

Lent Six

Read

[Matthew 26:14–27:66](#)

Text and Land

Each year on this Sunday at the beginning of Holy Week we read the full account of the passion of Jesus from one of the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew's version of the passion narrative has some unique features. The most notable are the earthquake which causes a temporary resurrection of several long-dead characters from the Old Testament (Matt 27:25–52), and the placement of an armed guard at the tomb of Jesus (Matt 27:62–66).

The physical setting of this tradition is familiar to every Christian pilgrim who visits Jerusalem. The Last Supper is set somewhere in the Mt Zion district of the City, while Jesus had to cross the Kidron Valley to enter the olive groves at Gethsemane. The interrogation at the residence of Caiaphas is now marked by the Church of St Peter Gallicantu, while the trial before Pilate will either have taken place in the *Praetorium* (close to the *Ecce Homo* hostel) or else in Herod's former palace (now mistakenly known as the 'Citadel of David'), in the city's very best location.

For centuries pilgrims have walked the Way of the Cross, the *Via dolorosa*. On this route, in these texts, and in our observances this week, history and pious imagination combine to renew our faith and call us into mission. Whether or not Jesus walked these streets, millions of pilgrims have done so. Their faithfulness celebrates the faithfulness of Jesus, and his faithfulness to God's call on his life is the catalyst for our salvation.

Jesus had no one announcing his arrival as he carried his cross through the narrow streets of Jerusalem. His mother may have wept silently on the sidelines. A passerby from Cyrene called Simon may have been conscripted to carry his cross. Veronica may have wiped his sweaty forehead with her handkerchief. And the women of Jerusalem may have wept for another son of this city on his way to a violent and unjust death. The women of Jerusalem – both Israelis and Palestinians in unwilling interfaith solidarity – still weep for their sons and daughters who are snatched from our midst by violence and hatred.

Questions for Discussion

- This is a story that we all know so well, and we all know how it ends. How do you engage with this story in ways that keep it fresh and challenging for you?
- People who confront and challenge the elite, then as now, are at risk. Who are the 'prophets' in Australian society today, and what risks do they take for the sake of us all?
- Is your local church ever likely to get into trouble with the authorities for its actions in the area of justice or environmental issues? If so, what trouble and what issues? If not, why do you think this is so?
- A crucified Jesus is a Jesus who got involved in politics, and encouraged others to do the same. He chose not to take the safe option. He paid the price—for us. Are we willing to take up our cross and follow the path he trod?

Prayer

'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27.46)

When the heart is cut or cracked or broken,
Do not clutch it; Let the wound lie open.
Let the wind from the good old sea blow in
To bathe the wound with salt, And let it sting.
Let a stray dog lick it, Let a bird lean in the hole and sing
A simple song like a tiny bell, And let it ring.
- Michael Leunig

Let your wounds lie open before the wounded Christ.

