A JOURNEY TO EASTER

LENTEN MEDITATION WEEK 4

Reflections and linked meditations are derived from 'An Ocean of Grace' by Tim Chester (©The Good Book Company)

The Exchange of Places

1.For me in tortures thou resigned thy breath,
Embraced me on the cross, saved me by death.
And can these sufferings fail my heart to move?
Such as then was, and is, thy love to me,
Such is, and shall be still, my love to thee –
To thee, Redeemer! Mercy's sacred spring!
My God, my Father, Maker, and my King!
Alexander Pope, 1688-1744

HYMN

There is a green hill far away,
without a city wall,
where the dear Lord was crucified,
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot tell,
what pains he had to bear,
but we believe it was for us
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be forgiv'n,
he died to make us good;
that we might go at last to heav'n,
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin;
he only could unlock the gate
of heav'n , and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved,
and we must love him too,
and trust in his redeeming blood,
and try his works to do.

CONFESSION

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From thy riven side which flowed;
Be of sin the double cure:
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.
Augustus M. Toplady

May the Father forgive us by the death of his Son and strengthen us to live in the power of the Spirit all our days. ***Amen***
(Common Worship)

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

2. 'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.' *(1 Peter 3:18)*

3. At the cross an amazing exchange took place. Jesus took on himself both the shame and the penalty for our sin. What makes this all the more extraordinary is that, as Almighty God, what he actually deserved was not shame but honour; and as the perfectly holy One, what he actually deserved was not judgement but vindication. As a result of this amazing exchange, another amazing exchange takes place for his people. Instead of the shame that we ought to have as a result of our sinful nature, we receive glory as a result of God's gracious love. Instead of the condemnation we deserve, we are declared righteous – that is, in the right before God. A swap has taken place. The third century church father, Cyprian, reminds us that we see this great exchange in every aspect of the story of Christ's passion.
4. Precious Saviour, even before your Passion reached the cruelty of death and the shedding of blood, what infamies of reproach you patiently heard, what mockings of contempt you suffered. You had used your spit to heal a blind man; yet for us you received the spittings of insulters! In your name the devil and his angels are beaten; yet for us you suffered beatings! You clothe us with immortality; yet for us you were stripped of your earthly

garments. You ae guiltless, the just One; yet for us you were counted among transgressors and truth was suppressed with false witnesses (Cyprian)

5. 'Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.' (Galatians 3:1)
6. The Galatians 'saw' Jesus crucified when they 'heard' the gospel preached. In the gospel we see a great exchange. In the message of Christ we encounter Christ himself. John Bunyan writes, ' He comes to you in the word of the gospel.'
7. Do you understand me, sinful soul? He wrestled with justice that you might have rest. He wept and mourned that you might laugh and rejoice. He was betrayed that you might go free. He was condemned that you might be justified. He was killed that you might live. He wore a crown of thorns that you might wear a crown of glory. (John Bunyan)

8. 'At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.' (Titus 3:3-5)
9. Paul writes to Titus of humanity's defiantly heading in the wrong direction, having rejected God and become entrenched in opposition to him, but God intervened. Why? Because of humanity's righteous deeds, or to reward those who had made an effort? No. It was all down to his kindness, love and mercy. The second century 'Epistle to Diognetus', an anonymous early example of Christian apologetics, highlights God's patience with us during our past life, and the 'sweet exchange' that has turned our lives around.
10. *For now you have revealed your goodness and power, your boundless kindness and love. You did not hate us; neither did you reject us, nor did you bear us malice. Instead you were long-suffering and patient, and in pity you took the responsibility of our sins upon yourself, parting with your own Son so he might be our ransom; the holy for the lawless, the blameless for the wicked, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. (Epistle to Diognetus)*

PRAYERS
*Jesus, by your wounded feet, direct our path. Jesus, by your nailed hands, move us to deeds of love. Jesus, by your pierced side, purify our desires. Jesus, by your broken heart, knit ours to yours**. Amen**. (Richard Crashaw 1613-49)*

We pray for the world and for all who acknowledge you as Lord. We thank you for all those who minister in your name and who make sacrifices in order to serve others.
Lord, in your mercy..**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the nations of the world, especially for those where poverty, hunger or conflict are affecting their peoples.
Lord, in your mercy…**Hear our prayer**.

We pray for the sick and suffering, all who face worries, the bereaved and all who are in any other special need.
Lord, in your mercy…**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves and all those we love, our families, friends and neighbours, thanking you for their love for us. Lord, in your mercy….**Hear our prayer.**

We say the **LORD'S PRAYER**

We share **THE GRACE**

THOUGHTS 1) Might we take sacrifice for granted? 2) How can we ever repay a sacrifice?

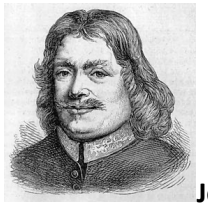
'For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.' (1 Peter 3:18)

Notes for Week 4



Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage c.200 – 258

He was of Berber origin, born to a wealthy family in North Africa. Prior to his late conversion to Christianity, Cyprian had a successful career as an orator, teacher of rhetoric and lawyer. He then turned his attention and his studies exclusively to the Bible and Christian writings. He was ordained as a priest, and elected as bishop of Carthage in 248. A fierce persecution of Christians by the Emperor Decius followed a year later. Cyprian went into hiding, so that he could supervise his see of Carthage more effectively than he might from prison. More controversy followed when he returned in 251. He reaffirmed the supremacy of the Pope and called for unity and understanding in the church. However, following an outbreak of plague, and opposition of the African church to Pope Stephen I, there was more persecution of Christians under Valerian. Cyprian reaffirmed his faith, and was tried and executed. He had been loved by his flock, and had been a conscientious pastor. His writings make a valuable early contribution to the great tradition of Latin Christian literature.



John Bunyan 1628 – 1688

English writer and Puritan preacher, best remembered as the author of the Christian allegory The Pilgrim's Progress. He was born at Elstow in Bedfordshire, had some schooling, and aged 16, joined the Parliamentary Army during the first stage of the English Civil War. Returning to Elstow, he took up the trade of tinker, which he had learned from his father. After his marriage he became interested in religion, attending the local parish church, and then the Bedford Meeting, a nonconformist group in Bedford where he became a preacher . After the restoration of the monarchy, Bunyan was arrested, and spent twelve years in prison, as he refused to give up his preaching. During his imprisonment, he wrote and autobiography, 'Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners', and began work on The Pilgrim's Progress, which was published some years after his release. Bunyan continued preaching and fell ill and died aged 59 on a journey to London where he was buried. The Pilgrim's Progress became one of the most published books in the English language.

The Epistle to Diognetus, late second century.

This is a very early Greek example of Christian apologetics, that is, writing defending Christianity against the charges of its critics. The author isn't named, only once calling himself 'a student of the Apostles'. Diognetus means 'God-born', which may signify a fictitious recipient of the Epistle. It was discovered copied in a 13th century manuscript, and then published in 1592. It was transcribed extensively, fortunately, as the original was destroyed by fire in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. It is held by modern readers to be a gem of early Christian apologetics.