

GOOD FRIDAY, March 30, 2018

Jesus' Passion story

The Cross of Christ

Why did Jesus have to die? And why on a cross through one of the most cruel means-crucifixion? On this Good Friday these two questions seem to resonate because it is on this day that the Christian world remembers the One whom God sent to save all people. It is Jesus who is lifted above the earth nailed to a cross to die a slow, agony filled, cruel death. But why?

Jesus' death did not just happen because King Herod and Pontius Pilate wanted to crucify this man. In fact Pontius Pilate did not want to have anything to do with it. To save face, he was the one who asked the crowd what should be done to Jesus. The crowd responded, "Crucify, crucify." And so Pilate handed him over for this purpose.

Jesus however knew his life's purpose on earth. He is the Son of God knew he was sent into the world to save the people from sin. He knew the words of the prophets who spoke of the Messiah who would save them. He knew that as he taught about love, tensions began to rise. This tension was not only between the established Roman rule but between the people= Jewish and Gentile (non-Jewish). Jesus knew that if the crowd united against him, his death would end the rivalry.

Jesus' death was also a means by which God truly proved his love for creation. God knew that people had turned away from him almost every generation. But because of love God sent his Son Jesus to live a human life and taught and showed love. There is so much power in love, but how do we understand it. How do we share it? And yet the people chose not to love Jesus but to crucify because he was bringing a message of love and not of battle or war.

Crowds were at Calvary that day watching the teacher be put to death along with two thieves. But as the day progressed fewer people watched..

Jesus showed us the depth of his love for all people by sacrificing himself. In previous generations, the faithful offered sacrifices of animals- lambs, bulls, birds, or rams- as a way of seeking forgiveness for what they had done wrong. But Jesus teaching in the temple told the disciples and the crowd who listened, said that prophecy had been fulfilled in him, through him, because he is the Son of God.. Jesus became the means by which people might be forgiven. Jesus is this sacrifice for he is the only one who could for he had not sinned against God. He was the only one who could die so that all others would be forgiven. He was the only One who could enable reconciliation between people and God.

But why crucifixion? It was one of the cruelest forms of capital punishment known to people and it was the only death that would fulfill Old Testament prophecies. If we recall the story from Numbers 21 after God had brought the people out of slavery and across the Red Sea. God provided water and food all the time they were travelling. But they grew impatient and eventually spoke against God and Moses. They chose hopelessness instead of faith and they dishonoured God. As a punishment, God sent poisonous snakes amongst them. Many were bitten and died. When others saw this, they went to Moses and admitted their sins. They pleaded with Moses to get rid of the snakes. Moses was told by God to make a bronze snake and put it high on a pole. Those people who were bitten needed to only look at the bronze snake and were healed. Jesus referred to this story when he said that he would have to be lifted up in the same way that Moses lifted a snake in the desert. Jesus would be put on a cross above the people and for all the people to witness his death.

These crosses were heavy timbers and were often used over again because of the shortage of trees in the region of Jerusalem. They were cleaned but often blood stains remained of the previous prisoner who was killed; and when an individual was on the cross, it was because by asphyxiation that they died—they could not breathe as their body position did not allow it; nor could they move. Their feet and hands were secured by nails and they died in much pain.

Sometimes the Roman soldier would offer bitter wine vinegar to help with the pain of those suffering on the cross. As the hours go by, the crowds dwindle and only a few stand by

Often in order to see if the person was dead they would pierce their sides; if they weren't dead the lung would be collapsed and they would take maybe a few more breaths if they could. If they weren't dying fast enough bones like arms and legs, knees would also be broken—in case there were more people to crucify. It was a horrible slow and agonizing death. Sometimes people would be overcome with emotions, grief, watching and waiting for their loved one to die. Jesus mother and the other women cry as they see Jesus dying.

David wrote Psalm 22 describing the death of the Messiah even though crucifixion was not used during David's time. How did David know of the manner by which the Messiah would die? God had inspired him to write these words and even words Jesus spoke from the cross were David's. "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Jesus was alone on that cross.

Even God had left of so many had thought. Yet we must also believe that Jesus not alone, for he is God himself.

The prophet Zechariah wrote: The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares . . . I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son (Zech. 12: 10 NIV). This passage not only predicted the manner of the Messiah's death, but also states that it is God's Son who dies. And as the sky grew dark, Jesus body slowly shut down. When it was time he said, 'It is finished.'" And breathed no more.

But why is Jesus' death on a cross so important? Because it is Jesus who dies for the sake of the world below his feet. Salvador Dali's painting of Jesus on the cross from the top almost cries out, "I'm dying for you and you don't even know it."

Good Friday calls us to hear this story, to lament, to reflect to experience the moments of the Father's sadness when his Son dies not for anything He has done. But for us. The question is do we know the Christ of the cross? Do we believe in the one sent by God to die for us? It is through Christ alone that we might be forgiven. It is through Jesus that we have hope. It is through Jesus that we can believe that there is good news in this world. Christ came, to live, to die and to help us keep focus—to have hope.

Jesus needed to die in order to show to God's people the depth of his human love. And by his death we are forgiven through Jesus. But are we even willing to talk about Jesus' death and the gift and promise of forgiveness?

Images of Jesus on the cross- help us to put us there—are we a part of the crowd, the ones shouting aloud; or are we at the foot along with the women in Jesus' life? Are we standing away and only glimpsing a little when and if we can. Or are we up there weeping? Good Friday

reminds us that Jesus died by crucifixion. It was horrible and traumatic and he died for you and

I. Are we willing to look at Jesus' on the cross and experience his love?

Let us pray.

God how your heart must have hurt when Jesus your son died on the cross not because of anything he did, but because of what he did for all those who have faith and believe. Reveal to us Jesus on the cross and buried for our sake. And continue to reveal him to us as we seek to know you and love you. Amen.