



On your marks

The following outline is based on an all-age Good Friday service that was held at my own church. It is important that children are invited to be part of the events of Good Friday, awful and mysterious as they are, because without this experience, the glory of Easter morning can be robbed of its full truth. This service was designed with children in mind, with plenty to see, touch and do; however, as each year has proved, it has increasingly appealed to all ages as a way to enter more fully into the story of this unique and special day.

Get Set

This service takes the shape of a journey with Jesus over the last 24 hours of his earthy life. For this you will need to decide on at least three different 'stations' around your church and / or hall to which everyone will walk and where they will gather to hear and experience each part of the story. This will probably mean some rearrangement of furniture and creating of space to move. A possible pattern could be:

- gathering in the front seats or pews for the introduction
- walking to a side room / chapel / area for the Last Supper sequence
- gathering at the back of the church / hall for the story in the garden
- re-gathering in another side room / chapel / area for the courtroom scene
- and finally returning to the front of the church, this time in the chancel or around a focal point, for the scene at Calvary.

Each of the areas needs to be decorated and prepared to become the places they represent:

- The upper room needs a long low table set out for 13 people with a basket of matzo bread and bowls of grapes on it. Have cushions and mats for children to sit on and other chairs or benches for adults in a semicircle around the table.
- The garden scene needs to be dark and gloomy. Put up some grey sheets or black tarpaulin. If this area is cold (for example near the doors) all the better!
- The courtroom needs to have a 'throne' and beside it a wooden cross and crown of thorns overshadowing the scene.
- The hill of Calvary is the open area in the chancel or near the focal point of your church.

You will need to have some artificial flowers ready to be given out at each stage of the journey and also some seeds. I used:

- some sunflower seeds, to be used in the introduction
- some small blue forget-me-nots for the Upper Room. These are available in bunches as a decorative wedding craft from Hobbycraft
- some olive leaves. I cut these off some stalks of greenery bought from the same shop
- some little budded roses - again cut from longer stalks from Hobbycraft

- and finally some artificial lilies, both closed ones for Good Friday as well as opened ones for Easter Day. The Hobbycraft stalks have both.
- I gave each of the children and adults a small sachet (available in bulk from... guess where?!), in which they could keep each of the flower items they were given.
You will also need to create five large latticework crosses. I made each of these from two pieces of expandable wooden trellising - the sort you use to mark off the edge of a flowerbed - which are available from places like B&Q, Homebase or a garden centre. I strung these together, using some bamboo sticks to make sure they didn't retract again, and then threaded wide (cheap) ribbon (from Hobbycraft) to give each cross a distinct colour to match the flowers that will be related to it at each 'station' The colours of the crosses in order are: purple, blue, green, red and no colour at all.

At each station there should be some brief introductory words; the story read from the Bible - why not use The Barnabas Children's Bible (see stories 302; 305; 307; 309)?; the giving out of the flowers with some wondering questions (see below); a simple activity to help everyone step into the story and a suggested song or hymn to sing. Between each stage of the journey, music could be played as people move on to the next step of this Good Friday service.

Finally, I used small scented tea lights, which burned with the appropriate perfume for the flowers at each 'station'. These were lit at the beginning of each part of the service and snuffed out as the congregation moved on.

Go!

Play some music to set the mood for this reflective service as people arrive, such as the theme tune from the film *Schindler's List*.

1. Welcome and introductions

Welcome to our special service for Good Friday. Today, along with Maundy Thursday and with Easter Eve, which comes tomorrow, is regarded by Christians as one of the most solemn days of the year. People often mark an important occasion with flowers and so we, too, are going to remember the events of this day and the Thursday evening with some significant flowers that will show us the way to the cross.

Our service is going to be in four sections in different parts of the church. We are going to walk with Jesus to the cross and try and step into the story for ourselves. At each stage of the journey there will be a retelling of the Bible story, an activity, a song and a flower to help us explore what God is saying to us on this unique day.

(N.B. Similar words are on the service sheet and so you will need not spend long on this introduction.)

2. **A Cross of Purple**- the sign of a King



Key verse: 'But if it dies, it produces many seeds' (John 12:24 NIV).

Introduce the latticework cross of purple (see 'Get Set') and explain how Jesus was the king that nobody expected. Purple was a kingly colour in those days but the way that Jesus would be king was to take everyone by surprise.

Retell in your own words the story of John 12:23-29, where Jesus uses the parable of a seed being planted as a way to understand why he was going to have to die.

Introduce the sunflower seed, which will remind us of this truth - the mystery behind the events of Good Friday and Easter.

Hand out the seeds and also the sachets they will need to collect the other items in, as the journey progresses.

Pause for a prayer for Good Friday.

Suggested song: 'From heaven you came, helpless babe'

During the last verse and chorus or to some instrumental music, move on to the next 'station' of the journey.

3. **A Cross of Blue**- Jesus breaks bread and shares wine at the last supper

Key verse: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19, NIV).

Light the scented tea lights.

Introduce the latticework cross of blue (see 'Get Set'). Blue is often associated with sadness. The last meal that Jesus ate with his friends was a sad occasion. Jesus spoke of leaving and of death; his friends did not understand. Then came the mysterious words about the bread and wine.

Retell the story of the upper room from Luke 22:14-22 in your own words or use the version in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 302.

Hand around a piece of matzo bread and a grape for everyone to eat. This would be the way to remember him.

Introduce the 'forget-me-not' as the flower that sums up the message of this 'station' and as you hand out one to everyone, pose some of the following questions based on those that the disciples asked, to reflect on the story

I wonder...

... who is the greatest?

... where are we going?

... how can we know the way?



... how will Jesus show himself to us and not the world?

Suggested song: 'Broken for me, broken for you'

During the last verse and chorus or to some instrumental music, move on to the next 'station' of the journey.

Snuff out the tea lights around the cross.

4. **A Cross of Green**- Jesus says 'yes' to God's way

Key verse: 'Yet not what I will, but what you will' (Mark 14:36, NIV).

Light the scented tea lights.

Introduce the latticework cross of green (see 'Get Set'). We are now in the Garden of Gethsemane among the olive trees. It was in a garden once long ago that people chose not to go God's way. Now in this garden, Jesus replays that decision, but this time chooses God's way on behalf of us all. The green of new life was regained by that choice.

Retell the story of the midnight garden from Mark 14:32-40 in your own words or use the version in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 305.

Introduce the 'olive' leaves that sum up the meaning of this 'station', as each person has to open up their hands to receive this gift of life symbolized by the leaf. As this is done, pose some of the following questions based on those that the disciples asked, to reflect on the story:

I wonder...

- ... if, even though others all fall away, I will?
- ... if I will deny you?
- ... if I will fall asleep?
- ... if I can say, 'not what I will'?
- ... if I can watch with Jesus for just one hour?

Suggested song: 'Abba Father, let me be'.

During the last verse and chorus or to some instrumental music, move on to the next 'station' of the journey.

Snuff out the tea lights around the cross.

5. **The Cross of Red**- Jesus is sentenced to death

Key verse: 'Let his blood be on us and on our children' (Matthew 27:25, NIV).

Light the scented tea lights.



Introduce the latticework cross of red (see 'Get Set'). Red is the colour of love and the colour of our lifeblood. We believe that it is out of love for us that Jesus stood there and let himself be condemned, even though he was completely innocent. It is as if Jesus offers us the rose of God's love but the cost is that he must bear the pain of the thorns, which surround that rose.

Retell the story of the hostile courtroom from Matthew 27:15-26 in your own words or use the version in The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 307.

Using two artificial rose stems (see 'Get Set'), cut the rose buds off and then plait the remaining stems with thorns into a 'crown of thorns'. As the rose buds are handed out to each person, pose some of the following questions based on what was said at the time, to reflect on the story:

I wonder...

... what Jesus meant when he said, 'I will destroy the temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'?

... why Jesus didn't answer when Pilate asked, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed One?'

... what sort of king of the Jews lets people do all this to him?

... what sort of charges they brought up against him?

... why the crowd called for his death?

... whether I would have dared to shout anything different?

Suggested song: 'There is a green hill far away'

During the last verse and chorus or to some instrumental music, move on to the next 'station' of the journey.

Snuff out the tea lights around the cross.

6. **The Colourless Cross**- Jesus takes our place

Key verse: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34, NIV).

Light the scented tea lights.

Introduce the latticework cross that has no ribbon woven into it like the others. When we come to the place of execution, all colour is now drained from the scene. This is not a place of beautiful flowers but of bare rock and stone. Even the sky was drained of light as darkness came upon the whole area and life ebbed away from Jesus.

Retell the story of the lonely hillside from Mark 15:33-41 in your own words or use the version from The Barnabas Children's Bible, story 309.

Introduce the closed lily flowers. It were the women who stayed longest at the cross, including Salome, whose name in Hebrew means lily. The closed lily is like the tomb in which Jesus was laid. Life was locked up out of sight but was waiting to burst out on the third day. In Christian art the lily has been a symbol of death and resurrection from early times. There are pictures and sculptures of



lily crosses in some churches, for example. Hand out the closed lily buds to everyone and invite them to hold them hidden in the hollow of their two overlapping hands as a picture of Jesus laid in the tomb. As you do this, ask some of the following questions to reflect on the story:

I wonder what was going through Jesus' mind when he said...

... 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing.'

... 'Today, you will be with me in paradise.'

... 'Mother, behold your son. Son, behold your mother.'

... 'I thirst.'

... 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?'

... 'It is finished.'

... 'Into your hands I commit myself.'

Snuff out the tea lights around the cross.

Suggested songs: 'Jesus Christ, I think upon Your sacrifice' and 'For God so loved the world' (by John Hardwick)

Put on the *Schindler's List* music and leave time for some quiet reflection before a final prayer and blessing for Good Friday.

Why not share in some hot cross buns together as a congregation after the service?

7. Some time later the final cross should be decorated with the opened lily flowers ready for Sunday morning.