

Good Friday

In the four gospels, Jesus speaks seven times from the cross. Each saying reminds us of why he – and we – are here. Remembers part of his life and work.

He has always been vulnerable. Fragile as flesh and blood can be. A Saviour in the body of a baby, who grew up to be one of the poor of the earth. Which is why the poor, the sick, the children, were never afraid to come to him. Blessed are the poor, he said. Blessed are the hungry, the mourners, the persecuted. The vulnerable.

To be vulnerable was his mission. Long before he was arrested, he warned the disciples that, 'The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ... and killed.' When he was arrested, tried, stripped, beaten, and crucified, he did nothing to resist.

Now, he says, 'I am thirsty'.

To be vulnerable is his mission. To suffer; to give his life. When he says 'I am thirsty', they offer him wine on a sponge. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, he doesn't drink it, because at the Last Supper, he'd said that he wouldn't drink wine again until he drank it new in the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom has not yet come. But for John, the Kingdom has come. God's will is done at this moment, and so he drinks.

Because he is vulnerable, all his life, Jesus has been torn between passion and doubt. No sooner was he baptized, than the devil tried to corrupt him in the desert. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he was attacked by doubt – could he bear what was going to happen? Even on the cross, he cries, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' The devil has not given up yet.

Strangely, when it comes to other people, Jesus never seems to have any doubt. He has always known what God wants for his people. So his stories have been full of shepherds who found lost sheep and women who found lost coins and fathers who found lost sons. Even when he has not known what to pray for, for himself, he has always known how to pray for other people. In the towns and villages he has prayed for God's forgiveness for Israel. For the eyes of the blind to be opened and the ears of the deaf, and for the lame to walk and the unclean to be clean. Now, he knows how to pray for the people taunting him. 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

Just as he has always known how to pray for other people, so he has always known how to bring them together. All through his ministry, he has told people, Love one another. Forgive one another. In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself. At different times, he has made families of his disciples, of the people in a synagogue, of a crowd on a mountainside, of Romans and Canaanites, the people of Israel and people everywhere. He has built families on the gospel of God's love, and taught them to see

God in each other. Now, he looks down on Mary and John and says, 'Woman behold your son. Behold your mother.'

And just as he has always known how to bring people together, he has always known where he was leading them. He has prepared them for the time when they will see the Son of Man coming in glory, seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven, to gather the elect into the Kingdom of God. And now his vision of heaven does not desert him. When the thief says to him, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,' he replies, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'

Time after time Jesus has prayed, and struggled, and doubted himself, and raged at Israel, and every time he has ended up by putting himself into God's hands. In the desert he said to the devil, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test,' and he took that saying to his own heart. He taught the disciples to pray, 'Our father in heaven, let your name be glorified, let your kingdom come, let your will be done.' 'Not my will, but yours be done,' he said last night in Gethsemane. So in his last moments, after all his fears and doubts, Jesus says, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.'

'It is finished.' 'It is fulfilled.' *Tetelestai*. It's one word, in Greek, meaning so many things. Resignation. Relief, maybe. Jesus has spent his life with us – in all our suffering and struggle and our fragile faith. Now he is leaving us, letting us go, disentangling himself from our love and hate and fear and fascination, our tormented human embrace. For a moment, Jesus hangs between life and death, between earth and heaven, and for the first time in his life he is free.

Tetelestai. There might be a note of apprehension, there. Everything Jesus has said and done and meant since the day he was born has been leading up to this. Now he is handing over to us. Everything depends on what we do next.

Whatever *tetelestai* means on Jesus's lips, in our ears it should sound like fear. It is finished. We have destroyed a man, a wholly good man, a man filled and overflowing with God's spirit. We have rejected God. This is the moment when we know what it means to be cut off from God. We are alone in the universe, without meaning; without love. It is finished.

We should be terrified. If we're not terrified, we don't understand what we've done.

And yet. In this blackest of black hours, we have one thing left. Jesus had faith: in God and in us. He believed that his prayers, his teaching, his gospel of love and his vision of heaven would change us. He believed that when we understood what we had done to him, we would be horrified and shattered, and beg for forgiveness, and turn back to God with such passion that nothing would ever separate us again.

It is in John's gospel that Jesus says, It is finished. John, for whom the Kingdom has come and God's will is done even as Jesus hangs on the cross. John for whom Jesus's

vulnerability is not only his greatest weapon but his glory. And so, would we be wrong to hear in *Tetelestai* a note of satisfaction? Of triumph even? Of trumpets sounding on the other side?

Amen

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