

Good Friday 21 March 2008

Call to Worship: Reading Christ and Us 1 Peter 2:21 – 24

Intro

In a busy bank holiday weekend it is easy to rush Good Friday and head for Easter Sunday – to glance at the cross as we rush past towards the celebration of the resurrection.

Yet the challenge of Good Friday is to dare to linger, to dare to look up into the face of Jesus hanging on the cross. The challenge of this day is to allow the death of Jesus to impact us deeply, for us to understand something of what Jesus' death meant for him – and of what it means for us.

Stephen Holmes in his book 'The Wondrous Cross' writes that 'the invitation of the New Testament is to "Come and See the King of Love"' ..and that 'the Jesus the New Testament Gospels want us to see is a Jesus who hung on a cross.' All of Mark's gospel focuses upon and leads up to the death of Jesus – the resurrection is almost a given –Mark calls us to focus upon Jesus' death.

I do not claim to fully understand Jesus' death but during this short time together we are going to reflect upon the crucifixion through words from Mark's gospel, through music, through wondering what it may have been like for the disciples and importantly by quietly reflecting upon and responding to what Jesus' death means for each one of us.

And so the invitation for us this morning is to 'Come and see' to dare to linger at the cross and consider all that that means.

Song: Come and See v1 & 2. Bk1

Prayer: Lord, lead us to that place where we can see the wonder, the scandal and the challenge of the cross of Jesus. Allow us to be moved afresh by what it means to be a follower of the Son of Man.

Reading 1 & 2 Mark 15:1 – 32 (p124 - 127)

Hymn: O Sacred Head v1,2,3 Bk1

Jesus is being crucified – as his disciple I wish I could say that I am kneeling at the foot of the cross as you so often see in pictures. But I am not - I am hiding in the shadows. (Scared to be seen.)

I am trying to work out what it all means, why our teacher, our rabbi who we followed and learnt from is stripped, blooded and dying hanging from that cross.

I'm thinking back, over the last three years.

Jesus' first words to me were 'follow me' and I did. At the time I thought I was being brave and courageous, pious even, leaving everything and following this teacher. I looked humble but inside I knew I was also attracted by the glamour of it all. Jesus was becoming well – known, there was something special about him – he was a talking point. People could see he was different, of course that's what some people didn't like about him, they thought he was full of himself - yet others recognised an authority that went alongside a humility. He didn't talk himself up – but people just wanted to hear what he had to say, be where he was.

So to be picked to follow him – wow! It was an honour, a privilege but it also took me into the limelight – it was good to be seen with him – one of his chosen disciples.

I feel ashamed that it is that very limelight that I am hiding from now – somehow the glamour has gone – I don't want to be seen with him now.

Looking back I start to see that Jesus knew this is where it was all leading. I remember at least three times Jesus telling us about suffering; the first time was just after Peter had said he believed Jesus was the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus said to us 'the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again'. Most of us were confused, what did he mean?

Of course Peter thought he knew best and took it upon himself to take Jesus to one side and tell him off for making such statements. Jesus was angry with him – and looked kind of sad, he said to all of us,

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

He seemed to be speaking in riddles – what cross?

A second time Jesus said to us,

"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise." But we did not understand the saying, and we were afraid to ask him.

And then later when we on the way to Jerusalem he said to us, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

What he was saying didn't make sense – we were heading up to Jerusalem to claim kingship of God's Kingdom. We were even planning who would have the key roles in the kingdom. We pictured a throne scene with a large throne in the middle for Jesus and then the key leaders one on the right and one on the left. We were really indignant with James and John because they tried to knobble Jesus and get him to agree that they could have those prime seats.

Again Jesus looked sad, he asked them if they could drink the same cup as him and be baptised with the same baptism – yes of course!

He told them about God's way and the way of discipleship (Jesus we've been with you nearly 3 years, we know what it means to be a disciple we thought). They, like him, are to become servants – to serve not to be served, 'whoever would be great among you must be your servant' the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

We heard Jesus' words but we didn't understand, we didn't want to understand. We wanted to be at the left and the right side of the King of the Jews.

As I say these words – I realise what I am saying. There he is on that cross with the words 'King of the Jews' nailed above him. I don't want to be on his right – or his left – the men who are there are being crucified. This isn't the glory I signed up for when I said I would follow.

Is this the cup – is this the baptism? Is this what it means to be a disciple?

Reading Mark 15:33-39

Song: You chose the cross Bk 3

We disciples have completely failed to understand Jesus' ministry and service to death and how that impacts being a disciple.

We thought we were being called to positions of privilege but it seems we are called to suffering alongside Christ.

There in front of the cross I get a brief glimpse of a new community in which relations are not governed by power or status but by service and hospitality for those without status – a community in which those who have been ransomed live for others.

I want to come out from the shadows – face up to what Jesus has done and align myself with him – as his follower, as a true disciple – with all that that might mean for me. Will you join me?

Slide on Screen – Is it enough to gaze at the cross and do nothing?

Reflection and images and Nails at the Cross Response – explain.

Song: I will choose Christ (sung by the worship group)

Prayers of commitment and response

Forgive us Lord when we thrive on your support, the community, the excitement of following you but back away from the challenge of obedience and sacrifice.

Forgive us Lord when we love to receive, be served and cared for but shy away from giving, serving and caring.

Forgive us Lord when we crave recognition, affirmation and comfort, yet fail to recognise, affirm and comfort others

Forgive us Lord when we define discipleship by what we need, yet fail daily to pick up our cross and follow you.

Lord challenge, inspire and lead us.

Lord, draw us to your cross which brings forgiveness

That we may be cleansed

Lord, draw us to your cross which brings light

That we may have vision

Lord, draw us to your cross which brings love

That we may have compassion

Lord, draw us to your cross which brings life

That we may live for you

Hymn: When I survey the wondrous cross Bk 1

Closing Prayer

Living God,
Whose son died on the cross
for everyone who lives:
Show us by his dying
How the place of defeat
can be the place of victory;
And help us to take up our own cross
whatever form it takes
so that women and men
may recognise your love in us
And come to you, with Christ,
In resurrection glory,
Amen.