

Sermon

Good Friday

‘The Passion of Christ’

‘I hate being wrong.’ My brother said to me recently, suddenly, over coffee. It took me by surprise. And stayed with me afterwards. It’s true. We all hate being wrong. And yet we all get it wrong at various time in our lives. Take a wrong turn. Leaving us stranded, or lost, or worse. And needing to find our way back. Back on the right path. The right path laid out. By God. For his world.

In Jesus’ earthly life, the people around him, got it wrong. Took a wrong turn. Leaving them stranded, and lost. As the people’s cry of ‘Hosannah!’, at Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Sunday, has turned sour. On Friday, they cry ‘Crucify him!’ Leaving the people of the ancient world, both Jew and non-Jew, in the darkest possible place, spiritually. In a place, much, much worse.

In the words of Bob Dylan, ‘There must be some kind of way outta here. Said the joker to the thief. There's too much confusion. I can't get no relief.

Why did they reject and crucify Jesus? Why did they close the door, on God? Why did they choose to take the wrong path. When God sent His eternal Son, to suffer, and to die, to reconcile the people, who had become lost and stranded, to himself?

The answer was because the people had fallen into temptation. The temptation to triumphalism. Such as we see each year on Palm Sunday, in Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was this that stood in the way of the people’s reconciliation with God, under the sign of the Crucified, when the Messiah came.

Throughout his life, Jesus refused the title ‘Messiah’, because of the political sense in which the people had come to use this title. Under the influence of the zealots of the day, the Messianic expectation had become centred upon a political figure. Who when he came

would lead them in a revolution. Against the Roman Empire. For themselves. Their own, particular, political interests. In order to overcome, through human political means, their own human experience of suffering. And in order to vindicate themselves, as the righteous ones, in an evil world.

It was this temptation to triumphalism, this false messianic expectation, which mistakenly sees in Jesus a political Messiah, which led to the people to reject Jesus, as a messianic pretender Messiah. Which became the stumbling block to God's plan, to bring them back to himself, to reconcile them to him, and on this basis to each other, through the crucifixion and death of his eternal Son.

This is the history lesson of Holy Week. The lesson for the world, both ancient and modern. As 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

No reason to get excited
The thief, he kindly spoke
There are many here among us
Who feel that life is but a joke
But, you and I, we've been through that
And this is not our fate
So let us stop talking falsely now
The hour's getting late.

At the beginning of Lent each year, the Gospel of Jesus' in the wilderness reminds us of the persistence of evil in the world. When in the climax to that story, we hear that the devil take Jesus to a very high mountain, and showing him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour, says to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Temptation is real. Temptation is great. Temptation is intense.

The temptation, for the human creature, to want for itself, the glory of God, is always there. The glory which belongs to God alone. The temptation to want this for ourselves, in open sin against the first and greatest commandment, the justice of God, is great.

Especially when the crowd around you is doing it. It takes enormous spiritual maturity, energy, not to mention cost, to refuse it. As Jesus refused it, in the wilderness, when, turning to face evil, his rebuke is final. 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels waited on him.

In the modern world, the false messianic expectation, the temptation to triumphalism, is found in the many false teachers, whose anti-Christian this worldly doctrines of redemption, Their political Messianic expectations and ambitions, stand in the way today of the modern world's reconciliation with God, through Jesus Christ, the true Messiah, the Christ. Their false teachings deceive us, woo us away, seduce us away from the truth about God. From the truth about Christ. From the truth about the world. From the truth about ourselves. From the truth about the meaning of life. From the truth, from the meaning, that sets us free.

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To Jesus question from the cross, just before his death, which were his final words on this earth, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' the Christian answer is that the death of Christ, was the once for all, decisive action, by God himself, to set the world free. To liberate the world, from the power of sin, temptation and death. To reconcile the world to himself, through the death of his only Son. That by that death, God overcame the power of temptation, confusion, sin, leading to spiritual death. To our becoming separated, from the love of God, that made us. And from that eternal life that is Jesus promise to all who believe in him. In whose atoning sacrifice, the love of the Most High God for the world, came to expression.

The Christian Church uses the language of ‘expiation’ to describe this most extraordinary, once for all event. This once for all historical event, of God’s great love for his world. A word meaning that in Christ’s sacrifice, all human sin is removed – the offence, the guilt, the consequences – all of it. Overcome.

Leaving, only God. Only us. Only each other.

Standing here today. At the foot of the cross. Before the clear blue sky of God’s great love, for us and for the world. That brings perfect brightness, and peace, to our hearts. And that draws from our lips, the Hallelujah!