

St. Bride's Church of Scotland, Newtonmore

Rev. Catherine Buchan

Good Friday 29th March 2013

Hymn 380 There is a green hill far away

Prayer (using 777 Kyrie eleison)

Sing: Kyrie

Saviour of the world, though easier paths beckoned and friends pleaded with you to stay with them, you turned your face resolutely towards Jerusalem, determined to go all the way to Calvary.

Take us with you now, Lord, and show us how through your sufferings evil is conquered and the world is saved.

Amen

Sing, Kyrie.

Reading John 19:1-25

Hymn 385 Here hangs a man discarded (tune 432 Reres Hill)

Prayer (using 777 Kyrie eleison)

Sing: Kyrie

Lord Jesus, Saviour of the world, how can we contemplate your suffering: flogged by the soldiers, crowned in sharp thorns and mocked in purple robes; spat at, taken in humiliating fancy dress to be shown to the crowd, to the crowd who had known you in your own straightforward, humble truthful self. We see ourselves in the crowds, and pray, Lord, have mercy

Kyrie

How can we contemplate what it must have been for you to be made to hear the cries for your death, to be made to stand before Pilate, whose power was so transient compared to yours.

We know our voices in the mindless cries and pray, Lord, have mercy

Kyrie

How can we contemplate your weary, aching walk to the hill of crucifixion, and the cruelty and agony of that act, with the worst of humanity shown in the the baying crowds and the greedy, gambling soldiers. How could you have continued through it all to go forward in love and faith for

us? And yet you did. And we know that it was because of your mercy that you kept on going, that you would not speak one word or lift one finger to stop what was happening to you. You did it through your mercy.

Kyrie

We cannot contemplate it all, and yet we may not turn away. And in our watching we see a glimpse of your mercy and are comforted.

Amen.

Reading John 19:26-42

Hymn 383 While Mary was watching, they hung Jesus high

Meditation

Have you ever watched at a death-bed? Have you sat, for hours and hours, watching and waiting, till almost the reality of what you are waiting for has faded from our mind and it seems that there has been no other reality than this watching and waiting? Some of you have.

Have you watched a parent die, or a spouse die, or worst of all, perhaps, have you watched a child die? You know that you can do nothing, but you cannot leave, because no one should die alone, without those who love them best around them to comfort them as they face the unknown.

Sitting by a bedside is one thing. Mary watched her son being tortured to death. She could not stop it, she could not possibly want to see this; but nor could she turn away. This was her son, her son, her baby, and she who had watched his life, often uncomprehending, often puzzled, often needing to take out her memories to think over them again and try to make sense of the latest strange thing that Jesus had got up to; she who had watched his life could not turn from him in his death. No, she could not do anything to help, except be there. She could be there. She could let him know that his mother had not abandoned or disowned him. That there was still love for him, even if love which did not understand fully what this was about and how this end had come.

So Mary stood watching. It was the only comfort she could offer, and she would offer it, even though it cost her in nightmares for the rest of her life. And Jesus appreciated her watching. He in his turn did his best to show his love for her, providing what he could not give her himself, a home, and someone to love her for his sake.

The disciples stood watching too. They too could not turn away, though it was so painful to see their leader, their hero tortured and weak and dying. They watched, the women, the beloved disciple, maybe others. They had found that their faith, their love, was strong enough for this, though had you asked them in advance they might have wondered if they could manage it. They watched, lost in their thoughts or refusing to think, and they saw Jesus give up his spirit. He had done all he could. He had carried his faithfulness to God's plan through, despite the fear and the pain and the humiliation. He had made provision for his mother, he had fulfilled Scripture, not just in asking for a drink, but in allowing himself to be killed for the good of all. He had done all he could, and there was nothing left for him to do, but to give up his spirit – so he did. Those watching saw it happen.

Tonight we are asked to watch at the foot of the cross. You could be at home, with the telly on, maybe or with a good book, forgetting that this is Good Friday, that there ever was such a thing as a

crucifixion for our Saviour. But you have come here, and coming, we too are asked to keep watch. Last night the service was full of action, as we celebrated the Lord's or last supper together, as we moved to a different part of the church and did as Jesus commanded by washing each other's feet and thinking about what that meant, and why it was asked of us. The Thursday of Holy Week was a day, and an evening of action and movement.

But tonight we are still. By the evening of the Friday, by sunset, it was all over, and Jesus had been pronounced dead and taken by Joseph to be buried in his own tomb. By the Friday evening the disciples would have gone away to hide themselves, probably in their upper room, maybe taking Mary and the women with them, and the numbness and the questions of grief would have been upon them. You can imagine that they would sit around and from time to time one of them would say "Do you remember?"

Do you remember when he blessed the children and we wanted to stop him?
Do you remember how we argued about who would be the first and the greatest of us?
Do you remember how we tried to stop other people acting in his name?
Do you remember how long it took us to think that he was the Messiah?

When people are in grief they remember the things that they regret, that they wish they could go back and do again, do differently. So, perhaps, it should be with us as we contemplate the cross. Let us remember the things we regret, that we wish we had not done, that we wish we could do, or say over again – and differently.

Pause

It was because of these things that Jesus died. It was so that he could heal the harm that people do to each other in this world that he remained faithful to God, even to death on a cross. If by watching at the foot of the cross, even for a few minutes, we can realise again the love he had for us, that held him there, the faith he had in God that this would be worth it, the charge he gives to all of us who are the disciples whom he loves, that we should care for the people he cares for – the lost, the lonely, the helpless, the downtrodden, the poor, the forgotten, the grieving – if we can realise these things, then the time spent here is not time wasted, but time which will change, not only us, but the world. Even as Jesus' death – and what was to follow – changed the world for ever.

Hymn 387 At the cross, her vigil keeping

Prayer (using 777 Kyrie eleison)

Kyrie

Lord God, your Son died as one of the least of the world, one of those who do not matter except to a scant handful of unimportant people, one of those who are deemed expendable by those who have power in the land. Tonight, at the foot of the cross we pray for those whose deaths do not move us to tears: for those who die in wars, in famines in disasters far away and who are just numbers, not names and faces to us. Have mercy on them, and may they know that even the fall of the sparrow is marked by you, so no one is unimportant.

Kyrie

Lord God, your Son died as one who felt abandoned by the world. One who seemed to have taken on the systems and authorities and lost. One who had lost the power to feel your presence with him. Tonight, at the foot of the cross we pray for those who feel abandoned, that no one sees them, that no one cares. We pray for those who tonight contemplate taking their own lives from emptiness, and ask that when it seems there is no one for them, you would send someone, someone to tell them that they are not unseen, that your care is never withdrawn. Have mercy on them and on us.

Kyrie

Lord God, your Son died to save the world. To save us from ourselves, to save the world of creation from what we in our unthinking selfishness can do. Tonight, at the foot of the cross, we pray for ourselves, that we will allow him to save us. May we acknowledge our debt to him, and turning to you, may we live our lives in joy and in unselfish service of others. We do not deserve the love of Jesus: may we never cease to appreciate it.

Kyrie
Amen

Hymn 392 When I survey the wondrous cross