

# Grieving and Waiting in the In-between Time



A 'Holy Saturday' reflection  
for worship at home,  
whenever it is needed

## **Introduction**

In these strange and challenging times, when we are unable to gather together, celebrating Easter ‘together, apart’ is going to be hard – impossible, even, to celebrate fully.

In the days ahead, we might find that some days feel like ‘Good Friday’ – days where suffering and death fill our minds and hearts. Some days might feel like ‘Holy Saturday’ – an empty space where we’re able to do hardly anything, where the numbness of grief and shock are overwhelming. But there will certainly be some ‘Easter Sunday’ days, where we catch at least glimpses of life, hope, joy and resurrection.

For ‘**Good Fridays**’, you might find the Stations of the Cross – images and short prayers – helpful to spend time with.

For ‘**Easter Sundays**’ (as well as the ‘eucharist without communion’ we’re suggesting for Sunday worship), there’s an Easter dawn liturgy and a guided reflection on the Road to Emmaus.

*For ‘**Holy Saturdays**’, that strange ‘in-between time’, we offer you the pages that follow here. It’s much less structured than the resources for other days, reflecting the sense in which, in the ‘Holy Saturday space’, it’s almost as if time stands still: what is past feels lost to us, and we have no idea what the future holds. Here you will find opening and closing prayers, and some suggestions – including some poems and prayers – for using the space in between, however long or short, full or empty, you need that space to be.*

## Preparing the space

If we were gathered together for this time, we would usually be in a circle around a fire, in one of the patches of wasteland in our neighbourhoods. If you have a space and the equipment to make **a fire**, you might want to do so.

If you can't make a fire, you might want to find a space – inside or outside – where you can light **a candle, or a lantern**. You might also want to find **a fire-proof container**, such as a metal roasting dish, in which you can safely burn a few pieces of paper. Do also gather together **a few scraps of paper** that you can write on, and **a pen or pencil** to write with.

## Setting the scene

The picture on the cover is by the artist Nicholas Mynheer: 'Mary embraces Judas' mother'. In the background, two men hang, dead: one from a cross, the other from a tree. In the foreground, Jesus' mother Mary embraces the mother of the man who betrayed her son, and who then went and hanged himself. Both mothers have lost their sons. Neither has anything to hold onto, except each other. And somehow, in that moment, that is enough.

In the 'in-between time' between grief and new life, all we can do is 'hang on in there', holding on to each other, and to scraps of hope. At the moment, even holding on to each other, physically, is often impossible. But together, apart, in this Holy Saturday space, we can 'hang on in there', holding on to each other in our minds and hearts, if not with our bodies.

## **Lighting the fire**

*As you light your fire, or your candle, you might want to pray these words:*

God of life and death,  
God of all the worlds that are,  
God of dazzling darkness.  
We wait for you  
in the darkness of this night.  
Come to us in our troubles,  
come to us in our grieving,  
come to us in our fear.  
By the fire of your love  
may our hearts be warmed,  
our voices unfrozen,  
our stories opened,  
our hopes stirred.  
**Amen.**

## **Some 'seeds' for reflection**

*Feel free to use as few or as many of the poems and prayers that follow. Some might connect today – others won't. But see them as little seeds, planted deep in the dark earth. Given time, some of them may enable something, some kind of new life, to grow within you – something that slowly, with determination, pushes up towards the light.*

Here is a pit  
hollowed with the  
harrowing of hate  
it is deep deep  
for falling  
it is dark dark  
for losing  
it is death death  
for growing

till Christ forge the way  
show the foot-holds down  
marked by his descending feet

Here is a ladder  
wrung with tears  
it is steep steep  
for slipping  
it is sharp sharp  
for wounding

it is hard hard  
for climbing

no guide but Christ

take the ladder down  
ask no way but  
where the steps are marked  
hope no end but  
where the feet have gone  
think no help but  
what the way has forged

take the journey down  
take the ladder down

and

Here is a tomb  
hammered with the  
last lights of love  
it is hard as stone  
for breaking  
it is sharp as flint  
for razing  
it is sealed sealed  
for keeping

till Christ cleft the rock  
sear the sealed grave

stride his way seize his own  
loose the holds of hell

follow down:  
the pit is here  
the ladder prayer  
the tomb a womb  
wherein his life  
may rise  
but seek no birth:  
no seed will sprout  
but in the dark of death

*Nicola Slee*

For there is hope for a tree,  
if it be cut down, that it will sprout again,  
and that its shoots will not cease.

Though its root grow old in the earth,  
and its stump die in the ground,  
yet at the scent of water it will bud  
and put forth branches like a young plant.

*Job 14:7-9*

Spring is a promise  
in the closed fist  
of a long winter. All  
we have got is a raw  
slant of light at a low  
angle, a rising river  
of wind, and an icy rain  
that drowns out green  
in a tide of mud. It is  
the daily postponement  
that disillusions. (Once  
again the performance  
has been cancelled by  
the management.) We live  
on legends of old  
springs. Each evening  
brings only remote  
possibilities of  
renewal: “Maybe  
tomorrow.” But the  
evening and the morning  
are the umpteenth day  
and the God of sunlit  
Eden still looks  
on the weather  
and calls it good.

*Luci Shaw*



## **Prayers**

God of all our growing,  
take our roots down deep  
in the long, dark winter season  
of our grief.

Nurture the resurrection life in us,  
in the secret places of the soil,  
in the barren, frozen earth, underground,  
where no eye can see.

Send your Spirit where the cold season rage  
and speak to us the promise of spring.

*Nicola Slee*

When the winter of my life  
Threatens me with pain and death,  
Leave me not in loneliness  
To its cold and icy breath;  
Breathe upon me from above  
And enfold me in your love.

*Brother Ramon*

Praise to you for summer, fall and spring  
But faith reserves the right to wonder  
When chill of winter invades our bones.

Where are you when a sign is asked  
And none is given,  
And barrenness in earth and soul  
is all we know?

Enough of it! We've had enough  
of grey and cold and emptiness.  
Life wears heavily and joy becomes a victim,  
in the winter of our hearts.

What good is death if Easter never comes,  
If any sign of risen life is only in our memory  
and promises are all past due?

Revive. Restore. Lift up our hearts  
and with them, all creation.  
Breathe upon your world and warm us all.

What word have you for those who wait,  
For those who long like deer for running streams,  
Like infants for their mothers' breasts,  
Who yearn like birds for flight?  
What word have you for we who wait?

*Janet Schaffran and Pat Kozak*

O God who brought us to birth,  
and in whose arms we die,  
in our grief and shock  
contain and comfort us;  
embrace us with your love,  
give us hope in our confusion  
and grace to let go into new life,  
through Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Janet Morley*

## **Remembering stories**

*Here's a space, then, for you to remember your own experiences, your own stories of 'holding on', and 'hanging on in there'. Your own stories of hope glimpsed, and hope that seems so far out of reach that it isn't even yet a light at the end of the tunnel.*

*Reflect back over your life – recent, and maybe long ago – and remember some of those times of 'holding on'. If you have someone else close by, or on the end of the phone, who you can share those stories with, spend some time in conversation with them – and encourage them to remember and share some of their own stories too.*

*At the end of this time of reflection, you might want to read this poem: 'The Sharing'...*

We told our stories -

That's all.

We sat and listened to each other  
and heard the journeys of each soul.

We sat in silence  
entering each one's pain and  
sharing each one's joy.  
We heard love's longing  
and the lonely reachings-out  
for love and affirmation.  
We heard of dreams  
shattered.  
And visions fled.  
Of hopes and laughter  
turned stale and dark.  
We felt the pain of isolation  
and the bitterness of death.  
But in each brave and lonely story  
God's gentle life  
broke through  
and we heard music in the darkness  
and smelt flowers in the void.  
We felt the budding of creation  
in the searchings of each soul  
and discerned the beauty  
of God's hand in  
each muddy, twisted path.  
And his voice sang  
in each story  
his life sprang from  
each death.

Our sharing became  
one story  
of a simple lonely search  
for life and hope and  
oneness  
in a world which sobs  
for love.

And we knew that in  
our sharing  
God's voice with  
mighty breath  
was saying  
love each other and  
take each other's hand.

For you are one  
though many  
and in each of you  
I live.

So listen to my story  
and share my pain  
and death.

Oh, listen to my story  
and rise and live  
with me.

*Edwina Gateley*

## **Burning our troubles**

*You might want to take a few moments now to think about the some of the harder things that ‘remain’... the things that trouble you – the things that cause pain to your body, the words, memories and anxieties that trouble your mind, the griefs and fears, the hurts and heartbreaks that trouble your spirit. If you can, write them down on the scraps of paper. Then, when you’re ready, crumple each one up, and throw it into the fire – the fire of God’s love.*

God of life and death,  
God of all the worlds that are,  
God of dazzling darkness,  
We wait for you  
in the darkness of this night.  
Come to us in our troubles,  
come to us in our grieving,  
and cast out our fears with the fire of your love.  
**Amen.**

## **Getting ready to go**

*When you're ready to finish, put out the fire, or blow out your candle. You might want to use one of these prayers to end your time of reflection. Be aware that this time may have been emotionally draining, and that is always also physically draining. Be gentle with yourself – it might be time for bed (or for a nap, if it's not night-time), or to go and do something that makes you happy (e.g. have a cuppa and some cake, spend some time in the garden, play a game or some music... you will know what you need!).*

*If it's day-time:*

Ah my dear Lord, the church is locked  
but let my heart be open to your presence;  
there let us make, you and I,  
your Easter garden;  
plant it with flowers,  
and let the heavy stone be rolled away.

*Alan Amos*

*If it's night-time:*

God of the sealed tomb,  
we cannot bear to leave  
your dead and buried body.  
But you send us away  
to mark the long night  
of our mourning without you.

You lie in death alone,  
beyond the bounds of our feeble knowing.

Numbed by our grief and sorrow,  
we cannot interpret you:  
you have gone far from us,  
down into darkness,  
deep into death.

In your great love,  
wait for us  
where we grieve in the darkness,  
till we return to the grave  
to find you,  
risen, released in the night.

*Nicola Slee*

Many of the poems and prayers in this booklet are taken from Nicola Slee, *Easter Garden* (Fount Paperbacks, 1990). 'The Sharing' is from *Celebrating Women*, ed. Hannah Ward, Jennifer Wild & Janet Morley (SPCK Publishing, 1995).