



So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. **17** Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). **18** There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

19 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: *jesus of nazareth, the king of the jews*. **20** Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. **21** The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, 'Do not write "The King of the Jews", but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews.'

22 Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'

23 When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

24 'Let's not tear it,' they said to one another. 'Let's decide by lot who will get it.'

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said,

'They divided my clothes among them

and cast lots for my garment.'^[a]

So this is what the soldiers did.

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman,^[b] here is your son,' **27** and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Welcome to our CCK service this morning. It should be a joyous time with the school holidays beginning and our children's club beginning this week, but, instead, it is an occasion of deep sorrow as we grieve the loss tragic of one of our precious little ones, Louise Fowler, snatched off the rocks at Betty's bay by a freak wave just last Friday. This is a family we all hold dear and we cannot begin to imagine the road of sadness that now lies ahead for them. They shoulder a terrible burden and we must give them all the help we can as they struggle with it. That process has already begun and the strength and caring solidarity of Christ Church members in speeding to Betty's bay and being there for the Fowlers has once again illustrated for me, what a special community this is, we are family and we are there for each other. So, let's pause and express this shared commitment in a moment of silence as our hearts go out to Ryan, Kim and Claire.

In today's reading, we are invited to stand with another family facing the unimaginable pain and suffering of death.

Jesus, his mother Mary, and one of his closest friends and disciples, John, who was like a brother.

In every death of a loved one, we face our own personal struggles, fears, grief and loss. We question how can a good and loving God, allow suffering, tragedy, and death itself, to occur? How can a God who is all powerful and in control, not intervene to save us from such suffering?

We also experience the darkness of that which seeks to steal, destroy and kill the LIFE we've been created for. At a deep level, we know that we were never meant to experience the pain and consequences of sin, suffering and death. Only love.

The powers that seek to destroy the life that God created us to know and share are anti-kingdom. Powers against which we alone are powerless to overcome.

At the cross, we see the fullest expression of all that is anti-kingdom, and anti-life coming against Jesus.

We call that which is anti-life: evil or demonic, and at the cross we see how these powers collude to kill the ONE who is the source and mediator of all LIFE - JESUS.

Faced with the mounting support for Jesus and the Holy Spirit's power at work through him establishing God's reign of justice and shalom with us, in us and through us, the religious authorities and political powers form an alliance to crush him.

How would they stop this Rabbi who had the power to forgive, heal, liberate, and re-humanise the oppressed and oppressor?

Together they bring their weapons - the Jewish law, the religious courts, political trial, the army, capital punishment.

In Luke 23:34, Jesus cries out from the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'

Jesus experiences the agony of death. It's not just a physical and emotional experience. It's spiritual too. The power of death has the potential to extinguish the union we have with Life - God himself.

Jesus cries out from this place of union - 'Father Forgive Them'.

As if his life depended upon it. As if our life depended upon it.

In death we, like Jesus, are faced with what could really destroy us. Just as he taught his disciples to love even their enemies, he now fulfils it as the greatest enemy, death, comes to destroy him.

Forgiveness is the doorway to life now and to come... forgiveness is the heartbeat of the kingdom which even death cannot beat. Forgiveness is the fullest expression of love for God, ourselves and others.

Jesus submitted himself wholly to love even with his last breaths.

But before he closed his eyes and breathed his last, he looked to those his Father had given him - his family and his closest friends. The ones he had entrusted to continue sharing and spreading the Good News of his Kingdom.

'When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman,[b] here is your son,' 27 and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.'

Seeing and knowing their grief, fear, pain, suffering, confusion and the darkness that would encircle them, Jesus reminds them that they are his family.

Echoing Matt 12:46-50

46While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 47Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

48He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. 50For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Those who have been with him throughout his life, his trial, his persecution and now his death - they are his family, one family.

Together, they will return home shell-shocked, fearful, confused and questioning everything.

They will search for answers together. They will listen to one another's deepest fears and disappointments. In the listening and sharing, they will find themselves re-living what they learnt from Jesus and what they experienced.

In *The Living Reminder*, Henri Nouwen, reflects:

"One of the mysteries of life is that memory can often bring us closer to each other than can physical presence...when we remember each other with love we evoke each other's spirit and so enter into a new intimacy, a spiritual union with each other... [In John 16:7] Jesus reveals to his closest friends that only in memory will real intimacy with him be possible, that only in memory will they experience the full meaning of what they have witnessed."

When we remember who Jesus is, his Spirit re-members him in us - his body on earth.

As one body, we bear witness to his love as we bear with one another.

As Paul reminds the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 13:7

7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

As he breathed his last, the power of death seemed to have triumphed.

As the centurions checked by piercing his side and blood and water flowed, the power of death seemed to have triumphed.

As the disciples took him down from the cross, embalmed him and laid in the tomb, the power of death seemed to have triumphed...

Until the third day...

His broken-hearted, broken-spirited disciples, discovered his tomb empty. His body gone...

Then first sightings and then more sighting... until the news had spread...

He was alive!!!

Death may break our hearts and even crush our spirits, but it cannot quench God's promise of resurrection - life beyond death - now and to come.

From the grave, Jesus comes to us... full of the fire of his Spirit... brimming over with love for us... to bind up our broken -hearts, our crushed hopes, to cast out our fears and to furnish our minds with hope and health.

Unrecognisable to eyes shrouded by grief, Jesus appears an intimate stranger in our grief, recognisable to our ears before our eyes as he calls our name with tenderness and compassion.

Today, as we struggle and reflect on what has happened to Louise and as we pray for Ryan, Kim, Claire and their families and friends, may we hear Jesus calling us each by name afresh, re-minding us that we are his family here at CCK and together we will bear all things, believe all things, hope all things and endure all things for the sake of those who will be bowed low with grief today.

May we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith - whom death could not defeat and who stands beside the Father, Risen and Victorious, interceding on our behalf.

May we recommit ourselves in loving service to Jesus - THE FULLNESS OF LOVE, who has called us to share in and make his love known and to contend in love for his life and kingdom to be made manifest upon the earth...

May we avoid the trite explanations - reminded that instead of explaining our suffering God shares it. So let us enter into this journey of sharing one another's sufferings.

Each year in the Methodist tradition, congregations consecrate themselves afresh as disciples of Christ. In this public dedication, Christ is re-membered through his body the Church as they choose to offer themselves to his work and service in self-giving love.

May we make these words of dedication are own today:

Wesleyan Covenant Prayer (1755)

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;

put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,

exalted for you, or brought low for you;

let me be full,

let me be empty,

let me have all things,

let me have nothing:

I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things

to your pleasure and disposal.

And now, glorious and blessed God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.