



## Good Friday

Crucifixion by Graham Sutherland (1903-1980)

Reflections on the last words spoken by Jesus from the cross.

Opening Hymn (to be sung or read)

### My song is love unknown

My song is love unknown,  
My Savior's love to me;  
Love to the loveless shown,  
That they might lovely be.  
O who am I,  
That for my sake  
My Lord should take  
Frail flesh, and die?

He came from His blest throne  
Salvation to bestow;  
But men made strange, and none  
The longed-for Christ would know:  
But oh, my Friend,  
My Friend indeed,  
Who at my need  
His life did spend.

Sometimes they strew His way,  
And His sweet praises sing;  
Resounding all the day  
Hosannas to their King:  
Then "Crucify!"  
Is all their breath,  
And for His death  
They thirst and cry.

They rise and needs will have  
My dear Lord made away;  
A murderer they save,  
The Prince of life they slay.  
Yet cheerful He  
To suffering goes,  
That He His foes  
From thence might free.

Here might I stay and sing,  
No story so divine;  
Never was love, dear King,  
Never was grief like Thine.  
This is my Friend,  
In whose sweet praise  
I all my days  
Could gladly spend  
Opening Prayer

(Samuel Crossman 1624-1683)

## Prayer

God of Light, God of Shadow,  
as we enter into the darkness of this day,  
keep us aware of your presence.  
As we reflect on the words you gave us from the cross  
help us to find meaning  
and to keep hope alive.  
Amen

## Reflections on the seven last words

The following are a series of reflections on the seven last words spoken by Jesus from the agony of the cross. They have been written by seven different members of the Old Church congregation. Each ends with a prayer and a short period of silence for personal reflection.

### 1.

**"Father forgive them; they do not know what they are doing."**

(Luke 23v34)

By Revd Michael Goss

Many years ago, when our youngest son was at primary school, I went to collect him at the end of the school day. Francis, in his usual cheerful manner, ran to greet me. "Guess what happened in school today? Teacher stuck a pin in U...!" "Are you sure?" I asked. "Yes, it was because he had gone around the classroom sticking pins in other children and she said, now you know what it feels like!" "Let the punishment fit the crime" was the rule being applied here and was readily understood by the other children. Did U... learn from this? I hope so. Such an action would now constitute assault and be more difficult for young children to understand. The drama of the incident had clearly engaged Francis who was able to see its significance and learn from it. The brutal, degraded soldiers, used to torturing and killing the victims of the state, crucified him. The Roman system of state control needed soldiers who obeyed commands without question; there was a vast empire to be run that encompassed more than one continent. No room here for caring, just another vicious, tortured death. Did the soldiers with rough, handmade nails to hammer a man to a cross with, enjoy the excitement of torture? They were, after all, not asked for their opinion of the man they were framing onto a cross. This man was just another death required to continue control of a subject people. The job done, the foot of the cross was slotted into its prepared hole in the ground. Soon they would be able to use his clothes as a reward for a game of dice.

Long before the pin incident in the primary school, I visited Jerusalem. Golgotha, "the place of the skull" was one site I visited and saw what was claimed to be the place where it all happened, the roughly marked game still inscribed on slabs of stone. In my

imagination it all seemed very real. I can now feel pity for the hardened soldiers who were doing what the state expected of them. Did they hear Jesus speak those words of forgiveness? How did they come to be recorded and repeated across the reaches of time and space? Few perhaps had the opportunity to learn and reflect on the value of human life. One of the other crucified men spoke to Jesus and was given a great promise, "Today in Paradise." How did the nail bashers feel about their victim's offer of forgiveness? Perhaps they did later have a chance to weep silent tears for the harshness of their lives. "Unto seventy times seven, forgive." In my imagination I can construct a picture of eye contact with a tortured man who shows pity; the role reversal of the victim having the real power is hard to accept.

In normal circumstances I go quite often into Birmingham Cathedral to pray, usually with someone I have arranged to meet. I enjoy the peace the place has to offer. Sitting in the side aisle I am aware of a small, square stone inscribed in memory of a former Bishop of Birmingham Leonard Wilson, who was himself tortured in a Japanese prison camp. He forgave the man who tortured him whom he later met again after the war was over. Mercy, pity, peace and love are the ingredients of love's medicine and are often in short supply. We cannot gather together in church this Good Friday but let our prayer and hope be fully alive in our enforced isolation.

*God of compassion,  
whose forgiveness is unending,  
help us to know that  
your capacity to bring green shoots out of the dust  
is built in to all that you have made.  
And as we walk the bumpy road of life as forgiven people  
give us the heart to generously share this truth with those who  
are brought low by feelings of guilt.  
Amen*

Silence...

## 2.

**"Truly I tell you: today you will be with me in Paradise,"**

Luke 23:43

By Julie Humphrys

In his darkest hour, when Herod and his troops treated him with contempt and ridicule. When they had hung him on a cross to die. In his final hour he still had time for the criminal. When the criminal said "Jesus, remember me when you come to your throne." Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you: today you will be with me in Paradise".

Brothers and sisters let me tell you that I am missing each one of you greatly. As I write this the whole country is in lockdown. Most of us are only allowed to leave our homes for a little daily exercise, to shop for essentials ( Which does not include Cadbury's dairy milk) and for key workers to travel to and from work and when we are out we must remain two metres away from each other.

Most years my husband and I holiday on the Greek island of Rhodes and as we look out across the beautiful St Paul's bay, we imagine that perhaps this is a bit like what Paradise looks like.

But, currently we are in unprecedented times. I am currently working from home. This week I received a telephone call informing me of a bereavement and was politely asked not to attend the funeral. I also have two friends in hospital with Corona virus.

I have been borrowing my neighbour's dog and taking him on my walks around the village where I live. I have lived here for three years. But, recently I have noticed things that I have not appreciated before, like the pansies in the communal planters and the daffodils on the roadside and the robin that visits my back garden each morning.

Throughout my life I have said " Sometimes when looking for the greener grass we have to look towards our feet and realise that we are already standing on it."

For paradise is right here and all around us.

My Prayer: How will we cope?

*How will we cope when we cannot see our Christian brothers and sisters?*

*We will pray for each other.*

*How will we cope with staying at home?*

*We will pray for each other.*

*How will we cope knowing loved ones are sick, but we are unable to visit?*

*We will pray for the nurses and all medical staff who care for them.*

*How will we cope knowing there maybe a shortage of hospital beds?*

*We pray for the armed forces and volunteers, that we will succeed in the race against time.*

*How will we cope if there are shortages of food?*

*We pray that we will be gracious in sharing what we have with each other.*

*How will we cope when we know that we must relinquish loved ones into the arms of the Lord?*

*We will pray for them and let us do so graciously knowing that they are with the Lord our God in Paradise.*

*Amen.*

Silence...

### 3.

***“Woman, here is your son ... here is your Mother”***

*(John 19:26-27:)*

**by Revd Deb Buckley**

What does it mean to belong?

Having a sense of belonging is a basic human need. It's as basic as our need for food, love and shelter. At the most fundamental level, having a sense belonging is how we know that we are intrinsically part of something bigger than ourselves. It's how we

know that our lives mean something; that we matter and that we are cared about and cared for. Most of the time we get our sense of belonging from the people and places we know best, for example, our families and friendship groups, or from the organisations we are part of such as school, work or church.

Now the vast majority of us can no longer meet with those outside of home, due to the current 'lockdown', we have been forced to question how this basic human need to belong can be met differently. This has compelled us to search for new ways of connecting with one another. I, for example, have written more letters, made more telephone calls and, surprisingly, have learned to make WhatsApp video calls and to use Zoom, a video communications system. I guess we will all have our stories to tell of how we have tried to fulfil, if only in part, our need to belong.

Our behaviour during this period, however, has gone further than finding ways of staying in communication. It appears that, out of this strange and turbulent time, we are growing a new understanding of what it means to be a community in the broadest sense. Many new groups have been set up to deliver food parcels to the most vulnerable; as I write this, almost 8,000 people have volunteered to deliver medicines, take people to hospital appointments etc; gin distilleries are making hand sanitiser to meet the shortage; neighbours are joining together in keep fit sessions from drive ways and doorways; online choirs have been set up and the list goes on. In the darkest of times new life is emerging; in the depths of pain and fear a sense of community belonging is growing beyond the confines of our usual everyday expectations. In the shadow of the cross an understanding of community belonging is emerging that is closer to the vision Jesus set for us.

Jesus, in the agony of the cross where the salvation of the world hung in the balance, created a new relationship of belonging between his Mother and one of his closest friends and, in doing so, calls us to broaden our vision of what community belonging is all about. In these few words, "Woman, here is your son ... here is your Mother" Jesus provides us with a model of belonging that exists where we make it, not something that comes about just by birth, or blood, or tradition.

In the light of all the new signs of community life, although not easy, we have the opportunity to recommit ourselves to this vision of all time; to recommit ourselves to

being the loving, open community that seeks to nurture, sustain and refresh and where we can be unafraid to expect these things for ourselves.

Let us pray...

*God of community, one in three,  
on this day, and in these challenging times, we remember what your call  
to be an expansive community of belonging really means.  
Help us to honour your call as we seek to belong  
and as we strive to give others, near and far, a sense of belonging too.  
Amen*

Silence...

#### 4.

### **'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'**

Mark 15:34 (& Matthew 27:46):

By Dr Ann Conway-Jones

What words are echoing for you through this crisis? At our last Sunday service, before all social activity had closed down, I was struck by how familiar phrases - in the liturgy, in hymns - had gained new depth, new resonance. All our anxiety and uncertainty seemed mirrored in words which had previously passed me by. And of all the familiar phrases in our tradition, none is more raw and searing than Jesus' cry of desolation from the cross.

Mark was the first evangelist to set down the story of Jesus' life and death. As Jesus' last words - the encapsulation of his agony - he chose Psalm 22:1. It is not the first time that the Psalms are referenced in Mark's Passion narrative. From Jesus' betrayal (Mark 14:18; Psalm 41:9), to the false witnesses at his trial (Mark 14:57; Psalm 27:12, 35:11), the casting of lots for his garments (Mark 15:24; Psalm 22:18), the mockery of passers-by (Mark 15:29; Psalm 22:7) and the sponge full of vinegar (Mark 15:36; Psalm 69:21), there are echoes of the Psalms. It is as though Mark doesn't trust his own

words to tell the story. He's not just setting down 'what happened', but trying to draw out a greater meaning, and for that he delves into Scripture, plundering the resources of ancient liturgies of lament. And for us too, there are times when our own words seem shallow and inadequate. We need words that are already well-used, well-worn, which have acquired depth and resonance on their journey down the centuries. Mark needed the words of the Psalms to tell of Jesus' death - of the betrayal and abandonment it represented. We too need the Psalms, and Mark, to speak of our bewilderment and fear. We are rightly being urged to 'keep calm and carry on', to concentrate on the next task ahead, to contribute what we can to the national fight against covid19 by refusing to succumb to panic. But there will be times when we break down. As we think of those stuck in self-isolation alone and afraid; of parents trapped with toddlers in one room of a bed and breakfast hostel; of people plugged into ventilators struggling to breathe; of exhausted NHS workers; of families plunged into bereavement; of the situation in shanty towns and refugee camps across the world... the emotions are overwhelming. What do we pray? Where is God in all this? Sometimes we cling to God for comfort, inspiration and strength. And sometimes God is the one to whom we address our agonised protest at being abandoned. Psalm 22 and Mark give us permission to do so.

*My God, My God,  
we are not the first to cry out to you:  
others too, all down the centuries,  
have launched agonised protests  
at the pain and injustice of human life.  
Hear our pleas,  
through Jesus Christ,  
whose abandonment on the cross,  
released us into new life.  
Amen.*

Silence...

## 5.

### **I thirst.**

(John 19:28)

By Revd Colleen Shekerie

His head slumps forward, almost too heavy for his wounded broken body. Pain etched into every sinew of his body, the brow blackened by the dried blood caused by a crown of thorns, fashioned by gloved hand; every twist a barbed cruel hatred. The sun beats down relentlessly. Sweat mingles down the sides of his bruised and swollen face. These are the tell-tale marks of the torturous beating inflicted on Jesus following his arrest and the condemnation and mockery of a show trial. His breath comes in short laboured gasps, as mortal strength fails him. In a seemingly inaudible tune Jesus utters these words from the Cross, "I thirst", in a voice so muted that only those closest to the cross would have heard. Words that the author of the Gospel of John interprets as a metaphorical 'last will and testament' rather than a final appeal from a dying man to quench his yearning. It is ironic that Christ, the living waters, in who all our thirsts for righteousness are satisfied, would have requested water. Paradoxically, those in a position to offer Jesus comfort would have been Roman soldiers - those regarded as the enemy.

This is the scene John's Gospel paints for us. The sacrifice of the Pascal lamb, innocent blood shed. Our experience and attitude to suffering is a deeply personal one. Whether we have personally been racked by bodily pain or have cared for members of our family in their suffering, we are aware of the trauma that such pain can bring. We can be emotionally and physically altered by such events and find ourselves longing for a conclusion.

Theologians are divided in their opinion on the meaning of the words spoken by Christ from the cross, " I thirst". The main bone of contention between, what appear to be opposing views, is whether Jesus is declaring physiological requests for nourishment, or the recognition that his ministerial mission had reached, a climactic conclusion.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams suggest that whilst there may be conflicting ideas of what Jesus referred to, one thing is fundamentally true, help is never far away. In the midst of our suffering, humanity's Christian story is ultimately a search for spiritual and physical fulfilment in all its complexity. Being

reunited with God, in whom we find our meaning, purpose and an end to our journey, is that fulfilment.

It is a multifaceted and far-reaching search for enlightenment, both cerebral and spiritual, that brings wholeness. As we envisage standing before the cross in the presence of the suffering servant, we are called to witness the God that walks beside us in all our personal suffering, in our loneliness and in our brokenness.

The divine Christ, who calls to each generation, testifies to our desire and our longing to return to the spiritual source of our being. Christ's death on the cross is tragically triumphant and speaks of enduring hope. God offers us living water and the days of Easter beckon us to drink deeply from the well love and forgiveness.

### **Prayer**

*We who were in the wilderness, groaning for your water,  
we who harden our hearts and our Souls, are restless for meaning.  
Your people long for your console and your strength.  
Our thirsts are quenched in the abundance of your life-giving love.  
Give us the wisdom to seek your righteousness,  
revealed in the living waters and the sacrifice  
on the cross of your son, our saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen*

Silence...

## **6.**

**"It is finished".**

(John 19:30)

By Wendy Sorby

It is finished.

I wonder about those stood watching and waiting at the foot of the cross. I wondered whether Mary, the mother of Jesus, with the pain of loss piercing her soul; treasured these words in her heart as she did so many years before at his birth. Or whether she was purely overwhelmed in grief witnessing her dear son breathe his last.

I wondered too about those friends who couldn't be with Jesus in his final moments. Friends and possibly family locked away for their own safety, only hearing the news second hand, not able to be at his side or even see him laid in the tomb.

And I wondered did they hear of the final words spoken? "It is finished."

Did they imagine the words to be the dying whisper of their beloved friend? Words speaking the end of their hope, their expectations, their future?

"It is finished."

But rather than a defeated sigh of one giving up his earthly body to death; was Jesus crying out in the fullness of obedient triumph; a loud exultation of victorious accomplishment?

Mark (15:37) and Matthew (27:50) tell us that just before Jesus breathed his last, he "cried out again in a loud voice".

Scholars tell us Jesus' words "It is finished" in the Greek translation is "Tetelestai" from the verb *teleo*; meaning: the bill has been paid in full; the obligation has been completed; the debt has been paid off and the Hebrew: *Tam ve'nishlam* "it is completed and fulfilled".

It wasn't until Easter day when those who knew Jesus could look upon his final words and understand the fulfilment of Jesus' life on earth and the promise of hope to come. And they're lives were transformed.

That hope we can see today echoed in the rainbows decorating windows, cars and ambulances; the applause every Thursday evening at 8pm for the NHS but also for all key workers police, teaching staff, shop workers, delivery drivers and everyone staying at home; doing "our bit". God's promise in the rainbow is displayed for us all and that transforming love available to all who turn to him.

God coming to earth to walk amongst us; to die as one of us in Jesus, settled our debts upon the cross once and for all of time. God successfully completed the work he came to do, removing the barrier of sin and welcoming us into an eternal loving, understanding and strengthening embrace.

An unknown quote reads: Someone asked Jesus, "how much do you love me?" Jesus stretched his arms wide and died."

*Eternal Loving God, as we reflect upon the suffering in the world at this time let us remember we are not alone in suffering. Let us accept the love laid down for us, for all time, upon the cross as we remember the cry of "IT IS FINISHED". Amen*

Silence...

## 7.

**"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."**

(Luke 23:46)

By Siân Smith

I wonder what we think of when we think of these words - do they provide comfort? For me they do and I began to wonder why that was - is it the hope that the picture of Jesus on the cross evokes . The hope that, however traumatic our experiences, however devastating or painful we find life, however alone we might feel, our spirit, our very being our breath of life can be given to God.

I then began to wonder - commended to God for what ?

Was this for a life of eternity - which I like to think will be a pain free, fulfilling existence where, in the words of Martyn Joseph, "everything in Heaven falls apart " which I interpret as the things we struggle with individually and collectively fall apart to leave us with a pure honest relationship with ourselves and others.

That is hopeful indeed - but I think there is much more for us now - in this time, in this place .

Our spirit can often feel broken - through the trauma of living in oppressive regimes, through abusive relationships, through poverty and the lack of basic needs of shelter ,food and water, through worry about how we are going to survive, worry about our family and friends, health concerns , through ongoing racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism ,-through the coronavirus - the list goes on....

What if we could commend our spirit everyday of our lives to a loving and compassionate God who can nurture us, who understands us, who believes in us as unique and amazing human beings.?

Surely that would be wonderful - but what a challenge! Not necessarily a challenge that God can nurture us, although that may be the case, but a challenge to enter into that relationship in a deep and meaningful way.

What does that mean? for me it means that we need to believe in ourselves to be compassionate towards ourselves, to nurture ourselves and to value ourselves in the way I believe God does. That means challenging the negative words and judgements we impose on ourselves - I'm a failure, I'm lazy, I don't deserve good things.... It means entering into a relationship where we can really believe we are amazing and deserve to be the unique people we are. If we can do this and feel comfortable in who we are - a big ask I know -then I truly think we can do this in our relationship with others and become the inclusive vibrant world-wide community that we are.

**Into your hands oh God I commend my Spirit - let the work begin!**

**Let us pray**

*Loving and compassionate God help us to see ourselves as you see us, love us as you love us. Help us to enter into relationship with you where we can be nurtured and comforted and allow ourselves to grow without judgement. Amen*

Silence...

**Closing Hymn** (to be sung or read)

**When I survey the wondrous cross**

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

(Isaac Watts 1674-1748)

## Closing Prayer

O God,  
today we remember the horrors of the cross,  
and we think about how hard it sometimes is  
to be people of faith and bearers of hope  
in the midst of suffering, loss and fear.

Today we reflect on the last words spoken in the flesh by your son,  
words spoken out of brokenness, pain and despair.  
In this time of great suffering,  
when hope seems to have been crucified,  
help us to trust in your presence,  
for you are an unending source of comfort and love.  
When night surrounds us and we struggle to see the road ahead,  
help us to trust in your light  
a light that will always find us and guide us.

Help us in our despair  
to wait on you.

**Amen.**