

RESURRECTION FOR A WORLD STUCK ON THE CROSS OF GOOD FRIDAY

Series: Trails to Freedom

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Easter, Resurrection

Matthew 27: 51-56

The challenge with how we celebrate Easter is that we are often celebrating as separate from GoodFriday. We sometimes think of the crucifixion as the temporary defeat that Jesus was going to beat in a few days on Sunday morning.

Today just like in that time we are looking for a saviour King but do not want the suffering servant. We are often looking for a faith that is more triumphant than the cross and so sometimes we want to run fast past the cross to get to the resurrection.

And I guess it doesn't help that our experience of time, unlike God's, is of one moment at a time, So we wait for Easter Sunday as if it is separate from Good Friday.

Long before one of humanity's greatest brains, Albert Einstein, worked on the theory of relativity, which tells us a particle can be in two places at the same time, faith taught us that God sees the beginning from the end all at the same time. That he stretches outside of time. He is our future and our past, all at once. That a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day before him.

So what if death and resurrection of Jesus are one event of glory and not separate ones? You see as Jesus led his life to the cross, he often said it was time for him to be glorified and be lifted up. And he meant both being lifted up at the cross and being lifted up as resurrected Lord.

For him, the crescendo, the climax, of his life was not Easter Sunday morning but both the event on the cross on that dark GoodFriday afternoon and resurrection on the morning of Easter Sunday.

It sounds Cliché, like a duh moment, but there is no resurrection if there is no cross. But if we allow that to be our worldview it has to change everything.

Growing up, I remember watching a Jesus film that had people mock him because he hugged the cross before carrying it.

“Look at this fool, embracing his cross.”

But you see, this is what Jesus had been talking about. He taught loudly on the streets and open places. And some of the things he said were pointing to him embracing the cross.

“Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains but one seed”

“Take up your cross and follow me”

“If you lose your life for my sake, you will find it”

“Destroy this temple and I will build it up in 3 days”

He seldom talked about the resurrection as separate from the crucifixion.

And after Jesus died, the disciples ran in fear and despair. How could he do this to them? He was supposed to be the messiah, the deliverer, he was supposed to be the son of God, the son of David. how could he die on them?

You see, they too really believed there was no glory in the shameful crucifixion. They saw defeat until the resurrection on Sunday morning.

But the only way to get to Sunday morning was through the door of the disturbing death on the cross on a dark of GoodFriday. Without the cross, there is no resurrection Sunday morning. And resurrection is the work of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. Oh how with all of creation we long for the breaking in of the Kingdom of God

And I have often said that the coming of Jesus was the fulfilment of the promise of the Kingdom of God. The King was coming. The end was near. Time as we know it was coming to an end because God was coming.

And when we think about the end some of us are hearing echoes of the book of revelation some people are excited by them others repulsed by them. The pictures people are familiar with of God coming back as King and Judge are all over the Bible and most famously in revelation.

And yet, I mean that end was coming. Judgement, restoration, healing, wiping of tears, the victory over death, the new heaven and new earth. All that end time stuff that excites some and pushes some away and confuses many too was actually breaking into the present.

Jesus hanging on the cross, all these future realities were becoming true The darkening of the clouds. The shaking of the earth and God being right there among humans.

The situation was so bad that the end came in the middle of the story. God's Kingdom invaded the present reality. The Kingdom of God is not just a future reality but a present one too.

And the end is worth celebrating because God is King and sets everything right. But who thought that the coming of the Kingdom was through the death of the King? You don't write such a story.

What if the invitation of Jesus even on Resurrection morning is, embrace the cross. Don't run away from it. Don't grow resentful because of it, embrace it. There is an old hymn that says, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. The cross before me”

What if the story of our faith in Jesus has always been crowned by our embracing of suffering. Not for suffering's sake but anchored in the promise that God will bring resurrection?

What if believers are invited to embrace the cross to for resurrection to come to our families, our marriages, our nation and the world?

What if instead of the church being mad about not being able to meet and all the inconvenience of it all making us have a posture of wanting to quickly go past the cross to the resurrection, we like Jesus, embrace the cross. And dig deep our knees as we pray for our nation. For our families.

As we fall in love more and more with Jesus. As we love our community more now. What if we become more generous now. What if we sing more passionately now. What if we dedicate ourselves to scripture and prayer more now. What if the way the Kingdom breaks through is actually embracing the cross as it is the door of resurrection?

This guy called Paul who writes a lot of letters that become a huge part of our New Testament calls Jesus the first fruit of the resurrection. More like the firstborn of the resurrected ones. And this is what this Sunday morning is.

It is a reminder of the promise that death has lost and will lose its sting. It's a reminder that our tears are wiped and will be wiped away. It's a reminder that our shame is taken and will be taken away. It's both present and future

And this is a crazy Easter because the world is still stuck in dark GoodFriday. Its resurrection Sunday but the world is still stuck in on the cross. And it is easy to go back to the words of Jesus when he complained, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Right after answering, He is risen indeed.

Countries that had seen a decline in cases are trying to go back to normal and recording new cases and shutting down again. Our Minister for health comes out gives some good news and then tells how many more cases are reported.

It is easy to then not see the resurrection today and it is easy even in normal life to think that all the promises of God are future. Well one day, we will sing. lone day we will walk in the sun. One day, one day, one day?

And you are right, some of it is future and some of it is right now even as we embrace our cross and we are stuck on the dark GoodFriday. Look at this story

Matthew 27:51-56

At that moment, the Temple curtain was ripped in two, top to bottom. There was an earthquake, and rocks were split into pieces. What's more, tombs were opened up, and many bodies of believers asleep in their graves were raised. (After Jesus' resurrection, they left the tombs, entered the holy city, and appeared to many.)

The captain of the guard and those with him, when they saw the earthquake and everything else that was happening, were scared to death. They said, “This has to be the Son of God!”

There were also quite a few women watching from a distance, women who had followed Jesus from Galilee in order to serve him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the Zebedee brothers.

Even as Jesus hang on the cross on the dark GoodFriday, resurrection was beginning to break through. Signs of the end time were showing as the sun became dark and the earth shook. The KOG was breaking in and the King had come in glory.

The presence of God became accessible as the temple curtains tore in two. The dead were being brought back to life and people could not deny it.

The downtrodden like women were being seen at their place at the feet of the King.

All of this before Sunday morning. There is a resurrection for a world that is still stuck on the cross fo the dark GoodFriday. There is resurrection because on that cross the Kingdom for God was breaking through.

And it looks like the emails and texts I receive of people giving their lives to Jesus in isolation and quarantine.

It looks like reading stories of people getting healed even in the chaos of death.

It looks like the story of a medical doctor who came out of treatment to work during this pandemic.

It looks like the story of Ireland’s Prime Minister renewing his medical licence to also be on the front line.

It looks like the story of a priest who got the gift of a ventilator and he took it off to save the life of a younger person, and by the way, he died.

It looks like the faces of the people who had never heard of agora but now they know they can come for a bag of food.

It looks like people who would never consider walking into the doors of a church watching online faithfully and finding faith.

It looks like restored and rekindled marriages and relationships. It looks like families having communion together back home.

It looks like worship no longer being about the crowd but our audience of one, Jesus and sometimes our spouses and our brother whom we found so hard to worship with because of how well they knew us.

It looks like families praying for each other now that they cannot meet the pastor on Sunday morning.

It looks like the Kingdom of God is breaking through even now. It looks like there is resurrection even for a world stuck on the cross of the dark GoodFriday, long before our Sunday morning comes.

What would it look like for you to embrace the cross as we look forward to the resurrection? What would it look like if we stopped obsession over when this will end and ask Jesus what are you doing right now? If we stopped being mad and wondering if God is punishing, remember that the Kingdom always breaks in through the cross.

Where is life springing out? What graves are bursting open and the dead coming to life? Dead relationships and life coming out of graves?

Where are things being shaken and rock hard hearts being broken? Previously held on to beliefs and worldview are being shaken broken as God becomes King in your life and around the world.

And one of those is the idea that we are completely held hostage by this virus and that God could not end it overnight.

What unbelieving centurions are seeing me and you the church on the cross and finding faith?

What women and the undervalued are finally worth being mentioned and seen at this time? Teachers and homemakers and healthcare workers and grocery store tellers

Where Oh God, is your kingdom breaking out?

And guess what, the story of Jesus has always been the story of the end breaking into the present. Of the Kingdom of God breaking into the now. Of heaven invading earth. Of God stepping into human story and changing history. Yes, science is great and at best uncertain. But do we believe the God is still in the business of stepping into our story? That even tomorrow everything could change because God moved in?

I have had these beautiful visions of the time that is coming. Of the depth of worship and love and discipleship and the power of God. And one day this week I was walking and I felt the Holy Spirit ask,

“Do you still believe that Prayers change everything?”

This is the stuff faith is made of. It is looking at common sense and agreeing with it because it makes sense and saying but God. And realising that there is a bigger reality than our own and we get to be part of it by joining in with our knees to the ground and our hands to heaven?

The tragedy would be that resurrection comes but we have not been transformed by the cross. The way the Kingdom breaks through is through sons and daughters of God embracing the cross so that the world can have life.

Let's pray