

## **A Podcast for North Coventry Group – April 10 2020 (Good Friday)**

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. We are making a pilgrimage through Holy Week, an online one - as we cannot meet in our churches. In each short podcast we begin and end with some music, reflect in a number of ways on Holy Week scripture, and pray. Details of music and sources are in the online transcript. Our scripture is all taken from John's Gospel.

**Music\*** – *O haupt, voll Blut und Wunden* - chorale by J S Bach from his oratorio, the St Matthew Passion. [*O sacred head, sore wounded*]

### **Opening Words**

Jesus tolerated the mockery of a trial; the ridicule and rejection of the crowd

MAY WE ECHO HIS ENDURANCE

He rejected the option to say what they wanted to hear and to save himself

MAY WE IMITATE HIS INTEGRITY

He was condemned to death, tortured and executed

MAY WE MERIT HIS SACRIFICE

Jesus died that we might live

MAY WE HONOUR HIS NAME ALWAYS

### **Scripture<sup>†</sup>: John 19.16-30**

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others- one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews', but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

## **Reflection**

In a lot of our hymns and readings there is room for confusion, for misunderstanding, for oversimplification. Perhaps never more so than today, Good Friday. And I think that especially the nineteenth and twentieth century hymnwriters tended to sanitise the story, to smooth some of the rough edges, to avoid too much realism in their description of events.

Our opening music was the hymn 'O sacred head, sore wounded', or in the German version we heard 'O head full of blood and wounds, full of pain and mockery'. Rather more realism there than in the English translation.

We display planed, polished and perfectly constructed crosses in our churches. Sometimes serene Jesuses, for those traditions which depict the body of Christ on the cross, rather than our preferred empty cross. Very different from the strained sinews and agony of earlier pieces, that would have been the reality of the barbaric death of Jesus. I make no apology for drawing attention to this. Crucifixion was a desperately cruel and drawn out affair, used to execute those to be made an example of. There were far quicker and easier ways to bring about a death.

Jesus didn't look much like a king, with or without Pilate's sign above his head saying 'The King of the Jews'. What was Pilate trying to achieve? To wind the people up even more? Or was he showing a sign of what he really thought? Maybe it was a way of affirming the Roman supremacy over Palestine. A way of saying to those who passed by – if you want a Jewish King – if you want a Messiah, this is the best you are going to get, and where will that get you?

There had already been a lot of angst about the subject of kingship during the trial. Was the kingdom of Jesus of this world? Important for Pilate, puzzling for everyone else.

And what did Pilate say? What I have written, I have written – the die is cast. There is no going back. It is finished. And I'm sure it felt like an end, the darkest of dark times.

Good Friday is misnamed. It's not a good day but the name has its likely origins in an old sense of the word 'good' meaning 'holy'. The Germans call it Karfreitag – 'Sorrowful Friday'. It is a dark day.

Were you there, when they crucified my Lord? We are there now, at the moment of crucifixion. A sequence of events follows, through which Jesus fulfils the scriptures – lots being cast for his undergarment; taking a last drink; having his side pierced.

But what matters now is that Jesus dies on the cross, for us, as we silently watch and wonder.

**Music** – *Were you there when they crucified my Lord*, sung by the St Michael's Singers

## Prayers

*Jesus said from the cross: 'Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing'.*

Father, while we live under unaccustomed restrictions, we pray for the millions who are faithfully practising 'social distancing' however unnatural it feels. For those who are self-isolating or being shielded in the attempt to keep them from harm, and for those in hospital. But we also pray for those who are not following the rules, whether because they simply do not understand, or because their attitude is that rules are for other people and not for them. May they come to understand, to conform, and may we avoid adding to the burden of negativity through anger with others.

*Jesus said from the cross: 'Mother, there is your son ...'*

Jesus asked his beloved disciple to care for his mother, when he could no longer do so on this earth. We pray for the millions who are parted from their loved ones at this time. We pray for the lonely, the frustrated, the sad. And we pray for the health service workers and community and residential sector carers, looking after those who are vulnerable or ill, even to the point of death. Give them strength to endure and show us ways to support them through our love and our actions.

*Jesus said from the cross: 'I am thirsty ...'*

Lord we pray for the millions who are experiencing shortages in the availability and choice of food and drink, often for the first time in their life. And we pray for those in this country and beyond, for whom the inability to fill a stomach, still less a larder, is a harsh reality of daily life. May we learn from the experience, about the need to balance resources across the world's population. And we pray for all those risking their health to continue to produce, supply and sell our provisions.

*Jesus said from the cross: 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit ...'*

Father, we have never felt so cut adrift from all that is normal. In this very strange Holy Week, may the millions for whom life has been slowed down and simplified by the current crisis focus anew on you and on your message. May we see it as an opportunity to learn about what is most important in life and resolve to take that learning into life beyond Covid-19. And we ask your blessing on those working on the frontline on our behalf and that you give them refreshment, reassurance and renewal too.

In the name of Jesus, who died for us, we pray.  
Amen

**Music** – *When I survey the wondrous cross* Hymn by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), sung to the tune *Morte Christe* by the Treorchy Male Voice Choir.

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† Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition.