

Good Friday

30.03.2018
By Trevor Williams

Introduction

Good Friday and Easter morning are inseparable. They belong to a single event whose impact has changed history, is capable of changing how we see our world, our life, our future.

Numerous theories have arisen to explain why God allowed an innocent man die like this. Was it to assuage God's anger, was it to pay the price for our sin? Or was it to prove that in God's plan, good will triumph over evil – that love will have the last word?

I suggest today we don't debate the theory, we simply hear the story of Good Friday and allow that story to speak to us of God's love for us and for our world.

As you stand at the foot of the cross this is an opportunity to see what it means for you now. It is an old story and there can be nothing new in it. Yet today is different from all other days. And you are attending to that story in the unique circumstances of your life just now, with today's joys and sorrows, today's hopes and fears, today's achievements and failures. Give time, today, to hear afresh, the Good Friday Story.

Text

John 18:1–19:42

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again, he asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go. 'This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it,

struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, 'You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing round it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.' When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?' Jesus answered, 'If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?' Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?' Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

28 Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters – again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

28 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.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that

he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Comment

1 Jesus said "Dear woman, here is your son,"... and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19.26-27)

Mary, Jesus' mother, and John one of Jesus closest disciples. He commits his mother and his disciple to support each other. In these words Jesus affirms what has always been his priority – relationships.

What matters in our life is not the size of the bank balance, not the size of our house, but the quality of our relationships. This is the true currency of life.

But the quality of intimacy that is pictured here between Mary and John, is not restricted just for family, for those next to us, or even restricted for those like us. It embraces the thief on the cross, even our enemy. Love your enemy says Jesus. Love is the hallmark of the Christian life, and what it means to follow Jesus. In the first letter of John we read these words. Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God (1 John 4.7).

We have seen already how Jesus loves, the extent to which He forgives

The types of people who he befriends, the sinners, the down and outs, those who any 'decent' person wouldn't associate with. Jesus encompasses those people also with his love. And in receiving his love marvelous things happen. They find new life.

Jesus' extraordinary life was an illustration of the message he preached. It was always about the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Right Relationships.

It was passion for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven that brought Jesus into confrontation with the Temple authorities and finally led to his crucifixion.

Jesus says to us, Take up your cross and follow me. In other words. live the life of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Right Relationships, now.

As followers of Jesus we are called to live an alternative lifestyle,
where peace is the alternative to violence
where inclusion is the alternative to the emergence of elites
where the sharing of goods is the alternative to amassing of wealth
where a God of the powerless is the alternative to a God who sanctions inequalities.
So as Jesus lived so he died – Caring first and foremost for right relationships

Jesus said to his mother, ``Dear woman, here is your son,’’... and to the disciple,
``Here is your mother.’’ From that time on, this disciple took her into his home’’

2 Jesus said, ``I am thirsty.’’ (John 19.28)

Jesus says “I thirst” quoting Psalm 69 ”Save me, O God... I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God...”

Why, out of all the physical abuse of the cross, is thirst singled out? Keep in mind that this is John’s Gospel. This is the Gospel in which Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for a drink. During that amazing encounter, Jesus says that everyone who drinks water from this well will thirst again, “but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty” (John 4.13–14).

And this is another dimension of what is missing when Jesus says “I thirst”. Christ continues to long for the coming of God’s kingdom. For God’s liberation of all creation. For the vision which St Paul wrote about in the letter to the Ephesians, ‘Gods purpose as a plan for the fullness of time, is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.’ But that is to anticipate Easter morning

But here on Good Friday we see the marshalling of all the evil powers of this world against the Son of God and we see their total destructiveness exemplified in the suffering of Christ to the point of death on the cross. When the love of God meets sin, there is suffering. God suffers for God is love.

What is sin? Sin includes the attitudes or prejudices, ways of acting or behaving, that destroys others rather than builds them up, that breaks right relationships rather than restoring peace. Sin is opposition to the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Right Relationships

God gave humanity a special place in his creation. We are given power to be the stewards of creation, in God’s name to care for and nurture the life of all things and all people. But our God given power has been misused. We have used power to dominate, exploit others for our gain. We have used our power to mine the earth’s wealth to extinction, we have disrupted the balance of nature due to our insatiable desire to consume, we have used the power of violence to pursue our selfish desires.

We collude with world systems of Domination which emanate for the love of power rather than the power of love. Domination of economic and political power, through violence if necessary, is accepted as the way to achieve security. We see these domination systems on the news every night. It is the way of the world. And

these systems are so powerful, they hold us in their grip. They enslave us in patterns of living which are totally contrary to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was put to death by these powers. On the cross we see, clearly and unambiguously, the consequences of living by such distorted patterns of behavior.

- The abuse of power, to dominate through violence
- The abuse of privilege, for self rather than service.
- The abuse of our humanity, through greed devoid of gratitude

The temple authorities handed Jesus to the Roman authorities to humiliate, torture, make a public spectacle of this Jesus who would challenge their authority. He suffered because of his commitment to the Kingdom of God, God's will for the good of all creation. He refused to compromise. He refused to join in their violent power games and resist. He died as he lived, loving, caring and suffering for the good of others.

Crucifixion was one of the central ways in which authorities in the ancient world set out quite deliberately to show subject peoples who was in charge and to break the spirit of any resistance. The power of domination.

It was a humiliating and shameful death, by slow torture where the body was left on the cross until nothing was left. This is what Jesus endured when he refused to deny the Kingdom of God.

3 Jesus said "It is accomplished" John 19:30

It was a lot more than the end of suffering. Jesus had fulfilled his God given mission. From the baptism in the Jordan to crucifixion at Galgotha Jesus had remained faithful.

Could the cross have been avoided? Only if Christ was the compromise on his message, his life, his work his relationship with God the Father. That was not an option.

Jesus lived the Kingdom of God, refusing to retaliate, to meet violence with violence. That's the way of the world. At his trial he refused even to answer trumped up accusations and false representations. He became the scapegoat for the elite, was led out to be slaughtered. He accepted, absorbed the evil violence of the powerful, and in so doing neutralized it.

It is accomplished, a cry of joy, of victory the work he had been sent to do.

He completed his journey without wavering, without denying the way, the truth and the life God had given him. 'It is accomplished.' All has been done.

It wasn't 'til Easter morning that the world saw that Jesus was vindicated by God. Jesus showed that the greatest power in the world wasn't the systems of domination, superstates, the powerful economic and political forces, the culture of 'self-first' that drives our consumerist culture, the culture that seems able to disregard justice, dismiss love as irrelevant, and act with impunity.

Good Friday followed by Easter morning proved that God's love, shown in Christ Jesus, is the greatest power in our world. The powers were defeated on the cross. They had done their worst, and ultimately failed.

If God's love is the greatest power in the world we can say with Paul "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8.38-39).

Response

1. How is the story of Good Friday a source of hope for you?
2. It is in returning to the story of Jesus' passion and resurrection that we are renewed in God's love. How do you keep this story central to your life? What helps you? What distracts you?
3. Are you convinced that the greatest power in the world is the love of God? How may that reality change your perspective on events that trouble you?

Prayer

Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have given us,
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.

Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day.

Amen.

Richard, Bishop of Chichester 1253

