

BESSELS GREEN BAPTIST CHURCH

Reflections for Holy Week based on John 18-19

Welcome.

This guide is provided to help guide your prayers and reflections through Holy Week and to prepare you for our Easter celebrations. These reflections use John's gospel and take us from the Garden of Gethsemane to the garden in which Jesus is buried. The readings are printed in full at the end of the guide.

Each day follows a similar pattern:

BE STILL ... Here we quieten our hearts and minds and remember that we are in God's presence and ask Him to meet us in our reading and reflecting.

READ ... During the course of the week we will be reading through the entirety of John 18 to 19. Apart from a longer reading on Monday, the readings are fairly short (between 10 and 15 verses). Read the passage slowly with an open mind. When you have finished, think for a moment about what you have just read before moving onto the next section. Is there anything that particularly strikes you? Is there something you had not noticed before? Is there anything that seems strange to you?

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... In this section there are generally a couple of points to notice about the reading and then a couple of questions to reflect on. What is God saying to you through this passage?

RESPOND ... Think and pray about what you have learned.

I hope you find this material useful and may God bless you as you use it.

Andy

A prayer for Holy Week from Ephesians 3:18

*So may we grasp, with all your people,
how wide and long, how high and deep
is the love of Christ,
and be filled with the very nature of God. Amen.*

MONDAY: JOHN 18:1-27 – ARREST & DENIAL

BE STILL ... and remember you are in God's presence

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:10)

Come Holy Spirit: meet me in this time.

READ ... the text with an open mind.

John 18:1-27

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... what is God saying to you?

NOTICE:

- Earlier in John's gospel, Peter had said to Jesus, "I'll give up my life for you" (13:37). Here he bravely drew his sword to defend Jesus, knowing that he was massively outnumbered. And yet a few hours later, when questioned by hostile people, he denied even knowing Jesus three times just as Jesus had warned he would (13:38).
- During our study of John's gospel we looked at Jesus' 'I Am' statements. Notice how Jesus, when faced with armed soldiers looking for 'Jesus the Nazarene', replied "I am he" (5), affirming his identity as the Son of God. Compare this with Peter's "I am not" (17,25), denying his identity as Jesus' friend and disciple.

REFLECT:

- Are there times in your life when you have stood up bravely for Jesus, regardless of the cross? Are there other times when you have denied him?
- Peter doesn't just deny Jesus, he denies all that he has seen, heard and lived during these years with him. Why do you think that Peter denied Jesus? What do you think you can learn from that?

RESPOND

Lord Jesus, I don't like looking odd, facing ridicule, or standing alone. Keep me connected to your presence today, so that I can draw on your strength in times when I feel under pressure. Amen.

TUESDAY: JOHN 18:28-40 – JESUS BEFORE PILATE

BE STILL ... and remember you are in God's presence

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:10)

Come Holy Spirit: meet me in this time.

READ ... the text with an open mind.

John 18:28-40

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... what is God saying to you?

NOTICE:

- This passage (and those that follow) drip with irony as the religious leaders try to stay ritually clean ('the Law doesn't allow us to kill anyone') whilst scheming to kill their God. Meanwhile Pilate recognises Jesus' innocence, but despite all of his power he can't find a politically expedient way to set him free.
- Throughout his ministry Jesus had resisted being called a king. It is only now, when he is bound in ropes, that he accepts the title of King: "My kingdom is not of this world ... The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth." (36, 37).

REFLECT:

- What appeals to you about belonging to Jesus' kind of Kingdom? What is it about Jesus' Kingdom that challenges you?
- What is truth? How easy do you find it to live truthfully?

RESPOND

Lord Jesus, you came to testify to the truth. I believe the truth to which you testified. Help me day by day, in word and action, to testify to the same truth. Amen.

WEDNESDAY: JOHN 19:1-12 – “HERE IS THE MAN”

BE STILL ... and remember you are in God’s presence

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Ps. 46:10)

Come Holy Spirit: meet me in this time.

READ ... the text with an open mind.

John 19:1-12

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... what is God saying to you?

NOTICE:

- Jesus is largely passive from this point on in the story – “He does not speak anymore; he does not protest; he does not reproach or admonish ... He no longer acts, but is acted upon” (Nouwen)
- When Jesus came out, wearing a crown of thorns and purple robe, Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man’ (5). Do you see the unintended double-meaning in this statement? Pilate meant to say, “Do you see this man you have mocked, abused and hurt?” And yet his words remind us that in Jesus’ suffering we see most clearly what authentic human life looks like.

REFLECT:

- “There can be no human beings who are completely alone in their sufferings since God, in and through Jesus, has become Emmanuel, God with us” (Henri Nouwen). What does it mean to you to know that Jesus is with you, even in your darkest moments?
- The fear and hatred of the Chief Priests is never more apparent than in their snarling response ‘crucify him.’ Are there times in your life when fear, hatred or anger has caused you to act destructively? How can you guard against this in the future?

RESPOND

Loving Lord, Pilate said, “here is the man” and the religious leaders snarled “crucify him.” You’re still “the man,” and I want to follow you, not crucify you. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Amen.

THURSDAY: JOHN 19:13-22 – “THE KING OF THE JEWS”

BE STILL ... and remember you are in God’s presence

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Ps. 46:10)

Come Holy Spirit: meet me in this time.

READ ... the text with an open mind.

John 19:13-22

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... what is God saying to you?

NOTICE:

- The sign on Jesus’ cross read “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews” (19). Written in Latin, Greek and Aramaic, the sign proclaimed Jesus as king in the three great languages of the ancient world.
- At almost any other time, the religious leaders in Jerusalem would have said that they hated Rome’s control and the claim of Rome’s emperors to be divine. But having accused Jesus of blasphemy (John 10:33), they now commit that very sin by proclaiming allegiance to Caesar rather than to God.

REFLECT:

- What kind of king rules from a cross? And what does that teach us about how we might use the power that we have?
- To whom are you tempted to give your loyalty today, above your loyalty to God?

RESPOND

Loving Lord Jesus, I pledge allegiance to you and your kingdom. Deliver me from the urge to seek earthly power or influence by compromising that allegiance. Amen.

FRIDAY: JOHN 19:23-30 – “IT IS FINISHED”

BE STILL ... and remember you are in God’s presence

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Ps. 46:10)

Come Holy Spirit: meet me in this time.

READ ... the text with an open mind.

John 19:23-30

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... what is God saying to you?

NOTICE:

- In verse 24, John quotes from Psalm 22. If you have time, read Psalm 22 and notice how some of the prophecies of this Psalm are fulfilled in Jesus’ suffering and death.
- Jesus’ final words are ‘It is finished’ and then he gives up his spirit (30). In Greek this is the single word *tetelestai*. This word was actually used as a shout of victory which announced that a battle had been won or a mission accomplished.

REFLECT:

- “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14). Water/thirsting has been an important theme in John’s gospel (see also John 7). And yet here Jesus is thirsty. In other words, Jesus comes to the place where we are, the place of thirst, shame and death. What does it mean to you, that Jesus has shared your humanity?
- What difference does it make to see the cross as a victory rather than a defeat? What kind of victory has Jesus won on the cross?

RESPOND

Loving Lord, on Good Friday, I bow at the foot of your cross, and I commit myself anew to Jesus of Nazareth, the king of my life. Amen.

SATURDAY: JOHN 19:31-42 - BURIED

BE STILL ... and remember you are in God's presence

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." (Ps. 46:10)

Come Holy Spirit: meet me in this time.

READ ... the text with an open mind.

John 19:31-42

LISTEN AND REFLECT ... what is God saying to you?

NOTICE:

- John wants to emphasise that Jesus really died. Thrusting the spear into Jesus' side would either kill him or prove he was really dead (a living body would have produced blood only). In this case, it confirmed Jesus' death.
- There is a sense of finality in the scene where Jesus is laid in the tomb (38-42). No one said, "let's not waste the spices – he'll soon be alive again". God didn't raise Jesus immediately and Jesus' followers had to live with the grief and the sense that evil had won and good had lost.

REFLECT:

- "The coronavirus pandemic feels like an unending Holy Saturday" (Richard Lischer). Imagine the feelings of Jesus' followers on the day after his crucifixion. In what ways are you feeling the same at this time? It is important at times like this, not only to acknowledge what we are feeling, but to offer our pain, our sadness, our fear, and our grief to God.
- "The cross involves the silence of suffering solidarity with broken humanity ... But this silence was not the final sound ... He rose." (Stuart Blythe).

As we join with Jesus' first followers in feeling deeply how dark this world can be, we do so trusting that in God's world, despair and darkness never have the last word; we, like Joseph and Nicodemus, will emerge from the darkness into the full light of day.
Tomorrow is Easter.

RESPOND

O God, for light in the darkness, for hope in the face of despair, for eternal life now and beyond death, I thank and praise you. Create your new life in me. Amen.

JOHN 18-19 – BIBLE READING

John 18:1-27

¹When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

²Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

⁴Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?”

⁵“Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

“I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

⁸Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” ⁹This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)

¹¹Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

¹²Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

¹⁵Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, ¹⁶but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷“You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter.

He replied, “I am not.”

¹⁸It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

¹⁹Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

²⁰“I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”

²²When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded.

²³“If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” ²⁴Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”

He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

²⁶One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” ²⁷Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

John 18:28-40

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfil what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

John 19:1-12

¹ Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe ³ and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." ⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

John 19:13-22

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

“Here is your king,” Pilate said to the Jews.

¹⁵ But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, “Do not write ‘The King of the Jews,’ but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.”

²² Pilate answered, “What I have written, I have written.”

John 19:23-30

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ “Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.”

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

“They divided my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.”

So this is what the soldiers did.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” ²⁷ and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. ³⁰ When he had

received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:31-42

³¹ Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. ³⁵ The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," ³⁷ and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

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