

Good Friday

Readings: Isaiah 52:13–end of ch. 53

Hebrews 4:14–16, 5:7–9, John 18:1–end ch. 19

The time has come. Jesus has been mocked, tortured, stripped and crucified. As he awaits his death, he is joined by a group of women, including his mother - apparently a widow, as Joseph is not mentioned. Jesus, being the eldest son and in place of his father, would have been an essential advocate for his mother in a society where men took responsibility for most legal affairs.⁸ To ensure that his mother was cared for, he assigns that responsibility to a disciple, binding them together as family, saying:

“Woman, here is your son”, and to the disciple “Here is your mother”.

It’s not simply a legal and moral duty. How many of us, through the pandemic of the past year, have had to place our loved ones into the care of others? It’s not a decision that we’ve wanted to make; our hand has been forced. Strangers have brought food and comfort, they’ve wiped tears, conveyed our messages and created memories in our absence. We’re grateful, but there’s also a deep sadness as we realise what we’ve lost. Perhaps we can take comfort in knowing that Jesus understands, because he’s been through it too.

The voice of the disciple

“I was torn... I didn’t want to be present, but I wouldn’t be anywhere else. My Lord, my Master, my dear friend... breathing his last after hours of pain and humiliation. I don’t want to watch, but if the women have the courage to stay by his side, how can I leave? They stand in a tight group, weeping silently, and I grasp the shoulder of his mother so she knows I’m there, even though I’m just as helpless as the women. Jesus’ eyes open, flicking between Mary and myself. Through his exhaustion, we clearly hear his words; I am now Mary’s son, and she is my mother. I will do what I can for her, though I don’t know where to start, and nothing will ever be enough. I will do what I can.”

Stepping aside to let others use their skills in place of our own can hurt; we’re accustomed to being self-sufficient. Pride can get in the way of asking for, or accepting help, but by allowing others to step in, we’re enabling them to live their vocation. Far from being an inconvenient burden, it can be a gift, helping them to live as God created them to be.

✦ O Christ, your cross speaks both to us and to our world. In your dying for us you accepted the pain and hurt of the whole of creation. The arms of your cross stretch out across the broken world in reconciliation. You have made peace with us. Help us to make peace with you by sharing in your reconciling work. Amen.⁹



⁸ Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Zondervan (2019) John 19:26

⁹ Ali Newell, in Angela Ashwin (ed), The Book of a Thousand Prayers: Zondervan (1996), p.343