

Trinity XVI, 16th December 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Col.1:15-20; Mk.8:27-end.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Why '*must*'?

Why *must* Jesus suffer and die? Can't we think of the rejection, the cross and the nails as something that yes, happened, but didn't *have* to happen? Something that human wickedness did to Jesus, but not something that was bound to happen, not something he steered himself steadily and sacrificially into, not something he did above all as a matter of obedience?

The whole New Testament is clear that that is what it was. The Cross was obedience to God. Not just something the Romans did, something that God wanted. As Paul puts it in Colossians, this is why Jesus had come: to make peace through the blood of his Cross. Even the Old Testament suggests it. Our reading from Isaiah today is taken from the first of four haunting poems in the Book of Isaiah, which together have become known as the Servant Songs. If you haven't read them, go home and do so – Isaiah 53 especially. The prophet speaks of one who will save Israel through his suffering, who will go down into death, despised, rejected, killed, for his people, by his people, and somehow through that heal them. They are astounding poems, and there are a fair few hints in the Gospels that they were hugely important to Jesus. That they shaped his heart, told him who he was, and what he had to do. The Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and be killed.

So why '*must*'?

Well, unsurprisingly, there are lots of books with great answers to that question. And those books are, for the most part, well worth reading.

But there is a simpler, and more profound way into the *must*. You don't even need to be clever to find it.

It's this. Come and sit in this church sometime, when no-one else is here. Sit maybe in the space at the very back, under the East Window. You'll find a small crucifix sitting on a table, with a candle beside it. Light the candle, and just spend some time, much time, looking at that little figure of Jesus, stretched out on the Cross. Put everything else to one side for a while, and let the crucifixion fill your mind, fill your heart. Imagine what it was like for Jesus. Imagine what he was thinking. Try to feel some glimmer of the pain of it all.

The books will still be worth reading. But to know what the Cross means, to know why it was a *must*, that is first and foremost a matter of the heart, of being still, of letting that crucifix speak, and of listening to what it says.

And what it says to me is this.

Jesus has to die – and he has to die like this: in pain, in defeat, in shame – in rejection – because that's what being human is like.

I don't mean, of course, that each one of us is such a terrible person, that we deserve pain and misery and crucifixion. Some Christians might say that, but that's not what I mean. It is rather that there's a great failure at the heart of being human. A kind of great sadness. Each one of us knows it, each one of us bears it around within us. We know just a little, inside ourselves, of what happened on the Cross.

We know, for instance, what it is to be small. What it is to be frightened. What it is to fear that we will be snuffed out.

We know too, what it is to be unloved. What it is to suffer rejection, what it is to be terribly, terribly alone.

We know what it is to fail. For all our dreams, for ourselves and for others to end in a whimper, in a flat, dull loss.

We know what it is to be rubbish.

Most of the time, we shut all of that out. You have to, to stay healthy. You couldn't function, if all that filled your life all the time. Humankind, someone said, cannot bear very much reality.

But there's no shutting out death. Death comes for us all, and it dismantles all our defences, and it whispers to us that our darkest fears were right, and that the shadows within were but the edge of a pit into which we shall fall forever and ever and ever, a pit without bottom, the pit of being nothing.

That is what being human is. It wasn't meant to be like that, we weren't made like that: but when as a race, when as individuals, we drift away from God, that it becomes. We begin to slide back, into nothing.

Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand, never drifted. He was the One, the Bible says, who was human as we are meant to be, the one whose heart was knitted straight to God's, the one in whom there are no shadows, in whom there was nothing but life and love. He is the One over whom the pit had no hold, the one who had never even begun to fall.

And on the Cross, he still does not fall. He *dives*. He dives to where he does not have to go. He dives to where he doesn't belong – the place of defeat, of misery, of futility, of death. And when he goes there, he changes it. Before Good Friday, there is nothing in the pit but dead things, broken things, hopeless things. Corpses and ghosts. After Good Friday, there are dead things, broken things, hopeless things... and Jesus. And Jesus changes everything. Where there is Jesus, there is hope. Everything that was lost and broken doesn't have to stay that way. There's mercy and renewal and the promise of a future right down there in the blackness, where there was nothing. There's a way back to God, where all was lost.

If that all sounds hopelessly abstract, let me put it this way. I had a colleague once, a minister, who took his own life. He took his life because the police were about to come, to charge him with offences against young boys many years ago. For me, it is hard to imagine someone more failed, more lost: a human being simply wrecked through his own sin. Dead, lost, broken and hopeless and many would say not even deserving pity. Even *he* thought he deserved no pity. Well, the Gospel is for him. Jesus has dived to his depth. Jesus has his arms around him. Jesus is pulling him back towards the surface, back towards the light. I cannot say for sure that he will get there. I cannot say that he might not, even now, choose to stay in the darkness. But I *can* say that he is never, ever left alone. I *can* say that there is hope, even for him. Because where there is Jesus, there is hope, and our great Gospel is that Jesus is in even the darkest corner of hell.

Why must Jesus die? Because in the end, he did not just come to teach us. He came to *rescue* us: from sin, from death, from shame, from failure, from ourselves. That's what the Cross means, and for that we give him glory and honour, now and forever.

Peter Waddell

Trinity XVI, 16th December 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Col.1:15-20; Mk.8:27-end.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Why '*must*'?

Why *must* Jesus suffer and die? Can't we think of the rejection, the cross and the nails as something that yes, happened, but didn't *have* to happen? Something that human wickedness did to Jesus, but not something that was bound to happen, not something he steered himself steadily and sacrificially into, not something he did above all as a matter of obedience?

The whole New Testament is clear that that is what it was. The Cross was obedience to God. Not just something the Romans did, something that God wanted. As Paul puts it in Colossians, this is why Jesus had come: to make peace through the blood of his Cross. Even the Old Testament suggests it. Our reading from Isaiah today is taken from the first of four haunting poems in the Book of Isaiah, which together have become known as the Servant Songs. If you haven't read them, go home and do so – Isaiah 53 especially. The prophet speaks of one who will save Israel through his suffering, who will go down into death, despised, rejected, killed, for his people, by his people, and somehow through that heal them. They are astounding poems, and there are a fair few hints in the Gospels that they were hugely important to Jesus. That they shaped his heart, told him who he was, and what he had to do. The Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and be killed.

So why '*must*'?

Well, unsurprisingly, there are lots of books with great answers to that question. And those books are, for the most part, well worth reading.

But there is a simpler, and more profound way into the *must*. You don't even need to be clever to find it.

It's this. Come and sit in this church sometime, when no-one else is here. Sit maybe in the space at the very back, under the East Window. You'll find a small crucifix sitting on a table, with a candle beside it. Light the candle, and just spend some time, much time, looking at that little figure of Jesus, stretched out on the Cross. Put everything else to one side for a while, and let the crucifixion fill your mind, fill your heart. Imagine what it was like for Jesus. Imagine what he was thinking. Try to feel some glimmer of the pain of it all.

The books will still be worth reading. But to know what the Cross means, to know why it was a *must*, that is first and foremost a matter of the heart, of being still, of letting that crucifix speak, and of listening to what it says.

And what it says to me is this.

Jesus has to die – and he has to die like this: in pain, in defeat, in shame – in rejection – because that's what being human is like.

I don't mean, of course, that each one of us is such a terrible person, that we deserve pain and misery and crucifixion. Some Christians might say that, but that's not what I mean. It is rather that there's a great failure at the heart of being human. A kind of great sadness. Each one of us knows it, each one of us bears it around within us. We know just a little, inside ourselves, of what happened on the Cross.

We know, for instance, what it is to be small. What it is to be frightened. What it is to fear that we will be snuffed out.

We know too, what it is to be unloved. What it is to suffer rejection, what it is to be terribly, terribly alone.

We know what it is to fail. For all our dreams, for ourselves and for others to end in a whimper, in a flat, dull loss.

We know what it is to be rubbish.

Most of the time, we shut all of that out. You have to, to stay healthy. You couldn't function, if all that filled your life all the time. Humankind, someone said, cannot bear very much reality.

But there's no shutting out death. Death comes for us all, and it dismantles all our defences, and it whispers to us that our darkest fears were right, and that the shadows within were but the edge of a pit into which we shall fall forever and ever and ever, a pit without bottom, the pit of being nothing.

That is what being human is. It wasn't meant to be like that, we weren't made like that: but when as a race, when as individuals, we drift away from God, that it becomes. We begin to slide back, into nothing.

Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand, never drifted. He was the One, the Bible says, who was human as we are meant to be, the one whose heart was knitted straight to God's, the one in whom there are no shadows, in whom there was nothing but life and love. He is the One over whom the pit had no hold, the one who had never even begun to fall.

And on the Cross, he still does not fall. He *dives*. He dives to where he does not have to go. He dives to where he doesn't belong – the place of defeat, of misery, of futility, of death. And when he goes there, he changes it. Before Good Friday, there is nothing in the pit but dead things, broken things, hopeless things. Corpses and ghosts. After Good Friday, there are dead things, broken things, hopeless things... and Jesus. And Jesus changes everything. Where there is Jesus, there is hope. Everything that was lost and broken doesn't have to stay that way. There's mercy and renewal and the promise of a future right down there in the blackness, where there was nothing. There's a way back to God, where all was lost.

If that all sounds hopelessly abstract, let me put it this way. I had a colleague once, a minister, who took his own life. He took his life because the police were about to come, to charge him with offences against young boys many years ago. For me, it is hard to imagine someone more failed, more lost: a human being simply wrecked through his own sin. Dead, lost, broken and hopeless and many would say not even deserving pity. Even *he* thought he deserved no pity. Well, the Gospel is for him. Jesus has dived to his depth. Jesus has his arms around him. Jesus is pulling him back towards the surface, back towards the light. I cannot say for sure that he will get there. I cannot say that he might not, even now, choose to stay in the darkness. But I *can* say that he is never, ever left alone. I *can* say that there is hope, even for him. Because where there is Jesus, there is hope, and our great Gospel is that Jesus is in even the darkest corner of hell.

Why must Jesus die? Because in the end, he did not just come to teach us. He came to *rescue* us: from sin, from death, from shame, from failure, from ourselves. That's what the Cross means, and for that we give him glory and honour, now and forever.

Peter Waddell

Trinity XVI, 16th December 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Col.1:15-20; Mk.8:27-end.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Why '*must*'?

Why *must* Jesus suffer and die? Can't we think of the rejection, the cross and the nails as something that yes, happened, but didn't *have* to happen? Something that human wickedness did to Jesus, but not something that was bound to happen, not something he steered himself steadily and sacrificially into, not something he did above all as a matter of obedience?

The whole New Testament is clear that that is what it was. The Cross was obedience to God. Not just something the Romans did, something that God wanted. As Paul puts it in Colossians, this is why Jesus had come: to make peace through the blood of his Cross. Even the Old Testament suggests it. Our reading from Isaiah today is taken from the first of four haunting poems in the Book of Isaiah, which together have become known as the Servant Songs. If you haven't read them, go home and do so – Isaiah 53 especially. The prophet speaks of one who will save Israel through his suffering, who will go down into death, despised, rejected, killed, for his people, by his people, and somehow through that heal them. They are astounding poems, and there are a fair few hints in the Gospels that they were hugely important to Jesus. That they shaped his heart, told him who he was, and what he had to do. The Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and be killed.

So why '*must*'?

Well, unsurprisingly, there are lots of books with great answers to that question. And those books are, for the most part, well worth reading.

But there is a simpler, and more profound way into the *must*. You don't even need to be clever to find it.

It's this. Come and sit in this church sometime, when no-one else is here. Sit maybe in the space at the very back, under the East Window. You'll find a small crucifix sitting on a table, with a candle beside it. Light the candle, and just spend some time, much time, looking at that little figure of Jesus, stretched out on the Cross. Put everything else to one side for a while, and let the crucifixion fill your mind, fill your heart. Imagine what it was like for Jesus. Imagine what he was thinking. Try to feel some glimmer of the pain of it all.

The books will still be worth reading. But to know what the Cross means, to know why it was a *must*, that is first and foremost a matter of the heart, of being still, of letting that crucifix speak, and of listening to what it says.

And what it says to me is this.

Jesus has to die – and he has to die like this: in pain, in defeat, in shame – in rejection – because that's what being human is like.

I don't mean, of course, that each one of us is such a terrible person, that we deserve pain and misery and crucifixion. Some Christians might say that, but that's not what I mean. It is rather that there's a great failure at the heart of being human. A kind of great sadness. Each one of us knows it, each one of us bears it around within us. We know just a little, inside ourselves, of what happened on the Cross.

We know, for instance, what it is to be small. What it is to be frightened. What it is to fear that we will be snuffed out.

We know too, what it is to be unloved. What it is to suffer rejection, what it is to be terribly, terribly alone.

We know what it is to fail. For all our dreams, for ourselves and for others to end in a whimper, in a flat, dull loss.

We know what it is to be rubbish.

Most of the time, we shut all of that out. You have to, to stay healthy. You couldn't function, if all that filled your life all the time. Humankind, someone said, cannot bear very much reality.

But there's no shutting out death. Death comes for us all, and it dismantles all our defences, and it whispers to us that our darkest fears were right, and that the shadows within were but the edge of a pit into which we shall fall forever and ever and ever, a pit without bottom, the pit of being nothing.

That is what being human is. It wasn't meant to be like that, we weren't made like that: but when as a race, when as individuals, we drift away from God, that it becomes. We begin to slide back, into nothing.

Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand, never drifted. He was the One, the Bible says, who was human as we are meant to be, the one whose heart was knitted straight to God's, the one in whom there are no shadows, in whom there was nothing but life and love. He is the One over whom the pit had no hold, the one who had never even begun to fall.

And on the Cross, he still does not fall. He *dives*. He dives to where he does not have to go. He dives to where he doesn't belong – the place of defeat, of misery, of futility, of death. And when he goes there, he changes it. Before Good Friday, there is nothing in the pit but dead things, broken things, hopeless things. Corpses and ghosts. After Good Friday, there are dead things, broken things, hopeless things... and Jesus. And Jesus changes everything. Where there is Jesus, there is hope. Everything that was lost and broken doesn't have to stay that way. There's mercy and renewal and the promise of a future right down there in the blackness, where there was nothing. There's a way back to God, where all was lost.

If that all sounds hopelessly abstract, let me put it this way. I had a colleague once, a minister, who took his own life. He took his life because the police were about to come, to charge him with offences against young boys many years ago. For me, it is hard to imagine someone more failed, more lost: a human being simply wrecked through his own sin. Dead, lost, broken and hopeless and many would say not even deserving pity. Even *he* thought he deserved no pity. Well, the Gospel is for him. Jesus has dived to his depth. Jesus has his arms around him. Jesus is pulling him back towards the surface, back towards the light. I cannot say for sure that he will get there. I cannot say that he might not, even now, choose to stay in the darkness. But I *can* say that he is never, ever left alone. I *can* say that there is hope, even for him. Because where there is Jesus, there is hope, and our great Gospel is that Jesus is in even the darkest corner of hell.

Why must Jesus die? Because in the end, he did not just come to teach us. He came to *rescue* us: from sin, from death, from shame, from failure, from ourselves. That's what the Cross means, and for that we give him glory and honour, now and forever.

Peter Waddell

Trinity XVI, 16th December 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Col.1:15-20; Mk.8:27-end.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Why '*must*'?

Why *must* Jesus suffer and die? Can't we think of the rejection, the cross and the nails as something that yes, happened, but didn't *have* to happen? Something that human wickedness did to Jesus, but not something that was bound to happen, not something he steered himself steadily and sacrificially into, not something he did above all as a matter of obedience?

The whole New Testament is clear that that is what it was. The Cross was obedience to God. Not just something the Romans did, something that God wanted. As Paul puts it in Colossians, this is why Jesus had come: to make peace through the blood of his Cross. Even the Old Testament suggests it. Our reading from Isaiah today is taken from the first of four haunting poems in the Book of Isaiah, which together have become known as the Servant Songs. If you haven't read them, go home and do so – Isaiah 53 especially. The prophet speaks of one who will save Israel through his suffering, who will go down into death, despised, rejected, killed, for his people, by his people, and somehow through that heal them. They are astounding poems, and there are a fair few hints in the Gospels that they were hugely important to Jesus. That they shaped his heart, told him who he was, and what he had to do. The Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and be killed.

So why '*must*'?

Well, unsurprisingly, there are lots of books with great answers to that question. And those books are, for the most part, well worth reading.

But there is a simpler, and more profound way into the *must*. You don't even need to be clever to find it.

It's this. Come and sit in this church sometime, when no-one else is here. Sit maybe in the space at the very back, under the East Window. You'll find a small crucifix sitting on a table, with a candle beside it. Light the candle, and just spend some time, much time, looking at that little figure of Jesus, stretched out on the Cross. Put everything else to one side for a while, and let the crucifixion fill your mind, fill your heart. Imagine what it was like for Jesus. Imagine what he was thinking. Try to feel some glimmer of the pain of it all.

The books will still be worth reading. But to know what the Cross means, to know why it was a *must*, that is first and foremost a matter of the heart, of being still, of letting that crucifix speak, and of listening to what it says.

And what it says to me is this.

Jesus has to die – and he has to die like this: in pain, in defeat, in shame – in rejection – because that's what being human is like.

I don't mean, of course, that each one of us is such a terrible person, that we deserve pain and misery and crucifixion. Some Christians might say that, but that's not what I mean. It is rather that there's a great failure at the heart of being human. A kind of great sadness. Each one of us knows it, each one of us bears it around within us. We know just a little, inside ourselves, of what happened on the Cross.

We know, for instance, what it is to be small. What it is to be frightened. What it is to fear that we will be snuffed out.

We know too, what it is to be unloved. What it is to suffer rejection, what it is to be terribly, terribly alone.

We know what it is to fail. For all our dreams, for ourselves and for others to end in a whimper, in a flat, dull loss.

We know what it is to be rubbish.

Most of the time, we shut all of that out. You have to, to stay healthy. You couldn't function, if all that filled your life all the time. Humankind, someone said, cannot bear very much reality.

But there's no shutting out death. Death comes for us all, and it dismantles all our defences, and it whispers to us that our darkest fears were right, and that the shadows within were but the edge of a pit into which we shall fall forever and ever and ever, a pit without bottom, the pit of being nothing.

That is what being human is. It wasn't meant to be like that, we weren't made like that: but when as a race, when as individuals, we drift away from God, that it becomes. We begin to slide back, into nothing.

Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand, never drifted. He was the One, the Bible says, who was human as we are meant to be, the one whose heart was knitted straight to God's, the one in whom there are no shadows, in whom there was nothing but life and love. He is the One over whom the pit had no hold, the one who had never even begun to fall.

And on the Cross, he still does not fall. He *dives*. He dives to where he does not have to go. He dives to where he doesn't belong – the place of defeat, of misery, of futility, of death. And when he goes there, he changes it. Before Good Friday, there is nothing in the pit but dead things, broken things, hopeless things. Corpses and ghosts. After Good Friday, there are dead things, broken things, hopeless things... and Jesus. And Jesus changes everything. Where there is Jesus, there is hope. Everything that was lost and broken doesn't have to stay that way. There's mercy and renewal and the promise of a future right down there in the blackness, where there was nothing. There's a way back to God, where all was lost.

If that all sounds hopelessly abstract, let me put it this way. I had a colleague once, a minister, who took his own life. He took his life because the police were about to come, to charge him with offences against young boys many years ago. For me, it is hard to imagine someone more failed, more lost: a human being simply wrecked through his own sin. Dead, lost, broken and hopeless and many would say not even deserving pity. Even *he* thought he deserved no pity. Well, the Gospel is for him. Jesus has dived to his depth. Jesus has his arms around him. Jesus is pulling him back towards the surface, back towards the light. I cannot say for sure that he will get there. I cannot say that he might not, even now, choose to stay in the darkness. But I *can* say that he is never, ever left alone. I *can* say that there is hope, even for him. Because where there is Jesus, there is hope, and our great Gospel is that Jesus is in even the darkest corner of hell.

Why must Jesus die? Because in the end, he did not just come to teach us. He came to *rescue* us: from sin, from death, from shame, from failure, from ourselves. That's what the Cross means, and for that we give him glory and honour, now and forever.

Peter Waddell

Trinity XVI, 16th December 2018

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Col.1:15-20; Mk.8:27-end.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Why '*must*'?

Why *must* Jesus suffer and die? Can't we think of the rejection, the cross and the nails as something that yes, happened, but didn't *have* to happen? Something that human wickedness did to Jesus, but not something that was bound to happen, not something he steered himself steadily and sacrificially into, not something he did above all as a matter of obedience?

The whole New Testament is clear that that is what it was. The Cross was obedience to God. Not just something the Romans did, something that God wanted. As Paul puts it in Colossians, this is why Jesus had come: to make peace through the blood of his Cross. Even the Old Testament suggests it. Our reading from Isaiah today is taken from the first of four haunting poems in the Book of Isaiah, which together have become known as the Servant Songs. If you haven't read them, go home and do so – Isaiah 53 especially. The prophet speaks of one who will save Israel through his suffering, who will go down into death, despised, rejected, killed, for his people, by his people, and somehow through that heal them. They are astounding poems, and there are a fair few hints in the Gospels that they were hugely important to Jesus. That they shaped his heart, told him who he was, and what he had to do. The Son of Man *must* undergo great suffering, and be rejected, and be killed.

So why '*must*'?

Well, unsurprisingly, there are lots of books with great answers to that question. And those books are, for the most part, well worth reading.

But there is a simpler, and more profound way into the *must*. You don't even need to be clever to find it.

It's this. Come and sit in this church sometime, when no-one else is here. Sit maybe in the space at the very back, under the East Window. You'll find a small crucifix sitting on a table, with a candle beside it. Light the candle, and just spend some time, much time, looking at that little figure of Jesus, stretched out on the Cross. Put everything else to one side for a while, and let the crucifixion fill your mind, fill your heart. Imagine what it was like for Jesus. Imagine what he was thinking. Try to feel some glimmer of the pain of it all.

The books will still be worth reading. But to know what the Cross means, to know why it was a *must*, that is first and foremost a matter of the heart, of being still, of letting that crucifix speak, and of listening to what it says.

And what it says to me is this.

Jesus has to die – and he has to die like this: in pain, in defeat, in shame – in rejection – because that's what being human is like.

I don't mean, of course, that each one of us is such a terrible person, that we deserve pain and misery and crucifixion. Some Christians might say that, but that's not what I mean. It is rather that there's a great failure at the heart of being human. A kind of great sadness. Each one of us knows it, each one of us bears it around within us. We know just a little, inside ourselves, of what happened on the Cross.

We know, for instance, what it is to be small. What it is to be frightened. What it is to fear that we will be snuffed out.

We know too, what it is to be unloved. What it is to suffer rejection, what it is to be terribly, terribly alone.

We know what it is to fail. For all our dreams, for ourselves and for others to end in a whimper, in a flat, dull loss.

We know what it is to be rubbish.

Most of the time, we shut all of that out. You have to, to stay healthy. You couldn't function, if all that filled your life all the time. Humankind, someone said, cannot bear very much reality.

But there's no shutting out death. Death comes for us all, and it dismantles all our defences, and it whispers to us that our darkest fears were right, and that the shadows within were but the edge of a pit into which we shall fall forever and ever and ever, a pit without bottom, the pit of being nothing.

That is what being human is. It wasn't meant to be like that, we weren't made like that: but when as a race, when as individuals, we drift away from God, that it becomes. We begin to slide back, into nothing.

Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand, never drifted. He was the One, the Bible says, who was human as we are meant to be, the one whose heart was knitted straight to God's, the one in whom there are no shadows, in whom there was nothing but life and love. He is the One over whom the pit had no hold, the one who had never even begun to fall.

And on the Cross, he still does not fall. He *dives*. He dives to where he does not have to go. He dives to where he doesn't belong – the place of defeat, of misery, of futility, of death. And when he goes there, he changes it. Before Good Friday, there is nothing in the pit but dead things, broken things, hopeless things. Corpses and ghosts. After Good Friday, there are dead things, broken things, hopeless things... and Jesus. And Jesus changes everything. Where there is Jesus, there is hope. Everything that was lost and broken doesn't have to stay that way. There's mercy and renewal and the promise of a future right down there in the blackness, where there was nothing. There's a way back to God, where all was lost.

If that all sounds hopelessly abstract, let me put it this way. I had a colleague once, a minister, who took his own life. He took his life because the police were about to come, to charge him with offences against young boys many years ago. For me, it is hard to imagine someone more failed, more lost: a human being simply wrecked through his own sin. Dead, lost, broken and hopeless and many would say not even deserving pity. Even *he* thought he deserved no pity. Well, the Gospel is for him. Jesus has dived to his depth. Jesus has his arms around him. Jesus is pulling him back towards the surface, back towards the light. I cannot say for sure that he will get there. I cannot say that he might not, even now, choose to stay in the darkness. But I *can* say that he is never, ever left alone. I *can* say that there is hope, even for him. Because where there is Jesus, there is hope, and our great Gospel is that Jesus is in even the darkest corner of hell.

Why must Jesus die? Because in the end, he did not just come to teach us. He came to *rescue* us: from sin, from death, from shame, from failure, from ourselves. That's what the Cross means, and for that we give him glory and honour, now and forever.

Peter Waddell