperial Rome.

Murdered for daring to suggest that the world should be different,  
that it could be rearranged for once,  
not to make the powerful comfortable,  
but deeply uncomfortable.

Or,  
maybe it was the religious leaders who wanted you dead?  
For challenging their deeply and sincerely held religious truths,  
for shaking things up and rocking the boat,  
for daring to suggest that just because  
we have always done it like this,  
we always must?  
We cannot challenge the guardians of tradition,  
where would we be without it?  
Better surely to let one man die....

No!  
It was the crowd!  
It was their fault  
It must have been the crowd who gathered and cried "Crucify!"  
who are the ones who killed you.  
What they need, you see, is a scapegoat,  
someone for the Romans to blame,  
so that they won't come looking for anyone else.

Or  
maybe it was me?

Maybe you should pity me – me,  
for on this Good Friday,  
I will stand with the Romans,  
because I, who have everything,  
don't really want anything to change.  
I will stand with the religious leaders,  
and make sure that my traditions are honoured,  
no matter who they exclude.  
I will stand with the crowd,  
who already know who is to blame  
for all that goes wrong.

And I will cry "Crucify"

### **A prayer of response**

Lord Jesus, is it possible that I, who call you friend –  
Master, Saviour, King –  
Still stand with the crowd, the betraying disciples,  
the violent soldiers, and the religious leaders?

I confess it is possible. I confess it is true.  
Because I say I have taken up my cross

But I put it down when it's not convenient.  
And I claim I stand up for the least  
But I sit down when it's uncomfortable.

Precious Lord, how did you bear it?  
The pain of the nails.  
The tearing separation of One-in-Three – even for a moment.  
And the betrayal of friends  
Who would rather stand with the crowd  
Than with you.  
So you hung there with arms outstretched to all the world  
Even as each of us turned away from perfect love.

And how do you bear it now?  
When I make your kingdom into one of comfort  
And shift the blame for today's darkness  
To anywhere – anyone – but me.

Lord Jesus, is it possible that I, who have betrayed you,  
Served myself and pursued my own agendas  
Am still welcomed by those arms stretched out wide?  
Treasured by the one who says "Come weak and heavy laden – come to me"?

Only here will I find the way to carry your easy burden  
That costs the world for the sake of love.  
Help me Lord Jesus to come – to leave the crowd  
And replace our deafening chant with a silent prayer of surrender:  
That speaks "Anything for you – my Master and my friend."

## **Holy Saturday – hope deferred?**

### **Meditation**

What was it like for the first disciples?  
What was it like to live on that first Holy Saturday  
when all hope is gone,  
when all that we love is lost,  
when God is dead?

We know the end of the story.  
We know of resurrection,  
so we do not wish to dwell in this dark place,  
we want to rush on to Easter Sunday,  
when life returns.

It is too hard to live on Holy Saturday,  
to spend our time in the dark and conflicted places  
of Golgotha and Gethsemane,  
the place where despair has all the best answers  
to our questions.

But what of the people who have no choice?  
What of the people who always live on Holy Saturday.  
The child beaten and abused at home  
whose only hope is to run away?  
The child living with alcohol misusing parents,  
Trapped, too young, into adult responsibilities.  
The disabled child,  
never given the chance to join in.  
The refugee child,  
always a problem,  
never simply a person.

What must it be like to live on Holy Saturday,  
when we do not know how the story ends?

When hope is absent  
who will be there to look after them?  
Who will be there for the children  
on their Holy Saturday?

### **A prayer of response**

Lord Jesus help me to wait here  
In the in-between  
Of Holy Saturday.  
For I cannot help but rejoice – you have come!  
And yet still I grieve – for the world still waits -  
You have yet to come.

Lord Jesus help me to pray here  
In the in-between  
Of Holy Saturday.  
For you are risen and I can't, won't, don't want to forget it -  
And yet I mourn with those who still wait  
For your kingdom's fullness of peace, hope and justice.

Lord Jesus help me to live here  
In the in-between  
Of Holy Saturday.  
For your kingdom has come and is yet to come.  
And I, in some small way,  
Hope to build – with you – all things new.

### **Easter Sunday - joy beyond hope**

Sometimes it doesn't work out as you expect.  
Sometimes even though you know  
the game is up,  
even though you know  
the inevitable outcome,

even sometimes when you have given up yourself...  
...it doesn't work out as you expect.

There are those days when the child,  
who has been running away for years,  
every week, without fail,  
...doesn't.

The day when the disabled child,  
is finally accepted for who they are.  
When the traveller,  
for so long the outsider,  
suddenly becomes a friend.

There are those days when,  
in the face of despair,  
for some unexpected and  
incomprehensible reason,  
our long dead hopes  
are brought back to life.

There are those days  
we suddenly realise  
the stone has been moved...  
... and the tomb is empty.

### **A prayer of response**

King Jesus,  
Risen, ruling Lord,  
All glory, honour, and praise be yours.  
You make all things new,  
Constantly creating beauty from ashes,  
And pouring out gladness, all gladness – grace.

Why am I surprised each time you rise  
With healing in your wings?  
Answered prayers; transformed lives;  
Reformed systems; children embraced.  
All that is good comes from you.  
Everything that is life comes from you.

And I praise you, praise you, praise you  
That Calvary's victory is proved again a thousand times each day  
In glimpses, miracles and reconciliations,  
Even as we wait for an end to the good fight  
And strive to have faith for long dead hopes  
To burst to life as you promised.

And I ask you, plead with you, long for you  
To come still more Risen Lord.

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So your kingdom come, your will be done  
On earth as in heaven Lord.  
No more pain, no more poverty,  
No more child alone.

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