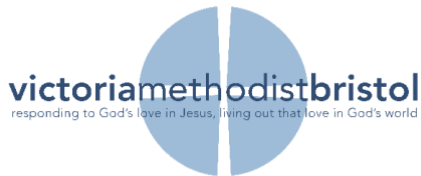

LENT KNIT-ALONG 2025

WEEK 7



Pattern by Lyn Lloyd-Jones
Reflections by Vicky Davies

Introduction

We are ever so grateful to Vicky Davies for writing the accompanying reflections for the final week of the Lent Knitalong.

Vicky is a local preacher in the Bristol and South Gloucestershire Circuit. She has been involved in Vic's knitalongs since their beginning, variously involved in knitting, reflection writing or admin – this year she is daringly attempting all three!

During Lent last year she began writing reflections based on works of art. She is now starting to publish these as a blog at <https://www.seeingbeyond.org.uk> and has selected a subset for our Holy Week reflections.

At the bottom of each reflection is a link to an audio recording on our GoogleDrive in case you would like to listen to the reflection while knitting or looking at the art.

Our thanks also go to Ken Luxon for recording some of the reflections. Ken is also a local preacher and storyteller in the Bristol and South Gloucestershire Circuit, but this is his first involvement with the knitalong.

Sunday, 13 April

Palm Sunday:

Christ enters Jerusalem by Sadao Watanabe



This is an unusual rendering of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: alongside Jesus riding on a colt and the crowd is a man who has climbed a tree to see Jesus. A reference to Zacchaeus? The diminutive tax collector who on an earlier occasion climbed a tree to spot Jesus in the crowd in Jericho?

Two themes emerge: the first is devotion. The crowds, of course, by placing clothes, palm branches and flowers down on the road for Jesus to travel over, are celebrating him. And the Zacchaeus figure is so determined to get a good view of Jesus that he runs ahead and climbs a tree; clearly he is fascinated with Jesus. And finally there is the artist himself. Creating this stencilled artwork involves multiple intricate steps: the hand making of the paper, the cutting out of the stencil, the colouring, covering, coating and washing with pastes and

dyes. Hours and hours of meticulous work. Surely a labour of love and devotion on the part of an artist who was keen to bring the Christian message to his fellow compatriots?

Are we this fascinated by Jesus? What kind of devotion does he stir in us and how do we express it? Do we metaphorically climb a tree to be always on the lookout for him? Reading, praying, listening out for Jesus in our conversations with others? Or do we metaphorically roll out a red carpet? Looking on in adoration? The risk with devotion can be that of separation, of making the relationship asymmetrical, of not allowing the other to adore us as much as we adore them.

And separation is our second theme. By riding on a donkey, Jesus is separated from the crowd. No jostling around him, no surreptitious touching of his clothes. Indeed, in this artwork, the crowd seem distant, standing back in awe. Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus is always looking for close engagement with people, countering the separation dictated by social norms and religious rules: children, women, lepers, even a recently deceased girl - he engages with them all without fear of contamination or concern for the opinion of others. That isn't going to happen here while he rides along on the donkey. It doesn't look like he is going to call down the tree climber this time, as he did with Zacchaeus.

So where does our devotion to Jesus lead us? To separation and distance? Jesus stuck on a donkey and us in a tree? Or to engagement and closeness? Jesus calling us down from

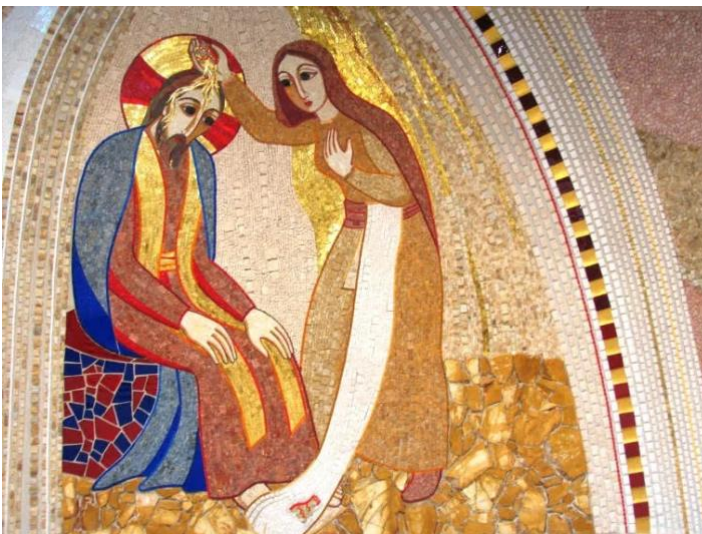
the tree and inviting himself into our home and our heart? Are we, in our adoration and service of God, making sure that we let God love and serve us, too? So that we can form a close mutual partnership in which we dwell in God and God in us? In which together we bring love and peace into the lives of others?

Listen

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Monday, 14 April

The Anointing at Bethany by the Atelier d'Arte e Architettura Centro Aletti



We are in Bethany. Jesus is in Simon the leper's house where he and others have been sitting and eating together at the table. An unnamed woman enters with a jar of expensive perfume which she breaks open and pours over Jesus' head, anointing him with the oil. In Mark's account, Jesus and the woman are closely surrounded: by the other guests who later criticise her for wasting the equivalent of a labourer's annual salary; by the ritual uncleanness of

Simon's house because he is a leper; by the plot to kill Jesus, involving first the chief priests, then Judas who agrees to help them; by the heightened sense of the story which is now inexorably moving towards the disaster of Jesus' death.

But here in the mosaic, Jesus and the woman are alone. They are cocooned, almost, by that arch, and protected from all the death, the murderous plots, the meanness, the prejudice that is around them. All we see is that intimate moment where the woman quite literally pours out her devotion and Jesus sits completely still, accepting what she is doing. Respecting it, contemplating it, appreciating it. They, and now we, are wrapped up in that moment, as they attend to one another, give each other time, see one another for who they each really are. For is that not what Jesus always does with the people he meets? He stops, sees them, engages deeply and fulfils their needs. Here, finally, is someone who is returning the favour: someone who has seen Jesus, seen his need as he walks towards his death and responded in the only way she is able.

How often do we manage that when we see others? Or do we get distracted by outside appearances? Either by the gold glitter or by the cracks between the stones? Placing the other person on a pedestal, or considering them beneath us? In either case, creating

distance rather than closeness between them and us. To be truly seen and attended to by another is immeasurably precious and so Jesus dismisses the quibble about money.

“You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life”, we read in Psalm 23. Here this woman fulfils this part of the Psalm for Jesus. Sandwiched as this account is between the chief priests’ plot to kill Jesus and Judas’s betrayal of him, here is something to reassure Jesus that goodness and mercy will follow him, that God will walk with him, even in these dark days to come.

Will we know ourselves anointed in the face of our enemies? In the face of illness and death and violence? Do we have relationships that can give and receive reassurance of God’s presence even in such dark times?

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Tuesday, 15 April

Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord Jesus for R.3.00 by John Muafangejo



Judas: called to be one of the twelve disciples, and yet he betrayed Jesus in exchange for money, leading the authorities to Jesus when he was away from the crowds. “Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?” the artist picks out as a key verse alongside his depiction of Judas’ embrace. The method heightens the betrayal even further and makes us wonder: what can have gone on inside Judas to have betrayed Jesus in this way? How can

he have spent all this time so close to Jesus, seeing and hearing all that Jesus did at first hand, and yet somehow apparently just not get it? How strong must his yearning for money have been? Or was he hoping this would be the start of Jesus overthrowing the powers that be? Did he even wrestle with his decision? Did he simply compartmentalise things? Or did he just never understand what the consequences of his actions could be?

Before we feel too superior and different, let’s take a look at ourselves. What are our own passions, obsessions or addictions that could lead us to betray our faith, our values, our very selves? Do we know what lurks within us? What experiences and situations might

push us into a similar situation? Beyond where we think we would ever go? How vigilant do we need to be about ourselves?

Much of the artwork is stylised and bold. But Jesus's face has a distinct softness about it; it carries an unmistakably compassionate expression. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, and yet he didn't throw Judas out of his group of close disciples, he didn't exclude him from the last supper, and now even in this very moment of betrayal he still offers Judas love and compassion. But even if Judas notices it, it's too late. And once Jesus has been condemned to death, Judas commits suicide before he can see that Jesus' love and Spirit outlive death, that his dreadful deed was not as final as it seemed, that where he thought everything was over, God still saw a future.

So when we come to God in prayer, opening ourselves to God in honesty and looking deep within ourselves; whatever we see, whether it be hurt and pain, shame and guilt, loneliness and isolation, let us remember that compassionate look on the face of Jesus, that will never reject us or push us away, but will always welcome us with open arms and offer us a new start, will heal and transform us and not leave us to our own devices.

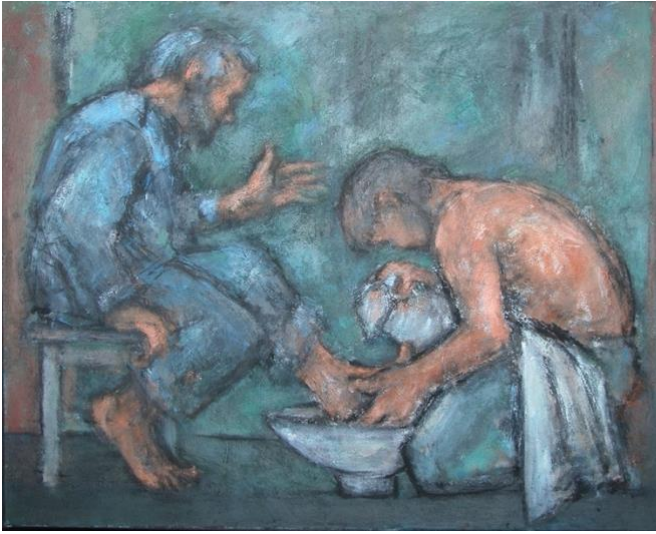
In the Bible Judas betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver; here it is for three rand, the notes fluttering in the wind like leaves falling from the tree: here today and gone tomorrow. So fleeting and transient. As easily lost as gained. What seemed substantial and something to hold onto proves to be worthless. By contrast the seemingly *insubstantial* Spirit of God, beyond detection by our normal senses, is eternal and ever present, a firm foundation to give our life meaning, strength and peace in all situations. To fill our hearts with love and bring newness of life.

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Wednesday, 16 April

The Washing of the Feet by Ghislaine Howard



The disciple, probably Peter, is clearly mid-flow, talking away while Jesus washes his feet. He starts out in disbelief, of course. What? Jesus wants to wash his feet? His Lord and Teacher take on the role of the lowliest servant? He can't possibly let that happen! But Jesus persists and points out that "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." And so Peter completely changes his tune: in that case, Jesus should wash not just his feet, but his hands and head as well! Impulsive, as always, Peter swings

from one extreme to the other. But that isn't necessary, Jesus tells him. Just the feet are sufficient.

We can't tell which bit Peter has got to in this painting. Is he still resisting or does he now want to go all in? All we can see is that he is still wrestling with Jesus, arguing, struggling to come to terms with what Jesus is doing. Jesus, meanwhile, looks completely still. Not immobile - he is washing Peter's feet - but completely calm, totally focussed on that one task, not letting himself get distracted. It's as though he is trying to tell Peter: "Relax! Calm down. Just let me do this for you. Be still. And simply appreciate this for what it is. Feel the cool water on your hot feet, the touch of my hands, the rub of the towel gently massaging your skin."

It's rather like the times when we come to God in prayer, our heads buzzing and filled to overflowing. So many things on our minds. And we're trying to work out what God is trying to tell us, what it is we should be doing, what it is we need to ask of God. Every time we try to focus, our mind takes us off somewhere else again. But God remains completely calm, patiently waiting for us to calm down, too. Waiting for the chatter, the thoughts, the busyness gradually to subside, until we can finally see what God is doing: washing our feet, doing us a service, refreshing us, tenderly touching and caressing us, helping us to relax and rest.

"Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Usually we associate Jesus or God washing us with the washing away of sins. But perhaps that isn't the only thing that is going on. Perhaps it is also about us quietly coming to rest in God and letting ourselves be looked after and filled with God's Spirit of love and peace. Letting the greed and selfishness be replaced by something new: knowing ourselves loved and cared for by God. And once the peace of that knowledge fills our hearts, once we have truly experienced that great reversal

of God serving us, then we can have a share with Jesus. Then we are ready and can learn, like Jesus, to wash the feet of others.

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Thursday, 17 April

Maundy Thursday:

The Elements of the Holy Communion by Jacques Iselin



The last supper, the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples; it is the meal we re-enact each time we celebrate communion. The elements are still the same: bread and wine. In this case, a baguette and a cup to hold the wine. Both present, but both also half hidden, only part of what is going on. What else is in the painting? What else is part of communion?

Perhaps most obviously, the fish jumps out at us, its silvery grey colour contrasting with the yellows, oranges and reds elsewhere. The Greek for fish, ICHTHUS, became an acronym among early Christians meaning “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Saviour”, and thus a stylised fish came to represent Jesus and Christian allegiance. So here we have a representation of another (surely the very central!) element of communion: Jesus himself, still with us each time we celebrate communion.

But the way the fish is placed right next to the bread, I can’t help but be reminded of the fish and bread from the feeding of the five thousand. The fish and bread which started out as meagre and utterly inadequate, but became plentiful and abundant. During communion so often we are given just a tiny morsel of bread and only a small sip of wine or juice. And yet, what we celebrate is abundance - the abundance of the love of God, poured out for all. In communion a small meagre offering of bread and wine is transformed into the plentiful love of God, so strong that it could not be stopped even by violence or death, so ever-present that we can never be separated from it.

What of the coloured shapes cutting through the midst of the painting? Like shards of stained glass letting through light of different colours and reflecting it in different directions,

they remind us of the many different ways in which people have seen, experienced and reflected on communion; be it an intense personal experience of love and mercy, an expression of community and fellowship that reaches across time and space, or a statement of radical inclusion in the face of societal or political exclusion. As many experiences as there are people and times they have received communion. Each person participating with their own perspective, their own context, their own relationship with God: yet another element of communion?

It isn't just what has been painted that tells us about the elements of communion, though. It is also how it has been painted. Thick blobs of paint, give the painting texture and body. When much of what happens in our Sunday services is cerebral, focussing on words and thoughts, confined to the insides of our heads, communion is one of the few things that gives our celebration of God's love body and substance. It is one of the few times we can engage our senses of touch and taste as we seek to encounter God, adding to the spiritual experience of being filled with the Spirit of God, a bodily experience.

Elsewhere are hints of many other things: ears of corn? Candles? A figure or angel?

The elements of the Holy Communion? Bread and wine are just the start, it seems.

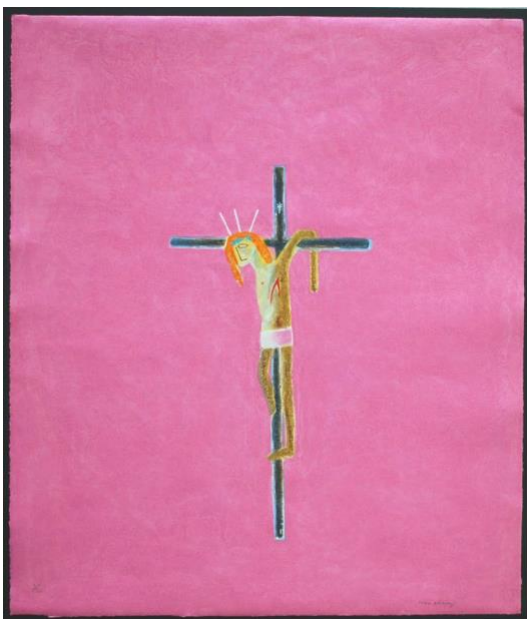
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Friday, 18 April

Good Friday:

Pink Crucifixion by Craigie Aitchison



Here is the classic Christian cross. Here is clearly a depiction of Jesus' crucifixion. And yet the figure has orange hair, barely any expression on his face, is so simply painted that he has no hands, and his arms aren't nailed to the cross, but casually slung over the back of it. You could say he was almost nonchalant - nearly like the stereotypical teenager lounging about, going "Whatever!" And then a Barbie pink background? What is going on? This, surely, is the crucifixion as we've never seen it before!

The artist has described the crucifixion as "the most horrific story I have ever heard". And yet, he is not in any way attempting to show the horror of it. Quite

the opposite: he appears to be ridiculing it! Or is he ridiculing our attempt to try and depict Jesus' suffering? How can we, as humans, possibly attempt to describe the suffering of God?

By not showing us the exact way in which Jesus suffers, the artist is enabling us to look at the scene afresh. We realise that we simply can't know how Jesus suffered. Even the gospels differ in the words they attribute to Jesus on the cross, each painting a slightly different picture of that experience. And if we try to imagine what it was like, it will be different for each one of us. Just as we all experience grief and pain and suffering in different ways. Like that pink background which isn't uniform, but has many different shades and textures, we are not uniform, our experiences of suffering are not uniform. And yet everyone's suffering will always cry out with the vibrancy of that pink, making an indelible impact on anyone willing to see it.

Perhaps we are being invited to go back and look at our own suffering. We often long for others to see it and to understand it. Finding others with similar experiences can be an important step on our path to healing. But God, the one whom we will never fully understand, is the only one who fully understands us. God is the one who can see deeply inside us, seeing not only the pain, but the route to it, the path that led us to experience the pain as we do, our history, our unique combination of nature and nurture. In God we are fully known, fully understood and fully loved.

And then, when we dare to lift our head and look at the suffering of others? What then? How do we perceive that suffering? Do we expect it to take a particular form? Or are we ready to set aside our expectations, our preconceptions, our own experiences and simply see whatever each individual presents us with? And then remain with them.

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Saturday, 19 April

The Deposition by Graham Sutherland



This is not a painting which I am drawn to. The browns, the greys, ... they aren't colours that appeal to me and I don't like their combination. And then the blue seems to clash with the orangey brown background. I feel uncomfortable. In an art gallery or exhibition I would probably quickly walk past this picture and find something different to linger on.

But this time I start looking at the picture in more detail – only to find that it gets worse! Look at that thin skeletal body which has been lowered down from the cross. You can see the ribs; it's not much more than skin and bones. Its form is influenced by photographs of the victims of the Nazi concentration camps.

Perhaps that is the clue. Perhaps I shouldn't like this painting. Just as I shouldn't and don't like some of the awful things that go in our world. Perhaps this painting should be a reminder to me that life isn't always joyful and harmonious – the way I like my paintings to be. Sometimes life is filled with horror, with unimaginable suffering. Sometimes life is ugly and uncomfortable and I would rather look away and ignore it – just as I would rather look away from this painting and ignore it.

God doesn't ignore it, though. In Jesus, we see God suffering as so many humans do. We see God not turning away, but entering into our suffering. Suffering with and alongside us.

What else is going on in this picture apart from the body? What is Jesus being lowered into? Is it a tomb, a coffin? But that large, possibly hexagonal shape, the blue reminiscent of water... this doesn't have to be Jesus being lowered into a coffin. It could be a font, and Jesus being raised up out of it. A reminder of renewal and new life – so badly needed here for this tortured body, and always on offer when we seek out God.

Then there is the cross in the centre of the background, the cross which Jesus has been lowered down from. On either side are – what? Two doorways? Two buildings? And what are those ropes hanging down from the corners? I'm not quite sure what is going on here, but the shape of the cross and the ropes: it looks like an anchor. Again a sign of hope, of security. Or do the cross and the coffin/font form a boat structure? Is Jesus about to bring peace in the midst of the storm that has ravished this body?

I still don't find this picture attractive. But there is so much in it. So often we are reminded of the divine by love and beauty. But this painting is a reminder that God is found everywhere, including in the horrors and sufferings of life. And that in the midst of them we can still find and experience signs of hope and peace.

Listen

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Sunday, 20 April

Easter Sunday:

The Empty Tomb by Richard Bavin



What an unusual perspective. It's only now that I am standing inside the grave that I realise that I normally stand outside. I'm always looking into the grave, past the stone which has been rolled away. I wonder why? Is it just that everyone always draws and paints it that way and I've never had the imagination to think of the scene any differently?

It is an intriguing perspective from inside the grave. It feels like a huge question, asking "What now?" Are we going to believe the evidence of the absent body? Are we going to rush out into the light? Or are we going to sit here and wait for a bit? Trying to take in that the body has gone. Trying to work out what resurrection actually means. What, after all, is out there? We can't see anything. So if we do go out, then we won't know what we're going into, what we're letting ourselves in for. What is going to be demanded of us, if we go out there? If we dare to believe? If we dare to follow Jesus' footsteps? Are we going to hesitate, taking one step at a time, only very slowly climbing those steps? Or will we rush out, half-stumbling through the entrance? Jesus clearly didn't waste any time: no folding of the cloths or anything like that. He just upped and went. Are we going to make an exit as quickly and easily as he did?

It's light out there. That should be a good sign. But I can't help wondering whether it really is light or not. I keep catching myself not seeing brightness outside, with a stone half blocking the entrance, but instead an optical illusion where I see a tunnel leading into darkness, into night. The moonlight from elsewhere lighting up the wall of the tunnel. Indeed, when you look at this picture from a distance the first thing you see is a moon in the dark night sky. I

keep having to remind myself that this crescent of brightness is the rest of the world bathed in sunlight. So what is it out there? Light or darkness?

Are we worried by the uncertainty of what awaits us? Does it make us hesitate? Are we tempted to stay in the darkness of the tomb? That small familiar space with the feel of a comforting cocoon. Or does this bare tomb look more like a prison than a cosy home? Surely, once we've seen the open door, we don't really have any other option than to go up those steps. After all, out there is where Jesus is waiting for us. Friend and God. Love and life. Hope and the one we can trust.

Listen

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Compiled by Vicky Davies