

Good Friday

Friday 15th April 2022 – written by Bishop Donald Kirk

From a hymn by Brian Wren:

*Here hangs a man discarded,
a scarecrow hoisted high,
a nonsense pointing nowhere
to all who hurry by.*

Today is a day like no other. Today we choose to remember an event about 2000 years ago that changed life for everyone. For many it is a sad day too horrible to contemplate. Certainly, it is a story of tragedy in that an innocent man was sent to his death. But, it is much more than that. It is the history of God's purposeful action in and for human life.

The narrative of John's Gospel that we read today recounts the events leading up to Jesus' death and burial. The characters of this narrative help us to see the worst and best of humanity:

1. One must start with **Judas Iscariot**, the betrayer. It is hard to imagine what was going through his mind. His betrayal was about more than money. Yes, the Gospel tells us he was a thief – but Jesus knew that. Was it that Jesus did not turn out to be the warrior king who would rid Israel of the Romans? Or was it that he could see the danger and sought to preserve himself? Whatever the reasoning in his mind, it was necessary for there to be a betrayal for the events of Salvation to unfold. Judas' part was necessary. This is why, when the moment arrived, Jesus clearly identified himself and went willingly with the soldiers.
2. Then there is **Peter**, who struggles to know what to do in the face of the situation. First, he attacks pulling out a sword. Jesus rebukes him for a defence that is not warranted. Second, he denies knowing Jesus, to the woman at the gate, to the Police at the fireplace, and to the slaves who recognised him. He goes from defending Jesus to denying him three times to protect himself – and the cock crows!
3. The most senior religious and political leader in Israel was the **High Priest**, a position held at that time by **Caiaphas**. He held significant power and influence within Judaism but because Israel was an occupied country it was the Roman Governor who held the official political power, so Caiaphas played the game and sought to rule through the Governor by manipulating him into the decisions they desired.
4. **Pontius Pilate** applies an appropriate amount of disinterest to the case presented to him in order to preserve his authority as **Governor**. He disparages Jesus by asking him "Are you the King of the Jews?" [John 18.33] but is confronted by Jesus' personal

presence and authority as he responds to him. Ultimately, Pilate reveals himself as a weak man who is a cynic.

5. The freeing of the known criminal **Barrabas** showed the cruelty of religious leaders. They were meant to uphold the moral and ethical standards of God's people and yet they chose to allow this criminal to go free in order to be rid of Jesus. Such was their fear of him and the following he had in the community.
6. When the **Soldiers** mocked Jesus with the Crown of Thorns and a purple robe they gave in to base instinct and peer pressure resulting in abuse. At the Cross they stole his clothes before he was even dead!
7. The **Women** at the Cross stayed – Mary, his Mother, Mary, wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene – and they watched to the end. They showed the love that the other disciples had failed to show.
8. The **Beloved Disciple** was also there and he and Mary, Jesus' mother, were bonded as family by Jesus' words, a final act of selfless love for them.
9. **Joseph of Arimathea** and **Nicodemus** organise Jesus' burial giving dignity to him after the humiliation of crucifixion. It was a risky thing for them to do and showed great faith and courage.

Looking at these characters we see these human traits: betrayal, denial, manipulation, cynicism, fear, and abuse. But the story is not all bad. We also see love, selflessness, faith and courage. That in itself hints towards the future.

The sign above Jesus on the Cross said, "*The King of the Jews*" and was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek to ensure everyone could read it. Jesus' death on the Cross is a sign to everyone of God's immense love for them, for us.

Today is like no other day, and yet, as Brian Wren's hymn suggests many will hurry by ignoring the sight of the Cross like ignoring a scarecrow. We recognise the human traits that we too share yet seek to find love, selflessness, faith and courage, and pray with Brian Wren's last verse:

*Christ, in our darkness, risen,
help all who long for light
to hold the hand of promise
and walk into the night.*