

**Sunday 7 June 2026**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**The First Sunday After Trinity**

**OT: Hosea 5:15-6:6**

**NT: Romans 4:13-25**

**Gp: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**

Look up at the great hanging crucifix that dominates this church – is Christ wearing a cloak? He is not. He has been stripped bare. Mary and John, at his feet, are dressed in the modest clothes of everyday people, but Christ has had his cloak taken from him. The fringe that brave, suffering, woman touched, now lay in the dust, somewhere in that place they called Golgotha, with soldiers throwing dice to decide which of them would keep it. And, hours later, it was no doubt bundled up, and taken away, even as Mary and John and the others who were brave enough, lowered their Teacher's lifeless body, and hurried to wrap it in grave clothes. His suffering had been intense – psychological, physical, spiritual, but nobody could say it was protracted. Christ was dead within a day of Judas's kiss.

Somebody asked me recently why Christ's suffering lasting hours was more significant, or powerful, than theirs, which had lasted months – undiagnosed pain, with medical care that left much to be desired, and the worry, and all the while, the nagging pain, which saps the world of its joy. When I was sitting listening to that person, in the midst of a busy week, trying to pay attention, my head began to lol a little, I'm ashamed to say, and I struggled to string together a coherent answer. But the pulpit allows me the privilege of a second attempt.

Our first reading today is from the prophet Hosea. He lived almost a thousand years before Christ, and his book is a troubling one. He describes the people of Israel as being like an unfaithful bride, a prostitute in fact, bringing the wrath of God upon themselves. And as the people come to their senses, the prophet imagines them saying, of God, 'it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up'. It all sounds quite masochistic – and of course, lots of people like that, some people enjoy the idea that they're not worthy, they're beyond redemption, they deserve to be torn apart. To point out that that's not very healthy, is not to pretend that human beings don't need redemption, and haven't made a terrible mess of things, but the point is, how do we imagine God in response?

In Christ's encounter with this woman, who has been bleeding for over a decade, painful, embarrassing, shaming, we see God's revelation of how God responds to our pain. God doesn't recoil from this woman who many would have considered 'unclean'. God in Christ stops to see her, calls her to step forward, healed, and restored, and tells her that her faith has made her well. Her faith has made her well.

Faith in God's goodness and mercy is hard to sustain in the face of great suffering, it requires more than wishful thinking, it requires practice – the practice of prayer, the rhythm of worship, the hands held open to receive the bread that is Christ, week in week out; and the sacrifice of oneself in love for others, in

unshowy ways, in ways that nobody notices, or acknowledges, these have been the ways in which millions upon millions have leaned on God in their suffering, and although everything seems to be being taken away, faith, which is ultimately love, God at work within us, this endures.

The prophet Hosea's strange book is one we need to revisit, not simply to make ourselves feel superior or sophisticated, but to understand the idea of Christ being present, not just in the course of Jesus of Nazareth's earthly life, but present as God with the people of Israel, carrying them for all those hundreds of years. St Paul tried to explain it this way, by saying that when the people of Israel travelled through the wilderness, and God gave them a rock that Moses struck, and it gave out pure water to drink, that rock was Christ. It was certainly a special rock, because every day when they walked on, the rock moved with them. St Paul is trying to get us to see that while of course we turn our eyes and imaginations to Christ's innocent suffering, embracing death, and giving his life as a ransom, to set us free from sin; nevertheless, God is cloaked with a robe of our experience and life, in every moment, God is with us, and all of our pain and despair, together with all of our joys and extraordinary achievements, form a cloak that God has chosen to wear, out of love for us, the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

This is all enacted in the mass. When we come together, by the grace of God, the Spirit of God prays within us, and lifts our words, and our simple gifts, by divine fire, into something extraordinary and eternal. We, who are not worthy to gather up the crumbs under Christ's table, are nevertheless, instructed by him to sit and eat, and as we receive his life, so our whole life, the highs and lows, is bound to the heart of God, and becomes part of Christ's offering of himself to the Father. It's not only when we're feeling joyous or mystical, or dreamy, that we're at one with God. It's also when we're on the cross.

God is bigger than the worst we can do, and it takes the carpenter from Nazareth to help us understand. He isn't offended, he isn't disgusted, he isn't distracted. He keeps going with the job in hand, God the practical tradesman has come to save us, and to set the world right. The mourners laugh, cynically perhaps, when he says he will raise a child from her deathbed. He doesn't get angry. He doesn't smite them. They too will be touched by the hem of his cloak. May God clothe us with the robe of salvation, even as he has clothed himself with our life, now and forever.

**Fr Philip Anderson**