

## **'A word or encouragement from Rector Rob: 'Embracing the worst to give us the best'**

Welcome to another 'word of encouragement'.

We are *always* to be an Easter people - but this talk and the next one will very much have an Easter focus.

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from my cries of anguish?*

Perhaps this is a cry you may want to say sometimes - or something like it? If not out loud then perhaps quietly under your breath. When life feels tough it can feel like 'Where is God'.

This is a quote from a Psalm in the Bible - Psalm 22 - a song of pain; of someone who is going through the toughest of times and feels utterly rejected and alone.

Just some of the many other lines showing suffering from that psalm:

<sup>8</sup>        *"He trusts in the Lord," they say,  
          "let the Lord rescue him.  
          Let him deliver him,  
          since he delights in him."*

You can hear the sarcasm!

<sup>11</sup>        *Do not be far from me,  
          for trouble is near  
          and there is no one to help.*

It predicts someone who experienced that cry around a thousand years after this Psalm was composed - someone who did cry that prayer: God the Son. To His Father.

Jesus is hanging on a cross - and in Mark's Gospel 15 we read: *33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?")*

God the Son - became one of us - identifying fully with us – and then on the cross on that Friday two thousand years ago Jesus experienced true awesome and awful desolation. Jesus who had only known the most joyful pleasure in this Father's presence is the one who the Father judges in our place for all that is wrong. Jesus pays the price for our wrong, for our sin.

For the Son during that time on the cross there was no peace, no intimacy with God. The One who did nothing wrong, experiences that out of love for us.

How awesome for the Son and Father to experience that. Yet they both chose to do this – out of love - to rescue us, to give us the only way to be at peace with God. To give people separated from God the way to be reconciled and to enjoy the presence of God.

Does God care? Yes!

God embraced what life can throw at us at its worst: Jesus rejected by many friends and followers, betrayed by one of his twelve disciples; sham trials and torture by so many of the military and religious leaders of that generation; and then executed as a criminal on a cross. And then on that cross Jesus cries this terrible cry: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

Jesus - rejected by men - and it felt like by God the Father as well.

God knows the struggle of life; physically and most of all spiritually. It shows that God knows the worst of life - and cares.

*But it also shows the way of life.* The cross is the most terrible experience but it is also the glorious throne of salvation. It is about giving life.

Let's go back to that poem and see where it goes. Back to Psalm 22:

<sup>22</sup> *I will declare your name to my people;  
in the assembly I will praise you.*  
<sup>23</sup> *You who fear the Lord, praise him!*

<sup>24</sup> *For he has not despised or scorned  
the suffering of the afflicted one;  
he has not hidden his face from him  
but has listened to his cry for help.*

<sup>25</sup> *From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;  
before those who fear you, I will fulfil my vows.*

<sup>26</sup> *The poor will eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord will praise him—  
may your hearts live forever!*

<sup>27</sup> *All the ends of the earth  
will remember and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
will bow down before him,  
<sup>28</sup> for dominion belongs to the Lord  
and he rules over the nations.*

<sup>31</sup> *They will proclaim his righteousness,  
declaring to a people yet unborn:  
He has done it!*

It ends with a future. A worldwide hope. The cross was no failure. He has done it!

Jesus pays the price and lives again to give a future. To show that He embraces the worst to lead us to the best: Life – and most important, spiritual life. Peace with God. Jesus has done it all.

Few of us would *choose* to have life as it is right now. Life back in January seems very attractive for so many of us compared to what are experiencing now. But Jesus chose *willingly to embrace the cross*. He chose the path that would lead to this cry of desolation.

We don't always understand why life is like it is. But we can have certainty in the cross. We are always to be a Good Friday people with the Easter Hope. Jesus's death is the only good death, because it His death that gives us life.

Life is so hard now, for some many. But know we don't have a God who is aloof to us, but cares enough to do what it takes to embrace the worst to give us the best. Spiritual life.

Look back to that time two thousand year ago - that Easter passion. It will help you cope with the present. Because, when you know Jesus and what He's done for you on the cross, you will know the peace and hope that it guarantees the most glorious future.

AMEN