

Good Friday
30/3/2018

Mark the Evangelist

Isaiah 52:13-53:8
Psalm 22
Mark 15:1-15

Seeing that we are blind

In the light of Easter, Good Friday lays bare the mystery at the heart of Christian confession.

And yet, what is laid bare is a confounding thing. What we come to *see* clearly is that we are *blind* when it comes to God. It is the burden of today's (rather short!) sermon to make some sense of such revealed blindness.

We begin with the affirmation that, for the church, the story of Good Friday *reveals* something; we come to the story in order to *see*. The trial narratives of the gospels relate a struggle over the identity of Jesus. The *who* of Jesus – his name – is clear enough but the *what* is not, which is why such titles as 'king', 'son of God' and 'son of man' feature at this point in the story.

As later readers, and most of us already being of Christian conviction, we read the gospel accounts with the knowledge that Jesus *is* the Son of God, the Son of Man, the King of the Jews. And so it might seem that our eyes have been opened, that we are at least *quantitatively* different from those in the passion narrative, that we have had added to us *knowledge* of what they only *hoped* for, or flatly *denied*. From this distance, it seems that we see and know as they did not.

To imagine this, however, is find ourselves *outside* of the passion narrative. The story of those people's struggle with Jesus is not, now, *our* story. If that struggle is not ours, then neither is the blessing ours, which at least some of them finally received.

For the story to be good news – for it reveals *to us* that Jesus is the Christ – it must *also* reveal that we are those in the story who do not recognise this. We come to see and yet at the same time we see that we do not see, that we are blind. The revelation of something about the identity of Jesus himself is not a sufficient outcome of the passion narratives, if they are to be good news for us. There is bad news which comes with the good. Jesus is only Christ to sinners; the recognition of *who* Jesus is brings the recognition of *how* we are. For Jesus is always only Christ as the crucified one – crucified by the likes of us.

Perhaps this sounds like hopeless pessimism and a radical denigration of the human. It is, in fact, precisely the opposite. It has been said that there is blessedness in knowing that, before God, I am always in the wrong (Kierkegaard, *Either/Or II*). The blessedness is that there is nothing upon which I can depend but God's loving grace. This would be a cause for great anxiety if we then had to *wait* for that grace, wondering whether in fact it would ever come. But it has already come. The grace of God, in the form of the risen Jesus' return in love to his disciples, is precisely what reveals that I am in the wrong in the first place. To know myself to be wrong before God is to know myself to be forgiven, for it is the light of forgiveness which cast the shadows of sin.

If Jesus is Lord – which is what the resurrection shows – then I am blind to the fact, and that is *good* news because the resurrection which reveals the catastrophe of Good Friday is not a random nature miracle but an affective *moral* one. There is *no* justifying the cry, ‘Crucify him,’ which will be found on the lips of all whom God approaches too closely. But, thanks be to God, God is not just: sinners will be forgiven.

What a difference it would make, were we to believe *that*.
