

Good Friday – 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2015 – 9.30am Parish Service

Readings: Isaiah 53: 5-6 *“He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities . . . .  
...and the Lord God has laid upon him the  
iniquity of us all”*  
John 19: 26-28 & 30 *‘Woman, here is your son.’ And to the  
disciple he loved, ‘Here is your mother’  
‘I am thirsty’..’It is finished’*

Good Friday Reflection

We have heard the long readings for this Good Friday. You will be pleased to know that I have in fact reduced the set Lectionary readings for this service to the Isaiah 52/3 section and simply John 19. We could have had more but what I have kept is important and that we hear both aspects from the Hebrew passage on the ‘suffering servant’ and the account of Jesus’ sentencing, crucifixion, death and burial. This makes his death on the cross real for us, not simply a story told that may or may not be true. It is recorded in all four Gospels and builds on the Jewish account of the one who was to come from God but who was not accepted, who was rejected and punished.

Here, in John, we have this person, this one from God, put to death on the cross. One without sin, one not guilty of anything except speaking the mind of God. One suffering for our sakes, taking onboard, in a sense, the ‘sin of the world’.

Here is an act of pure love, in the midst of the horror of being hung from a cross. Here is God showing us that pain and suffering is not foreign to our God.

I must admit I struggle with some aspects of the cross, yet there are other aspects that resonate immensely within me as I reread the Scriptures for today.

1. My first Good Friday as an ordained minister will never be forgotten because of the horror that happened on Maundy Thursday. A young couple who had warmly welcomed Annette and I to our first Parish, lost their 3 year old to an horrific farm accident. The dad was grading an area of the farm road and his young son was playing on a mound of dirt to be spread by the grader. The young lad, for some reason, came to his dad, who didn’t see him, and unfortunately the boy was crushed. I arrived about the same time as the ambulance but there was nothing to be done except to sit with the father and the mother, say a prayer that seemed pretty meaningless at the time, and be with them in their anguish. Next day there they all were in church on Good Friday. Yet, just maybe, that was the most appropriate Sunday for them to be present. In many ways the cross makes as much sense as the loss of their son. There on the cross, strung up for all to see, was the Son of God, in pain and dying – not a pretty sight. There was the supposed Saviour of the world, the one come to reveal God’s love, wrongly accused, convicted and hung out to die. Nonsensical to our way of thinking! As the missionary St Paul was to write: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” The God we have in the crucifixion is a loving God totally involved in the agony and shame that was taking place. God was not a distant observer. God was present with Jesus even in the bleakest of bleak moments, when the crucified man in agony wailed aloud to the silent heavens his fear of being forsaken. How human, how ‘at-one-with-us’, how remarkable is our God that even in our most distraught moments we have a God who understands, who in a sense has been there for our sakes. This gives comfort in my faith and in my ministry as I seek to

care for others in the name of Christ. I honestly cannot remember much of my first Good Friday service as an ordained minister 36 years ago, no idea about what I said or did, but I do remember the raw emotions, the tears of the community and the support offered towards that family. I can still name that little child in my mind and I still, on occasions around Good Friday, pray for the family.

2. The humanness along with the compassion of Christ are significant aspects of the cross for me. Jesus displays an amazing amount of care for his mother. He commends her into the keeping of 'the disciple he loved', presumed to be John, and makes John responsible for her ongoing care. This is interesting also in the light that there is reference to a wider family but Jesus chooses who will look after his mother. He didn't leave her wellbeing to chance but made sure she would be looked after as the eldest within the family. Even at the end his love, care and concern is quite exceptional.
3. The other thing that struck me in the John passage is that two men from beyond the immediate group of disciples claim the body of Jesus and give him a burial appropriate for him when others could well simply be thrown away to rot, when they had died on the crosses. Two secret admirers, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews and Nicodemus who had secretly come to him by night, are the ones to give Jesus a burial site with 'the trimmings' of myrrh and aloes to preserve and lessen the smell of a decaying body. It is not those closest to Jesus that care for him at this time but the secret admirers.

This Good Friday may we have, as a community, the pastoral care that Jesus showed.

May we have the compassion of Christ for those in desperate need.

May we see beyond ourselves to the world around us, and look to how, in the light of the cross we may serve others.

Let me close with a few words of Bruce Prewer written in his book 'Beyond Words' (page 60) – these are words that lead us into the events that are soon to come but are based out of this Good or Great Friday!

"It has taken almost a lifetime to divest my thoughts of dogma and theories which clutter and cloud the naked God of Good Friday.

Now your wounds speak to our wounds, your blood mingles with our blood. Your word of forgiveness dispels the slag of fear. Your love for a poor thief fills us with awesome hope. Your last cry in deep darkness has become our best prayer. It has taken almost a lifetime. The end is much nearer than when I first believed. When darkness falls over the world, I know you will be there."