

## ***Good Friday Readings***

### ***Sign of the Cross and God Friday And a Good Friday story – On the Run***

## **Sign of the Cross**

'Your cross is the wrong way round !' The upright is over the transverse. It should be the other way , he explained to us. He went on to make plain the meaning of the cross.

You see, the upright makes the letter I. That stands for me, for self, for the selfishness which is at the root of all the wrong in the world. When Jesus died on the cross he crossed out the I. Jesus died for me so that I could die to self. As we all learn that the whole world changes.

Then the cross piece - that's the arms of God stretched out in love. He died on the cross because he loves us and loves his world, and wants it to be good for everyone.

And the upright. Well that's more than just I. It's a signpost - stuck in the ground and pointing up to heaven. It tell me that when God gave us Jesus, he got his feet right down in our world, and made it possible for us to get up to heaven.

That's the whole Christian message. Like John wrote [3.16] God loved the world so much he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him should have eternal life.

I remember that every time I look at the Cross.

## God Friday

Good Friday ? What was good about it ? It was the blackest day in history.

Perhaps it doesn't mean that really. Maybe it's like saying Good-bye and it really means, 'God be with you.' Maybe 'Good morning' means 'God's morning.'

So then, 'Good Friday' is really 'God's Friday' !

But that doesn't help. If it was God's day, how could it be so awful ? Even Jesus on the cross felt as though God his Father had abandoned him

So where was God ?

Running away with the disciples !

In hiding !

Surely not there watching the cruelty; the tears; the agony - and doing nothing ! That would mean God was helpless !

No. God was there all right. It was his day. He was there through every agonising moment.

God was there in the darkness and the earthquake. He was the Lord of creation demonstrating his power over the elements

God was there in words of love as Jesus said to John - 'there's your mother' - and to Mary - 'there's your son' - as John took Mary's arm and she leaned on him in the depths of her sorrow

God was there in the word of forgiveness and hope to a penitent thief making a first and last bid for eternal life

God was there in the defiant title Pilate commanded to be nailed to the cross - 'Jesus. The king of the Jews'

God was there in the unreasoned faith of a Roman Officer whose spiritual insight enabled him to say - 'This is the son of God'

God was there in the final moments of Satan's writhing defeat as God's Son cried - 'It is finished'

Creative power  
Love and mercy and forgiveness  
Royalty and worship  
Faith and victory  
Yes, God was there !

And if God was there;  
if this is truly 'God's Friday'  
then he was there in the suffering, the pain,  
the sacrifice, the sin-bearing,  
the hell-defying,  
the cosmos saving

God was in it all, triumphing in his love

And now everyday is 'God's day' when we may find him, not running away, not absent from his world, but with us in all the agony moments - redeeming them.

## **On the run**

Under cover of the darkness, Peter had made his way out to Bethany, to the one person left who would understand.

Peter could hardly remember the last hours. Wandering, running, returning - driven by grief - by taunts and shouts running in his mind. Sure that he was going mad with the memories of what he had done.

He was like a different man. A man he did not know. The man he had always been but never seen. The real man the merciful mirror always hides.

Fearfully, he had taken advantage of the strange afternoon darkness to go up to the hill. He made out John and Mary still there - close together now. But he could not look at the crosses - and certainly not at the one in the middle. He stayed only brief moments. A Pharisee passed and looked closely at Peter. It was enough to set him running again - aimlessly running - trying to get away from his memories - running from himself yet never fast enough to escape.

The Bethany road was not safe, but he had crossed the fields in the half-light. The village was quiet - the earth tremors and the brooding storm had driven people inside. The house itself seemed empty. Mary, he knew, would still be in the city. No doubt Martha would be comforting someone somewhere.

Lazarus heard him enter, but did not speak or draw attention to him. He waited for Peter to speak from the shadowy porch.

'Lazarus !' The voice was so different - muffled, pained, unsure - that Lazarus looked in Peter's direction reassuring himself that it was the big Galilean fisherman. He beckoned Peter, and Peter almost ran across to him, falling on his knees before the older man. There was such a peace about this man now - the peace of that other world where he had been but of which he would not speak.

'Lazarus !'

'Peter ?' The gentleness of his voice broke Peter. The big man sobbed like a child, his whole body convulsed by his sorrow.

After a while, the passion subsided enough for him to speak through his tears.

'Lazarus, they've killed him.'

'Were you there ?'

'How could I be ? I tried. He wouldn't want me. I...I....I denied him.' He wept openly again.

Lazarus let him cry for a while, then put out his hand to grasp Peter's shoulder. 'I know, Peter. Philip came.'

There was strength in the touch and Peter began to speak more rationally now. 'What happened to me ? I was panicked by a young woman. I promised to be faithful. I even boasted I'd die with him ! I denied him, Lazarus. I denied him. Now he's dying, and I'm not there !

Peter fell silent now. Thunder rolled round the hills and at last the storm broke in torrents of rain..

'It's over,' said Lazarus quietly. 'His work is finished.'

'Finished !' Peter choked on the word. 'Finished! We're all finished ! The work's finished !'

'No, Peter. Remember ? Jesus spoke of resurrection; the third day he said. It's not finished. It's about to begin !

'But how can it for me ? I've denied him. I saw him look at me. He knew I'd done it. He hung on that cross out there, knowing what I'd done to him ! How can I ever hope to start again ?'

'Peter,' said Lazarus, 'Think about Jesus.'

'How can I think about anything else ? His look will haunt me till the day I die.'

'Peter, you are thinking more about you than about him. Think of the times you shared. Think of his words. Remember how he always talked about forgiveness new beginnings, about love - the strongest power in the world. Think about him, Peter. Trust him.'

The two men were distracted by a movement outside the door. Martha was shaking the wet from her robe. 'What a storm !' Peter rose quickly and pushed past her without a look or a word. He was sobbing...and running again. He had much running to do yet before he would find himself and let himself be found