

Theme for today: *Hold Firmly To Where There Is Grace.*

Good idea; What is Grace? Where do we find Grace at work and how do we hold on to it?

‘Grace in our Christian belief is the free and undeserved favour of God, as demonstrated in what we call the salvation of sinners and the receiving of many blessings.’ A dictionary definition but lacking emotion.

God’s Grace becomes front and central during the season of Easter. Today, Good Friday, we are confronted with the means of God’s saving Grace, the sacrificial death of his one and only son, Jesus. A death to which Jesus was destined and yet was willing to endure, the most extreme example of Grace – death for the sins of others. Still, do we need to feel, with Jesus, with each other?

Today I want to **feel** my way through some of the gracious words of Jesus, spoken from his place of agony upon the cross of crucifixion. My thinking is that these words might give us an indication of how we are to hold onto grace.

We have heard some of Jesus’ last words today from the gospel of John but I will also refer to some recorded in Luke’s gospel and in the Psalm for today. These words have offered blessing and benefit to people of every generation and in every context. So, I urge us all to read and reread these passages and to pay attention to what Jesus said to whom, and think about what understanding we can bring to these words about Grace itself. Obviously, Jesus said these things to particular people close by, but to us they are still remarkable powerful and relevant.

Let us step back in time long before Christ’s death to the period of today’s psalm - 22.

King David, whose life story is recorded in the old testament writes

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

*O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.*

Written long ago, David obviously knew what it felt like to be so alone when even God himself feels distant, remote, even absent. We, today, are hearing those words and thinking of their meaning through a different lens. In the centuries before Christ's coming, these words became familiar to the Hebrew people. They would have known them intimately, memorised them, etched them in their minds and souls as young boys especially, part of their education and understanding of life.

Jesus as a young Hebrew boy would have been no exception, he knew this psalm beginning, middle and ending.

King David may or may not have sensed that these words were prophetic, a speaking forth of the heart and mind of God – truly inspired words relevant at the time of writing, but especially applicable in a future setting.

Jesus spoke them into a new reality, a new season of familiarity and meaning. From the elevation of a murderous cross he started to recite this familiar psalm. He didn't have to finish it because his audience, those who knew their scriptures knew the middle and the end of the song. As we heard read, the song moves from despair and abandonment, scorn and mocking to a clear description of Christ's death, and finally to praise and glory and recognition of the unfailing rescue of God.

So, it is that Christ in, this dark moment of grief and suffering which today we appropriately feel and consider today, moves us forward to promise of joy! Shocking but very evident. Jesus died, yes, but even Jesus in His darkest moment he strained forward to express love and hope the countdown to the resurrection glory, to our celebration on Easter Day.

Good Friday is the day we press the pause button, and allow ourselves to feel for a time, the deep grieve of loss. Loss in all its dimensions, loss in every way we also have ever experienced or can imagine. The whole gamut of disappointment, infused with anger and

confusion, and heartache. How do we find ourselves here? For many this is exactly how they feel today, facing illness, death of loved ones, loneliness and pain. If not on a personal level then we could simply look at the news of today, note the deep suffering of others, especially the people of Ukraine, and then we ask ourselves what has changed? 2000 years ago innocent men and women were cruelly treated and killed despite their goodness, courage and sacrificial love. Jesus met the death of a common criminal, in a country dominated by powerful invaders. – the Romans. Whether broad scale or personal we could all pause and remain permanently hopeless and disheartened.

Look again upon the cross itself, here Christ commanded enough strength to utter, to his mother, **“Woman, behold, your son!”** **Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!”**. Amazing!

And for me, the most profound of words, recorded in Luke’s gospel chapter 23 **‘And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”** Amazing! One of the criminals next to Jesus

pleads, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, **“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”** **Amazing again. Amazing Grace!**

And when 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.

In his dying words Jesus cares for his family, his mother particularly, for those who abuse him out of ignorance and moral depravity, he asks for forgiveness, and promises the criminal a place in paradise. Do I hear us say such grace is beyond me? Beyond my understanding? In our own deadly mortality may we all call out **Father into your hands I commit my spirit** and hold onto that hope and faith that God’s amazing Grace will see us through any period of despair and suffering.