



Good Friday Reflections

April 10th 2020

*Jesus did not say "I am finished"
He said "It is finished!"*

(Please take the time to read John chapter 18 beforehand, to remind yourself of how Jesus came before Pilate following his betrayal by Judas)

As we reflect together, at a social distance or in self-isolation this Good Friday, I wonder if something of our current situation speaks into how we have approached Holy Week, and how we see God? Have you found yourself questioning where God is amidst the chaos and sadness and challenges of these days? Or have you felt him strangely near?

Easter reminds us so strongly that our God is one who redeems. I don't believe he has ordered this plague to invade his world, but I do believe that he walks alongside us whatever our circumstances might be, and however we might be feeling, therefore, he is "with us" at this time. Just over three months ago, we celebrated the birth of Jesus, and acknowledged him as "Immanuel" meaning exactly that, "**God with us!**" Our world may have changed in that time, but God has not.

Let us look at John's account of the crucifixion of that same Jesus, Immanuel, and remember again the sacrifice he made so that we might have life, and life in its fullness.

John 19 (J.B. Phillips translation) ¹⁻³ *Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged, and the soldiers twisted thorn-twigs into a crown and put it on his head, threw a purple robe around him and kept coming into his presence, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And then they slapped him with their open hands.*

⁴ *Then Pilate went outside again and said to them, "Look, I bring him out before you here, to show that I find nothing criminal about him at all."* ⁵ *And at this Jesus came outside too, wearing the thorn crown and the purple robe. "Look," said Pilate, "here's the man!"*

⁶ *The sight of him made the chief priests and Jewish officials shout at the top of their voices, "Crucify! Crucify!" "You take him and crucify him," retorted Pilate. "He's no criminal as far as I can see!"* ⁷ *The Jews answered him, "We have a Law, and according to that Law, he must die, for he made himself out to be Son of God!"*

⁸⁻⁹ *When Pilate heard them say this, he became much more uneasy, and returned to the palace again and spoke to Jesus, "Where do you come from?"* ¹⁰ *But Jesus gave him no reply. **So Pilate said to him, "Won't you speak to me? Don't you realise that I have the power to set you free, and I have the power to have you crucified?"***

¹¹ *"**You have no power at all against me,**" replied Jesus, "except what was given to you from above. And for that reason, the one who handed me over to you is even more guilty than you are."*

¹² From that moment, Pilate tried hard to set him free but the Jews were shouting, “If you set this man free, you are no friend of Caesar! Anyone who makes himself out to be a king is anti-Caesar!”

¹³⁻¹⁴ When Pilate heard this, he led Jesus outside and sat down upon the Judgment-seat . It was preparation day of the Passover and it was now getting on towards midday. Pilate said to the Jews, “Look, here’s your king!”¹⁵ At which they yelled, “Take him away, take him away, crucify him!” ¹⁵Am I to crucify your king? Pilate asked them. “Caesar is our king and no one else,” replied the chief priests. ¹⁶And at this Pilate handed Jesus over to them for crucifixion.

¹⁶⁻²¹ So they took Jesus and he went out carrying the cross himself, to a place called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and two others, one on either side of him with Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a placard written out and put on the cross, reading, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. This placard was read by many of the Jews because the place where Jesus was crucified was quite near Jerusalem, and it was written in Hebrew as well as in Latin and Greek. So the chief priests said to Pilate, “You should not write ‘The King of the Jews’, but ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”²² To which Pilate retorted, “Indeed? What I have written, I have written.”

²³⁻²⁴ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes between them, taking a quarter-share each. There remained his shirt, which was seamless—woven in one piece from the top to the bottom. So they said to each other, “Don’t let us tear it; let’s draw lots and see who gets it.” This happened to fulfil the scripture which says—‘They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots’.



²⁵⁻²⁷ While the soldiers were doing this, Jesus’ mother was standing near the cross with her sister, and with them Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary of Magdala. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by her side, and said to her, “Look, there is your son!” And then he said to the disciple, “And there is your mother!” And from that time the disciple took Mary into his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus realising that everything was now completed said (fulfilling the saying of scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹⁻³⁰ There was a bowl of sour wine standing there. So they soaked a sponge in the wine, put it on a spear, and pushed it up towards his mouth.

***When Jesus had taken it, he cried, “It is finished!”
His head fell forward, and he died.***

Reflections on the story.

Perhaps as you were reading that scripture passage, and the chapter before, you realised how familiar the words were? It’s a story most of us know so well, having heard it every year that we can remember.

Just pause for a moment, perhaps it would help to read it again, is there anything new in there for you? Were there any words, or verses or parts of the story which came fresh to you? It might help to write down those things, as you may want to come back to them later.

It could be of course that because I have put some of the words in bold print, those were the ones which jumped out at you. Did that make a difference? Did you begin to wonder what we will be reflecting on from those few words?

If you shared the Maundy Thursday meditation last night, you will recall that the question was asked;
What does love look like?

Today we get a true picture of what love does look like. Selfless, willing, sacrificial love on behalf of all humankind. Love so vast, that we cannot begin to comprehend it.

Here is love vast as the ocean,
Lovingkindness as the flood,
When the Prince of life, our ransom
Shed for us his precious blood.
Who his love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing his praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide,
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.

Take some moments to be quiet before God, as you try to take in the enormity, the vastness, of this love.

One of the thoughts shared in last night's meditation was based upon a simple act which Jesus was involved in at the Last Supper. You may recall that Jesus dipped a piece of bread, and gave it to Judas, at which point Judas left in order to betray Jesus to the authorities. What we considered was, by so doing, Jesus acknowledged that he knew what was about to happen, and therefore he gave of himself willingly.



I wonder if you can make the connection between that small seemingly insignificant act (which was anything but in the scheme of things) and the words of Jesus in answer to Pilate in the scripture we are considering today? ***"Pilate said to him, "Won't you speak to me? Don't you realise that I have the power to set you free, and I have the power to have you crucified?" 11 "You have no power at all against me," replied Jesus, "except what was given to you from above."(vs.10&11)***

Jesus went willingly to his crucifixion, knowing that God was in charge, and that through his obedience, any power which sin or death might have in the world, was going to be thwarted once and for all by his sacrificial death. God could at any point have shown his hand so to speak, and Jesus could have walked free, or come down from the cross. Whilst that would have shown his sovereignty, the death of his only son, would show the reality of his love and his forgiveness and his desire for all humanity to have the opportunity to be in relationship with him.

Pause for a few moments, and reflect upon what that means for you specifically, let the enormity of the love God showed you through Jesus begin to sink in again. Think too about what that could mean for our world if all mankind were to accept the gift of God's love through the blood of Jesus his son.

It's awesome! **Such Love!!**

Such love,
pure as the whitest snow;
Such love,
weeps for the shame I know;
Such love,
paying the debt I owe;
O Jesus, such love.

Such love,
stilling my restlessness;
Such love,
filling my emptiness;
Such love,
showing me holiness;
O Jesus, such love.

Such love,
springs from eternity;
Such love,
streaming through history;
Such love,
fountain of life to me;
O Jesus, such love.

Such love, given completely, given willingly, given for a purpose, but even so, for Jesus it would have been an agonizingly painful death. When God gave his son to the world, he gave him completely, as a human being with all the limitations of the human body. He didn't anesthetise him, or hypnotise him so that he didn't feel what was going on. No, Jesus had to suffer torture, humiliation and such pain when he died, and that makes his death for us all the more amazing.

There are so many things we could consider as we share "together" today, and it may well be that you go "from here" and look again at the other parts of the story of this day. We are going to keep it simple though, and having considered that God was in charge of all that happened, and that Jesus' death was an act of pure love on behalf of all mankind, let's look at the final words he spoke before he died.

Three words, that's all. ***"It is finished"***

Simply note that he didn't say *"I am finished"* because that was far from the truth. His earthly human life may have reached its conclusion, but the redeeming work of God continues through all generations because of his sacrifice. The church of God still moves forward because Jesus died for mankind. The work we do today in these strange and difficult times; the way we can pray into that even if we can't physically be involved, is powerful because of Good Friday.

Hebrews 10;11 reminds us (ERV)

"We are made holy through the sacrifice of Christ's body. Christ made that sacrifice one time—enough for all time."

My Lord, what love is this

That pays so dearly
That I, the guilty one,
May go free!

*Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God, given for me.
My debt he pays, and my death
he dies,
That I might live, that I might
live.*

And so they watched him die,
Despised, rejected:
But O the blood he shed
Flowed for me!

*Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God, given for me.
My debt he pays, and my death
he dies,
That I might live, that I might
live.*

And now this love of Christ
Shall flow like rivers;
Come wash your guilt away,
Live again!

*Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God, given for me.
My debt he pays, and my death
he dies,
That I might live, that I might
live.*

JESUS
DIDN'T SAY,
"I AM FINISHED."
HE SAID,
"IT IS FINISHED."
HE WAS JUST
GETTING
STARTED.



***Amazing love, O what sacrifice,
The Son of God, given for me.
My debt he pays, and my death he dies,
That I might live, that I might live.***

In these final few moments of reflection, consider what the last line can mean for you – his amazing sacrifice, “That I might live”. What does my life, your life need to look like in order for Christ to be seen in us?

A Benediction.

Let us live today by Christ's law of love,
Extending mercy, compassion and joy.
Let us share the gifts God has given,
Practicing generosity, hospitality and love.
Let us live as Christ would have us live,
Bringing freedom, justice and hope.
Amen.