

THE CROSS

Good Friday Year C

Gladstone 15/04/2022

Is. 52:13-53:12; Ps. 22; Heb. 10:16-25 (or Heb. 4:14-16, 5:7-9; Jn. 18:1-19:42 (and others))

Today we come face to face with the primary Christian symbol, and that symbol is a cross.

The cross is a heartbreaking reminder that Jesus really suffered. I think that we Protestants deny ourselves some of the reality of the suffering Jesus because we always have the empty cross...we celebrate the fact the Christ is risen. We do not dwell on the crucified Christ, and rightly so, but that will not do for today.

Today is the day to dwell on the crucified Christ. The Christ who suffered real pain, sweated real sweat, and bled real blood, and who wept real tears of anger and frustration...and, as we contemplate the cross, we inevitably come to the question...why?

Was it God's will that Jesus should die in this way?

Or was it the sin of those who were responsible for the awful deed, acting contrary to God's will?

There are texts which speak of Jesus being "obedient to his Father's will" – the apostle Paul states that quite clearly in a number of passages.

On their own, these texts could give the impression that it was God who willed that Jesus die in the terrible way he did.

If this is so, if God can will something as unjust and evil as the murder of the innocent Jesus, what hope is there for us to find any meaning in life? The crucifixion could only increase our belief and fear over the power of a fate over which we have no control.

On the other hand, when we turn to Jesus, we find that, far from causing him to doubt God, or God's goodness, or God's saving power, it was Jesus' faith in God that sustained him through the ordeal.

Jesus certainly expected the crucifixion because the only way for him to avoid the cross was to stop loving, to stop proclaiming God's justice and will, to stop challenging false

religion. This he refused to do. He continued to minister to those perceived as outcasts; he continued to love, effectively, powerfully, convincingly.

He was sustained in this by his total conviction concerning God's love for him, and indeed God's love for all. His teaching was that God is love; that God is not a God who inflicts suffering on people. In spite of what was happening to him, and the death that was looming up before him, Jesus spoke of God as one who did not, could not, change. The God of Jesus is not the cause of anything negative or un-loving.

Jesus taught, and showed us by example, that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love - not even sickness or death. This was what he taught. He kept on teaching it to the end, and he kept believing it.

The crucifixion was an act of murder done in God's name. It was a flagrant act of injustice. As such it was a sin, and so done *against* the will of God.

God's role in the crucifixion was precisely the resurrection.

It was God's presence that sustained Jesus during his agony.

It was God's love that surrounded him during his passion.

It was to God that he handed over his life from the cross.

In the words of the letter to the Hebrews: *For the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shamefulness of it.*

Jesus' death, not the fact that he died, but the way he died, enables us to believe. Jesus enables us to believe that no suffering inflicted on us by others or as a consequence of living in this world, can ever separate us from God's love.

And that is why we really have to look at the cross today and see the suffering love that is nailed there...because it reveals the depth of God's love for us.

Jesus knew that...do we?