

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Good Friday

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Isaiah 52:13-end of 53      Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

### **John 18-end 19**

In writing and reading may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Amongst all the thoughts and feeling this time of response to the emergence of Covid 19 has evoked, perhaps the most profound is the recognition of our mortality. Many of us have lived through years of remarkable advances in medicine and science; life expectancy is longer here than those of past centuries could have dreamed of. I think it is true to say that most very few people spend much time reflecting on the certainty of death, and very few people would feel comfortable doing so; even religious people. That makes us very different from those of past centuries, for whom a central part of religion was the guide it offered towards how to make a good death and the hope it offered for the eternity to come.

Now though, one of the most moving elements of the growing number of testimonies of young people who have survived the virus is their description of coming to terms with facing the possibility that they might not recover and the things that become important to them in that moment. Having faced that reality, they also talk of a renewed sense of what matters in life. I know from my conversations over these last days, we don't have to have been ill, for the existence of the virus to prompt us to think seriously about what we value in life and the fragility of human life too.

The celebration of Holy Week and Easter offers us a reassuring context for this reflection; a time to rediscover the promise of eternal life when we need that reminder the most. We don't have to face our mortality alone: Jesus' story shows us that our fragile

human lives are held within the durable strength of God's eternal love.

On Good Friday we bring our fragility to the foot of the cross.

In the traditional liturgy of Good Friday we do that by listening to the story of Jesus' journey to the cross; by coming to the cross in worship and prayer as we pray at a cross in the centre of the church; making intercessions for our whole world and sharing the bread of communion. Often in the past, this liturgy was accompanied by an extended period of meditation lasting for three hours on the afternoon of Good Friday. What I offer this year is in the spirit of that extended meditation.

One of the themes of such meditation might be Jesus' final words: the "seven last words". This is a devotion dating back to the twelfth century, when various authors wove together the different passion narratives of the gospels, and drew out the words of Jesus recorded in each.

One of the most recent reflections on them, which I am drawing on today, is by Timothy Radcliffe OP and he finds in them a pattern: they begin and end with an address to his Father

"The words that Jesus addresses to us are held within his relationship with the Father, just as it is there that we shall find our home, within the life of the Trinity. We nestle within that divine conversation. And the words that Jesus addresses to those at the foot of the cross grow in intimacy, as if death draws him nearer rather than taking him away.....Seven words, but it is all the speaking of the one Word of Life that comes to completion in the Resurrection"

Today, in the midst of the challenges of our time, let's listen to what it was important for Jesus to say as he faced his mortality in the great act that mysteriously has its completion in our resurrection.

**Forgive them, they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)**

Forgiveness comes first.

Forgiving and receiving forgiveness is what releases us from all that gets in the way of receiving and sharing the love of God in which we are created and for which we are made.

Jesus' first word from the cross is to ask God to release all who had rejected the love he offers from the imprisonment of that rejection.

As, in our hearts we come to the cross this Good Friday

This first word,

Forgive them

is what enables us to look at our own lives honestly.

Those things which distance us from God and others we can lift to God for healing

We do not need to hide anything from ourselves or God

We can find the release from all that distorts and obscures in us the love in which and for which we are made

So this Good Friday – let us offer to God for forgiveness all that burdens us now.

### **Today you will be with me in Paradise (Luke 23:43)**

On Good Friday, two days before he is raised from the dead, Jesus promises that "today" the man beside him will be with him in Paradise.

It's a reminder that God lives in the constant "today" of eternity.

Eternity is not what happens at the end of time. It happens now: every time we love, forgive, come alive in what brings us real joy, we have put a foot in eternity.

And Paradise - the happiness which is the gift given by God of the delight at the heart of the Trinity, Paradise is being drawn into the eternal joy of God.

This word from Jesus was in response to the request of the man being crucified beside him that Jesus might remember him when he comes to Kingdom. This man was open to the possibility of being welcomed into that joy, even in his own most perilous moments.

Such happiness is not an immunity to pain or sorrow. If such happiness is a sharing in God's delight, it will also heighten our awareness of those things around us now that are contrary to God's will – the suffering of our world and our fellows. Just as the questioner recognises in the vulnerable man beside him the King of all, so our own vulnerability, our tenderness enables us to be open to receiving and sharing in the joy of God as it is offered to us.

As in our hearts we come to the cross this Good Friday

This second word,

the promise of Paradise today

asks us to look at our own days with honesty

those moments when we have tasted eternity and known it

those moments when eternity was on offer

those moments when we have been moved with a compassion,  
or suffered at depth and known we are not alone

These are signs of the Paradise of which the crucified Jesus is King

So this Good Friday let us offer to God hearts open to receiving his  
Paradise today

### **Woman behold your Son...Behold your mother (John 19:26-27)**

On Good Friday, Jesus' community had disintegrated, fragmented by the fear of the hostility and accusation suffered by Jesus alone the cross. At the foot of that cross were two people drawn there each by their own particular love of Jesus: his mother Mary and his beloved friend John. And in this third word, Jesus creates of them a new community.

Hostility and accusation are what break up community, and create exclusion. Jesus takes upon himself all our hostility, all the accusations that turn into patterns of excluding people. He becomes the excluded one, the one expelled by the group.

And from that place he creates a new community, his family, from which no one can be excluded.

Woman behold your son...behold your mother

See one another for what you are – those related in my love

In this word his friend and his mother are given the task, which is ours too, of reaching across all boundaries, all hostilities and saying “behold my brother, behold my sister”

Right now, we are learning the interdependency of the whole human family in a powerfully practical way.

The gift of this third word is that it holds the discovery that it is not just because we need each other that we should care, it is because we are created to be one in the love of the Creator that we can discover a new unity.

And at a time when many feel isolated, especially if they do not have the contact of a wider blood family there is an invitation to us all to reach out to anyone we know as brother, sister, mother and father.

As in our hearts we come to the cross the Good Friday

This third word

Behold your son...mother (daughter, father, brother, sister)

asks us to look at our own relationships with honesty

those times of deep communion with others

those times of yearning for deep communion with others

the times we excluding, or are excluded

the relationships which need God's grace

This Good Friday let us offer to God hearts that want to learn more fully what it is to be members of Jesus' family.

### **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Mark 15:34)**

The first three words offer a view to the life that the resurrection will bring beyond the cross.

This word, at the midpoint of the reflections, is utterly desolate.

It voices an experience that comes in circumstance of deep suffering – of feeling utter absence. It voices an experience that in varying degrees many will recognise.

The explanations don't help.

God seems absent.

Words have literally "nothing" to say.

Jesus' words here are an echo from Psalm 22, written by someone in similar anguish several centuries before.

Jesus makes these words his own in a full embrace, a full sharing of human desolation.

"Even the experience of the absence of God is somehow brought within God's own life.....When we utter words of utter anguish, then we remember that on the cross Jesus made them his own. And when we can find no words of our own, even to scream, then we may take his own" (Radcliffe)

As in our hearts we come to the cross this Good Friday

Let us keep silent and allow Jesus' cry speak for all our moments of desolation and for all those who have no words now

### **I thirst (John 19:28)**

Early in John's gospel Jesus is tired and thirsty and he surprises a Samaritan woman by asking her for water.

One of his dying words is a crying out in thirst again.

God comes to us as a thirsty person – wanting something that we can give.

And what God thirsts for is our love.

We do not have to earn God's love – he longs for our friendship

We are more loved than loving.

Yet we know what thirst, longing, desire feels like.

We might not connect what we desire with God – be it success, wealth, companionship.....

But like the Samaritan women starting with honesty about our own thirst is likely to lead us to discover the love God is waiting for us to open ourselves to receiving.

She went to the well because she wanted water – and Jesus met her in her thirst and offered her the water of life for the taking.

Jesus cries out in thirst from the cross, and at his death water flows from his side.

His thirst is quenched in our willingness to receive his love outpoured.

As in our hearts we come to the cross this Good Friday

This fifth word: I thirst

Asks us to contemplate just how much God longs for our friendship

Longs for us to share his life and love

Longs for us

This Good Friday let us offer God our "yes" to that love

### **It is finished (John 19:30)**

"'It is finished' Jesus' cry does not just mean it is all over and he will now die. It is a cry of triumph. It means 'It is completed'. What he literally says is 'It is perfected'. At the beginning of the Last Supper,

St John tells us that 'having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to perfection'. On the cross we see the perfection of Love." (Radcliffe)

We all in our different ways have dreams of perfect love. In whatever form we try to discover or express that perfect love – in a committed relationship with another person, in the forming of a family, in a celibate commitment to God or in life giving friendships – in the myriad of ways we know love to be discovered or expressed, we soon discover the end of the honeymoon. We find that those we love are people who have fragilities and flaws, and what is even more challenging, that we ourselves are fragile and flawed in our capacity to love. What are we to make of that?

We dream of perfect love because we are made for perfect love.

Jesus' words invite us to continue to seek such love with the promise that we will arrive at that fullness of love in the end and at the end.

The perfection of love is when we receive the other just as they are, and allow ourselves to be received just as we are.

Jesus loves us to the end, accepting us just as we are.

And in that love lies the gift to us of our learning to receive others just as they are and be accepted by them in the same way – as love comes to perfection in us.

As in our hearts we come to the cross the Good Friday

Can we allow ourselves to be received by Jesus just as we are, that the perfection of love can be accomplished in us?

### **Father into your hands I commend my Spirit (Luke 23:46)**

Jesus' first and last words from the cross are addressed to the Father; words in between draw us into his intimacy with the Father and now in these final words he entrusts all back to the Father in an act of total trust.

We live in an era of deep anxiety. Even before the emergence of the new corona virus this was true, but currently it is heightened. This maybe because we also live in an era where we have the illusion, usually, of considerable control over our own lives. We feel like self-made people, cushioned from a need to trust anyone or anything other than ourselves. Beneath that though, lies fear of that over which we don't have control.

As the sun and the moon are darkened over Jerusalem and Jesus breathes his last such fears may seem founded – the worst has happened.

But this final word reveals a trust in something far deeper than human perceptions of control.

As the worst we may fear happens to him he places his trust in the Father in whose love he abides.

In his final word from the cross Jesus invites us not to be afraid. All that we dread is happening to him, his world is collapsing, the old world is collapsing and as yet unseen a new world is beginning.

The love for us which he has cried out for, the love for us he has shown, his love finds its final word in the love of the Father to which he is drawing us all.

As in our hearts we come to the cross the Good Friday

This final word of commendation to the Father

Asks us to find rest from all that we fear, from our deepest anxieties by entrusting ourselves once more to God's care

May we bring our own fears this day to God

May we bring the fears of those we love to God

May we bring the fears of those around us to God

May we, with Jesus place ourselves, those we love, and all God's people, and the whole Creation in to the loving hands of God.

As in our hearts we come to the cross the Good Friday we come with a knowledge that those who stood beneath it as Jesus uttered these words did not have. We come in the knowledge that Jesus' trust was founded. We come knowing we will celebrate his resurrection on Sunday. We come in the presence of the risen and ascended Jesus who calls us to share in his eternal life now. As we draw near to the celebration of Easter, let's draw our Good Friday meditation to an end with a prayer that this year we may share in and show the resurrecting power of God's love with renewed understanding and joy in the hope in which we stand.

**Jesus our brother and our Lord,  
As we have travelled this Holy Week journey as your companions,  
draw us ever closer to you in love,  
work in us a secure faith in the life-giving power of God,  
inspire in us a confident hope in the fulfilment of all you are  
working in us  
and prepare in us a profound joy at your victory over all that  
opposes God's will for us, his beloved sons and daughters  
as we await the celebration of your resurrection, and ours to  
come.  
Amen.**

