

Brancepeth Sermon

30 March 2018 – Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13–53:12; John 18:1–19:42

*Open our ears, O Lord,
to hear your word and know your voice.
Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills,
that we may serve you today and always. Amen*

Jesus, on the cross, says ‘It is finished.’

‘It is done’

‘It is completed’

‘I have finished my work.’

And then he bows his head, and dies.

This is Jesus, the carpenter’s boy.

He knows how to finish work.

How to bring it to completion

How to hand it over to its owner – all done.

He has made something complete,
something beautiful.

Though he had, as Isaiah said,
no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him,
his work is finished and perfected;
it is everything it should be

But *what* has he done?

What has he made?

What is he handing over, now, to his Father
as he bows his head,
and breathes out one more time –
before silence falls?

More than we can grasp;
much more than we can grasp.

We scarce can take it in –

But it was, it is, a gift for us
and one we're meant to unwrap,
so here is just one strand, one aspect of what Jesus made.

Jesus has placed himself in his Father's hands.

He has handed himself over to God.

He has *trusted* God, with his whole heart,

With his whole life.

He trusted God last Sunday, when the crowds were with him

when he was carried into Jerusalem

on a wave of affirmation,

when his sense that he was called to do God's work

echoed back from the calling crowds,

and he knew it would have echoed from the stones

if the crowds had fallen silent.

He trusted God on Tuesday, when he entered the temple,

When he felt God's righteous judgement

expressed through him,

and he threw out the moneychangers,

and he turned over their tables,

knowing this was his father's house, that he was *home*.

He trusted God on Wednesday,
when he was teaching the crowds,
and they were lapping up his words,
and he could see God's work in the expressions on their faces
and know that he was doing God's will,
speaking what he heard the Father say.

He trusted God on Thursday, at supper with his friends:
the friends he knew that God had given to him,
the friends he had seen grow in faith,
grow in knowledge, grow in love –
who reflected back to him the love that he had shown them
so that he could see God's work in them.

But then, he trusted God today.

He trusted God on Friday.

He trusted God when his friends *fled*,
betraying and abandoning him,
his work among them come to nothing.

He trusted God when the crowd turned,
all sign of his message on their faces gone,
all sign of what he had given them erased,
and nothing left but a mob's brutality.

He trusted God
when the keepers of his father's house
the house where he belonged, where he was at home
rejected him,
and handed him over.

He trusted God when he was taken out of the city,
his city – Jerusalem –
no long borne on a donkey
but bearing the means of his own torture and execution.

He trusted God when justice failed him.

He trusted God when all that was left was mockery and pain.

He trusted God
even when he no longer felt God's presence,
when he could no longer bring his father's face to mind;
when there was no longer anything
but agony and suffocation,
and no felt consolation to set against the pain.

He trusted God when all the props of his trust
had, one by one, been snapped,
when *nothing* made trust easy,
when *nothing* backed trust up,
when he felt nothing, saw nothing,
could hold on to nothing,
that told him of God's love.

He placed himself in God's hands,
and left himself there,
trusting God to the bitter, bitter end.

And *then* he said, it is finished.

It's all over, all gone: everything has been taken away.

And: It is finished. It's all done. It is *complete*.

* * *

Today, on Friday, in the light that shines from this cross,

I am shown up.

By his trust, I see my lack of trust.

In his light, I see my darkness.

I look at him and know:

I do not trust like that.

Like a sheep gone astray, turned to my own way

I trust myself,

I trust my family,

I trust my mind,

I trust my ability to string word together into a sermon,

I trust my memory of Easter mornings past,

I trust what is familiar,

I trust what privilege has given me –

I trust almost *anything* more than I trust God.

And when those things fail me,

instead of placing myself in God's hands,

resting in God's hands,

trusting God's embrace, God's firm hold on me,
I despair,
I give in to despair.

I don't trust God –
not like this Jesus.
I don't know how to trust like that.

I am shown up by the light lifted up on this cross.
I'm as scared,
as untrusting
as cowardly as Peter

It will be easy to trust on Sunday,
but here, on Friday,
when I feel no consolation,
when I can't feel God's presence,
when nothing reassures me,
nothing whispers kindly in my ear –
today I don't know how to sustain
my fairweather trust.

I stand condemned
by the condemned man whose cross stands in front of me;
I stand exposed by the man exposed here to die –
by Jesus who trusted,
whose life was a word that proclaimed
the trustworthiness of God:
the God whose love never fails,
the God who never lets us go,
the God who never abandons us,
the God whose love remains when everything else,
everything else, even our ability to *recognise* that love,
falls away.

I see this man, whose whole life testified to this truth,
whose death proclaimed it,
and see how little I believe it,
how little I trust in this God.

But this is the Jesus who,
speaking from the cross,
showed compassion,
who thought of his mother,
made provision for her care.

This is the Jesus who, trusting God,
trusting God to the end,
did not condemn even his killers.

This is the Jesus who,
condemned and exposed,
will not leave *me*
will not leave *us*
condemned and exposed.

Lord I believe, help my unbelief.

Lord I *trust*, help me in my lack of trust.

Compassionate Lord Jesus, trust *for* me, when I can't trust.

Trust for *us*, when *we* can't trust,
when we don't know how to trust in God.

Hold on to God for us, when we don't know how;
turn towards God's face for us,
when we don't know how to see it,
how to call on it any more.

Trust in our place;
we're not up to it alone.

Intercede for us.

Raise us up with you.

Dear Jesus,
We don't know how to trust;
We don't know where to find it;
We don't know how to make it ours
– but let us wear yours,
the trust you wore as a seamless robe.

Let us borrow your clothes –
or even, today, let us just touch their hem,
and that will be enough.
Your trust will be enough for us.

Your trust will be enough for me.

It is done.

It is finished.

Today you have completed your work.

Amen.