

Written Service Sunday March 17th
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev David Speed

Passion Sunday

Call to Worship – Thanks be to you, O God, who, in Jesus walked the path of suffering with us that we may ascend the heights of glory with you.

Hymn - Singing the Faith 20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord is here

Be Still, For The Presence Of The Lord, The Holy One, Is Here
Come Bow Before Him Now With Reverence And Fear
In Him No Sin Is Found We Stand On Holy Ground
Be Still, For The Presence Of The Lord, The Holy One, Is Here

Be Still, For The Glory Of The Lord Is Shining All Around
He Burns With Holy Fire, With Splendour He Is Crowned
How Awesome Is The Sight Our Radiant King Of Light
Be Still, For The Glory Of The Lord Is Shining All Around

Be Still, For The Power Of The Lord Is Moving In This Place
He Comes To Cleanse And Heal, To Minister His Grace
No Work Too Hard For Him, In Faith Receive From Him
Be Still, For The Power Of The Lord Is Moving In This Place

Prayer and Lord's Prayer,

Let us pray, O God, who is glorious, O God who teaches by example more than by instruction, O God who shows us what it means to be loving, we praise you.

We would be as you are, but we have to admit we are far from it. Forgive us for our lack of patience, and understanding of each other, and those whose backgrounds are different from ours. Forgive us our pride which puts us at the centre of every thought, and pushes you and others out.

Today, help us to concentrate on your way, Jesus way, which has a Cross at the centre of it. Even though we fail and fail so often, bless us, even your fallible children, and may we find blessing in the world you have made. AMEN.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn - Singing the Faith 361 - Man of Sorrows, what a name

“Man of Sorrows,” what a name
For the Son of God who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood;
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we,
Spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full redemption—can it be?
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Lifted up was He to die,
“It is finished!” was His cry;
Now in heaven exalted high;
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

When He comes, our glorious King,
To His kingdom us to bring,
Then anew this song we’ll sing
Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Reading - Jeremiah 31:31-34 Do not despair God’s new world is coming

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.

³² It will not be like the covenant
I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to^[d] them,^[e]”
declares the Lord.

³³ “This is the covenant I will make with the
people of Israel
after that time,” declares the Lord.

“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.

³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbour,
or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”
declares the Lord.

“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”

Hymn - Singing the Faith 446 I will offer up my life

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to
You
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You
have done?
O my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this
thankful heart*

You deserve my every breath for You've paid
the great cost
Giving up Your life to death, even death on a
cross
You took all my shame away, there defeated
my sin
Opened up the gates of heaven and have
beckoned me in

Jesus ...

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession – If possible, please take a World Atlas, or a globe of the world, and find the countries we are praying for on the map and think of people, people such as you living there.

Let us pray,

Lord God, we thank you for being more prepared to listen to our prayers than we are to offer them. We pray for the country of Haiti, in the throes of disorder, for Ukraine and Russia, and for Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank, the Yemen, knowing that men and women live there who through no fault of their own cannot deliver those hopes for family and friends that we have for our own.

We think of another country of the world and think of ordinary people like us who live there in the pressures that they face and the joys they have.

We think of our friends and family, their celebrations and anxieties, those in hospital, those enduring mental pressures or physical illness, and our government and country. We pray for ourselves.

We pray recalling that we do not know what is best.

You alone do. For it we pray. AMEN.

Reading - John 12:20-33

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up^[a] from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Hymn - Singing the Faith 636 O love that wilt not let me go

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee.
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

O Light that follows all my way,
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee.
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee.
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee.
I lay in dust, life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red,
life that shall endless be.

Sermon -IF I BE LIFTED UP

How would you react if someone said, "I'm going to be killed, but through my death all people will be lifted up?" You might say he or she is arrogant, or stupid, or mad. Rarely would you say the person is right. This passage, and this verse is about Jesus saying this because He sees God working in his situation. Do we see God working in ours?

JESUS SAW GOD WORKING IN HIS SITUATION

He put himself across as dying a martyr's death.

One of the first things my wife and I saw when we went to Nazareth, was a picture painted on a wall of Shireen Abu Akleh, who was a Palestinian Christian journalist killed in the West Bank. Her story is recorded in this year's Women's World Day of Prayer Service. She was referred to as a martyr journalist on the wall painting. Now the people of Jesus' day believed that a martyr's death would benefit her or his people. Jesus had inherited this view. His death would benefit many people. He saw God working through the situation.

The Greeks ask to see Jesus through Philip and Andrew. He doesn't answer the request directly. He says that the time will come when all people of all backgrounds and races will see him. The Greeks would be uplifted not by his conversation but by his death, along with everyone else.

We, also, saw in Nazareth pictures of Mary from throughout the world, designed as to how that culture, that people saw Mary. She was for all people, for all backgrounds.

If you go online, you can see different images of Christ. It reflects how people of various backgrounds have seen him throughout time, people of different cultures, backgrounds, and personalities. They see him differently, but show how His love on the Cross has uplifted people of all kinds. God worked in his situation.

Because it takes a sacrifice sometimes to bring people to see the truth under their noses. It took a sacrifice for people to see Jesus as who He was. You can only fight hate in limited ways. When you can't fight it with words, even calm words, you have to absorb it with love, and show that love is stronger than hate. That comes at a cost to us. It came at a cost to Jesus.

Somehow to live Jesus' life is a threat to those who want to cling onto a belief or privileges or position. Jesus' whole life was a threat. People from many nations came on pilgrimage to the Temple Mount. Pilgrimage has always been a good money earner, so it was a business, too. But, no, Jesus is suggesting that he is the alternative Temple. People will come not to the Temple but to Him. He threatened too many interests, not least would cost some people money, so He had to go.

Gene Edwards, in "The Inward Journey" writes, "If ever you see a great work of God, something joyous, alive and real, something of Christ, something that is Christ,... then you may be certain of one thing: some lonely saint, silent, alone, went to the Cross, suffered, died, and fell into the earth.

And for what did he die? For that lovely harvest, that work of God, which now you see and declare so beautiful".

Jesus was that saint.

We would not be here now if Jesus had not done this. Does it not oblige us to follow Him in seeking to find how God is working in our situations, grim though they may be? Does it not oblige us to follow even if it means being that lonely saint that must pay a cost for the world that God so wants, and is so beautiful?

For John, Crucifixion was Jesus' exaltation, glory, which is why there is no ascension story in his Gospel. On the Cross, Jesus was lifted up to Heaven says John. That is the offer for us, too. We shall be lifted up both in this life and in the life to come.

David Adam writes, "Beneath are the everlasting arms – and they bear the print of the nails. No matter how far I have sunk, He descends to lift me up. He has plumbed all the hells of this world that he may lift us upwards".

The Rabbis made the grain of wheat a symbol, too. They said, "If the grain of wheat, which is laid naked in the ground, grows up again in however many changes of clothing, how much more will that be true of the just, who are buried.. and will one day rise".

Because Jesus saw God working in his situation and followed through.

DO WE SEE GOD WORKING IN OUR SITUATION?

It can be difficult. It is so difficult to see God working in what is going on but how about the aid agencies, how about the movements for peace, and I include peaceful protest. Our call is to see something beyond the pain. **One preacher said we should keep both this world and the next in equal focus.** Perhaps we should do so before pain hits us. It is very difficult to see God's new world when pain takes over control either of the body or of the mind. But if there can be a little part of us that can be open to the thought that there may be something more, there is something more, that may be a light to guide us through.

Have we the belief that God can bring something good out of pain, and trauma?

A terrible fire took place in an office building. An office worker returned after the fire to look at the damage to her office. She shook her head and was just glad that she was not there at the time. None of her files had survived. At least she could say that she was paper free. There was a tiny, blackened vase in the remains of her office. She had a new office, so she said, "Well, little vase, you and I have survived, and you shall come with me into my new office".

It stood in the usual place on the corner of the desk.

Previously, when people saw the vase, they used to say, "Oh, what a beautiful vase". Since it had been through the fire, they said, "Oh, what beautiful flowers".

Sometimes, those who go through it can be a means of showing, can show a beauty of personality that goes beyond their pain. It may be that we go to see someone who has suffered real trauma and emerge because of how they have reacted newly inspired.

There is a prayer found lying on a piece of wrapping paper from a dead child in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. It goes, "O Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill will. But do not remember the suffering they have inflicted upon us, remember the fruits we bore because of this suffering, our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this. Then when they come to judgment, let the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness".

It may be a little as it was for Jesus that people become attracted to God because of the way we have responded to pain. **I know someone in Bethlehem who often inspires her friends such as me with her prayers for peace, protection and forgiveness despite all the injustices she faces.**

Even if our name is not lifted up on earth, He will lift it up in heaven. Jesus prayed to His Father, "Father, glorify your name". His Father replied, "I have done so and will do so again". When we ask that God will do good even through the distress we experience, then He will do something of the

same in us and through us. It's hard to say, but God will help us pray and live out that prayer. God will value the follower who followed Jesus all the way through.

IF I BE LIFTED UP, I WILL DRAW ALL PEOPLE UNTO ME. It means realizing that JESUS SAW GOD IN HIS SITUATION. It involves DOING THE SAME OURSELVES. In this, are we a work in progress? AMEN.

Hymn - Singing the Faith 287 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?

The Grace

You are invited to say the Grace, and by so doing not feel on your own but joined with all those who do so at the end of a time of worship.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us now and evermore.
Amen

God's graciousness and presence be with you this day and each day to come.