

Good Friday 2nd April 2010.
Good Friday reflection.

(pp 6 slides) WHAT IS IT THAT DRAWS PEOPLE TO JESUS?

“Jesus is crucified.”

I don't think anyone can say that the Gospel accounts of the trial and death of Jesus are written in an emotive way. They are simple factual statements – often there are pauses of many hours where no description is given of the sufferings of Jesus and the other 2 men – the bandits that are crucified one on either side. Hardly anything is said of the dreadful 3 hours of darkness between 12 noon and three.

Matthew 27: 1 – 61.

Mark 15; 1 – 47.

Luke 22: 66 – 23: 49

John 18: 28 – 19: 41.

Of course everyone in Jesus' day knew exactly what crucifixion meant – they did not need a detailed description or an explanation of why the death was so cruel, drawn out and all conducted in full nakedness publicly. Sometimes we may wonder whether the explicit and graphic display in the film *The Passion of the Christ* of the beating with the cat o' nine tails and crucifixion was excessive. The level of violence used was of course excessive and gratuitous but its depiction was probably reasonably true to what happened to Jesus. Jesus was certainly left unable to carry the cross bar all the way to Golgotha (Place of the Skull) and the serious beating at the hand of Pilate's soldiers meant he expired and died before the 2 bandits.

The Gospel Writer's use their supply of words to express the innocence of Jesus and the calculated wickedness of the Jewish religious leaders who because of jealousy bribed and manoeuvred to get Herod and Pilate to sentence Jesus to death. They also spend their words in describing the Disciples – men and women and how they behaved, where they stood and how they reacted during the crucifixion and following Jesus' death. They use their words in describing the care to shroud the body, the placing of the body and the careful securing of the tomb with a large rock and a little later the sealing of the tomb and placing the official guard. Few words are used to describe the awful picture of the torture and death of Jesus of Nazareth – but they are enough.

It is from the writings and prophecy of Isaiah that we gain our most poignant telling of the awful horror of a suffering servant – this we interpret as the horror and sacrifice that left Jesus with no human dignity:

He was left without form or majesty... says one translation.

READ Isaiah 53; 1 – 5 (Isaiah spoke about 8C before Christ).

Isaiah can not have imagined or fully understood that the human suffering he depicted would be visited upon the Messiah yet to come in the form of Jesus of Nazareth but it was.

Good Friday – the day hope was given to humanity is of course the day when as followers of Jesus Christ we stop and remember just how great was his suffering for each of us and for all of us. The Gospel accounts are personal to each writer and give us a picture of the factual happenings but it is in our worship and reflections that we come to consider the price he paid for our Salvation. It is in our reflections that flesh is added to the bones of the Gospel accounts and we come to consider Jesus and what he endured. It is then that our gratitude begins to grow to something of the true proportion that it should take ...*I'm forever grateful for the Cross...I'm forever grateful that you came to seek and save the lost!*

Jesus had no form or majesty or beauty upon the cross that would draw us to him. Maybe his suffering would engender sympathy but most of us would shrink from even looking at any human being suffering in this way – let alone looking at the good and holy Creator of the universe.

Yes we are attracted to a Jesus who blesses children, heals the sick, and touches the outcast. We are attracted to a Jesus who lambastes the religious leaders for their abuses of power and their hypocrisy – BUT – a suffering, beaten Jesus has nothing to attract us or draw us to him.

Yet it is Jesus who declared to his disciples: *When I am lifted up I will draw everyone to me (In saying this he indicated by what death he would die i.e. crucifixion) John 12: 32.* Crucifixion attracted only the voyeurs or the loving friend or relative. No one went to a crucifixion for “a day out – a bank holiday outing”!

Jesus described the drawing power of God – He says on another occasion to his followers who are arguing about his claims and difficult sayings and seeking to be dismissive of him:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him to me; and I will raise him to life on the last day. John 6: 44. (Jesus here describes his origins in God and his power to give life).

We are all reliant on the pulling power of God because there is something about Jesus that makes us draw back – certainly if it means we might have to suffer like he did. The disciples demonstrated and so do we that we shrink back from dying to self, we shrink back from the horror of having to die for truth.

BUT God (in the person of Jesus being lifted up in crucifixion) DRAWS US to Jesus and so to Godhead.

The image and word (*helkuo* & *helko*) is of drawing a net to a key point e.g. a boat or an ark to land a catch. Jesus is using it metaphorically of God drawing by inward power, Divine impulse towards himself – *you can not come to me unless the father God who sent me draws you BUT also if I am crucified for you I will DRAW you to me – I will exert my Divine will and draw all people to myself. (Some may resist, some may slip the net but others will be drawn to me.*

This word is generally used of a strong but purposeful drawing as in the LXX (Septuagint) in *SofS1:4* and *Jeremiah 3: 13* *With loving kindness I have drawn you.*

(Note it is less frequently used of a more vigorous drawing i.e. a sword out of a sheath in cases of forcibly drawing men to a place e.g. *James 2: 6*)

What draws people to Jesus?

What has drawn you? What will draw others who as of yet have not come to God through Jesus?

It will not be the mere human suffering of Jesus in crucifixion – many thousands have died (and some still do) in this way. He had nothing that made him humanly attractive or majestic.

BUT it is the work, the inner pulling of God through Jesus Christ – God is at work DRAWING people towards himself through the work of Jesus Christ. It is not just the suffering of an innocent man who lived a righteous life for others – it is the price he paid, the punishment he took instead of us, the healing he brought which is such a deep mystery that draws us towards God.

What draws people to Jesus and so to Godhead? It is Jesus himself pulling us as some great loadstone, some mighty loving “fisher of people” towards his heart. Only he can draw us – even the slight longing that we feel comes from ourselves to go to Jesus infact comes from Jesus. It’s all of his grace.

If I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself. Amen Lord – do it – Amen Lord.