

2018 Good Friday

In that last week of his life, some Greeks came to the disciples and asked to see Jesus. We never find out if they did! When he hears of the request, Jesus launches into talk about his coming death, and talks about seeds and harvests. The writer of the John gospel is sending us a message – want to ‘see’ Jesus? Well, look to the manner of his dying.

Jesus said there was only a harvest once a seed died. Gathered here, today, *we* are part of that harvest. After that first Easter morning, people had to be in the company of Jesus’ friends to ‘see’ him.

It can be hard to see him these days, even in our company. There is much that obscures Jesus from the sight of those wanting to see him – a world of suffering and indifference to suffering; churches that get caught up in fighting about who is in and who is not, so that few want to belong; and times when it is the Church itself that has done harm.

Jesus is never so clearly seen as in the deaths of martyrs. They shine with his life. They won’t give up on God, or renounce Jesus even when they could save their lives if they did. The Egyptian Coptic bishop had it right when he wondered if those young Egyptian Christian men who we killed on the beach in Libya in 2015 had seen Jesus coming to *meet them* and *rushed to him*. You probably know the saying, ‘The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church’.

But here is a hard thing for us. We are so used to a Church that has until recently shared in the glory of being part of ‘the establishment’, but we have fallen away from that. We are no longer on the radar of people fully occupied with the ‘here and now’, dazzled by celebrity not substance, and ignoring the mystery at the heart of life, the intuition that God has planted deep within us, as the writer of Ecclesiastes said so long ago.

Do we need to die to past glory? I think we do. Do we need to take seriously the reality that Jesus died in disgrace, and on the rubbish heap? I reckon it is our only hope.

The Romans crucified Jews in an unclean and unholy place precisely because they understood how seriously this people took being holy and being clean, as God is holy.

The sign above Jesus' cross, 'The King of the Jews' was meant to mock him and to say to the people, 'Well here is what we Romans think of your king, you Jews.'

God is willing to embrace the unholy, to embrace our polluted human hearts, to make us see what is truly holy. And a death like Jesus' death with unbroken trust in the God of life, is a holy death even when on a dunghill. It is a death like Job's. Remember the Hebrew novel about the man who lost everything, family, fortune and flocks?

Joh refused to curse God for what happened to him. And I believe Jesus dies in that same spirit. We sometimes think the cry, 'My God, my God why have you abandoned me' is only a cry of dereliction. But that Psalm 22, on the lips of a dying Jewish person was also an expression of utter trust in the God of life. And that is Jesus' prayer in his dying.

I have the sinking feeling we Christians have to relearn the deep paradoxical truth of the glory found in what appears anything but, and find a new way to speak about what God has done, is still doing, for creation in the reconciling of all things in Jesus, this new Adam who undoes the harm of the old Adam.

Sometimes there is a discarded skull in paintings of the crucifixion at the Place of the Skull. It is as if that skull represents human mortality and gasps up through the garbage dump of Golgotha that symbolizes all the horror and suffering we humans inflict on one another, and all the heartbreak we endure symbolised by Mary's embrace of her dead son. It is as if that skull is saying to the crucified one, 'Your image in me has been 'obliterated' by human sin, but you, crucified with me and for me, can remake me.

And the Spirit, once more moving over the face of the depths, this time the depths of human depravity, accomplishes what is not an end, but a new beginning.

'It is finished', Jesus says and dies, but dies in order to enter into the new creation, the remaking of our humanity - how that is made known to us is a story for the new day that will dawn with Easter.

