

Address – Good Friday – 2/4/21

Mark: 15:16-41

“And they crucified Him.” (Mark 15:24)

I wouldn’t say that we ever speak glibly about the crucifixion, but we do talk and sing about Jesus death without really batting an eyelid. There is a green hill far away outside a city wall, where the dear Lord was crucified who died to save us all. We sing the praise of him who died, of Him who died upon the cross. In the cross of Christ I glory. Familiarity with the last events of Jesus life can easily push its significance out of focus - we go into automatic pilot as we say, Oh yes, I know what happens next in this story. It’s perhaps only when we come to this time of year and listen to the story right through as we have been doing each day during the week that the real horror of what happened hits us. It’s true that Mark doesn’t dwell on the fact that Jesus was crucified - it takes him four words and then he’s on to describe how the soldiers took Jesus clothes and gambled to see who was to get what - but the act of crucifixion was the culmination of Jesus suffering and it was only the beginning of his death.

Jesus had met with his disciples for the last time and shared with them supper and fellowship, teaching and anguish. From the Upper Room they had gone to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus plumbed the depths of human suffering in anguished prayer, wrestling with God. It must have been pretty late at night when the armed crowd came to arrest him. The trial before the Sanhedrin took place illegally during the hours of darkness and probably went on most of the night because the various false witnesses could not agree on a story. When Jesus is finally accused of blasphemy, he is blindfolded and spat at, taken by the guards and beaten. By morning, he is all alone - the disciples have fled, Peter has disowned him, and the Sanhedrin have officially condemned Him to death. Because of the Roman occupation, the Jewish authorities did not have the power to exercise the death penalty themselves and Jesus had to be taken to the Governor. As we have read, the angry crowd shout for his death and Pilate hands Him over to be flogged and then crucified. While they’re waiting, the soldiers decide to have some sport at Jesus’ expense – subjecting Him to humiliation by addressing him as a king with a purple robe and a crown of thorns, and mocking him, falling on their knees in front of him. In the midst of all this he is struck again and again with a stick and spat at. Only then is He forced to walk out of the city to Golgotha, carrying the cross beam on which he is to be crucified. From the time he was arrested until the time the crucifixion

actually took place, Jesus had been suffering the most brutal abuse for over ten hours. He was nailed to the cross sometime around 9am. It was 3pm before He died. Another six hours.

When we speak or sing of the dear Lord being crucified or of Him who died upon the cross, we cannot underestimate the sheer brutality of all that Jesus endured. And yet the *physical* pain that Jesus suffered is not what is important as we seek to understand what happened at the Cross. As human beings, we can all relate to physical suffering - we've all had some ache or pain at some point in our lives that we have found difficult to bear, and at least in some measure we can understand what it meant to undergo physical pain on the cross. But the pain that really caused Jesus grief was the agony of coming under the condemnation of God and being separated from Him. Think of the closeness that Jesus enjoyed with His heavenly Father - He existed from the very beginning of time with God and even after the Incarnation He was engaged (as a man) ceaselessly in prayer - there was no sin in Him that could mar their relationship. Then at the height of his physical pain, after ten hours of torture and six hours on the cross, the father laid on him the iniquity of us all, the sin of the whole world from its beginning to its end. As Paul was to write later, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. Utterly alone, bearing the judgment of God that should have been laid at the door of every single one of us, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" and He submitted to a death that He did not deserve so that all who come to God pleading that sacrifice may be freed from condemnation, freed from the separation from God that is justly due to us, and be reconciled with God instead.

It was that bearing of the sin of the world which was the real pain that Jesus suffered at Calvary, and it is something that concerns everyone of us; it is something that we must all respond to one way or the other because we are all implicated in Christ death. We are accomplices in the injustice that led to Jesus execution; we stand side by side with those who hammered the nails.

Those who were there that day in person reacted to Jesus in different ways. I wonder which of the reactions we share?

For the soldiers, mocking and torturing Jesus was a game. He was going to die anyway, so what did it matter what they did to him beforehand? They were probably conscripts from other parts of the Roman Empire, serving their time and longing to get home again. The more fun they could have until then the better.

For how many people in our world today, is Jesus simply a figure of fun and a name to be used as an expletive - the insults that so many fling at Him still are among the sins that he bore on the Cross. Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do.

The chief priests also mocked Jesus, but they should have known better. Their insults amounted to blasphemy because they had been entrusted with the spiritual oversight of God's people and not only were they failing to recognise Him themselves, they were also pushing others away.

There is a danger for us in the Church to be guilty of the same sin - if we keep others from finding Jesus then we cause Him terrible pain. Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do.

What about Simon from Cyrene, who carried Jesus Cross? Certainly he was forced to undertake that task by the soldiers because Jesus had become too weak to carry it himself, but to have been a help to Jesus at the hour of His greatest need must have had an effect on him personally. Mark tells us here that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, a fact that would be of no significance unless these two were known to the early church for whom Mark first wrote. It would seem to me that even at Jesus weakest moment, He had begun his reign in that family. What a blessing when the meaning of Jesus' death becomes clear to a person and they acknowledge Him to be their Lord - that lordship overflows into their family and to all around them. Go and make disciples of all people.

There were the women who had followed Jesus right from Galilee, caring for his needs. We are not told what their reaction was, but we *are* told that they were there. They remained faithful even when the other disciples had fled, and they were rewarded by being among the first to see Jesus risen from the dead. Does Jesus provoke faithfulness in you? That consistency will surely be blessed.

Then there was the centurion. He had probably seen Jesus suffering throughout that day, and it had obviously had a profound effect on him. "Surely this man was the Son of God," he declare. As we ponder the story of the last days of Jesus life, let us recognise Jesus for who He is and confess that joyfully before the world.

But finally, one person who wasn't actually there when Jesus died - Barabbas. It was he who had been freed by Pilate when Jesus was sentenced to be crucified. Jesus had quite literally stood in his place. We are not told whether he was even aware of that fact, and quite possibly he was

right back to his terrorist activities, unable to believe his good fortune at being released. We are like Barabbas in that none of us is mentioned in these pages by name either, but we're all here – Jesus stood in place of each one of us on that Cross, bearing the punishment for our sin. We cannot go on unmoved, as if nothing has happened.

“And they crucified Him.”

I have sinned, but they crucified *Him*.