



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for Good Friday (3rd April) 2026

On Good Friday, we often focus on the brutality and cruelty of the Passion; or, perhaps, the folly in trying to obliterate the Son of God. What we spend less time considering is the fear, which must have pervaded the events of that day.

In the first place, there was a culture of fear in the Holy Land of the first century from top to bottom. Usually, the law was whatever even lowly government officials said it was in the absence of someone more important leading to a capricious and corrupt regime. Even Pontius Pilate, the Governor, had to look over his shoulder, as some amongst the local population reported back to the Emperor in Rome - something, which would do for his career in the end.

In that context, as we know from more recent tyrannies, you never really knew who your friends were, because human frailty feels the impulse to self-advantage by exploiting the venality of the system.

It is within this framework that the machinations, which saw Jesus arrested, created for those who associated with Him another level of fear: rightly or wrongly - probably rightly - those around Him thought that He was dangerous to know - as we see in Peter's three-fold and increasingly vehement denial of their friendship.

We might wonder whether Jesus Himself was fearful as events swirled around Him. The pious answer, presumably is that He was not; several times in the Gospels alludes to His coming Death as an inevitability. At the same time, we might ask ourselves whether He would have been Human if He was not intimidated by what was happening to Him.

All the evidence that we have suggests that if He was frightened, Jesus managed His fear whilst retaining His sense of Purpose; and for people of Faith, this is an important example for us to contemplate.

Fear is a complex emotion. On the one hand it is, as it were, part of our range of tools for coping with peril: it helps us to focus on the danger and find our way through it. The problem is that it can easily morph into panic - actually confounding the role that fear can play: our minds race chaotically; sometimes we struggle to maintain our physical co-ordination. Soldiers, so I am told, have to learn to manage their fear, if they are to be effective in the field of combat.

For soldiers of Christ - to draw on a metaphor implicit in the Letter to the Ephesians, learning to manage one's fear is an important element of our discipleship, because it reflects a confidence in God's power to transcend the slings and arrows of worldly fortune; and that whatever the woes we experience in this life, in the perspective of the eternal, this ephemeral anguish will yield to an experience of life in which, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."

In our own days, with their diminished appreciation of the extent of creation's realities and the widely held conviction that what we have in this mortal world is all that we have, it can be challenging to hold fast to our Faith and so find the strength and inspiration to manage our fear and constrain it within the wider perspective of the eternal. Today, we survey the worst that earthly powers can throw at humanity and, maybe, reflect on the miseries, which afflict our lives and those of the world around us. Yet, we must remember that we are here ultimately, not because Jesus was crucified, but because His Death was not the end, those earthly powers intended it to be.