

## Good Friday

As we gather at the foot at the cross and look upon our Lord Jesus Christ crucified we hear the story we know so well and yet that still has the power to confound us, confront us and ultimately has the power to set us free.

This is a story in which we come to see that the very author of life was stripped bare and became for us all that we fear, hate, loathe and turn away from – he became our sin. In his flesh he bore all that we do not want to know about ourselves as humans – individuals and a people. He became naked, exposed, vulnerable, broken – a failure. He became the universal scapegoat and we put upon him all we cannot bear to know about ourselves – our violence, our self loathing, our hatred, our fear.

Jesus was killed by the violence of soldiers, at the order of rulers, with the support of the crowds who had only days before hoped he was the new leader. And he was betrayed and abandoned by his closest followers. And even the women who remained faithful did so at a safe and helpless distance. Jesus bore not only the historical sins of first century peoples but the timeless sins of human failing. And today his passion and death still can show us the eternally vivid details of what we do to the divine, ourselves and one another; and what we do not do for the Beloved, ourselves and others.

In the light and shadow of the cross we must grapple anew with the meaning of the death of Jesus of Nazareth. At some point it becomes clear that the reasons we were taught in Sunday School or youth group have their limitations. Those neat theories and theologies explain things only in so far as they go.

But in the face of the harrowing readings we have heard this morning theories and theologies of any flavour dim and ring hollow. It is the story of love so great, so vulnerable, so passionate, so bloodied, that nothing – not even suffering to death – could contain it. Love beyond reason, love beyond limit, love beyond rules, love without end. God's deathless love for us.

Easter is not necessarily a sensible story. St Paul says as much – it is foolishness to many and God has disguised the wisdom of eternity in the foolishness of our proclamation.

While whole libraries have been written on the meaning of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus it is ultimately mystery that God should reveal god's own self in flesh and then die. The breath that breathed existence into the universe should cease to be. This is mystery. That life comes from death is mystery. And a foolish mystery at that. Hands that flung stars into space are nailed into local wood and bleed and tear as any flesh does. Hands that nursed the beginning of all that is, are wounded and will never be the same – even the resurrected Lord now bears the scars.

Jesus' death is not a little accident on the way to glory, the divine version of a bike accident, a little bump, as some of the children's books suggest and some theologies infer. Jesus' death *is* the location and the occasion of glory – of grace become so particular, so focused that each agonising breath, each word offered to another, each last flicker of human life, shakes the foundation of all that is and ever will be.

The author of life dies on the cross. The divine become flesh accepts the way of all flesh and succumbs to ordinary arbitrary death. A cruel death, but no more cruel than many. An early death but not as early as some. A sacrificial death which at this moment seems to have been in vain, to quite possibly have been pointless. God meets us in our broken and killed flesh. There is now no part of our experience, even the most terrible pointless of deaths, that is outside the embrace of God. And it is death itself that is laid to rest as Jesus' remains are hurriedly placed in a tomb.

It is right and proper and necessary that we remember Jesus being placed in the tomb and the stone being firmly closed after him. Not so much to prove the miracle of his coming resurrection but so that we do not rush ahead in our hearts and minds and let the holiness of Saturday escape us. We need to sit beside the tomb for the day and let every ready made wise theory and too contrived a hope lie dying and decaying away. We need to allow our manufactured faith to lie dead and buried and let what God wills be resurrected in the fullness of God's time. Let us be courageous for the day and allow all that is a given in our faith lie dormant in the grave with our Lord – it can be in no better hands. And let the Lord will what will be resurrected.

Let our sacrifice of gratitude be that we sit in the hollow and helpless place of this afternoon and tomorrow, allowing things certain to become uncertain and decay. To allow fear and loathing, disinterest and apprehension, distraction and desire to wax and wane as the work of the grave takes place in our soul. And to trust that the dawn will come with its first flush of light and the energy of a new day. A new day in our hearts, a new day in our church, and a new day in our world.

Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.