

15th April 2022 - Good Friday

We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

I think most of us have been appalled by the contrast between our own relatively comfortable lives and the lives of those in Ukraine who six months ago lived free, peaceful lives. In those days they could not have imagined the terror and violence which descended on their country in a matter of days.

Things they thought were stable – their workplaces, children's schools, and churches – were threatened and in some cases destroyed. The men who are did this are not evil. Let's be clear about that. I would suggest it's unlikely that individual soldiers actively want to kill and mutilate women and children. But that is what has happened. Ordinary men, with parents who worry about them, have been caught up in inflicting evil on the people whose country they are invading.

Our civilised, humane country, the country we trust to uphold humane, just laws has apparently decided that impoverished people affected by climate change who give up their home, country and relative security in an attempt to move to the United Kingdom, work hard and make a new life for themselves, should be transported thousands of miles to Rwanda for, and the word is chilling, 'processing.' For Rwanda this is a financial arrangement. I doubt they will they will be better cared for in Rwanda than in this country. This is an evil decision, made by ordinary politicians caught up in a culture which values some lives more than others.

Pilate, Herod, the soldiers on crucifixion detail that day – none of them intended to kill the Son of God the one who comes in the name of the Lord. But like Russian soldiers and many politicians, they had lost the habit of questioning their own assumptions and prejudices and checking them against 'whatsoever things are honest and pure and lovely and of good report.' They had forgotten that they might be mistaken. And they had too many important things to do to consider the justice of the particular crucifixion they were administering that day.

We are also are in a hurry most of the time – busy and tired so that we are tempted to cut corners and to forget that our first impressions may be wrong. We make mistakes. I was proud of Christ Church last night, when they welcomed in a rough sleeper who was rather the worse for wear and sat him at table and fed him. The Jesus Mark writes about in his Gospel is also busy, fired up with the need to reach the next village, heal the next person, speak to one more lost soul. Again and again we hear, 'And immediately, he set off' to do the next thing. 'Work while it is day,' he warns - 'night comes when no one can work.' And always his busyness is directed towards people. He always had time for them. Until today, Good Friday, when that boiling energy stops.

From the moment of his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus – who has been energetic and authoritative – stops. He allows himself to be arrested saying almost nothing. He does not argue the case for his release or demonstrate his divinity by signs and miracles. He does - nothing.

Van Stone reminds us that the word 'passion' has its roots in the word for passive. Passion here doesn't mean rage or desire, but impassivity.

After the burst of horror and fear in the garden of Gethsemane in which he cried out for a different destiny, he seems to have mentally and spiritually handed himself over to God. And so, he allowed himself to be handed over to the soldiers, to the high priest, Pilate and Herod and eventually the execution squad. They thought they were judging him, managing events, while all that day the tide of human history was God's tide.

And the tortured man, hanging from his hands on the cross as he slowly suffocated, was doing so in an act of will. The 'king of the Jews,' who was and is the Lord of the universe, could, of course, have come down from the cross and 'saved himself.' But somehow that wouldn't have saved others.

I don't understand and would not presume to attempt to explain to you how his decision to accept death relates to that saving of the world. But I can remind you of something else Van Stone said. 'The world, our small part of creation, is a costly precarious thing, forever caught between the possibilities of triumph and tragedy, calling forth from God unceasing commitment.' Christ on the cross is not just a historical event but a disclosure of the nature and work of God who so loves creation that all the evil and suffering of the world, in Ukraine, in the famine in Afghanistan, in the wars in Yemen and Syria and the repression in dictatorships - all that and all our readiness to reject God, bears on God, is carried by God with the anguish and act of will we see in Christ on the cross.

But all this, everything I have just said would be posturing and empty words, were it not for the seed of hope that is in us as we wait through today and tomorrow for the third day.