

## **Monday: He carried the purposes of God...**

Jesus, God's own son, carried the purposes of His Father.

Have you ever had a huge responsibility – one that weighs heavily, one that keeps you awake at night? Jesus, in the garden, knew the biggest responsibility of all. God's plan, His purposes for the salvation of the world.

Now, on the cross, He was faced with a choice. His own life, or His Father's plan.

His Father's plan- Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down His life for His friends.

How could Jesus possibly communicate these purposes to those who watched, not least Mary and John? He had already predicted His death, and we are told he spoke plainly about it. But this was raw. Incomprehensible to the world. Why? Because no one in the world can ever comprehend the greatness and majesty and power and might of God. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

Jesus had shown them something of God's unbelievable grace. He lived among them and had given them signs of the kingdom through healings, acts of compassion and justice, but this was even bigger than that. He has shown each of us something of His ways, but the depth of this is beyond even the most intense Spiritual encounters we may have had, or the words of pictures the Spirit may have revealed to us.

For so long the Priests had been the only ones allowed into the holy of holies in the temple, sacrifices had to be made and rituals carried out. Jesus was to be the last sacrifice – the lamb of God. The one who would fully reconcile all people to the Father. No systems required, no keys, and no entrance qualifications save that of knowing Christ crucified.

As we come to the cross we may feel as lost as Mary and John. We may just 'not get it.' Well perhaps we just won't, perhaps we won't ever understand God's purposes, but it happened – that we do know.

Jesus, despite the pain, gave Mary and John in their confusion to one another, and He gives us to each other now.

Mary's example of obedience to God's plans from the day she said 'let it be' is important. She could not have understood God's plan anymore then than she does now at the cross. A sword is piercing her own soul too – as Simeon told her it would back as she presented Jesus in the temple when he was only a few days old. But this is little explanation...

Like Mary and John united, we do not come alone. We bow down together and must pray for one another- that we will all take our right place in God's story.

Jesus is carrying God's purposes – bringing the Kingdom of God to earth – His body on the cross and His death, resurrection and ascension, fulfil the prophecies of old and God's covenant promises, making a way for us to be reconciled to the Father for ever. It is hard to comprehend.

But, consider this: imagine if your life was in danger, you are in the sea, perhaps, and about to drown, and someone pulls you from the sea, but dies themselves. Or you have stepped out into the road and are about to be hit by a car, but someone pushes you out of the way and suffers fatal injuries. How would you feel about the person who saved you?

We were about to die. Our sin was weighing us down and we had been separated from the Father, we had gone so far there was no way back. We were drowning in the sea of our own failure and selfishness, walking on the road- moments away from being hit by hatred of fallen humanity.

Jesus carried the purposes of God and saved us. For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He made a way back to God- to a new life. How do you feel about God's sacrifice, and the person who saved you?

Respond to Him, like Mary and John, and pray for one another.

**Tuesday: He carried the crown of thorns...**

The King of glory carried the crown of thorns.

People have been waiting and longing for a Saviour for so long – a King to rule the world. There is an irony in this joke as the thorns pierce his brow – the mocking, the jeering... somehow they've missed the point...

God looks on watching His child being insulted. The Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords...

Jesus suffers such physical pain- His whole body is crying out- but moreover, at this point, the anguish is psychological.

He knows who He really is; after all, he says to Pilate "My Kingdom is not from this world.'

But this is His vocation, as the crown presses onto His head He takes upon Himself the wounds of our minds. The way in which humans think up words to oppress, to put people down, angry outbursts, insults, silly stories to make people look foolish, lies to make ourselves look better, and thoughts of hatred towards others. Not to mention our corrupted patterns of thinking, and the way that we have been so influenced by the powers of this world that we manage to justify our unpleasant behaviour and excuse ourselves.

As He carries the crown of thorns – He carries the sharpness of our attitudes.

We have so much damage done to us, both as we deal out unkindnesses, and as we receive them. It doesn't take much to wound another, and it doesn't take much to be wounded.

We have wounds of hearing unpleasant words directed towards us, or simply as we ignore or are ignored by people with whom we do not see eye to eye.

But His eyes, despite the blood dripping down His face from the cuts in His head, look on and have compassion on us – whatever we have said or done, whatever we have failed to say or do...

His mind's eye sees all that has happened in the past and all that is to come and he weeps. He sees thoughts of depression and failure, addiction, struggle and guilt, he sees our worries and our fears, and the memories of trauma and bereavement, and He longs for His Kingdom to come on earth as in heaven – for people to recognise that He is looking at them- and loving them- each of them and each of us.

He is King of all things and we are more than conquerors through him who loved us- neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But they do not see, and often we do not see... the followers of this King are falling away, and those who are left simply laugh at His downfall.

He is put in His place, brought down to earth – yet He is God. He came down to earth of His own will, and His throne is the cross. He is reigning from the tree, and He is revealing a deep truth to us as looks at us – as He looks at you, tender and loving, and He stretches out His arms.

He is a servant King and to follow Him is to serve one another – to open wide our arms. Not to insult and be insulted, but to serve and be served. To speak truth and not lies. To love and be loved.

He conquers the devil – He conquers our demons, so we can receive true peace of mind. His throne is the cross.

Jesus carries your thoughts and fears as He carries the crown of thorns. He carries your past pains- the things people have said and done to you, and He carries the things you have said and done to others. Lord, I am so sorry, thank you for carrying me...

Do you turn away as He looks at you? Look at His head – the crown of thorns yes, but also into His eyes and let Him be Lord – the King of your life.

### **Wednesday: He carried a seamless robe...**

The beautiful Saviour carried a seamless robe.

On another day a lady stretched out her hand and touched His clothes...and she was healed from years of suffering and disgrace. On that day as He turned around, he asked 'who touched my garment?' But He knew.

Whenever people jostled to get close they were not just crowds to Him. They were each individuals. He knew their names, He knew their needs.

He knows our names, He knows our needs.

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

He knew the woman's needs and He healed her, and so he made the blind see and the lame walk and the deaf hear and he brought the dead to life.

But where are the crowds? There were so many people He healed during His ministry. There are so many that witnessed His preaching, who saw his good works, who shouted Hosanna, who ate with Him, who said that they loved him... Where are they now? Are they still trying to reach Him? No, now it is too hard.

Are they embarrassed, ashamed, frightened or simply indifferent?

The only people reaching out to touch His robe are the soldiers who want to strip Him bare.

Here Jesus carries in this seamless robe He wears the seamless purposes of God.

From swaddling clothes to grave clothes – Jesus faithful and true cannot be stripped of His beauty.

This seamless robe is something made meticulously by hand, not mass produced, created carefully and uniquely, and even when stained with sweat and blood it has lasting value.

Jesus once clothed in majesty on high with His Father, created and creator, the eternal 'I am,' the way, the truth and the life, has His dignity removed. His naked body exposed, the robe taken, and around its edges it seems that the stitching has come undone, it is frayed, something is unravelling. God, why is this happening? Father Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And yet, the robe is not ripped, it is not ruined; the stains which cannot be washed away by a human touch will not remain forever. It will be made perfect again. As the soldiers fold up the seamless robe to take it away, they do not realise the unfolding hope of salvation.

Jesus will be clothed in heavenly splendour with power from on high; the stains of sin and death are cleansed by His blood.

Our beautiful Saviour carried a seamless robe so that we can reach out and touch His garment for eternity – no longer separated from God by our sin. We can reach out and touch Jesus.

Jesus laid Himself bare.

The soldiers treated Him roughly pulling at the robe, and He felt the sting of the lashes He had endured. Then suddenly they stopped realising that this robe, kept in one piece, could make money, this could benefit them. Slowly they removed it, carefully, slyly. They didn't care about how they treated Him until they realised there was something in it for them. They stripped Him whilst clothing themselves in selfishness and greed, and they spat on Him. Then they cast lots.

Jesus hanging on the cross watching, waiting, clothed himself in selflessness and giving.

So where do you stand – looking for personal gain, an increase in status, and bit more money? What happens when Christ demands of you something different, something harder. Where are you now?

Reach out and touch Jesus. Allow our beautiful Saviour to cleanse you by His blood. To heal you at the point of your deepest need. Let Him show you what's best for you and how you can walk closely with Him in your life.

Don't fall away, reach out, and as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Be healed.

## **Maundy Thursday: He carried a broken heart**

The lover of sinners carried a broken heart.

A while ago, I was telling the story of Easter to a group of children— about 100 or so in a primary school assembly. What I didn't know at the time was that many of them had never heard the story before. As I spoke of Jesus on the cross they were wide eyed. How could such a good man have this happen to Him? They didn't know much about Jesus – not like we do. They didn't really know that He was God's son, and yet, as I finally said the words 'and then, he died.' There was an audible gasp and a look of horror on their faces.

But how? Why? This man had showed the people how to live, they'd been praising Him and saying thank you to him just a week before, he'd done miracles and healed people. How could this happen? It is just not right...

Their reaction was a challenge to me. How often we have heard the story and don't realise that Jesus, the perfect man – not to mention that truth that He was God's son, did this because He saw us and had compassion on us.

You and me.

He loves us so very much. Whoever we are, whatever we've been through, whatever our achievements or failures, whether we have money, or no money, none of it really matters at the end of the day. Jesus cares about you, his compassion is everlasting, and He longs to be close to us and show us what we mean to Him.

Well perhaps it does matter what we have and what we do. Not to Jesus, but to us.

It usually takes the times when everything is stripped away for us to realise what it means that Jesus really does love us so very much. Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the weak, the hungry, why? Because they know their need and become vulnerable in the presence of the Lord, and that's when we experience the profound love of Christ in all its fullness. Somehow, when we're in those situations, like the children in the school, we hear the story of God's love for us in the crucifixion of Christ as if it were the first time because we realise our need.

And tonight we hear the story of the last supper. What if it was the first time you'd heard it? Would that change your response.

At the last supper, John (the disciple Jesus loved) wanted to be close to Him. He recognised that something extraordinary was happening.

He knew Jesus loved him and He loved Jesus.

As they reclined we are told that John asked Him about His betrayer, at that moment, before the physical journey to Calvary had even started, as John leant back, I think He heard Jesus' heart break- break for the love of those around Him. To see His disciples and look around the room He hurt so much with a deep, deep, longing for them to be reconciled to His Father. His heart broke for love of them...

We are here now, and Jesus still feels that way about His disciples, but now I am talking about us. Do you realise how much He loves you? He loves you so much.

The crucifixion was awful; don't let me distract you from that. Jesus emotional torment, the cold, the agony of suffering and overwhelming burden of sin, loneliness, thirst, the vulnerability. Yet, he loved his neighbour to the end – not least the criminal to His side.

What came next was that His heart stopped.

Worth gasping at in shock, yes. But His heart was already broken.

He carried a broken heart, broken with compassion and love for me, and for you.



## Good Friday 1: He carried the cross...

The giver of life carried the tree...

It was once a tree, this ugly cross. It began so small and weak; as it was nurtured it sprouted forth and became taller and stronger. It was full of potential, growing, flourishing, providing a place of shade and rest under its strong arms. A place to be cool and refreshed in the midday sun, as place to wait a while – to be still.

It was beautiful through every season of its life and as it produced its seeds so it continued to create year after year more beauty, more potential, more places of shelter, more signs of strength and growth and hope.

...and its leaves created day by day the air we breathe – keeping us alive.

Then it was cut down- ruthlessly, roughly, without regard for all it still had to give.

The tree which Jesus carried, the cross beam which sat rough on his shoulders, was more than just a piece of wood – it revealed a deeper truth.

Jesus, came to earth, small and weak –a baby, as he was nurtured he grew taller and stronger. He was full of potential, growing, flourishing, providing for the needs of all people under His strong arms. Showing people how to be refreshed and how to wait a while – to be still. He was strength and hope.

Then he was cut – ruthlessly, roughly, without regard for all He still had to give. Like the wood of the tree, he was stripped and killed and breathed His last.

As Jesus carried the tree the splinters pierced His shoulders and His hands. These were little things, compared to the nails which would later be driven through Him. But it had started...

Here we meet Jesus walking along the road carrying the cross. He carries the weight of the cross – the huge amount of sin throughout the ages. But he feels the pain of the splinters too. He feels all the little sins. The times when we have uttered unkind words, given unpleasant looks, written people off... He feels the hurt which we have suffered from these things.

He feels the splintering of our communities, the fractured nature of our relationships and all the difficult memories that are as hard to get out of our heads, as splinters are to get out of your hands.

Simon of Cyrene is taken out of the crowd to help carry the tree. The roughness of the cross pains him. His hands are pierced – some of the splinters are his to bear – his life is as sinful as the next man, but he too is injured beyond what he deserves, not all the splinters belong to Him... he, like us, experiences the complicated and incomprehensible pains of humanity's fall.

Simon looks to Jesus, and as he carries the tree he carries something which seems dead and useless, and yet, because of Jesus, it is to become the symbol of hope throughout the ages and the place where God's purposes are fulfilled.

At this moment your sins, even the little things, are embedded in Jesus' hands, they are taken with Him to Golgotha and to the grave, and he says 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.'

God takes us as He finds us today, and as we walk the way of the tree, let us confess before Him our splintered lives, so that we may die to sin and once again be made fully alive.

## **Good Friday 2: He carried our sorrows...**

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

There cannot be one of us here who has not experienced sorrow. Perhaps you have known what it is like to be overwhelmed by sadness or simply weighed down by the heaviness of burdens. Perhaps the hardest times are not when things happen to ourselves, but when we watch others that we love suffer or look to an uncertain future caring for them. We wrestle as Jesus did in the garden with doubt and fear.

It can be, at times, that our sorrows feel like an interwoven mess – as web of sadness which is hard to untangle. We need knots to be undone, to be forgiven, comforted, healed and made well.

Suffering is hard to bear, and yet much of the time we get on with life as if all is well.

In my first year of Ordained ministry, my friend Penny, who had been ordained with me, died. So soon into her new ministry.

In the hospice, close to death, Penny said to me that all she'd ever wanted to do was to serve. She had been a faithful servant to God in all her life in different ways, but as someone ordained priest only 5 weeks before I knew all too keenly what she meant. She had not had the opportunities to fulfil her amazing potential as a priest.

However, as I sat by her bed, we spoke about the possibility of serving God forever in heaven- that Penny would now be truly able to be the person she was created to be, and this time, she would be able to serve him fully without pain or tears, and for eternity.

She said to me 'do you think this is true' and I said 'yes.' Then slowly and through the tears Penny nodded her head and said 'yes.' It was an honest 'yes' and showed such a brave and full acceptance.

At that moment I had to believe in the cross with my whole heart. It was not enough to know it in my head – without Jesus' death and resurrection the hope of heaven was lost.

I had to believe it deep within my heart.

I felt the wounds of Penny's pain, I felt more keenly the sadnesses of others, but I have knelt at the cross and I tried to let Jesus carry my sorrows. Slowly, I accepted His help I was able to say thank you. Thank you for the cross and thank you for these things which shape me.

The scars from bereavement, illness, tragedy, broken relationships, and abuse, mark us for the rest of our lives. But scars are wounds which have healed.

Your wounds may be fresh – the pain raw, but there is hope, and that hope comes from seeing the scars- the scars on Jesus’ hands and feet, the sign that death and sorrow are defeated. His wounds are healed.

Jesus’ scars didn’t go away at the resurrection. Thomas said to the other disciples ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’ Jesus showed Him his scars and Thomas reached out. Jesus said ‘Do not doubt, but believe.’

The scars which I share with you today are a sign of hope that God has met me, even me, in my deepest need- and how he meets you too. When things have been really hard in my life, when I have been broken, I have journeyed with Jesus and He has never left me, I have moved at varying degrees towards Him and away from Him, but He has remained faithful to me and I know He has waited patiently as I have tried to come to terms with my emotions. But, as I have shared in the sufferings of the cross, He has carried my sorrows.

Our scars, of all different experiences, make us the people that we are.

In order to be healed we must open ourselves up. We must not let sin and pain shut us away. We must come to the cross, to let pain put us in a place which allows Jesus to help us – to carry what weighs us down. Nothing is too small; nothing is too large or heavy. We can cover our wounds all we like, pretend we are fine, but unless we let Jesus cleanse us, the infection of hurt and sin, failure and pain, will never go away.

Like a child coming to her mother with a cut, we come to Jesus who we trust. Jesus’ touch can be painful, but in those moments of frailty and vulnerability we meet our healer.

As we have read - by His wounds you have been healed, for you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

We are not defined simply by the struggles and pains we have suffered, or by the wounds of hurt which can so often make us bitter, but by the *scars* – the signs of faithfulness of the healing power of the Shepherd who carried our sorrows.

This is our story – hope to the broken. We can be Jesus for others – to carry their sorrows too, because we are held close.

As we look to the cross now. We have to believe in it with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.... As we come to the time when Jesus died carrying all these things, do you believe that Jesus did all this for you?

### Good Friday 3: He carried the sins of the world...

The healer carried your sins and mine...

Sin, that little word that means so much. We talk about the sins of the world as if they belong to the rest of humanity— lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. Have mercy on *us*. These are our sins.

Just like those disciples who sat around the table we say 'surely not I.' Just like Peter we say 'I will not deny you.'

We need to acknowledge that we have become a selfish people. Self-centred, self-obsessed, self-important, self-reliant, and perhaps most damaging, a people who believe in self-help.

These are the things which divide us from Christ. Each is another blow. Jesus longs to daily recreate us, to show us that we are dead to sin and alive in Him, because he has carried our sins on the cross and they are buried with Him.

It was our sin that held Him there... until it was accomplished. Each hammer blow of the nails in His hands mark the times when we have served ourselves first, made sure we had enough, and used creation as if it were our own disposable commodity.

Each hammer blow of the nails in His feet mark the times when we have walked over other people, put ourselves in the way of them finding God, and walked on by...

We come to Jesus, and like Judas we kiss Him, all the while intending to continue with our lives as before. We turn a blind eye to the world's needs. We pass by pictures of global warming, war, famine, exploitation, genocide, violence and killing as if someone walking casually past the cross. We've seen it all before. There's nothing special here, just another day, another torture and death.

This is God's world. We are His hand and His feet. We are so separated from His purposes that we do not come near enough to the cross to experience the deepness of His love, the injustice, the pain Christ feels for us all. We do not realise the burden of sin which weighs us down and stops us climbing up Calvary's hill. We are so blinded by our sin we cannot see Him.

The cross brings a reconnection with God. If we repent, we can return to Him. As the psalmist says: 'Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.' We need to ask God to reveal himself to us, to fill us with the compassion of Christ, to be reawakened, restored, reborn, so that we can truly intercede and live lives which hope for the redemption of all creation.

In her poem 'Good Friday,' Christina Rossetti speaks of the need to be less like a stone and more like a sheep. Like the women at the cross, and like Peter realising what He had done, we should be affected by the cross. To be disturbed by it.

We should long for change and to be changed, our souls should be disquieted within us, until we allow ourselves to be moved, and gathered in by our great Shepherd.

The poem describes how Moses, exhausted and desperate after leading the people out of Egypt, was told by God to strike a rock, and water came out for the people to drink. So we, so often lacking emotion and sensitivity, should ask to be touched – struck even – by Jesus, so that we can truly feel again.

- Poem – see below.

Can you stand watching the world's sin – the sin that killed Jesus, and not care, and not long for God's Kingdom to come? How long Lord? We need you.

Jesus carried the sins of the world, draw closer still to the cross, and feel His dying breath – which is strangely the breath of life.

**“Good Friday”**

**A Poem by Christina Rossetti (Published in 1896)**

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,  
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,  
To number drop by drop Thy Blood's slow loss,  
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved  
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;  
Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;  
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon  
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,  
A horror of great darkness at broad noon—  
I, only I.

Yet give not o'er  
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;  
Greater than Moses, turn and look once more  
And smite a rock.

**At the Cross- Andy Stinson – April 2011**

I wait,  
And time ticks past.

I gaze,  
Made silent by the sight.

I watch,  
As soldiers meticulously move  
Executing each terrible, torturous task.

I gasp,  
Still life lingers in His fragile, broken form.

I flinch,  
As blow by blow,  
Nails bite deep through flesh to find wood.

I stand  
As He is lifted high,  
Silhouetted 'gainst the sky which He has made.

I weep  
As His cry echoes deep in my hardened, calloused heart.

I wail,  
As He screams 'it is complete,  
Finished, final, said and done.'

I fall,  
As the sky turns inky black  
And the sun and moon and stars forget to shine.

I kneel,  
As worlds collide,  
And time ticks by;  
What once bound, no longer seems to hold.

I bow,  
For part of me is gone,  
Kept forever on Calvary's painful peak.

I wait,  
At the foot of the cross, to begin my journey home.