

**Reflections for Lent 2021 – Why did Jesus die?
Session 6 – The Crucifixion (Mark 15.16 – 47)**

Mark 15.21: Someone who was changed by his encounter with Jesus was Simon of Cyrene, press-ganged into helping to carry Jesus' cross. Mark names Simon's sons, which suggests they were known to Mark's community. If that is the case then Simon and his family must have become followers of the Way. Paula Gooder remarks, 'When we think about the proclamation of the gospel it is often in terms of the gospel at its best. If we proclaim it really well, with all the skill available to us and present Christianity in its very best light, then perhaps people will be persuaded. Here something else seems to have happened. Simon encountered Jesus at one of the worst moments of Jesus' life. This was a very different encounter to that, say, of Peter, who was called to follow Jesus and drawn to him by all he had to offer. Simon may have encountered Jesus at a terrible moment, but Mark's gospel suggests that it was enough for his sons to be drawn in.... Here Christ, battered, bruised and about to die, seems to have drawn to him someone whose whole life was changed as a result' (p104).

Mark 15.22-32: In Mark's gospel the mocking and misunderstanding of Jesus by the Romans, the Jewish authorities and the crowd continues: he is ridiculed as 'King of the Jews'; as a bandit like those crucified beside him; for claiming to be able to destroy the temple; for being unable to come down from the cross and demonstrate his power as Messiah. The irony is that he really fulfilled what they mocked him for, just not in the way they envisaged. Jesus' opponents thought they had removed the threat to their way of life and faith. But Jesus' power was at its greatest at this point of seeming defeat. According to John's gospel, this was the revelation of God's glory. Hanging on the cross was the supreme moment when Jesus was revealed to be King, Revolutionary and Messiah. Jesus' opponents believed that power was strengthened by holding on to it with all your might; Jesus revealed that true power was to be found in letting it go.

Mark 15.33-41: When we ask 'Why did Jesus die?' our focus is often on what Jesus' death has done for us. But Jesus' death also had implications for the world itself. According to the gospels, as Jesus hung on the cross the sky was darkened, the temple curtain was torn in two, graves were wrenched open and the gates of paradise itself opened. Matthew and Luke are clear that Jesus' death ushered in a new age – the age to come – we still await it in all its fullness but it has begun. With Jesus' death the world changed for good and part of the task of Jesus' disciples is to find a way to live now in acknowledgement that the new age has already begun. How do we live as Christians in this new age?

Mark 15.42-47: 'One of the features of Jesus' death that is easy to miss, because it is only ever implicit in the texts, is that his death completely redefined what makes for a good death. In Jewish tradition three key features defined a good death: living to a good old age; leaving a son behind to maintain your line; and being buried in your ancestral tomb along with your forebears. Against this tradition, Jesus had a spectacularly bad death: he died young; left no children and was buried in a borrowed tomb. Jesus' death was, of course, not a bad death at all and blows apart our expectation of what dying well means... But Jesus' death speaks a challenge as much now as it did then. Our definitions of a good death are invariably about us and what we might wish to attain. Jesus' definition of a good death was about others and what he might give them. Above all Jesus' idea of a good death was about a love so great, so infinite and immeasurable that he was prepared to die to ensure that it was expressed to the full' (p130).

'The really important point is not why Jesus died but *that* he did. As so often, John's Gospel is the one that puts its finger on the deep truth that pulses beneath all our many answers: he died because of love. Jesus died because God's love for the world was so overwhelming that he could not stop pouring it out on the world. Jesus died because his love for his father and for us drove him to express that love in the most sacrificial way possible. Jesus died because his expression of love drove him to reveal the brokenness of the way in which we normally do things, and humanity could not bear the weight or consequences of that revelation. Why did Jesus die? He died because he loved us – the rest is commentary' (p165).