

Good Friday Sermon

Revd Canon Charles Jenkin – Friday 10th April 2020

Isaiah 52.13 – 53.end; Hebrews 4.14-16, 5.7-9; John 18.28 – 19.37

How are we meant to feel on a Good Friday? It's a solemn day, and yet because of this day, we are actually comforted. It is a tragic day, and yet Christians are actually called to rejoice. It is a day full of remorse, and yet we are set free. It is a day that God dies, and yet humanity is given new hope. It is a day when an awful thing happens, and yet we call it Good. It is all rather confusing; emotionally; how are we meant to feel on a Good Friday?

Partly, this confusion arises from the stark contrast in the Church's solemn celebrations of this day. On one hand we enter into the sad events that lead to the death of Jesus on the Cross. We join the crowd in the scenes; we become onlookers; and spiritually we acknowledge our own part in the sin of humanity that led Jesus there. We explore the different ways that we share that responsibility.

But on the other hand we rejoice in the life changing meaning and message of the whole drama. Our view of God is fundamentally changed. We are set free from our prisons of guilt, failure and a crushing sense of inadequacy. In God's grace we are given a new status as beloved children of God. In short, both our vision of God and our vision of ourselves is utterly transformed. And so the right feelings for Good Friday are wonder and gratitude. Indeed amazement and deep thankfulness.

Firstly, wonder and amazement. What Jesus revealed about God on the Cross was a complete revolution; it was a spiritual and a theological revolution. The idea that a god would actually sacrifice him or herself for the benefit of ordinary human beings was completely new. No one, but no one had thought of God like that before. It was always the other way round. People make sacrifices to gods, sacrifices of all sorts of things, sometimes even other human beings.

The harshness of life for most people made people think that the gods were also harsh and unforgiving. Leaders so often became corrupted by their own authority and privilege, that the idea of a god who would not be corrupted by absolute authority limitless privilege was almost impossible to conceive. Such is the human tendency to create gods in his own image. But the Cross reveals that the character of God is not like the character of human beings.

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The Cross reveals the true character of God's authority, which is the authority of love; love for all that the Creator has made, even wayward and sinful and corrupted humanity. And this is why the message of the Cross is such good news. God himself has paid, and will himself make up for all our human inadequacy, so that we can be set free from sin and guilt, and become true friends with God. Because this is the kind of God he is, and has actually always been.

Familiarity can make us blasé about the amazing wonder of the message of the Cross, but today, Good Friday, is a day once more to wonder.

Secondly, Good Friday calls us to feel deeply grateful; gratitude is the other proper feeling on Good Friday. Grateful for God's grace, grateful for God's love, grateful for God's invitation to learn to love like he does. Grateful to be included in his mission to renew his Creation, grateful for the gift of His own Holy Spirit to help us do all this, and grateful that nothing can separate us from his love in Jesus Christ.

Of course gratitude can be a slightly delicate flower. It's not helped by feelings of obligation. It's not helped by feelings of entitlement. It's not easy to feel grateful for something that brings obligations you didn't ask for. It's not easy to feel grateful for something which frankly you think actually you were really due anyway. And it is here where the integrity of our own outlook matters, really matters.

If a person doesn't really want to learn to love like God does. If a person doesn't acknowledge how much they need God. If a person doesn't really feel that they need some kind of rescue. If a person doesn't really rejoice in the vision of God that Jesus reveals. Well then, it's going to be difficult to feel grateful, for the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

In the end, the Cross is an invitation; one which we are free to accept or not. But when you decide freely to accept it, then the message is indeed amazing, and the only proper response is indeed the deepest gratitude. And life is transformed. Amen.

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