

## Reflections for Good Friday by Kerry Enright, used at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Friday 2 April 2021.

My name is Judas and I am son of Simon Iscariot. Don't believe everything you read about me. I am portrayed as a thief, a quisling, but life is more complicated than that. When that night I was faced with the consequences of what I had done, of course I was appalled at myself. When I saw how the chief priests and elders had turned their back on me, I was shocked. It wasn't meant to be like that.

You see, I had developed ways of achieving goals. I was used to doing deals, not underhand, not criminal, but getting things done, gaining supporters, maximising results. I had friends in influential roles, people beyond our small motley group who could pull strings and I could call on them. They were people of order and law, law-abiding people, people who kept our city safe, sometimes brutally. And I looked after the money, because I was careful and prudent, not wasteful.

I was drawn to Jesus. I was moved by his parables, inspired by the walk to Jerusalem, awed by the healings, and I can't deny that in Jesus I had truly seen the presence of God. I am almost embarrassed to say that as a person of standing in the community, I loved him as much as the crowds and the common people did. But he was very frustrating. He kept failing to seize power.

It came to a head in Bethany. Jesus let Mary's devotion to him be utterly wasted by letting her pour out perfume in a symbolic act of burial. The power of that devotion could have been harnessed for a popular movement. Those resources could have fed hungry mouths. It could have made a real difference. Instead it was an empty gesture. Pious nonsense. So I thought - "If you're not going to do what I know is good for you, I'm going to trap you in a position where you have no alternative." So I led the chief priests' henchmen to Gethsemane, and I kiss Jesus. I brought together the most powerful forces in Israel – the chief priests and Jesus. But when Jesus was handed to the Romans, hope ended. I was left with thirty pieces of silver. Worthless. I went to the chief priests and pleaded "It wasn't supposed to turn out like this." But the priests just laughed, "You thought Jesus could be your tool. Turns out you were ours."

My way of working was shown to be empty, troubled, devastating. When we don't believe our lives matter, we go looking for ways to make them matter. And we greedily draw other people into our net. We seek reassurance by trying to control other people's lives – emotionally, physically, sexually, professionally. That's what I did. If only I had realised what was happening in that last meal we shared, how much Jesus loved me, and wanted to keep eating and drinking with me. I would have realised I didn't need to be in control.

**Prayer** - Loving God, forgive our trying to control the lives of others, to manipulate them for what we imagine is a greater good. Forgive us when we let our desire for order sabotage your hopes. Forgive us when we forget that your love for us is enough for us to be fully

human. Keep us in that love and build our trust in you, that we may trust you with our future. In Christ, Amen.

### **Peter**

My name is Simon. I am called Peter. I know my reputation - a loud-mouth, impetuous, an extrovert if you will. Sometimes I speak before I think. So when I get caught up in the emotion of a moment, when I feel enthusiastic and excited, I blurt out words. Yet on the other hand, when I am afraid and anxious, when bluster doesn't work, when words don't work, I struggle to say the right thing. I loved Jesus. I felt able to say what I thought to him. There were times I managed to say something helpful and once he blessed me for it - Blessed are you, Simon, son of John, he said. And there were other times I was wrong. Once, when I said the wrong thing, it riled Jesus so much he told me to go to hell. Leading up to his death was a deeply anxious time. I could not believe that our little group was on the verge of falling apart, what with the strange behaviour Judas showed, and Jesus regularly talking about his crucifixion, the prospects for our little movement seemed dire. It seemed so wrong that something that was so good would end so soon and so brutally. At that last meal when Jesus spoke of going soon, I didn't get what he meant and, honestly, I couldn't face it, so I asked Jesus about it. And when I realised Jesus was going off to die, I asked why I couldn't follow. "I'll lay down my life for you," I said.

Then Jesus said to me the hardest thing I had ever heard him say, and he said it to me, to me - "Listen, listen," he said, "the cock won't crow till you've betrayed me three times" (John 13:36-38). I couldn't. I wouldn't. I never meant to. I am not really like that, am I. Remember when I was courageous. But have you ever been put under the spotlight, asked a question you didn't know how to answer, become so anxious that you spoke less than the whole truth, or times you exaggerated or denied or lied. In the moment, under pressure, in the spotlight.

There I was, sitting out there in the high priest's courtyard keeping warm by the fire while inside, I knew a terrible interrogation was in process, and then the woman asked me, three times. The cock crowed. The tears came. I knew. Yet he never let me go. He came to me. He stayed with me. He took me from being a fisher of fish to being fisher of people to being keeper of the keys to being shepherd of the flock. Even my betrayal, the worst kind of betrayal in the most needy situation, didn't stop Jesus from staying with me.

**Prayer** - God of love, we betray you often without realising. Yet you remain faithful. You stay with us. Thank you. In Christ, Amen.

### **Pilate**

I am Pontius Pilate. As I look back, I realise just how hard it was to work out what was the right thing to do, and then to do it. I had pressure and expectations from all sides. My role was senior and with seniority comes limits on what people like me can do. As Roman Governor, I knew I had the last word. I could have saved Jesus if it had been possible. It's what I wanted to do and what I'd like to have done, but it just didn't seem possible. After interrogating Jesus, I decided that no wrong had been done and I said so. Sure maybe he

had committed some religious faux pas, but religion was nothing to me. And truth, well truth was for people who had time to worry about truth.

I was a busy man. My role was clear. As a colonial administrator it was to keep peace in the colonies at any price, and the last thing I wanted to do was to stir up a hornets' nest by making a martyr out of some local hero. It was only when it became clear that I would stir up an even nastier hornets' nest by setting the man free. In addition, it was pointed out that no true friend of Caesar's would ever be soft on a man who had set himself up as a king to rival Caesar, so I had to give in to the pressures. So I said, go ahead and crucify him if that's what you have your hearts set on. To be absolutely clear, I wanted no part in the dirty business, which is why I washed my hands of it.

Now to be sure, I could have done something good. I could have resisted the pressure, and told the chief priests to go away. I could have spared the man's life. Or at least the scourging and the appalling way he died. Or I could have spoken some word of comfort. But I didn't. It isn't so much what I did as what I didn't do. But can you understand the pressure I was under, the expectations and amidst it all, the need to keep the peace.

**Prayer** - We have been there God, feeling pressured to the point of compromise. Sensing what truth is, but feeling urged to sacrifice it for a greater good. We can hear the siren voices calling to us, even now. So we ask, keep us true to justice. Keep us true to your way. In Christ. Amen.

### **The Crowd**

There were people among us whom Jesus had healed and treated with kindness. And yet at the crucial moment, here we were, among the crowing multitude demanding his death. We had given in to the demands for law and order. We had given in to those who spoke confidently of why he needed to be punished. We have done it before, and we have done it since. Name the offender, categorise the criminal, label the group, make them over there, a threat to us, a danger to us, a risk to us, and so we will, we buy for blood. Order requires someone be punished. The frenzied lynch mob. The crowd idly watching. The anonymity in numbers. Humanity at its worst. Failing to protect an innocent person. Remaining neutral in times of moral crisis.

### **Prayer**

God of truth, give us insight into what tempts us when people aren't watching, when we feel anonymous, when we think we are lost in a group. And give us courage to face temptation. Share with us your own good Spirit to help us through, for the sake of Christ, in whom we pray. Amen.

### **The family of Jesus**

Even in the moment before death, Jesus concerns himself with his mother, and with the beloved disciple. There is a lot going on. The soldiers are dividing up his clothes. Passers-by are straining to make out the sign over his head. The chief priests are arguing. Through all that, Jesus looks at his mother. "Woman," he says--the same thing he called her before, at the wedding--"Woman, here is your son." Then he looks at the disciple standing beside her

and says to him, "Here is your mother." From that hour, John says, the beloved disciple took Jesus' mother into his own home. As a widow, she would have been vulnerable but for this act. And she has felt things inside of her that they cannot even imagine. Perhaps that is why she stayed by her son while the others fled. Perhaps that is what allowed her to look full into the ruined face that no one but her (and her new son) could bear to see. While the powers believe they are tearing his family apart, Jesus is quietly putting it together again: this mother with this son, this past with this future. Although his enemies will succeed in killing him, the mother of the old becomes the mother of the new.

**Prayer** - The devastation of death. The supposed ending of hope. The closing down of life. The finishing. And yet, even here, in the valley, in the loss, in the ending, still there is love. Great God of life, we pray, may that love keep hold of us and those for whom we pray, now and always.

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