

**Good Friday Willows & Boolaroo '15**  
**Rev. Dr. Kenneth Brown**

Children of Jerusalem were still playing with palm branches as they relived Sunday's excitement. They pretended to be Jesus riding a donkey into the city. Everyone had heard about last Sunday's palm waving, donkey riding, Jerusalem event and hoped to see the prophet from Nazareth. Word had spread that he was in or around Jerusalem. Everyone was eager to to see him... no one yet knew that he had been arrested last night.

Pilate washed his hand in a bowl saying, "You want him crucified... His blood be upon you and not upon me." He then ordered Jesus to be taken away and crucified. The Romans had turned the practice of crucifixion into an art. At great speed 5" nails were driven into wrists, and feet (or heels) as the criminals were hung up as a warning to all others.

First it was the priests who began jeering: "Save yourself if you are the Messiah... Come down from the cross and we will believe in you." The crowd was disappointed. The disciples present wondered if he would now reveal his glory even at this late stage. He could. They knew he could. He only had to say the word. They watched and waited. Surely he would... any time now...

The sky began to turn dark with what looked like an approaching storm. Some ran for shelter. It got steadily darker until it was like mid-night at mid-day yet there was no thunder, and no lightening. It looked more like a desert storm that was approaching. It grew darker and darker. This was earth's darkest day.

Jesus now began his final struggle and faced his greatest fear. Beyond the agony of his body was the agony of his soul as he experienced the hatred, the evil and the darkness, of the sin of the world.

His agony was real. His pain was real. The sin of the world he experienced was real. This was a genuine agony for his soul. Here he experienced the world of sin (the sin of the world); he experienced the darkness of sin; and he experienced the death and despair of sin. His experience was the absolute opposite of his way, his life and his Kingdom.

Sin leads in the way of hatred, disunity, fear and death. From the depths of what feels like as far away from God as one can be Jesus called out, '***My God, My God, where are you, why have you abandoned me?***' This is our cry on his lips. Look where your desire for power and prestige, where your lies and jealousy, hatred and enmity leads. They lead to this... to darkness, to death and despair. "This is your way not mine..." Our way leads him to death – his way leads us to life.

It was over this that his sweat had been like drops of blood falling to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane. He whose very essence and being is brightness itself experiences the hopeless void of deepest darkness and what it is like to be *estranged from God*. The darkness is a fitting symbol of the agonising context of Jesus cry, and his cry reveals a pain, which is God's own pain. No wonder the earth shook and the mighty rocks were split.

Still, even in this evil darkness... the gospel message is *that the light shines!* From the darkness of the cross Jesus continues to reveal God's light, God's way of life and God's love. Even in his great physical agony and deep spiritual anguish Jesus continues to reveal the essence of God as love. Here is the heart of God and the heart of the Gospel. The crowd had come expecting the usual venomous curses and unforgiving abuses to be

spat out at the authorities. But Jesus is not spitting out vile hatred, venomous curses or foul-mouthed condemnation on their heads. To the amazement of all, Jesus is heard praying on their behalf: he prays for the forgiveness of those who had done this to him, "Forgive them Father... they know not what they do." Is there no limit to this man's mercy? And that's the very point! "**No!** There's no limit to this man's or his God's mercy!"

If they priests had hoped to silence him or to show him to be like all the other false prophets they were wrong – he was not like any other *in life or in death*. There are some present who are mocking the Temple Priests saying... "Look... he's praying for you... he forgives you... *ha ha ha!*"

His work was complete. His final words were, 'Abba... Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' And with that Jesus bowed his head and breathed his last.

Confirmation of death was not made by stethoscope, but by a spear through his side The Romans took no chances. **He was dead.**

High Priest Ciaphas learned of Joseph of Arimathea's folly... offering his own tomb for Jesus' burial. He also remembered Jesus' promise to rise again from the dead. He went once again to Pilate (*for the third time in a few hours*) and told Pilate of this. Pilate again despatched Roman guards – to oversee the proceedings and to keep watch over the Nazarene's tomb.

Because of the onset of the Sabbath the women were unable to tend Jesus body with the traditional spices and perfumes. They would observe the Sabbath and return on Sunday morning to perform the final loving act for Jesus.

As the sun began to rise, the darkness of deepest, despair and grief grew in the hearts of Jesus' friends. Only now was a rumour beginning to spread throughout Jerusalem that the prophet from Nazareth had been arrested – while others were saying, "no he's dead."

Together for consolation the disciples shook their heads as they considered the events. Over and over again they repeated the words, 'Jesus is dead, Jesus is dead.' It didn't sound right to their ears. This was so wrong, so terribly wrong. They couldn't take it in. How could it all have gone so wrong? He was supposed to show his glory. Instead, and with heads bowed, they just kept repeating the words, 'Jesus is dead.'