

Reflection for Good Friday 10th April 2020

Susan Peatfield, Reader

Almost everything about this Holy Week has been different to previous years. Not within living memory – several centuries of memories - have the churches in this country been closed at Easter. But everything that makes us remember Holy Week and celebrate Easter remains utterly unchanged. Jesus suffered on the cross, died to bring us into new relationship with him, rose again and opened the gates of glory.

Which of us, though, has not missed the familiar rituals of this time? The language of the liturgy, the beautiful words and music of the hymns. Perhaps for you it was walking in the Palm Sunday procession that was so achingly missed this year, or having your feet washed, sharing in the Last Supper, or kneeling amongst the lilies and incense in the darkness of the Lady Chapel – our Gethsemane.

And today, we made no walk of witness, and although we have heard the Passion according to St John, we shall not venerate the cross together. These symbols, actions, touchstones are important for our faith - our relationship with God –they anchor us in the story of our redemption and in the changing seasons of the church year. And, sometimes, when the words just stay on the page, the symbol can catch us on the raw and draw us deeper. Certainly the physicality of the cross, in its starkness, in a bare Good Friday church, has a power to move us. Move us to bending our knees, and if it is our practice, kissing the wood of the cross. Again, if it is our practice and we have a cross in our homes, we should not feel self-conscious to make this act of veneration today, of humble, often tearful, thankfulness. Many learned books have been written on the importance of symbols and posture, but kneeling at the foot of the cross requires little explanation.

St Paul wrestled with words and with symbols. He was always trying to get behind them and closer to all he wanted to share about the “beyond words” gift of Christ in the cross: Making us strangers no longer but beloved children of God. In the Letter to the Corinthians, Paul holds the cross before our eyes and shows us its meaning: “Love never ends,” Paul tells us, “for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I only know in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Because of the cross, in everything we are accompanied by Christ’s love.

For many this Good Friday there is no need for a symbol of loss. It is there in the fear of this illness, in the fear of those we love being taken from us. It is there in the isolation, in our own fears of dying - of dying alone.

Although heightened at this time, the essence of this fear is both timeless and daily. Amongst the usual busyness we can focus on other things. Now that is harder. These fears sit close to us. But so does the one who hung upon the cross, the one in whose perfect love all fear is cast out.

When we feel the grip of these fears, we can call upon him and grasp his hand. We can hold Christ’s cross before us, knowing that in him we do nothing alone: not our living, not our laughing, not our fearing, and certainly not our dying.

The cross casts no shadow only light, and Good Friday points only and ever to Easter Day. Today, let us prepare our lives and our hearts to let his daylight flood the darkness, and to know through his cross, Christ beside us in all life holds, every joy and every sorrow, everyday and each and every glorious tomorrow. His love will not let us go, for Love never ends. **Amen**