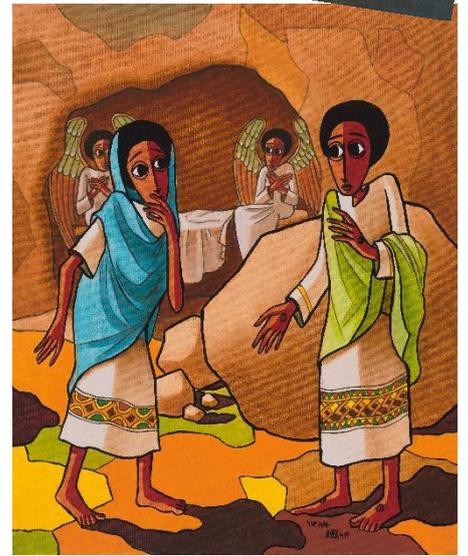
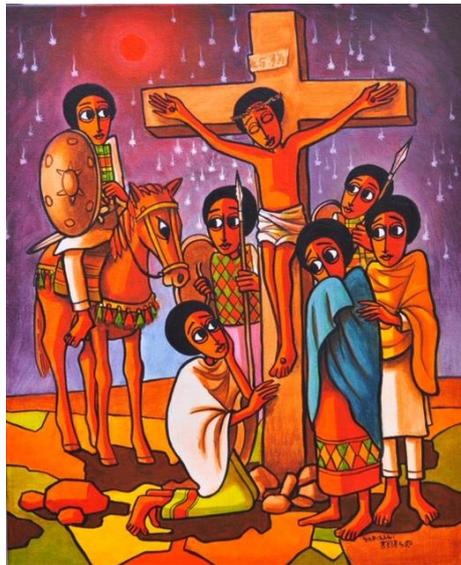
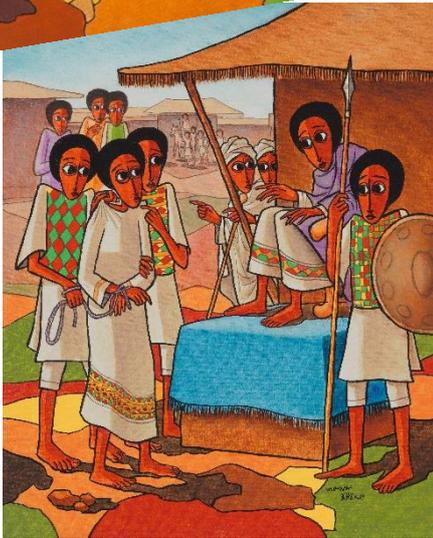
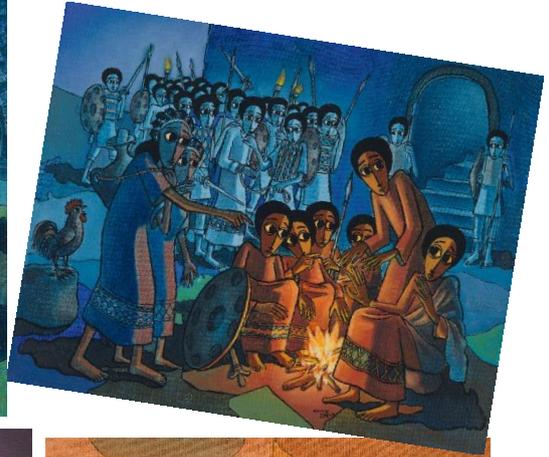
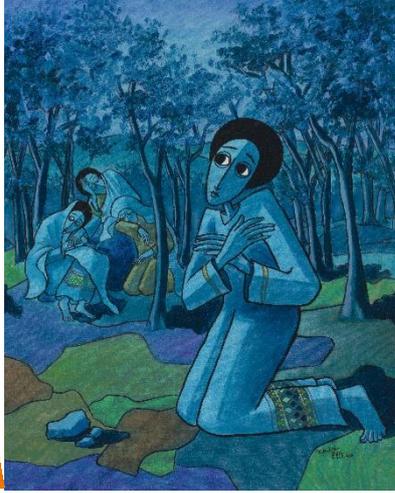


# A Journey towards the Cross



## Readings and reflections

using paintings by Ethiopian artist Nebiyu Assefa

Written by Jo Vickery

Holy Week 2020



## The Last Supper

### Reading

*26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'*

*27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.*

*28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will*

*not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'*

*30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Matthew 26; 26-30

### Reflection

In the painting, the eyes of all are fixed on Jesus. All except one solitary figure, who turns away. He cannot meet Jesus' gaze. He looks down where his bag of money sits in the shadows.

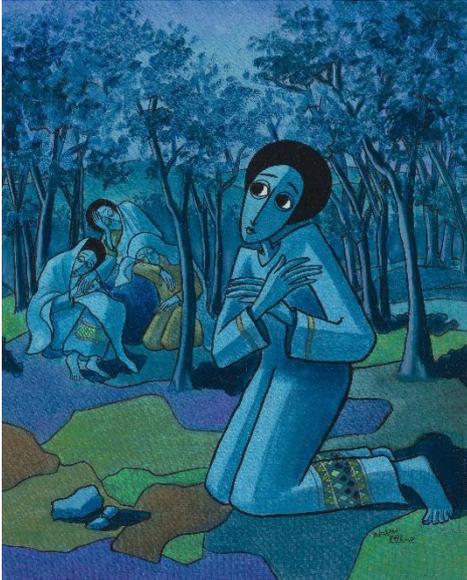
Yet this is the place where Jesus takes bread, blesses, breaks and gives it. And so with the wine. It is the place where community is formed; the place where family is fed and forgiveness offered to all.

This is the time when we remember and all are filled with thanksgiving that Jesus himself offers life to all, life to the world.

Whether we look at him or turn away, he continues to love.

### *Silence*

O light that followest all my way,  
I yield my flickering torch to thee:  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day  
May brighter, fairer be.



## Gethsemane

### Reading

<sup>39</sup> Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' <sup>41</sup> He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

<sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

<sup>45</sup> When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup> 'Why are you sleeping?' he asked them. 'Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.'

Luke 22; 39-46

### Reflection

The ice-blue night engulfs Jesus. His disciples sleep, leaving their Lord totally alone

Yet this is the place where prayer is most passionate. Jesus, in anguish, looks up to the Father and kneels down in surrender – abandons himself to what has to be done.

This is the time when Jesus could choose his way or God's. And he chooses to pray.

In the raging of battle, he chose to pray.

In the darkness of unknowing, he chose to pray.

In his absolute weakness, he chose to pray, and found the strength to submit and the courage to continue, for the sake of the world.

### Silence

Here is love, vast as the ocean,  
Loving kindness as the flood,  
When the Prince of Life, our Ransom,  
Shed for us His precious blood.  
Who His love will not remember?  
Who can cease to sing His praise?  
He can never be forgotten,  
Throughout Heav'n's eternal days.



## Peter's Denial

### Reading

*69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee,' she said.*

*70 But he denied it before them all. 'I don't know what you're talking about,' he said.*

*71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant-girl saw him and said to the*

*people there, 'This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.'*

*72 He denied it again, with an oath: 'I don't know the man!'*

*73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, 'Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.'*

*74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, 'I don't know the man!'*

*Immediately a cock crowed. 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the cock crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly.*

Matthew 26; 69-75

### Reflection

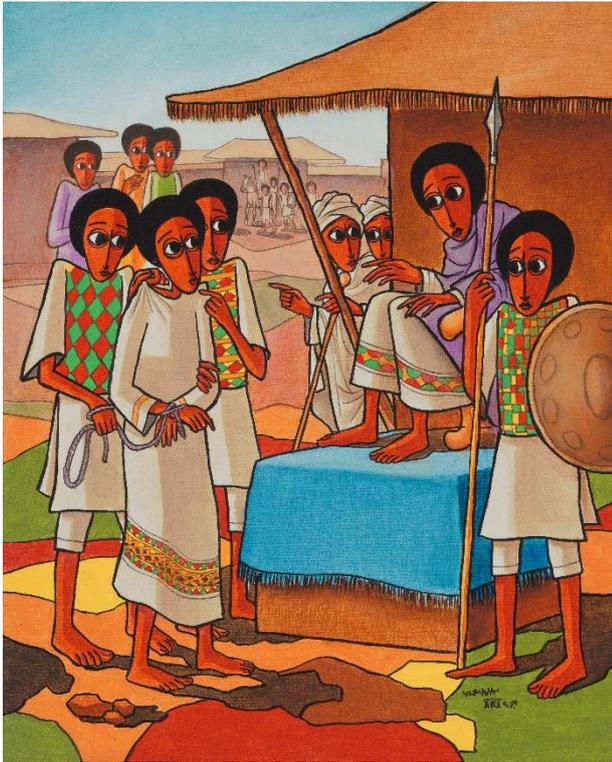
The Temple Guards have delivered Jesus to be tried. But it is Peter now who faces the heat of accusation. Finger pointing, pressure mounting and anger erupting from the apostle's mouth as he cowers in fear and confusion.

This is a place we are all familiar with. Put on the spot and nowhere to hide. The cry of the cockerel and Peter wept. Jesus had said; Jesus knew and Jesus knows.

For these are the times we all face and will sometimes fail. We will weep as we do so. Yet time for repentance is part of God's provision and the pathway is open to healing and peace.

### Silence

On the mount of crucifixion,  
Fountains opened deep and wide;  
Through the floodgates of God's mercy  
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.  
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,  
Poured incessant from above,  
And Heav'n's peace and perfect justice  
Kissed a guilty world in love.



## Before Pilate

### Reading

*<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'*

*'You have said so,' Jesus replied.*

*<sup>12</sup> When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' <sup>14</sup> But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge – to the great amazement of the governor.*

Matthew 27; 11-14

### Reflection

The Ethiopian desert is the setting rather than the city of Jerusalem. Yet the themes of false accusation and unjust conviction are as familiar in African experience today as they were in in first century Judea then.

This is the place where Jesus has been brought, willingly it seems, to hear the charges laid against him. The choice to surrender to the Divine will that Jesus made in the Garden is being lived out now. As he stood there in silence, Isaiah's prophetic voice must surely have been speaking deep in his heart:

*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Is. 53: 7)*

This is the time when Jesus stands with all who have been unjustly accused and cruelly treated. Pilate bows to the screaming mob. He washes his hands and delivers Jesus to be crucified.

### *Silence*

O cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee:  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.



## Carrying the Cross

### Reading

<sup>16</sup> The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. <sup>17</sup> They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. <sup>18</sup> And they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' <sup>19</sup> Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to

him. <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means 'the place of the skull') ..... <sup>24</sup> And they crucified him.

Mark 15: 16-24

### Reflection

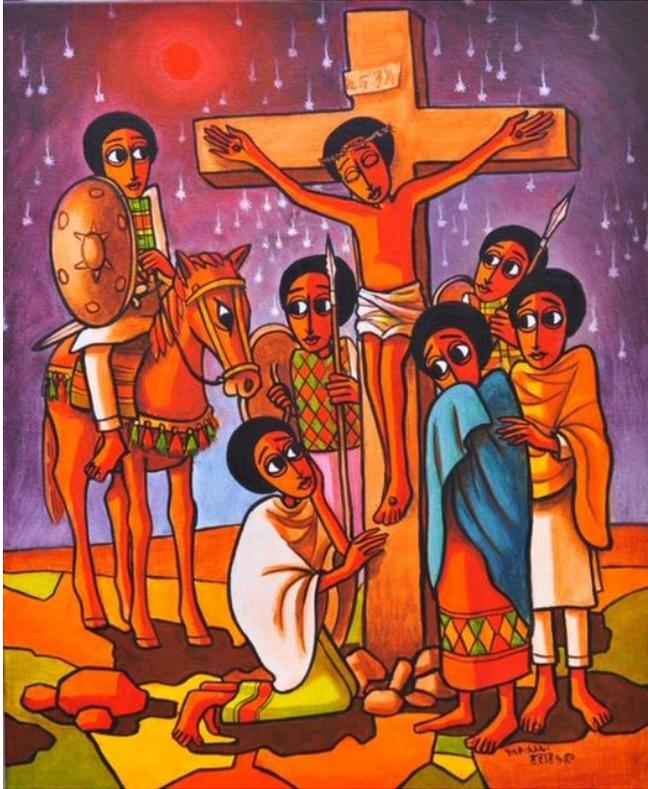
The image of strangers coming out of the crowd and helping Jesus to carry his cross speaks to the very heart of what it means to be human. It is summed up in the phrase, 'Carry one another's burdens.' (Galatians 6: 2).

This is the place where Jesus took his last steps along the path of suffering. Having been subjected to physical and mental torture he falls under the weight of the crossbeam. The help of others is accepted and he goes on.

This is the time when every person is tempted to blend in with the crowd and watch while untold suffering is all around. Yet when we witness today sacrificial love in others we can feel compelled to carry the burdens of another, even the stranger, and act selflessly. This is indeed the way of the cross, the way Jesus walked.

### Silence

O joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee:  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain,  
That morn shall tearless be.



## The Crucifixion

### Reading

<sup>25</sup> Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

John 19; 25-27

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a

loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was the son of God."

Luke 23; 44-47

### Reflection

The artist has chosen to portray not so much the horror but the love of the cross. He sets Jesus against a sun-absent sky. It seems all hope is extinguished. Yet the words Jesus utters from the cross give birth to a dimension of relationship that transcends place or time.

This is the place where new community is formed; where strangers become *Family* - brought together in the outstretched arms of Christ.

Standing back from the painting we begin to see that the far distance has become the curved horizon of planet earth; there is nothing that is not being embraced by Christ's love.

This then is the time when the love of God is poured out upon all people, the whole planet and everything beyond.

*<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1; 19, 20)*

*Silence*

**When I survey the wondrous cross**

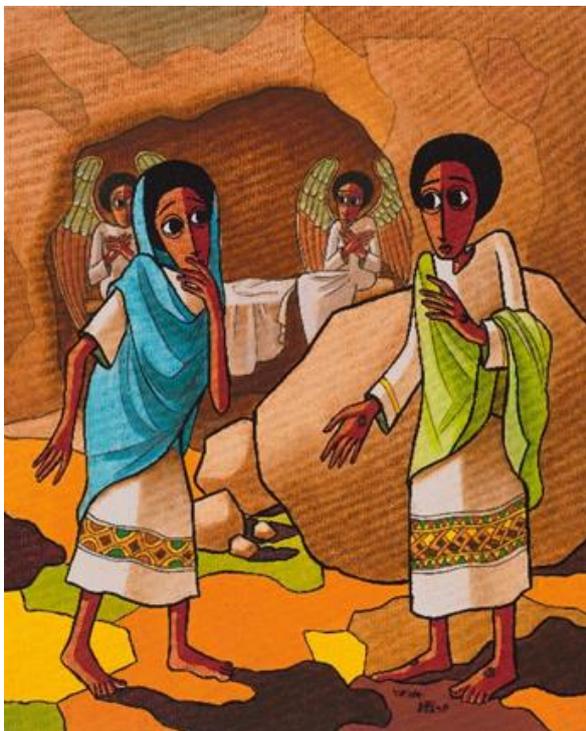
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God:  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of Nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

Isaac Watts.



Alleluia, Christ is risen

**He is risen Indeed. Alleluia!**