

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 in some way:

- The upper room needs a long low table set out for 13 people with a basket of matzo bread and a basket 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. You will also need a large water jug, a bowl and a towel placed centrally.
- 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! Have available a chalice, a bottle of wine vinegar and a number of plastic cups.
- The High Priestly courtroom needs to have a table with a large Bible open upon it, a candle burning and behind all this a large wooden cross and crown of thorns overshadowing the scene. Have a supply of tea lights available.
- The hill of Calvary is the open area in the chancel or near the focal point of your church where the large wooden cross can be set up. This cross will have been carried by the children from the courtroom scene up to this point.

You will also need sets of postcard-sized pictures of the four scenes from this Good Friday journey.



The four pictures are:

Christ washes the apostles' feet from one of the Giotto frescos in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, c.1305

The Betrayal by Ugolino di Nerio, c.1320

Christ before the High Priest by Gerrit van Honthorst, c.1620

Christ on the cross by Delacroix, c.1830

All but the first of these postcards are available from the National Gallery at a reasonable price, and ideally there should be one for everyone on the journey so they can collect a set of four 'to step into'. Alternatively one large picture as a poster could be fixed up prominently at each station or a smaller number of pictures made available for groups to look at.

At each station there should be some brief introductory words; the story from the Bible should be told and acted out by some people who have prepared this in advance; the picture should be introduced with some wondering questions; there is a simple activity to help everyone step into the story and a suggested song/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.

We have prepared a template of a service outline as a [PDF](#) ready to be printed for you.

Go!

1. Welcome and introductions

Welcome to our special service for Good Friday. Today, along with Maundy Thursday and Easter Eve, which comes tomorrow, is regarded by Christians as one of the three most sacred days of the year. More than that, these three days are the hinge on which the whole meaning of life and the purpose of the universe turns. It is Good Friday—a strange name for the day. It may come from a contraction of God's Friday—God's special day, which God had planned from the beginning as the only way to heal and mend the mess we have made of God's world. All time is here. All people are here. All places meet at this moment.

Our service is going to be in four sections at different places around 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 reading, a symbolic action, a song and a picture to help us live this story with Jesus. This is the day death died—the death of death.

Here is the special prayer for Good Friday:

*Almighty Father,
Look with mercy on this your family
For which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed
And given up into the hands of sinners
And to suffer death upon the cross;*



*who is alive and glorified now with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. Amen*

Let us open our worship by singing the song that focuses on the place where this amazing story of God's love was revealed: 'There is a green hill'

2. The Upper Room

The Focus: The water jar, the bowl and the towel

The Story: Jesus washes the disciples' feet. John 13:2-17

The Drama: Someone acting as Jesus should wash the feet of someone acting as Peter. At our church the minister washed the feet of the children's leader. Or why not have an older child wash the feet of the minister!

The Key Verse: Unless I wash you, you have no part with me (John 13:8, NIV).

The Picture: Christ washes the apostles' feet from one of the Giotto frescos in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, c.1305

The Questions:

I wonder why Peter was so reluctant to let Jesus wash his feet?

I wonder why the other disciples allowed Jesus to wash their feet?

I wonder what was going through the minds of some of the disciples in the picture?

I wonder would you be happy to let Jesus bow before you and wash your feet?

The Action: Invite everyone to turn to their immediate neighbour and in turn bow down low and touch their neighbours' shoes. Encourage people to be sensitive toward those who might find it hard to bend like this but ask them to find a way to let them still take part.

The Song: 'From heaven you came helpless babe'

3. The Midnight Garden

The Focus: The chalice, the wine vinegar and the cups

The Story: Jesus says 'yes' to God's way. John 18:1-11.

The Drama: Someone acting as Jesus should be kneeling in prayer, holding the chalice and after a silence should drink from that 'bitter cup'. A group arrive; one comes and hugs Jesus, who is then arrested and tied up. Someone acting as Peter should make as if to fight back but Jesus motions to him to stop.

The Key Verse: 'Put your sword away; shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?' (John 18:11, NIV).



The Picture: The Betrayal by Ugolino di Nerio, c.1320

*I wonder what would have happened if Jesus hadn't drunk that bitter cup?
I wonder what Judas was thinking when he showed the guards who Jesus was?
I wonder why the others didn't decide to fight back like Peter?
I wonder whether you could resist fighting back and choose instead the way of Jesus?*

The Action: Pour a small amount of the bitter wine vinegar into some of the cups and invite people to take a sip as a reminder of what Jesus chose to do for us.

The Song: 'Abba Father, let me be'

4. The Hostile Courtroom

The Focus: A lit candle on the table by the open book

The Story: Jesus looks beyond the suffering (Matthew 26:59-66).

The Drama: Reconstruct as far as possible with a few actors a [freeze-frame](#) that is like the picture for this station of the story, with Jesus facing the High Priest, and the advisers and the false witnesses on either side. The witnesses should pretend to be talking and the High Priest should thump the table as the story is told.

The Key Verse: You will see the Son of man... coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64, NIV).

The Picture: Christ before the High Priest by Gerrit van Honthorst, c.1620

*I wonder what Jesus is thinking in this picture?
I wonder what words are written in the book that is open on the table?
I wonder what you think about the way the light is reflected in this picture?
I wonder what you would say if the guards dragged you in to ask what you thought about Jesus?*

The Action: Invite everyone to come and light a small tea light and leave it on the table on the side where Jesus was standing as a way of identifying with Jesus who stood there for us.

The Song: 'My song is love unknown'

During the last verse the children should carefully and slowly carry the wooden cross up to the next station

5. The Lonely Hillside

The Focus: The strange throne

The Story: Jesus takes our place. John 19:23-30

The Drama: Some actors should be a group of soldiers gambling and two others should be Mary and



John standing in front of the cross as the story is told.

The Key Verse: It is finished (John 19:30, NIV).

The Picture: Christ on the cross by Delacroix, c.1830

I wonder what moods and feelings the artist is showing us in this picture and how?

I wonder why he chose to paint the picture from this angle?

I wonder what the positioning of the people means?

I wonder why it were mainly women who dared to stay near the cross?

The Action: The soldiers gambled for his robe. After the words 'It is finished', begin a tear in a large sheet and pass the sheet around for others to continue that tear, as a way of recognizing that Jesus died for our sins. You will need to start a second and a third tear in the pieces so that all can take part.

An Additional Visual: Put up the three words: Jesus—Sin—Us, as one way to show why Jesus had to die. Say this slowly and deliberately several times, eventually beginning to slur the first two words together so it becomes: Jesus—In—Us, as a way to show what can happen because Jesus died. Here are some other visuals for this moment in the story.

The Song: 'When I survey the wondrous cross'

6. End your service with an appropriate final prayer and a blessing and then use one of the following songs to conclude:

'Jesus Christ, I think upon your sacrifice'

'I'm special'

'Thank you for the price you paid for us'

At our service the children then distributed hot cross buns to the congregation.