

 *St Paul's Anglican Parish of Ipswich*  
**SUNDAY SERMON**

*Sermon preached on Good Friday  
Delivered by Rev'd Steve McMahon on the 19th April 2019*

The sun beats down on him as he hangs there in agony, blood caking dry on his forehead as it continues to ooze from the holes in his hands and feet. The young man hangs there, dying in front of your eyes.

And it's all your fault.

He hangs there, bleeding, beaten and dying because of the sins you have committed. Every one of them throughout your life has caused him to be in this point of despair, desolation and abandonment.

Except, he isn't quite alone. Standing nearby is his mother. Mary stands witness to her son's brutal, public execution. She has, as the gospels hint, been bemused by her son; his life has been something of a mystery to her. However, she knows that there's more to him than meets the eye and she's learned to trust in him and wait. Now his hour has come and mother and son are united.

"Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother."

In this brief interchange Jesus, who has himself been handed over, hands her over to the care of the beloved disciple. Even in death Jesus cares for and makes provision for her.

And Mary matters. Despite the differences in her status in the different denominations of Christendom. She matters because she was there. She says nothing. She does nothing. Peter and the others are the dynamic, all-action bunch who prefer to act rather than simply being. But they have proven themselves next to useless when asked to keep still and keep company with Jesus in his vigil in Gethsemane. Instead, all that is needed now is silence.

And presence.

Yes, it's tempting to do something or to say something as Peter was prone to do. It's tempting not to be present unless we feel we are actively engaged in some way. How often do we say "I'll come, but only if you've got something for me to do"? When we feel helpless or powerless we stay away. Quite often friends and relatives of a dying person absent themselves because they feel powerless.

We have a choice. We can abandon the relationship and withdraw or, like Mary, we can share another person's helplessness. We don't try to take some of the strength and control from those who are helpless - we simply offer them our presence in our weakness and silence which allows them to draw on inner strength. The holiest thing we sometimes can do is to be present in our helplessness and silence. Mary offers that to Jesus and God offer that to us. An active refusal to give up on us.

As the drama progresses Jesus appears to give in to human need when he tells the soldiers that he thirsts. Even at this moment of weakness it is Jesus who takes the initiative. The one who is the source of living water calls out in thirst – not primarily for his own needs but a thirst for the women and men who will believe in him: those who are dry, weary and discounted. But before he can give us the living water, first he has to die, for, as he said, “Unless I go away the Advocate will not come to you”. Before this can happen Jesus must drink deeply from the cup of death.

The soldiers miss this deeper meaning and take the words Jesus utters at face value and hand him a sponge of wine on a branch of hyssop – the plant traditionally used throughout Jerusalem for sprinkling, reminding us of the sprinkling of blood on the doorways of Israelite houses when the blood of the paschal lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts of Israelite homes. The soldiers think they are gaining some form of merit in helping a dying man when they are actually demonstrating to us that Jesus is the paschal lamb of the new covenant.

And then....

And then he gave up his spirit. In John’s gospel it is not a protracted struggle with agonised cries of desolation as it is in the synoptic gospels but a short and glorious finale with Jesus still in control. Even the cry “It is finished” is not of desolation but of triumph. It’s not “I am finished” but “It is finished”.

For those fortunate few who speak Latin the phrase is *Consumatum est*. It conveys triumph and achievement. But the Greek speakers will point that the original word *Tetelestai* is the word used to cancel a bill that has been settled. It marks an end to death and enslavement and the promise of a new relationship.

It is finished. Complete. Christ has redeemed the world. Nothing more needs to be done to bring us to God. And that was the point when Jesus handed his spirit over – to God, yes; but also to those standing by the foot of the cross. To his mother, who symbolises the church and to his beloved disciple who symbolises every Christian.

Christ hands his spirit over to all who love him in the one great selfless act of sacrifice. The Cross is not one of desolation, despite all appearances, but is one of triumph. For it was there that the work of Christ was completed in all its fullness.