

Week 6 (Holy Week): Jesus experiences extreme separation from God - death

Sunday Worship reading - 29 March

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the human heart conceived,

what God has prepared for those who love him'

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. (1 Corinthians 2: 1-12)

Reflection

The inspiration behind the title of this final chapter is a sermon given by one of Desmond Tutu's heroes, Father Trevor Huddleston, in South Africa just before his return to the Community of the Resurrection back in Mirfield, Yorkshire. Huddleston had been a thorn in the side of the South African apartheid government and his defiant last gesture assured the authorities that the days of their abominable policies were numbered. God was not to be mocked. All would one day have to give account: in the beginning, God; at the end, God.

Desmond Tutu graphically describes how the relationship between God and his creation went awry: where there should have been teeming life, there was a cold clammy death. It was a far cry from the paradise God had intended, and the catalogue of atrocities seems never to end. Yet God hasn't given up on God's dream. Throughout the ages it's been kept alive by those whom God has sent to remind us of it – the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Micah who both speak, almost in identical language, of a time of universal peace. The dream became more and more remote as God's people reneged, until just one representative figure remained - the Suffering Servant. In the divine economy, it was he who would attain redemption through his vicarious suffering. Tempted as we are, yet not succumbing to sin, he experienced the most extreme form of separation from God - death. Wonderfully, he rose again, ascended into heaven and now he reigns for ever. And it's that triumphant victory that awaits us: in the beginning, God; at the end, God.

Prayer

O Lord Christ, Lamb of God, call us, who are called to be thy saints, along the way of thy Cross; draw us, who would draw nearer our king, to the foot of thy Cross; cleanse us, who are not worthy to approach, with the pardon of thy Cross; instruct us, the ignorant and blind, in the school of thy Cross; arm us, for the battles of holiness, by the might of thy Cross; bring us, in the fellowship of thy sufferings, to the victory of thy Cross; and seal us, in the kingdom of thy glory, among the servants of thy Cross. (Eric Milner-White)

- *Endzeit ist Urzeit* is a German expression meaning 'the time of the end is as the time of the beginning.' And the poet T.S.Eliot wrote: 'In my end is my beginning.' How can this be true?
- How important is it to our faith to spend time reflecting on the sequence of dramatic events of Holy Week when they happened such a long time ago?
- How necessary is it to see the life and death of Jesus within the context of the whole story of our salvation?