



Addresses for the Three Hours Devotion at Wells Cathedral, preached on Friday 3 April by the Reverend Dr Kate Bruce, RAF Chaplain

Good Friday

Homily 1 – Mark 14.1-11

12.00

Reflection 1

The theme of our Holy week sermons is: Moving Deeper into Love.

As we move deeper into love, let's consider the loving and prophetic actions of an unnamed woman. Silent, yet eloquent in action, she takes staggeringly expensive perfume, breaks open the alabaster jar, gives it, anointing Jesus' head, blesses Jesus as he faces the coming storm. Takes, breaks, gives, blesses: She prefigures Jesus's actions at the Last Supper. It is generous and loving action.

Some bystanders are furious at the waste, but nothing in her actions is wasted. She understands Jesus's identity. She knows what she is doing.

Remember - both Saul and then David were anointed King -by the prophet Samuel. This woman recognises Jesus' kingship, announcing it with her action. She anoints his body for burial, and Jesus recognises her for this. In one prophetic action, without uttering a word, she names Jesus as the suffering King. She understands.

Remember Peter's confession of faith at Caesarea Philippi? 'You are the Messiah.' Yet moments later Peter rebukes Jesus for saying he will suffer and die.

Remember the gentile centurion at the foot of the cross? Having seen Jesus' suffering and death, he declares his divinity.

Both men have half a story. Peter wants a Messiah who does not suffer. The centurion has a suffering God but without glory. They each have two halves of the truth. She puts them together. The symbolism is unmistakable.

Kings are anointed, as are the dead. She has understood the heart of the good news. Jesus is King of kings, incarnate God – who suffers and dies on behalf of humanity. A truth she proclaims without words. A truth we see unfolding in all

that follows. Jesus says we will remember her – whenever the Gospel is proclaimed.

The prophet at the gateway of this story is an unnamed woman, a cipher for all the unnamed and unknown who are moving deeper into love, through faith in action. Remember her.

Collect:

*Gracious God,
We remember and honour her,
She who in her abundant generosity,
Pointed to the extravagant love,
Poured out by the suffering King,
Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen*

Song: Meekness and Majesty (Kendrick)

Silence

12.20 - Mark 14.12-31 & Mark 14. 32-43

Reflection 2

As we move deeper into love, let us journey further into Jesus's suffering.

In the first reading we see Jesus in command, assured. He *tells* his disciples where the Passover will be celebrated, and who to meet. He *knows* that Judas will betray him, Peter deny him, and the rest desert him. He is fully *aware* of what is to come – his body broken and his blood poured out. He seems almost matter of fact about the details.

But in the second scene – in Gethsemane, we see our Lord in a different light. Here he is distressed, agitated, deeply grieved. He is gripped in restless prayer. Might the hour pass from him, the cup be removed? He brings the horror of what is to come to his Abba with trust greater than fear.

Trust greater than fear – so important if we are to move deeper into love.

Meanwhile in the background his friends rest whilst he wrestles alone – knowing in his bones the suffering to come. Jesus demonstrates a spirit aligned to

obedience. The cup is not taken away – and he resolves to drink it. Trust greater than fear.

Suddenly, the scene becomes crowded, chaotic. Judas turns the kiss of peace into an act of violence. Darkness pounces. Swords are drawn. One is injured. Jesus is taken. His friends vanish into the night. In the moment - fear has overcome their love.

Here in the garden and later as the narrative unfolds, our King knows intimately what it means to be agitated, disturbed, to feel off balance, pulled between natural fear and the call to obedience and trust.

All who know the loneliness of abandonment, the wounds of injustice and harm, the hostile kiss. You are known and not alone. Our King has trodden the path ahead of us and is with us now. Present. Always. All of us are invited to follow, even in our human frailty, with trust greater than fear, moving deeper into love.

He is here. Take courage. Stay awake. Stay present. Stay with him. May our trust always be greater than our fear. May we journey deeper into love.

Collect:

*Loving God,
Whatever we face,
by the power of your Spirit
Grant to us the love and faith of He
whose trust in you exceeded his fear of them,
Jesus Christ.
Amen*

Stay Here, Keep Watch with me (Taizé)

Silence

12.40 - Mark 14.53-72 & Mark 15.1-20

Reflection 3

As we move deeper into love, let us journey further still into Jesus's suffering.

Three scenes.

Scene 1: *A venue of religious power. Beware when due process is abandoned.* What dynamics are at work here? Jealousy, hatred, desire for dominance. A scramble for false evidence in a hastily convened courtroom. Due process gone to the dogs.

The High Priest asks Jesus ‘Have you no answer?’ But Jesus does not enter their agenda of lies. To the High Priest’s direct question: ‘Are you the Messiah the Son of the Blessed one?’ he answers as only **he** can, ‘I am’.

The high priest loses his mind, bellowing ‘Why do we still need a witness?’ See how the religious institution has become too comfortable in its structures. Hell bent on power and position. Diabolical groupthink has taken over, Jesus condemned is spat upon, blindfolded, beaten.

Their Messiah. Our Messiah. Jesus Christ.

Scene 2: *A centre of political power. Beware when laws are bent to suit.*

What dynamics are at work here? Pilate the Roman governor is weak. He is *amazed* at Jesus’s self-possession. He is *fully aware* that the religious leaders are jealous. He *knows* Jesus has done no evil. But ‘wishing to satisfy the crowds’, laws are bent to suit, and he releases a murderer, Barabbas, instead. He wants a quiet life and an easy rule: power and position. Jesus Messiah, King of the Jews, flogged and handed over to the soldiers.

Scene 3: *A place of military power. Beware when free rein is granted to the undisciplined.*

What dynamics are at work here?

The soldiers, used to harsh treatment in the Roman rank system, exercise their power against Jesus who has no rank in their eyes. Brutality breeds brutality. They mock him up in royal dress, hail him ‘King of the Jews’. They don’t know what they are doing or saying: Jesus, King of the Jews, Messiah – led out to death.

As we move deeper into love, will we follow him there?

Collect:

Almighty God,
by the power of your Spirit,
Give us the wisdom to see where power is abused,
and the courage to name such corruption,
in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ,
The one whom we love.
Amen

O Sacred Head Sore Wounded (Bernard of Clairvaux; Bach)

Silence

13. 00 - John 19.25-30

Reflection 4

As a child, I read *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It was just a story to me, a book I picked up. Children playing in an old house, a snowy world through the wardrobe. Very entertaining, until...

I read the part when Aslan is shaved and bound to the stone table. The White Witch's grotesque supporters mass and mock, jeering and gurning, as the Great Lion dies. I wept.

I couldn't understand why this had happened. Why the Great Lion, who could have knocked them all aside with one blow of his paw would submit to their power. I will never forget the bleakness of reading that part of the book. I had no idea what it meant. I had no idea what was going to come next.

As we move deeper into love, let us journey with Jesus to his death.

When we hear again the Passion Narrative, we know what is coming; it's a familiar story to most of us. But for a moment, become again the child who does not know. Be a spectator in the trial scene as it unfolds; be with the women at the cross; be in *this* story – not so hasty to run ahead, to flee the incomprehensible cruelty. Stay present and watch.

Later today – read or listen to John 19 – and notice.

Pilate who finds no fault in Jesus, who wants to release him – yet is fearful. Of what? Disrule? Riots? Roman retribution? Or something deeper? Has he some intuition, some sense of a deeper disruption, an unease he cannot quite articulate? ‘Speak to me,’ he says to Jesus, ‘I can fix this.’

Jesus – calm amid the storm –in control of the situation, reminding Pilate that any power he has is given by the Power of all powers. Notice the ironic references to Jesus as King. Pilate insists on naming Jesus, ‘Behold your King!’ ‘Shall I crucify your King?’

Hear the chief priests’ political deception, ‘We have no King but Caesar.’ Surely, we raise our eyebrows here? The scriptures name God ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords.’ They know this. Truth denied for political expediency. Watch out for that. Watch and pray.

Jesus – carrying his cross on the road to Golgotha. A single image that cuts through all our pride. Behold your King who labours for you, approaching Golgotha – the place of the skull – the place of death.

How did it come to this?

Yet Jesus bears the humiliation, the mockery, the cross, the pain, without complaint, without resistance. He allows himself to be led into this. He who could summon a legion of angels to bear him away, is silent.

Pilate insists that a sign is pinned above Jesus’s head in Hebrew , Greek and Latin – ‘Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews.’ He wants all who see it to understand. Why? A petty act of revenge for being pushed about by the religious leaders? Maybe. But whether mockery or not, such truth cannot be withheld; Jesus is crucified under a sign of his identity: King. The suffering King. The King of Love.

Now see the women: His mother, grey with grief, stooped with sorrow. The sword that will pierce his side has shattered her heart. His aunt supporting her, as they gaze upon him. Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary – leaning together; a tableaux of trauma. Love and sorrow bind them all.

See Jesus – mother of us all, ensuring his own mother’s security. ‘*Woman behold thy son!*’ Re-mothering his friend, ‘*Behold thy mother!*’ pointing them to a future beyond this dreadful now - a glimmer of hope in this darkest of scenes. Such kindness and compassion. Even wracked in pain, he can frame the thought of their need. Reaching out in love. This is his nature, even in death.

And then – it seems the candle is snuffed out. It is Finished. A tsunami of grief smashes over them.

I am a child again, holding the book in my lap, weeping in utter disbelief.

Silence

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