

## Sermon for Good Friday 2017

Over the past 6 weeks we have journeyed through lent, reading our study books, perhaps being challenged and seeking to learn more about what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Our journey has led us to the gates of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (last Sunday) and there we entered with him.

Last night we ate together the agape meal, then we received the holy mysteries in the sacrament of Holy Communion at the mass.

After the mass, the altar was stripped bare in readiness for today when we come together to be present at the death of Jesus Christ.

This morning we have heard about the trial, the sentence and the crucifixion.

And here we are now at the foot of the cross of Christ, ready to talk about what has happened and what it means for us and the world around us.

In a little while we will then have an opportunity to bring our own sin, suffering, and death and lay it at the foot of the cross.

The re-enactment by our friends this morning of the trial, sentence and crucifixion of Christ helps us to reflect on the detail.

John's gospel mentions at the beginning of the passion that both Roman and Jewish authorities were responsible for Jesus' death. By mentioning both groups, John places the whole scene on a world stage.

Now in terms of the human element that perpetrate the events, there is no mystery at all.

It is predictable, brutal and self-seeking.

The detail is complicated, and it reflects the tangled web that we can weave for our own purpose. It also reflects the complicated political system of the day.

As we've heard Jesus is brought first before the Jewish high priest, he is then passed on to Pontius Pilate the Roman procurator, then to Herod Antipas the Roman backed Jewish king, then back to Pilate, who finally gives in to the crowd's demand that Jesus be crucified.

There is no mystery here.

The mystery is in the uncomplicated response to these events by Jesus.

It was simple.

He suffered what was done to him, and in this context, the word suffered means *allowed or permitted*. His suffering is filled with mystery and I believe it is in the depth of the love that empowered it.

The mystery is in the power of self-giving, loving communion between Jesus the Father and the Spirit which ensures the way of salvation for the creation and at the same time shows us, humanity, the way of personal transformation through death and rising.

Paul tells us in the epistle today, that we can trust in the faithfulness of God through Christ.

In allowing the crucifixion he has shown us that his love to secure our hearts eternally knows no boundaries. Paul in the epistle tells us to have confidence in this boundless love because the new and living way has been opened for us.

This is the new covenant that God has made with us through Christ. Paul urges us: *Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.*

Now in effect what this means for us is that in trust we can “let go” of old debilitating ways. We can learn to live, not by defence, but by opening up to what God promises us through Christ.

And if we then begin to live in a way that gives priority to God’s promise and gift, to live in trust and generosity as Paul urges us, we shall not be haunted and imprisoned by fear of death - either to sin in this world, or to our eventual death to this world for we trust that even in death, and especially in death, God has not finished with us. We have more to receive from him, and he will create the conditions that will make it possible for us to receive them.

Jesus Christ’s whole life’s work was meant for this point both in life and death. This is what reconciliation means. Both within ourselves and between God and ourselves.

Saint John of the Cross, mystic of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, wrote that it was in the Passion, that Christ finished that supreme work which his whole life, its miracles and works of power, had not accomplished. In his passion he accomplished the steadfast and eternal union and reconciliation of human nature with the life of God.

Our part is that we are simply to live, trust and accept the gift.

We are simply to allow it to happen in our lives.

The Lord be with you.

Showing us that we need not be afraid to let go of our old ways that hold us back – our fears that stir up prejudice unworthiness unpopularity difference

The reasoning behind the detailed re-enactment is not to feed our sentimental cravings nor to strengthen our faith in some fear ridden way. To hear the detail is to be made aware of the depth of the futility of their actions. However manipulating and determined they were, they never had the upper hand, Jesus simply suffered it – allowed it to happen.

For their part it was always a futile exercise, for Jesus it was God's victory over death and dying ironically for them and for all humanity.

Good Friday is not something that we can skip over, go around or deny. We need to go through it with him because this is what transformation is – suffering our own personal death to sin so that, transformed, the love of God in us, the victory of the cross can be seen by all in our every day life – in all we do.

This is the amazing process of the great mystery of the Christian faith. It touches all of humanity and in every era.

It points to us in this life having a sure and certain way of overcoming everything that holds us back from fullness of life. Rather it means that here and now you learn to live not by self-defence but by opening up to what God gives.