

Worcester Cathedral

Lent 5: Passion Sunday 6th April 2025

Sermon at the 10.30 Eucharist on the Sunday following the death of the Revd Canon John Paul Hoskins, Residentiary Canon and Precentor.

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fightings within, and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come.**

Where to begin? Where to begin to write a sermon, to say a few words? Where to begin to make sense of the unthinkable? Where to begin with unravelling the decisions, the emotions, the must dos? Where to begin?

All is flung upside down, the rug is taken from under our feet. I have nothing to say.

And yet I scan the readings for today and each one has a thousand messages for a time such as this. Each hymn, each text, this service holds us as a community, as the Church, as God's people.

With both beautiful timing and painful coincidence our Lenten season moves into Passiontide and in scripture and verse and liturgy we are thrown into the emotions of the suffering, passion and death of Our Lord.

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt*

Since the news of John Paul's death on Tuesday, the rhythm of daily worship continues – as it would and as it should. The lectionary, that well-tuned, well-thought out, prescriptive and deliberate setting out of the scriptures for our reading and learning, continues unbroken and unaltered. And rightly it should. Morning Prayer, Holy Communion, Evening Prayer, the first day, the second day, the third day, every day...

There have been times when I have wanted to miss out a verse, or alter a reading but I have heard John Paul's voice over my shoulder; in the past John Paul has been quick to remind us of the importance of authorised liturgical practice, and so I have stuck to what was prescribed.

That provision, in Bible reading, in psalms, and indeed in the anthems and hymns throughout this week has thrown us into emotionally charged waters: *Just as I am, though tossed about.*

It should not be any other way, and I have so much thankfulness for and pride in our Cathedral Choir for singing the most poignant verses of the psalter to the most haunting, exquisite chants, whilst dealing with their own grief for the death of the precentor – the one whose voice has almost daily sung alongside theirs.

It is because of the raw and honest force of the psalms that many of us have been given a ladder for our emotions. We have added our tears to the laments of ancient times, laments which cry through the ages and sustain our grief today. We have proclaimed the good news of hope and life with poignancy and through gritted teeth and tearful eyes – confident and determined to trust what we can sometimes only tentatively say.

That ladder of biblical verse has been partnered by the rhythm of morning and evening prayer and the eucharist, day by day. Some who do not usually come to these daily offices have joined the community, and this, together with the wave of love and support and prayer, has strengthened the witness of this Cathedral Church to the hope of the Gospel – which is, the hope to which John Paul at baptism, confirmation and ordination, promised his life.

As Lent turns to Passiontide so Holy Week will walk us to the cross, to the tomb, and to Easter. We look towards the cross knowing fully, and believing confidently, in the resurrection of Our Lord – Easter will come, and indeed is here. Which is why, in reading and sharing these scriptures

at this Eucharist, each one has a thousand messages for a time such as this. But for now I remain with the hymn:

*Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fightings within, and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Passion Sunday: we enter into the last days of our Lord, and walk with him in suffering and pain, and we are there at his death and burial. For us all this will be a heavy and difficult time, but it is my sincere prayer that we witness boldly to the glory of the risen Christ; we shall honour the faith and dedication of our dear brother John Paul by entering into this Paschal mystery with absolute confidence in the power and triumph of Christ. It was Christ who called John Paul and Christ who also invites us:

Together we will worship.

Together we will sing, '*O Lamb of God, I come*'.

Stephen Edwards
Dean of Worcester
6 April 2025

* *This hymn was sung during the offertory in this service.*