



## Embrace and Renewal: Listening to the Music of the Cross

Sermon given on Good Friday, Friday 29<sup>th</sup> March during Compline

In this series of sermons and homilies Revd Canon Ivor Moody takes us through some of the experiences and emotions of living with love, death, despair and hope using contemporary music as an explorative vehicle for us to site our joy and pain within the context of the Passion of Jesus Christ.

### Brothers In Arms by Dire Straits

Our second song this afternoon is 'Brothers in Arms' by a band called Dire Straits. It was written in 1985, but one of the reasons why it has stood the test of time is because its lyrics appeal to any generation experiencing the ravages of war and the challenges of divided and broken societies. It is written from the standpoint of a wounded and dying soldier lying in the moonlight in the midst of mist covered mountains. He addresses his comrades, both those who have fought with him and those other brothers in arms who fought against him, but who are brothers in arms nevertheless; all of them someone's daughter, someone's son.

This song communicates something which is a fundamental characteristic of any relationship with Jesus Christ, that we are a common humanity of women and men from all points of the compass, joined together and linked to the Father. It speaks of the ultimate inter-connectedness of us all and as such it builds on ideas we developed with the song 'Heroes' when it was suggested that a simple, ordinary demonstration of human affection immediately adjacent to the Berlin Wall designed to separate, incarcerate and instil fear, was the 'ghost in the machine'. A non-competitive, non-violent passivity which not only sets the benchmark for all human behaviour, but ensures that one day love *will* be proved stronger than hate, and walls which stand for the setting of one human being against another, seeking to establish one way of life over another, *will* come tumbling down.

But Brothers in Arms with its own overt and crucial emphasis on a brotherhood and sisterhood which transcends opposing armies, cultures and nationalities offers us a true theology of neighbour, and links us directly to Jesus' ministry and this liturgy and time together this afternoon. A defining characteristic of all Jesus did was centred on the love and embracing of neighbour, whether it was a leper, a Syro-Phoenician woman or Samaritans, and the song helps us to see the words from the cross, 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' not only as the passivity of love, but its inclusiveness. Spoken as they were from a

height looking down at the sea of humanity in front of him, it was addressed to Jews, Gentiles, Roman soldiers and shocked and aghast disciples alike for, as the psalmist says, 'All had fallen short of God'.

It is why this afternoon's liturgy, whatever else it might mean and inspire us to think about, should convince us of the need for atonement, and Brothers in Arms, a secular song about the scourge of war and the need for peace leads us into Good Friday by powerfully reminding us of that. Our dying soldier reflects that in a Universe with so many different worlds, with so many different suns, we have just one world but we live in different ones; and we are fools to make war on our brothers in arms. The need for atonement - a humble recognition of our fallenness and our common enslavement to it, especially in and through our powerful liturgy today, is a recognition not only that all of us have the capacity to do great harm to others, but that hatred is the common enemy of us all.

And as we will approach the cross in a little while to make our devotions before it, I think we come face to face with our own bereavement and loss, not least of course the eventual prospect of our own deaths and what awaits us as we soar through tracts unknown. Like the dying soldier in our song, this afternoon is about that thing with which we all wrestle. To carry on living our lives in the hope that one day there will be something better than this. Immersed as we are, caught up as we are in the dramatic tragic pageant of the crucifixion, being together in this sacred place today we experience a liturgy, a drama, which has the ability to hold opposites together: love and hate, joy and sadness, war and peace, to help us live with the suffering and the ambiguities of our lives and to try and make sense of those contradictions.

But the song 'Brothers in Arms' has one more precious thing to give us today. For the injured soldier in our song, his final thoughts turn to the warmth and security of home in contrast to the mist covered mountains which will be his final resting place. At this moment hovering between life and death it is the powerful, primaeval pull of the womb, to the one who gives life, a home and a security and to whom one finds perhaps a hitherto unconsidered yet deeply entrenched spiritual, emotional, psychological connection which appears paramount. It is a well attested fact that men lying injured and dying on the battlefield call out for their mothers.

I wonder, then, if this is a modern twentieth century take on something which the incarnation makes explicit? From the moment God chose the womb of the Virgin Mary, that because the mother-child relationship is amongst the strongest there is, that this was *also* to be an essential component in the process of salvation begun by God becoming man? The story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee where Jesus and his disciples had been invited as guests is significant here. The wine runs out and the fact is reported to Jesus by his mother. We often puzzle over Jesus' apparently cold reply to Mary, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come'. But we miss the significance of the fact that it is his Mary his

*mother* who makes him aware of the crisis. In the first instance it was a mother telling her son about the state of things. A basic, filial conversation between the God Bearer and the Word Bearer that is about a mother calling upon her son and no one else when she sees the distress and upset of the bride and bridegroom and their guests.

Here now maybe, we have a story of rootedness and connectedness which isn't merely horizontal between this global community of women and men and given a secular context by 'Brothers in Arms', but vertical - a belonging to God which has been passed down in human DNA from the moment God decided to inhabit a human womb.

And this can throw new light on that hugely poignant and emotional encounter between Jesus and his mother and the beloved disciple standing near the cross. From the cross, is it possible that we can now say that it is this umbilical cord connection between a divine son and his human mother which prompts Jesus to ensure that the two people he loved most in the world are placed in each other's care and not left destitute and rejected? 'Woman, here is your son... Here is your mother.' Perhaps the most precious gift that Mary has to give is that through her human motherhood of God *all* of us have this umbilical cord connection with the Godhead as well as with each other, linking humanity with the divine. Perhaps it is this, above and beyond all else, which makes us *all* brothers and sisters in arms.