

## **The Preaching of the Cross**

*Conducted by  
Canon Dr Tom Clammer OC*

### **12 noon – I do not know the man**

Introduction and Collect

*Interim Dean gives introduction and says a Collect.*

Hymn - There is a green hill far away – NEH 92

There is a green hill far away,  
without a city wall,  
where the dear Lord was crucified  
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,  
what pains he had to bear,  
but we believe it was for us  
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiven,  
he died to make us good;  
that we might go at last to heaven,  
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough  
to pay the price of sin;  
he only could unlock the gate  
of heaven, and let us in.

O, dearly, dearly has he loved,  
and we must love him too,  
and trust in his redeeming blood,  
and try his works to do.

C F Alexander (1818–95)  
Tune Horsley, NEH 92, W Horsley (1775–1858)

Short reading – Matthew 26:69-75

69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilean.'<sup>70</sup> But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.'<sup>71</sup> When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl

saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' <sup>72</sup>Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.' <sup>73</sup>After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.' <sup>74</sup>Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man!' At that moment the cock crowed. <sup>75</sup>Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

### First Address

The whole of our Lenten journey has been leading us to this place. Leading us to the inevitable place where our self-reliance fails, and we are scattered. In this cathedral, and in countless churches and congregations across the world this will have been symbolized last night, as a communities which just 10 or 15 minutes earlier had been sharing the family meal around the table of the Lord disintegrates. The altar was stripped, and the congregation scatter into the darkness. Some might have managed a few moments at the Watch. The really devout might even have managed a few hours. But the liturgies of these Great Three Days bring us, inevitably, to our breaking point. 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' No, most of us, most of the time, cannot.

The darkness of the night in between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday is the place where strength and nerve, confidence and ideology fail, and the disciples scatter. And Peter is the exemplar of this. He who at the table just a few hours earlier boasted that he would never abandon Christ finds himself denying that he even knows him. Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber put into the lips of Mary Magdalen words which perhaps were on the hearts and minds of many of the disciples as an intimate family meal turns into a brush with the law, and arrest, and the collapse of the systems that have been sustaining them: "I think you've made your point now, you've even gone a bit too far to get the message through. Before it gets too frightening we ought to call a halt. Could we start again please?" When this faith thing starts to demand of us: real bravery, real cost, starts to be a negative pull on our prospects, cutting and running begins to look very attractive. Let's go for the 'diet' version of this. The half measure that won't upset or offend or challenge anyone.

But there is no starting again in God's redemptive plan. For this act of salvation can't be done in half measures. This is the great act of love, of self-emptying, which will reach into the deepest depths of the darkness and kindle new light. Hope is coming, but to lighten the darkness the darkness must be recognized, stepped into, occupied. Peter's act of abandonment is ours also. And it must be owned.

And that recognition, and that owning, is of course both individual and communal. Probably most of us can recognize moments of turning away, moments of abandonment, moments where it is simply easier not to own the Cross and the Crucified. And if you are anything like me in this, those moments won't be spectacular. They will be banal. They will be embarrassing. They will, frankly, be cheap. Any of us who regularly make our confession know that we bring the same mundane sins back time and time again, they become habitual, and we deny knowing our Lord almost routinely. That is of course the great genius of sin. It's usually not spectacular. It is banal. It is routine. It just slips in. And it slowly winds itself around our decision-making processes, our priority lists, the checks and balances in our mind. That in itself needs to be faced in the silence today. That, alongside the great evils in which whole systems, governments, societies abandon integrity and fall into easy denial. And we know about that as well don't we? Of entire nations being told that they have no legitimate right to exist. Of girls in society being told they have no legitimate right to

education. Of a hundred similar abuses by hundred similar systems where power is equated with truth. All of that is sin. All of that, as Peter's act of abandonment, is humanity's. And it must be owned.

At the same time it must be seen as the beginning, and not the end, of today's journey.

Silence

## 12.15pm – What is truth?

### Collect

Let us pray

O Lord Jesu Christ, take us to thyself;  
draw us with cords to the foot of thy cross:  
for we have no strength to come, and we know not the way.  
Thou art mighty to save, and none can separate us from thy love.  
Bring us home to thyself, for we are gone astray.  
We have wandered; do thou seek us.  
Under the shadow of thy cross let us live all the rest of our lives,  
and there we shall be safe. Amen.

### Hymn - O dearest Lord, thy sacred head – NEH 89

O dearest Lord, thy sacred head  
with thorns was pierced for me;  
O pour thy blessing on my head  
that I may think for thee.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred hands  
with nails were pierced for me;  
O shed thy blessing on my hands  
that they may work for thee.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred feet  
with nails were pierced for me;  
O pour thy blessing on my feet  
that they may follow thee.

O dearest Lord, thy sacred heart  
with spear was pierced for me;  
O pour thy Spirit in my heart  
that I may live for thee.

*Belmont 89 NEH  
adapted from W Gardiner's Sacred Melodies 1812*

*Father Andrew S D C (1869–1946)*

### Short reading – John 18: 36-38a

<sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' <sup>37</sup>Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' <sup>38</sup>Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

## Second Address

Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?' And that question has never stopped being asked. There are some times, are there not, where the truth seems absolutely obvious. Where we seem to have absolute clarity, and the moral or ethical choice before us is evident. And there are other moments where truth seems incredibly elastic. We exist at the moment in a world where certain members of the community seem perhaps more comfortable than has been usual hitherto with stretching the definition of truth to previously unexpected lengths. Where things can be labelled as 'fake news', even if the news is actually unpalatable rather than fake. And so in order to deflect attention away from truth about our actions being told, we simply label them fake. Because if we say that this news is 'fake', then perhaps it is? Perhaps the truth is just how we feel on a given day, at a given moment. Perhaps it is no longer objective. And perhaps if my self-importance, or my self-preservation, or my retention of the power I enjoy and that makes me look impressive is threatened by the truth, well then perhaps again that truth is not as 'truthy' as it looked at first. Perhaps it is fake as well. Perhaps I don't need to pay attention to it.

All of this we know, not least because it is writ large in our newspapers and on our television screens on a daily basis. The truth, it seems, is rather relative in today's culture.

One of the things that it is perhaps important to remember is that there is a significant difference between treating the truth as relative simply because we object to it, or it is distasteful to us, or if taking the truth seriously will keep us from power, or status, or popularity - there is a significant difference between *that* dealing with truth, and the quite proper constant searching for revelation, for enlightenment. Searching for a deeper understanding of the truth is never wrong. And believing that we have the whole thing sewn up, and that there is absolutely nothing new that we can learn, and that everybody else just needs to shut up until they come round to our own point of view is almost certainly a confident step down a sinful path. We know, don't we, Christ himself said to his disciples that he had many things to tell them, but that that could not bear all of them at one time. To the real danger of collapsing the truth into whatever suits us on a given day there is the equal and opposite danger of arrogance. Of assuming that what we have now is all that we'll ever need. That's there is no more revelation coming our way. Both are terrible misuses of the term 'truth', both are highly seductive, and both are holes into which the church has fallen, with the consequent wreckage strewn in her wake. How do we know where the boundaries are? How do we know who we are? And we overstep on both sides from time to time, and we damage and dishonour our brothers and sisters in so doing.

What is truth? For the Christian, as we heard just a moment ago, the truth is that to which Christ testifies. And it is that into which those who listen to Christ's voice begin to belong. So on this Good Friday we look to Christ, we look to this sinless man staggering under the weight of the Cross, and we ask ourselves, to what is he testifying? What is the testimony today? What is truth?

And the unfolding liturgy of this most Good Friday begins to answer that question. The title in itself speaks of a truth which seems quite absurd. That we call this day 'Good' on which the sinful crucify the sinless. And, of course, we remember that the sinful includes us. Whatever the evangelists' linguistic style might be, we are clear that, as we will explore shortly, it is our voices that cry out, as it is our hammers that drive the nails home. As the hymn writer puts it: 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee, I crucified thee.' We must be very careful of sidestepping our own place in this story. St John, in particular, is not helpful in this regard, using the term 'the Jews' when context and history is quite clear that he means something very much more specific: he is not talking about a people or a religion. He is talking about power structures, is talking about elites and decision-

making bodies. And we all belong to those. We all exercise agency. We all crucify Christ. Remember that when you hear the Passion sung later on. When you hear the phrase ‘the Jews’, translate it. Don’t collapse that phrase into an easy way out for us. Or even worse, into accidental anti-Semitism. In the Passion narrative that phrase refers to us.

We will unpack more of the truth to which Christ testifies over the coming hour or so, but one element of it at least must be that God is calling us to himself. Notice the sequence of the verses in the hymn that we have just sung. The sequence is probably quite important. We pray in this hymn that we may think, work, follow and finally live for ‘our dearest Lord’. What Christ calls us into is his life, which is more than intellectual endeavour, is more than some impressive activity, but is a day by day *following* that leads eventually to a wholehearted *living* for, and in, him. But that following leads us, today, into our misconceptions and misrepresentations of the truth, and into the darkness that result from that. So we follow. We strain to listen for the voice of Christ, we pray we may belong to the truth.

Silence

## 12.35pm – We have no king but Caesar

### Collect

O God, our Judge and Saviour,  
set before us the vision of thy purity,  
and let us see our sins in the light of thy holiness.  
Pierce our self-contentment with the shafts of thy burning love,  
and let that love consume in us all that hinders us  
from perfect service of thy cause;  
for as thy holiness is our judgement,  
so are thy wounds our salvation. Amen.

Hymn – Morning glory, starlit sky – A&M 544 tune ii (Song 13).

Morning glory, starlit sky,  
soaring music, scholars' truth,  
flight of swallows, autumn leaves,  
memory's treasure, grace of youth;

Open are the gifts of God,  
gifts of love to mind and sense;  
hidden is love's agony,  
love's endeavour, love's expense.

Love that gives, gives evermore,  
gives with zeal, with eager hands,  
spares not, keeps not, all outpours,  
ventures all, its all expends.

Drained is love in making full;  
bound in setting others free;  
poor in making many rich;  
weak in giving power to be.

Therefore he who shows us God  
helpless hangs upon the tree;  
and the nails and crown of thorns  
tell of what God's love must be.

Here is God: no monarch he,  
throned in easy state to reign;  
here is God, whose arms of love  
aching, spent, the world sustain.

William Hubert Vanstone (1923–1999)

© Mrs I Shore

Tune Song 13, A&M 496, Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625)

## Short reading – John 19: 13-16

13 When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. <sup>14</sup>Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' <sup>15</sup>They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.' <sup>16</sup>Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

### Third Address

It is at this point where the darkness completely overwhelms us.

As we have noted, ours are the voices that cried 'hosanna' on Palm Sunday. We know in ourselves the way that our hearts can rise up in worship, at the promise of the possibility of a bigger world to live in.

We recognise also ourselves in those bleary-eyed people in the garden. 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' We recognise the fickleness and the transience of our faith, our seemingly never-ending capacity to be distracted by something else. Our failures to pray, our failure to prioritise the important, because the urgent or the easy monopolise our lives.

We recognise ourselves in the fear and confusion of the disciples as Jesus is taken away during the night to be tried. We recognise our inability to make decisions, and our second-guessing of the decisions we do make. We recognise our desire, like one of the disciples, to lash out, to strike out, to inflict pain when we are frightened.

And above all we recognise ourselves amongst the crowd in that conversation with Pontius Pilate. We recognise, too, our shame, that we too easily and too often deny that we belong. It is simply easier for the crowd at that moment, worked up as they are into a frenzy, seemingly committed to a course of action, to make that ultimate of collapse of personal integrity, and to align themselves with the Roman authority structure which they themselves hate, because what it is going to gain them is a victory in the short term. I think of all the exchanges in Scripture, and certainly all of those in the Passion narrative, this is probably the most chilling:

"Shall I crucify your King?"

"We have no king but Caesar."

"We may not know, we cannot tell" exactly what was happening on that Good Friday morning which led the crowd to this extraordinary act of mob mentality, but we recognise, don't we, in this account, that rather seductive of human sins which is to simply follow the crowd.

Yes, we know that there were minds at work that day, as they had been working for days and weeks beforehand to bring Jesus' public ministry to an end, to silence his dissenting voice, to maintain the status quo and bolster up the power of the Roman occupiers and the religious elite.



But there were those there of course as well who had no idea of those details. Those who I suspect were simply caught up in whatever you want to describe it as: crowd mentality, group delusion, seduced by the excitement and the thrill of this annual festival day of the amnesty of one Roman prisoner. And the crowd turns, and the voices become nastier and nastier, and suddenly everybody is shouting “crucify!”, And when Pilate tries to defuse the situation and give them a way out, the crowd by then is too far gone: “we have no king but Caesar.”

Falling in with the crowd is such a seductive thing. It is such an easy thing. And we see it happen across the world. Probably one of the most infamous in recent memory was the events in the United States on that January day at the Capitol. But we see it across Europe, and within our own nation and community. And we will see it happen again. Overly simplistic soundbite-driven one issue communities will always spring up appealing to those who are not interested in the nuance, the complexity, the conversation. Social media makes it easier to happen, but it is not new. In every community where opinions are divided the temptation to fall into factions and simply follow the crowd without thinking about what it is that we are doing, is present, and dangerous, and can be almost overwhelming. And it is not worthy of us, and it is not worthy of our freedom.

And into this maelstrom, bowed down by the weight of the sins of broken humanity in the shape of a wooden cross staggers Christ.

WH Vanstone, priest and poet, whose extraordinary poem, *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense* we sang a few moments ago, offers us in some of the most beautiful and affective language of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Anglican tradition, some concepts by which we begin to approach an understanding of what is happening on Good Friday. He is trying to help us understand what is going on upon the cross. In other words he is giving us language of the atonement.

Faced with a baying crowd, whipped up into such a dangerous cocktail of emotions, recriminations, God's answer is love. This ought not to surprise us, for one of the central tenants of our faith is that God is love. But even that phrase bears a moment's reflection. We do not say, Scripture does not say, ‘God *does* love’, or even ‘God is *loving*’. We say that God *is* love. Only, always, and eternally so. A classical, an orthodox, doctrine of God tells us that he is only ever love, all of the time. He doesn't change, he doesn't alter, and he certainly doesn't degrade or grow weak. He just keeps loving.

And in the incarnation, in the person and nature of Jesus Christ, we therefore see that perfect eternal love made flesh. We see what happens when that everlasting and unchanging love encounters the weakness and falsity and duplicity of the world. We see, in the words of Vanstone, Love's agony, Love's endeavour and love's expense. Though of course we do not see them easily, or at once. Or perhaps even at all. Vanstone notes in verse two of that poem that certain aspects of love are open and easy to see, but other aspects, deeper truths, are hidden.

And of course part of that is because we find it very difficult to reconcile that sort of love with our definition of victory. Because as we have discussed already this afternoon, we naturally want victory to look like power or triumph. And instead we see the nails and crown of thorns that tell what God's love must be.

Silence

## 12.55pm – And their voices prevailed

### Collect

O Christ,  
Thou Master Carpenter of Nazareth,  
who at the last through wood and nails,  
wrought our whole salvation,  
wield well, we pray thee, thy tools in this thy workshop,  
so that we, who come rough-hewn to thy bench,  
may here be fashioned to a truer beauty and a greater usefulness by thy hand.  
We ask this for thy name and for thy sake.  
Amen.

### Hymn

It is a thing most wonderful,  
almost too wonderful to be,  
that God's own son should come from heaven,  
and die to save a child like me

And yet I know that it is true:  
he chose a poor and humble lot,  
and wept, and toiled, and mourned, and died  
for love of those who loved him not.

But even could I see him die,  
I could but see a little part  
of that great love, which, like a fire,  
is always burning in his heart.

It is most wonderful to know  
his love for me so free and sure;  
but 'tis more wonderful to see  
my love for him so faint and poor.

And yet I want to love thee, Lord;  
O light the flame within my heart,  
and I will love thee more and more,  
until I see thee as thou art.

Words W Walsham How (1823–97)

Tune Herongate, NEH 84, arr R Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

### Short reading – Luke 23:22-25

<sup>22</sup>A third time he said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore

have him flogged and then release him.’<sup>23</sup> But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

#### Fourth Address

When we meditate upon the instruments of Christ’s passion, as we will do in a few moments time as we venerate the Cross, as we follow that cross to the desolate altar, and as we hear the heartbreakingly rending sound of Sanders’ glorious setting of the Reproaches, “O my people, what have I done for you? how have I offended you? Answer me!”, well, we need to keep on thinking about the atonement don’t we? We need to gaze at the Cross, gaze into it, pray into it, and see if we can begin to see the glimmer of ‘love’s agony, love’s endeavour, love’s expense’. And I guess it comes down to that question of what sort of victory this Good Friday might be. What sort of throne our God actually occupies?

We *can* look at the crucifixion as some sort of wrathful action by a furious God so appalled by the mire of sin in which we stumble that his righteous zeal demands payment in blood. Demands satisfaction. And there are theologies of the atonement that want to say something like that. But to me it looks rather more like the most extraordinary act of love.

What kind of God is it who, faced with this crowd, this angry, blundering, unthinking crowd whipped up by jealous and desperate people most interested in maintaining their own social status, is able to entirely defuse it through this extraordinary act of self-giving? The cross is not a symbol of vengeance or anger. The cross is the ultimate symbol of love. Because the cross is not the judge’s seat. It is Christ’s throne. The reason the darkness doesn’t win, the reason that you and I and society can say things like “we have no king but Caesar” and yet still be God’s welcome, beloved children is that God isn’t playing the same game as we are. The crowd influence things through fear and intimidation: ultimately through power. Christ is entirely uninterested in power and that is why he is our King. As he topples forward from the Cross into oblivion at 3 o’clock on that Good Friday afternoon, as, in the words of the Creed he ‘descended into hell’, as Pilate’s nerve weakens and the “crowd’s voices prevail” and the people sell-out to the Caesar that they actually hate, love wins.

Love wins because love is not reliant on strength, or on numbers in the crowd, or on intimidating its opponents. Love doesn’t need a majority, and love doesn’t need to look impressive, or dignified, or particularly attractive. Love just needs to be love. And so the crowd’s voices prevail, and the darkness closes over Christ, and for us, and for our salvation, the 33-year-old story of the Word incarnate reaches its conclusion and the mother of the babe of Bethlehem watches him breathe his last.

And as he breathes his last he is victorious. Defusing the deception that you need to shout the loudest to be heard, defusing the deception that to get on in life you need to be the centre of everything, defusing the deception that power is the solution to all our resentments and hatreds and inadequacies, he submits to the crowd as their voices prevail. Allowing the powerful to be powerful, the cross and crown of thorns tell of what God’s love must be, a love for us so free and wide, and he dies, and he is our King, and our sins are forgiven, and we can come home, and love wins.

Silence

## 1.10pm – Father, forgive them

Short reading – Luke 23: 32-34

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup>When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup>Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

### Fifth Address – *Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34)

There are three religious images that I can see from my desk in Salisbury where I wrote these meditations. One of them, immediately in front of me, is an icon of our Lady of Kyiv, particularly poignant this Good Friday. In it she cradles the infant Christ in her right arm her left arm pointing towards him inviting the viewer to move beyond her to the baby. The second image is also an icon and it is of the Transfiguration. The third image is a small statue of the Christus Rex – Christ on the Cross, but robed in rich vestments, and wearing a crown. It was my grandmother's, and it now lives in our house.

In all three of these images, Christ is King. He is enthroned upon the arm of his mother in the icon and Mary's free hand draws us to worship our infant King. He is King on the top of the mountain in that brief flash of revelation to the disciples which of course they didn't understand at the time, of the true nature of his humanity and divinity, and of course he is king upon the cross. And that is the point of the depiction of Christ in royal robes on the Cross. If you're looking for Christ's throne, if you're looking for an image to tell us what God's royal palace looks like, it is Mary. It is the mountain, and above all it is the Cross.

The place where the Romans and the chief priests and scribes most desperately hoped that Christ and his disciples would recognise the collapse and the failure of all their endeavours, paradoxically here he reigns supreme. Here, in the words of the devotional prayer, "no strength is known but the power of love." It is love which makes Christ victorious here. Here Christ is King. We don't have to wait until Easter Day to sing the hymn that I have chosen to finish this devotion with in a few moments time. When I was a parish priest I used to set this final hymn every year at the end of the Good Friday liturgy as the altar was stripped again after the distribution of communion and the church returned to darkness to await the Easter Vigil. I wanted to remind myself, and my people, as I invite you to remind yourself now in these last few moments that in the deepest darkness, in the places where you fear to tread, the places that make you quail with fear, the places of sorrow and darkness and shame and regret, when the earth shakes with pain and suffering and terrorism and bloodshed and hatred, here in these places, here in this place, in his mother's arms, in the moments of Transfiguration, but also in the bleak places, Christ is King.

Silence

## 1.17pm Collect

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light,  
look favourably on your whole Church,  
that wonderful and sacred mystery,  
and by the tranquil operation of your perpetual providence  
carry out the work of our salvation:  
and let the whole world feel and see  
that things which were cast down are being raised up  
and things which had grown old are being made new  
and that all things are returning to perfection  
through him from whom they took their origin,  
even Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*All* Amen.

## Hymn – All for Jesus – A&M 421

All for Jesus! all for Jesus!  
This our song shall ever be;  
for we have no hope, nor Saviour,  
if we have not hope in thee.

All for Jesus! thou wilt give us  
strength to serve thee hour by hour:  
none can move us from thy presence  
while we trust thy love and power.

All for Jesus! at thine altar  
thou dost give us sweet content;  
there, dear Saviour, we receive thee  
in the solemn sacrament.

All for Jesus! thou hast loved us,  
All for Jesus! thou hast died,  
All for Jesus! thou art with us,  
All for Jesus crucified.

All for Jesus! All for Jesus!  
This the Church's song must be,  
till at last the flock is gathered  
one in love and one in thee.

Words W J Sparrow-Simpson (1859–1952)  
Tune All for Jesus, A&M 421, John Stainer (1840–1901)