



THE ARCHBISHOP
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In St John's Gospel we are told that on the cross not one bone of Jesus' body was broken. Whenever I read these words, I grieve for how very broken we can be.

In his moving book 'Let us Dream' Pope Francis has written about how our world is very polarised. He observes that some of the verbal violence we often witness on social media and in other parts of our culture reflect a fragility of selfhood. We seem to have forgotten who we are and that we belong to each other and have a responsibility for each other's wellbeing. We even get security by discrediting others. We become a nation of competing tribes, not one people living with disagreements and seeking a common good. This, he says, makes it "harder to generate a shared horizon toward which we can all move forward together."

Standing under the cross is a place to find such a horizon. Here we see the worst of human failure, the death of Jesus standing for that overwhelming mass of human sinfulness and all the cruelties and failures that we see across the world. But also, paradoxically, the best of God: God's tenacious love and God's unyielding forgiveness. It is a place where we can start again.

So my first prayer is for a more generous, tolerant world where a common vision of a common humanity binds us together – despite differences.

In my recently published book, *Dear England*, I speak about the values that can bind us together, and how the very best of what are sometimes called British values flow from belief in God and the things we see in Jesus Christ, not least self-sacrifice for the common good, rather than a self-preservation which excludes others.

In the Church, we too, have to work at this. Christian churches are not nearly as united as they should be. Divisions persist.

Of course, all human communities have disagreements. But the Christian community is charged with a message of reconciling love. We ought to be showing the world the way. And we shouldn't let disagreements get in the way.

Jesus is the one who teaches us that the separations of class and caste, race and nation that so often keep us apart, could be reconfigured if we only started seeing each other as sisters and brothers, children of the one God. Therefore, of all people, his followers ought to strive for a unity that transcends the old divisions, embraces diversity and lives with conscientious disagreement.

So my second prayer for Good Friday is that the Church may be united.

My third prayer is for leaders at every level of public life and for a recovery of the vision and values that can help us move forward as we emerge from all the difficulties and horrors of the past year.

Traditional news outlets, public service broadcasting, national, regional and local newspapers also have an important part to play here. They offer a more balanced and nuanced voice than the ones that prevail in the echo chambers of social media.

So thank God for the Yorkshire Post!

My final prayer is simply that we can all be less selfish and more concerned with other people's needs than just our own.

When Jesus died on the cross, most of his friends had abandoned him. They were worried that what happened to him might happen to them.

Quite understandably, they saved their skins.

However, they were the ones who were lost.

The message of the cross is that we actually save ourselves, by losing ourselves. All our attempts to save ourselves usually mean putting ourselves first and we end up building walls around ourselves so that others can't get in. Before we know it, we are lost in an isolation of our own making.

Jesus shows us a different way of being human, and the only way of being saved. He says that the greatest love of all is not to defend yourself, but to lay down yourself for those you love. He says this on the night before he dies. And when he goes to his death he goes in the knowledge that it was one of his own friends who betrayed him. Others will declare they don't even know him.

We make similar mistakes. Letting ourselves down. Letting those we love down. Becoming separate and polarised from each other.

At the cross we can learn another way. The cross, we discover on Easter Sunday morning, is at the heart of God and is also at the heart of humanity. Because Jesus is risen from the dead, these things no longer have the last word. God has spoken a first new word in the resurrection of Jesus, and this is our starting point.

Across Yorkshire, and across our world, this year has been a year of isolation. We have been separated from each other. But, in this case, it has been a demonstration of love. The selfish thing would have been to disregard the necessary sacrifices of lockdown. And although we know that some people in our poorer communities have suffered disproportionately because it has been so much harder for them to work from home or self isolate, our isolation has itself been an act of love. We have laid down our freedoms for the greater good of saving others.

As we, at last, move forward into what we all hope will be a better world, there is a new reality and a new hope when we think more carefully about the sort of world that we want to build.

My Good Friday prayer is that we look at the cross and see there a better way of being human, where we acknowledge our need of God and our need of one another, and where the highest ideals are those of sacrifice and service.



Dylan McLeod on Unsplash

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