

A Reflection for Good Friday

He Died for Me



Instructions for Readers

This is a meditation and should be taken slowly without any rush or hurry, pausing after each line and each paragraph. The whole service may be done by one person or the words shared between two or three. Where multiple voices are to be used, this should be agreed beforehand.

The service should have some simple focus, such as a cross or a draped cross and silence encouraged both before and after the service.

How deep the Father's love for us

(Track 1)

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory
Behold the Man upon the cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished
I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom



Introduction and Welcome

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

We gather here to worship God. We gather to remember how Jesus suffered and died for us and to thank God for his love and his mercy. *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before God like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

The service today is a meditation upon the cross. With the exception of the first hymn - we would like everyone to remain seated during the service. After that hymn, we gather at the foot of the cross and hear Jesus speak to us. After each word reflection there will follow a time of silence then a hymn. Immediately after the silence, we ask you to sing the verse or verses from on the screen. It is our hope that you will relax - and enter into the experience of Christ's passion, that you may know the meaning of what our Lord has done for us. Let us prepare for our worship now by standing to sing "For Me O Lord".

For Me, O Lord

When you prayed beneath the trees,
it was for me, O Lord;
when you cried upon your knees,
how could it be, O Lord?

When in blood and sweat and tears,
you dismissed your final fears,
when you faced the soldiers' spears,
you stood for me, O Lord.

When their triumph looked complete,
it was for me, O Lord;
when it seemed like your defeat,
they could not see, O Lord!

When you faced the mob alone,
you were silent as a stone
and a tree became your throne;
you came for me, O Lord.

When you stumbled up the road,
you walked for me, O Lord,
when you took your deadly load,
that heavy tree, O Lord;
when they lifted you on high,
and they nailed you up to die,
and when darkness filled the sky,
it was for me, O Lord.

When you spoke with kingly power,
it was for me, O Lord;
in that dread and destined hour,
you made me free, O Lord;
earth and heaven heard you shout,
death and hell were put to rout
for the grave could not hold out;
you are for me, O Lord.

Meditation 1 A Covenant



Meditation 1 – A Covenant

Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask of Him.'

Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'

Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die.'

In St Luke's Gospel, the criminal who was hanged with Jesus speaks to Him. He said, 'Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.'

Jesus replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'

The Bible might be called a book of covenants, indeed, given the close relationship between the word covenant and the word testament, perhaps it is. The Hebrew word for 'covenant' implies a binding relationship, while the Greek word of the New Testament has overtones of what we would call a 'last will and

testament'. As the payment of a debt by cheque implies a promise on both sides, so the relationship between God and His people in the Bible is a series of promises.

Some of the covenants in the Old Testament are between human beings, as that between David and his friend Jonathan, but most are to do with the relationship between God and His people, as when God makes a promise to Noah and validates it by the sign of a rainbow. In the key covenant on Mount Sinai, the Children of Israel are given their side of the bargain – God will look on them with favour, but they have some rules to keep, which we call the ten Commandments.

The trouble with human promises, as we all know, is that they can go wrong. And even a covenant made in good faith can be broken. Those of us who have had teenage children will remember the force of 'If you let me go, I promise faithfully that I'll be home by 10.'

There is another aspect to making promises, too. Although we had every intention of keeping a promise, it will depend on God. Any human promise made in the sight of God is liable to be affected by the will of God.

At the Last Supper, a new covenant was made by Jesus with His followers. He said that the cup poured out for them, and by extension for all of us, was the new covenant in His blood. We, like the Children of Israel, are a covenant people. We make our promise to do what He did, in remembrance of Him.

And towards the end of His earthly life, Our Lord spoke to Martha the words that we hear at all funerals in this place: 'I am the resurrection and the life.' He is the One through whom Martha, her sister and all the bystanders, will see God glorified, and His promise is to all His people: if we believe in Him, we shall never die. Of course we shall die as everyone does, in a physical sense, but spiritually we will be alive for all time.

This is a general covenant, a promise to 'all who believe in me', as Jesus says. But only a little while later, as He is hanging on the Cross in His last agony, we have the record of another promise, this time to an individual.

This seems to be a very one-sided covenant. The dying thief has, as far as we can tell, never followed Jesus, done no good works, never preached or taught about Jesus as the Son of God; on the contrary, by his own admission he has lived a dishonest and lawless life. He seems utterly undeserving. And yet right at the end, in the final moments of his life, he looks at Jesus and he sees and understands more than the disciples in all the time that they have spent with Him, more than Pilate and all those involved in Jesus's trial; he sees a Man Who is a King, Whose Kingdom is not of this world, but Who has a power which will

extend even beyond death. And Jesus responds to that last-minute understanding. Quite what He means by Paradise we can't yet know, but the critical words are 'you will be with Me', the very highest promise that any human being can receive.

So this is the final covenant of Our Lord's earthly life: 'believe, and you will be with Me.'

We can see, today of all days, what the cost of His side of the covenant is: the betrayal, the isolation, the beating, the horror of crucifixion. We can't fully imagine the agony, physical, mental and spiritual, that He endured; as we wait here, we can feel just a little bit of the darkness that covered the earth as He died.

So what about our side of the bargain? A covenant involves two parties, and we have to fulfil our part in this final agreement. The penitent thief, as history calls him, had time only to believe, and that was enough. What are we asked to promise, on our side? We in our society can promise easily, perhaps too easily. We expect no more persecution than perhaps a bit of teasing or, if we're unlucky, ridicule for our faith. But even today, the calling of God may involve very much more, perhaps all that we have to give. Would we be ready, in the sight of the Cross, to give everything for the Man Who is hanging there?

In 2008, when he took office, a politician said this. 'Jesus is the nucleus of my life, and I want to be His true follower through my actions by sharing the love of God with poor, needy and suffering people.' That was his side of the promise, and early in 2011 Shahbaz Bhatti, a Pakistani politician, was murdered because he did just that. His response to the love that brought Our Lord to the Cross was also to love, even to death. This may be the cost to His followers, even now, of accepting the love of God.

It is a two way agreement, as all promises are. And today we see it worked out in front of us. Our Lord is giving His life, His earthly Being, because He loves us. And we are here, watching beside His Cross, trying in some small way to show our love by being here.

And in doing so, although today we can hardly imagine it, we are accepting that He is the resurrection and the life, and that He and we together, when He chooses, will meet in His kingdom.

Silence

When I survey the wondrous cross

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.

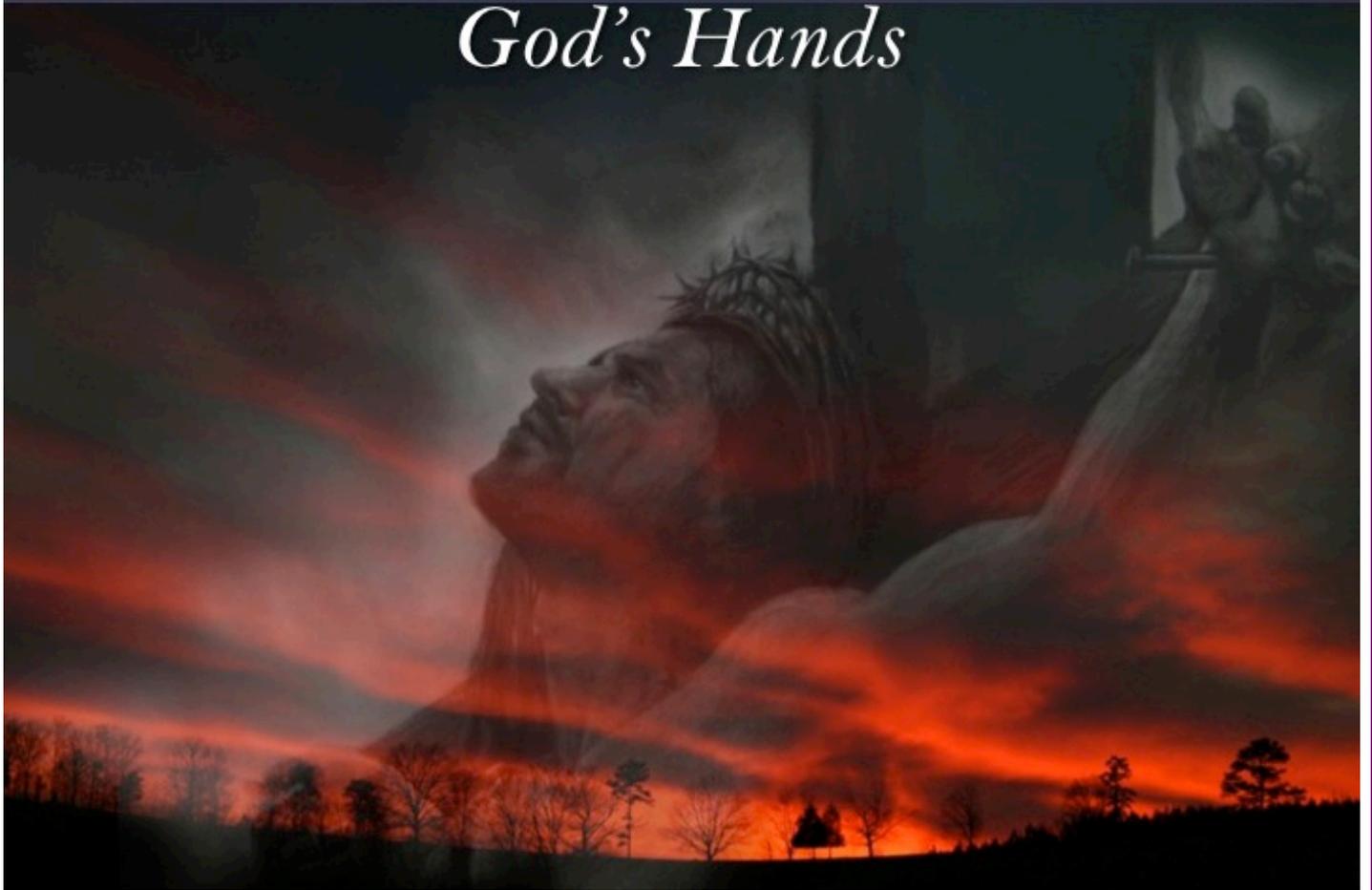
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

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.

Meditation 2

God's Hands



Meditation 2 – God's Hands

By now it was about mid-day and there came a darkness over the whole land, which lasted until three in the afternoon; the sun was in eclipse. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus gave a loud cry, and said 'Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit', and with these words, He died.

The hands of God are the hands of creation. However we interpret the strange, mythical words of the first chapter of Genesis, the message is clear: behind all that is, is God. We may imagine Him with the equivalent of a lump of playdough, fashioning birds and animals and flowers, and perhaps laughing at the beauty of some and the oddity of others: we can hardly think that the creator of the camel lacks a sense of humour.

But God wanted something more, and, by a slow evolution, He created human beings who could talk to Him and respond to His love. If we think of the scale of God's creation, we are full of awe, amazed at His imagination and the creativity of His hands.

The hands of God are wounded hands. Today of all days, we imagine with horror the hammer blows that drove nails through His flesh, and the agony He endured.

It seems like a contradiction: God's hands create all that is, and yet they are disfigured by the very human beings who were the summit of that creation. Perhaps it is one of the great mysteries of our faith, that One who is all-powerful should let Himself be tortured by His own creation. But He is giving us one of the hardest lessons we ever have to learn, that love is infinitely vulnerable. To be strong, powerful, knowledgeable, even invincible – this might be possible without suffering. But to love means to be open to pain, as God Himself always knew, long before Good Friday.

The hands of God are loving hands. Pain and love go together, and as God loved, He also suffered, and, having suffered, still loves. This is also almost impossible for human beings to understand: terrible pain is inflicted, and the sufferer goes on loving the very people who are inflicting the torture. During His earthly life, Our Lord healed the sick, put His arms round the children, and with His own hands broke bread and gave it to a hungry crowd. At each stage, His hands revealed His love for His creation. And that creation repaid His infinite love by driving nails through His hands.

But, another mystery of our faith, it is impossible for human beings to destroy that love, however much we try. On Good Friday, we human beings did our utmost to do just that, and we failed as we will always fail. God's hands are wounded, but they are always, for eternity, the hands of love.

Our hands, the hands of a human being, share these qualities. They are creative, whether we work in wood or in words or in paint or in healing. Our hands are exquisitely made, flexible and skilful, and one of the wonders of our life is that God made them to be little replicas of His, creating beauty for Him; sometimes, of course, we misuse our hands, and their creativity results in pain for others and the near-destruction of His world.

Our hands are also wounded. We are made to love, and if we love, we, like God, are vulnerable. We see the pain of a woman giving birth, the cruelty which the young – and not only the young - sometimes show one another, the agony of cancer or AIDS, not just for ourselves but for those we love, the unimaginable suffering of a parent who has lost a child. This is a true reflection of the vulnerability of a loving God. We cannot escape such pain: hearing of prisoners of conscience, imprisoned and tortured for their beliefs, of lives cut short by

starvation and disease, of the depths of human cruelty, we can be like Our Lord in this, that we weep for our brothers and sisters.

But our hands are also the hands of love. God has given us the skills, the generosity, the great gifts of friendship and compassion, so that we too can bring healing to others. As we have free will, we can misuse this gift, too, but the potential is in our hands to touch the lives of other people and to enrich them by our love.

God's hands have a further quality that ours don't have. His hands are everlasting. There is no place, no time that God is not; we can never be outside His love. So, as Our Lord commended Himself to His Father's hands, we pray that at our death we may stretch out our hands to Him and see His hands, already there to take ours.

Silence

The Servant King

From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served, but to serve
And give your life, that we might live

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow him
To bring our lives as daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King*

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load, he chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
Yet not my will but yours he said

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow him
To bring our lives as daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King*

Come see his hands and his feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered

*This is our God, the Servant King
He calls us now to follow him
To bring our lives as daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King*

Meditation 3



Fear Not

Meditation 3 – Fear Not

Being afraid is part of the human condition, and, it's not necessarily a bad thing, as long as it doesn't paralyse us, so that we are unwilling to take on any challenging activity, to take any risks at all, even if the outcome might be to everyone's benefit. Fear is usually unpleasant, but it shouldn't cripple us.

I'd like to look at three examples of fear that we find in the Gospel accounts of the Passion of Our Lord: St Peter was afraid, Pilate was afraid, Our Lord Himself was afraid, but these three examples show fear in different ways.

Peter was a man of great courage, as we see throughout the Gospels. We've only to think of his attempt to walk on the water as Jesus did – he got out of the boat onto a rough, windswept sea – how many of us would have dared to do that? He shows how brave he is again when he declares his willingness to go to prison and even to death with Jesus, and we have no reason to doubt that he means what he says. And Jesus warns him – before the cock crows, you will betray Me. You would have thought that Peter would have run a mile at the very suggestion, but he doesn't; he follows Jesus even to the high priest's house.

But he knows what is going to happen to his Lord; he suddenly realises that the agony of the taunts, the beating, the crucifixion, might be his, too, and when he's challenged by three separate members of the high priest's household, his courage suddenly fails him, and he denies even knowing Jesus. And the cock crows.

Peter was an ordinary man, and the fear of pain is common to us all. Sheila Cassidy, the British doctor who was tortured in Chile after treating a sick rebel, eventually gave way under intense and repeated torture, and says she felt sick with humiliation at what she had said. 'Does everyone talk, or am I weak?' she asked. 'Everyone has their breaking point,' was the reply.

Lent was in the early Church a time when those who had given way under persecution and denied their faith prepared themselves by repentance to be received again into the Christian community – a time of forgiveness. Peter went through his time of Lent, and was forgiven. Sheila Cassidy wrote of the time she was in between sessions of torture: 'I sat there and somehow stretched out my hand to the God Who seemed so far away.' And she found her God nearer than she could imagine.

Pilate wasn't threatened with pain; he was the one in a position of power, the one who could have pain inflicted on others. But he was afraid. Part of his trouble was that he had doubts. If he'd simply believed that Jesus was guilty, then he would have had no hesitation in handing Him over for crucifixion. Unfortunately for him, he had a strong suspicion that the Man before him wasn't guilty, and Pilate was in some ways a just man, who didn't want to convict someone who was innocent.

He squirmed, it's the best word for it, he squirmed, consumed by a sense of justice and at the same time fear, fear of the crowd, of the Roman soldiers, of his reputation, of the risk of a damning report to Rome. And he had doubts.

There's nothing wrong with doubt. Few Christians could ever say that they have never doubted, that they have been utterly convinced of the truth of their faith for as long as they could remember. Sometimes doubt comes because other people pour scorn on our faith, sometimes we have intellectual doubts, sometimes it all seems too unlikely, this story of a crucified Man Who is alive for eternity. Having doubts means that we are thinking, we want to know, we are concerned about the issue, we ask what is truth, as Pilate himself did. We should never be ashamed of our doubts.

But Pilate's trouble was that he didn't have the courage of his doubts. After one attempt to save Jesus, he gave in. He had too much to lose, and he was afraid.

Sometimes even to doubt requires courage, a willingness to put at risk our own reputation, our regard for our status, the opinions of others. Honest doubt may itself be an act of courage; Pilate's doubt turned into dishonesty, the desire to save himself at another Man's expense. Fear overcame his scruples.

Our Lord Himself seems to show fear on two occasions, for different reasons. In the garden of Gethsemane, He prayed in anguish that the cup of suffering might be taken from Him. He knew, no one knew better, what awaited Him, and it was entirely natural that as a fully human being, He was in terrible dread and fear. Nevertheless, He still said, 'Thy will be done.'

And on the cross, He gave that great cry of despair to God, 'why have You forsaken Me?' It seems to me that this is also fear, but a different kind of fear – the horror that He might be separated from God. This above all is His final torture, that God Himself might have abandoned His beloved Son.

For all people, a sense of isolation is hard to bear. We want to know that we are cared for, that we are remembered. Most of all, we want to be assured that God hasn't left us to suffer alone. A Chinese doctor, imprisoned for many years for his faith, wrote this:

No one can be my companion for ever,
but You are the Lord Who is everywhere,
present at all times.

Only You are my dear companion and Saviour...
...when others have forgotten me,
please remember me in eternity.

When Peter, suddenly afraid, thought that he was sinking in the water, Jesus said, 'It is I. Be not afraid.' Jesus Himself in almost His last words commended His spirit to His heavenly Father, Who was with Him.

And we have the assurance that, however great our fear, it will ultimately be replaced by peace and joy, for He is with us always, even to the end of time.

Silence

Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle

Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle,
of the mighty conflict sing;
tell the triumph of the victim,
to his Cross your tribute bring.
Jesus Christ the world's Redeemer,
From that cross now reigns as King.

When at length the appointed fullness
of the sacred time was come,
he was sent, the world's creator,
from the Father's heavenly home,
and was found in human fashion,
offspring of the Virgin's womb.

When the thirty years were ended
which on earth he willed to see,
willingly he meets his Passion,
born to set his people free;
on the Cross the Lamb is lifted,
there the sacrifice to be.

There the nails and spear he suffers,
vinegar and gall and reed;
from his sacred body pierced
blood and water both proceed:
precious flood, which all creation
from the stain of sin has freed.

Faithful cross, above all other,
one and only noble tree,
none in foliage, none in blossom.
none in fruit your peer may be;
sweet the wood and sweet the iron
and your load, most sweet is he.
in precious blood, and crimson lines

Praise and honour to the Father,
praise and honour to the Son,
praise and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three and ever One:
One in might, and One in glory,
while eternal ages run. Amen.

Meditation 4

The Crucifixion



Meditation 4 – The Crucifixion

Video Clip: Crucifixion from the Passion of Christ

O Sacred Head

O sacred head, sore wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down;
now scornfully surrounded by thorns, thine only crown:
how art thou pale with anguish,
with sore abuse and scorn;
how does that visage languish,
which once was bright as morn!

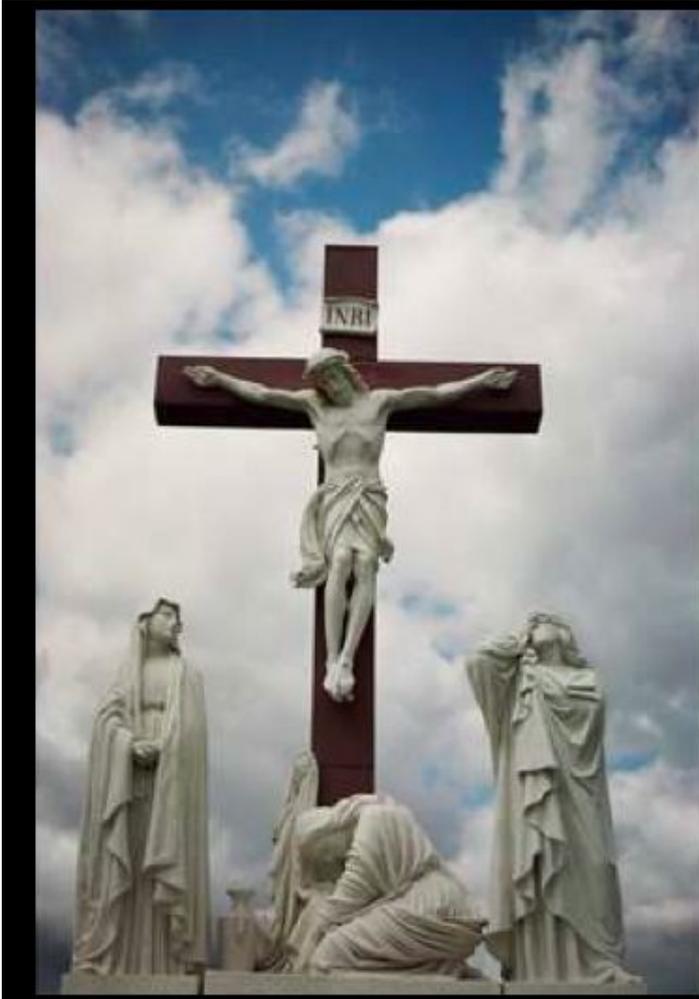
Thy grief and bitter passion
were all for sinner's gain,
All mine was the transgression,
but thine the cruel pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Saviour,
turn not from me thy face;
but look on mine with favour,
and grant to me thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
to praise thee, heavenly friend,
for this thy dying sorrow,
thy pity without end?
O agony and dying!
O love to sinners free!
Jesus, all grace supplying,
turn thou thy face on me.

In this your bitter Passion,
good Shepherd, think of me,
look on me with compassion,
unworthy though I be:
beneath your cross abiding
for ever would I rest,
in your dear love confiding,
and with your presence blessed.

Lord, be my consolation,
my shield when death is near;
remind me of your Passion,
be with me when I fear.
my eyes shall then behold you,
upon your cross shall dwell,
my heart by faith enfold you;
and who dies thus, dies well.

Silence



"It is finished."

John 19:30

Fifth Meditation *John 19:29-30*

*So, Lord, I have watched with you one hour.
The cross by which I kneel, is empty now.
That night, your disciples and the women
went to their homes in tears,
believing all their hopes were dashed
and they would never see you again.
I, too, am sad and shaken by this hour,
but I cannot identify with them;
not fully, for I know what they could not -
I have heard about the Sunday morning!*

Silence

Prayer

It is finished, Lord, yet it has just begun. What you have done, has giving me – New Life. Yet I find it hard to accept this, to live as a citizen of your kingdom. Help me to re-commit my time, my talents, my resources to you and your mission. **Amen.**

How deep the Father's love for us

(Track 3)

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory
Behold the Man upon the cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished
I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom