

2018-03-30 Meditations for Good Friday

1. Meditation of John

He was groaning,

a sound like I'd never heard before,

a sound I never want to hear again

– awful, stomach-churning, indescribable – the sound of unimaginable pain,
of overwhelming sorrow, of utter isolation.

And I could watch it no longer.

I thought I was ready for it, prepared for the worst, for I knew he had to die.

But I wasn't ready, not for this;

I never realised people could suffer so much, that anything could be quite so terrible.

But I know now, and I'm telling you straight, I'd have felt sorry for anyone facing that – a
robber, a mugger, even a murderer!

My heart would still have bled for them.

But to see Jesus there, a man of such gentleness and compassion,

a man who had always loved and never hated,

a man who had brought healing to the sick and wholeness to the broken,

it all but finished me.

What had he done to deserve this? What crime had he committed?

What was it about him that aroused such passion, such devotion, yet such loathing?

I prayed that God would finish it, put him out of his misery,

but still the torment continued,

still they mocked him, delighting in his pain.

I knew he was suffering, but even then didn't realise how much,
not until he lifted his head and I saw the despair in his eyes,
not until he spoke and I heard the wretchedness in his voice:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Then I realised, and my blood ran cold.

He felt alone, totally alone,

abandoned by everyone he'd loved and trusted, even by God himself.

He could cope with the rest – he'd even expected it – but God?

It was the final torture, the ultimate agony, a pain beyond words.

He was groaning, a sound like I'd never heard before,

a sound which suddenly I understood,

and a sound I could listen to no longer.

2. Meditation of Mary, wife of Clopas

He was silent, quite still, his body limp and lifeless, like a rag doll, like a broken puppet.

And I thanked God that at last it was over, his ordeal finally ended.

But it wasn't, not quite.

He moved again, just the faintest twitch, the last flickering ember of life,

but enough to prolong our hopes, enough to prolong his pain.

He was still breathing, still suffering.

We watched wretchedly,

torn by conflicting desires – the longing to see him come down and prove his enemies wrong;

the longing to see him find peace in the cold embrace of death.

But suddenly his eyes were open, wide, bright, triumphant;

the lips were moving,

eager, excited, exultant;

and his voice rang out:

“It is finished!”

An acknowledgement of defeat, some said afterwards,

a last despairing cry of sorrow.

But it wasn't, not for those who heard it,

not for those with ears to hear.

It was altogether different – like sunshine after storm,

like rain after drought,

like laughter after tears

– gloriously unexpected,

wonderfully surprising.

He had stooped and conquered,

staked all and won.

Defeat was victory,

darkness was light,

death was life.

I didn't see it then, mind you, I can't pretend that.

It was just a glimpse at the time, a glimmer barely understood.

But what I did see, with sudden staggering clarity,

was that until that moment,

until that last victorious shout,

he had lived with the awful burden of holding the world's fate in his own

and wondering whether he could see it through.

At last it was done – he had honoured his calling,

fulfilled his mission, walked the way of the cross.

It was finished,
and with a song in his heart
and joy in his eyes
he bowed his head and surrendered his spirit.

3. Meditation of Pilate's wife

I told him not to get involved

"Leave it alone," I said, "Stay out of it.

After all, you're the governor, you're the one in charge.

Let the Jews sort it out, send him off to Herod, get someone else to do your dirty work for a change. It's not your problem!"

So what did he do?

Made a right botch of things, that's what!

Oh he tried all right, I'm not denying that; he wanted to wash his hands of Jesus as much as I did, more if anything.

I've never seen him so agitated, so uncertain what to do. And to be fair he took my advice, to a point; sent the man off to Herod, just as I suggested.

But he let him send Jesus back, that's what I can't understand – he let that cunning old devil off the hook and left himself in the lurch.

Honestly, men!

After that it was downhill all the way.

"You decide," he told the crowd, "Barabbas, or Jesus? It's up to you?"

Brilliant! They could all see what he was angling for, and they were dammed if he was going to get it.

“Give us Barabbas!” they shouted, and you could almost hear the chuckle; they could scarcely keep the smirk off their faces.

So there he was, nowhere else to turn, no-one else to turn to, the decision his and his alone.

Yet even then all wasn't lost;

he should have stood up to the mob, listened to his conscience – not that he ever has before, mind you.

But when they suggested his loyalty might be suspect, his job on the line, that settled it.

Now look at him. I thought my nerves were bad,

but his – they're shot right through.

He just can't forget the man, night or day, never a moment's peace.

He's tormented by shame, riddled with guilt.

Well I tried to warn him; I couldn't do more.

He made his decision, and now he has to live with it.

But I can't help wondering sometimes,

when I look into his eyes,

when I catch that haunted, hunted expression deep within,

just who passed judgement on whom that day.

Was it Pontius who condemned Jesus?

Or was he the one condemned?