

Good Friday Hour at the Cross

Opening Reading- Luke 23:26-31 "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. **27** A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. **28** But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. **29** For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' **30** Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' **31** For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Introduction to service and rhythm etc. John, able to leave etc.

Collect:

Almighty Father,
look with mercy on this your family
for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed
and given up into the hands of sinners
and to suffer death upon the cross;
who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
All Amen.

Opening Hymn: There is a Redeemer

First Reading: Luke 23.31-46 **32** Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. **33** When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus[e] there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [[**34** Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."]] [f] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. **35** 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[g] of God, his chosen one!" **36** The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, **37** and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" **38** There was also an inscription over him,[h] "This is the King of the Jews."
39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding[i] him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah?[j] Save yourself and us!" **40** But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41** And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." **42** Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into[k] your kingdom." **43** He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."
44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land[l] until three in the afternoon, **45** while the sun's light failed;[m] and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. **46** Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

Reflection on: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (John)

Luke's is the only Gospel to describe Jesus' physical response to his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane: his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood. And it's as if this experience frees Jesus on the cross to act in a way fully consistent with Luke's portrayal of him during his time of ministry.

His first word 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' is a prayer of extreme generosity, especially given what Jesus is going through. It's not clear who the 'they' are that he is asking God to forgive. The obvious group are the soldiers. But they are simply doing their job, under instruction (and they certainly do know what they're doing in relation to crucifixion). Or maybe it's the soldiers on behalf of Romans generally. But more likely it's all those responsible for Jesus' execution, Roman and Jewish leaders alike. If so it's an even more remarkable prayer; and ever since it has provided an exemplary model for Christian martyrs down the ages, starting with Stephen.

By contrast, during his exchange with the 'good' criminal, Jesus doesn't talk about forgiveness at all; he simply assures a man outside decent and honest society that he will share Jesus' future, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.' His attitude of acceptance is the same one he'd shown towards other outsiders - the woman who washed his feet with her tears, the Samaritan leper, the woman with haemorrhages. Here the criminal seeks no forgiveness, just to be remembered by Jesus whenever his kingdom comes. And Jesus goes well beyond what he has been asked for. He offers presence, intimacy and immediacy.

Thus Jesus has asked God to forgive those who don't know what they're doing to him, and offered a place to the only person who, in these last hours, has done other than mock or revile him. Now his time has come and he calls out to God his Father one last time, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' These are words from Psalm 31:15. The whole Psalm is one of confidence in God's protection of and goodness towards those who trust in him. This final word of Jesus maintains his relationship with his Father; emphasises that Jesus retains autonomy and capacity to surrender his spirit to him; and expresses the assurance that, even in and through death, God is his 'rock of refuge', the one 'whose love is unfailing'.

Silence (7 minutes)

Hymn/Music: My Song is Love Unknown

Second Reading: John 19.16-30 So they took Jesus; **17** and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew[d] is called Golgotha. **18** There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. **19** Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth,[e] the King of the Jews." **20** Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew,[f] in Latin, and in Greek. **21** Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" **22** Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." **23** When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was

seamless, woven in one piece from the top. **24** So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."

25 And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." **27** Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." **29** A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. **30** When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Reflection on: "It is finished." (Gemma)

It is finished.

The words Jesus speaks from the cross in John's gospel are the simplest. They are not seemingly as theological as the words of Luke... Nor as emotional as the words of Mark and Matthew... The Jesus seen here is instead triumphant in the completion of his work.

The word Jesus used is Tetelestai in Greek... it means to bring something to its ending but also that an action is accomplished/achieved/fulfilled. This word is in the perfect tense in Greek... that's of significance for us because it indicates an action which has been completed in the past, but the results of that action continue into the present and future... It is finished.

Christ's words might seem a little odd to us because surely it isn't finished. Jesus, knew he would be resurrected after three days... He stated so in the temple... So, his death is not the end because in many ways it was just a temporary and passing moment in the bigger story of Easter. We understand the words in Luke's gospel where Jesus commends himself to his Father... We understand the very human cry of despair that we hear in the gospels of Mark and Matthew. But John's depiction of Jesus perhaps sits the least comfortably. It isn't finished because the story isn't over.

Not only this but of course for us it isn't finished... The finishing comes on Sunday afternoon when the Easter lunch is eaten, the chocolate eggs are being unwrapped. On Sunday we see flowers, alter frontals, Alleluias and the Gloria all return to our Churches. We rejoice in the Lenten disciplines being over and we relax into the coming season of joy following a season of penitence. Then it is finished.

Also, this year, perhaps more than any other, the idea of 'it is finished' has another significance... One which resonates with our lives in a less than comfortable way... It is finished. We long to hear those words spoken about our own situation of anxiety and suffering. We want to see the ending of

coronavirus, of lockdown... we want to see our families, to meet together... to sing together... We long for what comes after those words. We are Easter people who live this story each year and so we know in bones that after it is finished comes the renewal, the resurrection, and the restoration. Once it is finished there will come the celebrations and the joy. I want to skip to those moments too... I'd love to hear that COVID is finished and I long to celebrate with you all.

So it is natural that we don't see Good Friday as an ending. We want the Happy Ending... we want to push on ahead from Good Friday to the coming Sunday. We'd like to perhaps briefly acknowledge the darkness which gathers but focus instead on the coming bright sunshine. We would... I believe... sometimes trade the Friday afternoon for the Sunday dawn. But without the darkness and the pain we are faced with today then there is nothing being accomplished...

Here in John's Gospel, we see Jesus declare that it is finished. His work of a lifetime and death on behalf of others is brought to completion. In his death on the cross his life gains it's meaning and significance. This moment is a victory cry because in it Jesus does finish something... and his action echoes into the past and into the future. So much so that even two thousand years later it has meaning for us.

In this moment Jesus completes the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. He fulfils his own prophecies and he fundamentally transforms the relationship between God and humanity forever. This is the moment of our reconciliation to God.

Jesus celebrates the completion of this reconciliation in his final moments... Here we meet with a Christ who willingly embraces the cross, knowing that he could have chosen not to... He chose us and our relationship, renewed and restored with God our creator. This story reminds us that we are the people of God- we are those who Jesus completed this for... And that God is with us. Through this action nothing separates us from God's love, and he is with us in every circumstance of our lives. We have lost loved ones, we have lost jobs, certainty, time and even a sense of who we are because our global situation... Yet we are not alone. God is with us in all these situations. Jesus- is the incarnation of God... He went to the cross trusting his father even though he was pained and doubted... Through that action we have a relationship with God that allows us to know him in all aspects of our lives. Soon we hope this current trial with finish. Today we remember the pain and the darkness that is Good Friday, but we know that in that moment- it is finished.

Silence (7 minutes)

Hymn/Music: Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Third Reading: Mark 15.25-37

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.^[e] **29** Those who passed by derided^[f] 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,^[g] 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.

The Death of Jesus

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land^[h] 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?"^[i] **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.

Reflection on: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (John)

In his Gospel Mark is unflinching in his descriptions of incidents and those involved in them, especially so in relation to the disciples. Thus, at Capernaum, Jesus' rebuke to Peter - 'Get behind me Satan' - could hardly be stronger. Similarly in Gethsemane, at the time of his greatest need of support, he criticises Peter for his inconstancy. And while Peter and the others sleep, Jesus prays to his father, *Abba*, to take away the cup of suffering.

So when we come to the single word from the cross in Mark's (and Matthew's) account, we should not be surprised that he reports it in all its bleakness: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 22. If at this stage of his brutal passage towards death, Jesus perceives that God has distanced himself from him by forsaking him, then he responds by foregoing the intimacy of *Abba, Father* as in the Garden for the formality of *My God* on the cross. Any lingering hope of the cup being taken away has gone - only death will bring the unbearable pain to an end.

Christians down the ages have sought to mitigate the full terror of Jesus' cry, this ghastly separation of the Son from the Father, by looking at the rest of Psalm 22. It ends, 'those who go down to the dust will kneel before the Lord - those who cannot keep themselves alive. They will proclaim his righteousness to people yet unborn - for he has done it.' This may be a comfort, and worthy of reflection, but it seems implausible that it lay behind Jesus' cry. That cry has to stay with us in all its starkness and bleakness.

This is the point at which, just as his life is about to end, Jesus experiences the full depth of human despair and desperation. It is only by recognising this that we, in our inadequacies, weaknesses and sins, can realise fully what depths Jesus had to sound to make this Friday good. Without his forsakenness, the miracle of Easter day - the sign of the reuniting of Son with Father, the proclamation that we need never experience such abandonment - would be negated.

It had to be like this. In the words of Isaiah, God's suffering servant 'had to be pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that bought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.'

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

Silence (7 minutes)

Music/Hymn: O sacred head, sore wounded (Bach)

Jesus, our Lord and our God, you gave your cheek to those who struck you and for our sake you endured much mockery. Grant that following the example of your sufferings, we may be courageous in bearing our own, and learn from you, for you are meek and lowly in heart; you now reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen