

Mary Mother of the Lord

Mary, the Mother of Our Lord watches on the day he was crucified. Nothing good about this Friday. Today is a day of utter unfolding horror.

It is not just her heart that is broken. It must seem that the whole world is broken.

Perhaps this year we can understand her agony better than before. Perhaps this year we will find that she is with us in a world that seems to be broken beyond mending.

The agony of death being disrupted has been one of the most cruel things that this last year has brought.

There have been thousands of people lost to the virus that engulfs the world. There have been tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of moments of grief as a consequence.

The norms of people dying have been disrupted and shattered. People not able to be with relatives when their relatives need them most. People not able to visit. Not able to hold a hand. Not able to do anything. The state (necessarily) making decisions that used to be governed only by love.

Limited numbers. Fear everywhere. Healthcare disrupted. Families disrupted. Friendships disrupted Funerals disrupted. Death itself disrupted. Strange. Agonising.

As Mary stands at the foot of the cross, maybe this year her agony reaches out across the centuries and meets our own with understanding and compassion.

This year, I had just a few week's notice that we would indeed be holding services in Holy Week both in church as well as in the form of online worship.

Whilst delighted at the prospect of opening the church's doors again, I will admit to an ungracious resentment of how quickly everything had to be put together.

I usually start thinking about Holy Week in the autumn and planning it out as soon as Christmas is over. But not this year. Why did the authorities have to open us up right now?

For Mary at the cross, Holy Week, her unholy week, has hurtled towards her at breakneck speed. She must have known that her son was being exalted by the crowd on his entry to Jerusalem. Maybe she was there whilst the palms we being waved. Maybe she heard the crowds crying hosanna. Maybe she even

allowed herself some joy that her son was being listened to. That they were paying him attention.

Maybe, she might have wondered, just maybe, this time the world will hear the message of love and start to sort out its wrongs and its injustices and pains. Maybe this time.

Lady peaceful, lady happy – that's who she longs to be. Maybe this time. Maybe this time love will win.

But oh, oh did it go wrong quickly? So spectacularly, utterly, impossibly wrong.

Here he is being crucified. There she is by the cross.

The mental pain and anguish are imp... well, we think they are impossible to imagine but that's because we can't face such pain and tuck it away out of sight.

Mothers never expect to bury their sons. But bury their sons they do.

Mothers never expect to lament because of state violence but lament they do.

Mothers should never be left howling in pain at being unable to make the pain of a loved one better. But howl in pain they do.

Silent howls, some of them. The pain that cannot be spoken or expressed. The pain that is beyond comprehension.

If we cannot fully understand or comprehend the experience of Mary at the cross, we enter into her pain. She's not understanding it either. It is just raw. Endless. Hopeless. Raw pain.

The hammering. The heat. The heaving of his body. Gasping for breath. Gasping for breath. Gasping for breath.

I can't breathe.

As Christ dies on the cross, with Mary helpless near him, remember others who have been unable to breathe freely this year.

As the church experiences holy week the United States is experiencing the trial that relates to the death of George Floyd which sparked all the black lives matter protests.

Help me mama. Help me mama. I can't breathe.

Words that came from George Floyd as he was dying. Taken up by communities around the world unable to live freely, unable to breathe freely, unable to be freely due to racism and prejudice so mind bogglingly deeply embedded in society that those of us guilty of it can't even perceive it.

I can't breathe. I can't breathe.

Words used by thousands who have been struck down by covid.

Some of us have had covid. Some of us have been in hospital with covid. Some of us have been caring for those who have had covid. Some of us have had unrelated health concerns made worse because of covid. Some of us have been unable to mourn or grieve as we should have been due to covid.

I can't breathe.

Our society is struggling for breath. Our world is struggling for breath.

Mary stands somewhere at the foot of the cross. And her son can't breathe.

I'm pretty sure that she feels that she can't breathe either.

Where does she go in her mind whilst all this is going on.

Is there a Magnificat of tears?

My soul doth magnify the Lord.

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

It seems unjust that this good woman should suffer so whilst this good man, her son dies.

She has praised the Lord. Magnified the Lord. Cradled and carried the Lord.

Why is this thing happening to her?

For he hath regarded: the lowliness of his handmaiden: For behold, from henceforth: all generations shall call me blessed.

No. No he has not. He has not regarded her. No he is not blessing her. What chance of her being remembered through the generations when her son is being wiped out. Cancelled. Erased.

For he that is mighty hath magnified me: and holy is his Name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him: throughout all generations.

Where is the mightiness of God when you need it most? Where is the holiness of God in the middle of this bloody and brutal killing field? Where is mercy?

Not here.

He hath shewed strength with his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

So scatter them Lord. Scatter them. Scatter the Pilates and the Ciaphases and the betrayers and the false friends and the politicians who look away and those who profit out of the suffering of others.

For God's sake scatter them once and for all.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat: and hath exalted the humble and meek.

Exalted. Held up above everyone else. Exalted high upon a cross. Exalted him naked, bloodied and dying for all to see. Mocked in his exaltation.

He hath filled the hungry with good things: and the rich he hath sent empty away.

Yet those with power seem to have got away with it. Those who manipulate power to fill their own bellies so often seem to get away with it. Those who are rich – their riches must have come from somewhere.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel:

As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

Promises promises. What use are God's promises on a day like Good Friday?

A women stands in agony as her son is being killed in the glare of the afternoon sun.

He can't breathe. He can't breath.

What use are God's promises now?