

18 April 2014

Good Friday

With death comes resurrection

When Jesus walked into Jerusalem last week, he knew where he was going, he knew why he had come, he knew what would inevitably happen. Yet he came willingly, he did not try to find ways around it, he did not try to bargain his way out of it, he willingly walked into town knowing that he would be arrested, tried and put to death. He allowed himself to go through that death, knowing that without death he would not be able to also experience resurrection. It is easy for us, on this side of the resurrection to see the purpose of it all, we know how it all ended, we know what comes next. Jesus knew this trial was part of a plan, but it didn't stop him asking his Father, in the garden to, if possible, take this trial away. But he ended with the ultimate sacrificial statement, 'Not my will, but yours be done'. Jesus knew this was all God's plan, he accepted it willingly, but not without sadness and pain. It was not an easy thing to accept, not an easy thing to live through, but live through it he did, and because he did, Jesus lived through his death and lived into his resurrection as well.

We all have deaths in our lives, we also have resurrections. And the important thing is, without death, we cannot have resurrection. A number of years ago, there was a man at my work place who had a Christian faith which he frequently shared with his workmates. One year, on Good Friday, I cannot remember all the brief conversation we had in the corridor, but I will always remember how it ended, he declared he could not observe Good Friday because, he said, 'how can you celebrate or observe the killing of Jesus'. And with that he continued walking away; I was stunned with the comment and momentarily unable to respond. But the thing is, without the death of Jesus, this man is unable to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, without the death of Jesus, we are unable to have salvation, we cannot live the new life, the eternal life promised by God through Jesus.

Every time our life changes, we experience death. Death to the old way of life, the old way things were, so that we can experience and celebrate resurrection and a new way of life, a new life. If you change jobs, you have a death, but unless you allow yourself to experience and live that death, you are not able to adequately and completely live the resurrection inherent in that new job. A yr 12 student experiences a death at the end of the year; they are no longer a student, or at least a school student. They may also not know what their resurrection will look like for some weeks after they cease to be that school student. They live in a sort of limbo, waiting to see if they have a job, waiting to see if they will become a different type of student in a tertiary environment or apprenticeship or other training environment. They are just waiting to see what their resurrection will look like. None of us would probably admit to liking our deaths, they are painful, they are traumatic, and besides, we may well have liked the way things were before. Sometimes we do not know why things have to change or maybe we just plain don't want things to change, so we resist and deny the reality of the death which is all around us. But unless we do allow the death to occur, unless we accept the reality of the death, we fail to see the resurrection which is also around us. It won't stop the changes happening, they are beyond our control, but we fail to accept them, we keep trying to live the 'way it was before' and we fail to see the potential in front of our eyes which has been created by the resurrection.

When Matthew left some two and half years ago, you all suffered the death of what was, you liked what you had and to see that it was no longer there was painful. Then, after a time of awkward limbo, Randall came to join us, our resurrection was completed, the new had taken its final shape, and that shape is also slowly changing, through new deaths and resurrections. This church is also experiencing death through our partnership with the Sudanese community. No longer is St Pauls just an Anglo 8.30 service, we now have a new shape, we have the 8.30 weekly group, the once a month baptism group, and the weekly 12 o'clock group, all one community, all one church, all one in Christ, all united in this church called St Paul's. But those changes are painful, we have had to change the way we view ourselves, we have had to change the way we think about what we do and who we are. We are a combined, multi-cultural community who all work together to ensure that our worship needs are satisfied. Death to the old 'one Sunday service' parish has given way to resurrection as a 'three Sunday services' parish, even if one of those services is only held monthly. We used to have a choir, and, due to many and varied internal reasons it suffered death, and that death was a very painful thing for many of us, but through that death, we are able to await with much excited anticipation the resurrection of what is coming in the future. Unless we accept that death, unless we accept the reality of the fact that what was is no longer, we will be unable to enjoy, embrace and see the potential created by the resurrection which is coming.

Jesus death on the cross allowed us to be offered salvation, but if all we see is his death, we cannot see the reality of the salvation in front of us. Jesus accepted his cross, and because of that cross, because of his death, we have resurrection, we have salvation, we have new life. Live a good death, each time they occur in your lives, resurrection is not a 'rebirth' of what you had before only in a new skin, it is something new, related to but different from what was before. Remember, no-one recognised Jesus after his resurrection, Mary did not recognise him in the garden, thinking him to be a gardener, the two on the road to Emmaus do not recognise him until he breaks bread at the end of their day of walking, so the resurrection clearly left him changed. We need to be ready to accept the change that comes after the deaths which occur in our lives, change which allows our resurrection to be true. Sometimes, when we experience our deaths we may feel as empty, as exhausted as Jesus did when, just before the end he uttered those profound words from the 22nd psalm, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me. We may really feel forsaken, forsaken by life, forsaken by the events around us, forsaken by the death we are confronted by, but Jesus knew his death was not the end of the story. He may not have known what his resurrection would look like, but he was certain, and comforted, by the knowledge that this was not the end. We cannot let our deaths be the end for us. Live a good death, in the knowledge that this death, and all the subsequent deaths we will experience throughout our lives, is not the end, it, and they, will lead to resurrection and we need to be ready to accept and live into those resurrections.

John tells us 'Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit.

If we have died with Christ, we shall live with him.

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