

A Reflection for Good Friday

Matthew 26: 57-75 Contemporary English Version (CEV)ⁱ

Jesus Is Questioned by the Council

⁵⁷ After Jesus had been arrested, he was led off to the house of Caiaphas the high priest. The nation's leaders and the teachers of the Law of Moses were meeting there. ⁵⁸ But Peter followed along at a distance and came to the courtyard of the high priest's palace. He went in and sat down with the guards to see what was going to happen.

⁵⁹ The chief priests and the whole council wanted to put Jesus to death. So they tried to find some people who would tell lies about him in court. ⁶⁰ But they could not find any, even though many did come and tell lies. At last, two men came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man claimed that he would tear down God's temple and build it again in three days."

⁶² The high priest stood up and asked Jesus, "Why don't you say something in your own defence? Don't you hear the charges they are making against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus did not answer. So the high priest said, "With the living God looking on, you must tell the truth. Tell us, are you the Messiah, the Son of God?"

⁶⁴ "That is what you say!" Jesus answered. "But I tell all of you, 'Soon you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right side of God All-Powerful and coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

⁶⁵ The high priest then tore his robe and said, "This man claims to be God! We don't need any more witnesses! You have heard what he said. ⁶⁶ What do you think?"

They answered, "He is guilty and deserves to die!" ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and hit him with their fists. Others slapped him ⁶⁸ and said, "You think you are the Messiah! So tell us who hit you!"

Peter Says He Doesn't Know Jesus

⁶⁹ While Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, a servant girl came up to him and said, "You were with Jesus from Galilee."

⁷⁰ But in front of everyone Peter said, "That isn't so! I don't know what you are talking about!"

⁷¹ When Peter had gone out to the gate, another servant girl saw him and said to some people there, "This man was with Jesus from Nazareth."

⁷² Again Peter denied it, and this time he swore, "I don't even know that man!"

⁷³A little while later some people standing there walked over to Peter and said, "We know that you are one of them. We can tell it because you talk like someone from Galilee."

⁷⁴Peter began to curse and swear, "I don't know that man!"

Right then a cock crowed, ⁷⁵and Peter remembered that Jesus had said, "Before a cock crows, you will say three times that you don't know me." Then Peter went out and cried hard.

Before the cock crew twice

Hallgrim Pjetursson (1614-74), tr. C V Pilcher ⁱⁱ



Before the cock crew twice – dread hour of trial –
the Apostle uttered thrice his dark denial.

And then the Saviour turned, on Peter gazing –
a look divine, that yearned with love amazing.

Swiftly to Peter's face the sham came leaping;
he had denied such grace, and went forth weeping.

Lord Jesus, look on me, your kind face turning;
my soul with agony of sin is burning.

The way is long, I find my weak steps falling;
O turn, to my dark mind your grace recalling.

Oft, oft with weeping eyes I gaze to heaven;
then, at your look, arise restored, forgiven.

Matthew 27: 1-10 CEV

Jesus Is Taken to Pilate

27 Early the next morning all the chief priests and the nation's leaders met and decided that Jesus should be put to death. ²They tied him up and led him away to Pilate the governor.

The Death of Judas

³Judas had betrayed Jesus, but when he learned that Jesus had been sentenced to death, he was sorry for what he had done. He returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and leaders ⁴and said, "I have sinned by betraying a man who has never done anything wrong."

"So what? That's your problem," they replied. ⁵Judas threw the money into the temple and then went out and hanged himself.

⁶The chief priests picked up the money and said, "This money was paid to have a man killed. We can't put it in the temple treasury." ⁷Then they had a meeting and decided to buy a field that belonged to someone who made clay pots. They wanted to use it as a graveyard for foreigners. ⁸That's why people still call that place "Field of Blood." ⁹So the words of the prophet Jeremiah came true,

“They took the thirty silver coins,
the price of a person among the people of Israel.
¹⁰They paid it for a potter’s field, as the Lord had commanded me.”

Thirty Pieces of Silver ⁱⁱⁱ

Cornelia Parker



Thirty Pieces of Silver comprises over a thousand flattened silver objects, including plates, spoons, candlesticks, trophies, cigarette cases, teapots and trombones. All the objects were ceremoniously crushed by a steamroller at Cornelia Parker’s request. She then arranged the transformed silver artefacts into thirty disc-shaped groups, which are suspended about a foot from the floor by hundreds of fine wires. Each ‘disc’ is approximately ninety centimetres in diameter and they are always hung in orderly rows, although their overall configuration is adapted each time to the space in which the work is displayed. The title refers to the biblical story of how the apostle Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus in return for thirty pieces of silver. When the work was exhibited in the Hayward Gallery’s British Art Show of 1990, Parker commented on the work in the exhibition catalogue:

“Silver is commemorative, the objects are landmarks in people’s lives. I wanted to change their meaning, their visibility, their worth, that is why I flattened them, consigning them all to the same fate. As a child I used to crush coins on a railway track – you couldn’t spend the money afterwards but you kept the metal slivers for their own sake, as an imaginative currency and as physical proof of the destructive powers of the world. I find the pieces of silver have much more potential when their meaning as everyday objects has been eroded. ‘Thirty Pieces of Silver’ is about materiality and then about anti-matter. In the gallery the ruined objects are ghostly levitating just above the floor, waiting to be reassessed in the light of their transformation. The title, because of its biblical references, alludes to money, to betrayal, to death and resurrection: more simply it is a literal description of the piece.”

Matthew 27: 11-26 CEV

Pilate Questions Jesus

¹¹Jesus was brought before Pilate the governor, who asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Those are your words!” Jesus answered. ¹²And when the chief priests and leaders brought their charges against him, he did not say a thing.

¹³ Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear what crimes they say you have done?" ¹⁴ But Jesus did not say anything, and the governor was greatly amazed.

The Death Sentence

¹⁵ During Passover the governor always freed a prisoner chosen by the people. ¹⁶ At that time a well-known terrorist named Jesus Barabbas was in jail. ¹⁷ So when the crowd came together, Pilate asked them, "Which prisoner do you want me to set free? Do you want Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ¹⁸ Pilate knew that the leaders had brought Jesus to him because they were jealous.

¹⁹ While Pilate was judging the case, his wife sent him a message. It said, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man. I have had nightmares because of him."

²⁰ But the chief priests and the leaders convinced the crowds to ask for Barabbas to be set free and for Jesus to be killed. ²¹ Pilate asked the crowd again, "Which of these two men do you want me to set free?"

"Barabbas!" they replied.

²² Pilate asked them, "What am I to do with Jesus, who is called the Messiah?"

They all yelled, "Nail him to a cross!"

²³ Pilate answered, "But what crime has he done?"

"Nail him to a cross!" they yelled even louder.

²⁴ Pilate saw that there was nothing he could do and that the people were starting to riot. So he took some water and washed his hands^[c] in front of them and said, "I won't have anything to do with killing this man. You are the ones doing it!"

²⁵ Everyone answered, "We and our own families will take the blame for his death!"

²⁶ Pilate set Barabbas free. Then he ordered his soldiers to beat Jesus with a whip and nail him to a cross.

Alone

Peter Abelard (1079-1142), tr. F Bland Tucker ^{iv}

Alone you once went forth, O Lord, in sacrifice to die;
does not your sorrow touch the hearts of people passing by?

Our sins, not yours, you bore then, Lord:
make us your sorrow feel,
till through our pity and our shame Love answers love's appeal.

Matthew 27: 27-30 CEV

Soldiers Make Fun of Jesus

²⁷The governor's soldiers led Jesus into the fortress and brought together the rest of the troops. ²⁸They stripped off Jesus' clothes and put a scarlet robe on him. ²⁹They made a crown out of thorn branches and placed it on his head, and they put a stick in his right hand. The soldiers knelt down and pretended to worship him. They made fun of him and shouted, "Hey, you king of the Jews!" ³⁰Then they spit on him. They took the stick from him and beat him on the head with it.



They made a crown of thorns

F Pratt Green (1903-2000) ^v

To mock your reign, O dearest Lord, they made a crown of thorns,
set you with taunts along that road from which no one returns.

They could not know, as we do now, how glorious is the crown,
that thorns would flower upon your brow, your sorrows heal our own.

In mock acclaim, O gracious Lord, they snatched a purple cloak,
your passion turned, for all they cared, into a soldier's joke.

They could not know, as we do now, that though we merit blame
your robe of mercy you will throw around your naked shame.

A sceptred reed, O patient Lord, they thrust into your hand,
and acted out their grim charade to its appointed end.

They could not know, as we do now, though empires rise and fall,
your kingdom shall not cease to grow till love embraces all.

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Matthew 27: 31-44 CEV

Jesus Is Nailed to a Cross

³¹When the soldiers had finished making fun of Jesus, they took off the robe. They put his own clothes back on him and led him off to be nailed to a cross. ³²On the way they met a man from Cyrene named Simon, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross.

³³They came to a place named Golgotha, which means "Place of a Skull." ³⁴There they gave Jesus some wine mixed with a drug to ease the pain. But when Jesus tasted what it was, he refused to drink it.

³⁵The soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross and gambled to see who would get his clothes. ³⁶Then they sat down to guard



him. ³⁷Above his head they put a sign that told why he was nailed there. It read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸The soldiers also nailed two criminals on crosses, one to the right of Jesus and the other to his left.

³⁹People who passed by said terrible things about Jesus. They shook their heads and ⁴⁰shouted, "So you're the one who claimed you could tear down the temple and build it again in three days! If you are God's Son, save yourself and come down from the cross!"



⁴¹The chief priests, the leaders, and the teachers of the Law of Moses also made fun of Jesus. They said, ⁴²"He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the king of Israel, he should come down from the cross! Then we will believe him. ⁴³He trusted God, so let God save him, if he wants to. He even said he was God's Son." ⁴⁴The two criminals also said cruel things to Jesus.

Earth's darkest hour

Peter Abelard (1079-1142), tr. F Bland Tucker ^{vi}

This was earth's darkest hour, but you did light and life restore;
then let us give all praise to you who live for evermore.

Grant us with you to suffer, Lord, that, as we share this hour,
your cross may bring us to your joy and resurrection power.

Matthew 27: 45-56 CEV

The Death of Jesus

⁴⁵At noon the sky turned dark and stayed that way until three o'clock. ⁴⁶Then about that time Jesus shouted, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me?"

⁴⁷Some of the people standing there heard Jesus and said, "He's calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸One of them at once ran and grabbed a sponge. He soaked it in wine, then put it on a stick and held it up to Jesus.

⁴⁹Others said, "Wait! Let's see if Elijah will come and save him." ⁵⁰Once again Jesus shouted, and then he died.

⁵¹At once the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and rocks split apart. ⁵²Graves opened, and many of God's people were raised to life. ⁵³Then after Jesus had risen to life, they came out of their graves and went into the holy city, where they were seen by many people.

⁵⁴The officer and the soldiers guarding Jesus felt the earthquake and saw everything else that happened. They were frightened and said, "This man really was God's Son!"

⁵⁵Many women had come with Jesus from Galilee to be of help to him, and they were there, looking on at a distance. ⁵⁶Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John were some of these women.

When I survey the wondrous Cross

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) ^{vii}

Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14)

When I survey the wondrous Cross, on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

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

His dying crimson, like a robe, spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then I am dead to all the globe, and all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul,
my life,
my all.

Matthew 27: 57-66 CEV

Jesus Is Buried

⁵⁷That evening a rich disciple named Joseph from the town of Arimathea ⁵⁸went and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate gave orders for it to be given to Joseph, ⁵⁹who took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth. ⁶⁰Then Joseph put the body in his own tomb that had been cut into solid rock and had never been used. He rolled a big stone against the entrance to the tomb and went away.

⁶¹All this time Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb.

⁶²On the next day, which was a Sabbath, the chief priests and the Pharisees went together to Pilate. ⁶³They said, "Sir, we remember what that liar said while he was still alive. He claimed that in three days he would come back

from death. ⁶⁴So please order the tomb to be carefully guarded for three days. If you don't, his disciples may come and steal his body. They will tell the people that he has been raised to life, and this last lie will be worse than the first one."

⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "All right, take some of your soldiers and guard the tomb as well as you know how." ⁶⁶So they sealed it tight and placed soldiers there to guard it.



In the tomb

Anon., adapted from the Orthodox Liturgy ^{viii}

Your body in the tomb,
your soul in hell,
and with the dying thief in paradise,
enthroned as God,
in Holy Trinity:
Christ, filling all things, ever unconfined.

Prayer

Julie M Hulme ^{ix}

Thank you, God of all grace, that your Son did not forego the cross, but with it, carried our burden, and on its wide-stretched arms made himself an offering for our wrong.

Thank you, God of all power, that you Son did not avoid the cross, but on it made his intercession for the life we have corrupted and the joy that we have wasted and abused.

Thank you, God of all hope, that your Son did not escape the cross, but that through his offering of a pain and grief already won by love, we are released for healing, and in love sent out to all the world.

Strengthen us, God of all life,
as we wait with you through the long night of desolation and sorrow,
that we may learn your silence and receive your shelter in our grief.

Amen.

ⁱ Contemporary English Version (CEV) Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society.

ⁱⁱ Rejoice and Sing, 214

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted in British Art Show, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery, London 1990, p.88.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/parker-thirty-pieces-of-silver-t07461> [accessed 10 April 2020]

^{iv} Rejoice and Sing, 212.

^v Rejoice and Sing 221

^{vi} Rejoice and Sing, 212

^{vii} Rejoice and Sing 217

^{viii} Rejoice and Sing 231

^{ix} Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary vol 2, Epworth Press 1998.