

“Walking With Jesus: The Road To The Cross”

2 April 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: IPH 414 Hallelujah! What A Saviour! (Man Of Sorrows)

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Luke 23:26-49

Sermon:

We have chosen the theme of walking with Jesus, because it helpfully allows us to explore journeys that Jesus made in the period we mark as Easter. We also chose the theme because walking has become a universal experience for most of us during the current restrictions due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. On Palm Sunday we explored the walk to Jerusalem from Bethphage and Bethany, small villages about a 3km journey from Jerusalem. As we followed Jesus and his entourage we saw he came as King, with authority and yet humble and gentle riding on a donkey, bringing peace for all who acknowledge and live under his rule.

Today on Good Friday we are walking with Jesus in Jerusalem. It has been an eventful final week in Jerusalem, the important Jewish festival of Passover is being celebrated, where they remember Gods rescue of Israel from Egypt and from Pharaoh’s slavery, which culminates with the death of a lamb and its blood being placed on the doorposts and lintels of each family home, those who obeyed were saved from death and those who did not woke to find their first born son dead. It was an important week for Jesus, he was about to become the lamb as John prophesied, at the beginning of Jesus ministry, *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* John Ch 1:29. This was also Jesus last week on earth and there was much preparation, and final instructions to give which you can read about in all the gospel accounts.

We follow the walk to the cross, from Gethsemane to Golgotha.

I. Gethsemane

Gethsemane means oil press and was the common name for a garden on the Mount of Olives, a place that Jesus loved and often went to pray. Jesus is fully aware of the horrors that await him in Jerusalem which he has outlined in detail to his disciples, listen to what he said to them, ³¹ *Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. ³² He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; ³³ they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.”* Luke Ch 18:31-33

Gethsemane is significant because he wrestles with the will of his Father, in a way that highlights the enormity of the journey’s destination, the cross. If you are not familiar with the story here is how Luke describes it. ³⁹ *Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be*

done.”⁴³ *An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.* ⁴⁴ *And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

A. Pressure

Jesus is under terrible pressure. So much so that his sweat was like drops of blood, as he wrestled in prayer with the will of his Father. There have been two thoughts about what happened. One he was sweating profusely in the intense physical effort of his prayer that it looked like the drip of blood from an open wound. Or in the intensity of his wrestling he raised his blood pressure so much that it was like being strangled, and his sweat was blood tinged. Either way it is a phenomenal pressure, like the pressure placed on an olive in the press.

B. Punishment

What is it that causes him such pressure, it the cup his father is handing to him! The cup is not just a metaphor for death, it is a metaphor for experiencing the wrath of God. The prophets spoke of this Isaiah 51 and Jeremiah Ch 25, this was what they had predicted would happen. Jesus is about to be punished and experience the wrath of God. He was about to become the sacrifice. The one who knew no sin was about to be sin. The sinless Jesus was about to be punished for the sin of others, the one who was in perfect relationship with his father was about to have that relationship ripped apart, he was going to be forsaken and the sheer agony and pressure of that reality was seen in these physical manifestations at Gethsemane. The pressure is not because of death but because of his Father's punishment for the sin of others.

Jesus is under great pressure, in Gethsemane, the Olive press and as the prophets had predicted he was going to experience the wrath of God for the sins of others. For us.

II. Golgotha

The journey ends at a place called Golgotha which means the skull, where Jesus was crucified.

³³ *When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left.*

The place was just outside the City walls of Jerusalem, on a hill, shaped like a skull, hence the name Golgotha. There we read, Jesus died, by crucifixion, still considered one of the most awful and brutal ways to die.

So, we have a journey from Gethsemane a garden to Golgotha (to darkness and death)

What is this the significance of this? Let us explore this by looking afresh at the moment of the journeys end as outlined in Luke's account in Ch 23:44-49

A. Details: of the crucifixion (v26-43)

At Golgotha, Luke records a flurry of activity, as Jesus is crucified. Every crucifixion would have these usual things happen and the details help us appreciate the

authenticity of the moment. There were unhelpful comments and actions by the crowd and the soldiers, there was the mocking, and a sign was erected over Jesus' cross, "*This is the King of the Jews*" and there are details of the interaction with the three condemned men, Jesus and the two criminals alongside him, on his right and left. Yet the most significant detail was the darkness that came over the whole land.

- B. Darkness: over the whole land (v44-45a)** It goes dark at the sixth hour, Jewish time, that is sunrise around 6am, plus 6 hours, therefore it is mid-day, and it goes dark, because the sun stops shining, and it stayed dark until 3pm, that is 6am plus 9 hours! It is remarkable and significant. It means something, the question is what?

Metaphorically we speak of things being dark when they are tough, distressing, sorrowful, a time of grief. The bible uses the metaphor of darkness to highlight moral failing and death the reality for all humanity as each of us testify to. The Covid pandemic has reminded us of our vulnerability to death.

Luke starts his account of Jesus by reference to John the Baptist, Zechariah his father prophesies about Jesus, "*because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.*" **Luke 1:78-79**

We live in darkness and in the shadow of death and Jesus comes as the light. In the history of Gods dealing with his people, they knew that darkness, was a sign of God's judgement, the plagues on Pharoah, one of which was "*darkness that can be felt*" (Exodus Ch 10:21ff) taught them that, the darkness lasted three days, no one could move but they the Israelites had light. Light in the temple was a sign of God's presence and grace and darkness a sign of his displeasure and punishment.

This is supernatural darkness, being the time of the Passover, it was around the time of the full moon and an eclipse is impossible at the time of a full moon. But it was the effect that it had on those around that is noteworthy, it un-nerved and upset those who witnessed Jesus, death and the darkness, v 48 the people, beat their chests. It was a darkness that was felt, it was a time of Gods anger and punishment and the people sensed it.

The darkness pictures the reality of the moment, highlighting two things, God is angry, and God is punishing Jesus.

As God punishes Jesus another remarkable supernatural event takes place in the temple

- C. Divided: the temple curtain is torn in two! (v45b)**

The curtain is a fascinating object that was the thickness of a human hand span about 10cm, made of one piece of material, was elaborately embroidered, beautiful with rich colours and had the pictures of Cherubim woven into it, symbolising the Cherubim that guard the entrance to the garden of Eden, and the presence of God and eternal life. It was placed at the entrance to the Most Holy Place, The Holy of Holies in the temple and it stopped access to God except for the High Priest who entered once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people.

Now as Jesus dies, it was torn in two, other gospels tell us the tear happened from top to bottom, that happened by God's action. The barrier is down, and access is

now possible to God in Christ. It is a wonderful new reality which is outlined for us in Hebrews Ch 10 ¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰ *by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,* ²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²² *let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

Jesus was punished in our place, he experienced the wrath of his Father so that we would not and that we might be brought into a relationship with God or have peace with God and help in life, even in suffering and death, having the full assurance that faith brings. That is why Jesus' journey to the cross, his walk to death and suffering is a good news story and today is known as Good Friday.

To bring the reality of what a relationship with Jesus through faith in his death achieves for us, we invite you to listen to Winnie's story of her walk with Jesus, through bereavement and suffering.

Walking With Jesus: Winnie's story

I suppose because of my age, I can recall several specific incidents of suffering and coping with grief as I have walked with God. I like the idea of walking - it speaks to me of companionship. In 1996, my husband, Winston, who was blind dropped dead of a heart attack in the hospital where he worked as a telephonist. Even though I felt such a feeling of loss, I also felt peace that is beyond explanation. A few memories stick in my mind - I remember the CEO of the company where I worked sympathising with me and I was able to say to him, "God is good." I knew a sense of God's presence beside me now that I was a widow. As the coffin was being carried out, Ken, the organist in the church, was playing a hymn with the verse, "when I stand in glory, I shall see His face," which was wonderful in view of Winston's physical blindness. One of the children in the church told her mother, "Winston can see now" - another confirmation of God walking with me. A few days after the funeral, Winston's guide dog, Judy, was collected to be retrained with someone else. This was another tough loss, but just a few minutes after her departure, a work colleague who was a Church of Ireland lay assistant called. He had been on holiday the day of the funeral and so felt compelled to call and was quite happy to pray with me. A few years later, Clive started to attend Adelaide Road, and we got married even though his first impression of me was not so good. He sat in my pew and I informed him that he needn't sit there, as I had to go out to Sunday School! God is so good.

In 2002, I tumbled headlong down a flight of concrete stairs at work and ended up in the hospital trauma room. As I was in the ambulance, slipping in and out of consciousness, I kept thinking, *the only thing I can hold on to now is God, irrespective of the outcome.* Those who knew me at the time also knew how scared I was of both doctors and dentists. However, I felt so calm throughout, that there was no other explanation but that God was beside me. I am convinced that God has a sense of humour, as I had to deal with not only doctors, but dentists also to replace smashed teeth! When I was unable to sleep at night, because of my wired jaws, I derived great comfort from listening to Christian music, particularly that of Marilyn Baker (a blind lady who writes much of her own material out of her experience of God).

In 2011, Clive collapsed at home and died on his way to hospital, having suffered an aneurysm. A few weeks before Clive died, I distinctly remember walking by the river and at almost the exact spot where Clive proposed, the verse from Job, “though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him” came to me and was a recurring thought. I felt that God was preparing me for something I was going to endure. On the day of his death, the key verse in my Bible reading notes was 2 Corinthians 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” God was walking with me through His Word.

These experiences have helped and developed my relationship with God by teaching me that in everything, He is in control. They’ve also taught me the need for reliance on Him. I know I can trust Him to see me through any circumstance and that He is worthy of praise and thanks. When our human supports are taken away, we can lean much heavier on the “friend who sticks closer than a brother”. I read recently, “When we are wrapped in the intercessory prayers of God’s people, we can experience God’s strength and comfort, no matter where life takes us.” I am thankful for my church family and their prayers as we’ve walked through life with God together.

III. Responses to Jesus’ death

Thank you Winnie, we appreciate you sharing your life with us all, the presence of God with you in his word, in your heart and through other Christian believers is the outworking of all that Jesus achieved for us at the cross and a true testimony to the reality of relationship.

Can I encourage you to re-read the story of Jesus’ death in Luke Ch 23:26-44 looking at the facts of his death as he walked from Gethsemane to Golgotha? As you read you will also see that Jesus and his death provoked quite different responses, the anger of the Jewish authorities, Simon seized and forced to carry the cross, the women of the city who wept, the two criminals, the centurion and the crowd who saw what happened. Each is worth considering!

We finish by thinking of the responses of the two criminals!

One insults Jesus and mocks his claims, the other acknowledges his sin and Jesus’ righteousness, with the request, “*Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom*” and Jesus replies, “*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.*”

These words have brought the reality of trusting in Jesus’ home to many. To hear Jesus assure us that immediately in death, a person can be with him in time and space in paradise, which is understood to be heaven is wonderful. It is a remarkable truth, not attained by personal merit but by faith in Jesus. The fact that it is spoken to a criminal who was undoubtedly not good by the standards of society, and who readily recognised this truth himself, (v41) “*we are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve*” highlights the gracious invitation of Jesus to all sinners like us and is our only hope for salvation.

The darkness has turned to light, the curtain has been torn in two, the way has been opened to God’s presence. Gods’ justice and mercy at the cross make it possible for all who believe, to be with Jesus in heaven. This is our reassurance in death and as Winnie testified, Jesus

is with us in life in its severest trials. Knowing Jesus, trusting Jesus makes each day a Good Friday!

Praise: The Power Of The Cross

Prayer

Closing Hymn: When I Survey The Wondrous Cross

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all evermore. Amen.

Discussion & Application:

Consider Jesus' walk from Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46) to Golgotha (Luke 23:26-49).

- Why was Jesus under such pressure?
- What is the significance of the darkness and the curtain being torn in two?

Why do you think Winnie experienced peace and help in the midst of her bereavements and suffering?

Consider the responses of the two criminals. What application do they have for us as we consider our response to Jesus' death on the cross?