

The Five Final Days

What to say when the fig tree fails
and the wine is sour



Janet Lees

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This series of short reflections and prayers might be used, like an alternative grace, before a simple meal during each evening of Holy Week. Or it might be used during a meal, to give space for thought and conversation whilst eating together.

You might want to plan some of the meals to include fresh or dried figs and grapes or raisins.

There is a tension in the final five days, when we remember Jesus visiting Jerusalem for the Passover Festival and spending time with family and friends. Yet it will be his final Passover.

There's also a tension in the Bible between the image of peace and plenty when 'Everyone sits beneath their own vine and fig tree', and when there is no harvest or times are hard. Yet: 'We will still rejoice and praise God.' This series explores some of those tensions as they relate to the events of Holy Week in Mark 11–15. Words for each day are from my remembered Bible.

Holy Monday

Jesus goes out and sees a fig tree ...

May no one ever eat fruit from you again!

It's going to be a tough week.
Even this fig tree has no fruit.
The curse passes his lips in exasperation.

The one who cursed the fig tree knows my frustrations:
empty shelves in the shops,
no time to do the tasks required in a busy week,
too many questions I can't answer.
How can I support vulnerable people
when I can hardly hold myself up?

In these final days, God of vine and fig tree, may we still rejoice.

Holy Tuesday

Jesus goes out and sees the fig tree has withered ...

Have faith in God! Believe that what you say will happen.

And so the fig tree withered.
It was inevitable:
the words were enough to make it curl up.

The one who spoke of the fig tree knows my limitations:
not confident with words,
uncertain what to say at times,

unwilling to intervene in challenging situations.
How can I change the world
when I can hardly change myself?

In these final days, God of vine and fig tree, may we still rejoice.

Holy Wednesday

Jesus goes to the temple and tells a parable ...
What will the owner of the vineyard do?

There's always a story to tell.
The damage is done,
vines are torn up, trees are cut down,
creatures are dispossessed.
How can I cherish the earth
when my own self-interest is so consuming?

In these final days, God of vine and fig tree, may we still rejoice.

Maundy Thursday

Jesus eats supper with his friends ...
I will not drink wine again until we all share in God's new 'kingdom'.

A simple supper, but nothing is that simple.
Bread and wine are daily things,
but this meal is not without controversy;
who will serve it and to whom?

How can I share things
that are denied to others?

In these final days, God of vine and fig tree, may we still rejoice.

Good Friday

Jesus called out from the cross ...

They gave him a sponge soaked in sour wine: Jesus gave a loud cry and died.

The one who cries out knows the agony,
has lived in a body marked with service,
tortured and rejected.

Even the wine is sour.

How can I follow a way
that demands so much?

In these final days, God of vine and fig tree, may we still rejoice.

Janet Lees

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