



# Reconciling

# Christianities



THE Center for  
Anglican Communion Studies

VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A PUBLIC THEOLOGY INITIATIVE FROM **corrymeela**<sup>®</sup>

## The Reconciling Christianities Project

Corrymeela has long been active in those places where the barbed points of division between traditions and cultures cause the most hurt and tension. Our intent at these contested places is, and has been, to transform division through human encounter. In the context of Northern Ireland we are conscious that often this tension and conflict is discernible within and between Christian traditions.

The Reconciling Christianities project grew from a desire to test the possibility that as Christian faith leaders we could find a route to discussing our very real differences in ways which could ultimately inform the ongoing discussions about faith in contemporary Ireland.

We chose the title Reconciling Christianities recognising that there are many public witnesses to Christianity on the island of Ireland. By reconciling we indicated that we wish to foster engagements where friendship and feeling are the economy of our relationships, together with truth, prayer and sharing. We had no interest, nor aim, of exploring any consensus on the traditions or practices that divide us, rather we sought to share a table of friendship, prayer and devotion together.

In doing so we were conscious that in our group, each evening when the Gospel text was read, there were a variety of accents from different parts of the world, from Poland, South Africa, USA, New Zealand, England, Scotland and from the north and south of our own island. This added considerably to the richness and diversity of our understanding.

## Methodology

The Reconciling Christianities gatherings were a small group of Christian faith leaders from a variety of traditions and very busy lives who met once a month during October-December 2017 and then for a 24 hour residential in January 2018. Each gathering was shaped around a Gospel narrative and ended with an examination of a different prayer form.

We engaged in spirited discussion on the selected texts conscious of how our various traditions often threaten the other in our readings of the text. We sought from the beginning to affirm the credibility of each others confession of faith and to avoid the forms of reading which excluded. Each session began by posing a question from the text that highlighted our differences and then explored how we could hold those differences in a way that bore fruitful witness to our Christianities.

When the time for conversation was ended each participant was given time and space to reflect and to compose a prayer response to the conversation. These compositions were then read or prayed in plenary session together. Over the course of our gatherings we experimented with collects as well as prayers of confession, thanksgiving and petition.

These times together were characterised by hospitality and generosity.

## Why gather?

Aside from the warmth of our gatherings, the renewal of friendships and the making of new ones Corrymeela had a number of other desired outcomes which we reached towards with varying degrees of success or otherwise

We wished to encourage the Church to be less tentative on the non-traditional issues that divide us as Christians by modelling healthy ways of disagreeing. Several members of the group often found themselves in media studios on opposing sides of a public debate. We set ourselves the challenge of finding ways of discussing difference which were more productive and edifying than the confrontation which the media outlet often desired.

We also wanted to find ways of moving from the text to the issues that animate the wider world in which we live and thereby to find ways in which theology and theological thinking could be curative on the issues that divide.

And we wanted to be alert to the kind of learning that might emerge in such gatherings and for which it is impossible to plan.

## This Document

This document is a form of project report in that it gathers together some of the elements of our gathering and conversations. In particular we have curated here the written prayers of participants across the four events. We are delighted and honoured that all our participants have consented to their prayers being published in this way.

## Thanks

This project would not have happened without the imagination, the risk-taking and the financial support of Centre for Anglican Communion Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary. We are grateful for their ongoing partnership.

## Glenn Jordan

Programme Manager for Public Theology

# Introduction

“Christianity in Ireland — north and south — has long had a reputation of division. In the past generation, it was due to questions of British or Irish sovereignty in Northern Ireland. This continues, but has been added to in recent years, notably on how Christianities speak in public about questions of marriage, inclusion, start and end of life, and other matters of public and moral interest.

Often the witness to Christianity from those who are representing and disagreeing with each other in public continues the idea that Christianity is influenced by an incapacity to disagree well on matters of serious public interest.

The Corrymeela Community has a longstanding interest in how divided peoples can argue well. This is, for us, an indication of moral action around issues that split moral analysis. To argue well is not easy. This is not a saccharine proposal for a ‘live and let live’ attitude, or a polite tone-policing approach towards important matters of disagreement. There are Christian people who disagree seriously, and we need a serious form and forum for our disagreements. Christianity is big enough and long enough and strong enough for people to hold significantly different viewpoints. Sometimes, we recognise, these disagreements are so significant that people have a difficult time in recognising the Christianity that is espoused by someone else.

We speak of Christianities here because there are many platforms on which people build their Christianity. For some, their focus on the salvific news of the gospel is the immediate starting point. For others, the focus on incarnation informs their theological engagement. Still others see the purpose of Christianity’s engagement in the public square as a narrative that invites all to respond, and others see the narrative purpose of Christianity as the beginning of a critique of power, not least their own. The starting points of faith can often influence the outcomes of faith-informed dialogues.

Corrymeela has an interest in the practice of faith-informed disagreements. We know that peace can be deepened when people who disagree seriously — indeed, people who may find it difficult to share a room together — can find a language of approaching one another in a new way. Disagreements can continue to flourish, but hopefully — and this is the hope of peace — in a new and more creative way.

Christianity is, of course, a vision that informs its adherents’ opinions on contemporary political, moral and civic issues. It is also a language and lens of prayer. As such, we wished to bring Christians together — from across so-called liberal and conservative belongings, and explore the intimacy of prayer with each other. Prayer raises the heart towards the One from whom the heart comes. The heart is the dwelling place of God, as well as a place of deception. We asked participants to write prayers — sometimes along formal lines — towards the end of our gatherings with each other. This practice brought discomfort sometimes: not everyone was comfortable to share the intimacy of prayer with everyone else. Nevertheless, we approached prayer together: sometimes a person would share their prayer, other times a person would feel more comfortable reading out their prayer, rather than reciting it as a prayer. However it worked for the participants, it worked. This journey towards each other was always going to be lumpy, and we appreciated the courage and generosity of people to meet each other in difference and devotion.

For us at Corrymeela we were interested in how new formed relationships — relationships away from the media’s spotlight — could deepen the intimacy of our engagements with each other; engagements in both public and private contexts. Too often, Christianities’ witnesses wound each other in public. At times in our meetings, someone took an extraordinary risk: they asked a question like:

“Do you trust me?”

“Do you think I hate you?”

“Do you think that I am a Christian at all?”

It is not only difficult to ask questions such as these; it is also difficult to answer them.

This is the task of Reconciling Christianities. Not that we agree, not at all; not that we avoid these questions, not at all — but that we create a place that has enough intimacy and trust to engage in these most serious of questions.

My sincere thanks to all the people who took part in this project: coming to meet with people whose version of Christianity is different can be a demanding thing, and I am moved by the kindness and heart people brought to these engagements. My thanks, too, to Rev Robert Heaney Ph.D, D.Phil and Ms Hartley Wensing from the Center for Anglican Communion Studies for their initiative, imagination and insight in supporting and partnering with us in this project. Finally, my thanks to Glenn Jordan, a colleague and friend of the heart.

**Pádraig Ó Tuama**  
Leader of Corrymeela Community

The four sections which follow correspond to the four gatherings that took place as part of the programme. On each occasion we reflected together on the particular bible text presented here, and the prayers are those written by the participants in the light of our conversations.

Thanksgiving 7  
 Petition 13  
 Confession 16  
 Collects 27

**1 The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” 34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called[b] the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37 For no word from God will ever fail.” 38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

Thanksgiving

A Birth Narrative of Jesus

Luke 1,2

**Mary Visits Elizabeth**

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

**Mary’s Song**

46 And Mary said:  
 “My soul glorifies the Lord  
 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
 48 for he has been mindful  
 of the humble state of his servant.  
 From now on all generations will call me  
 blessed,  
 49 for the Mighty One has done great things  
 for me—  
 holy is his name.  
 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,  
 from generation to generation.  
 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his  
 arm;  
 he has scattered those who are proud in  
 their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones  
 but has lifted up the humble.  
 53 He has filled the hungry with good things  
 but has sent the rich away empty.  
 54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
 remembering to be merciful  
 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
 just as he promised our ancestors.”  
 56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three  
 months and then returned home.

## 2 The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while[e] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.  
 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.  
 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.  
 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel

said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”  
 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,  
 14  
 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
 and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”  
 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”  
 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.  
 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.  
 21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

1

## “You will be with child and give birth to a son” Luke 1:31

Even though I begin to doubt the Science of the virgin birth I know it is, I know you are The one who has given and taken away my disgrace The one who has loved my being like that Thanks be to God in whom my spirit rejoices.

What happens to our understanding of this text if we read the annunciation in the light of the current news cycle’s concern with women’s bodies?

Mary consented to God’s invasion.

Was there an imbalance in power in the relationship between Mary and Gabriel?

It is a story told with mystery and lots of questions.

We wonder how this all happened. Was this a full-on vision Mary had, or did she see with an oblique, corner-of-the-eye perception?

2

## “May it be to me as you have said.” Luke 1:38

F a t h e r ,  
 Thank you for Mary’s Yes!  
 That Yes! that brings your Kingdom amongst us.

Thank you for daily opportunities  
 You give us to say Yes!  
 To start again,  
 In every present moment,  
 To choose your will,  
 To love those you put next to us.

Grace has entered the world and yet it is so full of fear.

Even at his presentation in the Temple, Mary is warned that a sword would pierce her heart also.

Mary and Elizabeth’s stores are intertwined. Elizabeth’s shame is that she has not had a child. Mary’s public shame is that she is pregnant, but not married.

These stories are countercultural today, in that there is no shame associated with either.

But a key part of the incarnation is the taking on of shame.

What are the traditions we follow to protect ourselves from shame and indignity? What would I never do to avoid looking like a shameful Christian?

**“He has performed mighty deeds with his arm.”**

**Luke 1:51**

Our spirits rejoice in God our Saviour,  
The Mighty One made low for us.  
While modern-day Caesars issue decrees  
We are reminded that You bring  
down rulers from their thrones.

In a world riven by fear and insecurity  
You remind us—Do not be afraid!

King of Kings, born of a virgin.  
Lord of Lords, placed in a manger,  
Human, divine, three in one.  
Announced by angels  
Worshipped by outsiders  
Reconciling us to you and to each other.

In the midst of it all  
You are and remain  
Emmanuel—God with Us.

A m e n

**And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.**

**Luke 2:7**

Thank you heavenly Father for  
This room tonight,  
This conversation between us  
These gracious people here.

Thank you for your voice of reassurance  
Unspoken perhaps,  
That you inhabit my world,  
My space, my fractured place  
And make it holy,  
Filled with gentleness and compassion.

Thank you for your embrace of this fearful world  
Filled with its contested claims  
And ugly insistent demands.

In your silent, wordless infancy  
You speak softly of a different way.

Thank you.

This text is too ‘December.’ Come January it is a struggle to hold on to it. It is a struggle to preach it each year. The first unveiling of God is an infant; and then we move on so quickly. Would it be different if we read it in July?

How quickly we forget the incarnation and the weakness of God.

Jerusalem, the most holy place, and therefore it is contested. Where is the true holy place? Temple? Courtyard? Stable? Holiness and sacredness happen in unlikely places, thus reducing the need to contest.

**“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.”**

**Luke 1:51**

Lord I believe, but  
There were majestic angels  
and pregnant virgins.  
There were heavenly songs  
and traveling strangers.  
and untrustworthy messengers.

And all around me this winter  
There are untrustworthy messengers  
And frightening strangers.  
There are siren songs  
And privacy-invaded teenagers  
And not many majestic angels.

But I am thankful this Advent,  
For the surprise of Elizabeth  
And the obedience of Zechariah.  
For the trust of Mary  
And the loyalty of Joseph.  
For the joy of angels  
And the curiosity of shepherds.

And hopeful too that my mean gifts,  
of shaky faith  
And stumbling obedience  
Can belike the gold, and frankincense and myrrh  
Of the wise travellers.

A m e n

Boundaries are constantly being crossed in this story: a word to disrespectful shepherd; angels leaving heaven to come to earth. But circumcision rites are still followed. Jesus is within the tradition, but breaks it too.

**The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen.**

**Luke 2:20**

I give thanks for grace that rewrites a story  
That brings life from barren places  
That shines light on unlikely faces  
I give thanks for grace that dignifies every story  
That lifts up the hidden  
And subverts the norm  
And births hope in tears and  
fears and hearts that hold on.

A m e n

Can we reconcile Christianities and our different theologies? This story is full of doubt, anxiety and shame. On that basis we can reconcile with anyone, whatever their doctrinal position. Jesus comes as the bearer of shame.

There is a hierarchy of belief. God is love is the highest.

Doctrinal statements can close down dialogue. Shame disconnects us. Reconciliation reverses the direction.

We want to sanitise the story and lock down its meaning. God brings hope into the shaming.

What does Zechariah mean when he prays “show mercy to ancestors”? Normally you are fearful of ancestors and therefore never disrespect them but follow their beliefs.

Who is our enemy today and what do we make of the words salvation “from” our enemies?

“This child is destined to cause the  
falling and rising of many”

Luke 2:34

L o r d ,  
I thank you that you work in  
The mess of our lives.  
Yours—no tidy resolution of all the difficulties.  
Yours—no sparing of us  
from our fears and traumas.

Yet your work in us is real,  
Your presence true,  
Your intervention a promise that all  
Your purposes will one day be fulfilled.

Help us Lord, to see that our mess  
Is neither purposeless nor irredeemable.  
But like Mary we must bear that piercing sword,  
We must walk through all that human frailty  
Will expose us to.

A m e n

## 5 Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

### The Beatitudes

He said:

3 ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

# Petition

## The Beatitudes Matthew 5

6 Blessed are those who  
hunger and thirst for

righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted  
because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 ‘Blessed are you when people insult you,  
persecute you and falsely say all kinds of  
evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice  
and be glad, because great is your reward in  
heaven, for in the same way they persecuted  
the prophets who were before you.

1

Now when Jesus saw the crowds,  
he went up on a mountainside and  
sat down.

Matthew 5:1

O God who sits upon mountains,  
You open your mouth and  
speak all things into being.  
You open your mouth and re-  
create us with words of blessing.  
Visit us in this valley, and remove our tablets of  
stone: our pronouncements, our certainties.  
Give us hearts of flesh  
and the courage to speak our needs,  
that we may open our mouths to tell  
and taste  
your presence.  
For you sit and speak and walk among us.

A m e n

2

and he began to teach them  
Matthew 5:2

Almighty and loving Father  
Please open my mind and purify my heart,  
So I can be a blessing to all who I encounter,  
And a witness to your everlasting  
and unconditional love.

Through Christ our Lord

A m e n

3

He said: "Blessed are..."  
Matthew 5:2-3

God of Blessing  
If this is a scorecard  
I'm lost. I've failed and fallen  
And cast a long shadow over  
those who I've sought to drag down,  
cast out and castigate

My given riches have been stolen  
And I am poor

My gloating victory has turned to ashes  
and I am grieving

My arrogant reach has shortened  
and I am humbled

My greed for more has been met  
and I am empty

My foolish heart has deceived me  
and I am blind

My warring spirit has caused devastation  
and I am orphaned

Do not abandon me  
for that would be more  
than I could bear right now

Help me to hear that I am loved  
even when I get it wrong

A m e n

4

Blessed are those who are  
persecuted because of  
righteousness  
Matthew 5:10

Many named Jesus  
You heard it all: Liar, fool,  
fraud, friend, god-enfleshed,  
devil, deluded, dead.  
And somehow you kept steady  
till the end.  
May I — and those I misname —  
be sustained through the winter,  
because you had things in you  
to keep you breathing  
even when others  
rejoiced  
at your bleeding.

A m e n



## 14 Jesus Anointed at Bethany

1 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 2 “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

6 “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are

# Confession

## The Trial, Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus

you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” 10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11 They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

## The Last Supper

12 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” 13 So he sent two of his disciples, telling them,

“Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. 14 Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” 16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” 19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?” 20 “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me.

21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man

who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” 23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 25 “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” 26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

## Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

27 “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ 28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” 29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” 30 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus

answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.” 31 But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

## Gethsemane

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. 41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

## Jesus Arrested

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those

standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 “Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. 51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, 52 he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

## Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. 54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. 56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.’” 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree. 60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” 61 But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”

62 “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” 63 The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. 64 “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” They all condemned him as worthy of death. 65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him

with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

### **Peter Disowns Jesus**

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. 68 But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway. 69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” 70 Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” 71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

## **15 Jesus Before Pilate**

1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. 2 “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” Jesus replied. 3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” 5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. 9 “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate,

10 knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. 12 “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. 13 “Crucify him!” they shouted. 14 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” 15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

### **The Soldiers Mock Jesus**

16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

### **The Crucifixion of Jesus**

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. 25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the Jews.

27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. [28] 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three

days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!” 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

### **The Death of Jesus**

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). 35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” 40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

### **The Burial of Jesus**

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so,

he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

1

**Take it; this is my body.**

**Mark 14:22**

Lord of all wisdom and power  
Full of grace and truth  
I confess that I do not always know  
The right way to be right.

Teach me how to speak the truth  
Teach me better, how to live it

That I may neither be a victim  
Nor a tyrant  
But a grace-filled and truth-full disciple

A m e n

2

**This is my blood of the covenant.**

**Mark 14:24**

O Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God  
confounder, pursuer, healer

Open the blindness of my eyes  
and the deafness of my ears

that I may detect your whispers  
and perceive your traces

and so praise your disturbing generosity.

A m e n

3

**You will see the Son of Man sitting  
at the right hand of the Mighty  
One and coming on the clouds of  
heaven.**

**Mark 14:62**

Come Holy Spirit  
Faithful, powerful, sovereign and generous  
Sprit of wisdom, Spirit of truth, Spirit of grace  
Yahweh, the one true God

We come before you Father in confession

Forgive us, when we impose our will, not yours  
Forgive us, when we strive without resting  
Forgive us, when we run without waiting  
Forgive us, when we work without worshipping

Thank you for your mercy  
Thank you for the gracious gift of your Son

In the name of Christ whose name we bear.

A m e n

4

**Then Peter remembered the word  
Jesus had spoken to him.**

**Mark 14:72**

Father God,  
Our intentions are good, but so often  
our actions fall short of your holy desires.  
So often we serve our own  
notions of right, wrong and truth  
While neglecting your will  
to seek graceful encounters  
and conversations infused  
with love.

Father forgive us

Father forgive our selfishness,  
deafness and blindness  
When we serve ourselves, ignore your call  
and fail to fix our eyes on Jesus.  
Restore us to fellowship,  
So renewed and replenished,  
We might better serve you in love and grace  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord  
and so praise your disturbing generosity.

A m e n

If we only had this text, and not Paul's letters, what would we make of this story?

In what ways can we consider the events here as happening "for us"?

In effect we often threaten one another with our reading of this text. "Unless you read it like this, you are not one of us."

The narrative in 14:32-36 has so many terms which heighten the sense of threat.

distress  
agitated  
deeply grieved

Mk 15:40 "they did not know what to say". How often, in the face of something traumatic, there are no words. And when sleep comes it is convenient.

As we, with all our differing accents read the text together, we are reminded that differing accents betray Peter.

**And he broke down and wept.  
Mark 14:62**

Heavenly Father,  
Here I am facing you once more.  
You already know the secrets of my heart  
You see and hear the insecurities  
Which seep out of me into a public place.  
You know the doubts I harbour about myself  
And the rage I sometimes feel towards others.  
And so I return to your embrace.  
I need to know that I am OK with you  
And especially that I am treasured by you.  
Thank you that you come looking for me  
And that you find me each day

A m e n

**But Jesus still made no reply, and  
Pilate was amazed.  
Mark 15:5**

All knowing and knowable God  
Who understands all things yet is  
comfortable being misunderstood  
Help us embrace being misunderstood too  
Help us embrace silence as often as  
words, listening as often as speaking,  
That we, like Christ, may be  
welcoming, hospitable & generous  
To all whom we encounter

A m e n

Jesus appears to be passive here, almost fatalistic.  
This rubs up against modern, Western mindsets.

But he also meets power with power.

**The soldiers led Jesus away into  
the palace...and called together the  
whole company of soldiers.  
Mark 15:16**

God of destinies,  
In allowing torture, acts of violence  
over which we have power,  
allowing inequalities to persist that  
demean the dignity of your creation,  
we have sinned against you.  
We kept silent when we should have spoken;  
we pleaded ignorance when  
we should have known.  
And yet you kept silent in  
the face of your oppression,  
torture, and the diminishment of your humanity.  
Grant me the strength and grace to bear my cross  
during times of affliction and adversity;  
and the courage to stand and speak  
with those who are oppressed.  
Grant me the wisdom to know when to act  
and when to stay silent,  
So that the world may know your love and justice  
that enables us to flourish with dignity  
in the plans you have for us.

A m e n

**Then they offered him wine mixed  
with myrrh, but he did not take it.  
Mark 15:5**

Gracious God,  
Vulnerable, transparent, and truly humble,  
You who refused to anaesthetise your suffering,  
Help me take the path of denying myself,  
of unveiling my truest self,  
of walking through life's pain and not around it,  
So that I may be like you  
to a world needing to know how to navigate fear,  
conflict, and inner torment,  
Through Jesus, the one who  
sees us and is mindful of us.

A m e n

And at three in the afternoon Jesus  
cried out in a loud voice,  
“Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”  
**Mark 15:16**

Abba, Father—Eloi, Emmanuel

We have pleased crowds, and joined jeering  
Denied justice, and dared to mock  
Compromised truth and inflicted harsh wounds  
Colluded in the disempowerment  
of those we could have liberated

We have slept when we should pray  
We have wounded when we should not  
We have fled naked  
Or stood and denied what we could  
have accompanied and shared.

But You, O God, speak truth in a slave-girl  
Call time in a cock’s crowing  
And abide compassion in the  
helpful helplessness of women

Name us today in your story of suffering  
Include us in your family,  
Offspring of Passers-by who bear your cross

Because in your absence  
You are most present with us  
And in our emptiness  
There is room for the flood of your faithfulness  
So that in us you may fulfil your deepest desire  
To dwell in humanity.

A m e n

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.  
**Mark 15:37**

F a t h e r ,  
You know us better than we know ourselves,  
In the Word which was, is and always will be,  
the one towards whom Jesus points us,  
Be with us and help us to  
recognise your abandoned Son,  
Jesus crying out – in His forsakenness  
In all the situations of pain, conflict, division,  
hurts, calamities, confusions, messes,  
Mistakes, ignorance, emptiness,  
incapacity, negativeness,  
places where there is no  
Love,

Help us find your Son there, in that Cry.  
To recognise and embrace Him,  
To keep believing in your plan  
of Love behind all things,  
And then to keep on loving, and serving,  
And may Your Kingdom of mutual Love,  
of perfect peace,  
of unity and diversity in You  
grow according to Your Will,  
And all to give glory and thanks  
to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Throughout this narrative Jesus is being asked  
who he was. Only the women who attended at a  
distance (15:40) and maybe the young man (14:51)  
were not bewildered. Then, at his final breath,  
the word of abandonment was persuasive for the  
Centurion and gave him a moment of recognition.

The curtain of the temple was torn  
in two from top to bottom.  
**Mark 15:38**

Lord, Almighty and Loving Father  
Forgive us for all injuries caused and received  
So we can bring healing and peace  
To all those we encounter  
through our ministry and work  
Through Christ our Lord,

A m e n

The curtain of the Temple is torn at Jesus death,  
indicating it is now open. In Jewish tradition a  
grieving father would rend his garments. Was  
this the act of a grieving father. Or is the Temple  
grieving its lost son? Or does this mark the end of  
the Temple?

So Joseph bought some linen cloth,  
took down the body, wrapped it in  
the linen, and placed it in a tomb  
cut out of rock.

**Mark 14:72**

Ever Present God of all creation,  
Nothing exists without the  
fingerprints of the divine.  
Touch our lives in the places that  
have become resentful, bitter  
Fearful and despairing  
That new life can once again blossom and bloom  
Bringing hope and grace  
and joy and contentment  
Because of Jesus and the way he lived his life  
And died his death.  
A m e n

Slapping, spitting, nakedness and betrayal are all  
shaming acts

There is a role for the passer-by (15:21)

The tick-tock of what happened and the markers of  
grief. It was 9am when they crucified Jesus (15:25).  
Like the disciples in Jn1:39 they were indelibly  
marked by encounter.

G o d  
 We overstep, we miss each other,  
 we say it wrong, we stay deliberately silent.  
 We rarely hit the sweet spot  
 of compassionately speaking up  
 or prophetically sitting down beside  
 Forgive us God  
 Show us tender mercy when we speak too loudly  
 or break eye contact and say nothing.  
 For you are with us in our noisy bluster,  
 our awkwardness, in our guilty, silent complicity.  
 Give us wisdom. Give us  
 wisdom. Give us wisdom.  
 For you are both humble and wise.

A m e n

Someone with a social conscience gave him sour wine. Human rights are otherwise abused and social justice ignored throughout the narrative. How would we re-write this story in our day of human rights and social justice?

## 9 Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and

**From the story of the man born blind**

washed, and came home seeing.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” 10 “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

11 He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” 12 “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said.

### The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened

the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided. 17 Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

18 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. 19 “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?”

20 “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” 25 He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” 26 Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27 He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen.

# Collects

**John 9**

Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

### Spiritual Blindness

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, [a] "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

1

**As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.**

**John 9:1**

Ever attentive Lord  
Who walked this earth and noticed  
I'm frequently blind to others  
and inattentive to their need  
Heal my eyes that I may walk like you and notice  
Create in me the capacity for change  
and the generosity to recognise it in others  
That the on-going work of God  
may be clearly seen in me  
To the glory and praise of the  
One who brings light to clay

A m e n

2

**"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**

**John 9:5**

O Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God  
confounder, pursuer, healer  
Open the blindness of my eyes  
and the deafness of my ears  
that I may detect your whispers  
and perceive your traces  
and so praise your disturbing generosity.

A m e n

**So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.  
John 9:7**

Author of Light  
Who divided waters from earth  
And brought life to crawl, swim, walk and fly  
Unite us in dust, breath and water  
from the word of your sending  
That we may wash, be cleansed  
To see each other clearly in your image  
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of All

A m e n

**His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?"  
John 9:8**

To my neighbours who share the same streets  
And among whom I grew, poor and blind  
May every confusion which  
clouds our vision be clarified  
That we may speak for ourselves  
of what we know and have seen  
Of the Light who brings light  
to those who cannot see

A m e n

**"He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."  
John 9:15**

Unfathomable God  
Who defies our expectations and  
breaks apart our categories of thought  
Teach us anew the wonder of your redemption  
That we might be signposts to your living hope  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord

A m e n

**"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"  
John 9:25**

Creator God  
Who gives sight to the blind  
Grant us light in times of darkness  
So that we might follow you into  
new and unexpected places  
For the glory of your name

A m e n



**“Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.”**

**John 9:32**

God who spoke and speaks  
 People seek your voice  
 in corners that they trust.  
 Help us all hear where you speak  
 to people whose lives  
 frighten us.  
 Because you are the one,  
 I hear,  
 whose words are life for all,

A m e n

**Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”**

**John 9:35**

O God of seeing  
 The One who sees our hearts and all within  
 May we see others as we are seen by You  
 And recognise our own blindness  
 So that we, and they, may be loved with Your love.

A m e n

**“Who is he sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”**

**John 9:36**

God who brought life and light and knowing  
 through spit and dust  
 And caused questions to tumble and run  
 from the sceptical and the searching  
 from the blind and the seeing  
 from the angry and the scared  
 Like Who? and What? and Where?  
 and how? and Why?  
 Enter my own questioning heart  
 That I may clearly see and hear the Voice  
 Who brought illumination from the beginning  
 So that the work of God may be visible in me  
 To the glory of the One who is  
 the Shining Light of the World.

A m e n

**Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”**

**John 9:37**

Creator of light  
 In whom no darkness can be found  
 When I am blind open my eyes to your light;  
 when I think I am enlightened may I become blind  
 So that I may always know that I only see in part  
 Thanks be to God

**Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”**

**John 9:39**

God who breathes life through dirt and clay.  
 You used simple things to open eyes  
 and give life to those on the margins.  
 Bring sight when we are blind  
 And challenge us when we think we can see.  
 For you see through our blinkers  
 And lenses.  
 You are the Light of the World

A m e n

**“If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin”**

**John 9:41**

Almighty and Merciful God  
 Who continually surprises us with  
 your gifts of healing and release  
 Free us from the shackles of shame,  
 hopelessness and frustration  
 So that we might grow into the people  
 you have always intended us to be  
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord

A m e n

