

Good Friday
Friday, 2nd April 2021



Dear Friends,

'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself!'
(2 Corinthians 5:19)

Palm Sunday heralds Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and marks the beginning of Holy Week. We are reaching the climax of the Church's year as we commemorate what our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, did for us.

Each day of this 'great week,' you will receive a meditation from a member of our Ministry Team. Their thoughts allow us to reflect on this sacred time - remembering what it means for humankind to have allowed God's greatest gift to the world to be betrayed, humiliated, falsely accused and left to die on a cross by those who professed to love Him. It is a time for us to think deeply about where each of us are in this bleak reality of God's created people and our capacity to ignore the weak, the vulnerable and the poor whom Jesus came to liberate.

Today we hear from Dr Alan Disher, as we contemplate Christ's final hours of suffering: patient even unto death, in the knowledge that everything He undertook in our name would set us free: God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

With my love, in the Passion of Christ,

Jax
Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Good Friday – The Cross of Christ

Dr Alan Disher LLM Emeritus

*Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, should'st die for me?*
(Charles Wesley)

Many years ago I had a brief discussion with a friend after our Morning Service. It may have been Good Friday because it concerned Jesus' heart-rending cry of anguish from the Cross. What was going on in the relationship between Father and Son? I don't think we came to a firm conclusion and the question has continued to niggle at me ever since.

There are several issues that have puzzled me over the years, the chief of which is the concept of the Father forsaking the Son. How can this be reconciled with the repeated statement by Jesus of his intimate oneness with His Father?

I and the Father are one (John 10: 30)

I am in the Father and the Father is in me (John 14:20)

If you have seen me, Philip, you have seen the Father. (John 14: 9)

'Thomas, see my wounds, and feel them,' as Thomas fell at his feet with his great affirmation 'My Lord and my God!' (John 20; 27-29)

The Son Born, the Child given is the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father! God's Great Plan of Salvation did not divide Father from Son: it united the Godhead. *God was IN Christ reconciling the world to himself.* Indeed, what kind of God – and for that matter, what kind of Father – would plan such a rescue by such a sacrifice, and then leave its terrible climax to His Son? How could that make Jesus one with the Father?



'Torn' by Mike Myers

There is no question that Jesus endured great and terrible suffering amongst the Olive trees of Gethsemane. Mathew and Mark tell us that He longed for another way to fulfil His task; Luke tells us that His sweat was like great drops of blood. Was this the only way? Could He escape this 'Cup'? It was not just the appalling death – many had suffered crucifixion. The real horror for Jesus was not the pain, the thirst or the breathlessness but the spiritual burden He had to carry on our behalf. 'We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' (Isaiah 53:6)

Gethsemane tells us that Jesus knew exactly what He would be facing in the very near future. His Father did not forsake Him there – He strengthened Him. Many have suggested that Jesus was forsaken by God just while he was carrying the sins of the world because God was not able to look upon sin. (Sadly, this view spoils an otherwise beautiful hymn). The truth is clear; Jesus was in God, God was in Jesus throughout the whole ordeal.



Gethsemane – Source Bing

It is often claimed that the Bible teaches that God cannot look upon sin. It doesn't! There is a verse in the book of Habakkuk: Chapter I verse 13: 'Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?'

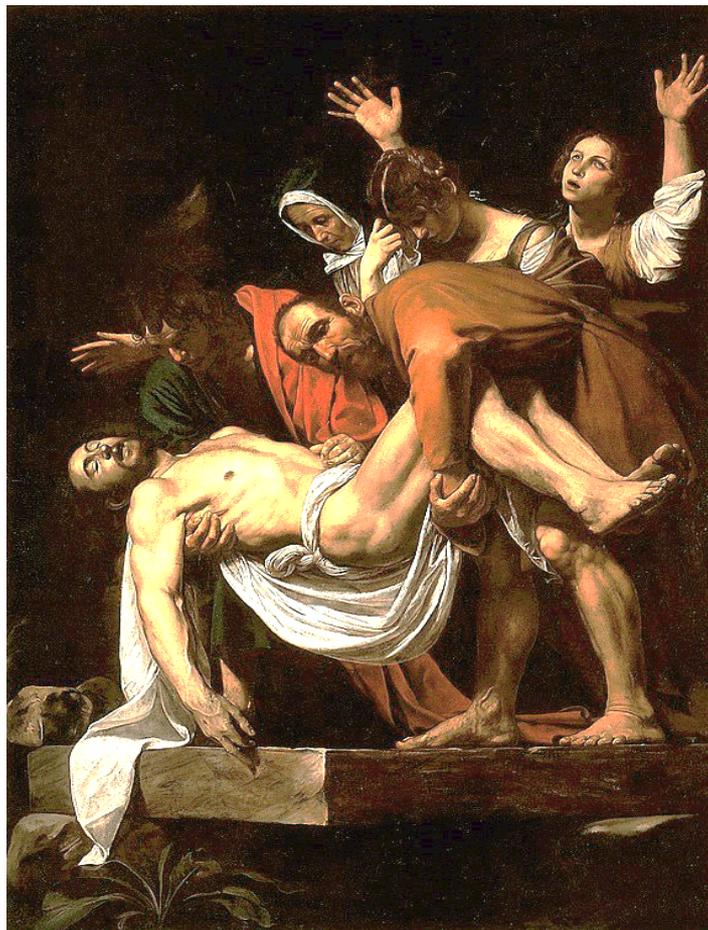
This is part of a dialogue that the prophet had with God, when he challenges God to explain what seem to be contradictions - which God then does. This single, atypical text, cannot be put alongside the myriad of references in the Old Testament. And just one verse in the New Testament should bury that costly error for good! Here it is: Hebrews 4:13: 'Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.'

Just as Jesus was in the Father, so was the Father in Him, sharing the horror of the Cross, for 'God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.....' (2 Cor. 5:19) 'Help me to understand it, help me to take it in....'

Matthew and Mark both have Jesus' lonely 'forsaken' cry in their Gospels. Neither Luke nor John include it but there are other significant events and sayings that they do include. If it were of such significance why did Luke and John both omit to mention it? Nor is that moment, that cry, referred to in the rest of the New Testament.

Then there is the testimony of Jesus himself. On several occasions He made a clear statement that He would need to go to Jerusalem, in order to endure hostility and fulfil the Scriptures. Clearly, Jesus identified with the 'Suffering Servant' of Isaiah's prophecy, with its climax in Isaiah, chapter 53.

Luke was a meticulous historian, but his focus on the crucifixion was on Jesus' forgiveness for His executioners and His promise of paradise for the penitent thief. Yet he was well aware of the extreme suffering which Jesus faced and accepted in Gethsemane. What he *does* include within his description of the Crucifixion itself was the soldiers dividing Jesus garments between them by casting lots. Luke comments: 'This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "*They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*"



'Entombment of Christ' by Caravaggio

What about John? His account is much more personal, but it includes a record of two incidents, to which John added the phrase: 'that the scriptures might be fulfilled.' One, he shares with Luke about the disposal of Jesus' clothes, but he gives more detail. The second is the saying, 'I thirst' which John links firmly with the fulfilment of Scripture. This is followed by a final cry: 'It is finished' – a triumphant cry of achievement, a task completed!

It is striking that both Luke and John are referring to Psalm 22. Even more significant is that the 'forsaken' cry, recorded by Matthew and Mark, is the opening verse of the same Psalm. Is it not likely that Jesus would do what He had *a/ways* done? He would point to the Scriptures that must be fulfilled in His dying, as He had done via special incidents throughout His earthly ministry. From the Cross, Jesus would not have had the strength or breath to quote any more, but that stricken cry of verse would be a sufficient pointer. By their quoting from that same Psalm, both Luke and John demonstrate they had each understood his purpose!

Some years ago the Coleman family brought several copies of a book, *THE SHACK*, to St. Catherine's. Within one key scene, the main character finds himself sharing a meal with 3 characters – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all in human form. During the meal, the man notices that all 3 of his hosts had terrible scarring of their wrists – the prints of the nails. A very strange story, but a great truth! God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself!



Untitled - Ladislav Záborský

Father God,
We are awed at the mystery of Christ's death
and all that He accomplished for us on the cross.
We are humbled at such amazing love that gives all so that we might live.
Jesus announced on the cross 'It is finished,'
and so we rest in faith that His sacrifice covers our sins.
His grace is sufficient for us and for that we are truly thankful.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

John 19 – The Death, Crucifixion and Burial of Christ

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.



'Rugged Cross' by Mike Moyers

The Crucifixion of Jesus

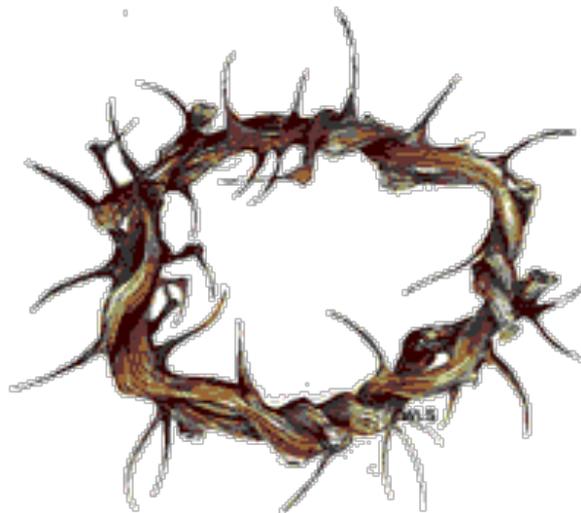
So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.



Jesus' Side Is Pierced

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

The Burial of Jesus

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



'Jesus is Laid in the Tomb' by Edward Arthur Fellowes Prynne