

GOOD FRIDAY 10-04-2020

Psalm 22; John 18.1 – 19.42

Sometimes when a loved one has died, a bereaved person needs to tell the story of what happened, and they might tell the same story many times- as if they want to make sure they remember it properly and get it straight in their mind.

When a patient has died unexpectedly in hospital, or when there has been a medical emergency and the crash team has come running, there is usually a formal de-briefing afterwards- to make sure that everything was done that should and could have been done, and to learn from the experience.

Some of us have sat at the bedside of a dying friend or relative. The Good Friday gospel brings us all together in a kind of death-watch as we stand at the foot of the cross, suffering as we watch our friend Jesus suffer, waiting to see him draw his last breath. In this shared experience we draw strength from each other.

Every year on Good Friday we replay the details of Jesus' death- to make sure we get the story straight, but also to find ourselves in the story and consider our place in it.

Of course, this year is different. This year, we are separated from one another and must not gather for worship; but we can still enter into this most solemn of stories and learn about ourselves as well as our Lord.

We wouldn't do what Judas did, and betray Jesus- would we?

Unless we thought he was the political messiah we'd been waiting for, and all he needed to start the revolution was a good push. Have we ever felt impatient enough to push someone? Is there anything of Judas in us?

We wouldn't do what Peter did- would we? Promise to follow Jesus to the grave and then deny him because a servant asked a question? Who knows how strong we would be, or how scared we would feel.

We wouldn't do what Caiphas did- would we? Claim that it is better for one person to die for the people? Have we never been guilty of political expediency and chosen what seemed to be the lesser of two evils? We wouldn't do what Pilate did- would we? He tried to find an answer, he knew what was the right thing to do but he wanted to be popular.

We can almost feel sorry for Pilate; he wants so much to spare Jesus but can't bring himself to take a stand and go against the people.

Would we do what Mary did, and stand at the foot of the cross, watching her son's life drain away? Or would we do what the disciple Jesus loved did, and stand by her, risking his life? Maybe we would; maybe some of us have, staying by the bedside in that last hour, speaking in whispers, staying awake and keeping watch through the night.

This is where we can enter the Good Friday drama- not betraying Jesus, not denying him, not judging him, not condemning him- but standing at the foot of the cross with others who love him and putting our arms around each other for comfort and strength.

Today we can't put our arms around each other, but we all have memories of those times when we have hugged our friends, leant on a shoulder, and been comforted in our grief.

The cross stands as symbol of suffering and death, certainly, but much more than that as a sign of God's immense love which triumphed over death and evil at the very moment they seemed to have won.

Because death is not the end. Jesus did not end his life in failure and disgrace. There is always the promise of Easter dawn.

The Lord be with you.