

Lent sermon series for St Peter's, Limpsfield
Good Friday, 10th April 2020, 3pm

**A journey through our humanity,
with Jesus**

Rev James Percival

Eight: **Loss** *Crucifixion*

Gospel: Passion - John 18:1-19:37 [& Burial - 19:38 - 42]

in the Live Stream Eucharist

(see <https://www.stpeterslimpsfield.org/live-streams.html>)

*in a time of national and global emergency precautions
to resist the coronavirus pandemic*

For those of you who find that the best sermons have a good beginning and a good ending, as close together as possible, I have good news on this solemn day.

Though the preaching of the cross has been and is central to the witness and life of Christians - as Paul wrote to the Corinthians - '*foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved... the power of God...and the wisdom of God*' (1 Corinthians 1:18, 24), personally, I struggle for words on Good Friday.

Our first hymn, *There is a green hill*, takes us through some of the different understandings of what is happening as Jesus is crucified: saving love, sacrifice, bearing the weight of sin, victory, redeeming, bringing us back to God.

For me on Good Friday there is a sense that God is doing something, something dreadful and important is happening, but there's nothing much that I can do about it today, other than to notice and to offer myself to join in from the sidelines.

This points to the first important 'Loss' of Good Friday. The loss of our independence, our precious right to choose for ourselves which can easily topple over into the root sin of pride where, rather than offering our own gifts to the way and will of God, we just choose for ourselves, thank you very much. And of course this is particularly relevant and close to home for us all this year, in the midst of the coronavirus lockdown in our country and across most of the world, when we are not allowed the liberty to choose to do lots of things that we normally take for granted.

In the topsy-turviness of the Christian faith, though, this basic loss can actually be a gift to us. As we will sing at the end of this service: *When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.'*

Our best position at the cross is to lose the pride that leads us to depending only on ourselves; and instead to take a humble and grateful position at the love of Christ for us all - including each and every one of us.

We can notice lots of losses in the Passion gospel according to John which we have heard today.

Judas loses his soul.

Jesus loses his liberty - though not his freedom, it seems, as he frightens Pilate.
Peter loses his cool and lashes out.
Malchus, the high-priest's slave, loses his right ear.
Peter also loses his courage and his self-confidence, as he denies Jesus, despite his bold assurance that he wouldn't.
The crowd loses its senses, as crowds often do.

Pilate loses his calm and his control.
Though Jesus offers her another one, Mary loses her son.
Jesus loses his clothes and ultimately, his life.

Jesus has taught us before that *'those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it'* (Mark 8:34-5).

As we are invited again today - not forced, never forced - to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

I reflected earlier in this sermon series that it is best for us to be real with God, not to pretend (which doesn't work anyway); to let our darkneses be dark; and so today, we let our losses also be real. Even ones that we can't face alone. And especially those ones. Bring them to the cross and place them there.

And we find ourselves - sometimes against our will and better judgement - depending on God again instead of ourselves, and opening up that channel of 'sorrow and love flowing mingled down' to us (*When I survey...*).

Our Archbishop Michael Ramsey taught of 'the eternal question mark of Calvary' standing always in judgement and mercy over our human schemes and achievements - especially when we forget to invite God in on them, and offer our gifts and our wills to the work of that kingdom which is very much in this world, but not of it.

Our hymns often say it most memorably [*When I survey / O sacred head, sore wounded*]:

We can find uniquely at the cross again *'love so amazing, so divine'* that continues to sustain and inspire all our human loving in the midst of the loss and pain that we all face.

*'That I may fight befriended, and see in my last strife
To me thine arms extended upon the Cross of life.'*

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We adore you O Christ, and we bless you
For by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.