A JOURNEY TO EASTER

LENTEN MEDITATION - WEEK 6

The reflections and linked meditations are derived from 'An Ocean of Grace',© Tim Chester

The Gift of Christ

1. *This gift of Christ was the highest and fullest manifestation of your love that ever the world saw: the Son of your love, the darling of your Soul, your other Self, yes, one with yourself, the express image of your person, the brightness of your glory.* John Flavel

HYMN

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ, my God:
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingling down:
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an off'ring far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.
Isaac Watts

CONFESSION

O Lord our God, in our sin we have avoided your call. Our love for you is like the mist, disappearing in the heat of the sun; have mercy on us. Bind up our wounds and bring us back to the foot of the cross; in your name we pray. **Amen.** *(Patterns for Worship)*

Grant, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace; that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP)

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

2. ' I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding, and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. (Colossians 2:2-3)

3. Paul tells the Colossians, among others whom he has not seen face-to-face, that Jesus is a treasure trove, but it's treasure far greater than gold or silver. In a way, it's the happy ending of a mystery story, and needs to be proclaimed - 'Come and find treasure in Jesus – there's enough for everyone!' We all find different needs as we seek to live a Christian life, and to serve Christ himself. Some may be tempted, some feel guilty or ashamed; some may become weary or distracted by the world, feel daunted, insecure or fearful. Some may find opportunity. In Christ, says John Calvin, we can find our needs met.

4. *This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, Christ has made with us: becoming Son of Man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; by accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; by receiving our poverty to himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; by taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself, he has clothed us with his righteousness.* (John Calvin).

5. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her, and he said, "Don't cry". *(Luke 7:13)*

6. Isaac Ambrose describes the history of Jesus as the history of love. Every incident in Christ's life, every encounter and conversation

speaks of his love – not just in the past, but for us today. When Jesus saw a widow burying her only son, his heart went out to her, and his heart has not changed. It goes out to us in the struggles we face. Merging the story of Christ's life on earth with the story of Christ's work in our lives highlights the love we have received from him. The aim is to fan the flames of our love for Christ.

***7**. Oh, here is the lovely object: the absolute holiness and perfect purity of Christ! This is the fairest beauty that any eye ever saw; this is that compendium of all glories. How you should flame forth in love for the Lord Jesus! Can a man stand by a hot, fiery furnace and not be warmed? Awake, awake your ardent love towards your Lord! Are you rock and not flesh, that you are not wounded by these heavenly darts? Christ loves you – is that not enough? Christ loves you, and Christ is lovely. His heart is set upon you, and he is a thousand times more fair than all the children of men.* (Isaac Ambrose).

8. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. *(John 1:14)*

9. Grace is God's undeserved kindness. We may deserve judgement and punishment; but what we get in the gospel is forgiveness and glory, coming to us through Jesus. His death makes the blessings of grace possible. The guilty can be declared innocent because, at the cross, Jesus swapped places with us, bearing our punishment so that we could receive his righteousness. So Jesus is not only gracious, he is full of grace. His grace took him from the heights of heaven to the depths of hell, to rescue sinners who had abused his love. The Puritan Thomas Watson invites us to examine Christ's grace from every angle so we get a sense of its fullness and richness.

10. *Consider why he came: that he might take our flesh to redeem us; that he might bestow on us a kingdom. He was poor, that he might make us rich. He was born of a virgin, that we might be born of God. He took our flesh, that he might give us his Spirit. He lay in the manger, that we might lie in paradise. He came down from heaven, that he might bring us to heaven. And what was all this but love? The name of Christ is sweet: like music to the ear, like honey in the mouth, like a cordial for the heart.* (Thomas Watson).

PRAYERS

How shall I not give you all that I have, when you, in your great goodness, give me all that you are? (Anon)

Lord, we give you thanks for all your gifts to us; all that you shower upon us, day by day, throughout our lives. Help us to glory in everything you give us, and to be determined to share your glorious gifts with others.

Lord, in your mercy**, Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all, throughout the world, who are in any kind of need: for the victims of cruelty, poverty, hunger and natural or man-made disaster….

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**.

We pray for the sick and suffering, the lonely, the anxious and the bereaved, praying for those known to us…

Lord, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer**.

O Lord God, our Father, you are the light that can never be put out; and now you give us a light that shall drive away all darkness. You are love without coldness, and you have given us such warmth in our hearts that we can love all when we meet. You are the life that defies death and you have opened for us the way that leads to eternal life. (Karl Barth 1886-1968)

We say **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

We share **THE GRACE**

THOUGHTS What turns something into a gift?

Is an adequate response possible?

Week 6 – Notes on the writers



John Calvin 1509-1564 Born Jehan Cauvin he was a French theologian, pastor and reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, fleeing from France after the eruption of violence against Protestant Christians. Originally trained as a humanist lawyer he had broken from the Roman Catholic church around 1530. (His family had intended him to be ordained to the priesthood). He generated much controversy in his time, being opposed by powerful families in Geneva. Calvin was firm in his protestant beliefs, and Calvinism expressed such views as predestination, the absolute sovereignty of God, the salvation of the human soul and eternal damnation. He recognised the power of music, composing hymns for the Geneva psalter. He preached over 2000 sermons, many of which were transcribed and preserved. He instituted a school, part of which became the university of Geneva. He died aged 54, and because of the reformers' fear of fostering a new saint's cult, he was buried in an unmarked grave.

Isaac Ambrose 1604-1664 

Born in Ormskirk, he was probably descended from an influential Roman Catholic family. He entered Brasenose College, Oxford in 1621. He graduated and was ordained in 1624, and took on the parish of Castleton in Derbyshire in 1627. He was appointed one of Charles I's itinerant preachers in Lancashire then, under the patronage of the Hoghton family, became vicar of Preston. He became associated with Presbyterianism and with the ejection of non- Puritan teachers and ministers during the Commonwealth period. He left his Preston parish in 1654 for Garstang, but was himself ejected from that post, along with about 2000 other ministers who refused to conform with the Book of Common Prayer after the restoration of the monarchy. His remaining years were spent in quiet meditation among friends in Preston. As a religious writer Ambrose is known for his vividness and freshness of imagination, unlike many of the other Puritan Nonconformists. He was peaceful, gentle and meditative.

Thomas Watson 1620-1686  An English Nonconformist Puritan preacher and writer. He was educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge and served as vicar of St Stephen's, Walbrook in London. He showed strong Presbyterian views during the civil war, although he supported the King. He was imprisoned briefly, in 1651 with other ministers, for his share in Christopher Love's plot to recall Charles II. Reinstated at St Stephen's, he became famous as a preacher until the Restoration, when he was ejected as a Nonconformist. He continued his ministry in private. After the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, he regained a licence to preach. Many of his writings remain in print.