

TFTD 25.40 Easter Eve April 19th

It is finished: Luke 23.44-56

A day of quiet, sabbath rest — with the drama of the Easter Vigil as night falls (6.30 pm tonight), as we kindle the Easter fire and mark the transition from the darkness of the Cross to the light of Easter.



“It is finished,” Jesus cries on the cross in John’s Gospel (John 19.30). Not a sigh of resignation but a shout of triumph. Luke has the same sense that Jesus’ death on the cross is a moment of accomplishment, a work long-prepared and now at last completed (Luke 9.51). So now, as we look back on the crowded events of Holy Week, we have a moment to reflect: what is it, this work that can only be accomplished on the cross?

Jesus’ death is the supreme example of the com-*passion* of God, *suffering-with*: Jesus entering into our death, sharing to the utmost the whole experience of what it means to be human. But it was more than that. Jesus’ death was also a once-for-all event, a task accomplished, a victory won. On the cross we see not only the passion, the suffering of

God-in-Christ, but the action of God-in-Christ, God in Christ taking action to reconcile the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5.19).

The Bible has many kinds of picture-language to describe what happened when Jesus died. The epistle to the Hebrews 2.14-15 describes it as a moment of solidarity which is also a moment of victory: “Since the children [you and me] share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death (that is, the devil), and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Hebrews 2.14-15). And later on, Hebrews pictures Jesus as an Olympic champion leading a great lap of honour around the stadium before the cheering crowds (Heb. 12.1-2).

Something of that sense comes across in this orthodox icon of the Resurrection. I find this a helpful way of approaching the mystery of what was achieved by the cross. Look first at the figure of Christ, slightly off-centre, straddling and dominating the centre of the icon — decisive, joyful, bursting with energy. This is not a tragic victim of circumstances, but a carpenter with his sleeves rolled up, ready for action.

The wood of the cross has become a ladder, a bridge across the abyss — a platform for Christ to do his work. The other name for this icon is the “Harrowing of Hell.” It shows Jesus reaching out strong hands, one to Adam, one to Eve, reaching down to pull them up out of the pit of death, breaking their chains to share his risen life. (Can you see all the keys and broken padlocks?)

It shows us human beings, you and me, being pulled by this joyful and vigorous Christ from darkness to light, from death to life, from captivity to freedom. It’s a vision of Jesus as the new Adam, setting free the whole human race, reversing Adam’s disobedience by a life of complete obedience — obedient unto death — and thus restoring the free and confident relationship with God that was broken by the fall. That’s why Jesus could say to the penitent thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise” — restored not merely into a life beyond death, but to a life in fellowship with God beginning now.

What the icon reveals is the astoundingly bold conception that the effects of the Cross transcend all the boundaries of space and time, reaching forward into the future and back into the past. It shows us Adam and Eve (sinful humanity) being pulled by this joyful, vigorous Christ from darkness to light, from death to life, from bondage to freedom. That's why we call this Friday Good.

'Tis mystery all, the Immortal dies:
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free
For oh, my God, it found out me.

And meantime, on this Holy Saturday, after the tempest and the trauma, a sigh of peace. Jesus' final act on the cross is an act of breathing out and letting go: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'. The words come from Psalm 31, still used at night prayer: words of trust and commitment, learned over the years through the nightly act of committing oneself to God in sleep.

I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast: like a child that is quieted is my soul. (Ps 131)

Even in the great psalms of lament, in the most profound desolation, there is an irreducible connectedness:

Yet it was you who took me from the womb,
You kept me safe upon my mother's breast.
Upon you was I cast from my birth;
And since my mother bore me, you have been my God.
Be not far from me, for trouble is near:
And there is none to help. (Ps 22.9-11)

And in that confidence — the confidence of victory won, the confidence in the absolute dependability of the Father's love — Jesus can rest.

Low in the grave he lay, Jesus, my Saviour:
Waiting the coming day, Jesus, my Lord.

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

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

God bless,
Loveday



Luke 23.44-56

The Death of Jesus

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

The Burial of Jesus

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of

Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.
On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

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

Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.