

St Mary Bramshott



Good Friday Meditations 2 April 2021

Introduction and Opening Prayer

The Long Silence (Anon - written before Summer 1982)

At the end of time, billions of people were seated on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with cringing shame - but with belligerence.

"Can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?", snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror ... beatings ... torture ... death!"

In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched, for no crime but being black !"

In another crowd there was a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes: "Why should I suffer?" she murmured. "It wasn't my fault." Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He had permitted in His world.

How lucky God was to live in Heaven, where all was sweetness and light. Where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the vast plain, they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their judge, He must endure what they had endured.

And so we now explore their decision and sentences.

First Sentence

God should be sentenced to live on earth as a man. Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind.

Luke 2:30-35

Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.'

'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'

The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.'

Matthew 2:13, 19, 22-23

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 'Get up,' he said, 'take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.'

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

Mark 3:20-22

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.' And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.'

Reflection

Time of silence

Hymn on organ only - The Servant King v1-3 (SoF 120)

From heaven you came helpless babe
Entered our world, your glory veiled
Not to be served but to serve
And give Your life that we might live

This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King

There in the garden of tears
My heavy load he chose to bear
His heart with sorrow was torn
'Yet not My will but Yours, ' He said

This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King

Come see His hands and His feet
The scars that speak of sacrifice
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered

This is our God, The Servant King
He calls us now to follow Him
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to The Servant King

Second Sentence

Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

Matthew 26:21-24

‘And while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?’

Jesus replied, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him

Matthew 26: 47-50

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: ‘The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.’ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed him. Jesus replied, ‘Do what you came for, friend’.

Matthew 26:59-60

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Matthew 26: 71-74

Then Peter went out to the gateway, where another servant-girl saw him and said to the people there, ‘This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.’

He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, ‘Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.’

Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’

Immediately a cock crowed.

Matthew 27:19-20

While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: ‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.’

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

Matthew 27: 24-26

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’

Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Reflection

Time of Silence

Hymn on Organ O sacred head once wounded v1-2 (MP 520)

O sacred head, once wounded,
with grief and pain weighed down,
how scornfully surrounded
with thorns, Thine only crown!
How pale art Thou with anguish,
with sore abuse and scorn!
How does that visage languish,
which once was bright as morn!

O Lord of life and glory,
what bliss till now was Thine!
I read the wondrous story,
I joy to call Thee mine.
Thy grief and Thy compassion
were all for sinners’ gain;
mine, mine was the transgression,
but Thine the deadly pain.

Third Sentence

At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die so there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.

Matthew 27: 27-31, 33-37

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers round him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. 'Hail, king of the Jews!' they said. They spat on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.....

They came to a place called Golgotha (which means 'the place of the skull'). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Matthew 27: 39-43

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!' In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, "I am the Son of God."'

Matthew 27:45-50

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'). When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.'

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him.' And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit

Reflection

Time of Silence

Hymn on organ - Here is love vast as the ocean (SoF 168)

Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as a flood
When the prince of life our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood
Who his love will not remember,
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten,
Throughout heavn's eternal days

On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide
Through the floodgates of God's mercy,
Flowed a vast and gracious tide
Grace and love like mighty rivers,
Flowed incessant from above
Heavens peace and perfect justice,
Kissed a guilty world with love

Conclusion

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered a word. No one moved.

For suddenly, all knew that God had already served His sentence.

Final Prayers & Blessing