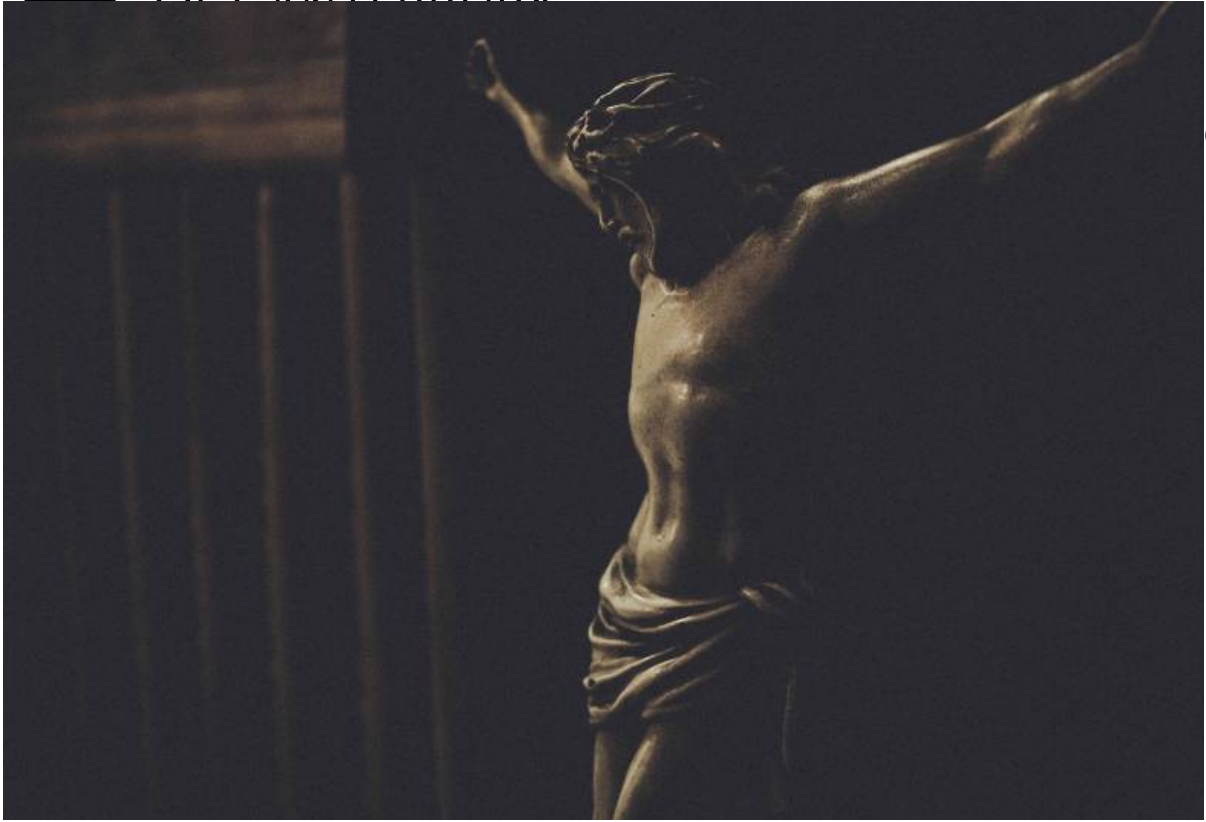




## THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY



on Good Friday, published on Medium.

Today is Good Friday — the day Jesus cried out from the cross: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’

Throughout history, this has been a cry of people in times of suffering and despair. I have no doubt that people in Ukraine will ask the question as they continue to endure the great evil of war – by the side of every mass grave, over every shattered home, and along each treacherous route seeking refuge. It must be asked. It can only be answered by God.

The same question comes to mind when we hear of famine in Afghanistan, families fleeing, or girls denied education, and great violence and deep suffering in Ethiopia, Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, and countless other places.

The UN Secretary General said last month that we are facing the highest number of violent conflicts since 1945. Again, comes the cry to God: why have you forsaken us? Our suffering world cries out for food, safety, protection, peace, and justice.

Meanwhile, in this country, we are still living through a terrible pandemic, many still mourning those they loved. The cost-of-living crisis and grinding poverty are affecting millions. Nearly four million children in the UK live in poverty, with families forced to choose between rent, food, heating, and fuel.

Of all the shocking images from Ukraine, one that I am particularly thinking about this Holy Week is a [photo](#) of a statue of the crucified Christ being removed from the Armenian Cathedral in Lviv, to be stored for safe-keeping. Jesus’ tortured body, arms flung wide, is held by men in an image reminiscent of Renaissance paintings when Jesus was taken down from the Cross after the Crucifixion on Good Friday.

The photo gathered a wide range of social media comments. Many, like me, found it profoundly moving; others were more sardonic. ‘People pray to this Jesus to save them, and he can’t even save himself’ was the response from some, echoing those who mocked Jesus in Mark 15:31: ‘He saved others, but He cannot save Himself!’

Confronted by the cruelty of the world, people have always struggled to see where God is — including those who were present at his death on the cross. This question is often seen as an obstacle to faith, but it is one of the most faithful questions you can ask. After all, we hear it from Jesus himself.

On Good Friday, the followers of Jesus must have thought they were seeing the defeat of good itself. Jesus, who had stood for everything that was loving, kind, good and true, was tortured and strung up. Does Good Friday show the absence and apathy of God? Or could it be the exact opposite? For God doesn’t protect himself from the cruelty of humanity. In Christ, God allows himself to be hurt and hated. He enters fully into the forsakenness that the widows and orphans of Ukraine and millions suffering around the world must feel today. At the moment of greatest separation from God, He was with us — and for us — most intimately.

Good Friday is marked not just images, but by sounds of great suffering. The sobs of women burying loved ones in makeshift graves, the helpless response of those who witnessed great horrors seared and mourn their inability to stop them. Those deepest sobs from the darkest places resonate in the heart of the divine. The mother crying out her loss is Jesus' voice. A child's devastation is known and felt in the heart of the Creator of all things.

Suffering wracks our bones, reverberates around our hearts and escapes through wails and cries. The man on the cross makes the cry that resounds across history: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' The cry of millions worldwide who feel forsaken this Easter.

Good Friday offers no response to people who feel utterly abandoned and alone today. But the image of the crucified Christ and the sound of his cry, show us where Jesus can be found. On Good Friday God is not sheltered from the harm of the world. But utterly exposed to it. And it does its worst to him.

Don't sanitise the cross or try to make it more palatable. This is a week of torture, death, and brutality — the suffering we are still capable of inflicting upon each other. God does not respond glibly to that suffering. He enters it. We are called to do the same — not looking away from the horror of the world, but opening our arms to those affected by it, imitating the generosity of God who gives his life on the Cross.

Christ is with us — truly with us — on the Cross in the cruelty of the world today. And yet, in the resurrection, he promises us that evil will never have the last word.

4 min read

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