

Good Friday Gathering at Hoddesdon Clock Tower 2024. Revd Nick Sharp's address

Introduction

At this morning's event our dramatic presentation helped us to hear voices of people who witnessed Jesus hanging on the cross, saying what they might have made of it.

Some thought he'd lost it, that he was crazy. Some thought he was a loser. Some thought they had lost someone on whom all their hopes had been pegged. One, the last one, found something incredibly precious - new life. But all of them were battling the fact that the world is a crazy mixed up place.

The debt

Sometimes when we look at human history, it seems we're like a load of lost sheep, wandering all over the place, with no idea who we are or where we're going. We're like a man who comes out of a night club drunk, gets into a taxi, and says to the driver, "Just start driving." The taxi drives all over the place, and all the time the meter is clicking up the bill, and the man in the back has got no means of paying. On and on goes the journey, the bill is getting higher and higher, and the man in the back has got no means of paying. For the human race, one day the journey will end, and there will be a bill to pay. How can it be possible for anyone to pay enough? Is there anyone who could foot the bill?

Today, Christians are remembering that the answer to this question ... is yes.

There is no God

Is that crazy? Some people look at the mess the world is in and say that proves it, there is no God. What God worth the name could possibly leave things in this state? That's the conclusion that the first voice we heard in the drama came to. Call yourself God? You're mad. The world's mad. This is hell and we're living in it, and there's nothing else to see.

If there is a god - he wasn't it

Some people decide that if there is a God, Jesus certainly wasn't him. The citizen who nearly followed Jesus, but then thought she had a lucky escape- she can't get her head round that fact that if Jesus saved others, he doesn't seem able to save himself. Mary, Jesus' mother, in the drama was blaming God for letting her son suffer. Both those people couldn't understand how one person's suffering could cancel out everyone else's.

So how does it work then?

Jesus was a Jew - he went to the Temple, but he had a different idea about how forgiveness worked. He saw that the Temple actually kept people out, and he wanted everyone to have access to God. He wanted everyone to be able to have their sins forgiven. He wanted everyone to be able to overcome their failures and their hurts, their bitterness and their anger.

So he took it on himself to do something about it. He went up to the Temple, and he challenged the people who ran it, saying that they were turning it into a den of thieves. He said, "Destroy this Temple, and I will rebuild it in three days." But he wasn't talking about the building, he was talking about himself. The most important thing about the Temple was that it was the place where heaven and earth met. It was the one place on earth where you could go and meet God. Jesus saw himself - his own self - as the place where heaven and earth met. He knew that he was both God and human.

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"If you have seen me", he told his friends, "you have seen the Father." The Father was what he called God. If you have seen me, you have seen God. If you want to meet God, come and meet me.

And there were those who really saw God through Jesus. Like the disciple, fearing the worst now he's lost his leader, like the Roman centurion comparing Jesus to all the different gods he's worshipped - and finding something different in him.

Could it really be that God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ? If so, he didn't just come to do a walkabout, shake a few hands and then jet off back where he came from, like a politician visiting a disaster area. Jesus' visit to earth was the first of two, and it was intended to solve the world's problems. Not instantly, not at a stroke, but before he comes back for his return visit, Jesus has put in place something that will pay for the Holocaust, for 9/11, for the Crusades, for the World Wars, for the invasion of Ukraine, the atrocities of Hamas and the flattening of Gaza. Jesus has paid for all the people who die of starvation, for slavery, for child abuse, for famine, disaster and death. He did it all on the best day in history - the day we call Good Friday. What did he do?

The Bible says it like this: *"He used his servant body to carry our sins to the cross so we could be free of sin, free to live the right way. His wounds became your healing. You were lost sheep with no idea who you were or where you were going. Now you're named and kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls."*

The other man on the cross was a lost sheep. But he realised that and turned to Jesus and just asked that he might be remembered. And in that moment he found that he had returned to the shepherd of his soul. His bill was paid. He was free. So if you're a Christian you know that the price is paid for every wrong thing.

If you're not a Christian, but sometimes you feel that the world is bankrupt and it leads you to despair, remember this. God has given this world a cash injection. There's no interest, it never has to be repaid, all we have to do is claim it. Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, was the richest man on earth - and he gave it all away to you and me.