

Dear all

This is my first year, since starting my ordained life, that I have not taken part in a Good Friday Walk of Witness. It all seems very strange.

But one bizarre thing that has characterised, I think, every walk I have been involved in, is the often heated discussion beforehand. This tends to centre on 2 points: should the walk be a silent walk, and should it end with the message of resurrection.

On the former, I am very much of the silent mind (with the exception of readings and hymns/songs). The counter-argument is does the world want to see a bunch of Christians looking miserable. But I believe it is a powerful witness for a large group of people to be walking in absolute silence. There's plenty of time to catch up on how the family is after the walk!

The second discussion is, in my mind, more of a problem. Do we want to end in despair – with a crucified body being taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb, or do we want to celebrate the fact that death is not the end? Do we want to offer instead a message of hope? (Especially given that we might have an audience we wouldn't have on Easter Day).

My gut feeling is that it is actually good to stay in the darkness for a while. This world is a dark place at times – something exacerbated by the consequences of COVID-19. Good Friday proclaims that God shares that darkness. He has truly lived it. It is perhaps good to remind ourselves of that. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves not so much of the words of that lovely spiritual *Were you there when they crucified my Lord*, but rather *Was HE there when YOU...* (answer, always, YES!).

Here is a recording of Mahalia Jackson singing the song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4B72Ff3KAY>

or another version, with stills from the Mel Gibson film *The Passion of Christ*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPmGcridHQ8>

A reflection by Mary Elizabeth Todd:

Were You there...

I was told that I needed to take up my cross and carry it.

It didn't worry me.

What trouble could that be?

I had seen crosses made of brass hanging on the walls  
Of small country churches.  
I had been amazed at the majesty and workmanship  
Of gold crosses encrusted with pearls and rubies.  
I had seen small white crosses

Standing on the roadsides,  
And I had worn a tiny gold cross.

I could do that... pick up my cross and walk.

But the Cross I was given wasn't one of those I had seen.  
It was rough new timber.  
I lifted it to my shoulder and it was heavy and damp.

I said no problem...still sure of myself.  
The first few days,  
I called out and said look at me.  
But then, I had to say no when I wanted to say yes.  
The cross became heavier and heavier;  
My hands were sweating and it would slip from my shoulder.  
Splinters cut into my hands.  
I picked it up over and over again.

I tried again to pick it up...just had to find the trick of carrying it.

I found that I tripped over the small stones.  
My feet could not lift over them.  
I thought how easy it had been.  
I thought about all the reasons I picked up the cross;  
No one told me how heavy it would be.

I was ready to ditch it...no one would ever notice.

I had seen others go to churches and smile  
Sing songs of praise and go out the doors  
To say yes to things they shouldn't.  
No one said to them, "Where was their cross?"  
I wondered if it was that or they never really heard the question.

I laid the cross down gently...I could not walk away.

I sat down by the roadside.  
My back hurt from the weight.  
My hands bleeding from the splinters and cuts,  
My feet were stone bruised and tired.  
I buried my face in my hands.  
Then I heard Jesus, as he washed my wounds and hurts,  
"Why did you think you must do this alone?  
I said I would be with you."  
He pulled the splinters from my hands and they healed as he said,  
"Here, let me help you carry this.  
I have been there and know the way."  
He wiped the tears from my eyes, and said,  
"Come and rejoice; it is a beautiful day."  
He smiled and I smiled.

We picked up the cross...I knew I would follow Him anywhere.

For a completely different take on the Crucifixion story, here is a meditation from *The Dream of the Rood*, an 8th century telling of the crucifixion of Christ in the style of an Anglo Saxon Hero Saga, told by the cross itself:

Many years have gone – yet still I have it in remembrance – since I was felled upon a forest’s edge and wakened from my slumbers. Strange foes seized hold upon me and wrought me to a pageant and bade me lift aloft their wretched men. Men bore me on their shoulders, till they set me on a hill; enough of foes, fastened me there. Then I beheld the Lord of all hasting with mighty, steadfast heart, for He would fain ascend upon me. Yet might I not bow down nor break, against the word of God, what time I saw the compass of the earth tremble and shake. All those foes might I lay low; yet firm I stood.

The Hero young – He was Almighty God – did off His raiment, steadfast, stout of heart. With valour, in the sight of many men, He mounted up upon the lofty gallows, when He would fain redeem mankind. I trembled when the Hero clasped me. Yet dared I not incline unto the ground, nor fall upon the face of earth, but I must needs stand firm. As a cross was I lifted up; I bore aloft the righteous King, the Lord of heaven; I dared not bow me down.

They pierced me through with darksome nails; on me the scars are manifest, the open, woeful wounds. Yet dared I not work harm to any one of them. They mocked us both together. All bedewed with blood was I, gushing from the Hero’s side, when He had yielded up His spirit.

Many a dire affliction I bode upon that mount; beheld the Lord of hosts stretched out grievously. Darkness had compassed about with clouds the body of the wielding God, that lustrous radiance. Wan under heaven shadows went forth. And all creation wept, wailing the slaughter of its King. Christ was on the cross.

Attached to this post is a copy of the [Walk of Witness](#) liturgy that Churches Together in the Deepings would have used this year.

One of the most beautiful Good Friday pieces of music is *Stabat Mater* by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. The title comes from its first line, "Stabat Mater dolorosa", which means "the sorrowful mother was standing". The hymn is sung at the liturgy on the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows. This is possibly the best recording I have come across. The conductor, Nathalie Stutzmann, has previously sung the alto role – here taken by one of my favourites, Philippe Jaroussky. The revelation to me, though, was the soprano Emöke Barath. I have never before heard so much passion in a recording.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzOmPUu-F\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzOmPUu-F_M)

For those who would like a more modern take, I love the version by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt - *Stabat Mater* for Choir and String Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ne1Azm4Ezpc>

I thought I'd add a link or 2 to some different styles of reflective music:

Graham Kendrick: Meekness and Majesty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDGF3c8tsko>

Don Francisco: Too small a price

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYmucQyOBuA>

Here is a song by master-guitarist Phil Keaggy telling the Passover Story (with a small contribution from his grandchild – very appropriate as the telling of the story is a family affair, and the youngest has a contribution to give too!).

<https://www.facebook.com/PhilKeaggy/videos/628233174433820/?v=628233174433820>

Using the images of the Stations of the Cross designed by Eric Gill situated in St Alban's Church, Charles Street, Oxford, several members of St Barnabas Jericho pray the Via Dolorosa for Holy Week.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyNp0WsOpE4&fbclid=IwAR3V6h2k1PowouYjolku0Y9ULQhaMhPaJKJm1B2tK1B4gig5wH3hcLTLW4s>

Services from Peterborough Cathedral:

[https://www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/watch-again.aspx?fbclid=IwAR2vSQ\\_WdX9nRJu1wY4Fg-iWI\\_kvh9yz4WKjlvoSpQ8Jm\\_t4toYI\\_pWfW9s](https://www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/watch-again.aspx?fbclid=IwAR2vSQ_WdX9nRJu1wY4Fg-iWI_kvh9yz4WKjlvoSpQ8Jm_t4toYI_pWfW9s)

Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark