**Good Friday 2020**

Normally we should be walking to Cam Peak with a big cross. But this is not normal.

Meet in church garden – reading:

***Matthew 27.27-54***

The coronavirus is so called because the virus visibly resembles a crown (Corona in Latin). A crown is a symbol of power and authority – and certainly this virus has colossal power over us humans. It is invisible to the naked eye and yet just think about what it has forced many millions – indeed billions – of us to do and not do.[[1]](#endnote-1)

It also reminds us of our vulnerability. It is easy to forget that humans are mortal. The coronavirus is evidence both of our relationship with creation and creation’s relationship with us are disordered; and that this is not an accident. It reminds us that we are not in control.

We normally like to wear the crown. WE like to be boss of our own lives. The king of our castle. The Masters of the universe. We put our trust in ourselves. We look after our own comfort.

Jesus came teaching and living out the faith that we should act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God. Today we remember that he got himself crucified for that.

But leads us to the third crown; and the Christian claim that hope is found in another corona: the crown of thorns that was forced on Jesus head at his trial before his execution.

This is Good Friday. It is always strange that it is called ‘Good’ Friday because there was a lot of bad stuff happening on it. WE call it Good because ultimately Good came out of it.

Lot of bad stuff happening at the moment. We hope and pray that good will ultimately come out of it, but it doesn’t stop the pain and hardship and suffering of many at this time. But the cross has always stood as a symbol of hope in times of suffering and pain – so I want to encourage you to turn to Christ and put your hope in him and in the old rugged cross at this time and here’s why:

The Christian faith is not a once upon a time, happy ever after fairy story. It is rooted in history and realistic about the evil and suffering the world. Good Friday was a day of violence suffering and death. Jesus experienced physical violence of being nailed to a cross. He experienced emotional violence as the onlookers verbally abused him. He got insults from the crowd and the religious authorities and mocking from the Roman soldiers. There’s a saying that sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me. I think we all know that isn’t the case. Cruel words can be very damaging. Jesus knew the pain the words can bring.

At this time of lockdown there is great concern for those suffering domestic violence – whether it is physical violence or verbal abuse. If that is you then try and speak to someone National Domestic Abuse phone line is 0808 2000 247

There was the spiritual suffering too for Jesus – feeling forsaken by God – where are you God he said from the cross. He experienced thirst and desertion; all his friends had left him apart from some of the women. It was literally earth shattering.

For many who are losing their loved ones at this time it, likewise, is earth shattering.

The mystery of this day is the God took all that violence and pain, evil and death. God was there and God is here, with us now.

The crown of Jesus, his corona shows how deep the break between creature and Creator goes. Earth is Gods creation not ours. We are not its owner, but we seek to be. We are only tenants and stewards and flawed ones at that – many of us have made a mess of our lives and even those of others, to say nothing about what we have done to the planet.

There cannot be two paradises for humans: one in fellowship with God and one without him. The coronavirus is very rapidly demolishing the illusion that we can build perfection on earth. It reminds us of our mortality and once again questions of life and death.

I hope it induces us to look to the God we may have ignored for years, but who wore a crown of thorns in order to bring us back into relationship with himself and into a new unfractured world beyond death.

Good Friday is about God taking our evil, sin, violence, suffering, pain and death not giving it out. Not lashing back with retribution and punishment. But paying back love, forgiveness – so that evil and sin, suffering and death is spent. That’s why it’s a Good Friday. Because God turns all this round for Good.

Three days later is the hope, the reason why this Friday would be known as Good Friday.

Because God decides that in the words of a famous prayer by Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

Goodness is stronger than evil;
Love is stronger than hate;
Light is stronger than darkness;
Life is stronger than death;
Victory is ours through Him who loves us.

Despite all the challenges, fears, anxieties suffering and death in the world at the moment we also know it is calling out goodness and love and the value of life. We hang on to the ultimate victory of the cross and the resurrection.

In the words of the Queen who spoke on Sunday: We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again."

In the words of the old hymn the Old Rugged Cross:

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down
And I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it some day for a crown

The message of the cross and resurrection is the same – we will meet again. Keep the hope.

Here’s a prayer:

Saviour of the world

What have you done to deserve this? And what have we done to deserve you? Strung up between criminals cursed and spat upon,

You wait for death,

And look for us,

For us whose sin has crucified you.

To the mystery of undeserved suffering

You bring the deeper mystery of unmerited love.

Forgive us for not knowing what we have done.

Open our eyes to see what you are doing now,

As through wood and nails

You disempower our depravity,

And transfigure our suffering and death.

Transform us by your grace

And give us hope everlasting.

Amen

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

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all

May God keep your eyes on the cross and the victory of Christ over sin and death. We will meet again.

The blessing of God be with you this Easter time

1. John Lennox, Where is God in a Coronavirus world, Good Book Company 2020 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)