

GOOD FRIDAY - THE CROSS AND THE MISSION

We have crosses everywhere; I wear a cross daily, and outside the church, when people wear a cross or see someone wearing a cross, it is usually significant to their faith. I have been asked many times, if I am a Christian or a priest because of the cross I wear.

But something is missing in the significance of the cross if the meaning of the cross is simply what Jesus died on. To revere the cross is a right thing to do, but how many of us can actually say what the cross is really all about? Perhaps what I should be asking is: what is Jesus' death on the cross really all about? Jesus with and in God, was part of God; though human, He was incarnate, embodying the presence and Spirit of God.

It is wonderful to acknowledge that Jesus voluntarily put his life on the line for us, to know it was to save us from our sins. To put that simply, in Jesus' death, he restores to us a sense of belonging that was taken from this world. Well, that is not so simple to put, because why did Jesus have to die on a cross in the first place? Theologians have wrestled with this question over millennia and have come up with different answers. Something very evil killed something very perfect, and God took that action and turned it into a way for humanity to be reconnected with Him.

God's mission has been his plan since the fall of Adam. The fall of Adam opened a floodgate of a kind of oppression poured over this world. God created us, and in his design for our life he built in part of himself, he breathed life into us, our existence is a two-way street with God. He, interacting with us, we, drawing from the life He brings, and this incredible relationship was temporarily disfigured.

What we truly need to understand is that reunion with God was God's plan all along. Not to kill Jesus, but in Jesus, the physical representation of God; by giving Himself, He broke the curse of worthlessness that grips all of humanity. Looking at the world with all its corruption, diseases, and death, there are people hating one another, and we may well say, "Fat lot of good that did". But the reality is God's mission is to make us feel valued, and he offers, but does not enforce, a new way of living to anyone who wants it; and who wouldn't want a life that is full of hope and peace and joy, even though darkness and anxiety is all around us.

God does not reject us; simply put, things that corrupt and perfect goodness cannot mix; it's like dish soap and oil. Is it any wonder Jesus cried out just before he died, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In that instant of separation, he became our access to God; yet as we know, it was only a moment in time that opened up the opportunity to know Jesus' love for us as part of God's outreach to us. Have you noticed that in the Christian story of the cross, in what God has done, God asks us for nothing? He, with Jesus, in that perfect unity, makes it possible to enter into His love story. The best love stories I know are when a lover is prepared to die for the other. In this case, God himself was the sacrifice with a double whammy, because he overcame death; this is how much He values us.

We look to the cross today, not as a means of execution, but as a symbol of the liberty God has given us. Christians say, "God has forgiven us for our sins"; but what is really meant in these words is that forgiveness is God's "reunion celebration", made possible by what happened on the cross. God does not count the wrongs we have done, and then say, "OK if

you do such and such you can come in". His act of forgiveness is to simply let His door stay open. We are given the choice to then come in, and if we do, we enter into a whole new world of what love and being valued is all about. Once, we lived under the oppression of condemnation, feeling like failures; this, in a sense, was like living a death. Or rather, it is like having a cancer we do not even realise we have until it begins to sap the life from us. Now we can be, as it were, resurrected into a new life, with a sense of purpose, belonging and meaning. It's living a life that God breaths into us as we come to him in gratitude and faith for what has been achieved through the cross. God's mission, a gift of grace, that has never stopped flowing out into the world since then.

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