

Good Friday Meditation – Jesus

by Rev'd Richard Sewell

It's nearly over; it is nearly finished. I've lost track of time and I'm struggling to understand what's actually happened to me. I've been pushed from pillar to whipping post, from person to person but that's all gone now. But I think I might have lost sight of what I'm doing and why.

I'm so exhausted and my mind keeps going over the events of the past few months. I knew when I set out towards Jerusalem that it would bring things to a head. John and Peter warned me not to go – everyone did – but they did not know (how could they?) that I had to do this. But for a while, as I went around the hills and fields of Galilee, I thought that people would see me for what I was and would accept the rule of God in their lives.

I did not know then that forces were gathering against me. But despite trying not to rouse a rabble, things got a little bit out of control. My friends tried to protect me but they were out of their depth. People were wanting things from me that I couldn't give and wanted me to give answers that I just felt would be used against me. Everything moved faster than I expected and then I could see that something had been unleashed against me. So I knew that I had to go to Jerusalem, to the Temple to take them on face to face. I had to show them that I wouldn't, couldn't, back down. Either I had to go there or else I would have had to quietly slink back to Nazareth, to that other life. But that's not what God sent me here for.

And yet, did it really have to end like this? It feels like everything is lost and oh, my Father.....where are you now? Right now I am alone; I feel abandoned. My friends have left me. In the garden it was horrible. It nearly ended up in a blood bath but I'm not here to kill people and take power by force so I let the soldiers take me and then suddenly everyone had gone, disappeared. I knew then that this was something I would have to do alone.

In the crowds I have seen faces, familiar. My friends are here but they're hiding. I am not surprised. I am not really even disappointed. I know they want to help me and they would if they could possibly do anything useful. But the forces against us are strong. They have stirred up evil in people's hearts. They are playing dirty because they are afraid of losing their power – the power of the sword; the power of control. It's strange. I came to help the weak ones, the little ones, the ones who are hurting and some people find that a threat. They seem to want there to be some people beneath them and to stand on top of them to make themselves feel stronger and more powerful.

But to fight them would be futile. I don't want to play by their rules. I am here for something else: to love. To love in the face of their hatred and fear. So I did not reply. I took their blows and their mockery. I'll take all that as I suffer and as I die. I'll take that and show that they can kill me but they cannot win because I will not become like them.

And there is John. And there is my mother; I am not alone, not quite. What will they do now? I can't help them now but they can help each other. I'll tell them to help each other and if all my disciples do that then maybe some good can come out of all this pain. I have taught them; I have shown them what to do – to live for God, follow me and love one another. It's up to them, I can do no more.....but, Oh, my Father.

Good Friday Meditation – Mary

by Rev'd Ann Lynes

When I agreed to the stranger's message, all those years ago, to have this child, to bear God's Son. How could I have possibly known what lay in store? What heights of love, what depths of misery and pain. How could I have known? And if I had, if I'd known then what I know now, would I have answered the messenger differently? I cannot say.

All I can say is, that I do not know how I was able to watch the cruel treatment of my son. It tore my heart to see him suffer, I wanted to run away, or intervene and stop them. But I could do nothing. I could not leave, I was rooted to the spot. But I could not act either, I was powerless to change anything. But I could not have left him there alone.

He had entered this world with me, on a messy and painful day in a dusty Bethlehem stable, I had shed my own blood to bring him into life. Being born in such a place was hardly an ideal start, but Jesus brought me such joy and happiness, raising this beautiful child, seeing the man he became. We were so close, all through his life, and that was an amazing privilege.

And so, even though it was torture, I could not leave his side at the point of his bloody and painful death. It seemed right, somehow, that I was there. So I had to stay, transfixed in surreal horror, before the grief overwhelmed me.

It was so surreal, I can think of no other word. The whole sequence of events. From the time we got word that he had been arrested, to the moment that he cried in anguish, before he breathed his last.

Mary, Martha and I, we'd been trying to get to see him. Everyone turned us away. We women had no rights, we couldn't do a thing. Powerless. And so we just had to wait, desperately trying to find out what was happening, all the while trying to rest and eat and occupy ourselves, but failing to do anything other than worry, and wonder, and worry and hope, and then worry and fear the worst...

And then, finally word came out, they had sentenced him. He was to be crucified. My boy, my lovely, gentle, beautiful boy. My baby. Crucified. I remember that moment of gut wrenching shock so clearly, I felt my head swim and my knees buckle underneath me. Crucified. And I heard afresh the words of the prophet Simeon, "And a sword shall pierce your own heart too". Those words I had so often pondered, words he'd spoken to me so many years before, suddenly took on a horribly sinister meaning, it was as if they cut to my very soul...

You know I don't think I believed it would really happen. Even as I stood watching, as every moment passed, every blow, every insult, playing out before my eyes, I think I still expected a miracle. I still expected Jesus to rise up out of the melee, to stop their violence, to end their evil. And that was the most surreal aspect for me. I mean, I know Jesus, I know his power, I know he is truly God's son.

And that left me with only one overwhelming question, as I stood there watching him just take it, take it all, without so much as raising his voice. WHY!? Why was he not doing anything? Why was he just taking it?

And then, as he was lifted up, into position, our eyes met. But rather than looking to me for sympathy or help. like all the other criminals do. Jesus' gaze was one of concern. Its as if he knew exactly what I was feeling, and he wanted to reassure me! He knew what being there, watching him die, was doing to me. And his gaze was as confident and loving as I have ever seen it, even though it was also etched with pain and disfigured with bruises and blood.

He knew exactly what was going on. He was still in control, even though he had surrendered himself to this torture. He called to me, and then to John. He wanted me to join John's family. To become John's mother. And John was to become my son. As if anyone could replace Jesus!

And yet I was so glad to hear his words, so glad to have John's strong arm around me, holding me close and sharing my grief. And I know that I will need John. A woman today cannot make a life for herself alone. Jesus know's I need someone, and he knows he can trust John.

We're going down to Joseph's tomb as soon as we can, Mary, Martha and I. My mother's work is not yet done, and as soon as the passover ends, at dawn on Sunday, I will go and ensure he is comfortable. I must wash the blood from his face, wrap his body in clean clothes and lay him down to rest. And then, perhaps, I may find some peace too...

Good Friday Meditation – Peter

by Geoffrey Barnett

'I do not know that man'. How could I have said this – not once, not twice, but three times? And all of that when he had told me that I would.

What's happened is unbelievable. These last three years have been so wonderful. He's taught me so much. He's rubbed off my own hard edges. And we twelve learned to love one another as he loved us.

What entered Judas's head at supper? Why did he run off and what made him plot to have our Lord arrested in the garden? And now they've all gone and I'm wandering alone back down the path into the Kidron valley. Everything's suddenly quiet, so I'll sit here on this stone for a while.

In the silence some words from the Psalms enter my mind:

'Rebuke me not, O Lord, in your anger, neither chasten me in your heavy displeasure. For your arrows have stuck fast in me and your hand presses hard upon me. There is no health in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no peace in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; their weight is a burden too heavy to bear. I am utterly bowed down and brought very low.'(Ps38, 1-6)

He taught us so many Psalms of thanksgiving and praise. There was so often such joy in our praying. But, now, this is all I can say.

Oh, it's cold. I can't stay sitting here. There are strange night noises around me and I'm frightened – frightened of this darkness – frightened of what I've done – frightened of what may happen to Jesus. He said he would die for the world. What does that mean and can it literally be true? I must just walk on. I feel so wretched. There's no way I could sleep on this night, of all nights.

What do you think is happening to our Lord? There he was, bundled through the door into the high priests' courtyard. When I was allowed in to warm myself, I felt like taking another lunge at one of the servants, but I'm glad I didn't. It was better to be keeping quiet. Perhaps it wasn't so bad to say I didn't know him. What would they have done to me if I'd boasted he was my friend?

And I didn't catch sight of John any more. I expect his priestly friends were giving him supper. I wonder what he was saying about Jesus.

I just can't believe it's come to this. I don't know where any of the others are. They seemed to melt away.

Oh, I'm exhausted. Have mercy, Lord, on me; see my bitter weeping.....

Good Friday Meditation – Servant Girl

by Christabel Gairdner

THE GIRL AT THE GATE TO THE COURTYARD OF THE HIGH PRIEST

I'm a servant girl. It's cold standing here by the gate but there's a buzz in the air, like something important is about to happen. Folk pass by these gates and tell me things and they say this Jesus who's been causing quite a stir around here, they say he's been arrested, in a garden, they said, and close friends were with him. I saw this Jesus for myself, about a week ago, he was riding through the city on a donkey and there were great crowds cheering him and throwing palms along the way. I can't make out who he is, really, except there's been so much talk about him, people have been excited, some saying he is the Messiah, others a prophet, a saviour, that he's come to free us all from Roman rule. And he does miracles and all that. But there are lots what don't like him, that's clear to me.

Ah, but here he comes. This is him all right, I recognise him. There are soldiers and Jewish officials treating him rough and his hands are tied but he doesn't seem to be struggling at all; he looks quite calm. They'll ask me to open the gate in a minute, I only open on command. They must be bringing him before the High Priest, I let him through here a short while ago.

'OPEN THE GATE', they're shouting at me now. I'm standing back for there's a great surge of people heading for the central courtyard. I recognise two faces in this crowd, they're just behind Jesus and they were walking close to him last Sunday. They say he has close friends and they're called his disciples. One has followed Jesus through, the other is standing by me, looking anxious. I study his face, yes I've seen him before all right, he was definitely with Jesus last Sunday, but not looking terrified like this. I've closed the gate now, but his friend has come back for him and asked me to let him in.

AREN'T YOU ONE OF JESUS' DISCIPLES? I asked. How did I dare put this to him, it just came out. I kind of needed to know.

I AM NOT he said. Quite angrily. He's moving through the gate now but I'm fixed on his face. He looks really uncomfortable, uneasy, frightened. Pale too. He's heading for a fire some of the other servants have made in the courtyard and I can see him warming his hands.

There's lots of noise now. I can hear the voice of the High Priest and all the people shouting above him. Sounds quite a commotion. But that disciple, he's taking all my attention. A number of folk are huddled round the fire and I've just heard someone else asking him whether he'd been with Jesus, saying they'd seen him in the olive grove with Him. AREN'T YOU ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES? Just like I asked him. Same answer he's given, I AM NOT. Now another, YOU ARE SURELY ONE OF JESUS' DISCIPLES? There's a lot of excitement round the fire now and they're all staring at him. I AM NOT he says. He looks really uneasy.

A cock is crowing loudly, I don't like this. I feel chilled. That friend, that disciple has turned away from them all round the fire. He's all hunched up. He looks broken. He's covered his face with his hands. What has happened? He's shaking. He's convulsed in tears. Oh my, what have we done. *He is weeping, weeping bitterly.*