

Holy Week Reflection 2020

By the Locum, the Reverend Jim Gibson.

“As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses round us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us.

Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right-hand of God’s throne”. (Hebrews 12: vs 1,2).

Sadly, as a consequence of the present coronavirus threat which is constraining us all within our homes, the intended series of Holy Week meditations cannot now be held. Unsatisfactory though it may be, the best we can do at this time, is for me to offer some thoughts based on that special week in the hope that something may appeal, challenge, irritate or encourage.

But where to start?

I have chosen the above words from Hebrews for they are crammed full of signposts and memories which have indicated much of significance down through centuries of Christian faith and witness. But what do they mean? Did Jesus really endure the cross because of the joy that was set before him? What sort of hope did he have as he faced the inevitability of his crucifixion? From the record of the Gospels, Jesus said a number of things about the future which, if we are honest, we have to admit are still greatly puzzling.

So: what sort of hope is it possible for people to have?

Is it blasphemous to think we can share the same kind of hope as Jesus?

I believe, by God’s grace, it is possible. That’s a belief I hold to because Christian hope is based not so much upon a prediction of the future, as our faithful response to the past. Perhaps I can explain: In the story of

the Prodigal Son, the son came home to his father not because he knew what would happen. He didn't. He wrongly expected to be given a job as a servant when, in fact, he was made an honoured guest. The son came home because he remembered what sort of father he really had. Just as the kind of hope with which Jesus faced the cross and gained strength by which he could endure the ridicule, humiliation, testing and horror of that last week of life, that hope came as a response in faith to a love and mercy which he had experienced in his past.

Is it really possible for us to see in our past – that whole personal Pandora's box of faith and guilt, creation and destruction, joy and sorrow, magnificence and ugliness, love and hate – evidence of the care and mercy of a God of love?

I believe it is, because there is no difference between things of faith and things not of faith. We live in a world of both matter and spirit, of both earth and altar, of both cold analytical reason, magnificent emotion and risk-demanding faith. We live in the world of the here and now – and, according to Jesus, that is exactly where religious faith is found and needs to be witnessed and practised. An after-life held little interest for him. The kingdom of God is to be discovered, celebrated, shared and lived right now.

On the night before his betrayal, Jesus gathered with his friends within Jerusalem. Together, they shared a meal. It was meant as a perpetual sign of the future. Today, people of faith call it the Mass, the Eucharist, Holy Communion, the Last Supper. As he broke bread and shared wine, Jesus was giving to those present a token of their future, right there and then. Not in precise details, of course. But what he was giving them was a sense of hope – to which they could respond. And because we, too, celebrate that sacrament, so it is with us, also.

The events of that first Holy Week are as dramatic as they are testing; uncomfortable as they are revealing. As they relate the eventual torture and agonising suffering Jesus had to endure, we are left confronting the feelings of powerlessness and pain that are the daily experience of so many. We expend so much time theologising,

meditating, spiritualising and puzzling over every uncertainty and each inconsistency. But that is not what we are called to do.

We are given these actions and events as signposts and reassurances that our future, as individuals and as a human race, lies in the memories centred around Jesus' death. Therein is our greatest hope!

So; do not fret over what seems like an often messy and confusing world, nor over what can often seem a messy and confusing Church. Through these human constructs come signs and assurances of a love greater than our own. And remember this: it is perfectly possible for us to look to the future with the same hope with which Jesus looked to his cross.

Prayers for Holy Week

Monday: Lord Jesus, in this sacred week, when we are confronted by the depth and mystery of your love and nature, help us to remain faithful to your ways even though the ways of the world may ridicule and belittle. May familiarity never be allowed to anaesthetise us from the horrors of that first Holy Week. Rather help us rejoice in the hope that love endures all things. AMEN.

Tuesday: God of love, you love us so deeply that we are never forsaken. In this time of global emergency, may we extend your love to all who, even faced with great risk, use their knowledge and skills so that others may live healthy and free. May they know the strength of our appreciation and may we appreciate more the strength of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Wednesday: Since you first called your disciples, Lord Jesus, countless millions have followed you. During this Holy Week, may we go forward with you on the way to the cross loyal in our discipleship, ever searching for meaning, humble in our witness. May we never presume to step into your shoes, but make us sufficient to fit our own as we would walk with you in faith, in love and in wonder. AMEN.

Maundy Thursday: Even overshadowed by the expectation of betrayal, Lord God, Jesus shares hospitality with friends. He takes things of our everyday, bread and wine, breaks and shares them as his body and blood will soon be broken and spilled. There is no greater love than a man should lay down his life for others. Forgive our part in the world's injustice, inhumanity, selfishness and greed. May faith work within us for good and may your love lead us to work for the betterment of all crying in despair. So may we know that, through loving others we ourselves are blessed. AMEN.

Good Friday: In the face of undeserving suffering, you bring the mystery of unmerited love.

Crucified, cursed and spat upon, you now wait for death and look for us whose humanity has betrayed you. Grant us forgiveness and open our eyes, our hearts, our souls to see what you do now; as you disempower our depravities and transform us by your grace. Thanks be to you Jesus Christ, now and forever. AMEN.