

Good Friday 2008

John 18:1–19:42

It is difficult to know what to say after such a reading. One in which the darkness and ugliness of our human nature is presented with such starkness and force.

We are shocked and ashamed by the violence and brutality we are capable of, the relentless and determined way in which we, as human beings, are able to persecute another to the point of death.

Each has a different part to play in the story – those that betray, those that abuse, those that abandon others, the judge, the torturer, the murderer; but each role is as deadly in its consequences as the others.

The heart of the challenge for us in Good Friday, I think, is that we find ourselves in the story as both perpetrator and victim.

We recognise in the crowd the violence within ourselves.

We find in Pontius Pilate our own cowardice and lack of integrity.

We discover in the religious authorities something of our own greed, pride and need for control.

And we recognise our own shame and guilt at what we ourselves have done to others and what we know we are capable of doing to each other.

And so we identify with the perpetrators.

But we find too, in this Good Friday experience, our pain in another way.

We find the despair and grief of watching a loved one die.

We feel our own fear and the horror of persecution.

We are put in touch with our anger and outrage at injustice and abuse; and we have brought to mind the times when we too have been the victims of circumstance or the actions of others – when we have suffered our own crucifixion experience.

And so we identify too with the victims.

Essentially we are torn apart by the truth of Good Friday – we are both victim and perpetrator – the one crying out for mercy and justice and the one shouting: I have no king but Caesar.

But there is another, deeper truth to Good Friday, and that is that only in Jesus can the two disparate sides of our nature be brought together and made whole.

Jesus stands beside both victim and perpetrator and weeps for both.

He sees and feels the deep searing pain of both victim and perpetrator and gives his life for both.

In Jesus we have forgiveness, restoration and healing for our deep inner selves in a way no one or nothing else can provide. There is no part or aspect of our selves, that is not redeemed by the grace of God.

We cannot fully explain how this happens – that is the Easter mystery; but we do know that it happens through the power of the life-giving, eternal, redeeming love of God. A love so great, so completely sacred that we could never fathom its heights nor its depths. It just is.

The cross then, may hold up a mirror to our deepest pain and brokenness, but it is also a place of healing and hope.

We may indeed not be worthy of God, but we are deeply, intimately and profoundly loved by God – every part of us.

The cross reminds us that no matter how far away we may feel from God, through pain, grief, shame or sin, we are never lost to God.

And so we wait in faith and hope for resurrection dawn.

The Lord be with you.