

On your marks

Increasingly churches are looking for service ideas for Good Friday that are inclusive of children and young people. Without a proper remembering of events of this holy day, the joy and wonder of the resurrection can be robbed of its power and significance. The following outline is based on just such an all-age service that is followed annually at my own church.

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 semi-circle 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! Have available a basket of olives.
- the courtroom needs to have a central governor's chair and plenty of gold or yellow drapes as well as some visible signs of things linked to Jesus' trial, namely a reed, a purple robe and a crown of thorns. There should also be a bowl of water and a towel near to the chair and finally baskets of rough stones.
- the hill of Calvary is the open area in the chancel or near the focal point of your church where a large wooden cross can be set up. This cross will have been carried by the children from the courtroom scene up to this point. Have a basket full of heart-shaped post-its and some drawing pins.

In the following outline there are some introductory words for each section; suggestions for hymns and songs; some comments and then some simple activities to do to help everyone step into the story of this day of days. We suggest you use Easter readings from [The Barnabas Family Bible](http://TheBarnabasFamilyBible.com) or another similar retelling.



Use different voices for the introductions, the readings and the comments. Between each stage of the journey music should be played as people move on to the next step of this Good Friday service.

Go!

1 Setting the scene

Welcome to our special service for Good Friday. Today, along with Maundy Thursday and Easter Eve, which comes tomorrow, have been regarded by Christians as the three most solemn 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 he had planned from the beginning as the only way to heal and mend the mess we have made of his 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 listen to the story and try and step into that story for ourselves. At each stage of the journey there will be a reading, a symbolic action, a thought and a song to help us. 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 captures this amazing story of God's love, *My song is Love unknown*.

2 The upper room - 'this is my body'

It was Thursday night. For Jesus and his twelve it was their Passover meal - a special meal enables the people of God to remember how God led them out of slavery through the water to freedom. It is an upstairs room, around a low table, candlelit, and with the guests reclining on couches. They had celebrated a meal like this many times in their lives - and at least twice with Jesus himself - but tonight in Jerusalem, this year, this week, it was different. Here is the table all set; with the lamb, the bitter herbs, the salt water and the special bread. Listen to the story.

Death passed over them because of the blood on the doorposts all those years ago. Death would pass over them again because of Jesus' death on a wooden post. Jesus is broken like the bread so that in the end death will not be able to break us. He must die so we can live.

They shared the bread. Let us share some food together to show that we want to belong to Jesus



through this cross today.

Share out pieces of Matzo and the grapes - maybe the children can help hand these round

Sing *Broken for me*

After they sang a hymn they went out and it was night

3 The midnight garden - 'watch and pray'

It was midnight in a garden of olive trees. For Jesus and his 12, now 11, this was a favourite place - a place for rest, for getting away from the crowd, for prayer; a place of olive trees on a hillside in a secluded garden. They were tired. Listen to what happened as they came to that garden.

In the shadow of the trees Jesus knelt in the shadow of death and he accepted it. It was going to hurt but it was to show us that death is only a shadow.

A shadow is as dark as the bright light that is blocked by what ever gets in its way. Jesus was going to show us that there is a bright light beyond the shadow of death. To get there He must go through the darkness for us and show us the way.

He said 'yes' to death so that it could have no power over him.

He said 'I will' to death so it can no longer call the tune.

He said 'Your will be done' so that he might deliver us from the fear of death.

Sing *This is our God* - one verse and chorus only

The Garden of Gethsemane was the place where they crushed the olives. Take an olive and crush it slowly in your hands and if you like to, eat it. As you do, remind yourself that he was crushed for us and that he swallowed death on our behalf. As for his disciples they ran away from the garden breaking the twigs in their hurry to disappear.

4 The crowded courtroom - 'I am he'

It was early morning. Jesus had been awake all night hustled from one torch-lit room to another. Tied up, bruised, battered and bedraggled. The High Priest had looked for charges in order to get the death sentence passed, but all that had been heard was a confusion of lies. Jesus is then taken to the Roman governor because only he could give permission for a crucifixion. Listen to the story.

This was the place of judgment. Here Jesus was condemned. Here they made a pretend king out of the real King. Jesus took all the anger, accusations and curses that the whole human race has ever heaped upon God and he accepted them. He agreed to be the solution to our problem - the sins, the mistakes and mess of our world.

He takes it all without appealing against the injustice



He takes it all without appealing for an army of angels
He takes it all without appealing for our pity

As we sing this next song, pick up a stone from the baskets that will be handed round by the children and then when you are ready take add it to the pile near to the purple robe and crown of thorns to remind ourselves that he took all our guilt upon himself willingly, so that he might take it into death for us and destroy it.

Sing *Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

In the last verses the children (with supervision) should pick up the wooden cross to carry it in front of the adults to the final station of the journey.

5 The lonely hillside - 'Forgive them'

It was nine o'clock in the morning. Jesus had been whipped to within an inch of his life. He had staggered with the cross beam as far as he was able. He'd been nailed to the wood and hung up to die. Listen to what happened.

What is going on? This isn't the way heroes conquer their enemies. This looks like a defeat not a victory. This looks like losing not winning.
Or is it?

Only by beating death at its own game could Jesus win.
Only by taking all that death could throw at him and not then becoming as bad as death himself, could Jesus overcome death.
Only by absorbing death's poison could he create the antidote to death that he could share with all of us.
He did this for us.

*As a simple visual of what this death means, show the words **Jesus-sin-us** as a picture of the separation sin brings; then fold away one 's' from sin so that it now reads as **Jesus-in-us**, which is what can now be true because of this day.*

Ask everyone to take one of the post-it hearts from baskets handed round by the children, onto which they should put their name, and then each can come and pin it to the cross, as the following song is sung.

Sing *I'm special*

A final prayer and blessing

Sing *Thank you for the cross*

To be continued