

Worship @ Home

Good Friday – April 10th 2020

Revd Val Reid

Christchurch Hitchin and Pirton



If we were not under quarantine, we would be meeting at church today for a short reflective service at 9.30am. We would then be joining our friends from Churches Together in Hitchin to walk from Bancroft Gardens to the Market Square for public worship. I understand over 500 people have made this pilgrimage in previous years. This year we will be at home, either alone, or with members of our own household. But I invite you to set aside half an hour to reflect on this day. In some ways there is nothing to be said. Jesus is dying on a cross, and the extent of God's love for us is shown in that lonely, agonising death. Perhaps there is nothing we can do other than sit with the pain. Many people are having to learn to do that during these difficult times. But we are invited to make a response. And each response will be different, personal, wrung out of our own lives and experience.

At my previous church, Hinde Street, we used to meet for three hours on Good Friday to reflect on the 'seven last words from the cross' in words, music and silence. Each reflection was led by a different minister or local preacher, and each person brought their own perspective. I have reproduced here the reflection I wrote in 2018 on the fifth word, 'I thirst'. It seemed an appropriate theme for a time when we are all learning to live with the things we can't have.

Val

THE FIFTH WORD: "I THIRST"

John 19.28 – 30

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.'

A jar full of sour wine was standing there.

So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.'

Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

HOMESICK

By Carol Ann Duffy

*When we love, when we tell ourselves we do,
we are pining for first love, somewhen,
before we thought of wanting it. When we rearrange
the room we end up living in, we are looking
for first light, the arrangement of light,
that time, before we knew to call it light.*

*Or talk of music, when we say
we cannot talk of it, but play again
C major, A flat minor, we are straining
for first sound, what we heard once,
then, in lost chords, wordless languages.*

*What country do we come from? This one?
The one where the sun burns
when we have night? The one
the moon chills; elsewhere, possible?*

*Why is our love imperfect,
music only echo of itself,
the light wrong?*

*We scratch in dust with sticks,
dying of homesickness
for when, where, what.*

Reflection

There are only two stories.
Our longing for liberty when we were in slavery.
And our longing for home when we were in exile.
Or perhaps there is only one story.
Our longing.
For what we don't have.
For what we once had.
For what we hope to have again.
One day.

Build houses, Jeremiah said.
Settle down.
Plant gardens, and eat what they produce.
Make yourselves at home.
But we couldn't.

Not entirely.

Oh we could go through the motions of settling.

Planting.

Harvesting.

Eating.

But always that longing for our real home.

That image in the mind.

That perfect city.

Jerusalem the golden.

Dying of homesickness

for when, where, what.

So how could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

We needed to keep hold of that longing.

However much it hurt.

However much it got in the way of our settling and building and planting.

However abrasive the disjunction between here and there.

Because if we stopped yearning for what we didn't have – what was there left for us to long for?

Would we let go of our God, along with our beloved city?

Perhaps there is a third story.

- Our longing for liberty.
- Our longing for home.
- And our painful recognition that home is not what we once imagined.

That there is no way back.

No way back past the angels with fiery swords.

Once you have demanded your freedom, and got it, you have to live in that lonely wilderness.

Once you have gone back to Jerusalem, you face the long, slow task of rebuilding the walls.

Rebuilding the community.

And it won't be the same.

It won't ever be the same.

When he told us that the kingdom of God was here – now – amongst us – then we began to hope.

That the coin that had been lost might be found again.

That we might locate that elusive treasure buried in the field.

That the Father was waiting for us with open arms, to welcome us home.

Perhaps that was why we followed him.

Because he quenched that thirst we didn't really know we had.

He fed that existential hunger for meaning that we couldn't really identify.

Yes, we fed it – day after day – with work, with family, with rules, with money, with religion.

Oh the things we fed ourselves with!

But it was only – in him – with him – through him – that we began to understand what really satisfied.

*Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again;
But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.
The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*

Perhaps that was the real horror of the cross.

That third story.

That painful recognition that home is not what we once imagined.

The one in whom we'd invested all our hopes...

The one who promised us life...

The one who offered us living water...

Hanging, broken, on a Roman cross.

Crying out himself:

I am thirsty.

But now, I wonder.

Was that his last gift to us?

His greatest gift?

I am thirsty.

First love.

First light.

First sound.

If we think we have found them here, we are mistaken.

In this person.

In this relationship.

In this life.

He too shared our human longings.

He too was thirsty.

He too found his true home only in his God.

Why is our love imperfect,

music only echo of itself,

the light wrong?

Because we are created to keep longing.

Keep searching.

Keep travelling.

Here we have no abiding city.

When our thirst is quenched – finally quenched – it will be on the other side of the cross.

Hymn

I hunger and I thirst:
Jesu, my manna be;
ye living waters, burst
out of the rock for me.

Thou bruised and broken Bread,
my life-long wants supply;
as living souls are fed,
O feed me, or I die.

Thou true life-giving Vine,
let me thy sweetness prove;
renew my life with thine,
refresh my soul with love.

Rough paths my feet have trod
since first their course began:
feed me, thou Bread of God;
help me, thou Son of Man.

For still the desert lies
my thirsting soul before:
O living waters, rise
within me evermore.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell

Tune: Ibstone

Prayer

You move us to delight in praising You;
For You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.
Alas for me!
Through your own merciful dealings with me, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me.
Say to my soul, I am your salvation.
Say it so that I can hear it.
My heart is listening, Lord;
Open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, I am your salvation.
Let me run towards this voice and seize hold of you.
Do not hide your face from me:
Let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed.

Confessions of St. Augustine (Book I, Chapter 1)