



GOOD FRIDAY

10 APRIL, 2020



A message from Michael

Today there is no sermon. We will journey through a series of meditations.

If you can gather some flowers, you can use them during the service, tearing off petals as a symbolic action.

Today we remember Jesus' life and ministry...the moments of inspiration and hope, and the slowly growing awareness that his vision would encounter difficulties; finally, that the authorities moved to eliminate him.

What do we take from his mission and message? How does it connect with us and help us through hard times?

Rev MB

Jesus' Funeral



On a hilltop outside the city walls, Jesus was crucified between two bandits.

Jesus was alone. Some of his female followers stood at a distance, but the rest had deserted him, unable to watch and pray, as Jesus had asked. Even the bandits taunted him.

On the cross, Jesus was given a title, one that he had queried all through his ministry, 'Messiah, King.'

On that day, he was king only of the abandoned, the tortured and the dead. Everything he had worked for lay in ruins, like so much rubble after a catastrophic earthquake.

How shall we remember him?

What title, what name shall we give him, this strange prophet, this Saviour who couldn't even save himself?

When someone who has inspired us dies, we gather to pay tribute, to share stories, and to be caught up again in their story. We want to be reminded what it was in their vision of life that gave meaning to ours.

Today is Jesus' funeral day;
we gather to pay tribute.

1. Jesus began his ministry full of so much hope and enthusiasm



MATTHEW 4:12-19

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake.

Words spoken by the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled:

On the road by the sea, across the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles –
the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.

From that time, Jesus began to proclaim, 'Turn around, join in; the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.'

REFLECTION

Strange to think there was a shadow, even then at the start of Jesus' ministry John was arrested. But when Jesus began, he burst onto the scene, full of life, energy and hope, brimful with enthusiasm, and such insight.

Yes, life could be turned on its head. The people he spoke to were moved. Many embraced a new way of living with God; even the Gentiles were included. Some called it naïve, the idealism of the young, but oh! What splendour it gave to our lives!

Yes, it was challenging, but Jesus was ready to engage the whole world with good news, to confront the powerful; so many were caught up in it.

It might just have happened. Do you recall the first lines of G.M. Hopkins' famous poem,

*'The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.'*

It was just like that.

Jesus reminded us that God's Spirit comes as a new bud, with the promise of beauty, waiting to be unfurled.

Do you remember Cathy Freeman at the Sydney Olympics winning the 400 metres? That last bend, the grace of the moment. When she won, it seemed like everything was possible, for the indigenous community, for the whole nation...

Loving God, we give thanks for every moment when our lives have been graced with hope... Jesus stirred people to believe in new possibilities, so close you could touch them

But now, is it no longer safe to dream?

2. Jesus perceives a much more difficult way ahead



MATTHEW 16: 21-23

From that time on, Jesus began to tell his disciples he must go to Jerusalem, undergo great suffering at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Peter immediately took him aside and began to rebuke him, 'God forbid, Lord! This must never happen to you.'

Jesus turned to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block; you are setting your mind not on divine things but human things.'

REFLECTION

Things did not turn out the way Jesus expected. His mission struck obstacles – the enthusiasm of many faded, society's profoundly ingrained inertia, the reach of the Temple; these ever-present realities that always loomed large would not shift or change. And God still seemed elusive: yes, present on the mountain top that day - yes! But not to the high priest, Caiaphas, and fellow religious leaders

They couldn't see it; they had other priorities. This slow down unsettled Jesus. The ebbing hope of that prayer, 'Your kingdom come ..' turned him inside out. He got edgy, shouting at Peter. He was grappling with that unwelcome reality, the dark side of life, which always rises up to confront hope, or more accurately, sticks to you like mud and drags you down.

If only it could be set aside with a display of defiance, like Peter's, 'No, Master, this will never happen to you.' Jesus reminded us that facing the darkness, taking account of the mud...this takes courage and a lot of resilience.

It can also lead to a crisis; it did for Jesus. The Spirit of God does not engineer a shortcut through this. No...We feel the Spirit move away from us, but it's not moving away, it's moving ahead, beckoning us further into the darkness

Do you recall the bushfires earlier this year, the devastation, the loss of homes, communities gutted, but also the sacrifices, the bravery, and the people coming together to help? Wasn't that enough?

But, no, there was more. We entered into a pandemic.

Loving God, Jesus had to make some tough decisions. We all have to at some point.

There was no shortcut for Jesus; there are no shortcuts for us.

Oh! How we wish there were!

Sadly, our dreams get worn and shabby, even disfigured.

3. The beginning of the end; Jesus confronts the elite in the Temple



MATTHEW 21: 12-17

Jesus entered the Temple and drove out all who were selling and buying. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves.

‘My house shall be a house of prayer’;
but you have made it a den of robbers.’

The blind and the lame came to him, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw what he did, and heard children crying out in the Temple, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’, they were angry.

Jesus left them, went out of the city to Bethany for his own safety, and spent the night there.

REFLECTION

At first, it was all about love, and hope, and gentleness, but as opposition grew, we saw a hard edge in Jesus. Was it ruthlessness?

His reasoning was difficult to follow, and then there was the explosion of anger in the Temple. Well, that was the beginning of the end. What did he hope to achieve? Being Passover, the Roman garrison was perched high up in the Antonia Fortress, overlooking the Temple courtyard. They saw it all, the mayhem, the chaos he caused

Of course, we weren’t keen on the High Priest and his mob, doing deals with Pilate, the Roman Governor. But at least, it allowed worship in the Temple to continue. We all have to make adjustments.

Not Jesus, not on that day. Jesus’ presence and the disruption he caused sent shock waves through the Temple. To see his eyes - intense, dark, angry, utterly focused. He was brave, without question.

But what was he doing?

From that day, he was a marked man. The end had begun. We had to go into hiding that night. We knew the authorities would strike during darkness. God’s Spirit as gentle, healing, inspiring. We value that; but disruptive, forceful, angry in a holy place that’s unsettling.

Gracious God, it's hard to call to mind such moments in his life. Why couldn't he have restrained himself, and returned to Galilee to continue exercising a fruitful ministry?

4. The end



MATTHEW 27: 38-55

Two bandits were crucified with Jesus, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, 'You who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'

The chief priests mocked him, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him. He said, "I am God's Son." '

Even the bandits taunted him.

From noon, darkness came over the land. At three in the afternoon, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?'

Then, he breathed his last.

The curtain of the Temple was torn in two. The earth shook, rocks were split.

When the centurion saw the earthquake and what took place, he was terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Many women were there, watching from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him.

A POEM BY BRUCE DAWE

'And a Good Friday was had by all'

You men there, keep those women back,
And, God Almighty, he laid down
on the crossed timbers and Old Silenius,
my offsider, looked at me as if to say
nice work for soldiers, your mind's not your own,
once you sign that dotted line, 'Ave Caesar'
and all that malarkey, 'Imperator Rex.'

Well this Nazarene
didn't make it any easier
really - not like the ones
who kick up a fuss so you can
do your block and take it out on them.

Silenius
held the spikes steady and I let fly
with the sledge-hammer, not looking
on the downswing, trying hard not to hear
over the women's wailing, the bones give way,
the iron shocking the dumb wood.

Orders is orders, I said after it was over.
nothing personal you understand - we
had a drill-sergeant once, thought he was God,
but he wasn't a patch on you.

Then we hauled on the ropes and
he rose in the hot air
like a diver just leaving the springboard, arms spread,
so it seemed,
over the whole damned creation,
over the big men who must have had it in for him,
and the curious ones who'll watch anything if it's free,
with only the usual women caring anywhere
and a blind man in tears.

Moving ahead

AN INVITATION

You're invited to pause, take some time to reflect and maybe write down your responses to these questions:

- *What do you take from Jesus' story?*

- *What name do you give him?*



Benediction

What will survive of Jesus' vision?
To find out we have to travel through
darkness.

Go now in peace, enter the darkness;
trust in whatever glimmer of light
you discover.

Amen

Stay in touch:



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