

Good Friday Meditation by Canon Roger Spiller

We come in our journey through Holy Week to today, Good Friday. We usually read this day in the light of Easter Day. And we're right to do so. But not this day. For today we must walk in the steps of the early followers of Jesus and let ourselves be shocked and unsettled by the strange events the day unfolds. Nothing must take away the shocking, tragic, offensive features of the first Good Friday. We must let them go on questioning and unsettling us.

We'll keep a short silence between three parts of the talk, which you can prolong if you wish.

Before the mystery of Calvary there is perhaps little that we can say. Words fall away and fail us before the image of Christ crucified. After all, it was not what Jesus said but what he did that most revealed the life of God. Jesus is crucified not merely by following some predetermined script, but as the consequence of expending his life in sacrificial service, in perfect filial obedience to his father. He was faithful to a cause and for that cause he was prepared to lose everything. If he was called to die, then his dying would be in the manner of his living. It was love, not nails, that held Jesus to the cross; love of us.

Cross as a mirror

The Cross is a mirror, in which we see ourselves, and our hidden motives are exposed.

Jesus was crucified not simply because of some doctrinal dispute, or for seditious activity. He was destroyed because his sheer goodness and love unsettled and shamed his contemporaries. It provoked a violent reaction as it does when someone gets right under our skin by exposing our lovelessness.

St Paul argued that sin is the refusal to be our true selves, as in the story of Adam. Jesus is the representative man, you and me, as we're meant to be and so the crucifixion of Jesus is the central drama of our refusal to be our true selves. But it is also the very means by which we can recover our true selves.

Jesus remains silent and defenceless before his accusers. In this he exposes the defensive way in which some in the church have sought to protect its public reputation rather than unmask the evil committed in its name.

'Where you there when they crucified my Lord?' Yes we were there, the whole of humanity was represented there. We are drawn to focus on the perpetrators of Jesus murder. But it was the bystanders who let it all happen; the crowd of decent, God fearing men and women who bayed for Jesus blood. They were acting not from mean motives but from the highest religious principles they knew

Can we be so sure we aren't resisting the pressure of God in our own lives; ordinary people who don't speak out, whose moral sense has been blunted, who hide behind their religion and let evil have its day.

Will **we** look on and keep silent as the rules-based moral order is being eroded by the power brokers in our world?

The Cross is a window

The Cross is not only a mirror in which we see our true selves. It's also a window into the heart of God.

'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son'. In the self-giving of Jesus we see also the self-giving of God

There is a story in Helen Waddell's novel about Peter Abelard, the saint who is known for expounding the love of God, Abelard pointed to a fallen tree beside him and his friend Theobald. It was sawn in the middle. 'That dark ring there, it goes up and down the whole length of the tree, Abelard said. 'You only see God's suffering love, like you see the rings in the tree, when it is cut across'.

Only pierced hands
Are gentle enough
To touch some wounds
The quivering flesh
Shrinks even from love
Yet knows
That without this touch
There can be no healing
(Elizabeth Rooney)

Bonhoeffer reminds us that a painless Christ would be no good for a suffering world.

We often act as people who are awkward about suffering and loss, who want to deny the extremities of the human condition, who look mistakenly to find God at a place other than the Cross. We want to move on quickly to Easter morning. We want to stifle Christ's cry of dereliction in an attempt to present God as a well meaning social worker.

Dennis Potter the playwright, fought a long battle with cancer. He felt that he couldn't enter the formal Christian community because he believed that the triviality and the half truths masking suffering would have deprived him of his power to write.

If we try to make everything better, give false comforts, we leave Calvary behind. Reality is cuneiform, cross shaped.

God is no more characteristically Godself than when seen in the suffering figure who hangs on the Cross.

The Cross God's meeting place

Then finally the Cross is God's meeting place with us. The Cross shows the extent of God's love for us. But more even than that, it declares that in the event of Jesus Christ God acted; did something for the human race; did for us what we could never do for ourselves. 'There was no other good enough' as the well known hymn puts it. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree', says Paul, We could never believe that we are forgiven, and that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself', unless we surveyed Christ's Cross and saw the measure of his love and passion that was needed to secured our redemption..

But the Cross counts for nothing unless we appropriate it for ourselves and unless we meet God at the Cross and own our guilt and shame; unless we invite him to reproduce the dying and rising of Jesus in our own mortal bodies, the Cross leaves us as onlookers..

As St Paul puts it 'I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal..2.19.f)

Questions:

You might wish to reflect on how the Cross of Christ can disarm the blame culture and the abuse of power and coercion in our world

How would you try to explain to others what the passion and death of Jesus means to you?