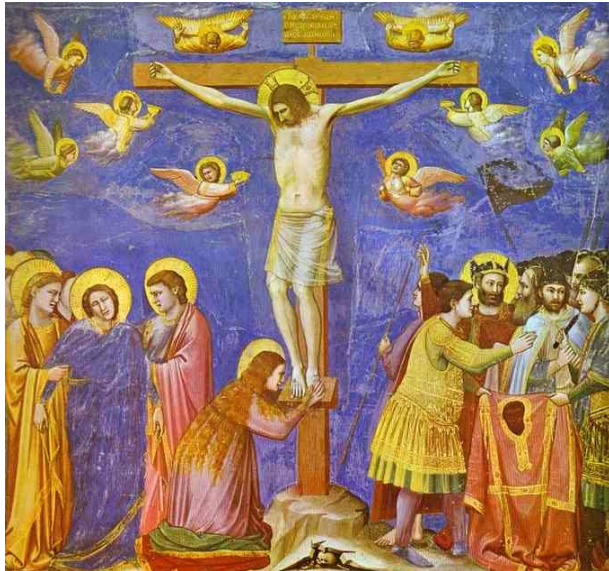


## Trinity 3

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020

### Five Events that Shaped Christianity – Week 3

#### Event 1. Good Friday – The Killing



*The Crucifixion, 1300, Giotto*

#### Readings:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

John 12:27-36

Jesus said:

‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say - “Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’ Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd

answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.' After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

### **Reflection**

After last week's reflection about Christmas, we move on about 33 years to the next event and after that big gap, the remaining four are of course very close to each other in timing. A couple of people remarked after last week's reflection that it seemed odd to be talking about Christmas in mid-summer – especially given the heatwave of the last few days. But that is part of our conditioning. We only celebrate Christmas when we do because it was incorporated into the old pagan festival of Yule, which was celebrated to lift the spirits in the winter gloom. We have been brainwashed by *In the Bleak Midwinter*, but in fact have no idea at what point of the year Jesus was born. We are on much stronger ground with the other events because we can time them from the Jewish Passover which Jesus had come to Jerusalem to celebrate, and so they fall in our springtime, and are a little more recent. I said last week that the baby in the manger grew up to take the road to the cross and this week we join him on that journey.

### **What happened?**

The final melt down began on the Thursday night with the last supper, the soul-searching of Gethsemane and the arrest of Jesus. Ever sensitive to the ambience, John tells us: "It was night." And it was a dark hour indeed! (John 13:30) After the arrest, came the trials and accusation of blasphemy which Jesus faced with calm resolution, only betraying emotion when he looks with sadness at Peter after his betrayals. From this time on, with all the disciples having deserted him, Jesus is totally alone as he begins the way to Calvary, the cross and agonising death. It is a story of horror and despair, yet, amazingly, also of victory and transformation. It is **Good** Friday. But why? Why does this one man's death change anything ... ?

### **What does it mean?**

Some have said that Jesus had a death wish and courted his fate, but Gethsemane shows that if another equally effective solution had presented itself, he would have embraced it. There was no other way and so he fulfilled his destiny and came to die for us. But he also came to live for us and show us how to live and open the way to that life eternally.

The cross is about the ultimate mystery of love as it shows us in **so many ways**:

It is Love as substitute. Jesus loved us and died as our substitute and in our place and by doing so he ended the need for any further sacrifice. Good Friday was a once and for all event. Does that mean that Jesus had to die to appease God's anger? No - the motivation for rescuing us, both his and God's, was always love.

It is Love as example; it evokes a response from us, but one that is limited and subjective. We might want to live better lives but often it seems that nothing objective has changed. The horrors continue and the world looks much as it always did whatever we try to do. But then, it is Love as victor; Christ has been lifted up and is victorious; "it is finished." But the even greater victory of resurrection had already been signposted in the miracles of healing which showed that God's kingdom was already breaking through. (Matthew 11:5)

It is Love as participation in God's great story. We were all baptized into Christ's death and are pledged to continue his work. We must play our part in that story, fit into the bigger picture, bringing that love to the world. We don't just observe the cross; we participate in it. The cross, and the atonement it brings, is not just a belief but a way of life and a pastoral imperative.

### **What does it mean for us now?**

First, it means that for the Christian, love is the only way. Whichever definition from those above strikes a chord with us, it is love that counts. Not fluffy sentimental love, but a love that gives whatever it costs. Love must become a way of life – our way of life.

And for each of us the cross brings a great release. We no longer need to earn our way into the kingdom by obeying the law. We can live as people set free. Yes we should be good, but our "goodness" isn't necessary to **earn** God's love; it should, however, be the **result**. The cross releases us from our imprisonments. We all have our habits and "addictions" and some are harmless or even good, (a sign of sound judgement like love of cricket, John Pritchard says,) but they should not take over our lives. The cross gives us the power to be free from those habits which enslave us.

The Cross shows us that God is always with us. And not just to give us a comforting pat on the head. He is the suffering God – who suffered with us and for us. He is right there beside us and he gets us through even our lowest days and darkest nights. Because everyone has a breaking point – except God. The victory of the cross was that his love could not be broken – it is always there.

But the cross also showed us what true evil is and challenged us to confront it – to continue to work for the compassionate justice which is the social face of love. Political awareness and action are also part of our discipleship, as recent events have highlighted; action which leads to reconciliation. For reconciliation is at the heart of the message of the cross, and reconciliation is rooted in forgiveness – a forgiveness which must be premature on the part of the one who forgives. Christ did not wait for an apology before he said: "Father forgive them." Grace does not "wait and see." It takes risks.

And finally, the cross teaches us how to face death. For the Christian, the cross shows us that in letting go of our lives we can know the beauty of resurrection.

In looking at the cross we learn everything that is needful for abundant Christian life: it will teach us both how to live and how to die - and above all, how to love.

Amen

### **Prayers**

#### **Today's Collect**

Almighty God,  
you have broken the tyranny of sin  
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts  
whereby we call you Father:  
give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,  
that we and all creation may be brought  
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen

**A Prayer of thanks for all that God has done for us**

Dear God, thank you for your amazing power and work in our lives, thank you for your goodness and for your blessings over us. Thank you that you are able to bring hope through even the toughest of times, strengthening us for your purposes. Thank you for your great love and care. Thank you for your mercy and grace. Thank you that you are always with us and will never leave us. Thank you for your incredible sacrifice so that we might have freedom and life. Forgive us for when we don't thank you enough, for who you are, for all that you do, for all that you've given. Help us to set our eyes and our hearts on you afresh. Renew our spirits, fill us with your peace and joy. We love you and we need you, this day and every day. We give you praise and thanks, for you alone are worthy!  
Amen.

**Blessing**

You believe that by his dying  
Christ destroyed death for ever.  
You have been crucified with Christ  
and live by faith in the Son of God,  
who loved and gave himself for you.  
May he send you out to glory in his cross,  
and live no longer for yourselves but for him,  
who died and was raised to life for us.  
And the blessing of God Almighty,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.  
Amen