

Where is God and where am I in our suffering?

Luke 22 v 39-46

Fairfield 5th April 2020

(Sue Carey)

Intro – By tradition, today is Palm Sunday. We are still going to have our heads in the Gospel of Luke but we are not actually going to focus on the usual piece for this day – the triumphant ride of Jesus into Jerusalem, the story with the palm branches and cheering etc etc – but rather -

Well, I was given a whole chunk of Luke 22 to consider for today but I've chosen only to focus on the Garden of Gethsemane at the start of the week leading up to Easter.

I think we are often strangely reluctant to linger long around the awful events surrounding the crucifixion, (apart, perhaps from on good Friday) and part of our justification for doing that might be that 2000 years on we know how the episode ends. It concludes of course with the absolute glory of resurrection!

We might think of the crucifixion as something now completely over and in the distant past - and push on to get to the celebration of Easter day when we can feel more comfortable and celebrate – and rightly so *of course* - the risen Christ and all that means to us.

But to do that, I humbly suggest, is to miss out on the profound things we can learn from Jesus' own suffering.

There are *far* too many aspects and complexities to this to even begin to cram into the space we have right now, but I just want to look at these verses this morning and shine my dim little light on two of them.

Namely – **1) Where do we think Jesus is in OUR suffering?
And the answer, I hope we will readily see, is identifying with us.**

And 2) **Where am I in our sufferings
And the best place to be, we will find, is in dialogue, or communion, or in prayer with Jesus. Us identifying with him, if you like**

In other words, as we look at these few verses, I hope we can get *better sight* of the fact that there is no more astonishing miracle in the entire world than that God - God - embraces our broken reality.

And there is no better help to us than Jesus *himself*, in times of trouble.

“ *In the world you will have trouble*” said Jesus .
“*But do not worry, I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33)

Straight away there, you can see what we often refer to as the ‘now and not yet’ of our salvation.

you WILL have trouble! Jesus told us that. **Now.**

But I have overcome it – but we will not see that in *all its fullness* until the end of all time. **Not yet.**

So let's read now: **Luke 22:39-46**

³⁹ Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.⁴⁰ On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹ He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴² *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* ⁴³ *An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.* ⁴⁴ *And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*^[c]

⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

So the first question we are asking, remember, is this:

Where is Jesus in our sufferings?
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How can Jesus possibly identify with us in our sufferings?

He wept at the grave of Lazarus but then he raised him!

He hasn't given birth to a still born, we cry. He never had a diagnosis of cancer did he?

We had a church-going great aunt who used to say, and not without a hint of bitterness and in-comprehension: *"God gave his only son. Well, he took mine!"* Aunty Nell's only son reached 21 and went off to see the world. In Australia he was killed in a motorcycle road accident, and his body came back home in a box.

How can Jesus identify with us on *our* sufferings? That was her question too.

Before he got the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told his disciples that he had **eagerly desired to eat this Passover with them before he suffered.** (Lk 22:15).

In Hebrews 12, we read that it was **for the joy** that was set before him that Jesus endured the cross.

Our Good Shepherd who lays his life down for his sheep (John 10) tells his disciples that **no one takes his life from him, but he lays it down of his own accord**

All the way through John's gospel we are repeatedly told the hour had not yet come.... **No-one laid a hand on him because his hour had not yet come** (John 7:30)

This gruesome event had been planned in the trinity from eternity past.

Remember Peter's epic sermon to the crowd (Acts 2) **"This man was handed over to you by Gods set purpose and foreknowledge"**

And now here in the garden of Gethsemane the hour has come.

And how do we find Jesus now?

Eager to get on with it?

Pleased at least, that the hour has finally come?

We find him praying the most astonishing words imaginable:

'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me'

It seems, at least for a split second, that he wants out.

Everything has led up to this moment, but Jesus is utterly overwhelmed.

‘Very rarely – **very rarely** - will anyone die for a righteous person’, wrote Paul to the Romans afterwards, ‘**though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die**’. Sacrifice for a *good* person would be pretty remarkable...

But the weight now coming to bear on the shoulders of Jesus is an incomprehensibly far heavier loadabout which we humans know absolutely nothing, and the enormity of which we can only comprehend the tiniest spec.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for **our** transgressions,
he was crushed for **our** iniquities;(Isaiah 53)

It wasn't only the barbaric physical suffering that Jesus knew lay ahead - the torture, the spitting, the flogging, the degrading, the pain, the blood, the sweat and the tears, the stumbling up to Calvary under the under the weight of his own cross - **It wasn't even that *and* the emotional pain** of seeing his friends and family, some deserting him, some weeping and confused.

It was – well, I have no word for it – the whole cosmic size - of this suffering.

The Lord, **the Lord** - has laid on him the iniquity of **us all!** (Isaiah 53).

That's the billions of those making up the entire human race from centuries past to the end of time.

And not just our *sins* ...

surely he carried our **infirmities and all our sorrows** (same chapter again)

And more than even *that* –

it was the **LORD's will** to crush him and **cause him to suffer** (same chapter again) >>>

And in some unfathomable way, Jesus is not just going to simply **carry** our sin – he is going to **become** sin for us.

For He made Him who knew no sin **to be** sin for us (2 Cor 5)

Can you *begin* to get your head around that?

'If it be your will, *let this cup pass from me*', Jesus cries,

his sweat like great drops of blood falling to the ground

Jesus KNOWS what is coming. Things will go from bad to worse

He will cry out to God that he has been forsaken.

He will die.

There will be silence.

There will be separation from God.

He will descend into Hades.

It will be the darkest day in the history of the world.

And its ALL on ONE man.

And why?

Because despite the abject agony and turmoil, Jesus is **always obedient** to the father

"*Not my will, but yours*" he says.

Jesus will undertake this almighty task because God's call for justice needs to be satisfied otherwise he simply can't be a good God.

Why else?

Because Jesus LOVES us.

Forget for a minute the triviality of the bumper sticker that says "Jesus loves me"

Listen to this: '*God demonstrates his own love for us in this:*

while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. (Romans 5)

You won't come across love of this magnitude anywhere else under the sun. Jesus loves us so so so much that he will go through all of this

....**in order**.....to blast wide open the deep cavern of darkness that otherwise would **forever** hold us *locked in* with sin and suffering, and *without any hope- or light- at all*

Don't say he was God, so it was all easy for him! Look at him in Gethsemane!

I hope you will forgive the glib sound of this next comment:

Jesus is prepared to go to hell and back for us.

But he will return with the key.

O make me understand it , Help me to take it in.

What it meant to thee, the Holy One, to bear away my sin

Because the better I understand *that*,

The less likely I am to rant and rave at God that he
neither cares nor cries with us in our sufferings.

Where is Jesus in our sufferings?

Fully able *and more so to identify with us*, for there are hidden and unrecognised depths in our Lord's struggle to control the power of evil and bring about the promised healing of a broken world.

For sure we know our hope of victory is certain in the 'now and not yet' of our times. But **let us also allow one another to weep, knowing that in the 'now and not yet' our Saviour weeps too.**

When the world has flung me in its deepest pit, I find my Saviour there.

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2) But I also said we want to explore a second thing in these few verses

Where am I in our suffering.

'he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41
Then He *himself* withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,

We can put this very simply:

If Jesus needed to pray when facing suffering, then so do I.

There's just a little hint in v 40 that he and the disciples may have come here to this little spot in the garden before for quiet prayer. It's just speculation because the account says "On reaching *"the place"*

We know from the Gospels that Jesus had a habit of withdrawing to pray throughout his ministry, and it is not unreasonable to think this may have been a special spot for just that. Not only that – his enemies seemed to know where to find him – he certainly wasn't making any attempt to hide!

It's not as if Jesus suddenly finds himself praying in time of *real* distress – like some of us. (Altho' *Thank God* that he often graciously listens to our prayers even when they are suddenly are flung at him from nowhere

But if we are to stand **really** firm in the storms of life, we **must** develop – here on in if we haven't done so before - patterns and habits of prayer. Otherwise, when the heat of the furnace goes up we might just find ourselves unable find him or hear him

We might take to yelling at God (yes, I know his shoulders are big enough), but then refusing to speak or listen to him, ultimately **robbing** ourselves of the peace that ONLY he can begin to bring. Again thank God that he is also often gracious enough to break through our blindness in these circumstances

Look. Even in the horrors of this devastating hour, when the Father is soon going to have to turn his face away because he cannot look at sin, *He sends an angel to strengthen Jesus.* Do you not think he is able to strengthen you?

**So as to where am I in times of suffering?
I too need to be on my knees**

And this not simply the *example of Jesus* at his time of trial.

It is also the *instruction of Jesus* to his disciples

Whist in prayerful agony of his own, Jesus has had one eye on those frightened and exhausted disciples

He has already asked them to pray and now he returns to find them sleeping:

45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

These disciples had left their homes to follow this man for the last few years. They had been **called by him, loved by him, witnessed his miracles, been in awe of him, argued with him, been rebuked by him, learned from him, didn't understand him** but ***in the best ways they knew how, they were utterly devoted to him.***

He brought them hope. Hope that they had never sensed the likes of before.. They weren't sure what that really meant - but now it was looking as if all that might be for nothing. Things had been hotting up for Jesus and his disciples and now they are exhausted and fearful.

So what might they be tempted to do?

What temptation did they need to pray *against*?

We see a few different things unfold later in the chapter of course

- One disciple, we read in Luke, sees fit to help things in his own way by cutting off the ear of the servant of the High Priest, one of those who had come to arrest Jesus

- Peter, a short while later, gives in to the temptation to deny Christ.

That wretched and predicted event happened 3 times and in a split second

But what's the BIG temptation here.

The big temptation is to give up altogether.

It's all been nothing. Its hopeless. No point praying.

Just fall asleep exhausted.

Incidentally, is that describing you today?

Just allowing yourself to wonder whether you've been wasting your time or been deluded to follow Jesus? Maybe your sufferings feel overwhelming?

Maybe you really fear this global pandemic - because in places its looking very out of control?

Perhaps he's not who he claims to be after all?

Maybe you haven't even thought that Jesus might be weeping too?

You know, wherever there is suffering, there is a battle — a battle where Satan is after your soul.

In Job's suffering, his wife said to him,

'Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!'

Job replied,

'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?'
In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.'

When our very lives come under the threat of sufferings, we seem to wobble precariously. God's enemy will be at work to whisper in our ears that we should give up on God. If he can get us to go so far as to curse him, he will rub his hands in glee. It is *in these exact same moments* that Jesus is calling us to run to him in prayer, for only when we do that can we resist the temptation to give up, and Jesus can begin to speak peace into our hearts

On the subject of suffering,
the God of Christianity does not major on answering the question "Why?"
Instead, He provides – **not the answer** to the intellectual dilemma –
but a **pointer** to the resolution to the problem: Namely, the cross.
And we are offered **an incomprehensible intimacy** with the man who hung on it.
We are given not an explanation, but Jesus HIMSELF

Don't rush past the suffering of Christ this Easter

Someone (wiser than me) has written:
*People who believe in the God who suffers with us,
recognize their suffering in God, and God in their suffering.*

Lets pray: What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins, and griefs, to bear
What a *privilege* to carry
Everything to God in prayer
O what peace we often forfeit
O what needless pain we bear
all because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

Lord forgive us, enlighten us, help us, strengthen and heal us we pray. AMEN

END

<p>Consider him, who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12 :3)</p>
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