

How do we sit with the complexity of the passion narrative – a story of political unrest, civil disobedience, death, compassion and unmeasurable love?

It is the central story of our faith and yet it raises so many questions for us, about God's love and our complicity as humanity when faced with injustice.

There is a Passion hymn which I find very powerful written by Brian Wren, that encompasses many of these questions.

*Here hangs a man discarded,  
a scarecrow hoisted high,  
a nonsense pointing nowhere  
to all who hurry by.*

*Can such a clown of sorrows  
still bring a useful word  
when faith and hope seem phantoms  
and every hope absurd?*

*Yet here is help and comfort  
for lives by comfort bound,  
when drums of dazzling progress  
give strangely hollow sound:*

*Life, emptied of all meaning,  
drained out in bleak distress,  
can share in broken silence  
our deepest emptiness;*

*And love that freely entered  
the pit of life's despair,  
can name our hidden darkness  
and suffer with us there.*

*Christ, in our darkness risen,  
help all who long for light  
to hold the hand of promise,  
till faith receives its sight.*

One of the reasons I find this poem so powerful is because it helps me sit with the frustration and depth of story which this Holy Week confronts us with. It does not move us quickly to the resurrection, but rather it highlights the loneliness and emptiness which comes with sitting with those who suffer. Like with any tragedy or time of suffering or illness, personal or global our human response is to ask 'why'?

What purpose can there be in suffering – why hasn't God stepped in? Are we being punished?

The story and pattern of Holy Week reminds us however that, no matter what God does humanity will choose to hurt creation. Even in the midst of the passion story Jesus says clearly that he is God's son, and wants to bring peace and change – but humanity will not listen. Our desire for power, for control – often globally and personally is such that pain is caused at times. If not to ourselves, but inadvertently to others. Jesus death bears witness to that – as do many of the atrocities we have seen in the past week. Even pain that we experience ourselves is so often as a result of the consistent collective damage to the natural order of the world – the damage to all creation, throughout all time and space.

But at the heart of this Holy Week message – which is the message we have shared over and over again in the past weeks as local students who have come to hear the story of Holy Week and Easter – is that in the midst of all this story is the fact that God is with us. God is with us in our joy and in our suffering. Whatever we have to face – we never have to face it alone – God is with us.

How do we sit and journey then in the coming week?

Uncomfortably I suspect.

But in this most important week of our year let us ensure we take the time to recognise that - to walk with God in the struggle of the journey, to listen to what God is saying to us now, and to love – with the love of God that will embrace us whatever we encounter. Amen.