

GOOD FRIDAY, April 7, 2023 *“This.. is..Jesus..?”*

Who do the people say I am? This is the question Jesus asked to the disciples. They answered some say Elijah and Moses a prophet. Then Jesus asked ” Who do you say I am?” How would you respond to this question right now?

In these Lenten days we have reflected upon this question of who is Jesus, and in many ways we are still trying to figure this out for ourselves and as people called Christians who believe in Jesus. Just who is Jesus? Throughout his life on Earth, He has been called by and given many names, titles, honours including the Lamb of God, Master, healer, Rabbi- teacher, Son of Man, and Son of God. Above his head as he hung on the cross, the inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews”. Just who is Jesus?

Jesus is the one prophesied in history who would come and save people, all people from sin. Jesus came to save those separated from God but did not come in the way they thought he would. The people were looking for a strong military or political leader who would come and free them from oppression of the Roman Empire. They were looking for somebody who was going to overthrow the Roman Government and bring freedom. But Jesus did not come just to save the Jewish people, but all people from sin. Jesus saw how sin had entered the world and that it brought separation between people from God. This separation created an emptiness, a sense of loss, being broken and searching for something and Someone! This separation continues in the hearts and minds of those who are unaware of Jesus’ death and its significance, and it continues in people who are wondering how and why Jesus’ death can and does make a difference in one’s life. So God sent/ gave/ willed Jesus to come to earth, live a human life and be the bridge for reconciliation to take place. Jesus came to earth to die-this was his purpose.

Jesus came to save sinners and took the consequences of our sin upon himself; He took that separation from God which we have as people and punished himself for our sake. He saved us from death by his death. This is why we call Jesus, Saviour. This is Jesus!

Jesus was killed in the most painful and humiliating way possible for a person to die. Crucifixion: Nailed to a cross, out in public, mocked by all those surrounding him and dying not due to the beatings and blood but by the manner in which his body hung on the cross. Most of his weight was on his chest. Immediately Jesus would have had trouble breathing as the weight caused the rib cage to lift up and force him into an almost perpetual state of inhalation. Suffocation would usually follow, but the relief of death could also arrive in other ways. The lack of oxygen in the blood would cause damage to tissues and blood vessels, allowing fluid to

diffuse out of the blood into tissues, including the lungs and the sac around the heart. This would make the lungs stiffer and make breathing even more difficult, and the pressure around the heart would impair its pumping. Jesus died and when one of the soldiers pierced Jesus side with a spear blood and water come out. Jesus died. The one upon whom people for generations had placed their hope for a new life, new possibilities and reconciliation with God. But this is Jesus now dead.

So how was Jesus to fulfill God's will now? Here he was dead and those who loved him the most were at the foot of the cross. Joseph of Arimathea a secret disciple of Jesus and Nicodemus a leader in the Jewish Sanhedrin, were given permission to take away Jesus body. According to the burial customs of the Jews, they wrapped the body in linen cloths, with spices and myrrh and aloe. They placed the body in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. A stone was rolled against the door of the tomb. At the request of the chief priests and Pharisees, the tomb was then sealed and secured by soldiers.

What was Pilate afraid of? The concern was that someone might stealing Jesus' body and claim that he had risen from death. Was there a possibility of this? Or was he and the soldiers uncertain? It was the Pharisees who had heard Jesus speak of his rising again.

But even the disciples themselves were uncertain of what was to come after Jesus was buried- they hid themselves in fear. Yet if we read Jesus teachings about his pending death, the disciples just did not understand. Mark 9:30-32 "Jesus said to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again. But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.'"

Jesus came to live as a human being to take the punishment that was meant for all people. He died on the cross which is the central point of the Christian faith because Jesus died not for what He did, but for us, all people. Jesus took the separation from God that we deserved and overcame it. How? He demonstrated to us God's love and provided a way for everyone who believes in Him to be saved- that is to have the gift of reconciliation with God made possible. He took the burdens of sin upon himself and died in our place. He did this so that we might be reconciled and made whole before God. He did this so that we may be forgiven. Jesus being found in appearance as a man, humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! As Christians we need to take a look at the cross, the witnesses, the voices, the faces and observe the Saviour.

Salvation is not about being perfect, never messing up, or being a good enough person. It comes when you recognize that you *cannot* save yourself and need Jesus as Saviour. You cannot make your life work apart from God and so you turn to Jesus; leaving the old way and turning towards a new life. This is repentance and is demonstrated by following Christ your whole life through. This is Jesus the one born of Mary, who lived and died for our sake.

On This Good Friday it is difficult to leave Jesus sealed in a cold a tomb knowing that in faith there is abundant life waiting to burst forth. As Christians we need to reflect on the cross- look at the witnesses, the voices, the faces and most of all, observe the Saviour and what He has done for you- This is Jesus.

PRAYER

God of grace and hope we praise you for your gift to us in Jesus your Son who was born to save us from sin and give to us the gift and promise of eternal life.

Enable us to reflect, grieve and remember Jesus' death and why he died. Help us to understand and to have hope beyond the cross and the tomb as we pray to you in silence SILENCE>
Amen.