

Sermon from 04/6/2007  
Good Friday Norwood Ecumenical Service

A Day of Defeat?

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Today, we mark the “something awful” that all of us are longing to escape, that is...death.

Although we may not like it, death is coming to us all.

As the lines of the hymn, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling* remind us: “*Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing / Passing from you and from me / Shadows are gathering, deathbeds are coming / Coming for you and for me*”

Because the founder of our faith died, Christians often come under the criticism of having a rather morbid faith.

What makes it worse is that the founder of our faith did not die gently of old age, after having lived an esteemed life.

No, the founder of our faith was frequently on-the-run, often driven ‘out of Dodge’.

The founder of our faith was often maligned, misquoted, misrepresented, misunderstood, frequently dismissed (even after the resurrection), and had few that He could rely upon.

The founder of our faith was viewed by some as a dangerous, rising star on the religious/political circuit of His time.

But all that young talent went to waste.

He was cut down during His prime leaving a handful of grief-stricken friends who had the rude awakening that if the Man they followed was put to death, they might be next.

On this day of defeat when everything that can go wrong did go wrong, why do we gather here as Christians and seekers wondering and marvelling?

I mean does a dead soul with a fanatical and incomprehensible religious agenda, who now hangs upon a tree, merit our gathering here?

I suppose we are all rather a bit morbid...or it could be that something else is going on?

Could it be possible that the founder of our faith hit a nerve, struck a chord, or

satisfied some kind of unknown longing in our soul?

It might be.

If we are to understand why we are here...marking the death of an outcast  
Palestinian preacher from 21 centuries ago...we must listen to what was logged into  
the record book about this Man.

But above and beyond what the record book (the Bible) says, we are here today, friends, because of fascination!

It is the same fascination that captivated the hearts, the hopes and the dreams of simple, homespun folk of two millennia ago.

As they were in awe then...so we are now!

Why?

Because Jesus had "a touch."

Because Jesus had "a way."

And what brought them to Him **then**...and what brings us to Him **now** is that His touch and His way are transformational!

You won't really find that word in the Bible, but the sentiment is generously spoken of.

What I mean is that people knew **that** when they met this Man something was different--something changed.

When they tried to think through, "Was it my politics, my ethics, my finances, or my relationships that changed?" -- all these had not.

What DID change--what was transformed--was themselves--from the inside out...so that their new life spilled out into their politics, their ethics, their finances and their relationships.

And what's more, when this really nice young guy changed their life--they *really* sensed, deep down, that **He gave them something**.

Oh, yes!

And what He gave them was the power to make the changes stick.

So it was not a cosmetic or a surface change that people sensed--but almost as if there was a "new person" inside that had always been desperate to get out--but was either too afraid, too weak, or too tired to get out.

Until they met the founder of our faith.

Somehow--we don't know how--He had this really weird affect on people: like He

could peer down into their souls--where all the undesirable stuff lurks--like a light reaching down through a long, dark tunnel.

So, what Jesus does--I can't tell you exactly how--is that He lets this "new person" out.

When this "new person" finally gets out, two things happen: (1) they are forever thankful to Jesus (like an inmate on Death Row who is pardoned by the State Governor and (2) the "new persons" now hates the "old person."

Just like you and I might hate someone that is always annoying or irritating us...or causing bad things to happen in our lives, so the "new person" hates the "old person."

And the "new person" has credentials, too.

When they open their wallet and reach for their I.D., it's not a picture of them, but of a guy with a beard and a penetrating gaze.

Sceptics of Good Friday will still insist, "So some wimp of a washed up carpenter was able to woo people over with ancient spells, mind games and fine oration.

To label this as transformation is a bit of an exaggeration.

Just another religion, right?"

I'd say "Yes" were it not for the other essential ingredient found in transformation.

You see, not only did this self-proclaimed oracle give something to others: like their dignity, their passion and their personhood...He also **TOOK** something from them!

*You see, what God wants to give us is the easy part.*

God is willing to give us His all in all everyday--it's not that big of a deal on God's end.

But, it's a big deal for us.

Why?

Because somehow we allow sin to sit too close to us.

We allow it to define us and drive us and, at times, destroy us.

When God insists on taking our sin--it is then that we wonder what we will ever do, or be like, without all our bad habits, our small hearts, our servitude of the self.

Pretty scary, huh?

Today, we reflect upon the cross as a vehicle in which heaven slammed into earth...like a massive meteor that could not be

stopped and demanded that the anti-god within each of us surrender.

When those Roman soldiers hoisted *Yeshua* (Jesus) high, they had no idea of how hard His love would hit the earth.

His love sews history into one seamless garment of unending proportion where the past, the present and the future all collapse into one crystallizing moment...and heaven redeems earth to birth His new and unending community.

This cross is a demanding cross.

It slaps the world across its indifferent face to snap it from its stubborn refusal to express sorrow to God for all the wrongs that we have done.

This cross gives all, but in return, it demands all.

When we say "Yes" to what once happened on that brutal and bloody hill, **we both take what He has to give...and we give what He wants to take!**

It is then that our life will be over.

We will die as St. Paul later says we ought to do.

And we shall emerge from the dark...naked and unashamed with our funeral clothes laid to one side ready to fly heavenward: eternally forgiven, fantastically free and bound for a city whose gates will never shut (Revelation 21:25).

The meeting point for our flight?

Golgotha--it is every believer's cemetery.

It is every follower's future found here...now, today! Amen.