**The Pathway to the Cross**

Texts: various

Rev. David Waldron

**Occasion: Good Friday**

**Service outline and meditations**

Sing: “The Power of the Cross”

**Introduction**

Prayer

Sing 295 When I survey the Wondrous Cross

Opening reading: Genesis 3:1-15

**Meditation 1: The need for Christ’s passion**

Sing 275 Ah, Dearest Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended

Readings: Genesis 22:9-14; Exodus 12:22-27

**Meditation 2: The power of Christ’s passion**

Sing: 291 There is a Redeemer

**Meditation 3: The pain of Christ’s passion**

Readings: Psalm 41:9; 55:12-14; Psalm 22:1-2; 6-7; 14-15, 18; Zech 12:10; Psalm 69:21; Isaiah 52:14; Psalm 31:5.

Sing: 287 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Reading: Isaiah 53:1-12

Zechariah 12:10

God’s gracious Spirit produces humility in those who look in faith upon the crucified Christ

Sing 290 Man of Sorrows! What a name

The ‘pathway’ of the cross continues on through Scriptures so that we can understand the meaning of Christ’s suffering and death.

**Meditation 4: The meaning of Christ’s passion**

Readings: Romans 5:6-7; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 Peter 2:24; John 3:16-17

Sing: 277 And can it be that I should gain

Closing prayer

Benediction

Doxology 279 How Deep the Father’s Love

**Introduction**

The ‘Via Dolorosa’ (literally ‘the sorrowful way’) is a processional route in the Old City of Jerusalem, believed to be the path that Jesus walked on the way to his crucifixion. Where would you say is the beginning of the pathway to the cross?

* At the governor’s headquarters where the Roman soldiers stripped Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him, twisting together a crown of thorns and putting it on his head (Matthew 27:27-29)?
* When Judas Iscariot said ‘Greetings Rabbi’ and kissed Him in an act of awful betrayal? (Matt 26.49)
* In the garden of Gethsemane, where in the agony of anticipation His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground (Luke 22:44)?
* When he resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51)?
* When, after Peter confessed Jesus to be the Son of God, He spoke of his coming death saying: "*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*." (Luke 9.22)?
* When Jesus began His public ministry, proclaiming the gospel of God ‘*the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel*’ (Mark 1:15)?
* When Christ was conceived and the angel of the Lord instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus ‘*for he will save his people from their sins*’ (Matthew 1:21).

We can trace the pathway to the cross even before the Son of God was born of the virgin Mary, before He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church: “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Cor 15:3). The Risen Lord Jesus explained to Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus ‘*that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled*’ (Luke 24:44).

The Word of God shows us that the Old Testament Scriptures reveal that The Christ would die for the sins of many. This morning as we remember the suffering and death of Christ Jesus we will trace the pathway to the cross back to almost the beginning of the Bible.

**Meditation 1: The need for Christ’s passion**

The English word ‘passion’ comes from the Latin ‘passio’ which means ‘suffering. It is first recorded use was in early Latin translations of the Bible texts describing the death of Jesus that appeared in the 2nd century A.D. In the 11th century, the Normans invaded Britain and many French words with Latin origins, including ‘passion’ which back then referred solely to the sufferings of Jesus became English words. By the 13th century the word ‘passion’ had come to refer to any strong emotion.

As we consider the need for Christ’s passion we are answering the question: why did He have to suffer and die? The Scripture in Genesis 3 provides us with the answer. The suffering of Christ is predicted by the words of the Lord God spoken to the serpent in the garden of Eden after the temptation and fall of our first ancestors, Adam and Eve. “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" (Gen 3:15) ‘Enmity’ means hostility/ opposition/ animosity/ill will or hatred. It denotes the hatred in which a hostile act is performed. This enmity is seen in the hostility of Cain against his brother Abel in the next chapter in the book of Genesis. Following the Fall, all of humanity was divided into two separate groups:

1. Those who are the seed/or offspring of Satan. Jesus said of this group: “*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies*”(John 8.44).
2. Those who are the seed/or offspring of the woman. This cannot mean all of mankind, for many are, as we have seen, in essence the seed of Satan.

Genesis 3:15 predicts that there will be a single person who will inflict Satan with a fatal wound ‘*bruising his head*’, but in order to do so He would suffer as a result of the hostility of Satan against Him – as we see in the words of the prophesy ‘*you shall bruise his heel*’. The ‘seed of the woman’ are those who are united to the victorious champion who overcomes Satan.

As many of you will know, Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the ‘protoevangel’ – the ‘first good news’; looking forward to the conquest of Christ over Satan, sin and death on the cross at Calvary. Today we remember the bruising of Christ’s ‘heal’ when Christ suffered and died to redeem a people, descended from the woman Eve, who would then no longer be the ‘offspring of Satan’. This coming Easter Sunday we will remember that His death at Calvary was not final, He rose from the grave. He is Alive! Satan has not succeeded in permanently ‘bruising his head’, nevertheless, he did suffer and die. The Devil ‘bruised his heal’. We see the pathway to the cross back here in Genesis 3:15.

**Meditation 2: The power of Christ’s passion**

Usually on a Good Friday morning I would be standing behind a pulpit in a church building, but today I am standing behind my desk in my office at home in ‘Alert Level 4 lockdown’. I have substituted a desk for a pulpit and a room at the back of my garage for an auditorium.

Substitution is the action of replacing someone or something with another person or thing. With substitution there is an exchange. That is exactly what we see happened on a mountain in the land of Moriah when the Lord provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in exchange for his only son Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram in the place of Isaac points forward to the death of Christ in the place of others outside Jerusalem where Mount Moriah is located (2 Chron 3:1). The power of Christ’s passion is in the gracious provision of the Lord of a Substitute: the promised ‘offspring of the woman’:

A ransom is a form of substitution where a sum of money is paid for the release of a captive. This word is used of Christ: “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45). Brothers and sisters in Christ God ‘*did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all*’ (Rom 8:32). He is the ‘Passover Lamb who has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor 5:7). Just as the blood of the lambs slaughtered by the Israelites and painted on the lintels and doorposts of their houses protected them from judgement of the Lord when He struck the land, so, the death of Christ protects all those who are united to the Lamb by faith. “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him*” (John 3:36).

This raises the personal question for everyone: Do you have a substitute – someone who stands in your place for the judgement which is coming? The power of Christ’s passion comes to weak vulnerable people like you and me by faith alone in the Redeemer through whom and by whom God purchases back a people for Himself.

**Meditation 3: The pain of Christ’s passion**

We understand something of the painful experience of Christ’s passion from prophesies which were fulfilled by his suffering and death.

**Betrayal**

1. **Psalm 41:9** Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.
2. **Psalm 55:12** For it is not an enemy who taunts me- then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me- then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng.

**Abandonment**

1. **Psalm 22:1-2**  My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

**Hatred**

1. **Psalm 2:2-3** The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."
2. **Psalm 22:6-7**  But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads

**Physical pain**

1. **Psalm 22:14-15**  I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.
2. **Psalm 22:16-17**  For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet- I can count all my bones- they stare and gloat over me
3. **Psalm 69:21** They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

**Nakedness/shame**

1. **Psalm 22:18**  they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. (John 19:24)
2. **Isaiah 52:14** As many were astonished at you- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind-

**An excruciating death**

1. **Psalm 31:5** Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.

**Meditation 4: The meaning of Christ’s passion**

**Romans 5:6-7** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die.

**1 Peter 3:18** For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

**1 Peter 2:24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

We see in these Scriptures the meaning of Christ’s suffering and death. The substitution of the Godly Man for the ungodly. The exchange of the Righteous Man for unrighteous men, women and children. The healing of the terminally sick through the immortal Christ suffering, wounded unto death. The Love of God made most evident through His only Son Jesus Christ through whom He has saved a people for Himself. Come to Christ today for salvation, godliness, righteousness, healing and hope.

The pathway to the cross spans the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament. The events of the day we remember on ‘Black Friday’ ended with deep darkness when the Sun’s light failed (Luke 23:45). The passion of Christ – His suffering unto death - resulted in open access to God for all who are united in faith to the crucified Saviour. The events of the cross we now remember ended with Christ’s final breath before the grave as He committed Himself in weakness and trust to God the Father.

*“It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last” (Luke 23:44)*