

Friday 30th March, 2018 - Good Friday
Year B
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
John 18:1-19:42

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

*Finally, one arrives at the place
of the skull because there is nowhere
else to go. And there before the face
of bone one pauses in despair.*

*The culmination of evil
is displayed before one's eyes:
man's heart conspired with the devil
and cared little for disguise.*

So writes the Australian poet, Andrew Lansdown, in his piece simply called "Golgotha."

It is a poem which seems to sum up perfectly the mood and the events of this day that we somewhat perversely call "Good Friday". Here, today, there is seemingly no light, no hope. In the solemnity and quiet of this day we gather to remember how he who promised that he came to be the light to the world has this light extinguished by a collective humanity who, as Lansdown says, has conspired with the devil.

And how does it leave us feeling, then? Does it leave us forsaken? Confused? Angry? There are any number of emotions that we might experience this day. But Bishop Tom Wright wonders whether the overwhelming emotion might in fact be one of feeling like we've made a mistake - that somehow we have mis-read the signs, or misunderstood what has been happening to this point.

After all, we have heard how Jesus was anointed at his Baptism; we have been told how God proclaimed Jesus to be "my beloved Son".

We have been witness to the deeds of power and miraculous healing that Christ performed in his earthly ministry. We have marvelled how he shows power over the wind and the waves, and yes, even over death itself. And we have begun to share in the proclamation of the faithful that this is “The King of the Jews”!

How can **this**, this day, then, possibly be the climax to the royal story? Surely it’s some sort of sick joke. But of course, it’s not, because we have been here before. We know this story all too well - Christ’s story, yes, but also we know all too well how this story has been repeated again and again throughout history - how in the Holocaust, in the killing fields of Uganda and Cambodia, through the exploitation of women and children, and acts of terror and violence which have been committed over and over again we know and understand this dark humanity all too well.

And so we come to this place, today, where we see that all of the pain of the world summarized in the betrayal and trial and crucifixion itself. This day, as hard as it is for us to bear, is a vital part of Holy Week - it is critical to our faith. For our faith says that in this stark image of Christ on the cross, somehow the pain and the darkness of the world is taken up, carried by one person, a truly human person who understands what it means to be betrayed; who has experienced the pain of desertion, and mocking, and persecution.

Christ’s actions in the Easter story are those of a servant leader, one called by God to walk fully into the pain of the world without responding with violence - one who goes, as Isaiah foretold, “oppressed, and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; [and] wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities”.

Today, the darkness of humanity is all around us, “and our question becomes ‘How do we face that darkness?’

Well, there is a third verse to Andrew Lansdown's poem. And perhaps for us, today, it is what we need to hear.

*Yet if, at the sight of the Cross,
a light is struck on the rough of the brain
and the mind conceives [that] all except this is vain,
[then] there comes a voice [which] reassures:
Thus is the seed of tenderness sown in the cleft of the heart of stone.*

There comes a *voice* which reassures...

Yes, even from the cross, Jesus speaks - at a time when for him every breath is precious; when every word means the additional pain of filling tortured lungs with precious oxygen. He speaks. And his words are tender, and full of meaning.

“Father, forgive them”.

“Woman, here is your Son”.

“Today you will be with me in paradise”.

And the greatest of all - “It is finished”

In those three words our confusion vanishes. With that cry of victory (for that is what it is, make no mistake) all is explained - this is what had to happen; all that had gone before was leading to one point - *this* point, where God's Glory was revealed. Not in a moment of power and accompanied by great acclamation, but in weakness, in broken-ness, and with apparent contradiction.

This is glory - whether or not we recognise it for what it is. This is the moment to which Christ's ministry and mission has been leading. This is the royal moment...

So as we approach the cross this day we do so in an understanding that this crucified Jesus is the one who draws all people to him - countless thousands have read or heard this story and found their own story mirrored in it; their own tale of injustice, their own horrible betrayal. Their own false accusations, their own unjustified humiliation, their own suffering.

So come to the cross - embrace this day. Hear the invitation to mingle your own story - with all of its pain and its sorrows, with its bitterness and its anguish - with all of your regret for dreams not fulfilled, or wrong decisions made. Come and see. How in the cross, Jesus takes it all on himself, and in the final cry of victory declares...

“it is finished...”

In the name of God, Amen.