

# Southside Worship Online

2 April 2021

*To prepare yourself to worship, you are invited to spend a few minutes settling yourself into a comfortable space. Close your eyes. Slow your breathing. Become aware of what you can feel in and around your body – what you can hear, or feel, or smell. Acknowledge the distractions around and within you and bring them with you into worship. You may like to light a candle to help centre your thoughts toward the love and presence of the living God.*

## Call to worship

For us and for our salvation,  
Jesus Christ humbled himself,  
and became obedient to the point of death –  
even death on a cross. Philippians 2:8

## Prayer

Crucified Saviour, Servant Lord, on the cross we see your love and our shame; here you bear the world's sorrows and sin, here you share the fate of the godforsaken. Open our ears to hear your word of grace, our eyes to see your thorn-crowned brow, and our hearts to know you in the least of our sisters and brothers. Amen.

**Song** *When I survey the wondrous cross*

**Bible Reading** Luke 22:39-23:56

**Sermon** *The evil within us*

There are 2 defining events in my life that shape and influence the way I approach Good Friday. The first is a conversation I had on the front steps of this building when I was a student minister. My starting point was, I don't want to have to deal with the pain and suffering of Good Friday, can't we just skip to the celebrations of Easter Sunday, we know how the story ends. But our minister, Peter Arnett, simply said, that without experiencing the depths of Good Friday, we can't appreciate the heights of Easter Sunday. The second event was watching the movie, The Passion of the Christ. Remember that movie that came out in the early 2000s by Mel Gibson? It was horribly gruesome, but a stark reminder of the pain endured by Jesus on this day.

The accounts that we have of this day see Jesus being beaten, whipped, stripped and humiliated. We see him so weakened by lack of food, water, sleep and blood that he can't even carry his own cross.

What caused these men to do this? In every part of this story we encounter people who do acts that are difficult to imagine: respectable religious leaders demanding that Jesus be put to death because he threatens their power and the status quo; the crowd who on Sunday called out Hosanna, now calling for his death; the Roman soldiers beating, flogging and humiliating him in ways that are designed to inflict the utmost pain on the victim and the utmost fear in everyone else.

But are they any different from others? In 1963 a lecturer from Yale University in the US invited people to come in off the street and take part in an experiment. They were paid to sit in front of a set of gauges and dials and told to deliver electric shocks when someone in the other room gave wrong answers to questions they were asked. The experiment was designed to determine how far people would go if an authority figure told them they must go on increasing the force of the shock until it reached apparently fatal levels. No one was actually shocked, but the subjects did not know this.

Before the experiment researchers thought that 1% would deliver what were considered to be lethal doses of electricity. What they found was that 65% of the subjects were willing to increase the electricity to 450 kws, despite the cries of pain coming from the people in the other room.

This makes me think of things like the horrors of genocides that we've seen across the last century, even the recent history of race riots in the US last year. And it drives me to think of the capacity that lies within humanity to be involved in some of the most brutal, violent, in humane actions that we can't even imagine.

But there it is, the unimaginable acts that humans inflict upon others. Over the past month we have shook our heads in disbelief as stories have unfolded from Parliament House on how our elected representatives treat women.

But it's only in seeing the extent to which we can all be drawn into this, that we are able to see the extent to which Jesus shows us God's love on the cross.

Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection constitute a divine drama meant to communicate God's word to humanity, to make clear to us our need for redemption and forgiveness, to show us the full extent of God's love and lead us to repentance.

When we read in John 1:1 - 5 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind,' we see God's intention to become one with humanity.

Because the brokenness of humanity is not the final word for this day. We are meant to see in Christ on the cross the love of one who suffers with us and for us and is determined to save us from our sin.

Jesus' suffering and death were not accidental. Isaiah prophesied 'Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.' Isaiah 53:4-5. And Jesus himself pointed to his own death. 'He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.' Luke 18:32-33

Jesus demonstrates a love that refuses to give into vengeance or to give up. He is determined to love the enemy in order to win freedom for them and restore the rightful relationship of beloved child and friend.

'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' Romans 5:8. And in John 3:16 we read 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'

There is a final word that we should hear in Jesus' suffering and death and that concerns the nature of sacrificial love. He has set an example for us of a kind of love that alone has the power to save humanity from its self-destructive ways.

Sacrificial love transforms enemies into friends, shames the guilty into repentance, melts hearts of stone. The world is changed by true demonstrations of sacrificial love and selfless acts of service.

I spent some time on Monday googling for a fitting story to finish this sermon. And there are many stories about people giving their lives for the sake of others. A German friar who was sent to Auschwitz and took the place of another prisoner to die. Of Christians on sinking ships who gave up their life jackets and spots on life boats. Of people in wars who gave their lives for others.

But as I think about sacrificial love, I think of a pair of elderly parents of disabled a disabled son, who carved out a whole new model of living arrangements to provide for their son after their death. A lifestyle that was arduous for them. I think of 2 British doctors who in the first years of their retirement in the early 2000s, and moved to a remote hospital in the Solomon Islands and faced all types of challenges to keep conditions clean, to source out equipment and provide medical care for the locals. I think of people like Grace Tame the current Australian of the year who, with great courage, speaks out on behalf of survivors of child sexual assault.

The power of love shown by Jesus on the cross is meant to inspire within us the courage and resolve to act from where we are to change the world, to move from the brokenness of humanity, to allow people to live with hope, freedom and joy. Amen.

## Reflection

*Spend as long as you need reflecting on the words that follow:*

Look at your hands. It was hands like yours that were nailed to the cross.

Look at your feet. It was feet like yours the stumbled their way to Calvary.

Look into the eyes of your neighbours. It was for ones like these, that Jesus was crucified.

Look at yourself It was for you that Jesus died.

## Prayers of intercession

Let us pray, brothers and sisters, for the holy Church of God throughout the world, that God may guide it and gather it together so that we may worship God in peace and tranquillity.

God of power and love, you have shown your compassion in Jesus Christ. Guide the work of the Church.

Help it to persevere in faith and to proclaim your name to people everywhere.

*Pause for reflection*

God of power and love, your Spirit guides the Church and makes it holy. Strengthen and sustain all who minister.

Keep them in health and safety and help each of us to do faithfully the work to which you have called us.

*Pause for reflection*

Let us pray for all who do not know God, that the light of the Holy Spirit may awaken them to faith.

*Pause for reflection*

God of power and love, may all your children everywhere know your goodness. Help us, your Church, to become more perfect witnesses of your grace so that all may see you in us.

Let us pray for all in positions of power in government and business that God may guide their hearts and minds so all may live in peace and justice.

*Pause for reflection*

God of power and love, defender of the poor and oppressed, call to account the rulers of this world, so that people everywhere may enjoy justice, peace and freedom and a fair share of the goodness of creation.

Let us pray for all who are sick or dying, all who are homeless or in prison, and for all who suffer from hunger or violence.

*Pause for reflection*

God of power and love, strength of the weary, hope of the despairing, hear the cries of your suffering children and give us the courage to be agents of your love for them. We pray in the name of Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

## Song

*O Praise the Name (Anastasis)*

## **Benediction**

Lord Jesus Christ, the story of your suffering is written on our hearts, and the salvation of the world is in your outstretched hands. Keep your victory always before our eyes, your praise on our lips, your peace in our lives. May you find in the cross a sure ground for faith, a firm support for hope, and the assurance of sins forgiven. Amen.