

St Botolph's Church Worthing

Good Friday

Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12. Hebrews 4: 14-16, 5: 7-9

Father Roger Walker

There can be few more explicit prophecies in the Old Testament than Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant. Listen to these quotations from just thirteen verses of the Old Testament:

- *He was pierced for our transgressions*
- *We like sheep have gone astray and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*
- *He was led like a lamb to the slaughter*
- *He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death*
- *My righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities*
- *He poured out His life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors*
- *He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors*

This says so much of what God was going to do for us through the death of Jesus and reflects some of the things that were to happen to Him. Then we heard another great prophecy of Jesus' death – Psalm 22, which includes words that speak of actual events that were to happen to Jesus – think of the Passion story and then listen to these quotations from the Psalm.

- *They gape upon me with their mouths*
- *I am poured out like water and all my bones are out of joint – my heart also is like melting wax.* Quite a description of the suffering of crucifixion, where the physical pain of a body stretched out on the cross was combined with the ever-present feeling of suffocation.
- *My tongue cleaves to my gums ('I thirst', cried Jesus)*
- *The council of the wicked lay siege against me*
- *They pierced my hands and feet*
- *They stand staring and looking upon me*
- *They part my garments among them and cast lots for my vesture*

No wonder Jesus cried out the opening words of this Psalm 'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' when He was hoisted up on the Cross. But notice too that, half way through, the tenor of the Psalm changes – suddenly there is praise for God and for what He does. It ends up with a great affirmation of what God is going to do after Jesus' death and reads 'The heavens shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, whom the Lord hath made'. That's a description of us keeping Good Friday today.

After Isaiah's prophecy and the prophetic words of Psalm 22 we hardly need to hear St John's account of the Passion. It is all as God foretold long before in the prophecies we heard – and many more like them. Good Friday is inevitably a day of sadness and emotion, but it is also a day when God changed everything for us and our Reading from Hebrews reflects what is

important for us today: Jesus is our great High priest and the function of a priest is to offer sacrifice for sin. In the Old Testament these sacrifices were offered continually because the people were not confident that they were truly forgiven – this has changed for us because Jesus is for us both High priest and perfect sinless sacrifice. He deals with our sin by taking upon Himself the punishment that our sin deserves and opens the way to God for us. He became – writes the author of Hebrews – the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him. We believe in Jesus as the sinless Son of God: we try in our earthly lives to obey, and this faith and obedience brings us the confidence in our salvation. That, by what Jesus has done – taking our sins upon himself and opening the way to eternal life – he has saved us. This means He has delivered us from the power of sin and death. That is the message of Good Friday, with its prophecies and account of Jesus' passion, that we are free. By faith in Jesus we need no longer feel oppressed by sin or fear the death of the body – we are saved.

AMEN

Father Roger Walker

25.3.16