

This booklet contains the 6 reflections for the Good Friday Hour at the Cross service and the one for the Holy Saturday Compline

GOOD FRIDAY

My Hour has come (Paul Day)

John 12: 12-15, 20-23

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

'Hosanna!

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!*

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

'Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

*Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!*

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'

There's a theme that runs through John's gospel about Jesus' hour. His time.

Way back in the story of the wedding at Cana where Jesus turned water into wine – the first of John's signs of Christ's glory - we have Jesus saying to his mother "My time has not yet come" and that phrase occurs several times in the first half of the gospel.

Midway through chapter 12 – about halfway through the gospel account and shortly after the Palm Sunday entry to Jerusalem – things change. Some Greeks – Gentiles – ask to see Jesus and he responds with the words "The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified". It's as if the fact that foreigners are asking to see him here, in Jerusalem, acts as a kind of marker. The focus for

him and for John the gospel writer changes. The remainder of the gospel recounts the happenings of Holy Week and Jesus' long prayer for his disciples at the last supper.

The events of Holy Week – culminating in the horror of Good Friday – are not an accident, not a somewhat uncomfortable and unpleasant end to an otherwise dramatic story. They are the very point of the story. It has all led up to this.

Earlier this year in our midweek reflections we were thinking about the seven signs in John's gospel, and again and again we saw that what they were pointing us towards was what we see before us now. The events of Holy Week and Good Friday.

The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified. This is Jesus' time; this is his hour.

Dying on a cross might not seem like the glorious ending one might expect from such a story, but it was the ending that was always going to be; the one Jesus knew was coming and the one he tried to explain to his disciples on several occasions. It was for this hour, this time, that he had come.

One man's journey to heaven (Sarah Penfold)

In Bath Abbey there is a series of diptychs which illustrate 35 scenes from the life of Christ, beginning with the Annunciation and ending with the Ascension. Each of the 35 is split between a panel of calligraphy with a gospel quotation and a textile panel in illustration.

I have been looking at one of the Good Friday panels – The way of the cross to Calvary.

The calligraphy tells us, 'And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha'. But it is the textile panel which fascinates me.

The background is stormy. Blue, purple and black, in random irregular stripes. The stripes flow from the bottom left-hand corner to the top right, drawing your eyes as if up a hill. A red line like a pathway goes in the same direction.

How bleak would have been the hilltop at Golgotha? This is an area of stony desert. Not much grows without irrigation. There was little shelter on a sunny day, but in the wind and rain of a storm? As the group climbed the hill, they would be ever more exposed to the weather, ever more removed from comfort.

The panel is dominated by a disc of dark grey, which represents the weight of the cross. It is like a granite boulder that pushes against the sides as if trying to be still larger, an even greater weight. It threatens to take up the whole space, to overwhelm everything else.

This is too big to be just the physical burden of a wooden cross. It is the weight of the world and it sits on the shoulders of one man. One man who is carrying it uphill to do something unthinkable for us all. I cannot even grasp the fear he must have felt as he climbed. Nor the feeling that somehow we are all part of that load.



Underneath, and just touching the grey disc, is a much smaller white disc. This represents Christ as he carried his great burden. It is so much smaller. Nevertheless, it does not allow the other disc to push it out of the way. There is a defiance, no not defiance, acceptance that reminds us of his words in Gethsemane, 'Thy will be done'. Despite the weight on his shoulders Christ is making his way determinedly up the path.

If you look carefully you can see a tiny silver bead in the centre of the Jesus disc. The artist tells us that this represents the Spirit of God that remains with Christ throughout. It is a tiny spark in a picture of desolation. But it is there. How much comfort did that spark give to an innocent man undergoing a barbaric death?

It reminds me of the tiny spark we read about at the start of John's gospel. 'The light of Christ had come into the world, but the world knew it not'. And also of the image in the Exultet, the joyful hymn of the Easter vigil service, Christ the morning star. The morning star who came back from the dead and who reigns for ever and ever.
One man's journey to heaven.

Prayer:

Loving God, as we remember the events of that Friday long ago, help us to appreciate the sacrifice that Christ made for us. He took for himself the burden of all our sin. We pray that we may be worthy of that sacrifice on our journey through life.

The Stations of the Cross (Theresa Jones)

Walking along a quiet road one day as we holidayed in Cyprus we noticed the start of a hill to the right side of the road. We thought: this will give us a bit of extra exercise, so we took that path. After a hundred yards or so I noticed a carving above me as I walked along. The carving was of a religious nature and I realised that we were on a route of the Stations of the Cross.

Along that route, especially on Good Friday, many people would have come and connected with the passion of Jesus as he made his way to the hill of Calvary where he was to be crucified. But on that particular day there were just two of us. Some of you who are watching or listening to this service may have walked along the Via Dolorosa which is a processional route in the old city of Jerusalem. The name of the street 'Via Dolorosa' is Latin and means, 'The way of grief' or 'The way of suffering'. Along this route it is believed Jesus journeyed to his crucifixion.

In St James Church we have the fourteen stations of the cross around the walls and when the church is open we have a service during Holy week when we walk around together, stop at each station, meditate and pray. Some of the words we use at each station are: **'We adore you O Christ and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world'**.

The first of the stations is: **Jesus is condemned to death**. That makes it quite clear that there is to be no reprieve for Jesus. In this short talk I will not be able to focus on all fourteen stations but I want to enter into a few of them, especially those where women are involved.

At station four **Jesus meets his Mother**. It's impossible to imagine how his Mother felt as she saw her son being forced to carry a cross and being treated so violently. In the past year we've witnessed how many Mothers and Fathers have had to watch with broken hearts as their loved one's have suffered during the pandemic. We've also heard of other tragedies that have brought heartbreak in families.

At station six we find that **Veronica wipes the face of Jesus**. Here another woman comes to the fore in the scene. Showing love, compassion and courage, she uses a cloth to wipe the bloodied face of Jesus. Although there is no scriptural reference to Veronica, tradition has it that an image of the face of Jesus was transferred to the cloth she used. Opportunities to show love and compassion do come into our lives. Sometimes we act on our desire to help another, sometimes we don't. On that day, Veronica plucked up the courage to do something to help as she looked upon the face of Jesus.

At station eight **Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**. These weeping women had obviously followed Jesus along the Via Dolorosa route, looking on him in pity and disbelief. They could have been professional mourners or they may even have known him and listened to his teachings in the past. Only at this station are we told that Jesus spoke as he carried his cross. To these women he says: "Weep not for me but for yourselves and for your children..."

Stations twelve and thirteen show how **Jesus dies upon the cross** and is **Taken down from the cross**. Over the centuries artists' depictions of these stations show women there, along with men, witnessing Jesus's fate. Here were possibly Mary Jesus's Mother, Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Cleopas.

A striking work known as **The Lamentation**, by the artist Lucas Cranach, painted in 1518, (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) shows Jesus taken down from the cross and the deep distress on the faces of the women present.



One can only imagine how the disciples and those who loved and cared for Jesus felt after the spectacle of his crucifixion. No doubt most of them would have been fearful for their own lives and thought they had reached the end of the mission Jesus had called them to carry out. All they could do was to perform the burial rites for Jesus and even for that they had to wait until after the Sabbath was over. But their waiting and their faith and Jesus's self-giving culminated in the glorious resurrection which we await and look forward to celebrating this Easter Sunday, with the joyful words: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

When I survey the wondrous cross (Gill Gough)

Who would have thought that a hymn written over 300 years ago would still be so effective and emotional today. "When I survey the wondrous cross" was written in 1707 by an English congregational minister and theologian named Isaac Watts. (1674-1748)

He became a prolific and popular hymn writer and has been credited with over 750 hymns.

But what is special about this hymn is that it is the first known hymn to be written in the first person:

Introducing and inviting the singer to a personal religious experience rather than limiting itself to doctrine as in earlier hymns.

This hymn gave Christians of the day a way to express a deeply personal gratitude to their Saviour. It is based on passages of scripture as follows.

Jeremiah Ch 9 v 23-24

The Lord says,

Wise men should not boast of their wisdom.

Nor strong men of their strength,

Nor rich men of their wealth.

If anyone wants to boast,

He should boast that he knows and understands me,

Because my love is constant,

And I do what is just and right.

These are the things that please me,

I the Lord have spoken.

Galatians Ch 6 v 14

As for me, however, I will boast only about the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for by means of his cross, the world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world.

But don't we all love a champion especially in today's society. People like to make themselves well known through social media, television and other popular culture.

Film stars and celebrities make a public display of their charity giving; Politicians brag about their work and achievements. We live in a world full of pride. And no matter which way we turn, we seem to see someone with a puffed out chest.

And it's not just the "superstars" who like to boast. Sometimes we want attention too. Our good ideas, our work, our achievements and endeavours, we want recognition, we want other people to know the good things we have done. So we brag a little, hoping to be admired.

In complete contrast to our human pride, this hymn invites us to look at the cross and see our real champion

Jesus Christ. With a heart focused on God's sacrifice we are humbled before him.

All the words are so meaningful but the last verse always gets me. You can't be a half-hearted Christian. His love is so Amazing, so Divine, it demands my soul, my life, my all.

Let us pray;

Lord, teach us humility instead of pride,
teach us sacrifice instead of gain,
give us hearts that are filled with love
and gratitude for all you have done for us.

Help us to tell your story and not our own

May your death on the cross give us life, hope, peace and joy as we look forward to your resurrection. Amen

May this well-loved hymn continue to stir your heart today.

*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.*

*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?*

*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.*

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

Vulnerable (Kate Day)

Over the past year a number of words have received new prominence in our conversations, our reading and our prayers. Until last year, most of us were unaware of terms such as “the R number” or “spike proteins”. We probably rarely used words such as “isolation”, or even “vaccine.” And unless we worked in health, or particularly social, care, we would maybe go for weeks or months without using the word “vulnerable.”

During the last 12 months or so ‘vulnerable’ has frequently been used as a kind of overarching word to describe everyone for whom the pandemic has brought particular problems and challenges. And it’s absolutely right that at this time, of all times, we should be asking God to relieve their distress; and asking our society and ourselves how we should be playing our part in bringing that about.

The downside of this, is that it can easily make “the vulnerable” into a separate group, an “other” group – perhaps the same group that we think of when we pray “for those less fortunate than ourselves.”

For no one wishes to be in this category of vulnerable. It’s associated with being at the mercy of others, of having little or no control over what happens to us. Much of our existence, as individuals or as the human race, is devoted to reducing our vulnerability. And although some of our attempts are crushingly negative – producing abuse of power, oppression, the ravaging of the planet; some are stunningly positive – supporting life and health, love and flourishing.

Yet despite all our endeavours, one of the truths which the pandemic has revealed is that we all remain “vulnerable”. It has reminded us of the inevitability of death, and the reality that it comes in many forms, including gasping desperately for breath in a ravaged body.

It has reminded us that, no matter how much we might think we can isolate and insulate ourselves and those we love from distress or discomfort, ultimately we are all connected. Only the most rigorous public health provisions in New Zealand keep the country “open” to its inhabitants, and even then, outbreaks still occur. In some ways the virus is an accurate picture of sin – it doesn’t just affect individuals, it permeates global society. And we are all vulnerable.

And yet, and yet – there is one aspect of our human existence where we choose to make ourselves vulnerable. For when we truly love, we open ourselves up not just to joy, but also to the risk of searing pain. The pain that our love might not be returned. The pain of betrayal. The pain of mocking and rejection.

Can I invite you to consider a man? He has fallen foul of both the religious and the political leaders, and they have chosen to exact their revenge by nailing his shredded body to a wooden cross and lifting it high above the city rubbish heap. As he hangs there he is utterly, totally, and completely vulnerable. He has not a shred of protection for his naked body. His arms are pinned wide - body and mind he is exposed to whatever the gathered crowd throw at him, be that mocking words or putrefying garbage. He is struggling for his final breaths as a public spectacle.

And yet - he has chosen to be there. It is the vulnerability of love which has brought him there. And which holds him there more firmly than any nail as he surrenders his spirit.

And as he dies, all is transformed. The vulnerability of his uncovered body reminds us that the man and woman were unclothed when they met with God in the garden of Eden. His opened arms are spread wide in welcome to all who come to him. His final breaths speak words of compassion and hope across the ages. Love absorbs all the sin and evil that can be thrown at it from the rubbish heap of life.

Vulnerability is transformed into glory.

Can I invite you to consider this man? Can I invite you to consider our God.

It is finished (Paul Day)

John 19:28-30

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.

The final word from the cross. It is finished. The words are followed in John's gospel by him bowing his head and giving up his spirit.

But surely that cry "it is finished" means more than the simple passing of time; more than the fact that the hour, the final week is ended. More than just signifying his death.

It also marks far more than an ending – it is really saying that his work is complete. What he came to do has been done. The Greek word that is used could be translated accomplished, or all done. It is the word that would be written on a bill when it had been settled. "Paid in full"

But what is finished? What has all this achieved? What has the death of Jesus accomplished?

Jesus talks elsewhere about glorifying the Father through finishing the work he was given to do. Here it is finished. Here then God is glorified.

How can that be? How can God be glorified by the death of an innocent person on a cross? How can such evil lead to such good? How can Good Friday be called "Good" Friday?

Christians through the ages have tried to explain what has been accomplished. Theories of what is known as the atonement have been put forward. The key is in the name. Atonement. At-one-ment. Through the death of Jesus we can be at one with the Father. Reconciled and reunited. Through his death the things that have separated us from God can be removed. No longer will those things create a barrier between us and God. Through the death of Jesus they have been dealt with. Forgiven and forgotten. In some mystical way we might say they have been paid in full.

Whatever we might understand or seek to understand, the words 'it is finished' show us that Jesus knew that what he had come to achieve was completed. He had seen the task through. He had been faithful to the end and he knew that the end had been reached.

This is good news. Surely good has come out of evil as it so often does.

But we have to remember that this wasn't the final ending. That Easter Day followed Good Friday. That resurrection followed death. That how we view his

death has to be understood from the vantage point of how we understand the resurrection.

That the work of Jesus deals with the future as well as the past and present. That its not just about sins being forgiven and the barriers between us and God being removed, but is about new and abundant life in the presence of God for evermore. And that's a thought that we will ponder on Easter Day.