

Good Friday Lessons and Reflections  
From the Three Hours' Service at St Mary's, Stoke D'Abernon  
14th April 2017

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 - The suffering Servant (KJV<sup>1</sup>)

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.

As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:

So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

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<sup>1</sup> KJV - The translation is that of the Authorised Version, or King James Version

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Reflection

*Christus factus est pro nobis obediens*

This is what the choir have just sung for us. The Latin words mean,

Christ became obedient for us unto death,  
even to the death, death on the cross.  
Therefore God exalted Him and gave Him a name  
which is above all names (Philippians 2:8-9)

And then our Old Testament lesson:

'He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief....

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.... and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

(Isaiah 53)

Here is the mystery of Good Friday. Why would the most innocent person who ever lived, the most perfect person, the most faultless person, indeed God in human form himself; why would such a person be put to death, indeed be put to death in the most horrible way, as a criminal?

For the Jews encountering Jesus, their folk memory, their heritage, included the ten years in the sixth century BC when they were in exile in Babylon: 'By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept', Psalm 137. The Jews were again under foreign domination in Jesus' day: this time it was the Romans.

The thing about all these Old Testament stories is not that it is dry history - you know, 'The army marched for so many miles and encamped at such-and-such a spot; then they encountered somebody else's army and there was a battle; and all these people - and a great list of them - were killed'; and so on. It's not that kind of thing, although you do get that sort of detail; but there's a moral, spiritual dimension to it.

Why did the kingdom come to an end, with the exile in Babylon, the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 597?

Answer, because the people forgot God and worshipped other gods; and God was displeased, so he punished them. Nothing happens in the Old Testament unless God wills it to happen.

Whatever people do doesn't just have human consequences, but it resonates also in heaven, and God reacts to it.

In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet that we call Deutero-Isaiah - there are three Isaiahs, who wrote the book called Isaiah; 'Deutero' is Second-Isaiah, who was responsible for chapters 40 to 55 - who is identified as an author in Babylon near the end of the Babylonian captivity, so between 597 and 587BC - Deutero-Isaiah prophesied salvation:

'The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.'  
(Isaiah 52:10)

And then we get a picture of the suffering servant, the agent of God, the leader who is coming - maybe, the Messiah. And the interesting thing is that he doesn't look very good.

'...his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: ...  
he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him....'

It turns out that he is a scapegoat, he is what the Jews relied on as part of their sacrificial worship. Since the earliest times, when they made sacrifices to God in the temple, they also confessed their sins, and then they made a special sacrifice, metaphorically loading all their wrong-doing on to the back of a young goat, a kid or perhaps a lamb and sending it out into the wilderness to die.

By killing the poor animal in this sacramental way, they were making a sacrifice, but sacrificing, not themselves, but an innocent animal, which had been chosen to take upon it their sins and die for them.

*Christus factus est pro nobis obediens*

Christ became obedient for us unto death,  
even to the death, death on the cross.  
Therefore God exalted Him and gave Him a name  
which is above all names (Philippians 2:8-9)

'Not what I will, but thy will be done', Jesus said. He was obedient, submissive, like the lamb, the scapegoat. Behold the Lamb of God. But that humble animal is the King, the king of beasts - not the lion.

Hebrews 10:16-25 - a reading from the letter to the Hebrews. (NEB)

Every priest stands performing his service daily and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never remove sins. But Christ offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat at the right hand of God, where he waits henceforth until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are thus consecrated. Here we have also the testimony of the Holy Spirit: he first says, 'This is the covenant which I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will set my laws in their hearts and write them on their understanding'; then he adds, 'and their sins and wicked deeds I will remember no more at all.' And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any offering for sin.

SO NOW, MY FRIENDS, the blood of Jesus makes us free to enter boldly into the sanctuary by the new, living way which he has opened for us through the curtain of his flesh. We have, moreover, a great priest set over the household of God; so let us make our approach in sincerity of heart and full assurance of faith, our guilty hearts sprinkled clean, our bodies washed with pure water. Let us be firm and unswerving in the confession of our hope, for the Giver of the promise may be trusted. We ought to see how each of us may best arouse others to love and active goodness, not staying away from our meetings, as some do, but rather encouraging one another, all the more because you see the Day drawing near.

### Reflection (HDB)

It's strange for us to read all the priestly stuff in Leviticus and in the letter to the Hebrews. You have to remember that for the Jews, just to be in the presence of God would kill you: and God's name, Elohim or Jahweh, we say, couldn't be said, or written. Jahweh,

Jehovah, is written without vowels in Hebrew, so it isn't really a word, it can't be said.

You need a priest to mediate, to be in the middle, between you, the ordinary bod, and the Almighty. Only the priests could enter the Holy of Holies in the Temple. So one way of seeing Jesus, which the Jewish Christians would understand, is that he is our great High Priest, our 'mediator and redeemer' (see 1 Timothy 2:5 and 2 Corinthians 5:18). Because he is both divine and human, he can approach God for us, is the idea. Of course since the Reformation, another way of looking at it is the 'Priesthood of all believers', John Calvin's interpretation. Now that Jesus has reconciled us all, now the fall of Adam has been reversed: 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.' (1 Corinthians 15 - and see also Romans 5). But how did it work - how did Jesus' death bring about that reconciliation with God?

'He paid the price of our sins', we say. We are, if we say things like that, following the Jewish idea, from Leviticus 16, of the scapegoat: it's a very old idea. You load the sins of the people on to an innocent goat, and lead him out into the wilderness to starve and die. So that, if you like, is the cultural heritage behind the idea of a sacrifice for sin. We have to say immediately, as modern Englishmen, that it is an entirely alien concept.

Why would you single out somebody who is patently innocent and punish them for something that other people have done? The answer some people have given, that it is a religious duty, something that God is calling upon you to do, is very difficult for us to accept.

Why would God want something so unjust and cruel to happen? It's interesting, against the background of the suffering servant and the scapegoat, in the Old Testament and the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and their looking for a Messiah figure, that when the chief priests and the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, started to discuss the impact of Jesus' preaching - you'll find this in St John's Gospel chapter 11- after the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, some people went along to the rulers of the

synagogue, the Pharisees, and reported on the healing that had taken place, suggesting that they thought there was something wrong with what Jesus was doing. Wrong, not marvellous. Just as today in some countries, just being a Christian is an offence. All that love - it's subversive, it's blasphemy, it's seriously illegal. Really. That's the flavour of how the chief priests and the scribes, the Jewish leaders, saw Jesus and his mission.

What should the Jewish authorities do? 'What action are we taking?' they said. 'This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone like this, the whole populace will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and sweep away our Temple and our nation'. It was potentially a threat to the Jewish nation. It would look to the Romans as though they were revolutionaries - like the Zealots, terrorists, upsetting the peaceful balance of power. So they brought Jesus up before the Governor, before Pontius Pilate.

By doing this, the Jewish leaders were affirming their obedience to the Roman overlords. They were acknowledging publicly the limitations of their authority under the Roman occupation. Poor old Jews: Egypt, Babylon, Persia - all those had conquered them: now Rome, the greatest of all the empires. Rome was greater than the USA is today, and the Emperor was, in the Romans' eyes, a god. So the Jewish - and Christian - belief in one true God, was itself a challenge to them. Just as today Donald Trump appals us in many ways, but has to be respected for his power, so 'we have no king but Caesar' represented the realpolitik of Jesus' time.

But even so, both the Jews and the Romans respected the rule of law. Still today, if you study law at Oxford, you will study Justinian, the great author on the Roman Law. And when you get into legal practice, you will find that many of our greatest jurists are, or were, Jewish.

John 18:15-25 Peter's Denial of Jesus (in Jerusalem) (NEB<sup>2</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> NEB - the New English Bible (1970)

Jesus was followed by Simon Peter and another disciple. This disciple, who was acquainted with the High Priest, went with Jesus into the High Priest's courtyard, but Peter halted at the door outside.

So the other disciple, the High Priest's acquaintance, went out again and spoke to the woman at the door, and brought Peter in. The maid on duty at the door said to Peter, 'Are you another of this man's disciples?' 'I am not', he said.

The servants and the police had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and were standing round it warming themselves. And Peter too was standing with them, sharing the warmth.

The High Priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about what he taught.

Jesus replied, 'I have spoken openly to all the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews congregate; I have said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask my hearers what I told them; they know what I said.'

When he said this, one of the police struck him on the face, exclaiming, 'Is that the way to answer the High Priest?' Jesus replied, 'If I spoke amiss, state it in evidence; if I spoke well, why strike me?'

So Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the High Priest.

Meanwhile Simon Peter stood warming himself. The others asked, 'Are you another of his disciples?' But he denied it: 'I am not', he said.

#### John 18:38-19:16 The Trial before Pilate

Pilate said, 'What is truth?', and with those words went out again to the Jews. 'For my part,' he said, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release one prisoner for you at Passover. Would you like me to release the king of the Jews?' Again the clamour rose: 'Not him; we want Barabbas!' (Barabbas was a bandit.)

Pilate now took Jesus and had him flogged; and the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and placed it on his head, and robed him in a purple cloak.

Then time after time they came up to him, crying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!', and struck him on the face.

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, 'Here he is; I am bringing him out to let you know that I find no case against him'; and Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. 'Behold the Man!' said Pilate.

The chief priests and their henchmen saw him and shouted, 'Crucify! crucify!' 'Take him and crucify him yourselves,' said Pilate; 'for my part I find no case against him.'

The Jews answered, 'We have a law; and by that law he ought to die, because he has claimed to be Son of God.'

When Pilate heard that, he was more afraid than ever, and going back into his headquarters he asked Jesus, 'Where have you come from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. 'Do you refuse to speak to me?' said Pilate. 'Surely you know that I have authority to release you, and I have authority to crucify you?'

'You would have no authority at all over me', Jesus replied, 'if it had not been granted you from above; and therefore the deeper guilt lies with the man who handed me over to you.'

From that moment Pilate tried hard to release him; but the Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend to Caesar; any man who claims to be a king is defying Caesar.'

When Pilate heard what they were saying, he brought Jesus out and took his seat on the tribunal at the place known as 'The Pavement' ('Gabbatha' in the language of the Jews). It was the eve of Passover, about noon.

Pilate said to the Jews, 'Here is your king.'

They shouted, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!'

'Crucify your king?' said Pilate.

'We have no king but Caesar', the Jews replied.

Then at last, to satisfy them, he handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Mark 14:66-72 - a reading from the Gospel according to Mark.

Meanwhile Peter was still below in the courtyard. One of the High Priest's serving-maids came by and saw him there warming himself. She looked into his face and said, 'You were there too, with this man from Nazareth, this Jesus.'

But he denied it: 'I know nothing,' he said; 'I do not understand what you mean.'

Then he went outside into the porch; and the maid saw him there again and began to say to the bystanders, 'He is one of them'; and again he denied it.

Again, a little later, the bystanders said to Peter, 'Surely you are one of them. You must be; you are a Galilean.'

At this he broke out into curses, and with an oath he said, 'I do not know this man you speak of.'

Then the cock crew a second time; and Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he burst into tears.

## Reflection

When we hear again the story of the ruthless pursuit of a conviction - or rather, of a condemnation to be crucified - by the Jewish leaders, there is that nagging temptation to blame the Jews - to blame them for being God-killers.

What should the Jewish authorities do? 'What action are we taking?' they said. 'This man is performing many signs. If we leave him alone like this, the whole populace will believe in him. Then the Romans will come and sweep away our Temple and our nation'.

And then here is the interesting bit: one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, said, 'You know nothing whatever; you do not use your judgement; it is more in your interest that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation should be destroyed.' (John 11:49-50)

And the gospel explains that he was dying for the nation – he would die not for the nation alone, but to gather together the scattered children of God. The logic of it, seen from today's standpoint, is very strange. In the eyes of the High Priest, if he endorsed Jesus' mission, then everybody would follow him, and that would be seen as a challenge to their occupation by the Romans, who would then clamp down hard, sacking the Temple and dispersing the Jews: '... the Romans will come and sweep away our Temple and our nation'. But the solution, according to the high priest, is for Jesus to be turned into some kind of scapegoat, for him to be punished, albeit he has done nothing to deserve it: and that will divert attention away from the Jews as potential challengers of the authority of the Romans.

Well, if you think about it, that's quite a bit different from what Isaiah and Leviticus before him (see Leviticus 16:20-22) have been talking about, with a scapegoat. It's not sacrificing a representative sinner or even an innocent animal to God, but it is some kind of representative sacrifice to the occupying power, to appease Rome, not God. Perhaps Caiaphas had his sights set on earthly politics, rather than any kind of reconciliation with God.

Caiaphas had been the one to talk about one man being sacrificed for the sake of the nation; but it wasn't some kind of sacrifice like Abraham and Isaac. Caiaphas didn't think he was advocating the death of God. We should be careful about blaming him.

Jesus went through three trials: a preliminary hearing in front of Annas, Caiaphas the High Priest's father-in-law; then in front of Caiaphas himself, and then in front of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. There was also a rather more friendly encounter, not really a trial, with King Herod, to whom Pilate sent Jesus as Jesus was from Galilee, over which Herod had devolved authority.

And I think that, properly understood, these three trials should be regarded as a full part of the torture that Jesus suffered. I don't know how many of us here have been involved in a trial in court in one way or another, but I'm sure that we can all empathise with anyone who has to be a defendant, in the dock, whether or not they are in fact guilty.

It is an ordeal, an ordeal that they have to get through. There might be some distinction between trial in a purely secular context and an issue in a religious court. We don't really have religious courts, except to decide recondite questions about what can be put on memorials in churchyards, and whether pews can be taken away and replaced by more or less ghastly blue upholstered chairs. The consistory courts don't really hear cases of blasphemy or sacrilege any more.

But then in Jerusalem we had a court, or a series of hearings, all in one cause, all about allegations that authority had been usurped - divine and civil authority. 'Are you the king of the Jews?' was the question - when 'King of the Jews' also had the connotation of Messiah, of a leader who was going to bring the Jews out from their captivity. And the whole of Jewish history is bound up with their relationship with God, with religious observance. When the Jews turned away from God and worshipped Baal and other gods, whatever they were, then God was angry, punished them and visited on them famines and hardships in captivity, slavery.

Difficult, if you pause at that point, really to parallel this in today's world. I suppose there's a temptation to have a nod towards those countries where blasphemy is a crime - indeed is a very serious crime, which might attract the death penalty. It's certainly true in Iran and, in certain circumstances, in Pakistan. It's perhaps interesting to compare the way we look at that today, with the way it would have been looked at in Biblical times.

In Biblical times the Law, the law of Moses, the religious law was at the bottom of the civil law as well. Obviously some things, like 'Thou shalt not steal', or 'Thou shalt not bear false witness; thou shalt not

commit adultery', are quite easily understood under civil law as well as being religious imperatives. But what about 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me'? The quintessential religious commandment: the Shema Israel, a purely religious law.

I wonder today whether we ought to look again at the Ten Commandments - or rather, at the Sermon on the Mount. Is it really the case that our moral choices are really only dictated by utilitarian considerations - what will tend to increase the sum of human happiness? Pilate asked, 'What is truth?' What is the standard that we can judge things by?

For instance, how ought we to look at the chemical weapons attack in Syria and President Trump's attack in response? Is it 'an eye for an eye'? And what is the truth? Russia disputes all the leading claims about the chemical disaster. What if they are right that it was a stray shot which hit a chemical weapon stored by ISIS? Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life.' But are we - are our leaders - taking any notice?

You might say that Jesus' teaching, his counter-intuitive commands of love, are really aimed at us as individuals, rather than at affairs of state, where there is no alternative to realpolitik. But look at what happened to Peter. I think that is the right way to put it - what happened to him, not, look at what Peter did. He was overwhelmed by the power of the mob. He could see a sort of trial going on, but it was not in a courtroom with silence in court and a learned judge hearing cross-examination and arguments from powerful advocates for and against the accused.

He saw a mob of fascists - or rather, a mob of normal people who had been whipped up into a frenzy of inhuman hatred - and he was afraid. If he had said he was with Jesus, he was afraid they would bay for his blood, or kick him to death - or, what they went in for in that world, they might stone him.

Again, the mechanics of what they did in those days is almost too horrible even to think about. And again, it still happens. In Iran when they stone a woman 'taken in adultery', as the story in St John's

gospel chapter 8 describes it, they bury the victim up to the neck, so the stones just hit her head. And her hands are buried.

If you think about it, that was what happened when they put people in the stocks in this country. Whatever they threw, hit the person in the face.

And Jesus said, 'Turn the other cheek': even on the cross, he asked his Father to forgive. 'Father forgive: for they know not what they do.' Do we know what we do?

### Matthew 27:45-56 - The Death of Jesus

Darkness fell over the whole land from midday until three in the afternoon; and about three Jesus cried aloud, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?', which means, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

Some of the bystanders, on hearing this, said, 'He is calling Elijah.' One of them ran at once and fetched a sponge, which he soaked in sour wine, and held it to his lips on the end of a cane. But the others said, 'Let us see if Elijah will come to save him.'

Jesus again gave a loud cry, and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. There was an earthquake, the rocks split and the graves opened, and many of God's saints arose from sleep; and coming out of their graves after his resurrection they entered the Holy City, where many saw them.

And when the centurion and his men who were keeping watch over Jesus saw the earthquake and all that was happening, they were filled with awe, and they said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'

A NUMBER OF WOMEN were also present, watching from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and waited on him. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

## Reflection

On Tuesday in the Spiritual Cinema for Holy Week some of us watched the film, 'The Passion of the Christ', directed by Mel Gibson and first shown in 2004. We watched it in St Andrew's Church. For two hours we are shown in the most graphic detail Jesus' trials; his being 'scourged', or flogged; then dragging, half-carrying his enormous timber baulk of a cross, with the help of Simon of Cyrene, who was portrayed as a fit young man who just happened to be around and was pressed into service, and then the crucifixion itself.

Perhaps sometimes when we hear the Passion Gospel, and Pontius Pilate says he wants to free Jesus, and he offers the Jews that, of course, he'll punish him a bit, by flogging him, we think that Pilate is offering to let Jesus off lightly. Six of the best, a smacked bottom, that's all.

The Saudis, among their catalogue of bestial punishments, still regularly flog people. What is less often reported is that this is often fatal in itself. Medical opinion is that any more than 40 lashes is potentially lethal. Again, in Mel Gibson's film, we saw what it did to Jesus. Of course he couldn't carry his 150lb cross: it was pretty remarkable that he could even stand up.

By more or less casually ordering that Jesus be flogged, Pilate showed that he certainly wasn't a humane man - the contrast that some people draw between Caiaphas the High Priest, the zealous and cruel religious leader - reminiscent of the Ayatollahs in Iran in recent times, perhaps - and Pilate as the decent chap pitched into a furious conflict which offered a serious threat to public order, that comparison - is contradicted by Pilate's order that Jesus should suffer flogging.

For what? Pilate said he was satisfied that Jesus had done nothing wrong. But still he was willing to order him to be horribly beaten, beaten in a way that might well have killed him anyway, even if he hadn't been crucified.

## John 19:25-27

But meanwhile near the cross where Jesus hung stood his mother, with her sister, Mary wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Jesus saw his mother, with the disciple whom he loved standing beside her. He said to her, 'Mother, there is your son'; and to the disciple, 'There is your mother'; and from that moment the disciple took her into his home.

### Reflection

This is unbearably sweet and gentle. This is the God of love. 'Stabat mater dolorosa', his mother stood there grieving. And Jesus did what he could to care for her. He gave her 'the disciple whom he loved', perhaps St John the author of the Gospel which bears his name, to be her son after he had gone.

I started with the mystery of the sacrifice of Jesus, his being like the Jewish 'scapegoat'. But the idea of substitutionary atonement, paying someone else's fine, as it is sometimes called, doesn't seem to me to be consistent with a loving God.

But I think that the real miracle, in this bleakest time, when it looks as though God is being killed, even God - and so we might doubt whether it is really God, whether all the wonderful things about salvation and eternal life which Jesus promised, are really true: 'What is truth?' we might say, along with Pontius Pilate - the real miracle is that in Jesus' suffering we see that it's not true that God is just a blind watchmaker, a creator who, having created, leaves his creation to evolve, and get on by itself.

As the centurion said, 'Truly this was the son of God'. Jesus was that; but he did everything that we do, he suffered everything we might conceivably do. That's presumably why he died in such a terrible way. He died 'to the max': you couldn't die more.

It's certainly an answer to people who suggest that the explanation of the resurrection is that Jesus didn't die. Roman crucifixions always killed their victims. You have probably read the medical

explanations. People crucified always die of asphyxiation eventually. But today, on Good Friday, we can't think of the happy ending. We have to reflect on how bleak it must have felt, how hopeless. I can't just say, as an academic, philosophical idea, with Nietzsche et al, that 'God is dead'. I don't think those philosophers are talking about Good Friday.

On that first Good Friday, God was dead: but it means that he cared for us. This is what 'greater love hath no man' really means. No blind watchmaker. God is involved - to the max, however dreadful a fate that brought for him. He is for us; he is with us; however low we fall, Jesus went lower.