

Reflections for Good Friday

(You may find it helpful to have an image of a cross close by as you reflect upon the meaning of Good Friday for you. I've found last year's palm cross given to me as I led the service at Allhallowgate – you may still have one – something you can hold on to. Failing that, draw one and cut it out so you can touch it as well as look at it.)

Psalm 22

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

**Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?**

**² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.**

It's highly unlikely that the Psalmist had heard of Coronavirus but these two verses pretty much sum up what so many people throughout the world are feeling right now. It's helpful to realise that as dire as the situation may seem, it's not the first time, nor probably the last, when individuals, families or indeed whole communities, have felt abandoned. We may get some solace from the thought that these were the very words Jesus himself used when confronting his pain and suffering on the cross. It's only human to feel this way. But the Good Friday story is not one of submission but of victory, a day not for mourning, but for celebrating Christ's supreme triumph.

StF 284

There is a green hill far away

There is a green hill far away,
outside a city wall,
where our dear Lord was crucified
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
what pains he had to bear,
but we believe it was for us
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiven,
he died to make us good,
that we might go at last to heaven,
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin,
he only could unlock the gate
of heaven and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved!
And we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood,
and try his works to do.

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

A Prayer for Good Friday

Lord Jesus, We come to you in prayer today on Good Friday remembering the day you were tried, convicted, mocked, beaten and crucified. We remember how you died and were laid into the tomb amid the sounds of incredible grief, fear, shock and sorrow.

Instead of jumping ahead to the happy ending where you arose from the dead on Easter morning, help us to meditate today on Good Friday on your great sacrifice, suffering and pain that you endured for our sake and for the sake of the whole world. In our greatest times of suffering we realize that we never have suffered as you did. You deserved life, honour and praise. Yet you willingly chose death, dishonour and ridicule in order to complete God's plan.

You could have opened your mouth and with just a few words you could have answered your accusers and proven them to be frauds, hypocrites and liars. Yet you remained silent. You could have called legions of angels, and yet you submitted your back to cruel scourges. You could have called down fire from heaven, yet you instead allowed the blood to flow from your hands and feet onto the wood of the cross. You could have called a fiery chariot like Elijah and been taken up into heaven, yet you chose for your lifeless body to be laid down into a cold dark tomb.

Jesus, I am overwhelmed by the depth of your sacrifice. May I sit in silence and allow myself to look with an open heart toward the cross. Help my knowledge of your suffering and crucifixion journey move from my mind and settle into my heart. Help me to feel the tension between great sacrifice and great love, between suffering and redemption, between death and life, between the fleeting and the eternal. Help me to experience the unseen force of Grace and obedience and weep with both joy and sorrow at the great cost.

Jesus Christ, I can only sit in awe and wonder as I think of all you have done for me and humbly offer my praise and thanks and seek your mercy

Amen.

Bible Reading Isaiah 53: 1 – 6

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Stf 360

Man of sorrows! What a name

1. Man of sorrows what a name
for the Son of God, who came
ruined sinners to reclaim:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
2. Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood,
sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
3. Guilty, helpless, lost were we;
blameless Lamb of God was he,
sacrificed to set us free:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
4. He was lifted up to die;
“It is finished” was his cry;
now in heaven exalted high:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
5. When he comes, our glorious King,
all his ransomed home to bring,
then anew this song we’ll sing:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

(Philipp Paul Bliss 1838 – 1876)

Bible Reading Luke 23: 26 – 47

The Crucifixion of Jesus

²⁶As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”” ³¹For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³²Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”^[c] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” ³⁸There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

³⁹One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” ⁴⁰But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” ⁴²Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” ⁴³Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

⁴⁴It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”^[c] When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.”

Some thoughts on the Crucifixion.....

How many of you remember having a wind up gramophone record player? It was one of my mother’s treasured possessions, and barely a week passed without this machine was taken out so she could listen to her favourite records comprising mainly of Kathleen Ferrier or Paul Robeson. I was given the duty of winding up the machine and woe betide if the record slowed down in mid-play. The total collection of her records amounted to about two dozen so not surprisingly I became familiar, and not infrequently bored with the words. I can still hear Paul Robeson asking me if I was there when they crucified my Lord? The answer was always no, but I suspected from the way he sang it, he must have been! (*“When I was a child etc.etc.”*) I’d like to think my faith has matured a bit since then, and whilst I still find it hard to comprehend the magnitude and complexity of Jesus’ death, I have a real sense of what a difference it can make to an individual and is a significant part of my faith.

In my later teens when I was able to study the scriptures at school and college where it became evident that the form of death dealt out by the Romans has got to one of, if not the worst, way to end the life of a human being. Strung up and sometimes nailed to a cross, above the ground so everyone could see the life gradually drain out of the individual sometimes taking several days. The place of execution was almost always in the most public of places beside a main road so that those who passed by would see it and be minded to keep the rules so that they didn’t succumb to same predicament. They wanted to set an example. The irony is that in the case of Jesus, they did precisely that, but instead of cowering in fear and trepidation, those who saw it or heard about it can only look on with awe and wonder as they realise what this means to them and to world.

How then, is Jesus' crucifixion an example to all who look and think about it? There are so many, but for now I invite you to think of the following:

1. Here's an example of one who knew what it was like to be human and to experience all the emotions we feel, like the satisfaction of being supported by one of the two felons, the physical pain of the torture, the ridicule from some of the crowd, and the sheer sense of being abandoned. It enables me to feel strong and supported even in the darkest times.

2. Here's the example of one who in the face of such cruelty is able to forgive those who are inflicting the pain and distress on him. *"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."* It helps me to realise how much I depend upon the forgiveness of God when I confess my sins to Jesus, and how much further I must go in forgiving those who do wrong to me.

3. Here's an example of one who truly practices what he preaches. Not content with preaching about going the extra mile, here is Jesus doing it. Not content with telling his followers to turn the other cheek, here we see it in action.

4. Here's an example of real love in action. *"No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends."* Even in the face of imminent death love for others was uppermost – in Luke's gospel we see his compassion for the felon by his side, in John we see him showing compassion for his mother, Mary. Selfless to the last.

5. Here's an example of someone who sticks to the plan irrespective of personal cost. Isaiah had foretold of the coming of the suffering servant thus demonstrating the will of God. Jesus personifies that servant, he realises the implications of the plan and on numerous occasions shares with his disciples what the plan entails. On Good Friday the plan was enacted just as he said. Mission accomplished!

In living and in dying, Jesus was consistent in his faith and commitment to God his Father. Is there any wonder that Matthew records that the Roman officer and soldiers who were present to conclude, *"He really was the Son of God."* May we this Good Friday join them in affirming our faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and commit to living our lives in his example in the sure knowledge that

***We have a hope that is steadfast and certain
Gone through the curtain and touching the throne
We have a Priest who is there interceding
Pouring His grace on our lives day by day.*** (Wendy Churchill)

May we all feel the comfort of this assurance throughout this Easter time and beyond. **Amen**

StF 362

Meekness and majesty

Meekness and majesty
Manhood and Deity
In perfect harmony
The Man who is God
Lord of eternity
Dwells in humanity
Kneels in humility
And washes our feet

O what a mystery
Meekness and majesty
Bow down and worship
For this is your God
This is your God

Father's pure radiance
Perfect in innocence
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross
Suffering to give us life
Conquering through sacrifice
And as they crucify
Prays: 'Father forgive.'

Wisdom unsearchable
God the invisible
Love indestructible
In frailty appears
Lord of infinity
Stooping so tenderly
Lifts our humanity
To the heights of His throne

(Graham Kendrick b. 1950)

Prayers for others

Father God, we are aware of many people throughout the world who are feeling abandoned. We pray for those who are at home alone, with no one to visit them. For those who are anxious for the health of family and friends. For those who are anxious about their jobs and livelihoods. For those recently bereaved who feel they are unable to mourn properly because of the current restrictions on gatherings. We pray for young people who are anxious for their futures, for those bewildered by what is going on. Lord may they know and feel your love and comfort now, the love which you showed in your life and death, and may they know your presence with them.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Father God, we pray for those who are demonstrating your sacrificial love day by day in the duties they undertake on our behalf. We pray for doctors, nurses and health professionals as they care for those who are sick at home or in hospital, especially those working within our National Health Service. We pray that they may be given enough appropriate equipment to keep themselves safe as they care for those in need. We pray for care staff in homes and in community, especially those who work with our Methodist Homes for the Aged, that they be given the strength to carry out their duties at these difficult times.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord we pray for those who have heard the call to help and have come forward assist their communities in a variety of ways. For the local groups in this area who are seeking to bring help to the most vulnerable. We pray for the work of Hambleton Foodshare that they may continue to receive resources to distribute to families in need. We pray for those who continue to supply our daily needs; those who work in shops to provide our food, those who supply our light and heat, those who ensure that shops are supplied. May each one know how much their individual contributions are contributing to the good of our communities.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, you are our God. We are your people. Pour your love into our lives, that we, too, may be able to give all for you, for one another, for the world, for the sake of our crucified Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

StF 276

Lift high the Cross

Refrain:

*Lift high the cross
The love of Christ proclaim,
Till all the world
Adore His sacred name.*

Follow the path on which our Captain trod,
Our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

Refrain:

Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
The hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

Refrain:

Each new-born soldier of the Crucified
Bears on the brow The seal of Him who died.

Refrain:

From farthest regions let them homage bring,
And on his cross adore their Saviour King.

Refrain

O Lord, once lifted On the glorious tree,
As Thou hast promised, draw the world to Thee.

Refrain:

Set up thy throne, that earth's despair may cease
Beneath the shadow of its healing peace.

Refrain

(Michael Robert Newbolt and George William Kitchin)

Blessing

May the blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ
Shine upon on this Holy Day,
And may he keep us in his loving care
Today and always. **Amen**

Musical links as follows:

StF 284 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogRvBVRvqvK>

StF 360 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lj2-iXKdtFw>

StF 362 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tK1hQpacs8>

StF 276 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt8xunjBXdk>

These are not automatic links – you will need to copy and paste them into the address bar of your internet browser.

Please note that no exact recording could be found for 276 that used the words given in Singing the Faith, so I'm suggesting this music only version. Unfortunately only three verses are played so if you want to join in the full hymn you will need to play it twice!



Wishing you peace and joy this Easter