

The Notice, The Lots and The Wine

Three Meditations for Holy Week

By Rev Ellie Clack

The Notice



Prayer

Quiet our hearts and minds dear Lord.
Make us ready to rest, ready to reflect, ready to respond.
Help us just to be with you, here, now.

Pause

Music

Miserere mihi, Domine – Byrd

Reading

John 19

16 Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. 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 Here 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, 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."

Reflection/Meditation

A notice above a dying man's head. Advertising? Proclaiming? Mocking? Cursing? Ironic? Sombre? Angry?

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 – all the languages of the area, so that all might read and understand. Why should everyone get the chance to read this sign?

Pilate was a man who knew what he was doing. He had been dealing with this man for sometime, he had tried to get rid of him, this problem. What was this final gesture; this sign prepared by the one who washed his hands of Jesus?

Was he making fun of Jesus by hanging a notice which was obviously absurd?

Was he hanging a notice which would deliberately antagonise the Jews?

Was he indicating the crime or the legacy of this man Jesus?

Or did Pilate know that this man really was the King of the Jews but felt he was powerless to stop the execution? Was this his final act of defiance or of courtesy to the persecuted man?

Standing, watching this final episode. Proud of the King, or ashamed to be there? How do they feel: his supporters, his mourners, his mockers, his killers?

The Messiah, the revolutionary, Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews.

What would our notice say? What words would we proclaim about this Jesus?

Pause

Music Reflection

When I survey the wondrous cross – Kathryn Scott

Silence and final Prayers

Lord Jesus of earth and of heaven,
King of the Jews, King of our hearts
Thank you for dying for us.

Pause

Visit this place, Lord we pray,
and drive far from it the snares of the enemy;
may your holy angels dwell with us and guard us in peace,
and may your blessing be always upon us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

May Christ crucified draw us to himself, to find in him a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope and the assurance of sins forgiven and life eternal; Amen.

Closing music

Lost in wonder (you chose the cross) – Martin Layzell

The Lots



Prayer

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Pause

Music

In manus tuas – Tallis

Reading

John 19

²³When 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 which said,
"They divided my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing."^[a] So this is what the soldiers did.

Reflection/Meditation on The Lots

Some people have all the luck don't they? They win at dice, they get the throws they want, and never get found out.

This game's mainly a game of luck, but you need skill too. You need to know what you're doing. A bit like life I suppose. The throw of the dice - a bit of a lottery - but you have to use your head too if you can.

What about this one? It could have been different for him. He had it all going for him last year. They loved him; called him a prophet, a miracle maker. They followed him everywhere. The most popular prophet since, err, well for a long time. Well you can't expect

me to remember their prophets can you? Nothing to do with me.

This one? Well he threw it all away didn't he? He could have been a travelling preacher, a nice young rabbi like him, safe out in the countryside somewhere making a good living in the villages.

But no, he pushed his luck. Went too far. Said some dangerous stuff about God and really upset the apple cart this week. Came riding into town like a celebrity. Caused a fuss in the temple, interfered with trade and took on the Pharisees. Big mistake.

What was he thinking of? It was a stupid gamble to think that he could win against the Jerusalem temple. Didn't he know that? Did he think they would just roll over? Even poor old Pilate couldn't persuade them. They wanted blood, so he had to let them have it.

So there is is up there – a bright bloke, a good bloke, who pushed his luck too far. He upset the wrong people and no mistake.

And here I am, just a soldier from Phillipi (a place you haven't even heard of), stuck here in Palestine. But at least I'm living and breathing and I've got a bed to go home to when this is all over.

And you? What brings you here? Chance? Curiosity? Does all this mean anything or is it just a random set of circumstances. Here you are. Does it mean anything at all?

Pause

Music Reflection

Befriended – Matt Redman

Silence and final Prayers

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Closing music

When I survey the wondrous cross – Kathryn Scott

The Wine



Prayer

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Pause

Music

When I survey the wondrous cross – Kathryn Scott

Reflection/Meditation

He was paying a price for a crime he did not commit. Above his head his innocence screams out as his offense reads - This is Jesus, King of the Jews. It's clear this man did not make any offense or break any laws but the surrounding crowds full of officials and religious rulers taunt and jeer at him "If you can save others, save yourself. If you are the Son of God, come down from that cross".

On his right and his left even robbers were insulting him. But he remained silent. The hate swirls in the air as he uses what's left of his strength to lift up his body for a breath. With every breath he struggles. His body beaten with rods and whips. His forehead dripping in blood from the crown of thorns shoved in his brow.

His face, tired, weary, shows his piercing eyes. His eyes. His eyes looked on in compassion, for regardless of what these people had done his love for them remained.

As the hours drag on, he remains silent. Not a word comes from his mouth, not a retaliation, no defence. He takes the taunting and the jeering, the hateful remarks as though they are more whips to his beaten body.

Music Reflection

O Christe Domine Jesu – Taize

Reading

John 19

²⁸Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." ²⁹A 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. ³⁰When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Pause

Music Reflection

In Manus Tuas – Tallis

Reflection/Meditation

What did it taste like? That last sip of history?

Was it a relief, a refreshment, the thing you needed most to say your final words? Did it clean your mouth and quench your thirst and let you die in those words? Did the soldiers have it ready as part of their job to refresh you in your death?

What did it taste like? That last sip of human life?

Was it bitter vinegar, sharp and acidic, a last and cruel attempt to cause you pain? Did it hurt you and sting your eyes and cuts? Did it parch your throat more? Was it part of their jeering, their mocking, their torture of you?

What did it taste like? That last sip of mortality?

Was it a gift from the soldiers own rations of cheap wine? Was it then, a gesture of kindness and generosity to you in the midst of a cruel and painful death? An offering, albeit far too small.

What did it taste like? That last sip of human action?

Offered to you on the hyssop plant, a plant designed to cleanse– was this too, a sacrifice and purifying like that of the Jews at Passover? Was this a prophetic action by unknowing soldiers, proclaiming you as the Lamb of God?

Whether it was cruel or kind, this bitter wine fulfilled the final prophecy that you Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, would die. Six hours have passed. The sky turns as black as night. Three more hours. Pure agony cuts through the darkness with a muffled crackling voice he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". And for the first moment in all eternity the Father turns his face from his Son. The perfect relationship now broken in an instant as the weight on his shoulders is not the physical weight he bears on the cross but the weight of the sin of an unfaithful people – past, present and future.

His death, a sacrifice to pay the price of a crime he did not commit as he wears the stain of a people who betrayed their God, who betrayed him. The cosmos responds, the ground shaking, the rocks splitting, lightning flashing through the sky as the veil tears in the temple. Enemies of God now reconciled as children.

It is finished. You would cry out those words because you did it, you have done it. A stamp placed as a seal Jesus has paid in full.

Pause

Music

Thank you for the cross - Hillsongs

Silence and final Prayers

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Closing music

At the foot of the cross (Ashes into beauty) – Kathryn Scott