

Palm Sunday

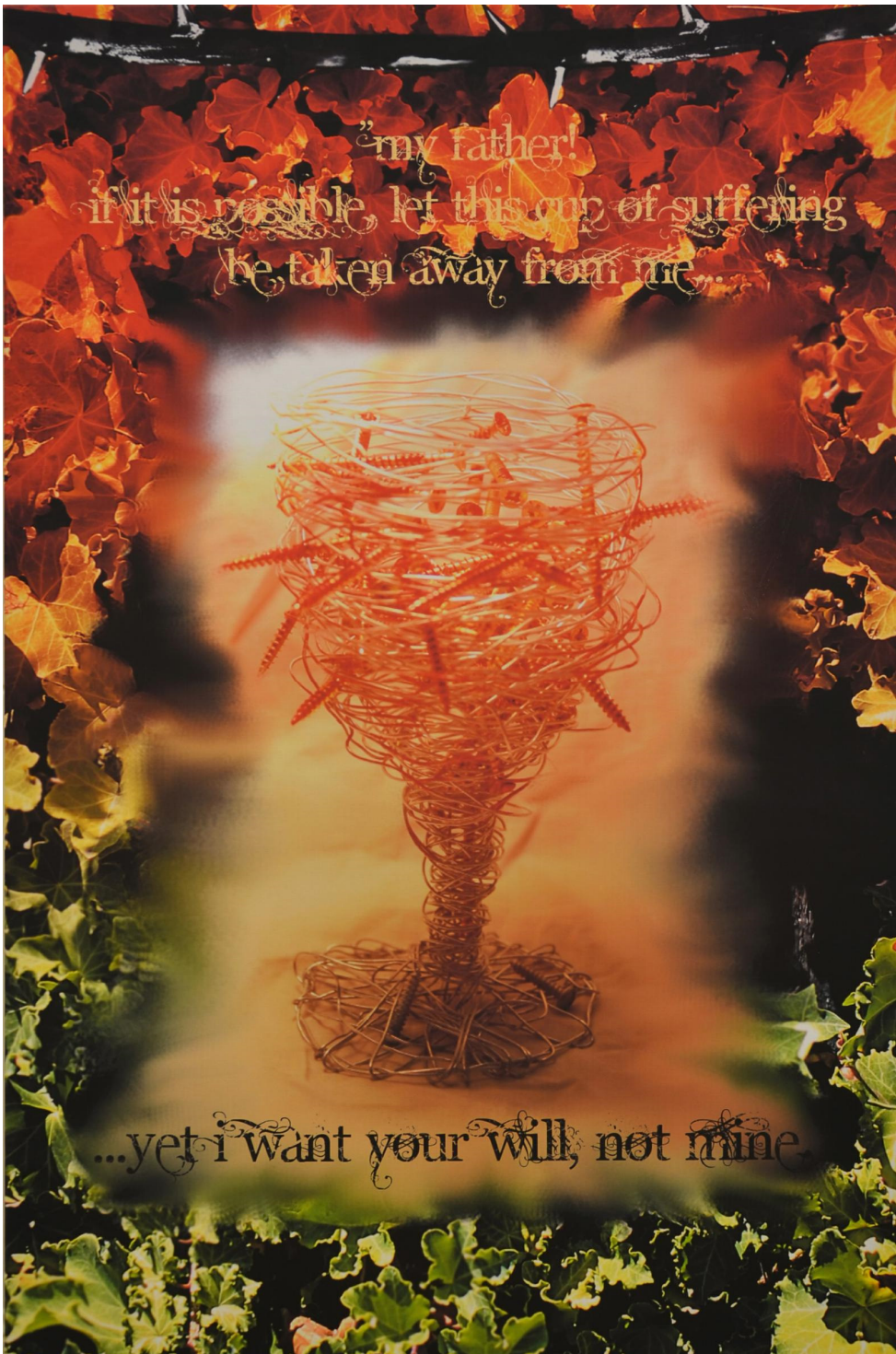


Palm Sunday Reflection by Samantha Browne

<p>Jesus he knows; What is to happen to him! Through the golden gate. A trial before Pilate. His death on a hill of thieves.</p> <p>A dark path waiting! As the people celebrate, Palms above their head. They shout out and sing for joy, But they do not quite know why.</p> <p>The donkey waits, Where Jesus said he would be. To carry the King! To his destiny, this day. The Saviour of our world .</p> <p>Jesus he knows; What is to happen to him! Through the golden gate. A trial before Pilate. His death on a hill of thieves.</p>	<p>Jesus he knows; What is to happen to him! Through the golden gate. A trial before Pilate. His death on a hill of thieves.</p> <p>A dark path waiting! As the people celebrate, Palms above their head. They shout out and sing for joy, But they do not quite know why.</p> <p>The donkey waits, Where Jesus said he would be. To carry the King! To his destiny, this day. The Saviour of our world .</p> <p>The disciples, His friends tagged along! Not getting the clue. Their journey's end is near. Their time with Jesus is short.</p>	<p>There in the township Men asked, "Who is this man?" And ask questions. Will he be a peacemaker? Or be a troublemaker?</p> <p>You have heard his tail! Who do you think that he is? Lord of creation? Or just another mad man? Are you a doubter or friend?</p> <p>They sing Hosanna To the Son of King David. Blessed is he who – Comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest!</p>
--	--	--



Maundy Thursday – in the garden



Matthew 26:36-46

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

36 Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." 37 He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. 38 He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." 40 Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Couldn't you watch with me even one hour? 41 Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!" 42 Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, "My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away[a] unless I drink it, your will be done." 43 When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn't keep their eyes open. 44 So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. 45 Then he came to the disciples and said, "Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look—the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Up, let's be going. Look, my betrayer is here!"

Reflection

It is impossible to live in this world without suffering. I don't need to give any examples about what types of sufferings exist in the world because as I even mention the word "suffering" there is a churn in your stomach, the brokenness of your heart felt again, the tears building up in your eyes...it is not hard to find the anguish of suffering just below the surface in all of us. How then are we to react when we know we are faced with imminent suffering? This is the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Knowing he is going to face unimaginable suffering he retreats with Peter, James and John – he tells his friends "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me." The physical distress is obvious as he falls to ground and seeks the Father and prays "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me..." – But what is this "cup of suffering" that He is asking to be taken away? Surely it includes the physical pain of being beaten, a crown of thorns forced onto his head and nailed into a cross – Jesus too felt physical pain in the same way that we do. But the cup of suffering was not just physical... this cup – this is the cup that contains all our guilt and the anger and judgment of God. It is the cup that holds the first lie we ever told, the cup that holds our spiteful words and thoughts, it's the cup that holds our envy of others, it's the cup that holds our greed – it's the cup that holds our rebellion from God.

This cup is truly the only cup of suffering – holding not just our sins, but all the sins of mankind. Imagine the taste of all the evil of the world, the bitterness and trying to swallow from that cup – it would be like trying to swallow a cup of nails, shards of glass and screws that are red hot from all the pain burning up in it.

Not only is he confronted with this cup of suffering but he is confronted with it alone – his friends are asleep and soon He will face not God's blessing but his wrath – while standing alone.

But despite because confronted with this cup of suffering – Jesus with willing arms and hands chooses to take this cup of suffering upon himself – his pray does not finish with "take this cup away from me..." – it finishes with "...yet, I want your will, not mine." Despite being grieved and anguished and having never sinned himself – never experienced the guilt of sin – never experienced even a moment of consuming selfishness – never pretended something was ok to do when it wasn't - he willingly chooses to take all of these sins upon himself.

We look upon this cup of suffering now with conviction – we are broken knowing the suffering and monstrosity of our own sins and his innocence – the red burning fire of God's judgement placed upon Him for us. But this is not the finale of this cup – what was a cup of suffering has become a cup of joy – a cup that is not filled with bitterness but is a cup filled with God's forgiveness; a cup filled with never feeling alone again, a cup that reminds us that there will be a time without any sufferings – a time where sin has no impact in our lives. We rejoice because it is this cup that will allow us to return to the green garden, where we will be in perfect relationship with our Father.

This cup is on offer to all of us – if only we are willing to sip from it.



Jesus is arrested

Matthew 26:47-56

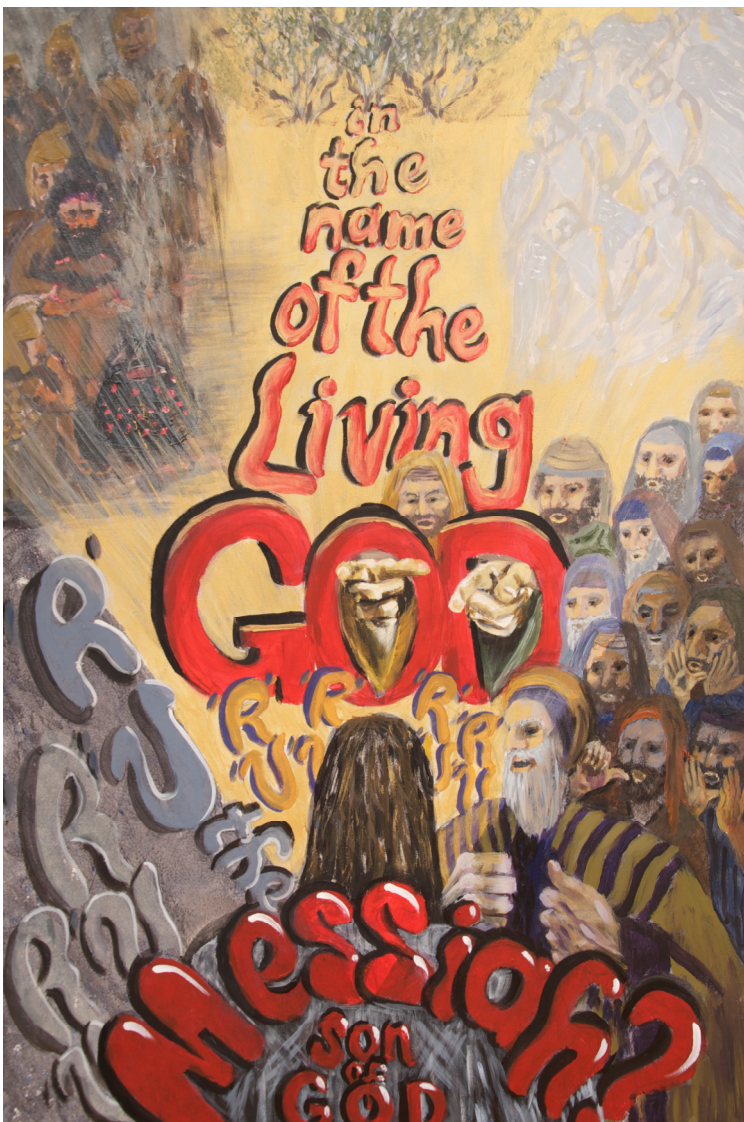
47 And even as he said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a mob that was armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent out by the leading priests and other leaders of the people. 48 Judas had given them a prearranged signal: "You will know which one to arrest when I go over and give him the kiss of greeting." 49 So Judas came straight to Jesus. "Greetings, Teacher!" he exclaimed and gave him the kiss. 50 Jesus said, "My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for." Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. 51 One of the men with Jesus pulled out a sword and slashed off an ear of the high priest's servant. 52 "Put away your sword," Jesus told him. "Those who use the sword will be killed by the sword. 53 Don't you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands* of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? 54 But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?" 55 Then Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I some dangerous criminal, that you have come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn't you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. 56 But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures." At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Reflection for meditation on the painting

Who was Judas, and what did he want of Jesus? Judas was zealous in his desire for the Kingdom of God to come. However, he did not understand God's plans & purposes, and sought to force God's hand. Judas believed Jesus was the Messiah, and wanted him to bring in the Kingdom of God politically by force. To do this he went to the leading priests and offered to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, and then looked for an opportunity to betray him. That opportunity came in the garden in Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed for strength for what was to come. Jesus responds to Judas with love & grace, calling him friend, and allowing him to betray him with his kiss. When one of the disciples acted violently towards their captors, Jesus response is telling –violence begets violence. As Judas listens in Jesus tells them all that thousands of angels would come and protect him if he asked, but that if he did this, God's

plans and purposes in him and for him would not be fulfilled. The angels are held back by the Word of God from Isaiah 53:10-12 'But it was the Lord's good plan to crush him and fill him with grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord's plan will prosper in his hands. When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of what he has experienced, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear their sins. I will give him the honours of one who is mighty and great, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among those who were sinners. He bore the sins of many and interceded for sinners.'

Isn't there a little of Judas in all of us, or the disciple with the sword? Do we not try and make Jesus into the sort of Messiah that we want to see, or who fits with our preconceptions of how God works in the world? How often do we come wanting what we think is right, and pushing for it violently; maybe not with clubs & swords; but with angry words, malicious slander or gossip to bring another down. Is this not to betray our Lord with a kiss?



REFLECTION ON Matthew 26:57-68 Jesus before the Council

57 Then the people who had arrested Jesus led him to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of religious law and the elders had gathered. 58 Meanwhile, Peter followed him at a distance and came to the high priest's courtyard. He went in and sat with the guards and waited to see how it would all end.

59 Inside, the leading priests and the entire high council were trying to find witnesses who would lie about Jesus, so they could put him to death. 60 But even though they found many who agreed to give false witness, they could not use anyone's testimony. Finally, two men came forward 61 who declared, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple

of God and rebuild it in three days.” 62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Well, aren't you going to answer these charges? What do you have to say for yourself?” 63 But Jesus remained silent.

Then the high priest said to him, “I demand in the name of the living God—tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” 64 Jesus replied, “You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand[b] and coming on the clouds of heaven.” 65 Then the high priest tore his clothing to show his horror and said, “Blasphemy! Why do we need other witnesses? You have all heard his blasphemy. 66 What is your verdict?” “Guilty!” they shouted. “He deserves to die!”

67 Then they began to spit in Jesus' face and beat him with their fists. And some slapped him, 68 jeering, “Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who hit you that time?”

Denial, Deception, and Self Deception contrasts with Serenity

How often do we fall into the sin of trying to tell God what to do or manipulate Him?

What is the frustration when He does not co-operate? Do we tear out our hair if not our clothes?

The High Priest and Council and accusers felt that frustration. They wanted Jesus, the crowd pleasing healer to fit their image. Only by denying His miracles could they maintain their self deception and perception that He was not the Messiah foretold by the Prophets.

Jesus was the miracle worker who helped the socially and physically “unclean” The Temple leaders wanted him ‘off their patch’. He would tarnish their image and give their faith, culture and traditions a bad name.

Peter's usual reflex action response to situations had to be curtailed or “denied”. Peter, on his own, having followed Jesus with his crowd of captors from a safe distance, sat with the soldiers to “wait to see how it would all end” “. How would “What” end?

(No mates around to stage a Mission Impossible-style rescue!) How foreign this must have felt for the ‘Action man’ Peter to be sitting and waiting. What were his thoughts? However awkward he felt sitting there with his Master's captors, he chose to “sit tight to be there on the spot”

Caiaphas' deceptive plan was to get rid of Jesus by fair means or foul, seeking witness after witness to vilify Jesus.

(God's plan was to use all elements to achieve his Master plan)

Jesus knew He could call on legends of angels, but he trusted in God's ultimate plan which included all those taking part.

The Accusers, with or without conscience, twisted the words of Jesus and condemned an innocent man. Was this self deception a product of bribery or just their needing a certain status in their lives?

How often do we point a metaphorical finger at someone, condemning and labelling them in our hearts or verbally with the aversion of racial or social intolerance?

The serenity portrayed by Jesus as he endures the barrage of accusations and interrogation, contrasts dramatically with the outrage and frustration demonstrated by the High Priest.

Staying calm when some else is losing their temper is the epitome of strategy.

“The Cool Dude stays in control while the one freaking out Looses the plot”

The frustration grows in the angry person till they either explode like Caiaphas or wake up to how ridiculous and inappropriately they are behaving (the latter only happens if any self-deception button can be switched off)

Later in the chapter, the self deceit and their attempt to obliterate even the resurrection by again bribing the tomb guards shows how determined Caiaphas and council were to deny the truth about Jesus. They just could not be mistaken! To admit their error or sin and be forgiven was totally unthinkable.

Do we ever fall into the trap of self deception? Does pride ever ensnare us into needing to be “Right” in all our relationship interactions? Perhaps even blaming God for our circumstances when they are of our own making?

Praise God that He is bigger than all our game playing . He can and will forgive us when we come to him with a broken and contrite heart, ready to start over.



Reflection on Matthew 26:69-75 by Angela Footit

Peter Denies Jesus

69 Meanwhile, Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came over and said to him, “You were one of those with Jesus the Galilean.”

70 But Peter denied it in front of everyone. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said.

71 Later, out by the gate, another servant girl noticed him and said to those standing around, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.[a]”

72 Again Peter denied it, this time with an oath. “I don’t even know the man,” he said.

73 A little later some of the other bystanders came over to Peter and said, “You must be one of them; we can tell by your Galilean accent.”

74 Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know the man!” And immediately the rooster crowed.

75 Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And he went away, weeping bitterly.

Reflection for meditation on the painting

“What have I done?” exclaimed Peter to himself as the realization of his betrayal settles on him. Those words of denial that no matter how hard he tries can never be crammed back into his mouth! Those eternal words now etched into his very being; engraved upon his heart with the blood of his best friend and saviour. Words that seemed innocent

enough at the time; just a careless throwaway line really; made real as betrayal and given depth by the proud boasting crow of the morning rooster.

“Jesus knew this would happen. He knew and he tried to warn me. Damn my ears. Damn my pride and arrogance. Lord and master, forgive me. I weep a pool of tears in contempt of those denying words.”

Peters torment and anguish is clear. He weeps the deep heavy sobs of a man convicted of his sins and humbly laying them before God. Peter ‘the Rock upon which I will build my church’ (Matthew 16:18) has crumbled into a pile of rubble and all of nature weeps with him.

Just a few hours ago Peter had taken an oath saying “Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!” (Matt 26:35) So easily that oath has been forgotten when fear takes hold.

Fear has an amazing power over us. It makes us do and say things that we never in our wildest dreams thought possible. Peter said “I don’t know what you’re talking about”, “I don’t even know the man” and “A curse on me if I’m lying – I don’t know the man!” But in his heart he is thinking “I’m afraid and confused”, “I don’t know what to do” and “My world is falling apart”.

Without the key of the resurrection Peter doesn’t understand what is happening and he is frightened. He knows Jesus to be the Messiah and have all the power of heaven at his command yet Jesus was just led away by his enemies without even a fight. Like a lamb to the slaughter. WHAT IS GOING ON? He follows Jesus, eager to see what is going to happen next. But when met with even the slightest resistance; a servant girl; the adrenalin takes over, he panics, forgets his vow and gives in to his sinful nature and lies.

How much like Peter are we? How many times have we denied knowing Christ in thought, word or deed, or in what we have failed to do? Our tears merge with Peters in the pool of regret and all of creation weeps with us. Fortunately, God doesn’t give up on Peter, or us. “He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.” (Revelation 21:4) God still uses Peter as a mighty figure to build his church upon; and he can use us to. No matter how many pieces we are broken into even if we are seemingly ground to dust, he can use us for good. God is our “Mighty Rock” (Psalm 94:22) who will not crumble. Give your fear to God. He is scared of nothing. He will take your fear and wipe away your tears. Trust him who has proven time and time again that he is so utterly worthy of our trust.

PRAYER

Forgive me, dear Lord, for my lack of faith. Help me not to be like Peter in this story. Help me to give my fears over to you; to leave them at the foot of the cross and have faith in your love. I regret so much of what I have done in my life; but most of all I regret not following you more closely. Lord, take my broken body and wipe away my tears. Renew my heart. Fill it with trust and turn my eyes upon you. Help me to stand strong against sin and temptation, relying on your strength; not my own. For you are the “Mighty Rock”; the great “I am”. My Lord, my Saviour, and my friend! Amen.



Reflection "Judas hangs himself."

Reading: Matthew 27:1-10

27 Very early in the morning the leading priests and the elders of the people met again to lay plans for putting Jesus to death. 2 Then they bound him, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor.

3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he declared, "for I have betrayed an innocent man."

"What do we care?" they retorted. "That's your problem."

5 Then Judas threw the silver coins down in the Temple and went out and hanged himself.

6 The leading priests picked up the coins. "It wouldn't be right to put this money in the Temple treasury," they said, "since it was payment for murder." 7 After some discussion they finally decided to buy the potter's field, and they made it into a cemetery for foreigners. 8 That is why the field is still called the Field of Blood. 9 This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah that says, "They took the thirty pieces of silver—the price at which he was valued by the people of Israel, 10 and purchased the potter's field, as the Lord directed."

Reflection on painting: Greg & Sharon Footit

Have you ever pushed at something, and found that what you have started gathers momentum you never sought or expected, till it ends up achieving the very opposite of what you intended? Judas wasn't evil, just misguided. He sought to push Jesus into political Messiah-ship, and when Jesus rejected this route, because it was not God's plan for him, Judas realized what his betraying kiss had begun, and he was devastated. He realized that what he had set in motion now led to Jesus being condemned to die, and this was never what he intended to happen. Shame & guilt brought him back to the leading priests, trying to give them back the 30 pieces of silver, his payment for betrayal. In Zechariah 11, there was another payment of 30 pieces of silver. A prophet was called by God to play the evil & worthless shepherd, who not only leads his sheep to slaughter, instead of protecting them, but who does the

slaughtering himself. He had two staves, named favour and unity; signs of God's presence and protection; and he broke them in two before the leaders of the people. They knew the Lord was speaking to them through these actions, and he felt compelled by the Lord to ask for his wages, for whatever he was worth in his betrayal of the sheep, and they gave him 30 pieces of silver. Judas betrayed the great shepherd of the sheep for the same amount, and he despaired, and in that despair, he took his life; desolate, inconsolable and alone.

But there are two deaths, two men who hang from a tree. One death reveals despair; while the other death stands as a sign of hope and promise. Judas set in motion the events which lead to Jesus arrest & ultimate death. However, God's plan was to restore both favour and unity through the sacrificial death of this man who was innocent.

In the story of Joseph, and the betrayal of his 11 brothers that led him into Egypt, his brothers come to Joseph to ask his forgiveness for what they did to him. He answers "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people."

In this same way, what Judas put into motion to force God's hand, God knew and planned to bring about his own purposes. Jesus death restored the possibility of the favour of God, and the unity of all peoples; saving the lives of many people.

Things can get out of control, a vicious word; a bitter letter sent in anger; a damaged silence in a relationship that cannot be reconciled. These things lead us to regret at what we have done by our thoughts, words & actions. All of us live with regrets, and disappointment in ourselves. Judas despaired, and desolate, inconsolable and alone, he took his life, instead of taking his regret and remorse to his loving heavenly Father, and turning it into repentance. Because of Jesus' death we have hope and a promise of forgiveness. What regret should you bring to your loving heavenly Father today, to repent of the damage, and receive his ready forgiveness, given because of the death of Jesus?



Reflection: “Jesus before Pilate”

Reading: Matthew 27:11-26

11 Now Jesus was standing before Pilate, the Roman governor. “Are you the king of the Jews?” the governor asked him. Jesus replied, “You have said it.”

12 But when the leading priests and the elders made their accusations against him, Jesus remained silent. 13 “Don’t you hear all these charges they are bringing against you?” Pilate demanded. 14 But Jesus made no response to any of the charges, much to the governor’s surprise.

15 Now it was the governor’s custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner to the crowd— anyone they wanted. 16 This year there was a notorious prisoner, a man named Barabbas.[d] 17 As the crowds gathered before Pilate’s house that morning, he asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you— Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” 18 (He knew very well that the religious leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy.)

19 Just then, as Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him this message: “Leave that innocent man alone. I suffered through a terrible nightmare about him last night.”

20 Meanwhile, the leading priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be put to death. 21 So the governor asked again, “Which of these two do you want me to release to you?” The crowd shouted back, “Barabbas!”

22 Pilate responded, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!”

23 “Why?” Pilate demanded. “What crime has he committed?” But the mob roared even louder, “Crucify him!”

24 Pilate saw that he wasn’t getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. The responsibility is yours!”

25 And all the people yelled back, “We will take responsibility for his death—we and our children!”[e]

26 So Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip, then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

Reflection on painting Jane Browne

Jesus, Pilate and the crowd

Jesus - I am the Son of God. My kingdom is not of this world. I have ruled in heaven with my father since the dawn of time. I thirst for Justice, offering the gift of living water, to refresh, renew and marks them as being reborn.

I am the way to peace and reconciliation. True peace not upheld by the sword of war or the tyranny of fear; but by the sacrifice of my life for theirs. It is the price that must be paid for truth and justice and to please my father. If only they understood.

Pilate - I am the emperor's strong hand. My rule is of Judea; this hot, dusty and rebellious back water of the Empire. I hunger for glory and power. I offer stability, rationality. A pragmatic man, I'll do what needs to be done to keep peace, here and at home.

I am the peacekeeper, bringing order to a chaotic people. Peace is not given, it is hard won. If justice is compromised, truth is stretch, then that is a small price. If only they understood!

Jesus - I weep for my people, offered life in abundance, those who revelled in my kingship just days ago; now drown. Weighed down by the greed, selfishness and arrogance that hardens their hearts. Their eyes do not see and their ears not hear. Their hearts are like stone. They sink in the mire of daily life, ground to dirt by the hardship and injustice of life without Joy, without grace.

Pilate - This crowd are like children, cheering one day jeering the next. They grasp at any glimmer of hope that they might be set free from Roman rule. The fools don't see that no mere man can overthrow the Roman Empire. It is an idea, an ideal, greater than any mortal living or dead. And if they fight it, they will drown; washed away in the torrent that is the Empire.

Jesus - But I feel for this man, not one without sin, he's arrogant with a hunger for power. He just doesn't understand. He believes he controls my fate but he cannot do what is right: convention; expectations; love of power; and his own vanity bind him. The script is rit and he has no more ability to change the outcome, than fly to the moon. But even he can be saved if he would accept the forgiveness my father is offering - a mere drop of blood!

Pilate - But this man; is different. I look into his eyes and I see concern not fear; pity not disgust; resolution not anger; peace not conflict; forgiveness, not revenge; understanding not confusion.

Who is he that he can stand before me his only hope and not beg for mercy? He's not like the fools in the crowd and yet he is one of them. He is not like the priest's and teachers but he is wise. He's strong but there is strength in him and gentleness I've not seen in any man, let alone the condemned.

Does he not know I have the authority to free him? What am I to do? Is he a god, an omen from Jupiter? No man has ever caused me to doubt myself, my judgement.

But now the crowd are on the verge of revolt. They disgust me! He's done nothing deserving of death. Maybe, if I flog him, they'll be appeased; but then those vile priests just whip them up again. Even Herod runs from this circus!

I wash my hands of them all!

The third voice - This story has a myriad of characters, a quixotic crowd, manipulative Pharisees and Pilate a very modern and dangerous man. In the name of "peace", and at the expense of "truth", Pilate embraced "tolerance". Tolerance as an absolute good, but when in the name of tolerance and peace we allow: just a little injustice, a little lie; compassion, freedom, trust and justice become the real victims. People seeking freedom, become "queue jumpers" and we tolerate their incarceration for years with out trial or a voice.

Like us Pilate knew what he was doing, torn by guilt he sort absolution by washing his hands of the business. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?" Jesus didn't come to tolerate, but to expose injustice. Rather than let blood and guilt condemned, to let it wash us clean. To teach compassion that softens our hardened hearts.



Reflection : “The Soldiers Mock Jesus.”

Reading: Matthew 27:27-31

27 Some of the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters[f] and called out the entire regiment. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. 29 They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed stick in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted, “Hail! King of the Jews!” 30 And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. 31 When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified.

Reflection on painting : Judy Pobke & Lisa Eames

The blackness of doom still hangs over the world while ‘the Regiment’ continues to sit in the seats under the big tent of the circus.

The words of the prophet Isaiah cries out loudly. Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open His mouth. ‘The Suffering Servant!’ Prophecy was being fulfilled.

It seems a bit of a farce that some of the governor’s soldiers and the entire regiment were there to guard, ridicule and belittle Jesus. Jesus wore the robe of humiliation. Though His body was weak and vulnerable, Jesus’ mind stayed strong with determination to fulfill what God intended. In the Arena, he was made to look like a clown; the butt of ‘the Regiment’s’ joke.

The sting of the verbal assault, mockery and unkind words must have felt like a vindictive slap in the face to the true ‘King of the Jews’. Silenced by the deep physical pain: who could have worn the crown of thorns as long as Jesus did? No other human being could have endured the piercing from the thorns as they pressed into His head, and the amount

of blood that flowed from His wounds. But the physical pain was nothing to the feeling of despair at being alone. This was the pain that pierced the heart. As we look on, it makes one weep inwardly with Jesus, as His strength only came from God. He did not show or give them the satisfaction of knowing His depth pain, even though he must have wanted so desperately to cry buckets of tears. What must it have been like to experience such unmerciful pain; physical, emotional and spiritual? Did it have to be done this way? This was His question in the garden, and His answer was clear. He could only do His Father's will!

Have you ever been one of those who, in the comfort of a large crowd; mock, or ridicule Jesus? Are not all of us in the circus seats? Maybe there were those in the battalion who looked on, and felt ashamed; perhaps the Centurion who was there at the last. How will you show compassion to stop the words that cause the cruel humiliation that Jesus endured.?

Jesus suffered in silence; alone separated from His mother, His brothers and His sisters; a reality all too familiar throughout His ministry. Abandoned also by His closest friends, His disciples, he faces it all in an agony of loneliness. Does he know that the worst is to come, that he will be abandoned by His Father as well as having to endure the cross?

It is as if all of us fill those seats in the arena of the big tent, every time we add to the mocking with our endless sins. Yet, it was God's will that this be His experience that we might experience the liberty and eternal life that His suffering brought for those who choose to recognize and submit to Jesus as the Son of God and King. We must take that walk with Jesus all the way to the cross, through humiliation and mockery, that like the thieves at His right and His left we are given the right to choose salvation.

Reflection: "The crucifixion."



Reading: **Matthew 27:32-44**

32 Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene,] and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. 33 And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). 34 The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with bitter gall, but when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it. 35 After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.[h] 36 Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. 37 A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Two revolutionaries[j] were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. 40 "Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!" 41 The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. 42 "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! 43 He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" 44 Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way.

Reflection on painting 6: Nisha Abrahams

The crucifixion, dates back to the 6th Century BC, was the most gruesome, humiliating and public means of punishing a criminal. But when Jesus took this cup of suffering for us it was not the pain or the humiliation that caused His suffering but rather the burden that he had to carry on his shoulders- the burden of our sins. The sins all of humanity have committed & continue to commit, especially those sins you and I commit in our lives.

Matthew 27: 32- 44 God opened me up to four things in this passage:

- God using an ordinary man, Simon by name, as part of His plan for His glory,
- the games that we play with God,
- the times when we mock Him
- the times that we don't trust Him.

Ephesians 2:10 "God has made us what we are and in union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do". Simon of Cyrene was one such vessel who was called to carry the cross on behalf of Jesus. I believe that I was called by God to do this painting for Easter. Today God is calling each of us to be used as his vessel. Are we listening to it and responding?

Verse 35 says, "After they nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice." Today we can play dice by looking for wisdom in the wrong places; without reference to God. People can be disguised shepherds, misleading us, and sometimes working against God. John 10:11- 12 "I am the Good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. But when the hired man who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them". Who are the disguised shepherds in our lives that keep us from the true shepherd?

There are times in our lives when we get frustrated and mock/ question God's power. In times of difficulty, we ask him where he is and why he is not doing anything about the problems that we want resolved. Like the soldiers and the people in verse 42 who scoffed him and asked, "He saved others?" But have we done our part when we ask Him? John 15 talks about the true Vine. If we remain in him we will bear fruit. He also tells us that "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it." Just like the dry branch that will be cut and thrown into the fire at the end of time, the weeds will also be gathered and burnt. Matthew 13: 30 "Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to pull up the weeds first, tie them in bundles and burn them, and then to gather in the wheat and put it in my barn." What are the weeds in your life that need to be removed for real growth and maturity?

There have also been times when we haven't trusted God or his ways. We are in darkness when we don't trust His ways because we think the ways that we take are right but we end up going down the wrong road of life. Jesus trusted God, but not to save him; rather that his plans would bring great blessing & peace. Luke 1: 78 & 79 says, "Our God is merciful and tender. He will cause the bright dawn of salvation to rise on us and to shine from heaven on all those who live in the dark shadow of death, to guide our steps into the path of peace." Jesus death brings this salvation & peace to us. He consoles us, "Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid." "The world will make you suffer but be brave I have defeated the world."



Reflection: "The Death of Jesus"

Reading: Matthew 27:45-56

45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 46 At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, [j] lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

47 Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. 48 One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. 49 But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

50 Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart, 52 and tombs opened. The bodies of many godly men and women who had died were raised from the dead. 53 They left the cemetery after Jesus' resurrection, went into the holy city of Jerusalem, and appeared to many people.

54 The Roman officer[m] and the other soldiers at the crucifixion were terrified by the earthquake and all that had happened. They said, "This man truly was the Son of God!"

55 And many women who had come from Galilee with Jesus to care for him were watching from a distance. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James and Joseph), and the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

Reflection on painting : Diane Ting

This is the defining moment in time and defines our time. While the hourglass depicts the marking of our human time with sand, the celestial sundial uses light and measures God's appointed time. While time is finite, in this event it

becomes the eternal infinite. It was 3.00 in the afternoon. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? It was almost as if our time starts now, for in his being forsaken by God, we are accepted, our entry point into eternity starts from this point and this time. Jesus shouted out and gave up his spirit, and at that moment everything changed forever, for we are no longer constrained by a life that must end in death, for in his death in time, he had overcome the finality of death for us.

Two Mary’s watch from a distance: Mary his own precious mother, and Mary Magdalene. Did Mary, his mother, remember how precious it was to hold him in her arms so long ago? Did she clutch at her own empty arms, holding the loss and pain in, as she watched and heard his cry of desolation and anguish? What did Mary Magdalene remember as she looked on? Everyone knows what is going to happen. It is a one way journey and it cannot be prevented. And yet, in both, there is an acceptance and a peace. Did they remember what he told them would happen? Did they believe?

Others look on, and what they feel is astounding. The earth shook, and rocks split apart at that moment when death came. Roman soldiers don’t frighten easy, but they were terrified by this earthquake, and its timing, and all that happened. For them, crucifixion was stock standard, and nothing out of the ordinary, and yet....and yet....this was so out of the ordinary that they declared “This man truly was the Son of God!”

Do we recognize what God has done for us in this moment? In his death, we now have fullness of life. Do we live each day, every day, knowing what Jesus did on this Friday, this Good Friday? Do we seek to live in his light?



Reflection: “The burial of Jesus”

Reading: Matthew 27:57-65

57 As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, 58 went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. 59 Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. 60 He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. 61 Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching.

62 The next day, on the Sabbath,[n] the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. 63 They told him, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise from the dead.' 64 So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we'll be worse off than we were at first."

65 Pilate replied, "Take guards and secure it the best you can." 66 So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.

Reflection on painting: Greg & Sharon Footit

Deuteronomy tells us 'If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and then hanged on a tree, the body must never remain on the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone hanging on a tree is cursed of God.' Paul tells us that 'Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.'

Genesis tells us that to protect the fruit of the tree of life, God banished human beings from the Garden of Eden. But from this very moment he set in place his plans to bring about the opportunity to taste of the fruit of the tree of life, and live forever. That plan culminated in the coming of Jesus, for Jesus is God's tree of life. And now, Jesus, God's tree of life is dead and buried! It was Joseph, a secret disciple, who wanted to show his respect, who made sure Jesus was appropriately shrouded and buried. The disciples had all fled, leaving only Mary Magdalene & the other Mary, who sat nearby watching. What were they watching for? Did they remember, as the leading priests did, that Jesus promised that after three days, he would be raised from the dead?

There is a 'blackness' that all of us experience in life in times of despair and desolation. It may be in the diagnosis of incurable disease in a loved one; the death of a longed for child; the loss of a soul-mate who has become one with you, and who, without, you feel incomplete. In the quiet and darkness, what do you wait for? Such blackness can make us question the reality of God, and the possibility of a future.

The writer of Psalm 94 was in despair. He writes 'When doubts filled my mind, your comfort gave me renewed hope and cheer' and Psalm 62 reminds us 'I wait quietly before God, for my hope is in him. He alone is my rock and my salvation...trust him at all times-pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.'

I like to think that Mary Magdalene & the other Mary waited quietly before God, knowing their hope was in him. My prayer for you today is that when blackness comes, and we question God's reality. or his love, we can all receive comfort & renewed hope as we wait; our hope in God as both rock and salvation; no matter how dark the situation we face.