

Holy Cross Day

14 September, 2016

Reading: John 3:13-17

Open the Bible to us in fresh way, O God. In Jesus name we ask it.

Whether in counselling rooms, on helplines or in agony aunt columns, the plea is always the same. If only I had someone who understood the pain I am going through - someone who has been there before me and knows my suffering.

There can be little doubt that Jesus knows what it means to suffer. When we gaze on the crucified Christ we see someone who shares our pain. It is into this context that I want to draw our reading for today. John is using an Old Testament illustration that would have very quickly resonated with his original audience. 'Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.'

The source of this allusion is found in chapter 21 of the book of Numbers in the Old Testament. We find there the story of the grumbling Hebrews. They have so grumbled against Moses and God that they are being punished by a plague of poisonous snakes. As a remedy, God told Moses to cast a bronze snake and lift it up on a pole. Anyone who gazed on it was healed. The bronze snake, then, is a symbol of salvation. And we are familiar with the bronze snake as a symbol of healing on the sides of ambulances and nurses badges.

But how can such a thing be possible? Bronze was for the ancient Hebrews cutting edge technology. It had only just been invented. It was as if by seeing what they feared most, the poison was removed. We are familiar with some of our cutting edge technology doing the same. A vaccine is a small taster of what can poison us, and through it we can be healed.

Psychologists tell us that what the human race fears most is death. This is our primeval fear. By gazing on the cross of Christ, lifted up for us, the fear of death is removed. This is because, through Jesus death, we have been given eternal life. We are healed from the poison of death.

Susan and her mother were driving home from school. It had been a normal day at school. Suddenly all that changed. A bee flew in the open car window. On seeing the bee, Susan had a panic attack. She had a severe allergy reaction to bee stings. Without her adrenaline shot, a bee sting could be fatal for Susan. Seeing what had happened Mum quickly pulled over to the side of the road. She put her hand around the bee while the bee stung her. Then she

released the bee out of the window. "It's ok Susie," said Mum, "I have taken the sting for you, you are safe."

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians makes this very point on the healing power of Jesus death on the cross. 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55 *When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come to pass: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"*

John is right. When we gaze on the cross of Christ, it has healing power. We see a Saviour who knows what it is to suffer. In Jesus we have a Saviour who can identify with our pain. Whatever it is we are going through, He can understand. And this is healing. When we gaze on the cross of Christ it has healing power because we know that the sting of death has been taken away by Jesus death. Death, our greatest fear, has been removed from us. By Jesus resurrection we have the promise of eternal life. As we gaze on Jesus, we see a Saviour who loves us with a love stronger than any kind of death.

The cross of Christ is healing because Jesus is the one who suffers for us and with us.

Many times though my ministry I have found it helpful to have a set of wooden hand held crosses, to give to people. I have given them to people who are terminally ill, or who are having a difficult pregnancy or who are undergoing a painful relationship break up. There is something helpful about having a tangible sign. Something we can gaze at or hold, a living symbol if you like. Always people tell me how helpful they find it and I never get them back. (So if you know a source of hand held crosses let me know.)

I like to pray in front of a crucifix - a cross with Jesus on it. I know all the stuff about Jesus being risen and how some are uncomfortable with the crucifix where Jesus is still present. But for me, like John and the Hebrews before us, I need a physical reminder of the one through whom I find healing.

Verna Mae Thomas wrote this poem:

*I carry a cross in my pocket,
A simple reminder to me
That I am a Christian,
No matter where I may be.*

*This little cross isn't magic,
Nor is it a good luck charm.
It isn't meant to protect me
From every physical harm.*

*It's not for identification
For all the world to see.
It's simply an understanding
Between my Saviour and me.*

*When I put my hand in my pocket
To bring out a coin or a key,
The cross is there to remind me
Of the price He paid for me.*

*It reminds me too, to be thankful
For my blessings every day,
And to strive to serve Him better
In all that I do or say.*

*It's also a daily reminder
Of the peace and comfort I share
With all who know my Master
And give themselves to His care.*

*So, I carry a cross in my pocket
Reminding none but me
That Jesus Christ is Lord of my life,
If only I'll let Him be.*

Let us pray:

O Jesus, Master Carpenter of Nazareth, who on the cross through wood and nails didst work man's whole salvation : Wield well thy tools in this thy workshop ; that we who come to thee rough hewn may by thy hand be fashioned to a truer beauty and a greater usefulness ; for the honour of thy holy name. Amen

Blessed Crucified Christ

You have called your church from every corner of the world to lift high your cross and proclaim your love to all the world.

Strengthen your church in this place: Victoria our Bishop, and the people and clergy of this parish, that we might draw others to uplifted love.

In Jesus name we ask it.

Suffering Jesus

On the cross we see love is the meaning.

We bring before you the suffering people of our world: those at war in Syria and the Congo, those refugees who have no home, and those who are without the means to find shelter in our own land.

May people this day find peace and shelter and homes.

This we ask in Jesus name.

God of the healing Cross,

We name those who need your healing presence: Stanley, Fred, Craig, Ashley June, Keith and Derek.

May they find hope in you.

Jesus on the Cross,

by dying and rising again you have removed our greatest fear.

In silence we bring our fears and concerns to God.

Almighty God,

Give us such a vision of your cross and such an assurance of your love and power, that we might ever hold fast to that which is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen