

**Weekly Devotions**  
**South Holburn Church**  
**12th April 2022**

## READINGS

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!"

and to the hills, "Cover us!"

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. <sup>56</sup> Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

## REFLECTION

Once again Easter is upon us, and once again, like all ministers, I find myself facing a difficult challenge – presenting the Easter story in a manner which causes us to realise the love and sacrifice of Jesus in our lives today.

You see we know the story so well: the last supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, the arrest, Peter's denials, Jesus' trial, the cross, the burial and the resurrection. And it all becomes a bit 'twee' in our minds. Somehow or other the story begins to mingle with Easter eggs and Easter cards and Easter holidays. And somewhere along the way we lose the impact of the depth of Jesus' suffering.

Max Lucado describes Jesus at prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest in these words:

*Go with me for a moment to witness what was perhaps the foggiest night in history. The scene is very simple; you'll recognize it quickly. A grove of twisted olive trees. Ground cluttered with large rocks. A low stone fence. A dark, dark night. Now, look into the picture. Look closely through the shadowy foliage. See that person? See that solitary figure? What's he doing? Flat on the ground. Face stained with dirt and tears. Fists pounding the hard earth. Eyes wide with a stupor of fear. Hair matted with salty sweat. Is that blood on his forehead? That's Jesus. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane... When Mark wrote about that painful night, he used phrases like these: "Horror and dismay came over him." "My heart is ready to break with grief." Does this look like the picture of a saintly Jesus resting in the palm of God? Hardly. Mark used black paint to describe this scene. We see an agonizing, straining, and struggling Jesus. We see a "man of sorrows." We see a man struggling with fear, wrestling with commitments, and yearning for relief. We see Jesus in the fog of a broken heart. My, what a portrait! Jesus is in pain. Jesus is on the stage of fear. Jesus is cloaked, not in sainthood, but in humanity.*

*From "The Great House of God"*

Several years ago, Mel Gibson's film of the last days of Jesus life, *The Passion*, caused much debate and drew much disapproval. One of the main criticisms levelled at the movie was that its crucifixion scene was too 'bloody'

Yet when we sanitise the Easter story, when we make it into some nice, light reading we lose so much of the meaning. For Jesus suffered horribly, and he bled and he hurt. It was a horrific death. All the more so because he was an innocent man!

But the physical suffering, for all its impact, is only a symbol of the spiritual suffering that Christ endured. He was the first man in history to be utterly deserted by God, he was the first person in all of time to be isolated from God, he was the first person ever to bear the full price of sin. The Son of God, who took his energy and hope from God, who loved God more than life itself, was utterly devoid of the presence of God. And that is a mental suffering, a spiritual suffering we cannot even begin to understand.

Only in realising the depths of Jesus' suffering, the heights of his pain can we begin to understand what it means to say that God loves us. Only when we see displayed before us in the broken body of Jesus on the cross, can we begin to comprehend the lengths to

which God will go for that love of us. He endured this much ...for you. He went through hell...for you.

This Easter don't let the eggs and the holidays and the cards get in the way. Come and see the agony and the pain of Christ which bear witness more elegantly than any words to the most powerful truth in history – God loves you.

May you have a blessed Eastertime.

Amen

## **PRAYER**

God Almighty  
You give all for us.  
Holding nothing back,  
Even the cross was not a price too great to pay.  
No words can describe the pain and suffering you endured,  
And you did it for us.  
May we never doubt your love.  
And may we respond to what you have given for us,  
With our own devotion.  
May we live every day in the light you offer  
And speak of you love wherever we are

In Jesus name,

Amen.

