

Holy Wednesday

Welcome as we gather together in spirit to worship God on this Holy Wednesday.

As we keep Holy Week and Easter this year, we are inviting all those who join us through our online worship resources to travel back spiritually with us to the time of Jesus. As we do so, we contemplate how Jesus who walked on this earth 2000 years ago continues to walk with us today. We also pray that he will bring his love and transforming grace to us and all those we pray for.

Today we think of Judas and his decision to betray Jesus. The Wednesday of Holy Week has for a long time also been known as Spy Wednesday – the time of betrayal.

During our services this week, we are inviting you, if you can do so safely, to light a candle as we pray together.

As we think of Judas choosing to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, you may like to place some silver coins where you can see them.

You may wish to stop this recording now, to give you time to collect a candle, matches or lighter and a few silver coins.

Lighting of a candle

If you have a candle with you, please light it now.

Greeting

The candle reminds us that we are in the presence of Jesus, he is with us now.

We meet together in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Introduction

Today we recall how Judas came to betray Jesus:

The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So, he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

'But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!' Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?'
(Luke 22: 2-6, 21-23, 47-48)

Call to worship

Come, pilgrim people.

Come to worship the liberator and peacemaker

who was betrayed and handed over to those who hated and despised him.

Come to worship, pilgrim people.

A gathering prayer

Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
who stand by night in the house of the Lord!

Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the Lord.

May the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.

A pray as we journey together this week

Draw us, Lord, to yourself by the power of your Spirit.

Quieten our hearts and our minds as we approach in worship.

Hold us in the love of your Son as we follow him through this Holy Week.

Journey with us, Lord.

A prayer of confession

Jesus, our Lord and our Master, forgive us the times we deny you:

in your mercy, forgive us.

Jesus our Teacher and our Friend, forgive us the times we betray you:

in your mercy, forgive us.

For lost opportunities to speak of your love:

in your mercy, forgive us.

For love of possessions and desire for wealth:

in your mercy, forgive us.

For the guilt that that leads us to despair:

in your mercy, forgive us.

May the Lord forgive us.

May he grant us peace in our hearts.

May he lead us by his Spirit,

into the ways of justice and peace. **Amen.**

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,

who in your tender love towards the human race

sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ

to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross:

grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,

and also be made partakers of his resurrection;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Psalm

(41: 1, 2, 4-10)

The Lord protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.

**As for me, I said, 'O Lord be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against you.'**

My enemies wonder in malice
when I will die, and my name perish.

**And when they come to see me, they utter empty words,
while their hearts gather mischief;
when they go out, they tell it abroad.**

All who hate me whisper together about me;
they imagine the worst for me.

**They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me,
that I will not rise again from where I lie.**

Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted,
who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me.

**But you, O Lord, be gracious to me,
and raise me up, that I may repay them.**

The Gospel

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St John

(12: 1-11)

Glory to you, O Lord.

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So, Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Address

The Gospels tell us time and again that Judas was a disciple who was close to Jesus. This fact makes the act of betrayal all the worse. All of this tells us that the Christian story is essentially down to earth and deeply rooted in human life and experiences.

The author John le Carré once wrote that betrayal can only happen when you love. If this is true then both Judas and Peter must have loved Jesus. This claim is, of course, speculation, just as any attempt to discover what motive Judas had for betraying Jesus his master, his rabbi and his friend. The Gospels are heavily laid with suggestions that the motive for Judas was money and greed. St Luke tells us that

'Satan entered into Judas' and thereby tells us that Judas was given over to evil. He went to the 'dark side' and turned away from the 'light of the world.'

The Gospels also reveal that despite the closeness of Judas to Jesus, Jesus was not surprised at the betrayal. When Jesus tells Judas at the Last Supper to go and do what he was planning, Jesus demonstrates his knowledge and also that he remains in control of the situation. There remains much tension in the Gospel accounts of the Passion and the betrayal. The Gospel writers are keen to show that what happened was all part of God's plan, but at the same time each person within the events had their own free will. There are no robots in the story, and no one is forced to do anything against their will.

We often find ourselves believing that we are nothing like Judas, but this is to delude ourselves. If the betrayal of Jesus is to hand over things into the realm of evil, then is it not fair to say that every prejudice, every unjust act, every act of revenge or retaliation that is carried in the name of our faith, is itself an act of betrayal. We so often convince ourselves that we really are standing up for the truth and that we are being beacons of light – but so often the things we do as churches and as individuals are ways that Jesus would never have recognised as belonging to his way. We may admit that in the past Christians have done terrible things in the name of their religion: crusades, inquisitions, witch-hunts, slavery. But we delude ourselves if we think there are no contemporary betrayals. We share the bread of Christ but fail to share with the poor. We sit by his side but fail to make room for others of whom we disapprove. We greet him with a kiss and rebounce those whose love of Jesus takes different forms. The responsibility is ours.

Today, we are encouraged to accept the reality of how we fail to walk with Christ in his way. We are encouraged to be able to turn to Christ, as Peter did, acknowledging our weakness and our failings – for in doing so, Christ can draw us to himself. Remaining stubbornly in the dark, as Judas did, means we are at risk, as he was, of being beyond the reach of Christ's light, love and peace.

Prayer

Lord, you have called us to be your friends.

May we delight in your presence and follow you always.

Lord, you welcome us to eat at your table.

May we gather with joy in communion with you.

Lord, you know what is in our hearts.

May we be loyal in all we do and say.

Lord, you are our light and our life.

May we walk in your light and live in your love..

Lord, we pray for all who have been let down,
for all who have been betrayed,
for those who have been deserted by friends or by family.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for all who fear the dark
and who face the night in loneliness,
for all who sleep rough and live on the streets.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for the police and special constables,
for street pastors and neighbourhood watch,
for all who work to keep us safe.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Short piece of music.....if possible)

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for all who weep today:

for those who grieve and mourn for the loss of loved ones – husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers, sisters, friends...

Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope.

We pray for those who care for people at the end of their earthly lives: chaplains, hospice workers, nurses, doctors, carers, pastors, undertakers...

Give them strength, courage, empathy and love as they walk with those who weep.

Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope.

We pray for broken relationships where there seems to be no hope;

for families destroyed by death, poverty, war, violence, or abuse;

for those who feel let down by society;

and for those who feel let down by you –

may all know your presence in those dark times.

As they wait on you, comfort them, Lord, we pray.

Lord, weep with us and bring fresh hope. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As Jesus, who is the true vine and bread of life, has taught us, so we pray:

Our Father,

who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those

who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Prayers

As we come to the end of our time of worship,

let us continue to celebrate Christ our king,

the liberator, the servant,

the one who caused disturbance –

and we ask for the grace and strength of God to do the same. **Amen.**

A personal prayer

Let us pray together, as we say:

Jesus, I journey with you today,

as you journey with me.

Let me go where you go.

Let me speak your words.

Give me the grace to bring

your peace and your love

into the world by all I say and do. Amen.

Blessing

May the Lord hold each one of us in his loving arms;
may he grant us restful sleep and peace in our hearts;
may he bless us and keep us safe this day, this night, and always. **Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.