

Week 5: What the Cross means to me

In the final week of this course, you are invited to take the opportunity to reflect on all that has gone before and to consider our response, to think about what the cross means to each of us individually.

Prayer

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

Notes

St John's East Dulwich

Lent Course 2013

Together at the Cross

Home Study Booklet



Introduction

The Passion narrative is familiar to us all – or so we think. The basic sequence of events, from Jesus praying with his disciples to his death on the cross is, of course, common to all the Gospels. But when we look more closely, we find that there are many differences of detail. Do we know, for example, in which Gospel Jesus heals the ear of the high priest's slave? Do we know in which Gospel Pilate washes his hands before the crowd saying "I am innocent of this man's blood"? And in which Gospel the inscription on the cross, "The King of the Jews", is written in Hebrew, Greek and Latin? Why do these differences arise? In some cases it is because different versions of the story had been handed down over the decades between the actual events themselves and the time that the gospels were written. In other cases details were omitted or added by the authors to make them more understandable to the audience they were writing for. However in many instances, the differences arise because the authors of the Gospels had very different understandings of who Jesus was and how we are to understand his death.

The intention then in this course is to explore these differences, to find out what is distinctive about each of the four gospels and what the authors have to say about Jesus and his death. A comparison of all the Passion narratives in their

ken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

Questions to ask ourselves

1. In what ways does John's account resemble the other three and In what ways does it differ?
2. Jesus's final words are very different in John's account. Do you think this tells us anything about how Jesus sees his death? If so, what?
3. Is there any significance in Jesus carrying the cross himself (rather than Simon of Cyrene)?
4. What is signified by the blood and water flowing from Jesus's side when it is pierced?
5. The women are no longer at a distance but at the foot of the cross. Is this significant?
6. What can we say about the inscription on the cross?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you humbled yourself in taking the form of a servant, and in obedience died upon the cross for our salvation: give us the mind to follow you and to proclaim you as the Lord and King, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be bro-

entirety would be too great a task given the time we have available for this course, so we are going to confine ourselves to the final hours of Jesus's life, starting with the journey to Golgotha and finishing with Jesus breathing his last. It is this section which probably draws out the greatest distinctiveness among the four accounts, particularly in Luke and John.

The course is divided into five weekly sessions. During the first four weeks, you are asked to look at one of the four gospel accounts. Begin by reading it slowly a few times, pausing and reflecting on what you think the main elements are. Then try to determine what makes it distinctive, what the author was trying to say about Jesus. To aid you in this process, there are some questions for you to think about. In the final week you are asked to think about our own personal responses to these texts and "what the cross means to me". At the end of each session, try to spend a few minutes in prayer.

Week 1: Mark 15:21-41

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some

Week 4: John 19:16a-37

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews", but, "This man said, I am King of the Jews."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.' When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did.

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and

Questions to ask ourselves

1. In what ways does Luke's account resemble Mark's and Matthew's
2. In what ways does it differ?
3. What strikes you about Jesus's last words and his attitude to his fate?
4. Jesus forgives those who are crucifying him. Would you have been able to do the same? When have you struggled to forgive? How did you overcome this?
5. Who are the daughters of Jerusalem?
6. What event is Jesus referring to when he says "the days are surely coming"?
7. Is there any significance to the Temple curtain being torn into two before rather than after Jesus dies?
8. Read the account of Stephen's death in Acts 7:59-60. Do you see a parallel?

Prayer

God of life and love, whose Son was victorious over sin and death, make us alive with his life, that the whole world may resound with your praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

Questions to ask ourselves

1. What strikes you in particular about this account of Jesus's last hours?
2. Is it significant that none of the disciples were with Jesus when he died? Why were they absent?
3. What about the women, why were they looking on at a distance?

4. If Jesus knew that he was to die, why do you think he cried out to God asking “Why have you abandoned me?”
5. Have there been times when you have felt abandoned by God? If so, how did that feel?
6. What would you say to someone in the same position?
7. And what about us, are there times when you have abandoned God? What led you to do that? And what helped you to rediscover your faith?
8. As Jesus spoke his final words, what caused the Centurion to recognise that he was God’s Son?

Prayer

Eternal God, in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of our sin and the depth of your love: in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet all that we have and all that we are, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.’ Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, ‘Certainly this man was innocent.’ And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Week 3: Luke 23:26 - 49

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, 'If

Week 2: Matthew 27:32-56

As they went out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." 'The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried

with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Questions to ask ourselves

1. In what ways does Matthew's account resemble Mark's
2. In what ways does it differ?
3. Why do you think Matthew has made these changes?
4. Who do you think Matthew was writing for?
5. What is the significance of the supernatural events (the earth shaking, the tombs being opened) when Jesus dies?
6. Why do the bystanders think Jesus is calling for Elijah?
7. Read Psalm 22. Does this alter your perspective on Jesus's last words?
8. Why do we call the day of Jesus's death Good Friday?

Prayer

God of compassion, through the cross of your Son Jesus Christ you have reconciled your people to yourself. Give us grace to obey you with willing hearts and serve one another in holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen