

SERVICE OF WORSHIP
Good Friday

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, this morning we gather at the foot of the cross upon which Jesus died. This cross speaks of your astonishing love for us. This cross is the symbol of the faith we share as your people. This cross challenges us to take up our own cross, to follow in Christ's footsteps and offer our service.

Loving God, you became a human being, flesh and blood like us. You experienced humanity at its worst but in and through your Son you revealed it at its best.

Bless our worship this morning; accept our praise and receive our thanksgiving for all the love you showed us through your coming, living and dying among us in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray this, amen.

HYMN

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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?

4. 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.

SCRIPTURE READING

Mark 15:20-39 New International Version (NIV)

20And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

22They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 23Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

24And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

27They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. [28]

29Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30come down from the cross and save yourself!” 31In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! 32Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Death of Jesus

33At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

35When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

37With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

MESSAGE

Crucifixion was the most terrible way for anyone to die. Cicero said that it was “*the most cruel and horrifying death*”. Dr William Barclay wrote: “*It was that death, the most dreaded in the ancient world, the death of slaves and criminals, that Jesus died*”.

If there was a usual place of execution the upright part of the cross was normally left in its socket. However, the condemned man had to carry the cross-beam. Jesus was so weak after the scourging that he stumbled under the weight of this cross-beam and so an onlooker- Simon of Cyrene- was compelled by the Roman soldiers to help him.

When the place of execution was reached, the cross was laid flat on the ground and Jesus was then laid on top. Nails were driven through his hands; it was at this point that Jesus said “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*”(Luke 23:34). The cross was then lifted up and set in its socket with Jesus hanging on it. The cross was not high, perhaps from seven to nine feet.

Jesus was crucified at around nine o'clock in the morning. At three o'clock in the afternoon he cried out in agony and distress: “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). Let us think about these words for a few moments. What do they tell us? Is there any comfort and encouragement we can glean from them?

Firstly, they reveal the full extend of Christ's redeeming work. He went all the way for us, even to the final despair of feeling God had abandoned him. Even when our lives are hard, our minds in turmoil, our souls in the depth of despair, let us remember that Jesus has been there before us, he knows our pain, he knows our suffering because he has experienced it.

Secondly, they reveal the gulf there can be between fact and feeling. Jesus at that moment felt that he had been deserted by his Father, but in reality he was never nearer or dearer to God's heart than as he hung upon the cross. Jesus himself had said: “*The Father loves me because I lay down my life, to receive it back again*” (John's Gospel 10:17). It's inconceivable that such a love would be withdrawn just at the moment when Jesus was

most committed to doing the Fathers will, but Jesus, as he hung upon the cross, didn't realise this. For a moment- perhaps just a fleeting moment- Jesus felt abandoned. This shows that our feelings are no real guide to how close our relationship is with God. Our feelings change depending on the circumstances and our temperaments. Some of the greatest of God's people have felt that the Father was not with them when in fact he was- Elijah, the Psalmists, John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul- to mention just some of the most obvious examples. Let us take comfort from knowing that if we ever feel God is distant from us, has forgotten us, it is at that moment that he is likely to be closest to us. This is the message of the well-loved piece of prose 'Footprints in the Sand':

One night I dreamed a dream.
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,
You'd walk with me all the way.
But I noticed that during the saddest and most difficult times of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you
During those times of trial and suffering,
when you saw only one set of footprints,
It was then that I carried you."

Thirdly, Jesus' cry from the cross reveals that even in his darkest moment, Jesus did not turn away from God, but rather turned to him, 'My God' he says. And the Father did not fail him, instead three days later he raised

him. *“Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning”* (Psalm 30:5).

These are just three lessons we can take from the words of Jesus from the Cross: *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*, if we take the words at face value and see them as a spontaneous cry of desolation.

However, there is another way of viewing these words, an interpretation based on the fact that they are the opening words of Psalm 22. Taken as a whole, that Psalm is a prayer of a righteous person who trusts fully in the love and protection of God despite the suffering they are enduring. Therefore the words *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* are not words of despair but rather the words of a person who is confident of being vindicated by God. In addition, there is reason to believe that the ancient Jews interpreted the opening words of Psalm 22 in the light of the rest of the Psalm and that therefore the words *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* were regarded as a powerful prayer for help in times of trouble.

When all is said and done, we do not know what was in the mind of Jesus when he uttered his cry from the cross, but what we can say with certainty is that he was not abandoned by God, and nor did he lose his faith in his heavenly Father.

When Jesus breathed his last, the curtain in the Temple, which veiled the Holy of Holies, was torn in two. We need to understand the significance of this. The Holy of Holies was the most sacred part of the Temple in Jerusalem. It was the place where the very presence of God was to be found. Nobody was allowed to enter except the High Priest and he on only one day of the year, the Day of Atonement. The curtain before the Holy of Holies being torn in two likely means that through the death of Jesus, God is no longer only for the Jewish people, he is now a God for all people.

This is emphasised by the fact that the first person to be converted by the death of Jesus was a Roman centurion- a Gentile- standing at the foot of the Cross: *“Truly this man was God’s Son!”* he said.

Now we must turn our attention briefly to the question of what the death of Jesus accomplished and to answer this we will turn to the great Apostle Paul- the Apostle to the Gentiles.

For Paul, the Cross of Christ was the very centre of the Christian faith. This is clear from two statements he made to the Christians living in Corinth: *“We preach Christ crucified”* (1 Cor. 1:23) and *“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified”* (1 Cor. 2:2).

Paul believed that Jesus Christ had died on behalf of people. In 1 Thessalonians he writes: *“For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **who died for us**”* (5:10). There is a story that when the body of Abraham Lincoln was lying in state in Cleveland, an elderly black woman stood there for a long time with a little child in her arms. Then she said to the child: *“Take a long, long look, honey; that man died for you”*. When we look at the Cross, we echo those sentiments as we say: ‘He died for us’.

Why did Jesus need to die for us? The answer is that the sinful behaviour of human beings had damaged our relationship with Almighty God. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross mended that relationship. The Cross bridged the gulf between people and God, took away enmity and restored the lost relationship of intimacy and love. This is why the Apostle Paul says: *“...we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son...”* (Romans 5:10). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off [from God] have been brought near by the blood of Christ”* (2:13).

It was the belief of the ancient Jews, that one person could represent other people so completely that whatever happened to that person actually happened to them as well. God cares for human beings too much just to dismiss our sins with a flippant ‘They don’t matter’. Action was necessary and that action was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In effect, God was saying, ‘Yes, your behaviour has hurt me a lot, but I still love you. Therefore, I will take your guilt upon myself. In and through my Son I will suffer for you- instead of you- to make things right between us again’.

Jesus once said: “*The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends*” (John 15:13). However, the great power of the cross lies in the fact that Jesus didn’t just die for his friends, he died for strangers, he died for everyone.

There are stories of people giving up their lives for others, for people they didn’t know. Here is one such story:

Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Franciscan Friar. During the German occupation of Poland, he remained at Niepokalanów - a monastery near Warsaw which published a number of anti-Nazi German publications. In 1941, he was arrested and sent to Auschwitz, being branded prisoner No. 16670.

Kolbe was put to work in the camp carrying heavy stones for the building of the crematorium wall. The work party was overseen by a vicious ex-criminal ‘Bloody Krott’ who came to single out Kolbe for particularly brutal and sadistic treatment. Witnesses said Kolbe accepted the mistreatment and violence meted out to him with surprising calm. On one occasion Krott made Kolbe carry the heaviest planks until he collapsed; he then beat Kolbe so savagely that he was left for dead in the mud. However, fellow prisoners secretly moved him to the camp prison, where

he had time to recover. Prisoners also reported that he remained selfless, often sharing his meagre rations with others.

In July 1941, three prisoners appeared to have escaped from the camp; as a result, the Deputy Commander of Auschwitz ordered 10 men to be chosen to be starved to death in an underground bunker.

When one of the selected men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, heard he was selected, he cried out “My wife! My children!” At this point, Kolbe volunteered to take his place. *“I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place because he has a wife and children.”*

Rather surprised, the commander accepted Kolbe in place of Gajowniczek.

Gajowniczek later said: *“I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me – a stranger”*.

Jesus gave his life for us. He saved us from the consequences of our sins. This is why today is known as Good Friday. This is why the cross is the symbol of Christianity. Jesus said, *“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself”* (John 12:32). William Barclay wrote: *“[Jesus’s] death upon the cross made him go through the hearts of men and women forever and forever. The conquering Messiah of the Jews is a figure about whom scholars write their books; but the Prince of Love on the cross is a king who has his throne forever in human hearts. The only secure foundation for a kingdom is sacrificial love”*.

What Jesus accomplished on the cross is of such great importance, but of course, it is the first part of a two part story, and so on Sunday we will join

together in worship again as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you were human just as we are. You experienced the same disappointment, pain, fear that we feel. Yet, you were without parallel in the extent of your love, without equal in your selflessness.

We know that you could have saved yourself, but you were determined to do the will of your Father and stay true to your calling. You chose to suffer and die so that we might be set free from the consequences of OUR sins. You freely surrendered your life so that we might have the promise of eternal life. You made yourself nothing in order to give us everything.

Lord Jesus Christ, however hard we try, we realise that we can never repay the love you showed for us by dying on the cross. What we can do though, is to show how much your sacrifice- all the things you suffered- means to us.

We want to walk with you on our life's journey; to hear your voice and do your will. We know that this is the way to breathe life into our faith and our worship.

Lord Jesus Christ, it is not always easy to stay true to you; it means sometimes taking up our own cross, but we do want to remain your faithful followers, people you can rely upon. Bless us with renewed commitment and deeper faith.

Lord Jesus Christ, inspire us by your example, remake us by your grace and refashion us through your Spirit, so that we may reflect something of your goodness and live to your praise and glory. Amen

“Our Father, who art in Heaven....”

HYMN

1. There is a green hill far away,
outside a city wall,
where our dear Lord was crucified
who died to save us all.

2. We may not know, we cannot tell,
what pains he had to bear,
but we believe it was for us
he hung and suffered there.

3. He died that we might be forgiven,
he died to make us good,
that we might go at last to heaven,
saved by his precious blood.

4. There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin,
he only could unlock the gate
of heaven and let us in.

5. O dearly, dearly has he loved!
And we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood,
and try his works to do.

BLESSING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, Amen.

