

Good Friday Reflections on John 19

Section 1, v16-22: 'The King of the Jews'

'What I have written, I have written.' So says the representative of earthly kingship after meeting the King of kings. And what did he write? – that Jesus was 'The King of the Jews.' Pilate's notice is his revenge, a bitter retort to his arm being twisted by the religious leaders and the mob, but with heavy irony, he alone in John's narrative recognises Jesus as king.

But what sort of king is Jesus? His crown not of gold but of thorns forced into his skull; the crimson on his body not an expensive robe but his own blood; his wooden seat not a throne but a cross; the metal on his wrists and ankles not necklaces and bracelets but nails; his attendants not courtiers but thieves.

'What I have written, I have written,' said Pilate. But as we gaze afresh upon the cross, God also says: what I have written, I have written. This is the path my king must take. To be despised and rejected by people, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. The rejected Messiah, who came to his own but his own did not receive him. The rejected King, neither a warrior, nor a politician but a servant, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. *Here* is your King. What I have written, I have written.

Scn 2, v23-27: 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'

Genesis chapter 3 looms large over John chapter 19. Humanity's first rebellion echoes through time, such that the crucifixion story is littered with rebels. The chief priests, the mob, the soldiers. Jesus' last possessions gambled away, another fleeting relationship defined by inequalities of power. Cast lots for his clothing: to the victor the spoils. A perfect summary of natural human behaviour.

But the cross is about beginnings as well as endings. As the reign of sin ends, so new possibilities emerge. Relationships can be healed, new families formed. The New Testament insists that Christ's work forms a new humanity, a new community, a new family of adopted children woven together as Christ's body.

At the foot of the cross a new family is also formed. Jesus' mother gains a new son, Jesus' best friend gains a new mother. A real new family no doubt, as the text suggests, but a symbol as well of the new community Jesus means for his followers to form. In Christ's family we can all gain new parents, new children, new siblings. We learn to call God Father and to call our friends brothers and sisters.

As we sit at the foot of the cross today, is God calling us to become a mother or father, a son or daughter to anyone?

Section 3, v28-30: 'It is finished'

Tetelestai. It is finished. The physical trial. The pain, the punishment, the wounding, the flogging, the carrying, the piercing, even the thirst.

Tetelestai. It is finished. The mental trial. The knowledge that 12 legions of angels were left unused. The violent means he could have used but rejected. The endless questions, verbal traps and false accusations. When to speak and when to remain silent. The constant movement from priests to Pilate to Herod to Pilate to the mob to the soldiers to the cross.

Tetelestai. It is finished. The emotional trial. The over-eager protestations of loyalty. The sleeping friends. The betrayal with a kiss. The fleeing comrades. The solitude. The mocking and spitting. The grieving mother.

Tetelestai. It is finished. The spiritual trial. The cup he sorely wished would be taken from him. The battle with Satan, sin and death. Above all, for the first time in all eternity, the separation from His Father: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The Scriptures have been fulfilled. Jesus has overcome. *Tetelestai*. It is finished.

Section 4, v31-37: 'Look on the one they have pierced'

Where does Easter start for you? Does it start at the entry to Jerusalem, looking at the crowd waving palm branches and shouting Hosanna? Does it start in Bethany, watching as Jesus is anointed king and prepares for his burial? Does it start at the Last Supper, looking at the disciples in the Upper Room, breaking bread and drinking wine? Does it start in Gethsemane, watching Jesus alone on the hillside in anguished prayer?

Does it start with the arrest and trial, picturing yourself in the courtyard with Peter, gazing in to the courtroom drama, where Jesus stands alone with his accusers? Does it start at the Stone Pavement, watching as Pilate confronts the mob and washes his hands. Or does it start at Golgotha, by the cross, looking at Jesus as hangs there, pierced for our transgressions, your transgressions, my transgressions?

Wherever it starts, the story requires more from us than just thinking, or singing or praying. Hard as it is, we need to look too, to look on the one they have pierced. John claims that he was there, with Jesus mother, Mary, and he looked. And what he saw was blood and water flowing from Jesus side. Blood and water: death and life. And what he saw, he testified about, that we may believe.

Today we have looked on the one they have pierced. My prayer is that this Easter, we will all have courage to look again, and keep looking. Look on the one they have pierced, for in him is life, and life in all its fullness.