

GOOD FRIDAY

INTRODUCTION:

These are the most difficult of times. None of us have experienced this way of living before. Many of us may be feeling a great sense of isolation, we may be afraid of what the future holds, we may be lonely, we're missing the fellowship we feel when we're together and so we gather together today along with the crowds. We meet at the foot of the cross with everyone who is there and we hear from some of the unexpected people whose lives were changed for ever by the events of the day in the hopeful prayer that our lives will be changed forever.

Our hymn focuses our minds on the cross.

HYMN: *There is a green hill*

1. There is a green hill far away
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all.
2. We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.
3. He died that we might be forgiven
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by his precious blood.
4. There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin.
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in.
5. O dearly, dearly has he loved,
And we must love him too,
And trust in his redeeming blood,
And try his works to do.



C. F. Alexander

PRAYERS:

Loving God, we come together now in the best way we can to focus on you and your total and unconditional love for us. Things feel strange for us at the moment, but we know that the message of hope is here in your words to us and we pray that as we hear your words again and think of all you have done for us we will feel the comfort of your arms around us. We know that your love is offered, not because we deserve it, but by your grace and so we pray the words you taught us, which unite us at this time:

Our Father.....

READING: Luke 23: 39-43

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. 'Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence?' ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.'

⁴² Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'^[a]

⁴³ Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

MEDITATION: *"Remember me!" he cried - The mother of the thief*

"Remember me," he cried.

"When you come into your kingdom, remember the poor wretch who suffered and died beside you."

What made him ask it?

I really don't know, but there was something about that man Jesus which clearly touched him, enough apparently, despite the agony he endured, to inspire that last desperate plea.

It came as a complete surprise, that's for sure, for he wasn't a religious man, his faith – not just in God but in everything – long broken by then.

You see, he knew he'd done wrong, and he wanted to change, to put the past behind him and start again, but what hope did he have, for how many were there ready to give him a second chance, willing to believe he could mend his ways?

One mistake, one moment's madness, and he was an outcast, a reject, condemned to spend the rest of his life in the gutter, devoid of hope, devoid of meaning.

No wonder he couldn't take it.

Eventually he just snapped, throwing not just scruples but caution to the wind, and after that there could only be one result.

It broke my heart when they caught him, for he was still my son, whatever he'd done, yet he seemed resigned by then, as if he accepted he deserved punishment for his crimes.

But as they lifted up his cross he caught sight of Jesus nailed there beside him and his expression changed in a moment, from dull despair to anger, disbelief, dismay.

I knew what he was thinking, for I felt it too: why this man? - a man who was so clearly innocent, not an ounce of evil in him, not even the faintest suggestion of hatred or malice.

He took everything the crowds threw at him, the insults, the ridicule, the rejection, and even when the other fellow hanging there beside him joined in the abuse, hurling down curses- his reaction never changed; no anger, no resentment, no curses in return.

It was the first time I'd seen anything like it – the only time – and clearly it touched my son as much as it touched me, for the next thing I knew I heard his voice, calling out, loud and clear:

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

I caught my breath then, afraid what might happen next, for why should Jesus listen, there of all places – no one else ever did – what reason to think he'd have time for anything but his own agony.

Yet he turned with a look I shall never forget – such love, such joy, such acceptance in his face – and he spoke those wonderful words:

“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Was it true?

Well, I can't tell you, can I, not in this life anyway - if you want proof, you must wait and see.

But I can tell you this, when they cut my boy down I held him in my arms, and you should have seen the smile on his face – the peace and joy which radiated from him, happiness which I'd given up hoping ever to see again.

It was enough for me.

I knew then, beyond doubt, beyond question, that Jesus had heard his prayer, and answered him!

HYMN: *Jesus, remember me*

“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom!”

“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom!”

Taizé

READING: Luke 23: 44-47

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’^[a] When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’

MEDITATION: *He was special, that's all I can say – the Centurion*

*He was special, that's all I can say,
And it's not like me to hand out compliments, ask anyone.*

*I've seen all kinds,
 The real dregs of society, murderers, rapists, bandits, muggers, you name it.
 And I've watched them all suffering without a shred of conscience.
 Good riddance to them, that's the way I look at it.
 Felt the same with this one too, at first.
 Blasted troublemaker.
 Should have thought more carefully, shouldn't he,
 Before he started raising expectations, stirring up the crowd?
 But as I watched him that all changed;
 You couldn't help but be impressed.
 There was something about him –
 The quiet dignity,
 The complete composure,
 The sheer courage of the man.
 Nothing could shake him –
 Not the mocking or the spitting,
 Not the lying or the jeering,
 Not the flogging or the interrogation,
 Not even the thorns twisted so cruelly into his head.
 And when it came to the end,
 As he staggered under that cross, just about all in,
 As the blood spurted from those hands and feet,
 As the life seeped from his broken body, still the same.
 He actually had time for others, more than for himself!
 Time for one of the two wretches hanging there alongside him,
 Time for his mother, for his friends,
 Time for his people who'd stood to gloat, time even for us.
 Amazing!
 The Son of God some of them called him.
 And you know what, I think they might have been right.
 He was special, there's no doubt about that.*



PRAYERS:

Lord God,
 Jesus cried out to you on the cross,
 “Why have you forsaken me?”
 You seemed so far from his cry
 And from his distress.
 Those who stood at the foot of the cross
 Wondered where you were,
 As they saw Jesus mocked and shamed and killed.
 Where were you then?
 Lord God,
 We, too, ask where you are,
 When there is trouble and suffering and death,
 And we cry out to you for help.
 Be near to us, and save us
 So that we may praise you for your deliverance.

Loving God, there are so many needs at this most difficult of times, we bring before you all those who feel their lives have been turned upside down, those missing lost loved ones, those worried about those near and dear to them, those who feel totally isolated and we pray your strength for those who continue to work on the front line, putting their own lives at risk, just as you did, to save the lives of others. We pray that they will feel comfort in your unconditional love.

Lord God,
 We wait, on Friday, for the resurrection of Sunday
 And sometimes our lives seem a succession of Fridays
 And we cannot see what is “Good.”
 Teach us to call your name
 As Jesus did.
 Make us to trust in you like little children.
 In Jesus' name,
 Amen.

Our final hymn reminds us that God gave his all for us, all he wants in return is for us to love him

HYMN: *When I survey the wondrous cross*

1. When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.
3. See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?
4. His dying crimson, like a robe,
Spreads o'er his body on the tree;
Then am I dead to all the globe,
And all the globe is dead to me.
5. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Isaac Watts

SILENCE



The words of the meditations are by Nick Fawcett.

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