



Good Friday, 15 April 2022

Good morning - and welcome to our Good Friday service. It's always seemed strange to me to call today 'good' Friday. You couldn't really say this day was anything approaching good to Jesus at the time. But of course the outcome was eternally good for us. I trust we'll be able to respond to why that's so today as we sing, read and reflect on the events that occurred almost two thousand years ago on that first as yet un-named Good Friday. Which is why I've built pauses into our service to reflect after each reading.

But first - let me set the scene for us. Yesterday evening Jesus celebrated the annual Jewish feast of Passover with his closest followers. Incidentally, the Jewish celebration of Passover - Pesach - doesn't always coincide with the dates we celebrate Easter, but this year it does. So your Jewish neighbours will be doing today what the Jews were doing in Jerusalem all those years ago - except of course they won't be killing a lamb in the Temple.

But when Jesus celebrated it with His followers in that upper room, He made some changes to the Passover ritual by putting Himself in the frame as the lamb killed in the place of others. Not now the roasted lamb on the table in front of them - but a pointing forward to it being *His* blood and *His* body that was going to be the substitute for them - and for everyone.

This group then walk out of the city of Jerusalem onto the Mount of Olives where Jesus agonies in prayer over what was about to happen to Him - which is terminated as one of His close group turns up to turn Him in with a mob of others. Jesus is then tied up and dragged off for at least two trials conducted by Jerusalem's Jewish hierarchy, and He receives at least a couple of beating along the way. But it's now this morning - and we'll pick up the story in a little while from gospel records of the events. But first I want to read a few verses from the beginning of John's gospel - John 1:1-5.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

This is how John describes Jesus - the man who is God - And this is the man we'll shortly witness being executed - God himself in the same flesh as us.

But before we go further, let's sing a old hymn that asks God to make this morning's reflections real to us. 'Give me a sight Oh Saviour'.

The events of Good Friday did not take God by surprise. He'd been putting down markers throughout the history of the OT on the fact that His Messiah



would be coming to be the 'lamb that take away the sin of the world'. One astoundingly detailed prediction of what would happen to Jesus was written as a poem a thousand year a before to be put to music by King David in Psalm 22. Let's read it now.

- 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.*
- ³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.*
- ⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.*
- ⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.*
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.*
- ⁸ 'He trusts in the LORD,' they say,
'let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.'*
- ⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.*
- ¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.*
- ¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.*
- ¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.*
- ¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.*
- ¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.*
- ¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.*
- ¹⁶ Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.*



- 17 All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.*
- 18 They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.*
- 19 But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*
- 20 Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.*
- 21 Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*
- 22 I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.*
- 23 You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honour him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!*
- 24 For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.*
- 25 From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfil my vows.*
- 26 The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him –
may your hearts live for ever!*
- 27 All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,*
- 28 for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.*
- 29 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him –
those who cannot keep themselves alive.*
- 30 Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.*
- 31 They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Let's sing again a well known Good Friday hymn. Unfortunately the first line has more to do with the author's imagination than the physical location, as it is most unlikely that Jesus crucifixion took place on a 'green hill' given the name of the site and its location. But that aside - the rest of its words fits the



facts. So let's sing 'There Is A Green Hill Far Away'.

Behind the details of *what* happened that first 'Good Friday', was the *why* it happened. And again, God had already been up front about the 'why' of it way before the event. So were now going to read Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, written more than six hundred years before it happened.

- ¹³ *See, my servant will act wisely;
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.*
- ¹⁴ *Just as there were many who were appalled at him –
his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness –*
- ¹⁵ *so he will sprinkle many nations,
and kings will shut their mouths because of him.
For what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will understand.*
- ¹ *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.*
- ⁶ *We 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.*
- ⁷ *He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*
- ⁸ *By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?*



*For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Let's SING again – 'I Stand Amazed In The Presence Of Jesus The Nazarene',

So it's dawn on Good Friday or thereabouts. Jesus, having been subjected to two interrogations plus physically and verbally abused by the Jewish leadership continues through the preordained events of this day. He's yet to have an encounter with King Herod and *again* be mocked and ridiculed, but we'll not covering that, so we pick up the story by reading Mark 15:1-20.

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

2 'Are you the king of the Jews?' asked Pilate.

'You have said so,' Jesus replied.

3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, 'Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.'

5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels



who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ 'Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?' asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to get Pilate to release Barabbas instead.

¹² 'What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?' Pilate asked them.

¹³ 'Crucify him!' they shouted.

¹⁴ 'Why? What crime has he committed?' asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, 'Crucify him!'

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. ¹⁷ They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' ¹⁹ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spat on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Matthew, Mark and John's gospels all tell us that Pilate had Jesus flogged before handing Him over to be crucified. Luke simply says, 'Pilate had him chastised'. You could say there's no logic in this. Pilate says he finds nothing wrong with Jesus, but then has Him flogged anyway. Perhaps it was just what the Romans did to subject peoples. Or maybe He just did it to appease the Jewish Sanhedrin in anticipation of being able to release Jesus, but it didn't work. We don't know. But Pilate had Jesus flogged.

Years ago I saw the film 'The Passion of the Christ'. Mel Gibson made it, and Jim Caviezel played Jesus. There's a scene where Jim Caviezel - as Jesus - is being flogged. And when I say 'flogged', you need to have in mind what one Bible paraphrase version of that verse says, "they opened up Jesus back with a leaded whip". That is what *this* flogging was. If I was using a Power Point this morning and showed what a flogging like this entailed it would put you off your lunch.



So in the making of the film the cameras are running, and Jim is laid out tied down and being flogged. Of course what you don't see is he's got a heavy metal plate on his back, and all his screams are fake. Then suddenly, there is one that very obviously isn't. Part of the leaded whip had missed the plate and hit the actor! It's said someone asked Mel Gibson if they should stop the 'shoot', and he said 'No'. As far as I know he only took that one actual stroke of the leaded whip - for which I sure he was very grateful.

Now I've no idea if something called the Turin Shroud that's purported to be the grave clothes that Jesus was covered in after His crucifixion is genuine. But it doesn't matter. Because if it is some sort clever fake - it's a really good one. And a forensic medical examination of the shroud has identified at least 120 flogging strokes imprinted in blood marks on the shroud. So, real or fake, it is a valuable illustration of the terrible thrashing Jesus went through.

Which is something to ponder as we think back to our reading from Isaiah. Translators have the licence to write in the language of their day and location what they think brings out the meaning of the passage being translated. So the translators of the KJV decided to put verse five of Isaiah 53 as, "*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed*". We just have in the NIV, 'His wounds'. But 'wounds' or 'strips', His brutal suffering on the first Good Friday is part of the process of our eternal healing.

Let's sing again - 'Man Of Sorrows, What A Name'.

So Jesus is now on his way to a place called 'Skull', which is the English translation of Golgotha, itself a Greek variant of an Aramaic word. However, I sure many of us were probably brought up with its Latin derivative, which is Calvary. We'll pick up the story in Matthew 27:31-50.

After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means 'the place of the skull'). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads



and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!' In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?').

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.' Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.'

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Let's sing again – 'When I Survey The Wondrous Cross'.

According to tradition the Apostle Paul was executed under Nero on a road just outside Rome in AD68. He was undoubtedly beheaded. Beheaded - because, except maybe for an extremely serious crime like treason, Roman citizens were *not* crucified. Crucifixion was such a horrible, shameful death, that a Roman citizen would not be executed in such a terrible way. And while I understand what the writer meant when he talks about the 'wondrous cross' in our last hymn, I do have a few problems singing it.

Crucifixion was death by suffocation. Slow, painful, suffocation. Your body hanging on your arms straggled the air out of your lungs, so you push up on the nail hammered through your feet, until you couldn't stand that pain any more, and your body sagged down again. And it could take days for you to die. That's why the Jewish leadership asked Pilate to have the legs broken of the three people being executed that day. They didn't want them still groaning on their crosses to spoil the Passover celebrations starting sunset that evening. But Jesus didn't get His legs broken. He was already dead.



And it actually surprised Pilate that Jesus was dead after only six hours - so he checked with the officer in charge of the executions that Jesus was *really* dead before he let His body be taken down. Which is another fact that's a nail in the coffin of those who say Jesus didn't really die, only passed out on the cross, as an attempt to try and rubbish the resurrection. But the record says, Jesus really did die that terrible death on the cross.

And Paul tries to underline the terribleness of Jesus' death by crucifixion when he writes his letter to the Philippians. He says in chapter two of his letter: "*Who (that's Jesus) being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!*".

And that last phrase, "even death on a cross" would be expected to send a shudder down the spine of his listeners. Today if you see the cross symbol you think, 'Christian'. It's the ubiquitous sign of Christianity around the world - the symbol that identifies us all. But that only really came into common use after crucifixion was abolished in the 4th Century AD by Emperor Constantine. Before that *no-one* would have worn it on a lapel or around their neck because of it's association with such a terrible painful, torturous way of dying.

And in passing, let me highlight something else from that quote from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Pilate didn't kill Jesus. Nor did the Jewish hierarchy who hated His guts. Judas didn't. Not even the crowd who shouted "Away with Him. We don't want Him." You see Jesus had already said, "No-one takes my life away. I give it up Myself". So while all those people where responsible in some way for the mechanism of His death, He actually offered Himself to the process in humble obedience to God's will. And He did it for us - all of us. That is *of course* if we've accepted personally He did so.

And He didn't *have* to. Earlier he'd told disciples who attempted to protect Him that he could call on twelve legions of angels to rescue Him. And they would have know exactly what He was talking about. A Roman legion had a core of about 5,000 men. But often they also had an auxiliary contingent of the same number again. So Jesus says, "I've got 60,000 to 120,000 angels on speed-dial". And *then* think from the Bible's record what one angel can do!

There was many ways I could have organised this morning's service. I could have concentrated on all of Jesus' saying from the cross - how he got John to look after His mother - and how He asked God the Father to



forgive those who were crucifying Him. But I just want to draw to a conclusion today by looking at one utterance of that day - the one we've just read. "My God, My God, why have *You* forsaken Me."

I've sort of highlighted some of the physical suffering Jesus experienced on the first Good Friday in our service this morning. It was real, and it happened. But I want to suggest that there was another suffering that Jesus suffered on the cross that we'll never get a complete handle on until we're in eternity that was worse than the rest.

And there were two aspects of this. The Bible tells us, "He was made 'sin' for us". The only person never to have ever sinned, who challenged people to point out any sin in His life, and they couldn't- wore all our dirty horribleness and all our guilty - in our place - on that cross. But secondly, there were consequences to that. He was separated from the Father. Jesus had previously said, "I and the Father are One", for which statement of course the Jewish leaders wanted to stone Him as He was claiming equality with God the Father in Heaven. God the Father and God the Son are *that* close. But *now* He was devoid of that closeness. Jesus was separated from God the Father for the only time in Time or Eternity. And in the unusual darkness of that mid-afternoon His distorted cry rings out, "My God. My God. Why have *You* forsaken Me". Feel the cost of our salvation.

We have no record of God's cry in Heaven at this time, the One who had previously broken the silence of Heaven to declare, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him". But we do know that God can't look inactively on sin - and on the cross Jesus took onto Himself *our* sin - so in consequence was also carrying the substitutional punishment for all of that sin. The Bible tells us the punishment for sin is death, so therefore Jesus - the only person who never sinned and therefore the only person who *could* stand in our place - was dying in our place.

But as I said earlier - He was *only* dying in our place if we've accepted that He was dying in our place. Because the Salvation bought at such a high price in the events we're remembering today is an offer from God that He allows us to accept - or reject.

Or as that verse from John's gospel that I guess many of you could repeat back to me word for word says, "For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever *believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life." So that means it's really only the 'whosoever believes' people who can call today - Good Friday.

Let's SING our final hymn - 'Oh Teach Me What It Meaneth'.



I'm going to give us just a moment more to reflect on the events of today that happened just outside Jerusalem around AD29. Because it's just possible that there is someone here who hasn't made Jesus sacrifice on your behalf personal. So now's the opportunity to do that. To accept His death on your behalf. His punishment in your place. And to - for the first time - thank Him for His salvation. Then I'll close in prayer.

CLOSING PRAYER

If you did accept Jesus death as your substitute for the first time this morning, please tell someone before you leave. Apart from making someone else very happy - we'd like to help you on the journey of the life long experience of being Christian.

Oh - and just one last thing. Today it is Friday. But Sunday's coming!

Granville Richards.

All Scripture has been taken from the New International Version of the Bible.