

Sermon, Good Friday 18 April 2025

St Ninians's Uniting Church

Reflecting in the Shadows

Friends, our Lenten journey is nearly over.

This year, as we have travelled together through Lent we have reflected on the theme of wilderness.

Today we are in the darkest part of our journey, as we meet and reflect in the deep shadows that mark Good Friday.

Today is a day to reflect upon the arrest, torture and death of Christ.

We have heard excerpts of the story of Christ's Passion from the Gospel of John – cumulating in the burial of Christ by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

While we know the conclusion of the story – with Christ's resurrection - we are not there yet.

Rather we are still in the shadows.

There can be an understandable temptation on Good Friday to emphasise that while it is Friday, Sunday is coming!

To move swiftly through the horror of Christ's death, onto the joy and triumph of Christ's resurrection on Easter Sunday.

It is, with respect, a mistake.

There are in the Christian church three great festivals – Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Of the three, two are festivals of great joy.

Good Friday is not one of them. Rather it is a day of pain, grief, aloneness and death.

Trying to move through or jump over Good Friday is to miss a

key message about Jesus. That he – fully divine and fully human – experienced betrayal, pain, suffering and death on a cross.

And Jesus accepted this journey, rather than avoiding it.

In this Jesus paid the price for the sins of humankind, so that we may experience God's compassion, forgiveness, and the promise of eternal life.

In our own lives, we experience Good Friday' periods – perhaps times when we feel betrayed, vulnerable, pain or loss - whether expected or unexpected.

It may be due to ill health; loss of a job; loss of a loved one, or separation from family or friends.

The bible acknowledges – indeed recounts - such moments.

In Psalm 22, the psalmist cries out:

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?” (Psalm 22:1)*

In the early days of Christianity, non-believers mocked the Good Friday narrative. How could anyone worship a God so weak they are nailed to a tree and left to die.

But in fact, this completely misses the enormity of what God does through the death (and then resurrection) of Jesus Christ.

In fully experiencing the fragility and vulnerability of human life, God was humbled; but not defeated. The Good Friday experience was essential for the good news to come.

Our human world generally values leadership through a prism of strength and power. Political leaders talk of 'shirt-fronting' opponents, and staring or shouting down opposition.

In God's world, vulnerability and fragility are critical elements of leadership. Because God cares most about the soul, not earthly power.

Through our own frailty and vulnerability, we can better pastorally understand and engage with the fragility and vulnerability of others.

And we can better understand the price God was prepared to pay for us so that we may have eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

While we should not deliberately linger in a period of darkness, the reality of pain, loss and grief are as much part of our physical and spiritual life as joy, gain and liberation.

Late last year a dear aunt of mine died of lung cancer. It was a drawn out and painful death, but through it all my Aunt Rose, a person of great faith, kept her joy and strength in the promise of God's love for each and everyone of us.

And at her funeral we sang the wonderful hymn

*"There's a light upon the mountain, and the day is at the spring
When our eyes will see the beauty and the glory of our King;
Weary was our heart with waiting, and the night watch seemed
so long,
But his triumph day is breaking, and we hail it with a song".*

As a family at that time, we were in shadows in our grief, but we knew the promise and love of God.

And we knew we were not alone.

As we reflect today in the darkness and shadows of Good Friday, the Gospel reminds us that we are not alone, and God never abandons us.

In John's Gospel, we see glimpses of community gathered and supporting each other. The disciples at the foot of the cross; Christ asking the Apostle John to care for his mother, Mary; Joseph of

Arimathea and Nicodemus taking the body of Christ and laying it in the tomb, despite the risk to themselves.

In our own moments of darkness, let us remember that we are part of a community – here at St Ninian's and in the wider, universal church.

This is our calling – to love, support, minister, and share the good news of God's love for us. Both among ourselves as a congregation, and to the wider community and world.

As we heard in one of the prayers earlier God's promises to us:

Christ took our pain and bore our suffering. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. He has brought us peace and by his wounds we are healed. (Hebrews 53:4-5)

And so today, reflecting together in the shadows, let us hold to our faith and await the coming light.

Amen