

Good Friday

We have just heard a gruesome story of human suffering but crucially it's been given meaning and purpose.

Jesus' whole life was a testament of Love. But it was love at its toughest. He laboured to reveal the truth about God's love for us, the relationship between God and mankind. He wanted every single person to know that they are wanted and loved by God, whether they be saint or sinner, male or female, Jew or Gentile. The gift of God's love is free for everyone. He wanted everyone to have access to God, to be able to commune with God, to be able to know God. This is what the New Covenant – *in his blood* - is all about. Easter expresses the deepest truth or mystery of the relationship between God and each one of us, the very meaning of what it is to be human and to experience what we do. It's about the gift of life and the gift of God's love freely given to us.

The trouble was that it wasn't in the interests of everyone that such a gift should be free. For some, mainly the Jewish Temple authorities, it was better for the gift to be "*regulated*" and used in such a way as to bring them power and wealth. They tried to confine God to the Temple and to ration the access. Some people were totally banned – lepers, sinners, tax-collectors and so on, others were banned on occasions and for everyone there was a price.

So, Jesus' message was in conflict with theirs. He hoped that the authorities might listen and respond to his Good News, but he wouldn't duck the conflict. In fact I think that by the time his public ministry began he already knew that they wouldn't concede. He threatened their entire Temple culture. He declared his agenda, mixing with sinners, with the sick, with lepers, and even with tax-collectors, the real scum of the earth who collaborated with the Romans for vast and dishonest fortunes. He got all of them to go into the beloved temple. No one was to be kept outside of God's real presence, not even on the say so of the powerful Jewish temple authorities.

It was a particularly delicate time in the Temple's history. King Herod had set about building a new enlarged temple area and a magnificent new temple. Some of this was still under construction in Jesus' days and you could be sure that it was part of everyone's conversation. You will appreciate then how big an accusation it was that Jesus' would destroy it. In fact the Romans destroyed it in the end and now only the western wall remains, the Wailing Wall

So here Jesus was, challenging temple worship. He even entered Jerusalem on a donkey, a deliberate gesture suggesting that in fulfilment of scripture, the Messiah himself was entering Jerusalem. It got everyone cheering and rattling palm branches. The whole place was talking about it. He'd even smashed up the temple's

lucrative bureau de change and turfed out those selling animals for sacrifice. They had to bring him down. They had to take him out or give in.

Jesus had talked about the temple being destroyed but it was in the context of him replacing the temple culture as the way to God, as the access to God.

Try to destroy him by killing him and you will find that on the third day he is risen or rebuilt as it were.

So what he entered, he entered for heroic and loving reasons. When he prayed about it in Gethsemane, he realised it was vital to face up to the conflict. He could only guess how brutal it would be; he could only imagine the pain. He'd endure it with dignity but how would or could his humiliation and apparent defeat be transformed into glory and victory? Where would redemption be? He entered it with faith and faith alone – as we have to sometimes!

Jesus, the Son of God was executed. He accepted death as the price he would pay to ensure that not even one person would need to feel separated from God or beyond his love. X's death shows us just how important he thinks each of us is. We are, each of us, very dear to him, very pricey indeed. It also shows us that he shares fully in our human experience and it promises to us what it gave to him: new life.

The apostles and many others saw him, risen from the dead. This 2nd part of the story is really crucial. He died for us AND he rose for us, each one of us. He lives for us. It's not all over for him. His death on Good Friday, years ago shows us how much he loves us today on Good Friday 2018. (We will need to look at that tomorrow.)

So now we venerate his cross. We will be identifying ourselves with it and all it stands for, Christ's personal sacrifice on Calvary, his love for us, his hopes for redemption in which we share, and his way to eternal life.