

St John's Church Good Friday 2nd April 2021

Service prepared by Rev Adele Moorhouse

Today we reflect on Jesus' journey to the cross. We remember a powerful and desolate time - for us it is made easier because we remember all this in the knowledge of the resurrection. Please do join with us on Sunday as we joyfully celebrate that wonderful truth - but for today we try to identify with Jesus and with the people who were around him on the day that he was crucified. In doing this we recognise the incredible extent of God's love for each one of us.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'. John 3:16

Prayer

Good Friday - in so many ways this is the blackest of days, recalling the darkest of moments - a day on which hearts were broken and faith tested to the limit, a day of appalling suffering and agonising death, a day when all hell was let loose and love seemed overwhelmed. Yet we can call this day 'Good Friday', for in all of that horror you were there. In the despair, in the pain, in the humiliation, in the sorrow, you were supremely at work, demonstrating the immensity of your love. Living God, as we recall those terrible yet wonderful events, give us new insight into what you did that day, for us and for all your children. Amen

Reflection 'O who am I, that for my sake, My Lord should take frail flesh and die'

Let us take a few moments to pause and reflect as we focus on these words taken from the hymn, My song is love unknown (Samuel Crossman 1624-84) SoF 400

(silence)

Jesus has been betrayed and arrested and now he is brought before the Council.

Reading Mark 14:53-65

53 They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. **54** Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. **55** Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. **56** For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. **57** Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, **58** "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" **59** But even on this point their testimony did not agree. **60** Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" **61** But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" **62** Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" "

63 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? **64** You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. **65** Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

Reflection The chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus in order to put him to death, but they found none.... and yet that did not stop them. Envy and jealousy can be so destructive. They spread throughout our whole being, leading to uncharitable conversations, false accusations, and other destructive actions. We see all of this played out among the religious leaders of Jesus' time as they condemn him without justification. How often do we see such things playing out in our own lives too, leading us to criticise, falsely accuse and condemn those who make us feel threatened or insecure in some way.

Prayer Lord help us not to allow jealousy and fear to influence the way we treat others. Guide us in those situations where we might be inclined to criticise or discredit others in order to secure our own position. Help us to turn from destructive paths and instead to follow the example of Jesus and to seek a way of peace and love even when that makes us vulnerable. Amen

Reading Mark 14:66-72

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. **67** When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." **68** But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. **69** And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." **70** But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." **71** But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." **72** At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Meditation

He warned me it would happen, told me exactly how it would be, but I just didn't believe him. If he'd said anyone else I'd have thought otherwise - I mean you can't trust anyone finally can you, not even your friends? And, to be honest, I expected a few of them to cave in when the pressure was on. But me, I felt I was different. It was me after all whom he called to be his first disciple, me who realised he was the Messiah when the rest were still groping in the dark, me he called 'The rock'. And I thought I was just that: unshakeable, firm, dependable. I'm not saying I was better than anyone else, just that my faith always seemed stronger. So I told him, confidently, proudly, 'Though all else fail you I will not. Lord, I am ready to die for you.' God, how those words haunt me now, how stupid they make me feel. If only I'd kept my mouth shut, if only I hadn't been so full of myself, if only I'd had more courage.

We all failed him, all of us in our own way. They look at me and say, 'He denied him.' they talk of Judas and say, 'He betrayed him.' They point at the others and say, 'They abandoned him.' Well, let them judge if they want to. j let them imagine they're a cut above the rest; I've learned the hard way that I'm not.

'No Ordinary Man' © 1997 Nick Fawcett

Reflection

All of us are like Peter to an extent, willing but weak. We make resolutions, but don't keep them. We try to start a new life, but slip back again into a way of darkness. Yet weak as Peter was - not only at Jesus' trial but at other times as well - he truly loved Jesus. In fact, it was his love that repeatedly set him up for failure. All of Christ's other followers ran away after his arrest. Peter, however, followed along into the courtyard, only there to see his weakness take over. Almost immediately, he wept because of what he had done. A few short days afterward, Jesus would take

his weak but loving followers and give them divine strength to overcome human weakness.

Prayer

Gracious God, you gave everything out of love for us and yet we fail you, we deny you, we abandon and betray you. But still you love us, still you have mercy, nothing able to exhaust your grace. So we come, with all our faults and weaknesses, all our doubt and disobedience, seeking again your renewing touch upon our lives. Help us to stand again before the cross and to receive the forgiveness you so freely offer, so that our lives may speak of your goodness and honour you through all we are and all we do. Amen

Reading Mark 15:1-24

15 As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. **2** Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." **3** Then the chief priests accused him of many things. **4** Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." **5** But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

6 Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. **7** Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. **8** So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. **9** Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" **10** For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. **11** But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. **12** Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" **13** They shouted back, "Crucify him!" **14** Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" **15** So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. **17** And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. **18** And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" **19** They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. **20** After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. **22** Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). **23** And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. **24** And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

Reflection

Pilate seemed anxious to release Jesus, almost looking for a way to do so, but the crowd would not allow that. Pilate gave in, fearing for his future and lacking the courage to do what was right. I suspect that most of us have, on occasion, acted in a similar way.

Pilate had Jesus flogged, or scourged - a truly cruel punishment. He was probably stripped to the waist and then lashed several dozen times with a whip, the first few of these strokes cutting open the skin of his back. After the scourging a band, or crown, of long sharp thorns was pressed into his scalp. The pain had to be excruciating. When we have to endure physical pain, it may help us to follow the advice in Paul's letter to the Hebrews: 'Let us.... keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.... For

the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross...' *Hebrews 12:1-2*

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He deserves our praise and reverence. Yet the soldiers placed upon him a dirty cloak instead of a royal garment. They handed him a thin reed instead of the golden staff used by kings. Through all this humiliation, Jesus remained silent. How different it often is with us. Though not as pure or anywhere near as worthy as Christ, we nevertheless often become angry and defensive when someone attacks or criticises us in any way.

Those in charge of Jesus' crucifixion *compelled* Simon of Cyrene to help carry the Lord's cross. He did not volunteer or willingly accept the task, but that is no surprise really as Simon was only passing by and may have known little about Jesus. We, on the other hand, do know Jesus, and we have heard his words about the necessity of taking up our own crosses each day and walking in his footsteps. What is our response? Must we be pressed, compelled, to carry our crosses, be they big or small, or do we accept them willingly?

'And they crucified him' - brief and simple words that skim over the horror of what Jesus experienced. First they drove nails through his hands and feet. Then they raised him on the cross, where he hung in agony for three hours - an incredible demonstration of the depth of his love for us. For Christians the cross is the supreme symbol of our faith because it was here that Jesus died and brought God's forgiveness to us all.

Song

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 (1674-1748) SoF 596

Bible Reading Mark 15:25-32

25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. **26** The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." **27** And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. **29** Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, **30** save yourself, and come down from the cross!" **31** In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. **32** Let the

Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

Comment

Luke’s gospel adds a little more detail about those crucified with Jesus...

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left.... Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, 'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.' The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, 'Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.' Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He replied to him, 'Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' *Luke 23:33,39-43*

One criminal said 'no' to Jesus, the other 'yes'. To his penitent companion on Calvary, Jesus promised immediate forgiveness and entrance into heaven. When we doubt God's willingness to forgive us, when we keep punishing ourselves for past mistakes, when we dread the thought of standing before the pure Christ with our not-so-pure lives, we might find hope and encouragement from recalling this scene.

Reading Mark 15:33-47

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34** At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" **35** When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." **36** And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." **37** Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. **39** Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

(pause)

40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. **41** These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, **43** Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. **44** Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. **45** When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. **46** Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. **47** Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

Poem Dead and buried

And so we took him down
(Or thought we did),
Wiped off the sweat and spittle
From his face,

Washed the dried blood,
Threw out the crown of thorns,
And wrapped him once again
In swaddling clothes.

A tomb can be a cramped,
Confining place,
Far smaller than a stable.
We laid him there
(Or thought we did).
We were not able
To comprehend
The infinite contained.
For us it was the end.
Only the harsh realities
Of death and stone
Remained.

Elizabeth Rooney 20th century

From 'The Lion Book of Christian Poetry' © 1995, 2001, 2005 Mary Batchelor

The words of the song 'Come and see' provide the focus for our final time of reflection...

Song

Come and see, come and see,
Come and see the King of love;
See the purple robe and crown of thorns He wears.
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer,
As He lifts the cruel cross;
Lone and friendless now He climbs towards the hill.

*We worship at Your feet,
Where wrath and mercy meet,
And a guilty world is washed
By love's pure stream.
For us he was made sin -
Oh, help me take it in.
Deep wounds of love cry out
'Father, forgive.'
I worship, I worship,
The Lamb who was slain.*

Come and weep, come and mourn
For your sin that pierced him there;
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail.
All our pride, all our greed,

All our fallenness and shame;
And the Lord has laid the punishment on Him.

We worship...

Man of heaven, born to earth
To restore us to your heaven,
Here we bow in awe beneath your searching eyes.
From Your tears comes our joy,
From your death our life shall spring;
By Your resurrection power we shall rise.

We worship...

Graham Kendrick © 1989 Make Way Music SoF 67

(silence)

CCL: 5347