

Good Friday 2020 reflection

Hi, I'm Andrew, and thanks for downloading this reflection for Good Friday.

Today we remember the sacrifice of Christ on the cross – we reflect on that day, 2000 years ago, where the Son of God was killed, not because of anything He had done, but so we could be justified with God.

Romans 5:6-8 says

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So whilst we are called to reflect on Jesus Christ's death, we also rejoice in the love that God has for us – and we remember the promised resurrection, of Christ three days after his death, and ours at the time Jesus returns once again.

As Romans 5 goes on to say, in verse 10: For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

This reflection will call for quiet prayer and contemplation.

It will follow the following structure: a reading, a short reflection for us to think about and pray for, and then a pause before the next reading.

Thank you to Alex for doing the readings.

You are encouraged to pause the recording after each reflection – of which there are three – and spend a few moments in prayer and contemplation before restarting and moving to the next one.

I will finish with a prayer.

Luke 21:5-38

The destruction of the temple and signs of the end times

⁵ Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, ⁶ ‘As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.’

⁷ ‘Teacher,’ they asked, ‘when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?’

⁸ He replied: ‘Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am he,” and, “The time is near.” Do not follow them. ⁹ When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.’

¹⁰ Then he said to them: ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

¹² ‘But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ And so you will bear testimony to me. ¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ Everyone will hate you because of me. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ Stand firm, and you will win life.

²⁰ ‘When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. ²² For this is the time of punishment in

fulfilment of all that has been written. ²³ How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

²⁵ 'There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

²⁹ He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² 'Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.'

³⁷ Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, ³⁸ and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

Jesus spoke these words as he prepared for the events that led to the cross, and then the resurrection.

His words to His disciples, the friends he loved and cherished, were hard.

The disciples did not know what the following days would hold, they did not know that their Lord would soon be brutally killed, but even more than that they did not know that the promises of God's kingdom were about to become true.

These were the disciples whose lives would change beyond their imagining, who would be there at the foundation of the church, and who would be the first missionaries – spreading the message of the risen Lord and the hope of eternal life.

Many of the disciples would be killed for their faith and the message of Jesus – they would be persecuted, hounded from their homes and murdered by their communities, the authorities or just for the whim of an emperor.

But Jesus knew that the next few days were literally the most important of all time.

So when he said these words he was warning of a hard life, one of sacrifice and suffering.

But He was also warning of a hope to come, a message of salvation that even in the darkest of times shines out and changes lives.

As we come to reflect on the sacrifice of the cross, consider where you are, where your heart is.

Are you ready to listen, to watch and pray, to focus your life on what matters?

All of this will pass away, in time, but the love, grace and mercy of God will never be moved.

Reflect and pray for a renewed focus on Him, and He will answer your prayer.

[Pause]

Luke 22:39-71

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. [c]

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ 'Why are you sleeping?' he asked them. 'Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.'

Jesus arrested

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus asked him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'

⁴⁹ When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, 'Lord, should we strike with our swords?' ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

⁵¹ But Jesus answered, 'No more of this!' And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, 'Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? ⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.'

Peter disowns Jesus

⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when some

there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant-girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, 'This man was with him.'

⁵⁷ But he denied it. 'Woman, I don't know him,' he said.

⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, 'You also are one of them.'

'Man, I am not!' Peter replied.

⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, 'Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean.'

⁶⁰ Peter replied, 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' Just as he was speaking, the cock crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.' ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly.

The guards mock Jesus

⁶³ The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. ⁶⁴ They blindfolded him and demanded, 'Prophecy! Who hit you?' ⁶⁵ And they said many other insulting things to him.

Jesus before Pilate and Herod

⁶⁶ At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. ⁶⁷ 'If you are the Messiah,' they said, 'tell us.'

Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, ⁶⁸ and if I asked you, you would not answer. ⁶⁹ But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.'

⁷⁰ They all asked, 'Are you then the Son of God?'

He replied, 'You say that I am.'

⁷¹ Then they said, 'Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.'

This passage encourages us to consider different perspectives of the trial of Christ.

Dating from about the fourth century, there is a collection of reflections on the trial, death, Jesus' descent to hell, and resurrection called the Gospel of Nicodemus.

This is not, and was never considered to be a biblical or historical gospel, but rather a collection of older Christian reflections on the different perspectives on what happened that day.

The interesting thing about it is the attempt to try to see the story of Jesus' trial from the perspectives of those who were there – trying to put us in the context, like we were there.

And that is something we do every year on Good Friday, we consider afresh the story of Christ's crucifixion – the sacrifice he made on the cross.

We consider the disciples, who were tired, didn't realise the significance of the moment and fall asleep whilst Jesus is praying in the garden of gethsemane.

And this should not surprise us – who truly knows the significance of the moments we are in?

Who knows the significance of our situation now?

Then there is the perspective of Judas – the traitor in the camp, who betrayed Jesus.

Judas, who himself felt like he had been betrayed by Jesus' message of forgiveness and peace, rather than war and vengeance against the Roman state.

But, who brought the Roman soldiers to arrest Jesus, and did so with a kiss.

Peter, who felt scared and alone, and denied Christ when he was put to the test.

Who despite his big heart and faith in his Lord and friend, lied in the face of a threat.

Which of us cannot see themselves in Peter's weak, but human, reaction?

And then Pilate, who just wanted peace, who wanted Roman authority respected and taxes paid – having to deal with a cultural struggle that he didn't understand.

All of these are important perspectives, in which we can see ourselves and learn about the different way God calls us to act.

And in the middle of all this, running through the passage, is the calm, measured and authoritative figure of Jesus – aware of where he is going and the sacrifice he is being called to make.

As we look at these people, at these different vignettes in the grander story of the crucifixion, let's reflect and pray about where we are – unaware of the implications of our situation, feeling angry and betrayed, alone and scared or not knowing how we can make a decision.

Then let us reflect on Christ, his calmness and certainty of his actions and mission.

[Pause]

Luke 23

Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ²And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.'

³So Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?'

'You have said so,' Jesus replied.

⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.'

⁵ But they insisted, 'He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.'

⁶ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. ⁹ He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies.

¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, 'You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.' [\[a\]](#)

¹⁸ But the whole crowd shouted, 'Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!' ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'

²² For the third time he spoke to them: 'Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.'

²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

The crucifixion of Jesus

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" ³⁰ Then "they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'"^[b]

³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'^[c] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One.'

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.'

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence?' ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

⁴² Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'^[d]

⁴³ Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

The death of Jesus

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.'^[e] When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man.' ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

The burial of Jesus

⁵⁰ Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, ⁵¹ who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the kingdom of God. ⁵² Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. ⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. ⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

⁵⁵ The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

Sometimes it is tempting to think that there must be a good meaning to suffering and death.

People have looked to find this meaning in many ways – that it is a punishment for things that have been done wrong, karma.

Or that pleasures in the long-term could balance out suffer – saying ‘I deserve this good thing, because I suffered this bad thing’.

But in reading Luke 23, Jesus’ death was unfair, it was harsh, painful and shorn of context will not give us the meaning we look for.

Jesus, in this passage, is often an onlooker, as others make decisions – Pilate, Herod, the crowd, the soldiers, Jesus’ followers.

Jesus’ death, in Luke 23, is not portrayed as something to be gloried in, but something deeply wrong, violent and everything that is to be resisted by a Christian.

But we read this with the context of the resurrection, we read it with the context of understanding Jesus’ death as a sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus did not have to suffer and die, but he nevertheless did.

He did because he loves and cares for us, and because through it he defeated death.

Jesus did not, in this moment, give meaning to death, instead he took it away – it is not final, it is not hopeless and it is not victorious.

The crucifixion cannot be understood without the resurrection – only in the whole can we understand the power of what Jesus accomplished.

He defeated death, the brutal and inhumane death of the cross, through the resurrection.

He took away the meaning of the death of a criminal, because all it did was affirm His divinity.

All it did was accomplish the mission of God's great plan – the good news of the gospel, the hope of salvation and of a life to come.

When we look for meaning in suffering, pain and death, we can reduce their impact and disempower those who suffer.

We remember those who are persecuted and killed for their faith in Jesus, in Pakistan, China and Eritrea.

We pray for their release and the love of God to be shown to those around them.

But we do not give their suffering the value it does not deserve – it is unjust, harsh and wrong.

Instead we declare, as with the resurrection, that it is defeated, it is not final and it is overcome by the hope of eternal life.

So, as we reflect on the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ, let us also think and pray for those who suffer persecution because of their faith.

And in it all, remember that death is not victorious, Christ is – we know this because He rose from the grave three days later, rules at the Father's right hand and will come again.

Prayer

You are worthy, O Lamb, for you were slain,
and by your blood you ransomed for God
saints from every tribe and language and nation;
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests
serving our God.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

To him who loves us
and has freed us from our sins by his blood,
and made us a kingdom of priests
to stand and serve before our God;
to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honour, glory and might,
for ever and ever. Amen.