

## The Power of the Cross.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 3:16-21

On many occasions I have been quizzed as to why I wear a cross and why I don't wear a dog collar: well apart from not being a dog, I chose early on in full-time ministry to focus on function rather than status: pastor instead of His Revererance, and I choose to wear a cross because that's what I have worn with huge significance since I became a Christian in 1975. Indeed on my return from Canada (where I had surrendered my life to Jesus) I went to Westminster Abbey and purchased the cross I still wear till this day. Even questioning by the Queen of mean, Anne Robinson, on the Weakest Link, does not shake my resolve that the Cross is the absolute centre of my faith in Jesus.

You see the Cross and by implication the completed work of Christ is what makes Christianity unique and utterly life transforming: at one staggering moment in human history the God made flesh, Jesus, the perfect sinless Son of God, took on my sin and yours, my separation from God and yours, my inner turmoil and agony, and yours, and because of His uniqueness He carried its pain and weight down into the depths of hell. Then because of his sinlessness He took on the Enemy on His home territory Hell and he not only prevailed but He defeated him once and for all. The wonderful cry of 'It is finished' was at one and the same time a cry of utter triumph and a declaration to Satan: You are finished! The Resurrection was the final stamp of triumph: death defeated, sin conquered, sickness overcome: Life in all its fullness and the gift of a renewed relationship with God on offer to every human soul.

But on this Passion Sunday the question needs to be asked: what does it mean to be a Christian and live in the shadow of the Cross of Calvary: the answer eludes many Christians who have never embraced the freedom that is theirs by right:

**It means that I can live in Freedom:** Sin can no longer have a hold over my life, and when I fall from a place of grace I can be confident that I have an advocate with Father God: Jesus himself! It was for freedom that Christ has set us free, no longer to be subject to the yoke of slavery!! Are you living in that freedom or do you exist in some kind of Christian Pharasism? **Speak about completed work of the Cross..**

**It means that my past can not dictate my future:** The Bible speaks on a number of occasions of the sins of the Fathers being visited to the third and fourth generation: you may know what your Father and your Grandfather was like but what about another two generations back. Often we hear the phrase: that's how it is because his father was the same. Whether that is your experience or not there are two reasons why you should take this seriously: one because through the Cross and its completed work you can declare an end to anything not good coming down the generational line and put an end to it, casting it away into the depths of hell which is its origin. But secondly the reason why you will want to get your life right is that if you don't then the effects of your sin could affect the generations to come: your children and their children and so on. Interestingly those who struggle with the scripture I mention fail to quote the other half where God says that the blessings of obedience will flow for a thousand generations: now that's the power of the Cross at work! **Mention Freedom in Christ & Cleansing Streams.**

Now the World struggles with the Cross (*tell story of Stratford market*) because it's not nice and comfortable and because they see it as negative message and a rather foolish one to the sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> century person in the High Street. Was it always not so?! Paul in his letter to the Corinthians tackles it right at the beginning: to them he says the message of the Cross

is foolishness but to those being saved it's the power of God and so today: you may be sitting here thinking how can this help me, its foolishness, but that's the point its not, it is the very source of God's power to transform your life, and the sooner you allow the Holy Spirit to open you eyes to that the better for you and your family and the generations to come. Again Paul says: the Jews demand miracles (Today's equivalent: the Lottery: its You, God!) and the Gentiles look for wisdom (Today's equivalent: people try and grasp the message of the Cross simply with their mind but fail because it can only come by Revelation) but we preach Christ crucified! Stumbling block or foolishness or could it just be true and the greatest place of liberation you can and could ever experience! In a revealing comment Paul goes further: the foolishness of God is wiser than mans wisdom and weakness of God is stronger than mans strength. So what will you choose? God choose us, mere Christians, the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things to shame the strong. But we do need to take seriously the need to open the hearts of people to God's Love before we present the cross so let me finish with two ideas on how to do this:

The first is from our reading in John: it starts with John's huge affirmation of the purpose of God the Father sending Jesus: because He loved the world he has made and every man women boy and girl within it and that will never change. But God needs our response: we need to believe, put our faith and trust in Jesus in order to have that grace transform our lives. John then affirms that God did not send Jesus to condemn the world but to be its Saviour, which is still true today: so don't feel condemned by God or the Church Jesus is building but do respond to His saving love! Put simply says John: it's a battle between light and darkness and light will always win (indeed darkness is simply an absence of light). So if you sense darkness in your life let the Light of the World in: for on that Cross darkness was defeated

once and for all, and so with confidence we can say, as individual Christians and as the Body of Christ, we can say to the darkness we beg to differ in Christ's name.

The second and final way of repackaging the gospel for 21<sup>st</sup> century hearers is to talk about rubbish. We all have loads of rubbish in our lives as well as in our homes: our domestic rubbish is collected every other week but what about the rubbish that attaches itself to us spiritually as the enemy of our Soul Satan attacks and seeks to trip us up. Such rubbish blocks our relationship with God and something needs to be done: listen to this and let God speak to you.

### Hey Tract!

#### Prayer to get closer to God:

*Dear God, Thank you that you love me and want the best for me in every situation. I'm sorry for ignoring You and doing things my way. I realise now that my sin has hurt You and the people around me and for this I'm truly sorry. Thank you Jesus that You came and on the Cross took the punishment for my sin. Thank you that you gave your life for me. Please forgive me and help me now as I decide to live only for you. Amen*

If you have prayed that prayer for the first time then would you come to the front at the end of the service where there will be Members of the Prayer Team to help you understand the step you have taken and the next steps we can help you take on the spiritual journey.

We are a Cross Centred people, a Cross-centred Congregation, and we contrary to popular wisdom will continue to impact this City and community as we lift high the Cross over all.

Pastor David  
March 25<sup>th</sup> 2012