

Come and Follow Me

GOOD FRIDAY 2011

CHRIST CHURCH (PARISH) CHURCH, FREDERICTON

CANON JIM IRVINE, GUEST HOMILIST

1ST REFLECTION

The Summons

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?



When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. The hour of our gathering has been set by the evangelists. And while some of us are observing the Watch by the Cross for the first time, many of us have been here before.

We gather as many did generations ago – those who followed Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem. Some gathered along the streets and some at the Gate of the City while others joined in the wake of the procession that led outside the City Wall to the place of crucifixion.

Some attended out of curiosity with a blood lust for public execution society has witnessed in our history. Others approached with caution, fearing accusations and incriminations.

Today we approach the death of Jesus with devotion and scepticism, contrition and cynicism. Many Christians avoid the Day and busy themselves for the resurrection. Some, knowing the story, spring ahead

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to a brighter Day.

Our familiarity with the story helps insulate us from the events that will make up the next three hours. We are acquainted with the account of Mark and of the other evangelists as well.

The seven phrases of Jesus are well known to us and none of us will hear words of Jesus we have not heard before. The hymns we will sing are for the most part familiar with the season of Lent and of Good Friday. There are no surprises here.

The rhythm of the Service with prayer and silence, meditation and praise is a pattern of Anglican spirituality that we know well. Over a half century ago I sat with my parents as John Vernon Young guided us through the darkness of the Day. Later, my parents and I sat at the feet of Arthur Caulfeild as he gave voice to the Gospel Account. While I was a student at King's, I attended St Paul's Church on Barrington Street when Harold Nutter – then Dean of Fredericton – was the guest homilist who guided us.

My ministry as a priest in this diocese has given me the opportunity to be a voice in the darkness of a Friday afternoon in several parishes. And today I am honoured to be here for my fourth visit.

On each of these occasions I have noted that while voice was given to seven familiar phrases of Our Redeemer, beyond the phrases each journey stood on its own. Each one was different. While Golgotha was visited each year, a different path was found that led the faithful to the summit.

Each one present heard something different, some with greater clarity than others. Some stood closer and had an opportunity to hear something that was missed by another.

This afternoon I invite you to join me as I journey to Jerusalem to witness Jesus' Passion again. We will trace the path of the great labyrinth of Notre Dame Cathedral in Chartres. You may be familiar with it. Others might know of its replication at Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco. The pattern is printed on your Good Friday flyer.

The medieval pattern found at Chartres provided the faithful of the day to journey to the Holy City of Jerusalem. While pilgrimage was part of the spiritual awareness of the faithful, the Church moved to enable

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pilgrimages to be taken when journeys were prohibitive and unsafe.

The Labyrinth was seen as *le chemin de Jérusalem*. And that is how we will approach it today. We will trace the path and pause from time to time, listening for the words Jesus expresses in the dark that surrounds him... and will surround us. We will begin here, in Fredericton and travel on this road to Jerusalem where we will approach Golgotha.

As this is our pilgrimage we will find that as in any large group travelling together, some will rush on ahead while others may pause to reflect. We will each travel at our own pace but we will advance towards a Temple.

That Temple is mirrored by a work of God on another hill from where Jesus looks into the depths of man's heart. The cross provides a vantage point that reveals our human condition. With his arms outstretched, Jesus is on the Throne of the cherubim made with carpenter's hands.

Reigning from his Throne, we have an opportunity to see how close he has come as God to the condition that weighs heavy for each of us. Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and to be praised and highly exalted forever;

And blessed is your glorious, holy name, and to be highly praised and highly exalted forever.

Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, and to be extolled and highly glorified forever.

Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne on the cherubim, and to be praised and highly exalted forever.

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, and to be extolled and highly exalted forever.

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 29-33

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2ND REFLECTION

Father forgive them. LUKE 23: 33-34

Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?



Our pilgrimage only begun, we pause. An echo of deferred absolution reaches our ears. Some hear it clearer than others. Some don't catch the phrase at all. There are some who are close enough to have heard Jesus' petition that they are able to confidently bear witness to others of us who are incredulous.

News spreads among our number, "Father, forgive them," he said. As darkness overtakes Golgotha and the City, as winds pick up, fear sweeps over those close to the summit. Some of us have walked faster than others and have reached the summit. The wind brought eddies of dust and some shelter their faces with their arms – an attempt to keep the dust from their eyes. No longer sheltered by the leeward side of the Hill the firmament of Heaven, some are met with the confusion of the moment.

Could they have heard it correctly? The Nazarene pleads with His Father. "Father, forgive them." This is a needful event in the redemption of creation and what these Temple Officials have clamoured for cannot be held against them. What the Governor resolved as he sat in judgment cannot be held against him. What these centuries of Rome effect on this height outside the City wall cannot be held against them. "They do not know what they are doing!"

The Works of the Lord extend to the cutting of a New Covenant and

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in these dark hours needful events that accomplish God's purpose warrant absolution. All of Creation lends its voice in a chorus echoed by the Angelic Host. Voices cry out from occupants of crosses covering this place. The wind muffles cries at once blasphemous and pious. The conversations amongst those standing guard are added while orders shouted to insult and inflame find Latin and Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in a linguistic anthem. Angelic voices? Perhaps.

And while Jesus' words, "Father, forgive", fall on our hearing, cheeks are moistened – gradually. A drop at a time. Tears? Rain? All of nature joins in the orchestration and as Jesus' cheek is washed by a salty tear, water from above the heavens begins to wash as well and anticipates his death, and anoints his body for burial.

All of Creation ministers to Jesus, and us as we approach and find ourselves closer perhaps than we would like. "Father, forgive" – those in costume and vesture different from our styles today – but not forgiveness for them alone. Forgiveness for us as well. And forgiveness for those whose actions have left a legacy of confusion and doubt.

Carved in the stone behind the stone altar of Coventry Cathedral, left in ruins after the Germans rained a firestorm on an unsuspecting city in the Second World War is the phrase Jesus gave expression to: "Father, forgive".

Father, forgive the decision of Winston Churchill not to warn the City of Coventry. Father, forgive those who did not rush to intercede the sacrifice of such as were at jeopardy in this City. Jesus' pleading speaks to those close at hand and far away. Jesus' pleading speaks of needful things where the cost of redemption is high. As tears and rain intermingled on Golgotha, tears and rain ran together as firemen and constables and members of the Home Guard dug through rubble and bricks after the night of bombing. In both instances darkness and cries and oaths ran together. They still do.

And, as you hear Jesus' plea, Will you let his love be shown?

God does not avoid needful things in the accomplishing of his redemptive love. It is His love that finds expression in what we might otherwise wish to avoid or evade. As each nail pierced Jesus' flesh we are filled with revulsion and we would avoid it, and often do. Suffering is intolerable and we fail to see the needful, purposeful components of this New Covenant that is being cut.

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Over the chalice Jesus told his disciples, “Drink this, all of you: this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” His words of Institution gave liturgical meaning to the meal he shared with them the night before. Christian iconography has recognized that what was anticipated on Maundy Thursday was actuated on Golgotha – where many have imagined another Chalice collecting his blood.

Jesus’ resolve in being obedient to the Father helps us understand Him better. We catch a glimpse of Jesus’ love. Will you let his name be known? Will you let his life – a life intent on our redemption and the promise of forgiveness inherent in this New Covenant – will you let his life be grown in you and you in me?

Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, and to be sung and glorified forever.

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, you heavens; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 34-38

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3RD REFLECTION

Today you will be with me. LUKE 23: 39-43

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?



With parched lips Jesus assured another close by, “Today you will be with me.” As cries of agony rose to the vault of heaven, as felons writhed in pain from their various perches dotting the heights of Moriah, one accused assured another. For the countless crucified on this fifteenth day of Nissan the prevailing apprehension of each one was his isolation and forsakenness.

While they died together, each one died alone.

The singularity of each final breath was sufficient to reveal the greatest terror of emptiness, about to be swallowed up by a great void. Remembrance was enough to ask for – could a felon ask for more? In the anonymity of death in this place, men would be forgotten for eternity, their names vaporous, their lives ignored.

More than remembrance, Jesus’ assurance provides more than what the felon might have either asked or imagined. “Today you will be with me.” Together, they will continue a journey that both amazes and confuses. Jesus by his words has penetrated the deepest fears of each one of us.

In the darkness that embraces him, Jesus’ agony resonates with all the powers of the Lord. The Sun that shone and gave warmth to the flesh exalts in his Passion. The fullness of the Moon of Nissan – that heralded the Passover observance exalts in his Passion. The stars of heaven, the

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orbs Gustav Holst captured in his symphonic harmonies exalt in his Passion. For all of the grandeur of the sympathy of the created universe, the isolated felon is bereft.

But he is not alone.

Though we walk through the valley of the shadow of darkness we are reminded that we are not bereft.

Circumstances for the felon as well as those circumstances engaged by each of us in this pilgrimage are not avoided or denied or dismissed. What the felon was assured of – what we are assured of – is that we journey through this valley. And we are strengthened by a rod of assurance, by a staff that comforts us: “You will be with me... I am with you...”

Some of us hear the phrase clearer than others of us. Some may have thought that they misheard, and whisper to someone nearby what it was that was said. The wind may have taken the phrase away too quickly. We may have let our attention lapse at a critical time and we may have missed it.

As we have continued on our pilgrimage some of us have distanced ourselves from the scene and we missed the phrase entirely. For some this may be the phrase – the only phrase – that they catch in their hearing. Possibly it is sufficient for some to know this assurance that Jesus first gave the felon is also something we need to hear.

As stars penetrate the darkness, so Jesus’ words plumb the depths of our souls. As certainly as the sparks of light blaze beyond our reach in a star-lit sky, so Jesus’ compassion finds expression that gives us courage. For all that threatens and overwhelms us, our isolation is as painful as was the approaching extinction of this unnamed felon. The incalculable cosmos dwarfs in contrast to our fear.

Jesus penetrates our fear and is as close as the rain and dew that exalts in his glory. The felon allowed the closeness of Jesus in this untimely darkness. We have much to learn from his fear – and his courage. Perhaps it was the wind. Some would say it was. The wind may have been the basis of the exchange between the two crosses cloaked in darkness. But some witness heard and then repeated the exchange. “Remember me...” “You will be with me...” Many did not hear this exchange and Luke is alone in finding ink.

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For those that may have heard the exchange, they caught words of courage the felon expressed as he was vulnerable in his darkest moment and the assurance provided by Jesus that assuaged that fear. When we are defenceless and most vulnerable Jesus penetrates our darkest moment and gives us hope. Throughout his ministry, Jesus invariably embraces the weakest with compassion. He is no different in this hour on Golgotha. And he is no different in our hearing, today. He reaches out – not to praise us for our meagre successes – but to reach beyond our bravado and touch us – each of us – where we most need to be restored, redeemed, healed, made whole again.

And you, will you leave yourself behind if he but calls your name? In the darkness, caught in a vortex of fear and confusion, will you remain mute on this pilgrimage and not speak out into the darkness, “Remember me”?

And having heard the assurance of Jesus’ companionship as we continue to tread a labyrinth, will you care for cruel and kind – and for that never be the same?

Bless the Lord, all you powers of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, sun and moon; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, stars of heaven; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all rain and dew; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all you winds; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 39-43

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4TH REFLECTION

Behold your Mother... Behold your Son. JOHN: 19: 26-27

Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?



We continue our pilgrimage. The path lies before us. If we have courage, we will endure and come to the heart of the matter. Tracing this labyrinthine path will secure our goal: Jerusalem on a darkened day. This is no maze. We will not get lost. There are no false turns, no cul-de-sacs. We turn away by times, only to find that our path to Jerusalem and the heights of Golgotha follows a closer route. We avoid crevasses and ravines but advance inexorably toward not simply a Cross, but Jesus on that Cross.

Each of us has come from different places and for each of us circumstances are different. But for all of our differences, our feet tread a common path. We may travel at a different pace. Some of us need to take the hillside slowly. Others are more sure-footed.

The darkness impedes our advance but it does not discourage it. The closeness of the clouds, dark and angry is threatening. The attendant wind sometimes takes away our breath. But we continue, some solitary, some with someone whose hand we hold tight.

And Jesus' words are carried again in the dark and on the wind... "Behold... your Mother... your Son..." Those that hear it are alarmed. They look about. Some have not cleared the precipice and cannot see the place Jesus occupies. Those that can, see a veiled woman supported in the arms of a man.

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Chilled flesh is shrouded and the visage of the attendants is lost to us. Huddled, High Priest and Temple attendants wrap themselves – protection from the dust and wind, the incessant wind. Soldiers huddle too, wrapped in their capes and turning their faces away from the wind. Mary and John as well huddle together. Conversations are private. And each conversation focuses on the concerns that have gathered here. The fire of each heart burns intemperately. Jesus, struggling with his pain sees his Mother. “Behold your Mother... Behold your Son...”

The elements that provide the weave in this pilgrimage are predicated on love.

And the quality of that love – its depth and character – is best understood as we catch a glimpse of Jesus’ death. This is His “Passion” we say. That which is closest to his heart and that which finds expression is His love. Ever the Rabbi from Nazareth, he has much to teach us and we have much to learn. And Golgotha is a teaching moment – always.

Jesus instructed his disciples that when they prayed, they should address Divinity with the intimacy found in a family. We are drawn into a family of God where we use diminutives that still seem inappropriate and over familiar. But the metaphor is not ours. While we might elect a more formal arrangement in keeping with the grandeur of transcendence Jesus shows us a better way. The immanence of God’s glory allows God to come closer to us than we are willing to be close to Him.

The metaphor is built on a relationship.

And that relationship is wrought on an anvil of love in the darkened smithy of Golgotha. “Behold your Mother... Behold your Son...” Mary and John are no longer acquaintances. Beyond friends, Mary and John are in a familial relationship that provides a pattern for us.

This is a relationship that challenges our current assumptions. This is a relationship that finds its endurance in the patterns we are familiar with from our own experience. We know what parental responsibilities are and what constitutes a relationship with a Father and with a Mother. The relationship is indissoluble – even death cannot overcome the bond of relationship. Distance cannot overcome it either. Whatever the circumstances, the relationship between a parent and a child – of any age – cannot be broken. As the relationship between parents and children cannot be broken, neither can the relationship among siblings be broken.

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That personal relationship of endurance and recognition is what Jesus invites his followers into.

Standing at the foot of the Cross, accepting Jesus as our personal saviour is shallow when we fail to recognize the relationship in a larger relationship – living out the veracity of the metaphor Jesus engages. How can I say that I love God, we are reminded, whom I have not seen, when I do not love my brother whom I have seen?

Jesus' brilliance does not dim and the darkness is penetrated as we are drawn by example into a Kingdom. Jesus reigns from a crudely fashioned throne. A nail head fills his palm in place of an orb and in the other hand, in place of a sceptre he grasps another nail head. King of Israel indeed! And in this Kingdom he fashions a relationship.

In this Kingdom, will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?

In this Kingdom, will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Bless the Lord, fire and heat; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, dews and falling snow; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, nights and days; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, light and darkness; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 44-48

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5TH REFLECTION

Why have you forsaken me? MARK: 15: 33-34; MATTHEW: 27: 46

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?



We have come to the heart of the matter. We have traced a path that has led us to the heart of the Labyrinth. We have not drawn this close to Jesus until now. Our path has drawn us closer by times, and it has distanced us as well. We have approached Jesus obliquely but the path of the Labyrinth has not permitted us to avoid the scene.

As evasive as we have been, as cautious as we have been – we now stand on terrible ground made holy by the occasion.

The closer we have drawn to the heart of the matter, the chill in the air gave us pause. The darkness is chilled and we are left with our own impending dread as we inch towards the space Jesus occupies on this height. The elements and seasons join in the exaltation on this Day. Ice and cold, frost and snow bite into the feverish flesh of the Lamb of God, proud from his scourging.

Lightening escapes from the oppressive cloud overhead and thunder resounds in the Kidron Valley. The Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives and Golgotha echo as mountains clapping their hands, exulting in this dire scene. Roman Guards give darting looks of concern and wrap themselves more securely in their ample cape. Those that clamoured for Jesus' death clutch their robes about their throats – as we raise our collars and gather our lapels with frigid fists.

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Cautious, we pause and hear – with a clarity that we are unfamiliar with – “Why have you forsaken me?” The indictment is clear. Disciples have fled, but the moment catches them. Those that have revelled in past healings and miracles are absent, but the moment catches them. Those that paved the way with their cloaks, waving branches of palm and shouting Hosannas are no longer in sight. His accusers and executioners while present, restrain themselves. The indictment is not addressed to them – Jesus’ words are spoken into the darkness. God is accused.

We are confused by Jesus’ accusation. He has revealed his forsakenness and penetrates our hearts. This is an epiphany we have not expected to find in this dreadful place. Taking on our flesh and living these years among humanity he has come closer to the human condition that we might have either asked or imagined. Better had he not come this close.

Our bravado falls away when we recognize that we have no hero here. The secondary dreads of our lives, the financial insecurities, the health fears, the social and political uncertainties fall away. Our failures pale and our successes evaporate when we see mirrored in Jesus’ phrase our deepest dread.

These hills are familiar with dread. Moriah generations earlier saw another Son, promised by God, ascend this height not bearing a cross but a bundle of faggots for an altar sacrifice. Abraham accompanied by his Son, his only Son, Isaac. “Father,” said Isaac, “here are the faggots and the brazier, but what of the sacrifice?” Abraham’s answer was quick, “God will provide the sacrifice my Son.”

Only when Isaac was bound and laid on the bier did the sense of being forsaken begin to overwhelm the youth. The question was written on his face as he looked at his Father. “Why have you forsaken me?” No defence seemed at hand; no one would intervene!

The Angel of the Lord stayed Abraham’s hand and a ram caught in a thicket was found and was sacrificed in Isaac’s stead. On this dark afternoon there is no Angel of the Lord staying a crucifixion. The reprieve of the Patriarch did not interrupt this needful event... “Why have you forsaken me?”

Will an Angel of the Lord prevent our abandonment? Have we forgotten the reality of our Baptism so quickly? Has it been so long ago and have others failed to remind us of the promises that God made? You

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are a child of God, and so am I. By adoption and grace we have been chosen by Divinity and instructed to address Divinity in a familiar way – assuring us that what is accomplished on Golgotha touches and heals our deepest dread.

Jesus calls us by name. He has searched our hearts. He has set aside what we are most proud of and has touched our broken lives where we most need to be touched. His touch has given us hope and courage. Jesus, the evangelist John reminds us, “took on flesh and lived among us and we saw his glory, glory befitting of the Son promised – full of grace and truth.”

Grace and truth are encountered on Golgotha. We are witnesses to this revelation. The challenge is ours – a challenge to participate in this redemptive work by letting the blinded see if he but calls your name? And as for those that are reluctant to draw close to glory, will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?

Bless the Lord, ice and cold; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, frosts and snows; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Let the earth bless the Lord; let it sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, mountains and hills; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 49-53

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6TH REFLECTION

I am thirsty. JOHN: 19: 28-29

Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?



Appetites are a constant companion and our appetites make demands that are relentless. The discipline of our pilgrimage this afternoon makes demands that give us some discomfort – seldom are we constrained by a period of three hours. We are used to interrupt even a busy day with a break that allows for our gratification.

Again Jesus gives voice from the Cross and some catch his phrase, “I am thirsty.” These are familiar words and on the surface, clear. A Roman Guard misunderstands Jesus’ intent and dips a sponge in cheap wine and raises the libation to Jesus’ lips. Cracked and dry from the day’s torment, the sour liquid would sting. Moistened lips perhaps – but thirst was not slaked.

Retracing our steps on the familiar path, some pause to reflect on Jesus’ phrase. Some barely heard it. Some didn’t hear it at all. His lips moved imperceptibly and his tongue was thick and dry. The wind carried his words. “I am thirsty.”

As life ebbs away in this wasteland all of creation responds with life springing from the bowls of the earth. Natural springs erupt and flow from a height and wash a hillside as water begins to sing in brooks and join water courses. Rivers glory in their journey to the sea where tides and waves join a rhythm of life and renewal.

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Life supported in fresh water and in the seas – titanic monsters of the deep and whales join in the chorus while birds of the air – song birds as well as the carrion birds of Golgotha – join their voices and sing.

But while creation erupts with springs and brooks and streams and rivers, Jesus was looking beyond a beverage. The Roman Guard responded out of his personal experience and while he demonstrated compassion, he nonetheless mistook a moment of human appetite.

Before Jesus' arrest he shared a meal with his closest disciples. The Twelve joined him in an upper room and during the course of the meal, "Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is *my blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins*." We rely on the evangelical record here. Jesus does not lose sight of the redemptive activity that he is engaged in.

Jesus went on to add, "I tell you, I will never *again* drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus anticipates an opportunity when we all – by extension – will be with Him in the Kingdom. It is not a solitary libation, taken in isolation. It is a celebratory gathering and he yearns for the imminent coming of that opportunity. While he expresses his thirst, he nonetheless knows when he will quench it.

We have an insight here. We have a glimpse of Jesus' impatience for the realization of the Kingdom. We discover Jesus' intemperance as he is on the threshold of a New Age. The page is about to turn and in the turning Jesus is thirsty for the Kingdom... for the New Wine flowing in the Messianic Banquet... for the fellowship of God's New Creation – you and me – as we gather with him. What we find at the altar rail in this holy place is but a pale anticipation of what Jesus thirsted for. The Communion we share as a Faith Community is promised as a greater Feast enjoyed by all those who are incorporated in Christ by Baptism.

Jesus' thirst goes beyond a sponge. His thirst is not for a cheap wine of Roman Soldiers on duty. He gives expression to a deeper reality and those who are beneficiaries of his ministry know full well his thirst to gather us at his Table. In his Kingdom we are promised a seat. Some care where they might sit. James and John may sit at his left and at his right. No matter. We will have a seat. Lepers will have a seat and others unclean in our eyes, they will have a seat. They will sit with us.

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Will you kiss them with the kiss of peace? Will you welcome others that Jesus' fellowship may extend beyond us and include others?

Jesus' expressed thirst demonstrates his desire to be in a Table Fellowship with you – and me. We are called to exalt in what His Passion – His Love – means in our lives. May we have the freedom to drink deeply of His new wine. New wineskins await us. The longing He has is a longing we share.

Bless the Lord, all that grows in the ground; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, seas and rivers; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, you springs; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, you whales and all that swim in the waters; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all birds of the air; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Song of the Three Holy Children vv 54-58

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7TH REFLECTION

It is finished. JOHN: 19: 30

Will you love the “you” you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?



Drawing away from the Cross we follow a path that leads us to the edge of the height and to the descent. Others have passed this way before. The path is well worn. Included in their number may have been the youth, Isaac, in an earlier day. A Midrash suggests that Isaac descended the mount following a different route from that of his aged father. Relieved that his ordeal was over, the Son of Promise may have breathed a sigh of relief.

As we near the edge we catch a phrase – “It is finished,” we hear on the wind. Turning, we see Jesus on the Cross, less robust – his life draining. The scene mirrors that on the Temple Mount where lambs are being slaughtered for the Passover. We pause and reflect.

Deliverance is the theme of this Day in the month of Nissan. Moses and the Children of Israel sacrificed lambs and with the blood stained doorposts and lintels. Jesus’ blood stained a lintel that held arms wide to embrace a delivered People.

The quickening of remembrance – *anamnesis* – sustained the Children of Israel year by year and generation by generation. Their deliverance continues as an expression of the efficacious love of God and it continues as a yearly remembrance. Fredericton doorposts and lintels no longer are stained with blood but households keeping Passover are delivered from Egypt. And a past event is operative as a current reality

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in their observance.

With the faint words, “It is finished,” we hear that the New Covenant has been cut – that it is accomplished. The quickening of our remembrance – *anamnesis* – will sustain us at every opportunity. Our deliverance is seen as an expression of the efficacious love of God we see in Jesus’ Passion. This is a needful event.

Sheep are herded to the Temple and men wrapped in tallits gather on the Temple Mount exulting in God’s Passover. Priests employ themselves in the sacrifices that will telescope time and bring the past into the present as candles are lighted and bitters herbs are shared and roast lamb is consumed.

And while sheep are herded on one hill, on another hill the Lamb of God – the *Agnus Dei* – is sacrificed and wood is stained and you and I and countless others gather exulting in God’s Redemption. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?

Children of Abraham gather on the Temple Mount and Children of Abraham gather on Golgotha – we have travelled there this afternoon, telescoping time and placing our feet on a path that has led us on a pilgrimage.

“It is finished.”

We have been incorporated into this redemptive event by our baptism. And while it is finished, it has only just begun. The Covenant has been cut. The Covenant has been made. We have been incorporated into a Promise.

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will

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remember their sins no more.”

The time has come. The Covenant is made. The Promise is this: forgiven, God will remember our brokenness, our sinful condition no more. We are restored, redeemed, made whole – healed.

Our pilgrimage enables us to remember what many of us have forgotten. Caution, fear and apprehension have clouded our memory. Cautious to enter tomorrow’s fresh opportunities we are fearful and apprehensive to live our lives fully as we were meant to be.

“It is finished,” says Jesus. And while it is finished, it has only just begun. A page turns for us as servants of the Lord. As soldiers and servants to our life’s end – and it’s completion – we are encouraged to love the “you” you hide if he but calls your name?

Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?

Bless the Lord, all wild animals and cattle; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all people on earth; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O Israel; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

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8TH REFLECTION

I commend my spirit. LUKE 23: 44-46

Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around, through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?



We are approaching the end of our journey. For the darkness, the path is familiar – we have passed this way before. We retrace our steps as we continue to reflect on the journey. Some of us are weary. Others of us find our spirits energized. The return path seems shorter somehow – perhaps because of the familiar landmarks.

Our steps seem more deliberate somehow, more pensive. Another phrase finds us out – “I commend my spirit.” The task begins, the task is ended. From the beginning to the ending Jesus was steadfast. He may now rest.

The veil of the Temple is torn and as though scales fall from our eyes, we see with clarity that alarms us. That which was kept from us is now disclosed. That which was hidden is now revealed. The epiphanies of the Passion of Jesus reveal such love as we have never seen.

The needfulness of Golgotha in the redemption of God's people has been carried in our hearts to Jerusalem and back. Our hearts have been examined. Our terrors and our fears have been displaced. As Jesus was lifted up indeed we were all drawn to him. Assurance has birthed conviction that has encouraged us, given us heart. Jesus now breathes his last and speaks for the last time into the darkness of an oppressive

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Day – “I commend my spirit.”

For all of his God forsakenness, Jesus knows that there is no other end. For all of the confusion that beset him as he drifted in and out of lucidity, his restlessness can only find quiet in God. The prayers and accusations and blasphemies of Golgotha brought redemption to a furnace that enabled salvation to be wrought on an anvil established from the foundation of the world.

Where else do we have to turn in our darkest moments when fears begin to erode our resolve? In the silence of the dark night of our soul we know by our pilgrimage today that we are not alone. What darkness there is need not cripple or paralyse us. Jesus entered a darkness that enveloped him and that darkness did not overcome him.

We have been rescued from Hades and saved from the power of death. We exult in a deliverance that reaches beyond Egypt, beyond slavery, beyond be a stranger in a strange land. Jesus has accomplished his task. Our fear of the darkness is transformed into exultation.

Our response is enduring thanksgiving. The pilgrimage we have made today is a beginning. Thankful at all times and in all places, we are challenged to exit the Labyrinth and this Nave and enter a world that lies before us, with enduring thanksgiving. Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around? Will you be a blessing to others who are lepers and unclean? Will you touch lives too fearful to enter this holy place – who will never rub elbows with others in a pew? Will Jesus' sight on Golgotha and touch and sound in you affect lives needful of the assurance we have witnessed this Day?

With Jesus, we commend our spirits, turning a page and finding a new beginning. All that we accomplish we find as the fruit of our enduring thanksgiving. We seek not success but to reflect the compassion of God that will displace the apprehension in others' lives.

Our *best* is only the superlative of our *good* and we know that no man is good... even Jesus disdained the honorific. Those that know that they are holy exult Jesus in his redemptive activity. Those who are humble in heart sing praises.

Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

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Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. For he has rescued us from Hades and saved us from the power of death, and delivered us from the midst of the burning fiery furnace; from the midst of the fire he has delivered us.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.

All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods, sing praise to him and give thanks to him, for his mercy endures forever.

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