

## The Sleeping Disciples – The Very Rev Kelvin Holdsworth

In our Good Friday meditations this year, we are reflecting on five scenes from Gwyneth Leech's Holy Week triptych that hangs in St Anne's chapel in St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow.

The first scene to look at is the sight of three disciples asleep under the trees. As I've looked at pictures of the whole triptych this week I've been struck by the fact that there's both more detail in it than I expected and also less detail in it than I expected. Taking photographs I've found figures in it that I'd never noticed before. Angels in the trees. People I've just not spotted. But when I look closely, there's an impressionistic sense to so much. There's a lot we have to fill in ourselves. Here we've got three disciples under a tree. But their faces are not terribly distinct. We know from scripture that they are Peter, John and James. But the truth is, they could be any of us.

They have listened to Jesus teaching day after day. Mind blowing stories. They have witnessed moments of high drama. A fit of dangerous bad temper in the synagogue. Tables turned over. Trouble in the air. And moments of beguiling intimacy. This is my body. This is my blood. Let me wash your feet. Kisses. Secrets. Love.

They sit under the trees. He tells them to stay awake. But they've got no energy left to stay awake with. Physically exhausted. Emotionally exhausted. He wants them to pray. They want to sleep. What a week it has been already. And they have no idea what is coming next.

### MUSIC

Many of us are exhausted. Physically exhausted. Emotionally exhausted. Perhaps we feel we are supposed to pray – and yet there's no energy there to make it happen. Yet sleep isn't always easy either. What a strange few weeks it has been. And we've no idea what is coming next.

We could fill in the details of the faces in the mural. They are our faces this year. We've heard and seen extraordinary things that we never thought we would hear or see. Bravery from health-care workers. Kindness and intimacy too. A nurse holding the hand of someone dying whose relatives are not allowed in. And we've known anger and resentment that is confusing too. Why isn't there the right equipment in the right places? Why have people who should know better broken the lockdown that others are working so hard to keep in place? Why did we start the lockdown later than we should? Will someone not come and turn over the tables in our world?

Anger. Outrage. Betrayal. Intimacy. Love.

The stories of holy week are always our stories. This is a holy week unlike any other. And yet simultaneously a holy week like every other. The reason for the power of the stories is that they are our stories – our experiences. We usually live them through the drama of holy week in church. But it matters because it is the drama of our own lives we are playing out. Even this year, especially this year just like every other year.

We've been exhausted too. We may want to pray. We may need to pray. We may be called to pray. And yet we find ourselves more likely to sleep a fitful sleep. Unsure of what comes next.

The experience of those disciples is our own.

MUSIC – An Oxford Elegy – played by Frikki Walker

## The Arrest of Jesus – The Rev Matthew Little

As you enter St Anne's Chapel in the Cathedral Church of St Mary's, here in Glasgow, you are struck by the huge mural adorning the North wall of that chapel.

The mural, featuring Gwyneth Leech's Kelvingrove Trip: consists of three panels.

Each panel is seventeen feet high by seven feet wide and combined depicts the Easter Passion set in Kelvingrove Park, a park just a stone's throw from the Cathedral itself.

As your eye moves to the top left of the first mural you encounter the scene at Gethsemane; the betrayal of Jesus.

Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives, was a place far from the crowds and Judas knew that Jesus often went there in the evening to pray.

It was the custom at that time for the disciple of a beloved rabbi to greet him by laying his hands on his shoulders and kissing each cheek.

As I look at the mural I see deep undertones of affection between the disciple and Jesus.

Judas' cloak envelops Jesus yet the juxtaposition in the mural is the hidden intention of Judas.

Around the two central figures are soldiers and high priests; Peter is there too and we see him lash out.

This cohort is filled with aggression and anger; we see torches and wooden clubs; this mob wants their man!

When I was born, I'm told that my parents decided on the name Christopher for me, however, on his way to register my birth, my Father visited my Grandmother; his mother-in-law. My Granny was a woman of strong character and if there was ever a Matriarch who ruled the roost, she was it!

When she was told what I was being called she insisted that it wasn't very biblical and SHE decided I would be called MATTHEW.

But what's in a name?

I'm sure in our lives we've all met Peter's and James' and Johns; I've even met a Jesus!

Maybe you've even been lucky enough to meet a Matthew; everyone needs a Matthew in their life; but have you ever met a Judas?

Judas is a name I have never seen on a name tag or mug. I'm sure parents would sooner name their son anything other than Judas; a name synonymous with treachery and betrayal. This 'infamous' name conjures up faces of merciless dictators of the past.

But maybe there is more to consider about the man who betrayed Jesus, than what comes to mind when we hear his name especially at this time of year, as we prepare for and look forward to celebrating Easter.

You don't have to be brought up in a church to be familiar with the story.

Twelve men were selected to accompany Jesus and spread his message and Judas was not only one of the 12, he was also so trusted that he was selected as their treasurer.

After three years of witnessing Jesus walk on water, raise the dead, calm the winds and waves, and perform countless other miracles, Judas decided to sell Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver.

As one of the most privileged men in history, a man who ate and slept daily near Jesus, Judas showed up that night with a crew of bloodthirsty Roman soldiers; he walked up to Jesus and kissed him, giving the squad the agreed secret sign to have Jesus arrested.

In response, Jesus simply asks the question "You betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

and we know that what follows is an execution for the innocent Jesus and a suicide for the guilty Judas.

While we refuse to admit a likeness, in some ways our own personal reflection looks a lot like Judas.

Not only can we experience the same guilt that we lay at Judas' doorstep, but perhaps if we reflect we may also come to realise that we too have some of the same issues that led to his demise.

#### MUSIC

It would seem that Judas was, if you like, living a double life but I wonder if, like many of us, Judas faced a huge inner struggle, a struggle of which no one knew.

Feelings of doubt, uncertainty, hostility, maybe even a lack of faith.

Perhaps it was unrealized expectations that were running through his mind and that led him to do what he did.

Judas had been teaching and serving others with such a flawless performance that none of the other disciples knew of his struggles.

We see this at the Last Supper when Jesus mentioned that one of them was going to betray him: None of the other disciples knew it was Judas.

How many of us are, like Judas, saddled without peace and face inner turmoil or anxieties, while those closest to us have no idea the depth of our struggle and confusion?

Judas was surrounded by religious people who were at best cold and indifferent. The people, who should have cared the most, cared the least.

He later returned to the religious leaders to give back the blood money and explain he had betrayed innocent blood.

It was the perfect time to reach out to a man who was obviously on the edge.

Their response showed they were 'all talk and no action when they replied, "What is that to us?" In modern-day vernacular, this could be translated to "That's your problem" or "We couldn't care less!"

Of all the people who should have shown compassion, it should have been these leaders.

People who have been shunned by professing Christians, a church or religious leaders by their own friends and family, can be found everywhere.

Regrettably, many of us have been on both the giving and receiving end of this mistake, not only by community leaders but also by those we are closest too; a situation that leaves us plagued by loneliness and maybe regret.

After finding no relief from his conscience or his demons, Judas became weighed down with thoughts of suicide; wanting to escape from the torment within himself.

I regularly meet or correspond with numerous people who have, for various reasons, contemplated such an end.

There are people from every segment of society who are battling with their own personal dilemmas and issues.

Whether it's us or someone else in the grip of isolation, loneliness, guilt or regret; and more so during these unprecedented times many will struggle with bereavement and the inability the restrictions have placed on us, to grieve appropriately and preventing us from comforting those in need when they most need it.

Many of us will struggle enormously with the new demands that have been placed on all of us.

To date I have been at home 'shielding' for the past 22 days; 22 days that feel like 222 days.

There are days I struggle; days it feels like this will never end but it will; of this I am certain.

Easter is a time we celebrate Jesus walking out of the tomb and perhaps, like the disciples did all those years ago, we to can place our trust in the Lord who will and who did rise on Easter morning.

This Lent, I'm sure you would agree has been the 'Lentiest' of Lents in ways that we could never have imagined.

Ultimately, Easter is a time to celebrate our salvation but it's also a time to celebrate the forgiveness Jesus offered. After all, like Judas, we are all guilty at times of the same betrayal.

May we never forget our obligation to reach out to others who are facing indifference, isolation, loneliness, rejection and the myriad of other emotions that hold them back!

Undoubtedly, we are the most qualified to reach out because the best person to reach a "Judas" is a person who used to be one.

MUSIC - Sicilienne played by Friikki Walker

All Who Pass By – The Rev Canon Oliver Brewer-Lennon

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? (Lamentations 1:12)

When I look at the Gwyneth Leech murals in St Anne's Chapel, I see two different worlds. Now, that isn't because one part of the image depicts a story of the past, and the other depicts a scene of modern-day. For, in fact, everything in this scene appears at the same time and in the same place.

Instead, the two different worlds I see are ... one where a terrible, violent, world-changing thing is happening and another where everyday life seems to be unaffected. People walk by, apparently unmoved by what's happening only a short distance away.

It strikes me that the same thing might be happening right now. For, during this time of a pandemic, some sit at home, while others walk about with impunity. Some people are happy to catch up on TV box sets, while others are climbing the walls, ridden with anxiety, waiting for the end of the world. Some buy into conspiracy theories about the Coronavirus and call this disease a 'hoax', while others are on the front-line fighting a physical battle of life and death.

I suppose the world has always been this way. Some see things one way, and others see them differently. It makes sense that our human experience would be this way, shaped by our own feelings, knowledge and encounters. But it can make life difficult for us—strange to work out, tough to understand why some don't share our perspectives or priorities. Indeed, it can make us downright furious.

Lately, Joe and I've been taking our walks in Kelvingrove Park—the very same park this mural depicts. And weirdly, it seems like this scene—the scene of people oblivious to what's going on around them—is happening right now.

I'm trying my best to see people in advance and get on one side of the pavement. I'm striving to be cheerful and think charitable thoughts. Meanwhile, a group of youths (Boy, that makes me sound old!) ... a group of youths are roaming and zigzagging all over the place, taking up the entire path, seeming to be in their own little world. Oh, I've gotten so cross!

'What are they doing?' I've angrily muttered. If only people would look up, take notice of what's going on around them, then (a), I'd be a whole lot calmer and swear a whole lot less, and (b), folk would be able to see each other—really see each other and respond.

A whole lot is going on around us at the moment. And I find myself sometimes wondering, 'Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?'

MUSIC

Of course, I realise how self-righteous it sounds—reproachfully accusing others I see in the park of ignoring their responsibility to socially distance. In calmer moments, I recognise that what I call 'righteous indignation' is just a smokescreen for my own frustration, masking a viewpoint that—at the moment—is hypersensitive and limited. I'm scared and accusing others of something I'm incapable of doing myself: seeing the connection of one thing to another.

For many people, the story of Good Friday may seem immaterial, unrelated. There's nothing to see here. It's someone else's religion, some other time's tale; it's nothing to do with me. And, perhaps people are right in thinking that, from their perspectives. I might ask myself what other stories I think are worth listening to—how much other things going on in the world or throughout history have a bearing on my situation.

And, I'm quick to filter out. Hey, I'm a busy guy. I've got only so much time and so much space up in my grey matter. 'It's a subject of self-preservation', I say. But where do I draw the line? How much should I listen to what's going on? When does someone else's problem have something to do with me?

That's where this mural has helped me in my meditation this Holy Week. A mural where everything appears at the same time and in the same place. Betrayal then is betrayal now. Worn-out-ness then is worn-out-ness now. Indifference then is indifference now.

This story—the story of the Cross—has something to do with every atom in the composition of the universe. We are all on the same proverbial canvases. There's no place our sorrow is irrelevant or where it does not touch the whole of creation. There's no isolated pain or death, no isolated disease or disorder. Everything is connected. And here, in this painted scene, we see revealed that Christ's suffering is ours. And Christ's rising to new life is the redemption of everything that is.

MUSIC – Cantilene played by Frikki Walker

## The Cross – The Rev Ellen Barrett OSB

'It is finished.'

At the edge of a path, in a grove of trees gilded by the late afternoon sun, three ladders lean together. Coming closer, we see they stand against a different sort of tree. A cross. While others take their evening stroll, three women and a young man are taking down the body of the crucified. The man's back strains as he takes the weight. One of the women grasps the legs, the other the shoulders, sheltering the dead face. The third woman stands ready to receive the corpse, the shroud unfurled.

The shadows are lengthening. Everything must be tidied away before the first stars appear. The approaching Sabbath peace must not be disturbed. This small scene of tragedy already seems almost to be erased. The life of the park goes on, but in the midst of the living, this one life is over.

The effort of those who maneuver the corpse is in stark contrast to the limp weight they bear. It is dead weight in the truest sense. The breath, the soul, is gone. None of the vigor, none of the charismatic presence remains. The body is but a cast-off garment.

Yet because they loved the living, breathing man, his friends try to treat his body tenderly. It is all they can do now. Even this little defies tradition—an executed criminal's name and memory are to be erased. But these few, and, others will remember Jesus. To imagine where his spirit has gone is, for the moment, beyond them. He has slipped into the lengthening shadows, and there is much yet to be done.

### MUSIC

Jesus is not finished. There is much yet to do.

The darkness under the trees evokes the very shadow of death into which he has entered. The sunlit tree trunks now evoke the brazen gates of death—the gates he must not merely enter but break, bringing up the souls of the righteous to his Father's courts.

This will not be a 'rest in peace.' No. While the mourning goes on, while his body is prepared in haste for burial, our Messiah, our Christ, is engaged in a battle against all that would erase not only him but the worth of every human life.

Since humankind first chose to set themselves above the God who loved them into being, we humans, created to walk with God, have been in a sense self-isolated from God. We go forth, we labour, we strive, and in the end we die. Small wonder so many of us seek comfort in transitory things yet feel inside a soul-deep emptiness. Our greatest joys seem hostages to fortune—to time and fate and death.

Created for the glory of eternity, we imagine ourselves shivering in the cold our self-alienation has built. Trapped in our own darkness, we do indeed 'rage, rage against the dying of the light.'

As his friends must have done, so we struggle to believe, beyond hope, that Jesus' walk through the shadows has deeper meaning for us and the sun will rise again on Sabbath peace.

But for now, especially now, we wait. We do what is needful. We mourn alone or in small households. Our day of rest seems endless as we wait for sunrise. Long but not empty. It is distilled opportunity to reflect, to quiet fears, to love fiercely. Let us not waste the solitude, the dark, and the emptiness, lest we miss the dawn to come.

MUSIC – Elegy from Richard III – Walton played by Frikki Walker

## Laying him in the Tomb

The last of the scenes to look at in this series of meditations for Good Friday 2020 is what happened at the end of that first Good Friday. Jesus's body, having been taken down from the tomb is wrapped in grave-clothes and laid in the tomb.

And here's a one of those details in the picture that I'd never noticed before. I'd noticed that the tomb was there under some trees close by to the scene of the crucifixion itself.

But when I came to take the photographs which go with these meditations I noticed that the body was actually there. And there's two figures – both women, one at his head and one at his feet. Matthew's gospel says that Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" were with him to the end. Waiting even after Joseph of Arimathea had put him in the grave.

Gently, tenderly, those who cared for him do what little they can at the end.

The crowds of people who shouted hosanna earlier in the week have evaporated. The chosen 12 disciples have all done a runner. Fear is in the air but still there is tenderness. No-one knows what horrors might come next. But still they love him and still they want him laid to rest after the horrors of the day.

There's kindness here but it is kindness in a bitter, empty landscape. The beloved teacher is gone. Wiped out by the violence of the cross. State sponsored violence. Power using its all its privileges. Threatened leaders lashing out and eliminating the threat in the only way they know how.

A couple of good women and an unlikely man bury him as best as they can.

## MUSIC

One of the experiences that we are having to get used to at the moment is restrictions on funerals. Only a very few people can be present at the final goodbye. All our instincts are to gather, to offer support to one another and to those most close to the person who has died. And that has been taken away from us.

Jesus's funeral has a marked resonance this year with the funerals that we are obliged to have right now. Sparse and quiet but surely not without love. The scattered disciples knew what had happened. They knew their friend was dead. Scattered abroad they are mourning in their hiding places.

So many things have been taken away from us this year that it is difficult to know what to mourn for first.

It is easier sometimes to focus on small things because the bigger picture is too difficult to deal with. It is hard to get our heads around what a future world needs to be like when we are focussed on the awkwardness of buying food or the restrictions on travel and work for today.

We've looked at five scenes from a particular triptych and perhaps this won't be the last time this week we will look at it. As we leave it for today and leave Jesus in his tomb, let us just remember that the events are all portrayed locally. Gwyneth Leech has it all happening in Kelvingrove Park. The bigger picture a reminder that these are our stories. We are in them just as they are in us. All the events of Holy Week are our events. We are there. We are here. Then and now blend into one another.

MUSIC – Peeter's Aria – played by Frikki Walker