

It is remarkable that centuries before Jesus was born the prophet Isaiah foretold not just his coming but his destiny; that he would be despised and rejected, and pierced for our transgressions, like a lamb led to the slaughter.

But what is even more remarkable is another truth that is revealed in the Book of Revelation; that Jesus is the Lamb of God that was slain before the foundation of the world'.

What this means is that not just before humanity sinned, but before we were ever born or created God made provision for our forgiveness.

What extraordinary grace!

It means that we lived in a pre=forgiven universe.

Behold and see!

JESUS IS BETRAYED

We're allowed to peer into the soul of Our Lord. It is holy ground. Mark tells us 'He began to be greatly distressed and troubled'. In the Gospel of John the evangelist uses a word to describe the state of Jesus' soul – it is 'shipwrecked'. His soul is on the rocks.

Maybe you have sometimes felt that your own soul has come close to being shipwrecked.

Then know this that Our Lord has gone before you.

Maybe you have been betrayed by family or friend; maybe you have been faced with impossible choices; maybe you have felt a threat to your life itself. And in the midst of all these terrible pressures you feel your faith has drained away from you. Then know that the Lord is with you in the depths even deeper than you realise.

And you cry out:

"Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake

Lay not our sins to our charge."

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE HIGH PRIEST

“They spat ...struck...and slapped him”

As the King said in his Easter Message yesterday from the Maundy Service in Durham Cathedral we human beings can be capable of great kindness but also of great cruelty. Consider the Kibbutz on October 7th, consider the Anglican Hospital in Gaza City, consider the children of Ukraine.

Consider those who spat at, struck and slapped Our Lord.

Consider our own hearts.

How often have I prayed the Jesus Prayer.

“O Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me a sinner”

It is this prayer and this prayer alone that opens the door of our darkened heart to the light of Christ, to his truth and grace.

JESUS IS TRIED BEFORE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR

“But he gave no answer”.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes we're told there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence.

The hardest time for any human being to keep silent is when someone accuses you of something you never did.

Paradoxically it is the refusal to speak that can be our most vocal defence. Our silence can be our accuser's greatest frustration.

It certainly was with our Lord's accusers.

That silence comes from a resilience that is rooted in the knowledge of both truth and justice.

It certainly was with Our Lord in the face of the judgement of a godless court.

And to Pilate's question 'What is Truth?' the answer came in the One standing silently before him!

JESUS IS CRUCIFIED

In the Gospels up until this point Jesus Our Lord is the subject of all the verbs. Then they arrest him, try him, scourge him and crucify him and he becomes the object of all the verbs and the object of their killing and sinning.

Jesus transitions from being active to being passive, from action to passion.

But it is in his passion that he secures the salvation of the world.

We tend to think that when we are active that is when we are able to do what God wants us to do. We resent those moments when we are put out of action – fall ill, retire, made redundant – and feel useless.

But a lesson that we learn from our Lord is that when we are no longer in control may just be the time when we are able to fulfil God's purpose for ourselves and others.

It is with Christ's Broken Body that we are fed.

JESUS DIES UPON THE CROSS

Every prayer that Jesus prays in the Gospels begins with him calling God 'Father'. Every prayer that is until he's heard on the Cross crying out, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'.

In that moment Jesus, the lamb of God and the Son of God, takes upon his shoulders the sins of all the world and denies himself the right to call God 'Father' so that we who because of our sin have no such right may say when we pray 'Father'.

This is the shortest prayer in the Bible. 'Father' 'Dear Father' 'Holy Father' 'Good Father'.

When we are weary and heavy-laden we are to focus on the Father's love

WHO SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

CHRIST TRIUMPHANT

When we hear that Jesus 'took the form of a servant' we could be led into thinking that this was a temporary act on the part of God, a means to the end of securing domination over the world. He becomes a servant for a moment so that having become a servant for a time on Earth he can then resume his position as the Lord of Lords upon his throne in Heaven.

But one of Jesus' parables confounds such a view. In Luke Chapter 12 he tells a story about a Lord who returns to be their servant, to serve his people. In other words, he reveals himself to be a servant at his second coming as well as his first.

And this is precisely the revelation in the Book of Revelation – Jesus is the Lamb upon the throne – the Lamb the symbol of servanthood; the throne the symbol of lordship. Jesus forever Our Lord and forever Our Servant.

The One who even in this holy service ministers to us by washing away our sins time and again and filling us with the peace of forgiveness and the joy of being loved.

Little wonder that we should now sing

PRAISE TO THE HOLIEST IN THE HEIGHT

