

Lord God, send your Spirit to open our hearts that we may respond to Jesus in love and trust. Amen

- LUCY AND CLAIRE EITHER SIDE OF SCREEN
- *'When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.'* Which robber are you?
- The second robber realised that Jesus was an innocent victim.
- LUCY READS: *'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.'*
- This robber understood that (s)he was being justly punished. She'd been caught robbing, judged and found guilty. Whereas Jesus had done nothing worse than openly shone a light into the lives of the self-righteous people around them to force them to see the tawdriness of their own decisions.
- The problem is that we demand punishment. We think it is only right that people should pay the penalty for their misdeeds. And when followed legalistically that line of thought can be cruel and unsympathetic.
  - I was watching TV last week about a Christian benefactor 190 years ago, a fine upstanding member of the community he lived in, whose umbrella was stolen by a couple of urchins. They were caught, he pursued them relentlessly and brought the case to court as was his right, and they were sentenced, aged 14, to transportation to Australia
    - I don't suppose anyone today would think that punishment fitted the crime, but I also don't suppose he lost much sleep over it.
    - Are there parallels today I wonder?
  - Closer to home the jury is still out about Julian Assange, and assuming there is some substance in the Swedish allegations, most people probably think he should be forced to answer the accusations.
    - But it is relevant that often carrying the weight of an accusation, whether you are guilty or not is very costly. It cost Julian Assange 7 years of freedom and seems to have affected his mental health.
    - Perhaps as a general principle, it is healthier to answer your accusers, so that the slate can either be metaphorically wiped clean, either by punishment or by being found not guilty.
- All of which points to the truth that if we do something wrong there are consequences.
- A naughty child at bedtime needs to have boundaries, otherwise the naughtiness goes unchecked and starts spreading.
  - And a child who lives a life without boundaries is rarely a happy or fulfilled child.
- If there is a mistake with Universal Credit calculations, they do indeed put it right, but it might take months, leading to real hardship for many vulnerable families and individuals all over the country.
  - So surely the restitution needs to be swift and accurate.
- And, if anyone else is caught by a speeding camera it is of course only right that they should be fined! It's only if I am caught that I should be let off because there would be a perfectly reasonable explanation.
  - And then I am like the first robber, who says to Jesus,
- CLAIRE READS: *'Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!'*
- The second robber realised the innocence of Jesus and acknowledged his own guilt, The first robber just sneered at him and thought only of himself. Jesus' crucifixion made no difference to him.
- Which robber are you?
  - It may be that you don't think you are like either. But unless you think you are perfect, and I sincerely hope you don't because you would be insufferable, the only difference is one of degree, or just possibly the small of getting caught!

- Jesus was crucified because of the sins and weakness of other people. It was only because of the foolishness and cowardice and treachery of men and women like you and me that Jesus was put on the cross. He did not deserve it!!
  - 'He bore our sins', as St Peter writes in chapter 2 of his first letter in the bible.
- The second robber, Lucy understood this
- LUCY READS: *'we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'*
- And (s)he was welcomed into the wide open crucified arms of Jesus *'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'* Just before (s)he died, her wounded life suddenly made sense and she was healed from the inside out.
- Similarly, if we approach Jesus in the same way, because of death and resurrection, we too, are put right with God. You could say, he took our punishment, rather than receiving the exacting eternal consequences of the 1<sup>st</sup> robber, Claire, who died an unhappy man. And we cannot know what happened when he met Christ again, at the judgement seat after his death
- So Easter is not really about eggs, and hot cross buns, and bunnies, nice though all of those are. They are all the distractions of the sort the first robber would have occupied himself with to take his mind off his own predicament.
- Easter is really about hope and self-esteem and meaning and the realisation that love conquers everything which is what the second robber, Lucy discovered. And we can discover it too. Hope and self-esteem and meaning and the realisation that love conquers everything.
  - As long as we let it
- So, which robber are you? And what is your prayer to Jesus on the cross? Amen.