



*Love ... always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres  
And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.  
Love... never ends*

*(1 Corinthians 13: 7, 13, 8)*

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last for ever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

*Wystan Hugh Auden.... Bringing word and picture to our grief.*

*Let's forget it now  
And all go home.  
He is buried and the stone is in place  
His family is in tears, his friends are lost  
This time it is really over ....*

Lord, it is not over.... but it is not easy here in the darkness always to see what comes next.

As Scripture says, sometimes it gets dark in the middle of the day, and God feels far away and dead<sup>1</sup>.

But here, as we stand at the foot of the cross... astonishingly, we find a presence with us. Jesus.... who said '*I will never leave you*' ... is even here, in the darkness. With us.

As Jesus is crucified, God's power stands silently while violence does its worst and rage is unleashed in all its fury<sup>2</sup> – in a whipped up mob, in pain and blood and love rejected. He absorbs, rather than retaliates – he absorbs all the toxic hurts and pains of our world, and gives back pure love, flowing like crystal water into the dried and angry hearts of our world.

He breathes his last. And that breath is strangely like the breath of Genesis, flowing over the world, flooding us with life, and hope, and promise... even in the darkness.

*It is finished*, he said. What is finished? Somehow, the hold of darkness and death, and despair, are finished. Somehow... it is not true that '*nothing now can come to any good*'.

It is finished, because nothing has been able to deflect him from his love. Nothing could change his truth. Nothing could twist and distort this offering of love, that offering that takes the place of all the lambs of sacrifice, of all the blood poured out in hope.. and says, 'enough' ... 'it is finished' – it is accomplished. The love that holds, that says God can be trusted, and the forces of despair are finished because we can believe in the sun even when it isn't shining, in love even when we don't feel it, and in God, even when God is inexplicable, or silent... because love and light cannot be overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, 'The Passion and the Cross'

<sup>2</sup> Magdalen Smith, 'The Grace-filled Wilderness'

Mohandas Gandhi once wrote:

*“When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love has always won. There have been murderers and tyrants, and for a time they can seem invincible. But in the end they always fall. Think of it always<sup>3</sup>”*

It was the high priest’s job once every year to enter the holiest of holies, dressed in a special robe with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved upon jewels on the breast, and to make the sacrificial blood offering for forgiveness and atonement.

Now Jesus, both priest and sacrifice, enters heaven, wearing our very skin... carrying the name – the being – the fingerprint, the DNA, the ... skin... of every single human, joined indivisibly to his own self. His blood, like liquid ruby, shed for us, leads the way to a new love, and new life... engraved in the centre of our very being, into the pattern of creation. With no-one left behind.

This, strangely, is no day for despair. And in this day... all days of despair are touched and held. All grief, all loss, all brokenness, all pain. For every single human ever birthed through the love of God our Father. And that is everyone, ever, through all time and history, and on beyond what we can know.

Jesus absorbs all the hatreds, and fears, and griefs of the world... and ... breathes out love.

*Jesus, remember me, says the criminal, when you come into your kingdom. What is it that he sees in this man in agony beside him, nailed to a cross?*

*Surely, says the Centurion, who has seen him arrested, nailed, and dying.... Who pierced his side, and watched the blood and water flow forth – like new wine from a newly pierced cask. .... Surely, this man was the Son of God. What brings this faith, from this armour-clad gentile? What is it that softens his heart?*

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, ‘The Passion and the Cross’ citing Megan McKenna in ‘The New Stations of the Cross: The Way of the Cross According to Scripture’.

There is a power here at work, that we hear in the silence, and see in the dark, but is all the more powerful for that.

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit<sup>4</sup>*

Now the seed is buried in the soil.... And we wait on its truth.

We wait, knowing that beneath and beyond our sight and knowledge, miracles are happening...

We wait through tomorrow, when Jesus descends into the darkest places of despair and wretchedness, when he goes deeper than the cross, and right into hell itself. The lost place, the barred gate, the everlasting torment, into hell itself, and every hell of every story, and every dark and lost place ... and says again – I am here, too, I will never leave you – ‘enough. It is finished’.

Let us pray:

It is finished. But yet it is beginning.  
Here, as we stand, Lord, draw us unto you.

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy

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<sup>4</sup> John 12: 24