



Christ on the Cross - Rembrandt

Good Friday

10th April 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'

(Luke 23: 34)

So here we are on Good Friday. A moment Christians dread and yet an experience we must endure. The invisible scourge of Coronavirus across our world reminds us of the physical scourge endured by Christ as he was beaten, whipped, kicked at and spat upon as He carried the sins of the world to the Cross that fateful Friday.

Though as Christians we are sorrowful that our churches are closed and we do not have a holy sanctuary of prayer and repose in which to venerate our Lord, our Maundy Thursday reflection reminds us that *we* are the body of Christ and that we do not necessarily need the physical church in order to share the actions of Christ's love in the world.

Our Good Friday meditations naturally centre on the death of Christ. We imagine what it might be like to live in a world without Jesus and all He has done for us. We reflect on our part in His crucifixion, and we pray in repentance for our sins and the sins of the world. Actually, I do not think we *can* imagine the world into which the disciples were thrown that bleak Friday night... because we who follow them *know* the salvation of Easter Day!

Even in the moment of His death, as we scourge our churches of any evidence of Him, we continue to pray to Jesus in our hearts for our suffering world and especially for all those suffering and dying from Coronavirus. I find myself crying out to Christ for the life of Dr Abdul Mabud Chowdhury who has died today from Coronavirus at the age of 53, two weeks after begging Government for PPE provision to the NHS, whilst simultaneously giving thanks to our Lord for the continuing recovery of our Prime Minister. I am deeply mindful as we have all been praying for him, that Boris too is suffering his own Gethsemane. He cannot fail to have been deeply moved by the selfless care and expertise of those who are caring for him, just as Jesus cared for us even from the Cross. I particularly pray that Boris has met with Jesus this Holy Week in a new, deep and inspirational way, which will bring him healing, light his path and guide his heart - both as a child of God and in his vocation as our Prime Minister.



Now more than ever, our Government, our society and we as individuals have a great deal to reflect upon. Just as in Jesus' time, the world is not equal. The spectrum of wealth is firmly skewed to a small percentage of the global population holding the greatest power and the greatest wealth. Even Coronavirus does not affect peoples of the world equally! It is the poor of the slums who will not be intubated or receive personal treatment in Intensive Care. It is the hungry, scavenging mountainous refuse dumps, who cannot sanitise the surfaces they touch. It is the homeless who have no protection on the streets. Yesterday, as I drove through the deserted streets of Winchester to and from a funeral, my prayers were with those in our communities who are responsible for the policing of our cities; for those struggling to manage family life in high-rise flats; for those out there delivering essential goods to the elderly; luxuries to the wealthy; water to our taps and collecting refuse from our driveways. It is these workers, along with countless other 'invisible' and hardworking people who deserve our praise and our prayers. As a nation, we stand as one on Thursday evenings at 8pm and clap NHS workers for their selfless actions in caring and

protecting us. It is a joy to hear the clamour across Winchester and to be a part of!! But what will happen after Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted?



Mary Magdalene anoints Jesus' feet

If all the bells and whistles and honking of horns in appreciation for these remarkable people has been a genuine desire to recognise their significance in our society, then let's really come alongside them and join them in the sacrifice. We have put these people on a pedestal of thanks. But in 'normal' times, they are the lowest paid in our society. How can it be that we justify the telephone number salaries and bonuses of journalists and celebrity presenters, footballers, city traders and the like and yet we quibble over minimum wage rates and argue in favour of pay-freezes for our nurses? It was the cry of Christ with His last breath that we truly love each other.

'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'

In the last hours before His arrest, Jesus called *'those He loved to the very end'* to *'love one another just as I have loved you'*. To love others was not a new Commandment, yet to love others as much as *Christ* loved others *was* revolutionary! Within hours, His tortuous death on the Cross was to reveal just how deep His own love was for humanity. And though this was a chain of events Jesus' followers would not understand until the Resurrection, as He hangs in agony, Jesus shows us with unflinching clarity, the true cost of our sins. This is what we *have* done and *continue* to do, over and over again. We crucify each other, ourselves and the world day after day and in the process, we sabotage all hope for love and peace and reconciliation to each other and to God. Yet, despite and because of all this, in the personhood and suffering of Jesus we are made one with God.



It isn't easy to come so close to the Cross as we read the Passion Narrative, It is easier to see the events of Good Friday in a detached 'far off' way. After all, it all happened a long time ago in a different culture, in an alien landscape we don't recognise. Calvary itself was a grim and desolate area on the edge of Jerusalem; home to lepers, outcasts and criminals; a place where unwanted things were cast aside, including unwanted

lives. It is much easier to project blame for Jesus' death onto the likes of Caiaphas, Pilate and Judas than it is to own that each of us share in that blame too.

The Cross of Christ is at the heart of the history of the world. It is the culmination of God's enduring love for what He has made. Yet the Cross we are confronted by today doesn't always feel to be the centre of our lives. We find it easier to sit passively in the grey shadowlands of our own lives; responding only to *our own* needs. Yet Jesus tells us this is not living! Instead, He calls us to take risks in loving others, just as He took risks in loving us. Love, says Jesus, is an attitude that reveals itself in action.

His own, seemingly passive submission to death on the Cross proves to be the most radical, generous act of love the world has ever known. Today, Jesus fires up each of us into vibrant, active, risky love - one for another. He calls us to see modern-day expressions of Calvary, such as Coronavirus, for what and where they are in our world. He urges us to avoid the sins of self-interest, greed and prevarication just as He urges us into social action against poverty, hunger, isolation and oppression.



It is our habit to venerate the Altar Cross in our parish churches which represent a thousand Calvary experiences. In Lockdown we shall have to improvise our Good Friday venerations wherever we are. Maybe we have a cross or crucifix which might hold personal resonance for us in our own homes? Or perhaps we might prefer to access the many resources you will find on our Benefice website. (If you have not done so before, simply google 'The Downs Benefice' to find our website!).

As we come, face to face with all it symbolises this Good Friday, I pray we each find the courage and the humility to submit to the reality of Christ's death. May we centre His cross in our lives, lying before it all that keeps us from being in real relationship with our Saviour - and each other. May our collective prayer, in and through our isolation, bring us in humble hope and fear as we place at His feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ - who forgives us for not knowing what we have done.

With my love, in the Passion of Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Collect Prayer for Good Friday

In the Cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of God's love.

In humble hope and fear may we place at His feet
all that we have and all that we are,
through Jesus Christ.

Amen