**GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION**

**In our church tradition, unlike many other Christians, we don’t often recite the Creeds, but I know that many of you will be familiar with them, nevertheless. They can be a helpful reminder of the fundamentals of our faith and our experience as Christians.**

**Perhaps the most famous of the Creeds is the Apostles’ Creed. Now it has to be said that there’s no evidence that it was actually composed by the apostles themselves and the earliest record of it dates to AD390. But it’s traditionally divided into twelve articles, one for each of the apostles, with Matthias taking the twelfth in place of Judas Iscariot.**

**And It can be very helpful. It begins at the very beginning with God the Father: *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth*. That’s Genesis of course, ch. 1 v. 1. I hope everyone listening can say “AMEN” to that statement because, if you can’t, nothing else will make much sense**.

**And it also teaches us about the Holy Spirit and the holy catholic church as it puts it (I had a lot of trouble recently trying to persuade a lady that that didn’t mean we’re all *Roman* Catholics!). It talks about the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. I hope you can’t just *agree* to those statements, but that that is also your *experience*.**

**And, in between the articles about the Father and the Spirit and most germane for us today, it teaches us about the Son. It tells us about what we call Christmas - *I believe in*….*Jesus Christ [God’s] only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost [and] born of the Virgin Mary.***

**Then it jumps 33 years to Easter. For all the wonderful things that Jesus *said* and *did* in between, you’ll need to turn to the gospels. But, referring to Good Friday, it says, most solemnly, He *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.* Yes, Pontius Pilate is mentioned and he’s mentioned for a reason: this is history, look it up!**

**Then, gloriously, we move on to Easter Sunday and then Ascension Day: *The third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*; and then that great hope, *From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead –* and on that day every wrong will be righted and justice and truth will prevail*.* Hallelujah, amen!**

**But some of you may have noticed that I skipped one of the Good Friday articles:**

* ***He suffered under Pontius Pilate* – check;**
* ***He was crucified, dead, and buried* – check;**
* **….*****He descended into hell.***

**Did He? When? How? Why? Today, as we reflect on His cruel sufferings, on His crucifixion, His death and His burial, let’s also consider that enigmatic assertion, *He descended into hell.***

**Some modern versions of the Creed say simply, *He descended to the dead* and some people say that that article is referring to Peter’s statement that *he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago (1 Pe. 3:19-20).* It is, without doubt, a mystery. So please *meditate* on these things with an open Bible and see where the Spirit takes *you*.**

**But as I pondered this in preparation, a thought came to me: *What is hell like?***

**Well….isn’t hell *dark* (Mt. 8:12)? And didn’t a strange *darkness* steal over the land at high noon on that Good Friday (Mt. 27:45) as the Light of the World (Jn. 8:12) was put out? But His dusk is our dawn.**

**And isn’t hell a place of *separation* (Lk. 16:26)? And didn’t Jesus cry out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Mt. 27:46)?*? Sometimes we’re alone or lonely. Some of you listening are in isolation right now. When Michael Collins was alone in the Apollo XI command module as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon, he was further from any human being than anyone had ever been in history – *except Jesus*. For, on the cross, not only was Jesus cut off from His mother and all His friends (some of whom had denied Him, anyway) and all humanity; even His Father denied Him as He *became* our sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and suffered the curse of all who hung on a tree (Gal. 3:13). Hell is where God *isn’t* – and that’s where Jesus went so that we can be where God *is*.**

**Isn’t Hell a place of heat and thirst? Didn’t Jesus tell that story of the rich man in hell who yearned for just a drop of water on his tongue (Lk. 16:24)? And what did Jesus cry out on the cross? Wasn’t it *I am thirsty (Jn. 19:28)*? I don’t know whether Jesus went to hell then, but I do know that He was suffering a hellish thirst. Do you remember how He’s the One who offers us living water so that we will never thirst again (Jn. 4:10, 14)? Yet He was thirsty! And how did they slake His thirst? Didn’t they offer Him a sponge soaked in vinegar (Jn. 19:29)? Have you ever wondered why a *sponge* should have been at the cross? Well, soldiers carried sponges…. because they didn’t have toilet paper. That may not be hell, but it’s certainly hellish. His parched lips were smeared so that *we* might drink deep of the water of life.**

**Darkness, separation, heat, thirst….and hope. Hell is a place of death and, we’re told, Jesus *gave up his spirit* and died (Jn. 19:30). But He said two other things (among others) from the cross. He said, *Father, forgive them (Lk. 23:34)* and He said, *It is finished (Jn. 19:30).* As He *gave up his spirit* and *finished* His work, so we receive our *forgiveness.* Dante said that above the gate of hell is written, *Abandon hope all ye who enter here.* That may be true. But we do not pass through that gate. By faith, death itself, for us, becomes the gateway to life. Christ died that we might live: we live because Christ lives again. Hallelujah!**

**This is a Good Friday like no other in our experience. We certainly don’t need lessons on death at the moment. Some sufferers have even described corona virus as hell. Take hope: the Creed says on good authority that Jesus *descended into hell.* That means that, whatever *your* personal hell is at the moment,nowhere is beyond the reach of His love. So, wherever you are, call upon Him now! And remember, it may be Friday, but Sunday’s coming!**

**HAPPY EASTER!**