

Good Friday

A Reflective Service of Prayer for those at home

Opening Words

There is now no going back, the world has taken over.
Was it for death that Jesus came?

In the shadow of the cross
is the suffering of Jesus.

In the shadow of human weakness
is the vulnerability of the Christ.

In the shadow of pain
is the God who cried out.

Seven Words from the Crucifixion

Following Jesus' arrest, the men who were guarding him began to mock and beat him. They blindfolded him and demanded, 'prophecy! Who hit you?'

They threw many insults at him.

At daybreak, the Council met, Jesus was led before them, 'If you are the Christ,' they said, 'tell us.'

He replied, 'You are right in saying I am.'

Then the whole assembly rose and Jesus was led off to Pilate. They began to accuse him saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation, he claims to be the Christ, a King.'

Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the King of the Jews?'

'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus said.

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.'

But they insisted, when Pilate asked if Jesus was a Galilean he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction he sent him to see Herod.

Herod plied Jesus with many questions but Jesus would not answer, then Herod and his soldiers dressed him in a robe, a symbol that both mocked and questioned the nature of his earthly power and they sent him back to Pilate.

Pilate said to them, 'It is your custom to release a prisoner at the time of Passover, do you want me to release the King of the Jews?'

The people all shouted back, 'No, give us Barabbas (who had taken part in a rebellion.' Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged; soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and forced it upon Jesus' head until droplets of blood trickled down his face. They spat at him and they knelt and mocked Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and they struck him in the face.

As soon as the Chief priests saw him they shouted crucify, crucify. Shortly after the people with one voice began to shout, 'crucify, crucify, crucify.'

They led Jesus away to crucify him.

Pause for a moment as you read the following and reflect



'He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of the people he was stricken and he was assigned a grave in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. After the suffering of his soul, He will see the light of life.

Isaiah 53



As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.'

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

Then Jesus said, '**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!'

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' There was also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals hung there started to hurl insults at Jesus but the other rebuked him saying, 'Don't you fear God.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom. Jesus answered, '**Today you will be with me in paradise.**'

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, when Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, '**Dear woman, behold, here is your son,** and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother,' from that time on the disciple took her into his home.

From the sixth hour darkness came over the land and about the ninth hour Jesus cried out, '**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**' Shortly after Jesus said,

'I am thirsty.' A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of hyssop and lifted it up to Jesus' lips.

When he received the drink he said, '**it is finished,**' finally Jesus called out in a loud voice, '**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**' When he had said this he breathed his last.



The day's work was done. The nails had done their cruel work. The vinegar sponge and the ladder are laid aside. All has been done that can be done to His body that the world would do. Now it must be given over to rest.

Pause for Thought

How does one begin to speak about the cross, for surely it points us to something that is beyond our understanding? Good Friday, the crucifixion, is stamped into the memory of all Christians, it has never been discarded in favour of only remembering the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Day and with good reason for Jesus' death is as important as the empty tomb!

The seven last sayings uttered by Jesus as he experienced crucifixion take us towards the heart of Christian hope, they also shed light and grace amidst the agony and darkness of death but they have also left us with many thoughts to ponder. I have chosen the fifth sentence, 'I thirst' because it compels us to imagine his agony with an even greater clarity. These words dispel any romantic notion we may have of Easter and they act as a fulcrum that marks the shift in balance.

At first we hear Jesus attending to some important last matters, 'Father forgive,' his grace and charity is astonishing towards those who have chanted 'kill him' only hours before. Next, to the thief beside him he assures Salvation awaits all who turn to God and repent of their sins.

Thirdly, he deals with the future of his mother's wellbeing insuring she is not herself abandoned by his impending fate.

Next, the mood changes and we see Jesus' human frailty leap to the fore as he uttered those chilling words, '*My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me.*' Psalm 22 As the story of the cross unfolds, it is difficult to ignore the feeling of Christ's desolation. These words have haunted theologians for centuries especially as the psalm continues '*I cry out but you do not answer.*'

Suffering poses the believer many questions about the nature of God and his kingdom and without doubt 'Good Friday' exacerbates our difficulty in understanding Christ's brutal and de-humanising execution upon the cross and where 'God' is in all of this both for Jesus and the onlooker.

Everything Jesus knew of the scriptures and taught, the very heart of his 'Messianic message' focussed on God's grace and saving love and yet as Jesus' life ebbs away on the cross, this absence of God appears to have made him question his destiny.

His anxiety was previously visible in the Garden of Gethsemane for we are told that sweat, like droplets of blood splashed onto the ground as he earnestly petitioned God saying, '*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me.*' Luke 22 v 42

Despite all the miracles or even the shouts of Alleluia as he entered Jerusalem sadly Jesus saw his last hours and his betrayal as one who was drinking from the cup of wrath, the cup which metaphorically contained all the sins of the nation.

Isaiah 49 v 17

Jesus never doubted his mission to bring the 'Good News' of God's love and saving grace to his people even though it carried the risk of rejection, and now, as he hung on the cross he was in no doubt that the cup he drank from was a poisoned chalice.

If Jesus was referring to the theological notion expressed in Isaiah when he petitioned his heavenly father in Gethsemane, then in the same passage Jesus knew what the Lord says to the one whose righteousness challenged Israel's sins,

'This is what the Lord says, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel – to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers, Kings will see you 'rise' up, princes will bow down because the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel has chosen you. In the time of my favour I will answer you, and in the day of Salvation I will help you' *Isaiah 49 v 7*

Death was just moments away for Jesus, 'why was the Lord not answering him, where was the blessing to come from? He had a pure heart, he had lived according to the will and the mission of God as God's own Son, and yet now... silence. As the shadow of death falls over his weakening body, Jesus now declares his 'thirst,' was he continuing to think of Psalm 22?

The graphic description of human frailty and suffering penned by the psalmist in psalm 22 reveals a clear understanding of fear and death and how the body responds to stress, *'I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax, my strength is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.'* *Psalm 22 v 14-15*

'I am thirsty' shapes our thinking, the scales are now tipped, it leaves us in no uncertain doubt of what it was like hanging upon the cross where only death can bring peace to the human body and soul unless a miracle happens.

There were some gathered around the cross that believed Jesus would call down the angels and set himself free from his persecution and yet nothing happened. All that Jesus could now muster the strength to say was, *'it is 'finished, Father I place my spirit into your hands.'*

The Gospels do not spare the agony of Christ's death so why does St John choose not to leave out what at first sight may appear a trivial detail, that crucifixion left Jesus dry and uncomfortable thirsting for relief, why did he not just move to the final words of a dying man?

That Jesus was 'thirsty' underlines the unpalatable truth about the cross, that Jesus does not escape suffering, he does not escape the agonising pain of crucifixion AND he does not escape the death that accompanies it, the hour had come! St John was pointing to the painful reality that Jesus can do no more, he is now at his weakest and what he thirsts for is his rescue. At such a moment a man can either give in and succumb spiritually and physically to death unwillingly and with bitterness OR he can reach up, trust and wait for the Lord to prove he IS faithful, right to the end.

What is important about his death will only be answered by his resurrection three days after but at this moment it is for us to ponder the thought that neither Jesus, the rulers (who had sought to have him killed) or indeed the people knew any other outcome except that Jesus found death on the cross that day.

I want to finish this reflection on the cross by surmising what Jesus may have said following his final words if he had been able to muster the strength to say something of his hope which clearly had not left him as he placed his spirit into the hands of God.' Without doubt Jesus knew the psalms perfectly, would he have recited Psalm 16 (See next page)

Psalm 16

Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.
I say to the LORD, 'You are my Lord;
apart from you, I have no good thing'

As for the saints in the land, they are the glorious ones
in whom is all my delight.

Those who choose other gods multiply their sorrows;
their drink-offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly inheritance.

I will praise the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure,
because you will not abandon me to the grave,
nor will you let your Holy One see decay
You have made known to me the path of life.

You will fill me with joy in your presence,
in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

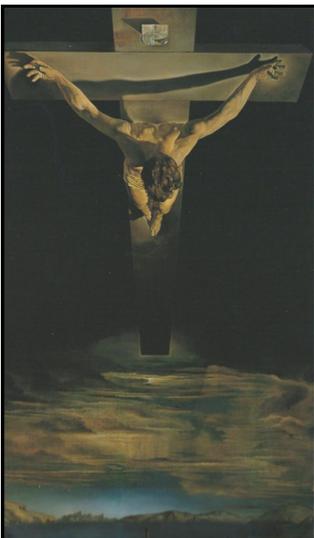
Light a candle

(please ensure this is done safely)

Pause for a moment of quiet

The cup which he took at supper with his friends is now empty. The cup of wrath that the world drinks from is now drained.

The light had gone from the world, as darkness hung like a shroud, over Golgotha, 'friends' came to remove his broken and limp body from the cross of His holy death



Prayers for the World

Who will we pray for today? Let us name them.

(Silently name those you want to pray for)

God in Christ, you travel with us in faith
towards the hard places of our souls.
You know the agony of pain, guilt and hurt
deep within us.

You know the violence we sometimes hurl in anger;
these are our stumbling blocks.

So that we may know your freedom,
we lay our sins at the foot of the cross
which is able to bear the weight of our human failings.

O Lord, hear our prayer and forgive us we pray.

Irradiate our hearts with your love
that we may love one another for Christ's sake.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done;
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But Deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory,
For ever and ever. AMEN



CLOSING WORDS

Be warmed by the glow of my presence
Come and melt in the rays of my peace
Thy heart shall be lifted with gladness
and the tempter's dark arrows will cease.
Go forth as the child I have made thee
With the flower of faith in thy hair.
Bring joy to the world as thou goest
and shed the
unfading Light of my Love everywhere.

Words by Briony Lill