

PARTNERPLAN

Muriel Pearson & Stewart Gillan Israel April 2025

Prayers for Holy Week from the Holy Land, 2025

As our joint partner letter this Holy Week and Eastertide we offer prayers written in the context of the Holy Land to help you engage with current realities through the lens of the Passion. Use as you wish, change as you like, and may we together glimpse the dawn and forge hope by our faithful, loving actions.

Rev Muriel Pearson and Rev Dr Stewart Gillan, Mission Partners, Israel and Palestine

Palm Sunday

⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Mark 11:8-10

Each year throngs of Christian pilgrims make their way down the Mount of Olives, waving palm branches and shouting, 'Hosanna!' Last year's procession was muted. What will happen this year? The war goes on, and Passover and Easter celebrations coincide.

The last words of Red Crescent paramedic Ref'at Radwan, executed by Israeli Occupying Forces in Gaza, captured on his mobile phone, were, "Forgive me, Mother... this is the path I chose to help people. O Allah, accept me as a martyr. Forgive me and have mercy on me."

This is the path you chose, Jesus.
You knew as you entered Jerusalem
To cries of 'Hosanna!'
That cries of 'Crucify!' would follow.
Forgive us and have mercy on us
As we hold before you
Muslim, Christian and Jew
Asking you would save us and lead us
On the path to peace. Amen.

Monday of Holy Week

'Then they came to Jerusalem.' Mark 11: 15

Like visitors to Jerusalem now, Jesus made his way to the Temple. He overturned tables and called for God's House to be a House of Prayer. The crowd were enthralled and the chief priests and rulers were afraid.

Today, the streets of Old Jerusalem are deserted. There are few pilgrims and the merchants have little success in their sales. These days, there is a general strike in the West Bank and Jerusalem calling for an end to the killing in Gaza. The shops are shuttered.

Is Heaven shuttered, Lord?
Why have cries for justice
And peace gone unheard?

PARTNERPLAN

Why do military might
And international duplicity
Have the upper hand?
We must believe you do see and hear;
As Jesus saw the oppression of the poor
Even in the Temple itself
And overturned the tables.
Overturn injustice, Lord,
Encourage those who seek non-violent ways
To set free those caged
By hate and fear. Amen.

Tuesday of Holy Week

"It was two days before the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him, ² for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people." Mark 14:1-2

The atmosphere was febrile in Jerusalem 2000 years ago, as Pilate, Rome's strong enforcer entered Jerusalem on his war horse at the gate opposite to Jesus on his donkey. Jesus was enacting the way of sacrificial love and servant leadership. The clash was inevitable.

Why did the religious leaders want Jesus dead? They may have feared general unrest which would kill thousands. They may have been afraid of their own place as leaders, afraid of Rome. They may have believed that Jesus was dangerous and behaving blasphemously. Perhaps a mixture of all three. What we do know is they were afraid.

Stealth and secrecy. International diplomacy which excludes those being discussed and ignores international law. Fear still holds the powerful in its grip. Military tactics are still used against unarmed civilians. Those who resist are called 'terrorists' and 'animals.'

Fear has a choke-hold, Lord
On many who stay silent
For fear of offence
Or fear of rebuttal.
But some speak out
Saying, 'Not in my name!'
For Love's sake
They march and demonstrate
And write and petition.
Let Love be our token
Our weapon
to overcome hatred and fear.
For humanity's sake
Let us see in each other
The face of God. Amen.

Wednesday of Holy Week

"Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! ¹⁸ Pray that it may not be in winter. ¹⁹ For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now and never will be." Mark 13:17-18

Jesus warned of the awful horror to come, and as he dragged his cross to Golgotha he told the women of Jerusalem not to weep for him, but for themselves.

PARTNERPLAN

Women and children always suffer most in conflict. The weeping in recent days has been endless. So much life lost. So many young people and children brutally killed. There is weeping in Israel too. Every tear is precious. But safety and security are not achieved this way.

Security Council Resolution 1325 urges that women be involved in all UN peace and security efforts. Women of the Sun, a Palestinian women's movement and Women Wage Peace, an Israeli group, have been working hard to overcome the violent polarization which happened after 7th October 2023. They see the only hope for a lasting peace being a solution which respects the rights of all.

Tears fall. Families grieve.
Women try to hold things together
And reach out to the other.
But peace is not built on injustice.
A shared future is not achieved by separation.
A genuine cease fire and real talks
Where women are at the table
Are needed now.
Women of Jerusalem and Ramallah
Of Tel Aviv and Nazareth
We pray you find your way to each other;
To dry your eyes and raise your voices,
To work together for peace with justice.
'Blessed are you who weep now,
For you will be comforted.'
May that time be soon, Lord. Amen.

Maundy Thursday

'It was now the day before the Passover festival. Jesus knew the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.' John 13:1

The Church of All Nations in Gethsemane is usually filled each year with pilgrims from all over the world for late-night prayers on the Thursday of Holy Week. Last year there were far fewer. The same is expected to be the case this year. The rock over which the Church is built, believed to be the one on which Jesus prayed in agony to his Father, is exposed to view in the centre of the chancel. It is rough: an intrusion into the otherwise ordered architecture of the Church, a reminder of Jesus' cries, irrupting into the night; disturbing any peace in which the olive trees might have stood.

This year, Gethsemane will again be a place of prayer offered in extremis, keeping faith with the Jesus whose soul was 'troubled unto death.' Let us join our voices with all who cry out in Gaza, on the West Bank, and in Israel, for the strength to withstand the things that make for death, trusting in the one who knew abandonment not to abandon them.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Though all things were given into your hands,
You used those hands to wash the feet of your followers,
To break bread at table and lift the cup of salvation,
Before your own feet took you to Gethsemane
To pray in anguish, looking death in the eye,
submitting to your Father's will.

121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN
T: +44 (0)131 225 5722 E: FaithAction@churchofscotland.org.uk
Scottish Charity Number: SCO11353

PARTNERPLAN

On that night you were betrayed and arrested
And taken to be questioned.
Hear the cries of all who cry from the depths this night,
Hear the groans of all who groan for friends this night,
Hear the calls of all who call for deliverance this night.
Amen.

Good Friday

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.' Mark 15: 16-20

We live in a time that leans more to crucifixion than resurrection, to death than to return from the dead, and to the violence of fear and hatred rather than the non-violence of understanding and embrace. Since 7 October 2023 we have seen the deaths of some 1,200 Israelis and over 50,000 Gazans, over half of them women and children. Estimates of those injured runs at least to 110,000. And still the killing continues, and hostages and prisoners remain in captivity.

Jesus laid down his life. Many do not get that choice. Their lives are taken from them by the blunt force of weaponised fear, vengeful hatred and aggressive nationalism. On Good Friday we remember Jesus' words from the cross, and listen for the words from Gaza today of grief, trauma, fear, rage, compassion and care.

Jesus, our Saviour, as we gather at your cross,

Help us to hear the words you spoke from it – those seven words:

'Father, forgive them,' you said: a revolution in spirit.

'They do not know what they are doing,' you said, acknowledging their ignorance.

'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise,' you told the repentant thief.

'Mother, there is your son,' you said, wishing her the consolation of family.

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Your soul-blasted cry in the words of Psalm 22: Scripture giving you words for even this!

'I am thirsty,' you said, and no-one blamed you.

'It is finished,' you said, a fulfilment of mission.

'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit,' you said – trusting in the relationship forged before creation.

Help us to have the courage to lose our lives for your sake, and thereby find them,

To trust your sacrifice of love and raise our sacrifice of praise,

Calling for an end to the killing, the freedom of the targeted, the binding up of the broken, and the release of captives,

As You have promised.

Amen.

Holy Saturday

'Then Joseph bought a linen cloth and, taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.'
Mark 15: 46

121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN

T: +44 (0)131 225 5722

E: FaithAction@churchofscotland.org.uk

Scottish Charity Number: SCO11353

PARTNERPLAN

It is the day between the days, and we are called to stand attendance at Jesus' grave. Joseph of Arimathea had asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body down from the cross – the crucified having no right to burial. No sooner had Arimathea set a stone in front of the tomb, newly hewn, than Pilate orders it sealed, to forestall any proclamation of resurrection. Jesus' body constitutes a text whose wounds speak loudly of violence and pain; whose naked state cries out for anointing.

No-one knows how many bodies there are entombed under the rubble in Gaza – this in addition to the bodies of the 1,200 and the 50,000, and those killed on the West Bank and in Israel. Who will anoint them? Who will recognise their dignity? And who will honour the dead, all equally made in God's image; and those left for dead, and those who will have died by the time you read these words?

Dear Lord,
You were not invincible, but vulnerable.
We are like you in this.
You were not eternal, but mortal.
We are like you in this.
You were not unmarked, but scarred.
We are like you in this.
Grant us the mettle
To sustain our engagement with the wounds of your crucified body –
signs of your solidarity with a wounded humanity.
Grant that we might sustain a prophetic witness to your truth, justice and healing,
seeking to right what is wrong in our relations
with other people and with the planet.
May we study the rewards not of war but of peace,
not of death dealing but of life loving,
not of fear mongering but of other honouring.
In your holy name,
Amen.

Easter Sunday

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.” Mark 16:1-2

They must have left their lodgings in the dark to be there at sunrise. They did not know how, but they wanted to tend to the wounded body of their dead Lord. They found the stone rolled and the tomb empty. No body. An angel told them He had gone ahead of them to Galilee and to tell Peter and the others. They left the tomb in fear and amazement and said nothing to anybody because they were afraid.

It was a subdued Easter, still shrouded in fear and secrecy. And yet the news spread, and disciples took heart. In Gaza this year, and in the West Bank, Easter will be subdued also. The Holy Fire will not travel from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem to Gaza. Permits to allow Christians from the West Bank to come to Jerusalem will likely be strictly limited.

And yet Christians continue to ask, ‘Why look for the living among the dead?’

The tomb is empty. Our Lord Christ is risen, the wounds yet visible, a pledge of solidarity with a wounded world. Death and destruction will not have the final word.

PARTNERPLAN

We cannot rush to an easy Easter. Without a cease fire and a genuine peace process, celebration is misplaced. Hope must not be made a cheap slogan. In his body Christ bears the wounds. He carries the pain of the people. He speaks peace and those who look for Him will find Him.

We whisper, 'Alleluia!'
We wonder at the empty tomb.
We hear the invitation
To Galilee
The places of our everyday lives
And the promise:
'There you will see Him.'
Open our eyes, Lord,
Unstop our ears
So that we see and hear you
Among the suffering of the world.
And we ask that you would stir us up
To 'good trouble'
as we live into the promise of new life,
restored relationships
and genuine peace. Amen.