

Good Friday reflection by Rev. Dr. Fei Taule'ale'ausumai

We can never find the right words to say when we approach someone else about the death of their loved one. We are often afraid we might say the wrong thing. When we are the ones in mourning we often don't want to have to go out there and face the crowd of mourners who come to offer us their love and support. I remember when my mum passed away in November 2020 people would say "be strong" fa'amalosi and I would think, be strong for who? For goodness sake my mother has just died, I don't need to be strong for anyone, how does this help you in me being strong? If anything it just made me angry to hear those words from people who really didn't know what they were saying, just passing on another cliché that they have heard said at one time or another. When we experience the death of a loved one sometimes we just want to curl up and hide away and remember, just remember and not have to face reality.

But who was there? The enemies against Jesus. The soldiers, the Pharisees, the crowd of rubber neckers. Also, the two thieves on the cross were there.

Jesus mother was there at the cross so too was Mary Magdalene. The only disciple who remained loyal to Jesus and was with him when he was being crucified was John, the beloved disciple. Mary was the only person in the Bible who was with Jesus from beginning to end, from birth to death. She was with Jesus throughout his whole life.

Mary was with Jesus at the foot of the cross. This would have been the most awful and gut-wrenching experience of her life, to see and experience his crucifixion on the cross. The nails that sent through his wrists could have just as well gone through

her wrists. The sword that pieced his side could have just as well been thrust through her side. Jesus' pain was her pain. That is the way it is with all mothers, all parents. I have known and watched many mothers during my life as a minister, and I have watched such mothers when their children are sick and suffering. It is always the same: the mother totally feels the pain of her child, and Mary totally felt the excruciating pain of Jesus

When we hear the words "it is finished" we often associate it with a child finishing a picture they are working on, or a student finishing an assignment or an exam, a parent finishing baking a cake or preparing a meal for the family. It is finished. Those last moments of your loved ones last breath, often too weak to utter any final words on departure. But here in the passion narratives, Jesus finds the strength to utter 3 words; it is finished as he passes from life into death. Other versions have him crying out "into your hands I commend my spirit."

The final act of completion for Jesus on that Cross, all in that final act of dying Jesus thought of everyone else first putting himself last. His last seven acts of love from the cross were THE SEVEN SENTENCES FROM THE CROSS ARE:

"Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

"Today you shall be with me in paradise"

"woman behold your son ... son behold your mother"

"my god! My god! Why have you forsaken me?"

"I thirst"

"it is finished"

"into your hands i commend my spirit"

Have you ever thought about your death, your last days on this earth? For many of us we just don't want to go there. But we do know that we want everything complete and tidied up for those we leave behind. Have I written my will, have I arranged for my bills and debts to be paid? Keith Quinn reminds us on the television ad as he wheels the rubbish bin onto the road that wouldn't it be nice to have everything in place for that unexpected event of death. That is one thing in life that is certain we are all going to die, it is the when that remains the mystery.

Good Friday is our opportunity to revisit our lives and remind us of the things that are important. Have we taken stock of our priorities? Have we laid aside the things that used to be important and now have become habit and tedium, have we put others before ourselves in our lives that we have sort of missed out the "me" in life. Will you leave this earth content and happy that you have achieved all that you set out to achieve in life? Or will you resent the missed opportunities that came and went but you were too busy avoiding and thinking about that it went on ahead without you?

Every year through the death of Christ we are given an opportunity to rethink, review and renew our life commitments and sorting through what is important and what is tedium. A Catholic priest friend of mine said, "When it comes to the crunch Fei, everything is important but nothing matters." Things that we used to think were a life and death situation really in retrospect isn't actually, we just thought it was. If I didn't actually do that, what difference would it really make? We so often carry the expectations around of other people, what people might

think if this happened or if I didn't do this or that we forget what is actually important for ourselves. Would you do it if their opinion didn't matter?

Today we have read the passion narratives and at the end of this service we will all go home and rest and relax on this Good Friday. Take stock of your lives and remember why we are here today. Why did Jesus have to die? Why did the people have to crucify an innocent man? Because of what others might think? Because they had to choose someone, not my decision but the will of the people.

Don't leave your decisions up to others, today is your chance to review and rethink your life priorities and options, everything is important, but nothing matters. Choose life and life in all its fullness the life that Christ died on the cross for us to have. Choose Christ as the way, the truth, and the life. Choose the life of justice and integrity, honesty and faith, not a simple option, not a cruisy option, but a choice made through passion and death and pain.

It is finished; go now in the peace of Christ. Amen.

Prayers of the people:

Hymn: There is a green hill faraway

Silence

Organ postlude

