

Good Friday

A sermon preached at the joint St Andrew's / Earlsfield Baptist Church service on Good Friday 2024

It's very good to be here today, and for our two churches to be commemorating Good Friday together.

Perhaps the only sadness is that we are comparatively few in number.

At Christmas, churches are full to overflowing, but this pivotal day in the Church's year only ever gathers the truly faithful. The celebration of Jesus' birth is far more palatable than the commemoration of his death.

It takes courage to embrace Good Friday. And yet, without this day there would be no Christian faith. Jesus would simply be another itinerant preacher, lost to history.

We don't have to look far to see why Jesus had to go to the cross. The political and economic struggles of Jesus' day continue unchanged in our day.

Tyrant rulers, more concerned with their own self-aggrandisement than with the good of their people, do all they can to hold on to their power.

While some of our neighbours enjoy a lifestyle that provides them with several homes, others struggle to feed their children. The experiences of guests at the Earlsfield Foodbank, which our two churches support, are often harrowing.

And in the background is the threat that God's creation will be overwhelmed by the exploitation that manifests itself in climate change – with devastating consequences for many of the poorest countries in our global village.

Today, on Good Friday, Jesus goes to the cross, and takes with him the sin of the world, which manifests itself in so many different forms.

In the gap between Good Friday and Easter, the universe is changed. As one of our Anglican eucharistic prayers puts it: 'He opened wide his arms for us on the cross, he put an end to death by dying for us, and revealed the resurrection by rising to new life.'

This cosmic transformation embraces all the horror of the world – the atrocities in the Holy Land and Ukraine, and all who are victims of forces beyond their control. Nailed to the cross, Jesus gathers together all this agony, and takes it with him to die.

The gap between Good Friday and Easter is important. Jesus does not simply get down from the cross, as the bystanders encouraged him to. That would have been too easy, and an insult to all who suffer.

The hours of silence between Jesus' death and resurrection take seriously the pain and the suffering of the world. This is the time when Jesus 'descended into hell'. But in this time in hell, in a way that we cannot comprehend, hell has its power taken from it.

Suffering and death do not have the final word, however devastating they may be. In the gap between the crucifixion and the resurrection, human mortality and corruptibility are overcome, and God's kingdom of justice, peace and integrity is opened to us as the way that leads to eternal life.

This is the faith into which we are baptised. I have to concede that our Baptist sisters and brothers do this far more powerfully than we Anglicans. Being submerged under water, which will lead to death if it is too prolonged, is a much more powerful act than having a little water splashed over your head.

But however we administer baptism, the effect is the same. We are made one with Christ in his death, so that we can share his risen life. This is the promise which allows us to call today 'Good Friday' – and to rejoice when we celebrate the resurrection on the third day. **Amen.**

Rev Jonathan Brown