

Meditation for Good Friday

There is a hymn that is often sung in Church called **"In Christ Alone"**. Part of one of the verses runs like this:

*'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live*

It is a great hymn but there are some words that have always worried me. The phrase is the top two lines.

Because is that what happened?

That God was so angry with us that He had to put His Son on to a cross?

This is known as the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement – I know! Sounds complicated! It's the idea that our sins have led us to being alienated from God and as a result we deserve punishment. God, out of love, intervenes by sending His Son to die in our place as the just payment for our sins to assuage the wrath He feels towards us because of our sins.

Now there are problems with this approach.

What does it say of the nature of the Father that he lets His Son sit in our place?

Is it that God the Father cannot control His own anger and needs to be placated by His Son?

But there is another way of looking at things.

This doesn't mean that we have to go down the route of the "Buddy Christ". Where Christ is your buddy, and everything is cool.

Too often when we want to avoid our own sin and to avoid the cost, we can all too easily create a parody of Christ as in the "Buddy Christ" of the film Dogma.



Instead, there is another way of seeing what God was up to in the crucifixion.

We start off with Sin. Sin is both real and has real consequences. We have both personal sin and corporate sin. We see this all too often.

We see this when we see people making choices that lead to bad consequences. We make choices every day and some of them are for selfish reasons that lead to serious situations for others. Some are obvious and extreme. Someone knocks someone over and drives off without stopping. Others can appear more subtle. We only consider our own needs and not those of others. We drink too much too often which can lead to relational breakdowns.

We live in a society that appears not only fractured but fracturing yet further. Where suspicion, disconnect and fear all seem to play a large part.

How would someone reach into this mess to help us and to save us?



Of course, some could use it to create a dictatorship and over the centuries that has happened many times (*from the fall of the Roman and Greek Republic's onwards*). And some want an authoritarian God. One who will tell us exactly what to do and when.

But what if you were concerned about changing how we saw one another and God? What if you were concerned not about power but about helping people see things differently? What would you do then? If you were concerned to create something new that had self-sacrificing love as the yardstick?

In the first letter of John we read,

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4.8-10)

God is love. That is at the centre of our faith.

God is love - self-giving, sacrificial love.

God who dies for the sake of the world.

God who takes the sins of the world, personal and corporate, upon Himself, and who in Himself takes the consequences on Himself.

Who by doing so, gives us the chance to change and start afresh.

At the heart of all is not the placation of the wrath of God. At the heart of it is a God of love who calls us into His image and likeness. Paul writes:

Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Cor 5:14-15)

To no longer live for ourselves but for him...

It's a radical solution to a deep and real problem. But that is what we are offered at the cross.

So, lets re-write the hymn:

*'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The love of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live*

I think that the picture by Daniel Bonnell, called **'The Dove and the Eucharist'** gets it right – in that we remember the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross when we take the Eucharist and Jesus gives us His Spirit to live this sacrificial life out.

