



PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

This year Good Friday will feel very different. Instead of gathering in the church building to reflect and worship, we who *are* the church, will be following this sequence of music, readings, poems and prayer from inside our homes. And this started a train of thought. What can Good Friday, what can the suffering and death of Jesus say to us, as we experience varying levels of anxiety, trauma or suffering as a result of the current Coronavirus pandemic?

Key for me is that God is not distant from our fear, nor our difficulties. For God knows what it is to watch a loved one suffer and to watch them die. One of the hardest things for those directly affected by Covid-19, is the pain of not being able to visit their loved ones in hospital; of not being able to be with them when they die. Funerals are also being conducted very differently, with the minimum of people present and social distancing preventing the usual physical and emotional comfort.

As I looked afresh at the events of Good Friday, I noticed these parallels. Jesus was also separated from his friends and family. He went through his suffering alone. And like those with loved ones in hospital or in isolation, Jesus' family and friends could only watch from a distance, when Jesus hung on the cross. One effect of crucifixion is that the chest and lungs are compromised. Breathing becomes increasingly difficult, resulting in death. Jesus experienced in his own body distress and breathlessness as a result of failing oxygen levels.

After his death, Jesus' body was removed by the authorities. His family weren't able to go through the usual rituals. Instead Jesus was hurriedly laid inside a borrowed tomb by two of his disciples while two of the women looked on. This wasn't the way it should have been. Just as it isn't for many today.

So, as we take this time to reflect on the events of Good Friday, let us remember that God totally understands the distress that people are facing in this current season. Above all let us remember that Jesus freely chose this path in order to set us free; free from the guilt of sin; free from the power of death; free to enjoy life with him forever. For him this was a price worth paying.

*Each reflection begins with a hymn, followed by scripture, a poem and a prayer.
Give yourselves space between items to reflect on what God is saying to you.*

1: "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING"

HYMN: There is a green hill far away <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23rHbE27YuQ>

READING: Matthew 27:27-37 & Luke 23:33-34

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers round him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spat on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Two criminals were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

POEM: "accomplices" by Godfrey Rust

Father forgive them.
They didn't know what I was doing
when I slipped into humanity disguised.
My light shone in a darkness
they could not comprehend.
Forgive them.
They don't know the cost of an immortal's suicide.
They tried to keep us from this meeting here.
Father forgive them, they don't know what we are doing.

Forgive them all, my dear beloved dull accomplices.
Forgive the crowd, who made the necessary choice of Barabbas.
Forgive Pilate's wife, whose conscience nearly ruined everything.
Forgive Judas his kiss of death.

Forgive them.
They didn't know what they were building.
We were the architects
and these rough beams were cut
to meet our most exacting standards.
Forgive them.
They don't know what will be executed here.
How could they understand
these hammer blows will be
the final acts of our creation?

Like workmen at the launch
of some great enterprise of state
they have come to watch
the ceremony of our fierce ambition
and as they hoist me up to you
before this brutal act of love
extinguishes my mortal life completely

Father forgive them.

They don't know what they're doing

PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

2: "I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

HYMN: You chose the cross <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJiw2rwCKDk>

READING: *Luke 23:39-43*

One of the criminals who hung there, hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom". Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

POEM: "thief" by Godfrey Rust

What would you steal from me, thief?

These Romans took my clothes. My friends
ran off with their loyalty. My priests
have filled their pockets with my people.

I've nothing left but you, my captive audience.
It took a lot to nail you down to gain
your full attention. All your life
you worshipped at the altar of desire

only to find it is a god unsatisfied
by less than everything. In all your crimes
you were the victim, and now you find
a god is dying next to you, and you

so skewered that you cannot even
open out your hands to ask for mercy.
Smile, thief: you are the archetype, the first
who took his cross up and then followed me.

Nothing is what it seems. Your prayer
was answered long ago, and you will see
breaking and entering done here
on a cosmic scale. Will I remember you?

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

PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

3: "DEAR WOMAN HERE IS YOUR SON" "HERE IS YOUR MOTHER."

HYMN: My Lord, what love is this? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYmlsps7U6o>

READING: *John 19:25-27*

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

POEM: "son" by Godfrey Rust

Woman, as I prepare
to slip the leash of time
for a moment your grief
reels me back in;
the sword pierces us both
but you alone will feel then
the pain I feel now,
watching a mother watch a son die.

Before you gave birth to me, *I AM*,
and at a word I made time flow like tears:
but what could I in my eternity
know of such a loss as yours?
Timeless I became mankind—
there was no other way
to learn the meaning of this moment.

Soon I will have gained
eternity again;
you have the meantime,
and I will not leave you comfortless.
Beside you is one whom I have loved
more than a brother:

***Dear woman, here is your son.
Son, here is your mother.***

PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

4: "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"

HYMN: How deep the Father's love <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLDGVI8D5UU>

READING: *Matthew 27:45-46*

From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" -- which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

POEM: "wager" by Godfrey Rust

To be human is to deal with death,
and I have wagered all to taste the fruit
of this desolate new Eden.

To be human is to court the risk of failure,
and so I embrace this tree of knowledge of despair.

And to be human is to know that God may be illusion,
and so I have made myself human enough
to doubt and disbelieve.

What else is left for God to understand?
Faith is the gamble of a dying man.

The condemned son cries out into the dark
guessing his father hears, yet will not come.

What kind of love is this that keeps such silence?
My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

5: "I THIRST."

HYMN: Broken for me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CKOvHDOdbY>

READING: John 19:28

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst."

POEM: "animal" by Godfrey Rust

nothing
up my sleeve
there's no sleeve
look on
your naked God
look on
your reflection
this is
the tree
of life
you need me
I chose
to need you—
to love you
God became
animal
help me
I thirst

PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

6: "IT IS FINISHED"

HYMN: When I survey the wondrous cross

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_fvFfPqjO4

READING: John 19:29-30

A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."

POEM: "masterpiece" by Godfrey Rust

I saw it first, this bloody work of heart,
conceived in my mind's eye *in the beginning*,
or what you call the beginning. Time
was the canvas I prepared to paint on.
I drew its outline in the life of Abraham,
my palette history, its colours mixed
in Israel's rise and fall. I worked from life:
against a landscape of an Eden spoiled
my people with their untamed rebel hearts
stared out through masks of beauty scarred with sin.
Painstaking detail. Light and darkness. Then
the hardest thing I ever did: love
was daubed with every brush-stroke of the Spirit
on the unforgiving texture of the soul.
Finally to shape the central figure
I needed human hands. I laboured with Mary
to bring the enterprise to birth. Three more decades
of preparation were meticulous—
it is not irony that I was framed
and hung up here to die: it is the point.
I am the artist and the portrait too,
painting out at last in the blood of God
a perfect self-expression: my still life.
This is my masterpiece and *it is finished*.

PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

7: "FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT."

HYMN: There is a Redeemer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUqfdaCLm0Y>

READING: Luke 23:45-46

At the ninth hour the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**"

POEM: "legacy" by Godfrey Rust

I have travelled light,
so that the leaving should be easier.

What I bequeath is left according to your will
and this new testament:
I leave a church to be built on a broken rock.
I leave nothing written down.

I heard my words blown freely on the winds of Galilee
to seed the fertile hearts of men.
I leave no money, debts or property,
no house for shrine, no artefact for relic.

I leave just the remnants of a meal.
My cloak is cast aside and gambled for.
I leave no tomb to raid, no corpse to disinter,
no fingerprints, no blood, no DNA.

I could have gained the world, yet now
nothing stands between us but this one last legacy.

Because it is written;
because it is the only pledge by which all souls
that fill the devil's pawnshop are redeemed;
and because until I give it up to you
it cannot be returned to anyone,

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

CLOSING PRAYER: Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and holy fear, may we place at his feet all that we have, and all that we are; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

*Godfrey Rust is a poet, worship leader, singer and songwriter.
His poems can be found on his website, www.wordsout.co.uk*