

## **Worship at Home – 17<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**Introduction** – This Sunday is the first Sunday of Passiontide when we remember the last two weeks of Jesus' life.

We think particularly of how in obedience to God, Jesus was willing to undergo terrible suffering to establish a new covenant of God's love. There was no other way. This service will reflect on the cross and the journey that Jesus made on our behalf.

**Reading** John 12:31-33 – Jesus said *“Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

**Reflection** - We understand that God intended to rescue and forgive humanity, giving them a fresh start. However the cost of this rescue is borne only on Jesus' shoulders, who offered himself as an ultimate gift of loving sacrifice on our behalf.

The Jews had been waiting for the Messiah who had been promised many centuries before, they believed that the Messiah would rescue them from their Roman oppressors and establish a new kingdom. However, many Jews overlooked the prophecies that spoke of the new king as a suffering servant who would be rejected and killed. It is therefore no surprise that few recognised Jesus as the Messiah. How could this humble carpenter's son from Nazareth be their king?

Jesus' disciples were possibly thinking that as Jesus was the Messiah he would one day lead an army to drive out the Romans from their country, they might even have been thinking of the roles each of them would play in the new kingdom.

For Jesus' followers the journey towards Jerusalem with Jesus must have been extremely confusing, they already understood that Jesus was the Messiah. But did they really know who Jesus was? Peter proclaims him as Messiah, but then immediately indicates that he does not understand Jesus' mission. Following the transfiguration Jesus continues to teach and explain to his disciples why he is travelling to Jerusalem and what will happen there.

You can almost imagine the conversations that the disciples may have had between themselves. It was a particularly perilous time, everyone would have known about the different revolutions overthrowing government after government, usually by force.

Any new leader, any prophet, any teacher with something new to say would soon come to the attention of the authorities and would be quickly subdued.

Those who followed Jesus would have been aware of the risks involved.

So when Jesus began to teach his followers that the Messiah was to suffer many things, ... be rejected by the authorities .... be killed and after three days rise again they may have gasped in amazement.

The victory when it came, said Jesus, would look like a complete failure, for he was going to Jerusalem to be killed, it was part of the plan!

That did it! ..... This was the worst news that they had ever heard.

Hadn't they already given up their lives to follow this man? Why was Jesus saying these things? Why was there any need to go to Jerusalem at all? Why couldn't life continue as it had for the last three years?

It was from this point that Jesus spoke plainly and directly to the disciples about his death and resurrection. He told them about the true cost of following him. He spoke to them about taking up the cross.

Death on a cross was the most horrific form of execution reserved by Rome not only for criminals and for enemies of the state - A prisoner carried his own cross to the place of execution, signifying his submission to Rome's power.

I think it is important to understand at this point that the first time anyone hears about the cross of Christ they find it extremely difficult to understand.

It is also true of many of us in the church, we are so familiar with the crucifixion, that we do not fully appreciate how horrific it was, we often try to gloss over it to make it somehow more acceptable and less appalling.

None of us will ever be able to understand what pain, humiliation, temptation, or fear Jesus went through during his trial and crucifixion, nor we can we turn aside from the darkness and struggle which Jesus went through for us.

But we do need to follow Jesus and live the life that he died to give us, continuing his ministry showing his love, compassion and care to all we are in contact with.

### **A prayer of thanksgiving –**

God of majesty and might, we give the glory to you, to praise you for all that you have done for us in Jesus, for his birth in Bethlehem, his ministry in and around Nazareth, for his death, resurrection and ascension in Jerusalem.

We join with all those who have gone before us in thanksgiving, knowing that his message sometimes fell on deaf ears, that he faced rejection and ridicule, that he was tortured and died an horrific death, yet was raised from death and glorified by you.

We thank you Father, that Jesus continues to live in those who believe in him and are prepared to continue the ministry which he began. - Amen.

### **Hymn – When I survey the wondrous cross – Isaac Watts**

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Please pray that as we continue our journey through Lent to Gethsemane and the cross we will all be ready to die to self and live for Christ, so that we can rise with him on Easter morning.

We ask this prayer in Jesus' name and to the Father's glory – Amen.

*Shirley Baxter*