***The Vigil Holy Week 2022***

***“It was on the Thursday.”*** (Iona Community.)

*It was on the Thursday   
that he became valuable. He hadn’t anything to sell…  
not since leaving his hammer and saw three years earlier.  
Needless to say,  
he could knock together a set of trestles  
or hand a couple of shelves at the drop of a hat,  
no bother at all.But he wasn’t on to making things.  
Not now.He was into…  
well…talking, I suppose.  
And listening  
and healing  
and forgiving  
and encouraging…  
all the things for which there’s no pay  
and the job centre has no advertisements.  
So his work wasn’t worth much.  
Nor, indeed, was he.  
For, not being well dressed  
or well heeled or well connected,  
he wouldn’t have attracted many ticket holders  
had he been put up for raffle.But he had a novelty value…  
like the elephant man or the fat lady  
or the midget at the circus.  
Put him on a stage and he might be interesting to look at.  
Sell him to the circus  
with the promise of some tricks  
and there could be a silver penny or two  
or thirty in it. It was on the Thursday  
that he became valuable.*

**In Gethsemane.** Matthew 26:36-56.

***36****Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”****37****He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.****38****Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

***39****Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

***40****Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.****41****“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

***42****He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”*

***43****When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.****44****So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.*

***45****Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.****46****Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!*

**Prayer.** O holy wisdom of our God, compassionate towards our weakness, we praise you and give you thanks, because you emptied yourself of power and entered our struggle, taking upon you our unprotected flesh, you opened wide your arms for us upon the cross that even the grave might be a bed of hope for your people. Therefore with those who are detained without justice, abandoned or betrayed by friends, whose bodies are violated or in pain: with those who have died alone without dignity, comfort or hope; and with all the company of the saints who have carried you in their wounds that we may be bodied forth with life. We bless the memory of our brother Jesus, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, from whom the cup of suffering did not pass.

*The first candle is extinguished. Silence.*

**Jesus is Condemned to Death.** Matthew 27:11-26.

***11****Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”*

*“You have said so,” Jesus replied.*

***12****When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.****13****Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?”****14****But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.*

***15****Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.****16****At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27%3A11-26&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24146a)*] Barabbas.****17****So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?”****18****For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.*

***19****While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”*

***20****But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.*

***21****“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor.*

*“Barabbas,” they answered.*

***22****“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked.*

*They all answered, “Crucify him!”*

***23****“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.*

*But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”*

***24****When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”*

***25****All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”*

***26****Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.*

***A Reflection on Jesus being condemned to death***. Abrev Sylvia Sands

*Silent, you were silent,*

*why didn’t you speak up then?*

*After all*

*you had enough to say in synagogues,*

*in the desert, by the lakeside*

*oh, and clearing the temple.*

*Listen to your voice bouncing off the walls.*

*I know your hands were bound but why your tongue?*

*God knows you’d have made a great lawyer,*

*with your eloquence, your gift for dramatisation*

*But there you stand, infuriatingly, frustratingly,*

*heartbreakingly silent.*

*Maybe the sound of those other voices*

*clamouring for vengeance called you to say nothing.*

*For bigotry shouts but never listens,*

*and any of us who have been oppressed*

*knows the feeling of not being heard.*

*Perhaps that’s why in the face of prejudice*

*we fall silent.*

*Silence is not always compromise.*

*Teach us to know when words are superfluous,*

*a sheer waste of time.*

*And help us to hold in our hearts the dignity,*

*the courage, the creative energy, the wisdom*

*of the silence falling across the world*

*at the first station of the cross.*

*The second candle is extinguished. Silence.*

**The Cross is laid on Jesus.** Matthew 27:27-31.

***27****Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him.****28****They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,****29****and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said.****30****They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.****31****After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

***“Cross carrying Jesus.”*** Kate McIlhagga

*Cross –carrying Jesus,*

*as you stagger on your lonely journey*

*time slips, worlds reel.*

*Forgive us that we turn away*

*embarrassed, uncaring, despairing.*

*Help us to stay with you through the dark night*

*to watch and wait,*

*to know the depths of your anguish*

*and to realise that you carry us,*

*forgive (even) us*

*and love us.*

*Forgive us,*

*that we get on with our work unthinking,*

*that we gamble unknowing*

*with precious things.*

*Cross – carrying Jesus,*

*nailed to the tree of life*

*forgive us and grant us your salvation*

*The third candle is extinguished. Silence.*

**Simon Carried the Cross.** Matthew 27:32.

*As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross*

***“On Simon Carrying the Cross.”*** (Sylvia Sands.)

*This will sound like poetic licence, but it happened*

*The boy, six-teenish, greeted me at the church door.*

*His limbs flailed and his head jerked,*

*and he wore the beatific smile of someone sure of*

*being loved. “Hello” he said,*

*as if I was a were a familiar friend*

*instead of being a stranger to the parish.*

*“Multiply handicapped,” I noted professionally,*

*But unprofessionally smiled and chatted.*

*It is hard to resist innocent love,*

*in the Limestone Road, Belfast.*

*Later in the church, empty but for me*

*he came in noisily joyful with his father,*

*Who showed him, helped him, painstakingly,*

*to light a candle.*

*They passed, brushed by me,*

*as I meditated on the fifth station of the cross.*

*The boy smiling yet said “Still here?*

*Don’t get tired now, don’t get tired.”*

*His father, grey haired, ashen faced,*

*met my eyes solemnly, with a kind of gratitude,*

*and followed the boy, three paces behind,*

*with a terrible weariness,*

*out of the church and into the world.*

*The fourth candle is extinguished. Silence.*

**Jesus is stripped of his clothes.** John 19:23-24.

***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.”[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+19%3A23-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26850a)*]*

*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,[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+19%3A23-34&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26852b)*] 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.*

***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.*

**“*The Great Sun*.”** Unknown origin, tr Charles Causley.

*I am the great sun, but you do not see me,*

*I am your husband, but you turn away,*

*I am the captive, but you do not free me,*

*I am the captain, but you will not obey.*

*I am the truth, but you will not believe me,*

*I am the city, where you will not stay,*

*I am your wife, your child, but you will leave me,*

*I am that God to whom you will not pray.*

*I am your counsel, but you will not hear me,*

*I am your lover, whom you will betray.*

*I am the victor, but you do not cheer me,*

*I am the holy dove, whom you will slay.*

*I am your life, but if you will not name me,*

*Seal up your soul with tears, and never blame me.*

*The fifth candle is extinguished*

**Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.** Luke 23:32-38.

***32****Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.****33****When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.****34****Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+23%3A32-38&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25970a)*] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.*

***35****The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”*

***36****The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar****37****and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”*

***38****There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.*

**Reflection.**  *“God’s Friday”* (Kate McIlhagga)

*Anointed for burial with gentle kisses, nothing, nothing, nothing prepared him for this: the thud of hammers, nails biting into his wrists, his feet, the lurch as his body swung forward and down into the pit of despair; the godforsakeness breaking his heart. How long, O God, how long must I endure this birthing death until the waters break and the at-onement is delivered*

*The sixth candle is extinguished.*

**Jesus Dies.** Matthew 27:45-54.

***45****From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.****46****About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27%3A45-54&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24176a)*] lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27%3A45-54&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24176b)*]*

***47****When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”*

***48****Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink.****49****The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”*

***50****And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.*

***51****At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split****52****and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.****53****They came* *out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+27%3A45-54&version=NIV#fen-NIV-24183c)*] went into the holy city and appeared to many people*.

***54****When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”*

***“The Servant.”*** (Iona Community.)

*Who would ever have believed it?*

*Who could ever have conceived it?*

*Who dares trace God’s hand behind it*

*when a servant came among us?*

*Like a sapling in dry soil,*

*he was rooted in our presence;*

*lacking beauty, grace and splendour*

*no one felt attracted to him.*

*Yet it was the pain and torment we deserved*

*which he accepted,*

*while we reckoned his afflictions*

*must have come by heaven’s instruction.*

*Though our sins let him be wounded,*

*though our cruelty left him beaten,*

*yet, though how and why he suffered,*

*God revealed our hope of healing.*

*We like sheep despite our wisdom,*

*all had wandered from God’s purpose;*

*and our due in pain and anger,*

*God let fall on one among us.*

*Who would ever have believed it?*

*Who could ever have conceived it?*

*Who dares trace God’s hand behind it*

*when a servant came among us?*

*The seventh candle is extinguished.*

**Jesus is buried**

Matthew 27:57-61

***57****As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus.****58****Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him.****59****Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,****60****and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away.****61****Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.*

***Christ’s Tomb*** (Bill Wallace)

*Christ’s tomb was a place of darkness.*

*In the world of Western dualistic thought*

*Darkness is the enemy of light,*

*The enemy of life,*

*The abode of fear,*

*Of death*

*And of destruction.*

*But without darkness*

*There would be no exposure to the light.*

*It was out of the familiar darkness of the womb*

*That we all came to be surprised by the light,*

*Moving from all-embracing security*

*To the unfamiliar and threatening world of light.*

*It was out of the darkness*

*That the Cosmos emerged*

*In a burst of fiery flaring forth.*

*And it is the darkness of dark matter*

*And dark energy*

*That seems to hold the Cosmos together.*

*So, let us celebrate the darkness*

*Acknowledging it as our primal mother*

*And be open to that greater part*

*Of the wisdom of God*

*Which only comes in the sacred mysteriousness*

*Of allowing ourselves to be encompassed by the dark.*

*The eighth candle is removed and we are in darkness, a bell tolls 33 times, one for each year of Jesus’ life, the candle is then returned*

**Closing Words**

It is finished, we have kept vigil now go into this sacred time, this empty time, have courage, keep faith with emptiness and darkness until light comes.

And the blessing of God be with you, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of the World Amen