

TFTD 25.37 Wednesday April 16th

The “Not my will, but yours be done” prayer: Luke 23.39-62



The last remnants of the Last Supper have been cleared away. It is late and dark and even maybe a little chilly. It is a time when you want to take stock of what has just happened. Your head is buzzing with all those things that have been said and all those things that have not been said. The sensible thing would be to have a rest, to get some sleep before the trials of the day ahead. Surely, nothing could be more important than a bit of sleep.

Yet, there is a twist In that interval of nothingness between the major narratives of the Passion story, we stumble on one of the most moving and agonising passages in scripture. Discreetly, the Gospel writer ushers us in to witness a moment of sheer pathos between God the Father and the Son. It is intense communion between Father and Son. This is prayer at its most intimate, agonising, and vulnerable when the Son, for our sake, submits to the will of the Father...This is love triumphing over fear.

“Not my will but yours be done” is a form of prayer. It is the most challenging form of prayer because it implies struggle, dread, pain, anguish, and a lot more beside. I have wondered over the years what that prayer looks like in the everyday lives of ordinary Christians.

It was a chance meeting with a wee elderly Chinese lady that gave me a flicker of understanding. I had been visiting an orchid garden on the outskirts of Singapore early one morning. After admiring rows upon rows of exotic orchids, I was drawn to another garden, hidden a little away. This was not an exhibition garden like the orchid garden but a real garden with shrubs, tall grasses, trees and water features. Deep in thought, I spent quite a while in that garden alone until this lady confronted me as she emerged from the shrubbery, brandishing a fierce pair of secateurs. “You

must be British,” she said in one of the poshest English accents I have ever heard. “How can you tell?” I responded, quite puzzled. “Only British people find this garden and spend as much time in it as you have.”

Soon, we found ourselves sitting on a bench deep in conversation. It is weird how you can end up confiding everything about yourself to perfect strangers. It transpired that she was the owner of the orchid garden, which she had inherited from her father. She had been an orphan in war-torn China. As a small child, she had been adopted by a prominent Scottish family who had settled in Singapore adopted. She had a privileged upbringing and was given the best education. As an adult, she has been a leading light in Singapore's political scene and a faithful member of the Anglican community.

It was then that she spoke to me about her faith. She told me how she had prayed continuously that her husband be restored to health. Yet now, she found herself being called to pray a different kind of prayer. It is what she called a prayer of acceptance. I don't imagine it was an easy kind of prayer. She had had a fascinating life, full of interesting people, glamour and privilege. She hinted at the struggle that accompanied those prayers. Her husband was now terminally ill, and her life revolved around his care, bar an hour early in the morning when she could escape back to her beloved garden. We departed best of friends, never to meet again. I took home from there a bunch of orchids for a friend dying of cancer and a window of new insight which had so graciously been offered to me.

“Not my will but yours be done” is the prayer Jesus teaches us. It sits alongside prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, confession and intercession. It is a prayer of agony, struggle, vulnerability and fear. It challenges us away from a consumer approach to prayer, which asks itself, “What can this God do for me?” towards embracing what Sam Wells calls “a devotional entering into the mystery of a universe saturated with the love of God”. Yet most of all, in this most holy of weeks, it anchors our prayers in the remembrance of what Christ did for us.

Rachel Roberts

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.



Luke 22.39-62

Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’ Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?’ When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, ‘Lord, should we strike with the sword?’ Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, ‘No more of this!’ And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!’

Peter Denies Jesus

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him

in the firelight, stared at him and said, 'This man also was with him.' But he denied it, saying, 'Woman, I do not know him.' A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, 'You also are one of them.' But Peter said, 'Man, I am not!' Then about an hour later yet another kept insisting, 'Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.' But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!' At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

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