

## Matthew 26: 36-56

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When I was 12 years old and my brother was 8 we were staying with a great aunt of ours. My brother got sick with a cold or something so he went to bed early. My great aunt made him a hot drink.

That night I woke up suddenly. I could hear my brother wheezing in the next room. I got up and went into see him. He was struggling for breath. I got into his bed and held him as he fought for each breath.

In the morning our great aunt took him to hospital. It turned out he had severe asthma. He was in hospital for two weeks. He had nearly died.

In the last two weeks, my brother and I have discussed that terrible night. I remember holding him certain that he was going to die. He remembers the panic he felt as he fought for every breath. This shared experience is our window of understanding into what it might mean to catch Covid 19 and die alone. Or to lose a loved one whom you cannot hold as they fight for breath.

When Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane we see a man facing death with the same fear we feel. The Son of Man is really Immanuel, 'God with us'. He feels what we feel. And so we know that our deepest and strongest fears are known to God because God has experienced them as well.

But there is more to the death of Christ than an assurance that God is with us. The crucifixion is more than an act of solidarity.

It is the once for all sacrifice that brings the final victory over death; the sacrifice that atones for the sin of the whole world. Jesus is not just praying because he is scared to die. He is praying for the strength to fight and win this one-off cosmic battle against all evil.

It is a struggle he must face alone. His disciples do not understand really what is happening. They are tired after a long day. They cannot stay awake, let alone pray with him the prayers they have no inkling of. And it is one of his own friends who betrays him with a false kiss.

The moment of betrayal sparks an act of violence. Even as he is arrested Jesus has to restore peace and bring healing. Only the violence that is directed towards Jesus can go forward now.

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We hear Christ's call to us in the haunting Taizé chant *Stay with me* which will undoubtedly form part of my Good Friday meditations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmAOCqV50Q>

But it is no use. His followers do not answer this call. Jesus walks on alone as Isaiah prophesied in words which form a kind of dialogue we have with Christ at the start of the Stations of the Cross.

*'Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson?  
Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?'*

*'It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save.'*

*'Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine  
press?'*

*'I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with  
me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath;  
their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes.  
For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work  
had come.*

*I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me;  
so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me.*

*Isaiah 63: 1-5*

You can follow the Stations of the Cross that Anna has prepared for us on our Facebook page and our YouTube channel *St Philip and St James Alderley Edge*

I'll finish by leaving you the collect for Good Friday:

Almighty Father, look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross; who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.