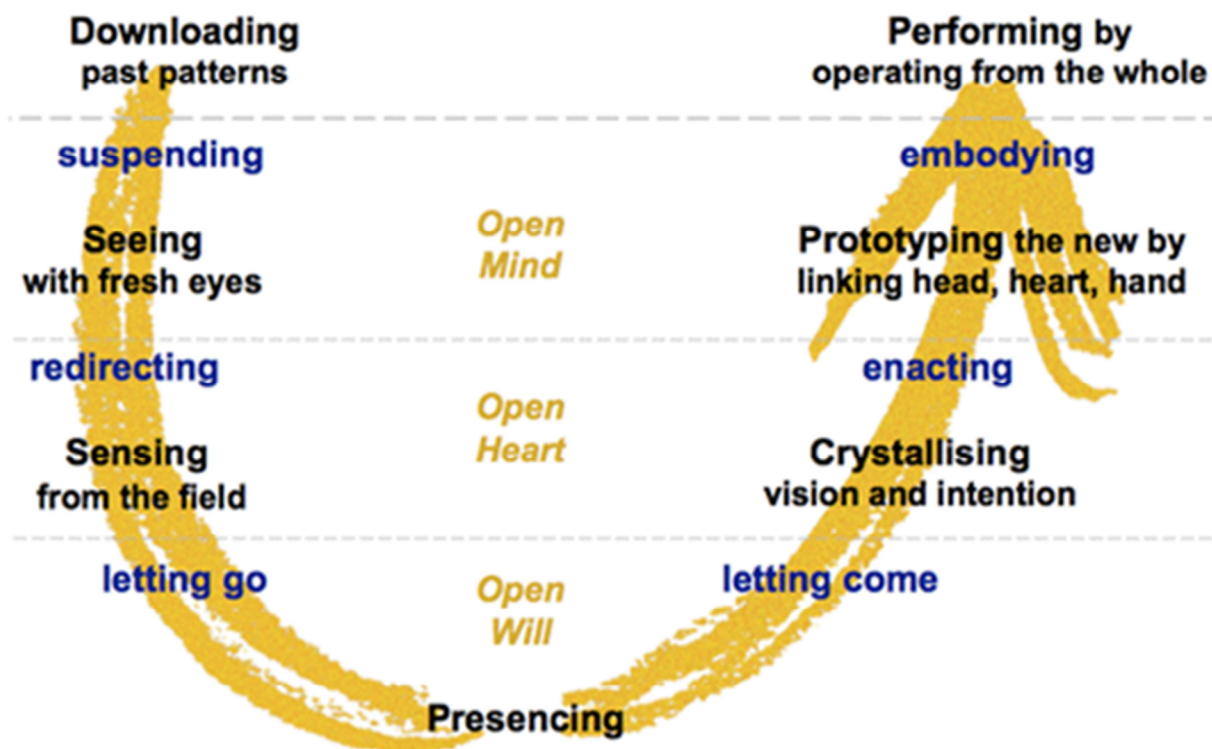


## GOOD FRIDAY REFLECTION

I'm pleased to introduce this devotional resource for Good Friday which Fiona, Alex and I have prepared for you to use today. It's based on the 7 last words of Christ that he spoke from the cross. For each of the sayings there is a poem written by Fiona, followed by some searching questions to encourage you to apply the words to yourself and then an invitation to pray. The whole is accompanied by some improv worship music and concludes with a beautiful worship song 'Above all powers' sung by Alex. You'll need to find a quiet corner for an uninterrupted 10-12 mins to make the most of it. But first I'd just like to say a few more words of reflection on Good Friday, pick up on some of the points on the theme I've been developing from Palm Sunday through Maundy Thurs.

Yesterday, in the Maundy Thursday service, I introduced the U-theory, a model of transformational change proposed by Otto Scharmer, and I suggested that during Passion week Jesus was following this path through the events that were unfolding.



One might easily suppose that the events of Good Friday, of Jesus route to Crucifixion from the Garden of Gethsemane, with the trial and the flogging, with the mockery of the soldiers and ultimately the nailing of his battered body to a cross was still part of the downward leg of the U, into the abyss. But, actually, I think otherwise.

Scharmer speaks of the bottom of the U being a significant point of change and there is a threshold that needs to be crossed from the downward trajectory to a new upward focus. He speaks of crossing from 'letting go' to 'letting come'. Yesterday after we'd reflected on the last Supper and then thought about Jesus praying with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, I suggested that that seemed to be the point when Jesus reached the depths of this world transforming journey he was on. This prayer in the garden was the point at which he completely surrendered to the will of God.

His words 'Take this cup away from me' followed by 'Yet not my will but yours be done' I reckon signifies that threshold point. This was Christ letting go and submitting and then committing to what had to happen for God's salvation story to be worked out in all its fulness.

All that was to follow therefore was part of the upward journey out of the transforming depths. This is evidenced, as I said yesterday, by the way Jesus simply allowed the events to happen to him without resistance – he ‘let come’ – from receiving Judas’ kiss of betrayal, to giving no defence at his trial. To all of this he willingly surrendered.

As we continue the upward curve of the U valley, Scharmer speaks of ‘crystallising vision and intention’. I propose Jesus’ crucifixion enacts this. Physically and psychologically Jesus’ suffering continues, with the flogging and the mockery, with the crown of thorns being pressed on his head and the nails being driven into his hands and feet. But if we consider for a moment what is going on spiritually, I imagine that with every flay of the whip, with every strike of the hammer, Jesus’ resolve to fulfil his mission is strengthening.

Through Lent I have been reading a devotional book which explores Celtic Christianity, looking at some of the hymns, poems and stories that expound a distinctive theology. On Tuesday this week, just after I’d finished filming the Maundy Thursday service, the daily reading told of ‘the Dream of the Rood’ a Celtic story that imagines the events of Holy week from the perspective of the personified cross.

The cross tells of Christ, a ‘young hero’ who was hurrying ‘with great eagerness to climb on the wretched gallows...’ [the cross] because ‘he wanted to redeem mankind.’

The author David Cole writes:

*We are used to seeing a beaten and bloody Christ falling and stumbling along a road, carrying a heavy beam of cross to his execution place, weakened by the flogging which he had received. This pulls on modern heart strings and on our mindset of being historically and literally accurate about things to give them their full effect, a modern belief that only the factually accurate presentation is useful for understanding the things which happened.<sup>1</sup>*

He says that this was not so for the Celtic culture, where imagery and metaphor were of greater importance than factual accuracy. In our modern age, we seem determined to imagine the physical nature of the crucifixion – remember the film of the Passion with its graphic images emphasising the horror and gruesome details in a bid to help us better understand the physical and psychological torture what Jesus went through. The Celtic tradition cautions us that we miss something if we allow that to blind us to the spiritual story that is being played out at the same time.

In this Celtic poem, the depiction of Christ as a young hero bravely striding towards the battleground helps us to see what’s going on in the spiritual realms rather than be distracted by the physical reality.

*Having drawn his resolve together in the garden of gethsemane, he came to the cross physically weakened by the ordeal he had been through, but spiritually strong, knowing what this meant to all people and all things in both directions of linear history.*

*Christ is depicted here as ready for battle, eager to make the choice to go into this fight which would redeem humanity and reconcile all things back to the Creator. We are introduced to the brave hero King staring death in the face without a flinching heart.<sup>2</sup>*

It’s powerful imagery!

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<sup>1</sup> Cole, David, Celtic Lent: 40 days of devotions to Easter (2018, BRF, Abingdon) pg.137

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg 138

In the Kingdom's topsy turvy world we've know that promise that when we are weak then we are strong. Like in the Lenten wilderness having fasted 40 days, Jesus physically was spent, but spiritually was hyper alive and strong and able to resist any temptations that were hurled at him by Satan. So too as he faced the cross, humiliated, beaten, mocked, abused, tortured, physically and psychologically spent, spiritually he was a force to be reckoned with, spiritually he was ready to take on the forces of darkness in the sure knowledge that he had the power to defeat sin and death and the devil. This is the power of the cross. This is the story of Good Friday.

Just before I leave you to continue your personal devotions, a final note...I have said in earlier reflections how struck I have been by the geography of the area mirroring this U shape, transformational journey that Jesus underwent.

On Palm Sunday I showed you this photo from the Mount of Olives showing the Kidron Valley with its tombs that forms the bottom of the U, and the gleaming city of Jerusalem beyond on the other side.

I'd like to show you another photo, this time of the steps that have been uncovered by archaeologists that lead from the bottom of the Kidron Valley up towards where they think Caiaphas' house is sited. These are the very steps that Jesus would have trod, as he was led by the soldiers

from the Garden of Gethsemane to face trial. I suggest these steps represent the upward resolve of Jesus as he went to the cross to enact the fulfilment of his mission. They are wide and solid and measured and well rooted and ancient. Reflect on that...



So today, on this **Good** Friday as we reflect upon the cross, using this devotional resource, let's not dwell too much on the shame and the pain, on the psychological and physical trauma that Jesus underwent. This is not to downplay that reality but to help us realise that it's not the whole, nor indeed the central part of the story. Let's rather remember to think about what is happening spiritually, to consider the victory that is being won for us on the cross.

I hope you are inspired by this resource to do some soul searching in company with the Spirit of God and that you will find it deeply moving and even transforming as you follow Jesus over the threshold towards a crystallising vision.

Let's pray....Heavenly Father, as we reflect on the crucifixion of your dear son and listen once again to his final words spoken from the cross, help us to open our minds, hearts and wills that we might encounter your presence and cross the threshold of transformation so that our vision of your will in our lives might become clearer and that we might commit ourselves once again, resolved to follow you. Amen.