

Be Pleased to Deliver Me, O God

16 April • Wednesday of Holy Week

Psalm 70

¹ Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! ² Let them be put to shame and confusion who seek my life! Let them be turned back and brought to dishonour who delight in my hurt! ³ Let them turn back because of their shame who say, "Aha, Aha!" ⁴ May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!" ⁵ But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay!

Meditation

This psalm comprises two parts: a prayer for protection from overwhelming enemies and a prayer to uphold the faithful. The singer is obviously the one for whom these prayers are needed and there is a sense of urgency that this help must come quickly.

There are times in our lives when we feel everyone is against us. Even God seems distant. We then echo the words of this psalm - calling for the emergency services of heaven.

One important element in this psalm is not expressed in words but implied in the call itself: confidence that God hears our prayer. Jesus' cry of despair from the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" has, underlying it, the same confidence that God is listening.

For centuries and across the world this cry has gone up from bedsides, and in dire times when all seems lost.

During the agonising months prior to her death, Lily, my dearest wife and I cried, "Lord, help us now!" But each prayer was followed by silence; the most deafening was when she breathed her last. I was devastated. Had it not been for my three teenage children and the mysterious ways of God, it would have been the end of the line for me.

God's silence is a call for faith. Job cried out and God showed him that since he could not understand the natural world, he could not expect to understand the ways of God, its creator. We have a better answer than Job. We believe that when the human race cried out, "God help us!" He replied, "I come!" He came and lived in Palestine, suffering alongside us.

When we cry out and He is silent, it is because He is already beside us, sharing our pain. We cannot get a quicker answer than that.

Prayer

O Lord, in whom we trust, increase our faith so that we may find You alongside us in times of despair, rejoice in the face of difficulty and persevere when all seems lost. Then all mankind will stand in awe of the strength You give to Your faithful children. We pray this in the name of Him who overcame the power of death, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Action

When problems appear in our lives, let us have faith that God is with us.

*Most Revd Datuk Bolly Lapok
His Grace the Archbishop
Anglican Province of South-East Asia*

The Passover of the Lord

17 April • Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbour shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb.

¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

Meditation

God gave final instructions to the people as they prepared to leave Egypt. They had been in slavery in Egypt for the past 430 years (v40). They were ready to be delivered and set free to head to the promised land. It would be a new beginning for them, a fresh start - it "shall mark for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you" (v2). They would no longer be slaves, but become free men and women. To get them ready, the Lord instituted the Feast of the Passover. In the Passover, the focus is on the lamb - an unblemished lamb (one-year-old) would be slaughtered and roasted over fire, its blood smeared on the doorway of their houses (v7). If no blood was found on the doorway, the first-born in the house would be struck down when the Lord passed over (v12). The roasted meat should be eaten and whatever was left should be burned (v10). The lamb would be the sacrifice, marking the end of their time as slaves and the start of a new life, as free men and women.

Today as we contemplate the Lord's giving of Himself to the cross this week, let us be reminded that He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" - Jn 1:29. He is our Passover. He gave Himself for our sins. He gave Himself as a penalty payment for our wrongdoings. By His sacrifice, we are able to come to the Father without any guilt or shame. Through His sacrifice, we are no longer condemned to an eternity without God, but have hope of an eternal future with God. Ultimately His sacrifice enables us to come into the presence of the Lord God Almighty as children of the Living God. Alleluia!

Prayer

Almighty God, thank You for the Passover Lamb who is my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. As we remember His sacrifice for us, we will always be truly grateful for Your love. As we look forward to this weekend's celebration of Easter, may we be ready to acknowledge Your grace and mercy for us with those around us, in our homes, our workplaces or schools. May Your Holy Spirit testify of the Passover Lamb in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Action

Let us not just reflect and contemplate on this sacrifice today or this week. Let us move into action by sharing our personal testimony of the Passover Lamb with someone today!

*Revd Andy Shie
Priest in charge
St Margaret's Seria parish and St James's Kuala Belait parish
(The Diocese of Kuching), Brunei Darussalam.*

The Passion and Death of Jesus

18 April • Good Friday

John 18:1-19:42

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" ¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at

the door, and brought Peter in.¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." ²² When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" ²⁴ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷ Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

²⁸ Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰ They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." ³¹ Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." ³² This was to fulfil the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

³³ So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ³⁴ Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" ³⁵ Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?" ³⁶ Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." ³⁷ Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." ³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, "I find no guilt in him." ³⁹ But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" ⁴⁰ They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

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¹Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. ² And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. ³ They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. ⁴ Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" ⁶ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." ⁷ The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." ⁸ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. ⁹ He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no

answer.¹⁰ So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"¹¹ Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

¹² From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."¹³ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha.¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."¹⁶ So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus,¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom,²⁴ so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these

things,²⁵ but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!"²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

²⁸ After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst."²⁹ A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away.³² So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him.³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe.³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."³⁷ And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

³⁸ After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body.³⁹ Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.⁴⁰ So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.⁴¹ Now in the place where he

was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.⁴² So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Meditation

The events leading to the death of Jesus Christ are gathering pace. There is a crescendo developing, interspersed with many painful reminders of the extent of God's incomprehensible love for humanity. In the words of the hymn, *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, we confess "What thou, my Lord, has suffered was all for sinners' gain; mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain." What Jesus did, as the Bible has revealed, was to fulfill God's salvation plan for the wayward people of the world.

In two long chapters, we see John putting together the unfolding drama of our Lord's passion. First Jesus was arrested, brought to trial before Pilate on flimsy charges, flogged by soldiers, mocked by religious authorities. Jesus' death was influenced more by pressure of a lynch mob than the findings of natural justice. Jesus was then left to die a slow and agonising death by crucifixion, while the soldiers nonchalantly drew lots to distribute among themselves whatever Jesus was wearing, save for his undergarment.

The intriguing sub-plots revealed the betrayal of a disgruntled disciple when Judas, a treasurer of the group, decided to give up on his Master, when he led the Jewish authorities to apprehend Jesus. Then there was the obvious frailty of an impetuous disciple, a gung-ho man who claimed that he would stick with Christ. Yet when he was identified, Peter sheepishly denied Jesus. It

shows that even close followers, including senior office-bearers, can denounce their Master when they discover that their agendas are no longer the same, or when they have to save their own skin. This happened with Judas and Peter. It has happened to others throughout history. It can happen to church leaders today.

Yet there are those, like the ordinary women and the beloved disciple who continued to be faithful, keeping close to Jesus even in the darkest hour of history. The least we can do, in response to what Jesus has gone through for us, is to declare, as Isaac Watts has so poignantly expressed in *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for going through Calvary for us. As we look at the cross, stir in us a deeper appreciation of Your love for us. Help us grow in our love for You, even though we are sometimes tempted to betray or deny You. We pray that You will teach us anew each day, what it means to love the way You have loved us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Action

Read, sing and meditate on the hymn *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* – Isaac Watts' version – slowly and prayerfully. Let the words be your unhurried prayer of promise and renewed dedication to God.

Rev Dr Daniel Koh Kah Soon
Methodist Pastor
Vice-Chairperson, Methodist Welfare Services
Lecturer and Director (English) of the Centre for the Development of
Christian Ministry, Trinity Theological College, Singapore

Strange Living

19 April • Holy Saturday

1 Peter 4:1-8

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Meditation

A young man believed in Jesus as his Saviour and Lord when he was in high school. As part of his belief, he chose not to swear or drink. His choice was unthinkable in his western culture where drunkenness was a mark of adulthood. So, when he chose not to drink at his high school's graduation ball, he was bashed senseless by his schoolmates.

Who is more strange – this committed young Christian or his drunken friends who beat him? 1 Peter can be called “the strange living” epistle. Peter the apostle wrote to Christians who were increasingly persecuted for their faith. They were perplexed. Why were they suffering if Jesus was God?

Peter wrote to assure Christians that their suffering was not strange. It was, indeed, normative. Why? We are God's suffering church because Jesus is God's suffering Christ (v1). Just as Jesus suffered the hostility of a sinful world, Christians will suffer the same antagonism while living holy lives in an unholy world.

This begs a critical question, “Have you factored suffering into your life?” Suffering is counter-intuitive. Everything within our nature and culture leans us towards a self-pleasing life. “Maximum pleasure, minimum pain” has always been the world's fashion.

Peter tells us that living to fully gratify our flesh is the old-fashioned way. We have wasted enough time in the past living for selfish “human passions” (v2). Jesus' arrival sounds a dire warning, and “We have no more right to live Godless sensual lives.”

But the unbelieving world will carry on living “in sensuality” (v3). We will obstinately carry on with God-forsaken lives because we simplistically conclude that such past and present lifestyles will carry on into the future - unpunished.

But Peter tells us that all sinners – living or dead - will be confronted by the gospel, punished by God for rebellion or rewarded by God for obedience (v6). Instead of us being seduced into the old-fashioned way of self-love, Christians are empowered by the Spirit and prayer to bear witness to Jesus’ new world where living to please God with selfless love, is not strange but normal living (vv7-8). The best way to stop the bad mouthing of Christ is good living by Christians.

Prayer

O God, grant us Your Spirit’s power that we might be courageous to live such different lives although the world may consider us strange.

Action

Identify one practical area of change. It can be the way you talk or a lifestyle choice, which will really show you identifying with God’s strange way of living, although you may suffer for it.

*Rev Christopher Chia
Senior Pastor
Adam Road Presbyterian Church*

Proclaim the Resurrection

20 April • The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Sunday

Matthew 28:1-10

¹ Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." ⁸ So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

Meditation

What are we to do with the news of the resurrection? We heed the words repeated to the women in the passage for today, "Go and tell" (vv 7, 10).

To be able to do that effectively, disciples of Christ must meet two conditions.

First, they must be convinced of the reality and power of the resurrection. For this reason, the first instructions to

the women were to get all the disciples to meet the Lord in Galilee. Jesus knew that was the only way they would believe He had risen. Without meeting Him, they might all end up doubting like Thomas.

While today we may not see Jesus in the same way as the early disciples, a personal encounter with Jesus is still necessary to make us convincing witnesses. Ours will be a spiritual rather than a face-to-face meeting. The point is that we may know in personal experience that He has risen, and He is real.

The second condition is that we must be bold, as the women were told both by the angel and the risen Lord. The words “do not be afraid” were meant to reduce the shocking impact of their encounters. Still, the women needed boldness to report what would be unbelievable news of the resurrection to the disciples.

Going to tell people who may not believe what you have to say (whether to skeptical Christians, or those who have yet to come to faith in Christ), calls for courage. The strength of the truth overpowers all other contradicting considerations. This disposition values faithfulness over compromise and concord; accepting contempt and humiliation to get the message across.

Prayer

Lord, let me be faithful, let me be bold, that others through me may know that You are alive and You are real. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Action

Write a statement of two to three sentences on why you believe in the resurrection. Then share it with at least one person.

*Bishop Dr Wee Boon Hup
The Methodist Church in Singapore*