

*Sermon preached by Revd Ross Fishburn  
St Paul's Canterbury  
Good Friday  
Friday 15 April 2022*

Our journey today brings us to the nails and the wood, to the broken body and the shed blood, to the silence and the darkness, and thereby the salvation wrought for us, in the end which was no end at all, but a beginning.

The story is indeed the story of the work of Jesus. The story John tells is not of an accident, nor something which overtakes Jesus unawares. What happens to Jesus is the result of **his** work, his consistent living of his life. It happens because Jesus continues to preach his message in witness to the Father who sent him, in witness to the Light. In response the powers and all those who cannot accept that light will oppose him. We have just read the final culmination of that response. Jesus freely gives himself into the hands of what John will call "the world", by which he means all that opposes God, and the Light. He lets them do their worst (and that is a very unpleasant worst indeed). Yet at the end (or perhaps we would better say, when they had thought they had made an end of him) he cries out ***It is finished!*** A cry which is not a cry of despair as other gospel writers have it, but of accomplishment. **The work is done!** And in so doing, Jesus yields up his spirit, his life.

In this work with nails and wood, with a broken body, with spilt blood, Jesus finishes a great work, his life's work. This life's work has been one of preaching & healing & teaching & living the wholeness of God's kingdom, and it was an offering to the Father of life as it was meant to be lived, and indeed in Jesus could be lived. But this offering was met with politics and fear and hate, and so the offering of Jesus life ends with nails and wood. This is the offering of Jesus, the sacrifice he makes which opens up the

way of salvation for us, that he offers his whole life, fully, completely and consistently in his cause. That cause is not himself and his own power; it is to serve his Father, and to call all people back to the Light. The offering and the message were too much for "the world" to cope with, and it sought to destroy it.

But what Jesus offered to God and to us could not be killed off; his life lived *in* love and *for* love, of God and of humankind, could not be disposed of permanently. That is why we will come back tomorrow night, to remember that the story doesn't end where we stopped reading today. When Love pours out everything, somehow there is more to find, and more to give. That is the mystery of salvation, that there is no end to God's love, and no conquering it. That is the story of our Easter journey.

What does this offering of Jesus do for us? Traditionally we would say it deals with our sins; it redeems us; it saves us. But that opens up a whole history of technical theological language, and I won't burden you with that.

Perhaps we could say quite simply that Jesus offering up of his life deals with all that stands in the way of our relationship with God. However the mechanism of salvation works or is described, this offering (which we might be tempted to call a sacrifice) gets rid of any and all obstacles to our communion with God. It provides a new start, a new focus for relationship. Now we come to God not so much with the history of our failures, our brokenness, our sadness or our badness, but instead we come on the basis of Jesus offering of his constant love lived out to the end. We come with what he has already given which **over-writes** anything in us that might get in the way. Because of Jesus offering of his life, there is literally nothing, no *thing* which can separate us from the love of God. The new focus of relationship is **him** rather than us.

So this is not the end of the story, but actually the beginning. As the Australian hymn writer Robin Mann has put it, *Love could only choose a cross, when our life began again.*