

Holy Week Reflections

6th-12th April 2020



Words from the Cross

Each day this week, we will look at the verses of a hymn by Brian Wren, alongside a quote of Jesus from the cross.

Hymn verses

Here hangs a man discarded,
A scarecrow hoisted high,
A nonsense pointing nowhere
To all who hurry by.

Can such a clown of sorrows
Still bring a useful word,
When faith and love seem
phantoms
And every hope absurd.

Yet here is help and comfort
For lives by comfort bound,
When drums of dazzling progress
Give strangely hollowed sound.

Life emptied of all meaning
Drained out in bleak distress,
Can share in broken silence
Our deepest emptiness.

And love that freely entered
The pit of life's despair,
Can name our hidden darkness
And suffer with us there.

Christ, in our darkness risen,
Help all who long for light
To hold the hand of promise
Till faith receives its sight.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

CCLI: 239313

Words from the cross

"I am thirsty"
(John 19: 28)

"Father forgive them; for they do
not know what they are doing."
(Luke 23:34)

"Woman, here is your son."
"Here is your mother."
(John 19: 26-27)

"My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?"
(Mark 15: 34 & Matthew 27:46)

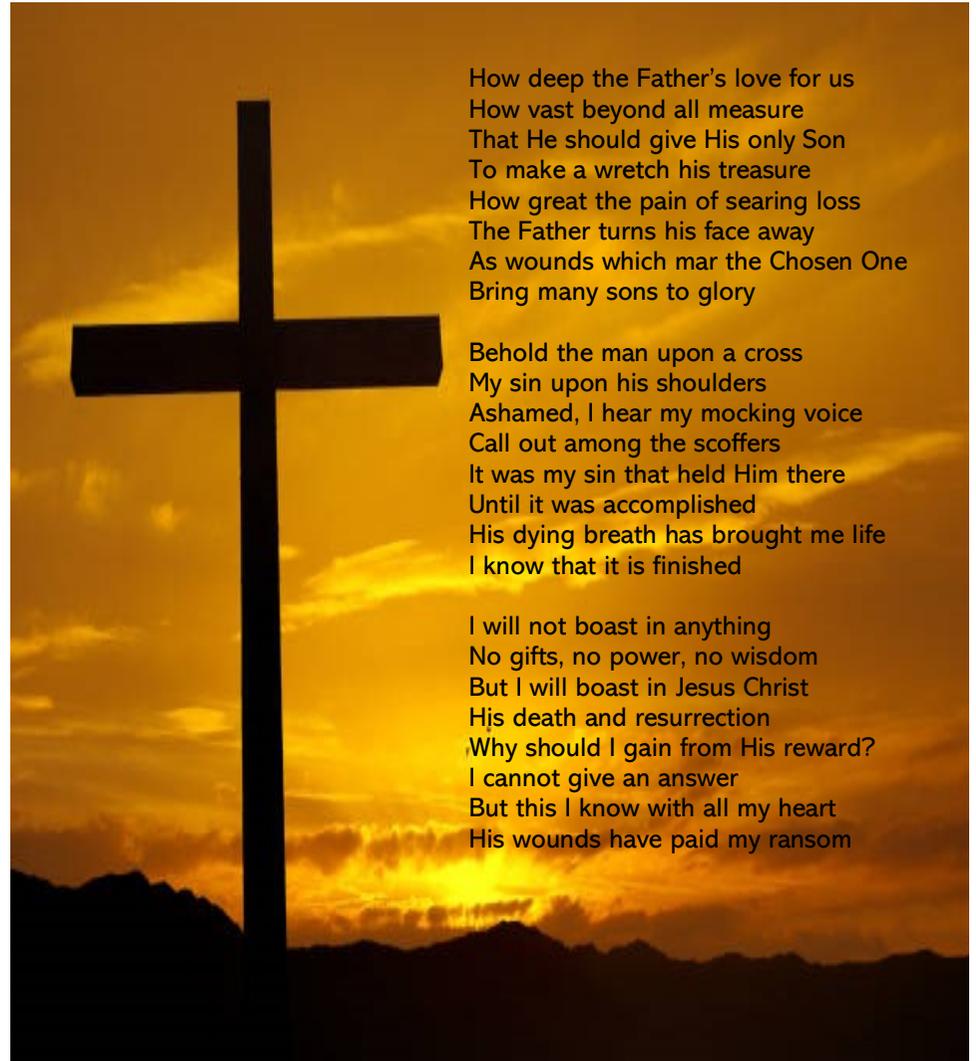
"Father, into your hands I
commend my spirit."
(Luke 23: 46)

"Truly I tell you, today you will be
with me in Paradise."
(Luke 23: 43)

"It is finished."
(John 19:30)

The **actions** are only suggestions—ideas for us to think about. They are all things that we can do from the confines of our homes. If, for whatever reason, you can't do something one day, think about trying it another time.

I hope these reflections help us keep a sense of fellowship together, until such time that we can meet together in person. Please feel free to share them—the more people who use them to explore their thoughts and faith, the better!



Monday 6th April

Take time to be quiet, perhaps light a candle.

Be still and know that I am God

Let us pray

Loving God, be with us as we join in fellowship in our own homes. Open our hearts to awesomeness of your love, made real for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May we never lose the wonder of the cross. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymn verse

Here hangs a man discarded,
A scarecrow hoisted high,
A nonsense pointing nowhere
To all who hurry by

Words from the cross

"I am thirsty"
(John 19:28)

Reflection

To so many people today, Jesus means nothing. He has been discarded, viewed as a nonsense. They hurry on, busying themselves with their own lives. They are thirsty for happiness and peace, but think that these can be found in the material things of this world—money, fame, the latest technology, transient pleasures. Like the ancient people of Israel wandering in the desert, they are thirsty for salvation, but they don't realise that Jesus provides the most thirst-quenching water ever—the water of life.

What can we do to lead them from this parched desert, help them to drink from the cup of the water of life and find salvation in God's kingdom?

Are we still thirsty for the water of life? Perhaps we, too, at times are guilty of crowding God out, hurrying on with our own lives and not taking time to be still and know God. Have we, to some extent, discarded him? Has our faith been reduced to a caricature (a scarecrow) hanging on the cross, where the rituals of prayer and worship are just dried up remnants of something that once meant so much more?

How can we inject the water of life back into our faith; find new wonder and joy in God's love?

Christ is still thirsty. He is desperate for all people to know of God's love and to find that peace and true happiness through him.

At this current time of coronavirus, the world is more thirsty than ever; more in need of a secure and steady base. The virus has shown us how fragile our stability is, and how unpredictable life can be. The only solid foundation we have is the love and faithfulness of God. So let's drink from the cup of the water of life which Christ offers us, and pray that it will not only revive our own faith but, through us, will overflow and revive others who are thirsty.

Action

- Look up a favourite psalm or Bible verse. Read it with fresh eyes and enjoy the wonder of God's love for you and for the world. If you're not sure where to start, consider Psalm 23, Psalm 121 or John 3:16.
- Spend some time in quiet prayer. Ask God to fill you with the water of life. Be still and rest with him.
- Think of a friend or family member who you know is struggling to find peace; who is thirsty, but doesn't know what they are thirsty for. Pray for them. Look for opportunities where you can show them some love and support—in that way, through you they will taste something of the Christ's living water.

Let us pray

Get yourself a glass of water. For each line of the prayer, take a drink from it.

Life-giving God, fill us with your living water.
Help us explore your Word with fresh eyes and feel your love within us.
May your Spirit fill every part of us with peace.
Help us, through the way we speak and act, to be cups of living water for others, that they might find salvation from the desert in the safety of your arms.

We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Tuesday 7th April

Take time to be quiet, perhaps light a candle.

Be still and know that I am God

Let us pray

Loving God, be with us as we join in fellowship in our own homes. Open our hearts to awesomeness of your love, made real for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May we never lose the wonder of the cross. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymn verse

Can such a clown of sorrows
Still bring a useful word,
When faith and love seem
phantoms
And every hope absurd.

Words from the cross

"Father forgive them; for they do
not know what they are doing."
(Luke 23:34)

Reflection

They convicted an innocent man, spat on him, whipped him, made him carry a heavy cross and exposed his nakedness. Jesus was a source of ridicule; a clown. And yet, as he was dying, he asked that these people should be forgiven.

Were they aware of the cruelty they were inflicting, the life they were destroying and the spirit they were crushing? It is easy to think they did, but Jesus said, "they do not know what they are doing."

We, ourselves can be the victims of unkind words, false accusations and thoughtless actions. Those cutting remarks can gradually eat away at our self-esteem and confidence.

We have seen people blatantly ignoring the guidance on social isolation during the coronavirus pandemic; gathering in large numbers, stealing NHS cards from key workers, targeting vulnerable adults in their own homes, and so much more. It is easy to write them off as "a bad lot" - but let us remember Jesus' words: "they do not know what they are doing". They do not understand about love and compassion—they are

ignorant of the grace of God.

We are hurt by personal assaults and we are upset by some of the things we see going on in our society and throughout the world. Imagine Christ's physical and mental pain, and his anguish over the state of his Father's kingdom. And yet, look again at the words he spoke on the cross. We are called to take up Christ's cross and to follow his example.

- *Can we find it in ourselves to say "Father, forgive them"?*
- *Rather than criticise and despair of the actions of others, how can we tackle their ignorance and lack of love and understanding?*

It is easy to feel that faith is a lost cause and hope is absurd, but let's not underestimate the power of forgiveness. Jesus obviously felt it was important enough to speak about in his last few breaths; so let's see what hope and power is unleashed as we "forgive those who trespass against us".

Action

- Think of someone you have found difficult to forgive. Perhaps you've not been in touch for a while. Give them a ring or send them a letter/ text/ email. Let them know you are thinking about them.
- If you have hurt someone else, get in touch with them; say you are sorry.
- Pray for the hearts of all people to be open to God's love.

Let us pray

Forgiving God,

Help us to show the same mercy to others that you have shown to us.

Show us how to forgive and give us the courage to seek forgiveness for the things we have done wrong.

May our grace towards others be a lesson in love for them—so that the world may hope again, and faith may grow.

We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Wednesday 8th April

Take time to be quiet, perhaps light a candle.

Be still and know that I am God

Let us pray

Loving God, be with us as we join in fellowship in our own homes. Open our hearts to awesomeness of your love, made real for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May we never lose the wonder of the cross. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymn verse

Yet here is help and comfort
For lives by comfort bound,
When drums of dazzling progress
Give strangely hollowed sound.

Words from the cross

"Woman, here is your son."

"Here is your mother."

(John 19: 26-27)

Reflection

Coronavirus has hit us hard. It can affect anybody; rich and poor, young and old, important and ordinary. Up until now, we have felt protected by the technology, safe in the comfort of our (relatively) wealthy lives. But this all has a strangely hollowed sound now as we find that all those things we have invested are not the things which protect and save us.

The single biggest fight against this virus is not the technology and science (although this will play a small part), but it is the human response; the task of keeping apart and preventing its spread. It is this corporate action which will be our salvation; it is our compassion and responsibility to others which will strengthen our communities.

Rather than seeing our isolation (social distancing) as a bad and negative thing, let's joyfully take on this sacrifice, knowing that we are following Christ's example of care and compassion for others; putting his love for the world into action.

On the cross, Jesus gave a message of the importance of interdependence (that is, being on the giving and receiving end of care from each other). His mother and his disciple, John, were symbols of

those whom Jesus loved—and he presented them to each other—"here is your son; here is your mother", encouraging them to look after one another. *They* were symbols—we are also the ones who Jesus loves. His message from the cross is that we should show the same care as a mother would to her son and vice versa.

Brother, sister, let me serve you; let me be as Christ to you.

Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

Action

- Encourage someone who is struggling with the isolation from social distancing—remind them of the Christ-like service they are offering to their community.
- Think of a family member or friend; get in touch with them and let them know how much you value them in your life.

Let us pray

Picture yourself at church, or in any meeting when you are in fellowship with others (it might even be at the supermarket or hairdressers!) In your mind's eye, go round the group, picture each of their faces. Pray for them and thank God for the fellowship you have with them.

All-providing God, We thank you for all those people who mean so much to us in our lives; those who walk with us on our life's journey and provide us with such comfort and support.

Help us to always look for ways that we can show our care for others and to follow the example of your Son in being there for one another. We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Thursday 9th April—Maundy Thursday

Take time to be quiet, perhaps light a candle.

Be still and know that I am God

Let us pray

Loving God, be with us as we join in fellowship in our own homes. Open our hearts to the awesomeness of your love, made real for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May we never lose the wonder of the cross. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymn verse

Life emptied of all meaning
Drained out in bleak distress,
Can share in broken silence
Our deepest emptiness.

Words from the cross

"My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me?"

(Mark 15: 34 & Matthew 27:46)

Reflection

Maundy Thursday is the day we remember how Jesus stooped down to wash his disciples' feet. This act reminds us of our reflection yesterday (our call to serve one another), but it also reminds us how Jesus put himself *beneath* the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low.

He was approaching the time when he would descend so deeply into the depths of anguish and despair that he would feel cut off from and abandoned by God. Whatever our distress, whatever our heartache, Christ has suffered before us. He knows what it's like to feel utter blackness and hopelessness. He offered to put himself into that pit so that, through him, God could show his grace and mercy. When Jesus rose from the dead, that pit could no longer be a place where we are alone and abandoned, because it was now a place into which God had reached and brought about new life.

Think of times when you have felt totally separated from, or abandoned by, God. You might even be in that place now.

Reach out in the darkness of that experience and find that your hand was and is being held. Because Christ was and is there—and he

remains with you until a time when you are raised up.

Through Jesus' sacrifice, there is now no place so dark that God cannot reach and lift us up.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. (Romans 8:38)

Just as hate is an absence of love, so darkness is an absence of light. Love and light are real and are *present*. Hate and darkness are merely an absence of these things. Christ is our light and we need his presence most when we are in our darkest times.

Imagine being in the deepest, darkest well. Jesus has lowered himself down on a rope to sit with you and hold you until you can be winched back up to safety. Know he is there.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. (John 1:5)

Action

- Think of someone who is struggling with a situation or who is low in mood. Get in touch; let them know that they are not alone. Be prepared to follow Christ's example and go down to the pit to be with them.

Let us pray

If you have one, light a candle and look at the light it gives out.

Ever-present God, in our times of pain and struggle, help us feel the light of your presence with us. *(You may have a particular concern you want to bring to God).*

We thank that you are with us all at this difficult and anxious time, staying with us during our darkness fears and bringing the light of hope to our world.

We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Friday 10th April—Good Friday

Take time to be quiet, perhaps light a candle.

Be still and know that I am God

Let us pray

Loving God, be with us as we join in fellowship in our own homes. Open our hearts to awesomeness of your love, made real for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May we never lose the wonder of the cross. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymn verse

And love that freely entered
The pit of life's despair,
Can name our hidden darkness
And suffer with us there.

Words from the cross

"Father, into your hands I
commend my spirit."
(Luke 23: 46)

Reflection

Today is the day when we remember that Jesus gave up his life for our sakes. Fully human, fully divine—perfect in every way. And yet he willingly took all the sin of the world into the darkest pit of despair. And he did that for you, for me and for everyone.

Just think about that.

We hear how, during some of the terror attacks, parents have laid across their children to protect them from the attack—and some have died as a result.

Would you do that for your loved ones?

Would you do that for people who didn't love you?

How would you feel if you had been the one protected from the attack?

What would you want to say to your saviour? What would you be prepared to do for them?

Our only response to Christ's sacrifice and to the love of God which

allowed his son to be sacrificed in that way is to offer our lives completely to him. Father, into your hands, I commend *my* spirit, my life.

Action

Spend time in silence, taking yourself slowly through the 14 Stages of the Cross, and re-living Christ's journey to death. Death for your sake.

Not all the stages are based on scripture (most are), but they paint a vivid picture of what Jesus must have gone through on Good Friday. Pause after each stage and take time to reflect.

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus carries his cross
3. Jesus falls for the first time
4. Jesus comforts his mother
5. Simon helps Jesus carry his cross
6. A woman offers comfort to Jesus
7. Jesus falls a second time
8. Jesus meets and comforts the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls a third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Let us pray—a personal prayer

Christ, my Saviour,

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for taking this lonely and frightening journey of suffering to the grave; all for my sake. Help me always to remember the power of the cross; that I can stand at its foot, fully forgiven and completely whole.

May your Spirit show me the ways I can offer my life, as you offered yours, in full obedience to God.

Through you, Christ Jesus, I offer my prayer.

Amen.

Saturday 11th April

Take time to be quiet, perhaps light a candle.

Be still and know that I am God

Let us pray

Loving God, be with us as we join in fellowship in our own homes. Open our hearts to awesomeness of your love, made real for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. May we never lose the wonder of the cross. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Hymn verse

Christ, in our darkness risen,
Help all who long for light
To hold the hand of promise
Till faith receives its sight.

Words from the cross

"Truly I tell you, today you will be
with me in Paradise."

(Luke 23: 43)

Reflection

We know what happened after that first Good Friday, but let's think for a minute how Jesus' followers must have felt.

They didn't (yet) have the joy of Easter, only the devastating loss of their friend, their mentor and their hopes. Easter Saturday must have been a very sad and strange time for them.

Spend a moment thinking how they must have felt.

Those who had listened and understood a little of what Jesus had said may have held just a glimmer of hope, perhaps? Their hearts might have wanted to hope, but would they have dared in the light of Jesus' brutal death?

At the moment, we are in something of an "Easter Saturday" time. Covid-19 has unleashed itself and brought about the devastation of Good Friday. We are in a strange tension now between ongoing grief and fear, and daring to hope for an end to this pandemic.

The verse of our hymn dares to promise of brighter times after despair, and Jesus' promise of God's kingdom to the thief, a sinner, brings that hope alive!

With coronavirus, we cannot yet celebrate Easter—the new life which will emerge beyond the outbreak has not yet been realised. But, today is the day to hold on to hope, trusting that this new day will dawn.

Is there part of your life which is in its 'Easter Saturday' phase? The bombshell has happened, but you are not quite sure what the fallout is, or what the future holds?

Let us hold on to HOPE. We are promised that the new day *will* dawn, and we will emerge stronger from it; closer to each other and closer to God.

Action

- If you have one, plant a bulb. As you bury it, think of Jesus in the tomb. And as you water it, and wait, think of the hope which will surely emerge.
- Go outside (keep your 2 metre distance!) and look at the trees and the gardens. Look out for the buds, the hints of green beginning to show and reflect that, despite what is going on, there is the certainty that winter is passing and the new life of spring is on its way.

Let us pray

Faithful God,

Be with us at this time of uncertainty and in all our times of doubt. As we look at the seasons come and go, help us to remember that after Good Friday comes Easter Sunday and all the hope and joy that this brings. May our trust in you hold firm as we hold on to your hand of promise. We offer these prayers through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Sunday 12th April—Easter Sunday

Words from the cross

“It is finished”

(John 19:30)

Reflection

Christ’s final words from the cross tell us that his task was complete.

His death, as the Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, opened the gates to God’s kingdom. Jesus is the Way to that Kingdom; the conduit between earth and heaven.

His resurrection blew the gates off their hinges! Because now, heaven had come back to earth and God’s Kingdom had begun! Never again will those gates be shut. The channel is open, the Kingdom is here, NOW.

God has a task for each and every one of us; he has made us for that purpose.

What is your task? Have you done it? Is it finished—or haven’t you even started?

If your not sure what your purpose is, ask him! Pray—and be ready for his response; be ready to be affirmed, be ready to be challenged and be ready to be surprised!

Easter’s resurrection joy puts us right into God’s Kingdom, here and now. We are the front line staff, the key workers here. On 26th March, many of us stood on our door steps in a gesture of support for the frontline staff in the coronavirus crisis. We are in admiration of their commitment, their skills and of their service above self. Now is the dawn of a new heaven on earth; let us be as committed, let us recognise and use the skills we have been given, and let us be as prepared to put others before ourselves as we take up our cross with Christ. Let’s follow his example to be Kingdom builders here on earth.

One day, we will be part of the chorus which says, “It is finished!”

Action

- Celebrate the JOY of Easter—be inventive in these difficult times. What can you do to show that today is special?
- Wish as many people as you can a ‘Happy Easter’ - stand at your door and greet those taking their exercise, put a poster in your window (haven’t got one? - make one!) , post on social media, etc
- Let the world know that God’s Kingdom is here and that, through Christ’s death and resurrection, the gates are forever open and we are all invited to join in.

***See, what a morning, gloriously bright,
With the dawning of hope in Jerusalem;
Folded the gravestones, tomb filled with light,
As the angels announce Christ is risen!
See God’s salvation plan,
Wrought in love, borne in pain, paid in sacrifice,
Fulfilled in Christ, the Man,
For he live: Christ is risen from the dead!!***

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty



HAPPY EASTER AND GOD BLESS