

Daniel's reflection for week beginning April 9th – The Mystery of the Cross

There is one occasion in the year when we gather to watch the figure of a man on the cross outlined starkly against the fading light and there is always a thoughtful child who asks the perennial question, 'Why do we call Good Friday "good"?' It is a profound question. Another way of putting it is, 'If Jesus was a man of love why was he killed? And if this good man was killed, why do we celebrate it? Why does love and pain go together?'

In his famous book the poet Kahlil Gibran writes: 'Some of you say that love and joy or greater than sorrow, and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater." But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come and when one sits alone with you at your table, remember that the other is the sleep upon your bed. The shell must break before the chicken walks free; the seeds must die before we celebrate the harvest . . . There is no other way. Seen through the lens of the Christian Easter mystery, our suffering becomes our friend, our pain opens up our hearts to compassion. If we take up our cross, as Jesus asks us to, our cross will be our salvation; it will prune and purify us; it will lead us safely home.'

Once upon a time there was a man who had a cross to carry through life. It was a particularly awkward and cumbersome cross, and he complained a lot about it. Journeying through the valley he met another man who felt sorry for him and suggested that if he sawed a bit off the bottom of the cross it would be much lighter to carry. Delighted with the good advice, the man cut off a piece from the bottom and, much lighter, continued on his way. Some years later, as he neared the city at the end of his travels, he came to a river. He looked in vain for a bridge. The only way across from one bank to the other, to reach the City of Joy, was to lay across down as a bridge, and clamber over. Laying the base of the cross on the near bank, he lowered the cross so that the tip of it might touch the far bank. But the cross was too short - by about the length sawn off. There is another reason for calling Good Friday good. It reveals to us forever what love is prepared to do. Many of us are familiar with an incident recorded by the Jewish writer Eli Wiesel. In one of the Nazi death camps, a prisoner had escaped and, in retaliation, the Nazis took a boy, hanged him publicly and forced everyone to watch this horrific spectacle. As the young boy dangled on a rope in front of them, one man cursed bitterly, 'Where is God now?' Another answered: 'There, on that rope! That's God!'

One day I was called to the intensive care unit of the children's ward. A baby had died. The broken-hearted parents were inconsolable and angry. 'Where is your God now?' they shouted at me. 'Holding you both and weeping with you,' I mumbled. It was then that he embraced her and gently said, 'You know I will always love you.' Some moments stay in your mind forever.

(Prism of Love pp 87, 88)