



Blacktown
Uniting
Church

Worship with a difference

10 April 2020

Good Friday



Welcome

Today we offer you the story of the Passion according to St Matthew with moments for your personal reflection. I am joined by Vesai Fifita, Kaye and Andrew Crook, Neville Blom and Gavin Glenn.

Song: Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Where you there when they crucified my Lord?

Where you there when they crucified my Lord?

O sometimes it causes me to tremble

Where you there when they crucified my Lord?

Where you there when they nailed him to the tree? ...

Where you there when the sun refused to shine? ...

Where you there when they laid him in the tomb? ...

Matthew 26: 36a, 47 – 53, 56b

Jesus is Arrested

Peter's first response

I'm Peter, one of Jesus' close followers.

I just didn't think – It was instinct that made me draw my sword.

For once I couldn't speak

I was so deeply embarrassed and ashamed when Jesus rebuked me

Silence

And yet I must speak

It's sort of surprising, sometimes, isn't it?

We pray for peace. We call for an end to violence.

Yet every one of us has to deal with the urges inside us.

Sometimes it's just the way we think when someone has hurt us.

Sometimes it's our words that are cutting

and we wish we could take back after they've left our lips.



Sometimes we have weapons of many kinds because we feel afraid,
or because we want to protect others we care about.
I took up a sword that night in the garden with Jesus because I was afraid

O God, as we journey with Jesus this day may we reflect upon our fears and our hurts and how we deal with them.

Matthew 26:57- 75

Peter denies Jesus

Peter's second response

I have done it again – failed Jesus – let myself down.
My weakness haunts me.
Immediately before that night in the courtyard
I told Jesus that I would die with him before I would deny him!
I was so dedicated to him.
I wanted to do the right thing but something inside me gave up.
Sometimes we don't want everyone to know our deepest thoughts;
what we say we stand for.
It's scary, even dangerous.

Silence

And yet I must say
Sometimes our silence is what sentences others to suffering!
Our silence!
Sometimes remaining a friend to someone can make all the difference.

*O God, may we stand with those who are persecuted
for being who they are
or for standing up for justice.
Help us to stay true to who we are even when it's not easy.*

Matthew 27:1-2; 11-23

Jesus before Pilate



A Chief Priest's response

I'm a chief priest in the story.

I really thought I was being a good leader for my people.

Listen, we were constantly having to figure out how to live with the Romans empire breathing down our neck.

I thought getting rid of one trouble-maker would help us keep the peace....

Silence

And yet I have to admit it didn't work.

The forces for change and freedom only got bigger when he was killed.

When one suffers, we all suffer.

Too often, we try to find simple answers to problems:

Build walls so people don't enter our borders.

Profile people because of how they look and who they are or what they believe so that we remain safe.

Beat the law and order can - Keep people in prisons rather than give people opportunities.

O God, may we find solutions to our problems that don't blame and punish a group of people - or one person.

Help us to reflect upon how we can practise mercy.

Matthew 27: 27- 44

Jesus is crucified



Centurion's first Response

I'm a Centurion in charge of soldiers in this story.

I was following orders; doing my job as a military man of the Empire far from home.

Isn't that what most people say when they participate in ways of keeping people afraid?

The cloak for which they threw dice was not worth much.

Silence

And yet, I must say it all goes to show you, wherever someone is being hurt or made afraid, someone else is benefiting.

When some are left without dignity, others grow their power base and bank accounts.

O God, may we bring peace to our world

By struggling for everyone to live with dignity.

Matthew 27:45-52a, 54-56

Jesus dies



Centurion's Second Response:

When we crucified Jesus and he cried
we lifted a sponge full of vinegar to him
I didn't think anything about it.
Later I found out that the branch
we used from the hyssop was a Jewish sign of sacrifice.
And when the poor man finally died all hell broke loose.
It was literally earth-shattering – terrifying - The ground itself heaved
And the graves were opened
– the curtain in the Temple was torn top to bottom!

Silence

I have not been that religious -You could say I am poor in spiritual matters –
But I cannot ignore what has just happened.
He is a man like no other I have seen - the Son of God!
Divine powers greater than us were at work here today!
O God, we pray for those who cry out to be saved and look to you for hope.

Song: Jesus, remember me

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom
(Repeat twice)

Reflection (see pages 7 & 8)

Song: 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.



Prayer of Intercession

Compassionate God on this the day of your Son's passion
we give thanks that we are never isolated from you - not in life and not even in death.
We thank you that Jesus knows and understands our sufferings and our pain;
and that on the cross he has borne our sins
and so we lift up those unfinished things in our lives that we need Jesus to heal.

Silent prayer

And in this time of COVID-19 we pray for the world
When we aren't sure, God, help us be calm;
when information comes from all sides,
correct and not, help us to discern;
when fear makes it hard to breathe,
and anxiety seems to be the order of the day,
slow us down;
help us to reach out with our hearts,
when we can't touch with our hands;
help us to be socially connected,
when we have to be socially distant;
help us to love as perfectly as we can,
knowing that perfect love casts out all fear.

For the doctors, we pray, for the nurses, we pray,
for the technicians and the janitors
and the aides and the caregivers, we pray,
for the researchers and epidemiologists,
for those who are sick,
and those who are grieving, we pray,
for all who are affected, all around the world...
we pray for safety, for health, for wholeness.

May we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty,
clothe the naked and house those without homes,
and welcome the refugee in our midst.
may we walk with those who feel they are alone.
Help us, O God, that we might help each other.
In the love of the Creator, in the name of the Saviour,
in the life of the Holy Spirit that is in all and with all,
we pray. Amen. **

Matthew 27:57-61

Nicodemus' Response

I'm Nicodemus. Matthew does not mention me, but John does.

A long while ago I came under the cover of darkness to learn from Jesus and I helped Simon to bury Jesus.

It was the saddest day of my life – all so tragic and disappointing that it had come to this. I am so full of grief I cannot speak.

Silence

And yet I must because I cannot believe that God would allow violence and cruelty and fear to win out.

I have never forgotten that conversation I had with Jesus.

Jesus saw into my soul – he saw my hunger to be righteous with God.

He talked about being born in the Spirit.

Surely it means this story of suffering and death does not end in this tomb.

Jesus told us to love each other as he has loved us.

He also talked about sowing seeds:

He said something that struck me at the time:

He said that ***unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.***

Could it be that out of this suffering and death, a seed has been planted that will blossom into new life?

I await a new rising into community.

O God, may we honour this story with our love and friendship

Out of this darkness may light yet shine ...

Blessing

Go quietly into the rest of this day

in the wonder that our lives

and the lives of others

indeed the life of the world

is so precious to God

that Christ would die rather than stop loving us.

Ofa ke tapuaki mai koe , 'e he "Otua koe Tamai,

Mo e Alo pea mo e Laumalie Ma'oni'oni Emen

* adapted from Seasons of the Spirit 2011 Seasons FUSION Lent-Easter

* adapted from a prayer by Right Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator, The United Church of Canada



Good Friday Reflection



Friends you are remembered. For you Jesus has come, has lived and for you he has died.

We have just heard the story of the suffering and death of Jesus as it is written in the Gospel of Matthew.

Strangely for us, today we are doing this in our homes - many of us alone or as couples or families in isolation.

I don't know about you, but this is probably the first Good Friday in my life that I have not been part of a gathered community in the church or at Easter camp somewhere. I feel a sense of great loss about that.

And yet perhaps this is an opportunity too.

This COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic that is shaking the whole world prompts us to bow our heads with the Centurion before the cross, and experience the sheer earth-shattering depth of it's meaning in ways we have not understood before.

We are being isolated in our homes in order to care for those who are most vulnerable in our community. We are also staying at home because we are conscious of our own vulnerability to catch this virus. We are doing it collectively so that our social systems and structures can cope and to save lives. Some of us in the health and aged care and other essential services are caring for the sick and we are doing it putting ourselves in danger's way.

For all of us, this coronavirus pandemic has forced us to stop and to think about what is most important

Perhaps today we can be more honest about ourselves like Peter.

Perhaps alone we can see more clearly what is happening out there and how we are consciously or unconsciously part of systems that hurt people and strip people of their dignity in our own society. Indeed, this virus has changed government policy like nothing else.

Perhaps in this strange time when we are pushing away from each other physically, we are more mindful than ever about the preciousness of our relationships – and that there is more to be done in tending to them.

The Good Friday story of Jesus sufferings and death evokes many questions.

Over the past months we have been confronted by suffering and destruction and loss and death as a result of drought and fire and storm and flood and now a virus which we cannot see. All of these have shown us both the worst and the best of what humanity are capable of. It reminds us to look to God to have mercy not just upon us but for the whole earth.

Today in the suffering and dying of Jesus on the cross – in his powerlessness and pain and isolation both physically and socially and spiritually - we see God suffering with us and suffering for us.

Julia Baird is a writer and a journalist. Still a young mother, she endured three major and brutal cancer surgeries - one operation lasting 15 hours. She writes about how in the midst of it all, she experienced such an intensity of fear, anxiety, loneliness, utter dread and love of her family – but how in the end she had to “walk alone through those “medical valleys of darkness...

Today we try to take in this amazing truth – Jesus on the cross carrying the weight of all our human perversity and sin and of all our fears and suffering. His cry of isolation and abandonment in the loneliness of it as he breathes his last is truly an earth-shattering moment.

The ripping of the curtain in the temple tells us that on that cross the holy presence of God is exposed for all of us to see. Here is the Son God – dying on the cross for you and for me and for the whole creation. Every barrier is broken between us and God.

Nothing could be bigger or more important. This is love without condition reaching out to embrace the world including to you in your home and me in my home –

Look at the table here in the church – each of these palm crosses made by Irene Gibson represent us in our separateness joined in community around the cross and the love there.

In our physical isolation today we are all connected and held by a ***love so amazing so divine that it demands my soul, my life , my all***. No wonder the centurion bowed his knee....