

Good Friday Sermon 2.4.2021 Tregear

Yes, Mary Magdalene was there standing near the cross witnessing Jesus' death.

It's strange, you know, in the last few weeks, at a time where the place and treatment of women has been highlighted in our country its significant to note that it was women who were brave enough to stay close to Jesus. Only one man was there at the cross, John. All the other disciples had fled and were in hiding. The mother of James and John who we heard about last Sunday was there too.

Mary just told us about some of the things she witnessed. And one of the things that struck me was that even on the cross Jesus was serving others, thinking of others. Remember on Sunday Jesus said I have come not to be served but to serve. If any of you doubted that God longs for relationship with us, just look at the cross. Mary heard Jesus speak gently to the thief who a few minutes earlier had been cursing and insulting Jesus; Mary heard the words of forgiveness – “Father forgive them because they don't know what they are doing” to the chief priests and Jewish leaders who had crucified him; Mary heard the words that Jesus spoke to his mother as he asked John to now be a son to Mary, to replace the son who now hung on the cross.

Matthew doesn't include these but highlights for us the loneliness, the desolation that Jesus felt. Mary heard Jesus say, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – This loud cry of Jesus tells us clearly that Jesus really was

separated from the Father; he was about to be abandoned by God. This was the moment that Jesus and the Father had known would happen but they were willing to go through it for us. Jesus must be separated from the Father in order to bear the sin of the world. He bore the full punishment for sin, as the Father's cup of wrath is poured out on him in divine judgement. He also becomes cursed by God. This is why Jesus came into the world – to be a “ransom for many”. But how could Jesus express the awfulness of being forsaken, abandoned by his Father - he cries out the words of the first verse of Psalm 22. The Jews would have recognised these words and they would have remembered that the psalm actually goes on to describe how God will deliver his people and establish a new kingdom.

The Chief priest and the religious leaders sneer at Jesus and mock him: “He saved others but he can't save himself”. Their words, spoken as an insult, were the literal truth. He could not save himself and others simultaneously, at the same time. He had to choose. **He chose to sacrifice himself in order to save the world.**

As we read the account of Jesus' capture, his trial, his whipping and mocking and then his crucifixion we know that the religious leaders wanted Jesus killed and put great pressure on Pilate to do this; we know that Judas betrayed Jesus and allowed his enemies to kill him; and we know that Pilate signed Jesus' death warrant saying that the Jews could crucify him. Yes, all these people were responsible and in a very real way we too are responsible for Jesus' death but there was one person we often overlook. The Father's plan was for Jesus to die, before the world was created. God the Father gave up his son, Jesus, he

gave himself up to die on the cross. Yes, my sins sent Jesus to the cross but also God's love for us took him there.

The cross shows us that our sin must be extremely horrible – it's serious stuff. Part of the whole point of the cross is that at the cross the whole weight of the world's evil really did converge upon Jesus, blotting out the sunlight of God's love just like the darkness that came on everyone when the sun was blotted out at 12 o'clock in the middle of the day. The only way that the righteous God could forgive our sin, our unrighteousness, was for him to take our sin on himself. Sin must be serious indeed. And when we see that, then we are ready to put our trust in Jesus Christ as the Saviour we so urgently need.

As we look at the cross with Mary Magdalene we realise that God's love must be wonderful beyond anything we could imagine. God could quite rightly have abandoned us to our fate. He could have left us alone to reap the fruit of our wrongdoing and to die in our sins. It's what we deserved. But he didn't. Because he loved us, he came after us in Christ. He pursued us even to the desolate anguish of the cross, where he carried our sin, our guilt, our judgement, our death. He took it on himself. The word the Bible uses to describe God's love is "grace" – love that is undeserved and yet freely given. God's love for us is amazing – he wants us to come back into his family, into his kingdom.

We've got to remember that none of Jesus' followers had really thought Jesus would be killed, let alone be killed in such a horrible way on the cross.

Remember just a few days earlier one of the ladies standing at the foot of the cross, John and James' Mum had asked Jesus for the top positions in his kingdom. Well, here was the king on a cross, dying. But Jesus knew. From his baptism onwards he had known what lay ahead: a path that went down into the deep water, just like Israel when they had come out of Egypt and they had to go into the Red Sea. Jesus had trusted, not that God would deliver him by taking him back again to the dry land from which he'd come, but that God would take him through the water and up the other side, leading him on to the promised land that lay ahead. This was the true-Israel path, the Exodus path, the path that led through death itself to a new world, a new life, the other side. He wasn't simply going to defeat death itself. But to do that he had to lead the way through; and in that he had to endure the mockery of those who said he was mad, deluded, just another fanatic who imagines he's God's chosen one only to find out too late that he's mistaken. And they cry out to him, If he really was God's son, surely he would come down from the cross?

But as Matthew expects us to know, it is **because** he is God's son that he must stay on the cross. That is the way the world will be saved. That is how death will be defeated. That is how he will finish the work his Father has given him to do. That is how the Father's delight will be complete.

And as we watch in awe and gratitude, we hear the voice that says to Mary Magdalene and to us: you, too, are my beloved child. Are you ready to follow me, whatever people will say?