

## Good Friday 2019 Medstead

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this service for Good Friday.

Our time together represents the three hours of darkness when Jesus was on the cross.

And perhaps no time in history has been pondered on and entered into as much as these hours of Christ's crucifixion.

The simple words of St Luke: "*They crucified him there*" - have become the pivot of human history.

The Gospel writers dedicated some 40% of their writings to the suffering of Christ, because it is his passion and death that makes sense of his life.

Their account has been studied, questioned and analysed more than any other story in history.

Together they are the most prayed about, sung about and thought about passages in literature and art and countless books have been written.

At one level the story is simple, even austere – both of the horror and of the wonder. On another level it goes deeper than any other moment in human history reaching the depths of depravity and hell.

The cross of Christ is everywhere. We see crosses in churches, outside churches, in market squares, in jewelry, on mountain tops, on flags.

And every time I conduct a baptism, during the service, I refer to what happened on this day.

As I mark the baby with the sign of the cross, it is a moment of significance because in every service, the cross on the face reminds us of the face on the cross.

It is not a happy gesture, drawing a means of execution on a new-born's forehead isn't exactly acceptable.

And yet it says, in every case, let this person, whoever they are, be a faithful Christian, taking up their cross and following Jesus.

This afternoon we explore what that means.

We are all invited to kneel before the cross, to adore and in adoration to be caught up and

overwhelmed by the love of Jesus Christ, and above all to respond by committing ourselves to follow him.

Why should we?

It is love that is the cause of the cross. It was not the nails that held him there, but the love of God – arms outstretched embracing the world – embracing you and me.

Our response to this love is what makes us a Christian.

So as we begin, let us stand to pray:

*Lord Jesus,*

*On this Good Friday, reveal to us the giftings of this day.*

*This day can be so bleak. We see how you were broken by the torment of humanity, yet you broke the back of death.*

*We hear the echo of your cry to your Father from the Cross, as you experienced the silence of God, but we pray that in our silences we would hear the sounds of hope and of freedom.*

*Lord, in your great mercy – bless our time together at the foot of your cross.*

*Amen.*

HYMN: There is a Green hill

FIRST READING: Isaiah 52.13 – 53.12- *“Surely he has born our griefs”*

<sup>13</sup> See, my servant will act wisely;

he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

<sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were appalled at him –

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being

and his form marred beyond human likeness –

<sup>15</sup> so he will sprinkle many nations,

and kings will shut their mouths because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see,

and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Who has believed our message

and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

<sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by mankind,

a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low  
esteem.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering,  
yet we considered him punished by God,  
stricken by him, and afflicted.  
<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on  
him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
Yet who of his generation protested?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was  
punished.

<sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,

though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.  
<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and  
cause him to suffer,  
and though the LORD makes his life an offering  
for sin,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his  
hand.

<sup>11</sup> After he has suffered,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied.  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will  
justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion among the  
great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

TALK – What does it mean that God shares our  
griefs?

We are, I'm sure, all very familiar with the story  
of Footprints in the sand.  
You often see it printed on cards in gift shops.

It tells the story of a man who had a dream that he was walking along a beach with Jesus, behind them they leave a trail of footprints in the sand.

Scenes from his life come into his mind – and he then notices that when he was going through times of pain and suffering there was only one set of footprints.

This bothered him and he says to Jesus – why did you leave me when I was going through difficult times?

*"You said that you would always stay with me in my life, that you'd walk with me all the way.*

*But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."*

Jesus replied: *"My precious child, I do love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."*

In our reading from Isaiah we hear the line:

*Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering.*

Other translations say: *It was our suffering he carried.*

And another:

*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:*

There was a cross in the heart of God before there was a cross on the hill outside Jerusalem.

The broad beams on which the universe is built are in the shape of a cross.

The point is Jesus has been carrying the world's sufferings on his shoulders for all time.

He feels your pain – always has done – the cross on Good Friday is simply a moment in time when we see the eternal compassion of God.

He came to show us the Father –  
As he once said: *If you have seen me you have seen the Father.*

In other words, if you have seen the crucifixion you have seen the ultimate compassion of God for all creation.

The cross of Christ is the cross-beam that supports our very existence.

Or as John Austen Baker once said: In a timeless way, *“the hands that hold us in existence are scared with unimaginable nails”*.

Where is God?

The question asked throughout time, and especially at moments of devastation and loss.

The answer has always been that he is on the cross, hanging in there with us, and truly present within the crosses we bear in our lives.

But the cross is more than a revelation of the compassion of God.

Something is happening on the cross that redeems the world's suffering.

I remember once a preacher on Good Friday. He began his sermon by placing a rather broken, bent, rusty old bird cage beside his pulpit while he told a story.

This is how it went – Once an unkempt, unwashed, little lad about 10 years old was coming up the alley swinging this old caved in bird cage with several tiny birds shivering on the floor of it.

As he came along the preacher asked the boy where he got the birds.

He said he trapped them.

So the preacher asked what he was going to do with them.

The boy said he was going to play with them and have fun with them.

The preacher said, “Sooner or later you’ll get tired of them. Then what are you going to do with them?”

The lad said, “I have some cats at home. They like birds. I’ll feed them to my cats.”

The preacher said, “Son, how much do you want for the birds?”

The boy, surprised, hesitated and said, “Mister, you don’t want these birds. There just plain old field birds. They can’t even sing. They’re ugly.”

The preacher said, "Just tell me. How much do you want?"

The grubby little lad thought about it. He squinted up one eye. He calculated and hesitated and said, "Two quid?"

To his surprise the preacher reached into his pocket and handed the boy two, one pound coins.

The preacher took the cage.

The boy, in a wink, hurried up the alley.

In a sheltered crevice between buildings, the preacher opened the door of the cage and tapping on the rusty exterior he encouraged the little birds, one at a time, to find their way out through the narrow door and fly away.

Thus having accounted for the empty cage beside his pulpit, the preacher went on to tell what seemed, at first, like a separate story.

About how once upon a time, Jesus and the Devil had engaged in a negotiation.

Satan had boasted how he'd baited a trap in Eden's garden and caught himself a world full of people.

"What are you going to do with all those people in your cage" Jesus wanted to know.

The Devil said, "I'm going to play with em', tease em'. Make them fight and kill one another. I'm going to teach them to throw bombs on one another. I'm going to have fun with them!"

Jesus said, "You can't have fun with them forever. When you get tired of playing, what are you going to do with them?"

Satan said, "Condemn them! They're no good anyway! Condemn them! Kill them!"

Jesus said, "How much do you want for them?"

Satan said, "You can't be serious! If I sell them to you, they'll just spit on you. They'll hate you. They'll hit you and beat you. They'll hammer nails into you! They're no good."

Jesus said, "How much?"

Satan said, "All of your tears and all of your blood. That's the price."

Jesus took the cage, and paid the price, and opened the door.

Because of the Cross of Christ, 'we are reconciled to God' and 'can know him as friend', he said.

'Our lives can start with the debit balance of all our sin set at zero as far as God is concerned. Love washes away our sin.'

This is GOOD Friday – because this is where we find forgiveness.

SILENCE

SONG: Gentle Christ

PRAYER

Let us pray:

*O Christ, you were put to death by cruel  
people who nailed your arms to a cross;  
Yet long before you stretched out your arms  
in love to all.  
Your body was broken and your blood shed  
So that we might be healed and made whole.  
You were faithful unto death  
So that we might be faithful unto life.  
May your way be our way.  
May we too stretch out our arms in love to all.*

HYMN: Glory be to Jesus

SECOND READING: Matthew 26.36-46 – “*Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane*”

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' <sup>37</sup> He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'

<sup>39</sup> Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'

<sup>40</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. <sup>41</sup> 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

<sup>42</sup> He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'

<sup>43</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup> So he

left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

<sup>45</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!'

TALK – Out of the dust...

Holy Week always begins and ends with a celebration.

Palm Sunday – huge crowds gathering around Jesus – waving their palms.

Hosanna – “save us”.

By Thursday – Jesus is showing us through sign and symbol that he will answer their prayer by allowing his body to be broken and his blood to be shed.

By Thursday night we find ourselves in Gethsemane.

By Good Friday – it happens. The Cross – from which our faith is measured, by which the love of

God is measured – the extent that God is willing to save us is laid bare.

The cry, the prayer to save us is answered – as the hand of God reaches a-cross to rescue any who would take it.

And the week ends with the celebration of Easter.

But this Holy Week journey cannot reach its destination without the Cross.

And so the cross remains.

I remember the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti. Total destruction – including the cathedral – and yet, there in the midst of the rubble stood a white marble cross.

Nine Eleven – and the collapse of the two Twin Towers – In amongst the devastation a fireman discovered an huge iron cross...which to this day stands as a symbol of God's presence in amongst the loss.

And Monday night – Notre Dame.

As President Macron and others walked into the shell of the building – they stood in silence as despite the wreckage of the once beautiful cathedral – the cross remained on the High Altar.

The West end of Notre Dame is the centre point from which everything is measured in France. For us, "how far is it to London?" is answered officially by how far it is to Nelson's Column.

"How far is it to Paris?" – is how far you are from the cathedral of Our Lady.

It is not only a medieval jewel but the epicentre of the nation's story –

It took 200 years to build, it has survived 850 years, and yet it took minutes to burn.

As the ashes rose and fell on the crowds, they stood in tears as the red flames rose and the yellow smoke from the lead roof billowed into the bright blue sky. Strangely beautiful.

The cross of Christ is strangely beautiful – and yet catastrophic in its reality that this is what we are capable of – crucifying goodness.

We speak of Notre Dame as being iconic. It has more visitors than anywhere else in Europe – twice as many as Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London put together.

The word icon means a window – through which it is not so much us looking at God, but God

looking at us. Any place of worship is not so much us coming to God, but God coming to us.

Notre Dame - "Our Lady" – Our Lady of tears – just as our lady, and the other women stood in tears before the cross of Christ.

It is said that the original crown of thorns was displayed in Notre Dame. Certainly this relic is over 1000 years old – possibly 2000 years – either way, it is a symbol of Good Friday – the mocking of Christ, the abuse he experienced as he was stripped naked and bullied.

As it happens the relic was rescued from Notre Dame by those brave enough to save it.

But it is said that we don't know how precious something is to us until it is gone.

Who would have thought that in such a secular country as France would grieve so deeply when their Notre Dame cathedral was almost destroyed – taken from them?

In our country the Church is still here – the cross, and all it represents, is still here – people so often turn to the church when we want to celebrate a wedding, rejoice at the birth of a child, grieve when a loved one dies.

Perhaps these buildings, the nations places of worship, that now officially outnumber pubs in this country – yes there are more churches than pubs - still remain because they are still at the heart of who we are.

And within every one of them there stands a cross. The epicentre of our faith – from which everything is measured.

President Macron immediately announced that Notre Dame will rise again – it will be rebuilt – and within hours of Monday night – pledges of money was pouring in.

When the original St Paul’s cathedral burned to the ground in the Great Fire of London in 1666 – it is said that the first stone picked up from the rubble that remained had words engraved on it: “I will rise again”.

It is Friday - but Sunday’s coming’.

SILENCE

SONG – John Lofthouse

PRAYER

*Lord Christ,  
On the cross, on the nails,  
you loved beyond reason and forgave  
beyond measure.  
you gave the forces of evil their notice to  
quit.  
you soaked up this world’s sadness like a  
sponge in vinegar.  
you lost – and won – in a single, glorious  
throw of the dice.  
On the cross, on the nails.*

*In the hands, in the side,  
you felt the misery of this world’s  
cruelty.  
you endured the hammer blows of the  
world, the flesh and the devil.  
you experienced the pain of the  
tortured, disfigured humanity.  
you lost the power to live, and won the  
right to glory.  
In the hands, in the side.*

*Through the sweat, through the blood,  
we see the eternal face of a suffering  
God.  
We glimpse the anguish of a crucified  
Creator.*

*We begin to believe the impossible  
happening.  
We begin to know that our God saves to  
the uttermost – and then beyond.*

*In the darkness, in the darkness  
All our prayers have died, save this:  
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have  
mercy on me, a sinner.*

(John Pritchard – The Intercessions Handbook)

**HYMN: A Song for Good Friday:** If we'd been  
there so long ago - *Tune: O Waly Waly*

If we'd been there so long ago  
When Jesus died upon the cross  
Would we have walked with him along  
That way of anguish, pain and loss?  
  
Would we have stood and watched him  
there,  
And heard him cry with dying breath?  
Would we have seen him give his life,  
and hand the victory to death?  
  
Would we have grasped what nailed him  
there –  
It was our pride and cruelty,  
Our lying, fear, injustice – these  
Died with our Lord upon the tree?

When dawn first broke on Easter day  
And new light shone not from the sun  
But from the Son, would we have seen  
that dark had died and light had won?

But just as then, we turn our back,  
The light is bright, our eyes are dim,  
We live as if our Lord is dead,  
And hand the triumph back to sin.

So break our hearts, these caves of stone,  
To set the resurrection free,  
And loose our limbs from darkness' shroud  
To live, and live abundantly.

READING: Luke 23.26-49 – *The Crucifixion*

<sup>26</sup> As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. <sup>28</sup> Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" <sup>30</sup> Then

“they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’  
and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’”

<sup>31</sup> For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?

<sup>32</sup> Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

<sup>35</sup> The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.’

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar <sup>37</sup> and said, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’

<sup>38</sup> There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: ‘Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’

<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. ‘Don’t you fear God,’ he said, ‘since you are under the same sentence? <sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are

getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.’

<sup>42</sup> Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’

<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.’

<sup>44</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.

<sup>47</sup> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’ <sup>48</sup> When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. <sup>49</sup> But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

TALK: Jesus on the cross – why the cross is central – what kind of love?

Let us pray:

*On the Cross of Christ I see  
Jesus' arms outstretched for me  
Loving Jesus let me be  
Still and quite and close to thee.  
Learning all thy love for me:  
Giving all my love to thee.  
Amen.*

Those words of Jesus:

*"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me  
in paradise",*

are perhaps the most beautiful words in  
existence.

They are words of such reassuring generosity,  
such conviction of faith, words that should be  
taken to heart whenever we reflect upon our  
lives.

Something that we perhaps never really hear  
preached is the thought that when we die, in a  
twinkling of an eye, the next thing we are  
conscious of is being raised from death.

But not raised alone, somehow grieving the ones  
we have left behind. This is not a resurrection in  
solitude.

The teachings of the New Testament are that we  
are raised together.

We are instantaneously together – not just with  
our great grandparents, or parents, but with our  
great, great grandchildren.

When we die, we don't say goodbye, but say hello.

The last day is a single day of resurrection for all  
who Christ has redeemed.

The word Paradise is a Persian word that means  
*"exquisite garden"* a garden fit for a King or  
Queen.

The story of our humanity and of our redemption,  
is played out in gardens. The Paradise of the  
Garden of Eden becomes a wilderness through  
our destructive and selfish nature.

Jesus wrestles with evil in the wilderness that  
that garden had become. We have remembered  
this throughout Lent.

And then Jesus wrestles again with his fear of  
death in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And on the cross, he turns to a repentant thief,  
who has only one fear left, the fear of meeting  
God.

And with a compassion that springs from the very heart of God and the source of all that we call good, he gives him the gift that today he would be with him in the Garden of Easter,

the Paradise one day we will also find ourselves in, if we but trust him.

Maybe we have death all wrong. Because we always think of it as ending a leaving, a goodbye, instead of being a new birth.

The story we have touched on during this part of our Good Friday service is full of paradoxes.

Jesus the Bread of life is now the broken bread of the Last Supper.

He who had made clay with spit to rub on the eyes to heal a blind man, is now spat upon.

The reeds and palms of Palm Sunday, become the reeds with which they strike his head.

The whip he used for cleansing the Temple is turned on Christ at his scourging.

Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth is flung down onto the handiwork of another

carpenter who has made a cross out of wood.

The hammer and nails the carpenter Jesus would so often have used, now pin him down.

The Good Shepherd becomes the Lamb for the sacrifice.

He who asked for a drink from the women at the well, the One who was the spring of the water for all life, finds himself thirsting on the cross.

The one who said: *"I shall never leave you nor forsake you"*, finds himself crying: *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

And Jesus experiences the silence of God.

And within the silence, he says the words from Psalm 31 verse 5:

*"Father, into your hands I place my Spirit".*

Jewish mothers taught their children to say this prayer before they went to sleep. It was the bedtime prayer. The verse continues with the words:

*"You save me, Lord, you are a faithful God".*

And Jesus says it now, his night-time prayer which he would have said with his mother as a child. His mother, listening at the foot of the cross, would have heard it too, and together they would have said *Amen*.

Jesus simply adds the word "*Father*", and then dies like a child falling asleep in his father's arms. Jesus did not come to explain our sufferings, nor to take them all away. He came to fill them with his presence. God offers no promise to shield us from the evil of this fallen world. There is no immunity guaranteed from sickness, pain, sorrow or death. He never promises to save us from suffering, only to be with us in the midst of it and that he is himself afflicted by it.

Sometimes we too have to live with the silence of God and for the Christian that is our greatest test. But what he does pledge is his never-failing presence. Nothing can take that away. Always he is with us and he promises us a Safe Arrival.

One day we will be with him in Paradise. And in the long run, that is all we need to know.

SILENCE

What kind of love is this that Jesus allowed himself to be crucified – not by constraint – it was

not the nails that held him there, but the love he has for you.

What kind of love is this – that we have for Christ when all is said and done.

Despite our searchings for meaning. Despite what we deem to be unanswered prayer when tragedy strikes our family or those we love?

What kind of love is this that Jesus allowed himself to be crucified – not by constraint – it was not the nails that held him there, but the love he has for you.

What kind of love is this that gave itself for me? A love that demands my life, my soul my all.

SONG: What Kind Of Love

PRAYER

*O Lord, there is silence now from your cross, It is done, and the horror of what we have done dawns upon us. Yet it was you who turned your face to Calvary, stretched out your arms wide to embrace the cross-beam and the whole world.*

*Lord we thank you for this Good day, this  
Good Friday, and we praise you that Sunday  
is coming.*

*Jesus, remember me, as you remembered the  
man who was dying next to you,*

*Jesus, remember me, as you remember all  
who are lonely or frightened,*

*And when I die, take me into your loving  
arms,*

*And show me that your Kingdom has never  
been far away.*

*Angela Ashwin*

HYMN: When I survey

SILENCE