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## **Good Friday 2018**

Jesus.

Isaiah 52:13-53, Hebrews 10:16-25, John 18:1-19

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them 'for whom are you looking'.

At St Marys Church Stannington in Northumberland where I am vicar, on Palm Sunday, like many churches, we have the whole passion reading read dramatically in parts. Even though I could perfectly well do it on the computer, every year I take a highlighter and go through Jesus lines on the script, because I find this little piece of admin a profoundly prayerful experience. At the beginning of the story of Jesus passion, the last supper, the footwashing, the first part of the trial before Pilate, Jesus has lots of lines, lots of yellow highlighter, and then, as the trial progresses and we move towards the journey to the cross, and the crucifixion itself, Jesus falls almost silent. When he speaks, he does so briefly. He has given control of his body and his fate to others. As Jesus' gradually stops speaking he gives himself over to death on a cross. In todays, reading, we can pinpoint the moment at which that happens;

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them 'for whom are you looking'.

This moment, when Jesus gives himself up to the Jewish authorities is the result of a lifetime of personal wrestling. Right back, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he went into the desert to be tempted by the devil for 40 days and 40 nights, we saw the beginning of this struggle. The temptations the devil offered to Jesus were all in different ways around persuading Jesus to take for himself the power that was rightfully his as the son of God, and Jesus chose not to do that. In the words of the epistle of Paul to the Philippians he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, gave up the power given to him by God. In the desert, by himself, with the devil, Jesus did the hard work which was going to prepare him for this moment in the garden. Just as in the desert he struggled with himself and gave the power to God, so he does that now, in the garden, handing himself over to the Jewish authorities. He knew what he was letting himself in for and he did it anyway.

That Jesus is fully human and fully divine comes into sharp focus on Good Friday. As a human being, Jesus not only has a body, he is a body. These things which will happen to his body will happen to him. For the moment, this is where he has his being and he is going to feel all the tortures that he is put through. And he is also God, and being God he has a maturity that we can never fully understand. He is able to see himself in the bigger picture that God sees and that is what drives him forward. He is very clear about that with the people around him. As he says to Simon Peter. 'Put your sword back in its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the father has given to me'? Jesus is in the lead right up to the moment of his arrest. He knows that this is what must happen.



Jesus The words from the cross in John are the most relational of all the gospels. Jesus speaks to his mother and the disciple that he loves and says to her 'woman, here is your son' and to him 'here is your mother'. As Jesus reaches the end of his human life, having given up his power to death on a cross, he offers those whom he loves the gift of each other.

A little over two weeks ago, we heard of the death of Stephen Hawkins. Over the days and weeks that followed, journalists, scientists, and preachers have tried to give voice to exactly what it was that he meant to us as a nation. He had a mind which was capable of so much and a body which was capable of so little. As well as opening up the secrets of the universe for us, he also helped us to question our assumptions about disability, about what we see when we look at a person. Very often on the news, Hawkins would be depicted in his wheelchair, against a backdrop of the stars and planets he was studying. The finite and the infinite, heaven and earth, the profoundly able and the profoundly disabled in one person.

I found myself thinking of Stephen Hawkins a little differently after watching an interview with his daughter in which she talked about the film 'the theory of everything' based on his life. She said that, for her, the most moving scene in it was when he was lecturing to a class from his wheelchair and one of the students dropped a pencil. Her father imagined himself standing up and going to pick it up. She said that it suddenly came to her in a flood all that he had lost through his disease.

As onlookers, we saw an amazingly brave and intelligent man, but his family loved that man, and lived day to day with the tragedy of his condition.

And that has resonances with the crucifixion. We know what happened next, we know about the joy of the resurrection and its cosmic significance, but the people who loved Jesus most, as he was being crucified, would have been aware only of the horror and tragedy of it. They would have been entirely with the man they loved who was in unbearable pain and who they thought they were about to lose forever.

On Good Friday, we remember how profoundly God understands the human condition. He understands us because he was human, and in pain on the cross. When we are in pain, be it physical, mental, spiritual, or a mixture of the three that we can't quite describe, God knows, because he has been there, he has suffered on a cross with us and for us.

Yesterday I went to 'east meets west', a group for women of every faith and language which meets in Lancaster. I was speaking to an asylum seeker from Cameroon. I asked her whether she was enjoying being in Lancaster and she thought for a moment and said 'the people are very kind'. Of course, I realised I had asked the wrong question. She was going through her Good Friday. She wanted to go home but she couldn't. There was no point having a sunny sort of chat and pretending everything was alright, because it wasn't and wouldn't be for some time. But in this group she had found kind people, she had found fellowship. And that was making an unbearable situation bearable.

The Christian calendar does not move us too quickly to Easter day. We have the rest of the day and the whole of tomorrow to remember that as well as being Easter people, we are also Good Friday people. We belong to a God who understands pain and hopelessness and despair, who is with us when we go through it because he has been through it too. Today, especially, we stand alongside all those who are experiencing their own Good Friday today and we lay all that we are at the wounded feet of our God who died for us.

Amen