

Good Friday**The Saviour in the Darkness****Luke 23:13-56**

It may have been in the full flood of daylight, but darkness is all round Jesus throughout the day that was the Jewish Passover-Eve, the day Christians call Good Friday. There had been darkness enough the night before in the upper room, and in Gethsemane, in the courtyard of the high priest. Even as dawn broke there was still darkness around the Saviour. Standing before Pilate in the early morning; standing before Herod later; standing once more before Pilate as sentenced is passed, in the darkness, the Saviour is there.

On this Good Friday we might think of all who face the darkness of a judicial sentence and its consequences. Of the 40-year sentence passed on Radovan Karadzic for his part in the Bosnian genocide; and on the sentence those who suffered and survived that time in Srebrenica and in other places, who still live under its consequences – the nightmares and the ongoing effects of torture – physical, emotional and mental. We think of the six-year sentence passed on the footballer Adam Johnson for sexual offences, and on the sentence the victim of his crime will live with for the rest of her life. In the darkness, the Saviour is there.

Each dark and dreadful place; each place where there is mindless suffering, or premeditated brutality, in the darkness, the Saviour is there. If your faith is challenged by stories in the media, or if in the past or today such places for you are part of your experience of life, in the darkness the Saviour is there.

On the Via Dolorosa, the way of the cross, in the darkness, the Saviour is there. That long and bitter journey from the courtyard of the Pilate to Calvary, with its stopping and its stumbling along the way, bowed down under the weight of the wooden crossbeam He would be nailed to in time. Surrounded by a jeering crowd chanting for His death. Already beaten, already scourged, already crowned with the brow-piercing thorns. A man en route, Simon of Cyrene, from modern day Libya, in the Jerusalem for the Passover, press-ganged or volunteered to

shoulder the burden of the cross for part of the way, following after Jesus. Passed the weeping women of Jerusalem, who wept, perhaps, for the unfairness and the injustice of it all. In the darkness, the Saviour is there.

On this Good Friday, we might think of those on the contemporary Via Dolorosa of the refugee. The Syrians and Afghanis and Iraqis fleeing bomb-shattered village, town and city, going from one darkness to another. Crossing dark seas from Turkey to Greece. Sheltering in dark camps across Europe, greeted with suspicion or hostility or, worst of all, indifference. Parentless children; desperate mothers; edgy young men – the majority of whom only wanting what we take for granted – peace, shelter, enough to eat and drink, and work to do. And before them, who remembers them, are they still coming, the displaced people of Africa, fleeing famine and drought, fleeing the broken nations of Libya and Somalia and Sudan. And the modern day Simons of Cyrene and the weeping women, found in the St Andrews Scots Church in Malta, and its Church of Scotland Guild supported 'Out of Africa and into Malta' project. Working in the open camps, and the container ships used as centres, where there is disease, and hunger, and fear, and loss. With today's refugee on their Via Dolorosa, in the darkness, the Saviour is there.

At Calvary, on the cross, in the darkness the Saviour is there. Not alone in His final agony and shame and rejection, but between two others who share with Jesus the ignominy and slow suffering of crucifixion. Stripped, and His clothes gambled away by the soldiers. Mocked by the religious authorities who could not accept that He was the Messiah; mocked by some of the soldiers who could not recognise a kingship without power, majesty without status. Mocked by a thief crucified beside Him who could not see how One about Whom it was claimed so much, could not effect an escape for Himself, and for those sharing death on the crosses beside Him. In the darkness, the Saviour is there.

On this Good Friday we might think of those who suffer, and see no possibility of escape; who suffer, and believe that the authorities of our day have abandoned them, or ignore them. The people on surgical waiting lists who have suffered illness and pain for weeks, months, years, because priorities change, or resources are scarce, or the system is overwhelmed. The

unemployed, wanting to work, and searching for jobs, but facing rejection after rejection, even if their applications are ever acknowledged. The people of whatever age, brimming with questions and ideas and imagination crushed under the dead-weight of 'it's aye been', and the nervous conservatism (with a small 'c') that makes many of us uneasy about change. Those who are discriminated against still, openly or covertly, because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, class background, creed, crucified on the cross of prejudice, or vested interest, or bigotry, or wilful misunderstanding or ignorance. In the darkness, the Saviour is there.

At that sixth hour, when "there was darkness over the whole land...while the sun's light failed..." when Jesus was close to death, with the words of forgiveness on His lips, and the committal of His Spirit into the hands of the God, and then He was dead. In the darkness, the Saviour is there.

On this Good Friday we might think of those for whom the grip of death is real and present. In Brussels, in the smoke filled airport hall and metro tunnel. In Ankara, in a busy, traffic filled street. In Paris, in a stadium, in cafés, in restaurants. In Israel-Palestine, in the Israeli state-sponsored violence perpetrated by thuggish settlers against Palestinians, and in the Palestinian responses. In the memories of Dunblane a few weeks ago. And in the families and circle of friends and colleagues from which we come tonight, where death has settled, or hovers now, or whose remembrance comes at this time of year, or whose influence, though in the past, still chillingly lingers, in the darkness, the Saviour is there.

In the tomb, in the darkness, the Saviour is there. In a borrowed grave, wrapped in a linen shroud, hastily hidden away without the usual mourning and embalming with spices and all the customary funeral rites. Left at last on His own. No Herod and Pilate; no hard-faced high priests; no death-baying crowds; no Simon of Cyrene or weeping Daughters of Jerusalem; no soldiers or centurions; no Joseph of Arimathea, or women folk or disciples. Alone in the tomb, in the darkness, the Saviour is there.

On this Good Friday we might think of all the tombs of doubt, or fear, or anxiety, or resentment, or jealousy, or grief that pockmark our lives, and our world. Those stone-carved sepulchres

whose jaws swallow whole our hopes and dreams and health and laughter and love. In the darkness, the Saviour is there.

On this Good Friday, there are so many darkneses. But the Saviour is there. The prophet, the healer, the teacher, is there. The Immanuel, the God with us, the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Redeemer, is there. The Good Shepherd, the Door, the True Vine, the way, the truth and the life, the bread of life, the living water, the resurrection and the life, is there.

The light of the world is there. In the darkness the light of the world, the Saviour, is there. For you, on this Good Friday, this bad Friday, this darkness-shrouded Friday, the Saviour is there. Walking with you, weeping with you, wounded with you, waiting with you. In the darkness. Whoever you are, however you believe or doubt, whatever you think or feel, in the darkness, Your Saviour is there.

And with you, in this darkness, He waits for light.

Amen