

# Good Friday 2 April 2021

## Introduction

Welcome to our act of worship for Good Friday. For this act of worship as we think about the events of the Friday before the resurrection day over 2000 years ago, I am going to use some of the meditations by Nick Fawcett from his book No Ordinary Man book 2. Nick does suggest which of his meditations to use for a usual length act of worship but as we are keeping our worship shorter I am just using some of them.

**Hymn** There is a green hill far away

## Prayer

Gracious God, we fail you, we deny you, we abandon and betray you, yet still you love us, still you have mercy, nothing able to exhaust your grace. So we come, with our faults and weaknesses, all our doubt and disobedience, seeking again your renewing touch upon our lives. Help us to stand again before the cross and to receive the forgiveness you so freely offer so that our lives may speak of your goodness and honour you through all we are and all we do. Amen

## Reflection 1

How would you have acted had you been hanging on the cross in place of Jesus, listening to the sneers and shouts of your enemies as they watched you writhing in agony? Would you have called down curses down upon them from heaven? I think I might have done. Would you have cried out in anger, 'Why me?' 'What have I done to deserve this? Again, yes I think I might. Or would you have been so preoccupied with your pain and misery that you had no thoughts for anyone but yourself. On reflection I think that is the most likely of all. Let us hear what Pilate thought after what he had done.

**Reading: John 18: 33-38**

**Meditation** 'Truth!' I said. 'What is truth? Pilate

'Truth!' I said. 'What is truth?'

No, I wasn't trying to be clever,  
despite what some people may tell you.

I really meant it,

for I'd encountered so many over the years  
convinced they had the answer,  
each swearing blind that they knew best,  
party to some special knowledge denied to others.

Well, they couldn't all be right, could they?  
and, the way I see it, none of them were.

Some were downright crazy,  
others well-intentioned but misguided,  
a few with genuine insights to offer,  
but not one of them had the truth,  
the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Life just isn't like that - black and white –  
and anyone who thinks otherwise is potentially dangerous,  
all the makings of a dictator or fanatic –  
believe me, I've trodden that road myself.

So when this Jesus fellow trotted out the same old refrain  
you can understand my being sceptical.

Quite simply I'd seen it all before.

Or at least, that's what I thought;

only it soon became apparent that there was more to this man  
than met the eye,

something quite out of the ordinary.

I'd expected him to launch straightaway into some diatribe,  
to tell me, as they always do, why he was right and I was wrong.

But he didn't.

He just looked at me with an expression that left me mystified,  
unlike anything I'd seen before.

None of the usual cocktail of fear and bravado,  
laced with a liberal dash of resentment,  
not even the remotest suggestion of it.

Instead there was what seemed like pity, concern,

even compassion -  
as though he was genuinely disappointed, I didn't understand,  
as though he longed for my eyes to be opened,  
as though he actually cared about the way I responded.  
It threw me completely, I don't mind admitting it;  
after all, I was the one conducting the trial, not him.  
At least, that's how it should have been,  
yet it didn't feel that way.  
It was as though my life was being weighed there in the balance,  
and found sadly wanting.  
Ridiculous, a man in my position . . .  
to feel I had to answer to some Judean nobody,  
but, try as I might, I just couldn't shake the feeling off,  
and the more I tried to wriggle off the hook,  
the more hopelessly impaled I became.  
Do you still ask 'What is truth?'  
I don't, for I know the answer now -  
I saw it there that day in the eyes of that man,  
and I wish to God I hadn't, for it's haunted me ever since –  
the knowledge that for the first time in my life  
I had the chance to make a stand,  
to commit myself to something which really mattered,  
and I let it slip through my fingers  
for fear of the consequences.  
I held the difference between life and death in my hands that day,  
his fate in my hands,  
and I decided finally on death.  
The trouble is I'm not sure whose fate we're talking about -  
his, or mine?

## **Prayer**

Gracious God, we look for the truth but we are often disappointed. What seems certain is suddenly shaken; what seems trustworthy turns out to be false; what seems clear becomes a puzzle; what seems good unexpectedly proves bad. Few things in life are what they appear and as a result, we

can feel like a ship without an anchor, tossed about in a sea of confusion. Help us to put our trust in the one thing that doesn't change; your love revealed in Jesus Christ, the same today, yesterday, and for ever and to him may we find the truth that sets us free. Amen

## **Reflection 2**

The one thing I'm sure I wouldn't have done is say this, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' In the most appalling suffering to think not simply about others, but of those who brought such suffering on you; in the throes of death to look them in the eye and seek God's forgiveness for your killers- amazing! That is why we are sharing this time together today. That's the man we have come to honour and the God we meet through him; the God who gives, and goes on giving, who loves, and goes on loving, who dies, and goes on dying, even though he lives, until that day when each and every one of us has responded to his grace and been gathered into his kingdom. Let us hear what Mary Magdalene witnessed.

**Reading** Mark 15: 33-36, 40-41

**Meditation** He was gasping. *Mary Magdalene*

He was gasping,  
his breath coming short and sharp,  
his body contorted in agony,  
and I could scarcely bring myself to watch.  
It's a dreadful business, crucifixion, at the best of times,  
even when the poor wretch up there deserves to die,  
but when it's a friend,  
a loved one,  
somebody who's been special to you,  
then, I'm telling you, it's indescribable.  
To stand by helpless as the pain takes hold,  
as the muscles tear and the tendons snap,  
as life ebbs out of the body -  
to see the misery, the torment, the despair,

and to know it must get worse  
before finally, in the sweet embrace of death, it gets better;  
you just can't imagine what that feels like,  
not unless you've been there.  
And we were there, more's the pity,  
each one of us enduring our own private hell.  
We wanted to run, God knows! -  
to close our eyes and pretend it wasn't happening.  
But we couldn't, could we?  
For he needed us then more than ever,  
simply to know we were there,  
that we cared,  
that he wasn't alone.  
It wasn't much, I grant you,  
the few of us huddled together,  
watching nervously from the shadows,  
fearful of recognition,  
but it was enough,  
one ray of sunshine in a wilderness of darkness;  
for he knew that despite our faults,  
the weakness of our faith and feebleness of our commitment,  
we were risking something,  
sticking our necks out for love of him.  
He was gasping,  
and we prayed it wouldn't be much longer  
before release finally came.  
But however long it took,  
and whatever it might cost us,  
we were resolved to stay to the bitter end –  
it was the very least we could do.

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, there are many who suffer, many who have endured untold agony of body, mind and spirit, but there are few who do it willingly, fewer still who would choose that course as their vocation in life.

Yet you came and walked the way of the cross with single-minded determination, and you gave your life freely, so that one day there will be an end to all suffering and sorrow, a time when all will rejoice in the wonder of your love and experience the joy of your kingdom. Until then, Lord reach out into the world of darkness, into every place of need, and bring the comfort and strength, the peace and the hope which you alone can bring. In your name we ask it. Amen

**Hymn** When I survey the wonderous cross.

### **Dismissal**

We wait expectantly at the foot of the cross. Help us to wait when things go wrong, when we are misunderstood, when friends let us down, when the world ridicules us. Help us to expect the peace of God, the loving presence of Jesus, the energy of the Spirit, and the very best of ourselves. Let us have courage to speak up for Jesus as we wait in silence at the foot of the cross. **Amen.**