

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – April 11 2020 (Holy Saturday)

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. With this Holy Saturday edition we complete our online pilgrimage through Holy Week, and look forward to Easter Day.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript.

Music* – *John 19.41* from *Jesus Christ Superstar* Andrew Lloyd-Webber (part)

Scripture†: John 19.38-42

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away.

³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about thirty-five kilograms. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was near by, they laid Jesus there.

Reflection

Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb. Our musical bookends for this podcast are taken from the end of the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*, when Jesus' body is taken from the cross and taken away – I found it an emotional moment. Ending as the disciples ended that first Good Friday, wondering what might happen next.

But what happened next was Holy Saturday – the Saturday of Easter weekend. Known by various names in different Church traditions, but clearly a pause in the Gospel story between the crucifixion and the resurrection. The Gospels have... nothing. Nothing is happening, and because it was the Sabbath day for the Jews, nothing really could. Luke's Gospel mentions this at the end of Chapter 23 as the reason the embalming of Jesus' body couldn't be planned for until a full day had passed. So it is early on the first day of the week – Sunday – that the women go to the tomb.

What was happening – nothing. What was happening to Jesus? There is, as some would say, no data. Further traditions in the Church are built around a reference or two in Paul's letters. The Apostle's Creed, one of our earliest statements of belief, affirms that Christ descended into Hell – 'descended to the dead' say some versions.

This was not in order to atone for anything more than he had done already, more to bring relief and salvation to those righteous dead – again in some traditions – who had been waiting for this moment in order to make the final step into the presence of God.

I prefer to visualise a calm waiting for the moment when the right people could make the discovery of his resurrection. But this is just the way I have come to feel about this hiatus, this pause on Holy Saturday.

This day is usually far from calm, in the present-day UK. Whether or not the Good Friday Bank Holiday has been observed, quite often you will find throngs shopping in order to be able to enjoy Easter Day and Easter Monday with get-togethers of family and friends. Depending on the weather, barbecues and barbecue food are big sellers. Plenty of food

and drink bought and consumed, whether or not a Christian celebration is part of the equation.

For Christians, what should we do? We are of the Church and also of our society. This year, isolated and unable to make use of the weather or time off, with the stresses and worries of the Covid-19 pandemic to manage, what should we do? What should we think?

Even if we are constrained to look out only at our own little part of the country there will be few who can not see signs of new growth in the animals and plant life. Spring is here again, its return as part of the cycle of the seasons always seen as a sign of God's continuing care of this planet. Even if our attention is focussed on the very human problem of the virus, the big picture still has God as Creator, Christ as Redeemer and Lord and the Spirit as the helper we can still rely on to inspire and guide us.

Even in lock down we can still resolve in those well known words to see Christ more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly, day by day.

Even Job in the Old Testament story, stricken by all his misfortunes had an assurance that he could still put his trust in God – his words were hijacked by Handel and his librettist Jennens to represent a hope we could place in Christ even during Holy Saturday, even during this year's dysfunctional festival, even before his resurrection is made clear.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. (Job 19: 25)

Music: Aria, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, from Handel's Messiah, Judith Nelson in the 2014 re-mastered recording by the Academy of Ancient Music.

Prayers,

Lord, we are waiting, waiting for your Resurrection once again.

Your disciples and followers waited uncertainly, having heard your words but not understood.

But we know that your death was not the end. We know that you will rise again. We know that you are with us always. We are lucky to know this to be true.

In all our present troubles; in all our present uncertainty; we are in another time of waiting. We don't know how or when the lockdown will end; whether it will have to be made stricter before it can be relaxed; how many temporarily closed businesses will in truth have been closed for good.

We don't know whether we or our loved ones will catch the virus; succumb to the virus.

Lord we are so used to feeling in control of our lives; help us to set aside the struggle to do what can't presently be done, and to surrender our whole beings and to put our trust in your undying and everlasting love.

In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen

Music – *John 19.41* from *Jesus Christ Superstar* Andrew Lloyd-Webber (all)

* All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067..

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