

High Noon

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] I did a sort of teaching mission at All Saints Church in Waterloo last week, and it was very interesting. And it was also with Waterloo North Presbyterian Church.

There are two churches in the same building. On the Wednesday, I was invited to go and talk to the Presbyterian ministers of the presbytery on the subject of evangelism.

And I was prepared for that talk in my own mind by being quite convivial and quite looking forward to talking to people who were in the same business that I'd been in for a long time, and I thought we'd have a lot in common and that I could get along with them and share anecdotes with them and tell them my experiences and hear from them and so on.

And it was a very strange experience because when I got there and stood up in front of them, I realized that wasn't going to happen. I realized that I was, in fact, facing a Presbyterian jury.

And unless I made my case in the next ten minutes, I was going to be in trouble. So it turned out very differently.

[1 : 19] And I mention that to you in part because I'm never quite sure where I am in relationship to you as to whether you're with me or whether you're a jury waiting to pass judgment.

And it's, I mean, I tell you this because it, you know, I've been doing Wednesdays here for quite a long time.

And the thing that I don't quite understand is how I need to hear from you.

I need to talk to you. I need to have coffee with you or something. So please know that I'm available to do that kind of thing in a way that I haven't been in the past and would like to talk to you about things to have a chance to share with you simply because I need to hear what you're thinking and what you're saying because I stand up and talk all the time.

And there's no way that I can hear from you unless you tell me. And also I have the honor of being introduced every week. My name is Harry Robinson.

[2 : 29] And you don't get introduced every week. And I'm not very good on your names, some of you whom I know very well by sight but couldn't give you your name to save myself.

There is a fellow there in the third row who's usually in the front row. Have you been demoted or are you... Anyway, I hope you don't go any further back.

I'll... That's... The title High Noon is the title of a movie, as you know.

And I checked with my authority this morning and he tells me it was... It starred Gary Cooper as... He told me it was as the Christ figure in the...

Which was a small western town. The bad guys had pretty well taken control of the town.

[3 : 38] Gary Cooper, I gather, was the sheriff who had to confront the bad guys. And he tried to rally some support in the town. And nobody would support him.

And so at high noon he stood on the main street of this town. And they came in. And he stood alone without anybody with him.

And had to face the powers of evil. As they rode into town with their six-gun shooting. And he had to face them out. Which isn't a bad sort of contemporary background to the story that was read to us just now.

A quite strange and wonderful story. Being the story of a particular event. Thing that...

You know... Isn't there a poem about the day that somebody struck out? Casey struck out or something like that.

[4 : 48] And there's the story of the first man on the moon. And for the whole of history now, There will be the story of the event when Yeltsin and Clinton came to Vancouver for the weekend.

There are certain significant events which take place. And those events are important.

I mean, people remember when President Kennedy was shot. And they remember when Henderson scored the goal that won the game. And there are certain events. And probably some of them are more familiar to us than to other people in other cultures. To whom they would mean nothing. I mean, I had a... I had a great time in Australia in November. [5 : 53] Because the Blue Jays had just won the World Series. And they thought it was totally fatuous of North Americans to call it the World Series.

That... That... That... That... That... That... That... I... My defense was that actually it was... It was named after a newspaper that originally started it.

You know... So that... As in Vancouver, it might be called the... The Province Series or the Sun Series. It was called the World Series after that newspaper, which was called the World.

Anyway, that... That was an event which was very significant in North America. Somewhat less significant in Australia for some reason. Huh?

But when you... When you take to... When you take to this story here... The...

[6 : 54] The... The understanding of this event is... That it is undoubtedly the most important event in the whole of history.

It is the event above all other events in the whole of human history. It is the event in which... Within history...

With real people involved... Real nails... A real cross... Real soldiers... All those things were happening... Around this event that took place when Christ was crucified.

And... From the biblical point of view... Which is presumably the point of view shared by Christians... It is the singular event in the whole of history.

The event by which the whole of history is to find some kind of interpretation. And so it's a very sparsely told story.

[7 : 59] It talks about... A cosmic darkness over the land. To mark a cosmic event. An event that involved the whole of the universe.

And there was darkness over the land. And... The commentators think whoever wrote that... Thought of it really in terms of three hours of darkness at noon.

And... And... At the height of the... At the height of the sun... There was darkness over the whole of the earth. And...

That was to mark this cosmic event. Strange because... Because in our... In our scientific world... We've had to adjust our... Our... Spiritual lives... To the real world of science. They seem to be able to adjust...

[9 : 04] The scientific world... To the reality of their spiritual experience. You know. And... That's... We've shifted. I mean... We've taken a... A hundred and eighty degree turn from that.

And... And... That we couldn't conceive of that event... Which could be charted scientifically... As being a... As being really a response to...

A spiritual event. An event in which God and man... And the whole of nature... Were focused. You know. The whole realm of nature...

Were focused in that event. And it was dark. And out of the darkness... Came... The cry... Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani...

When... Christ cried... My God, my God... Why hast thou forsaken me? And the kind of fascination there is... With...

[10 : 08] The last throes of a dying man... And what he might say... And what he might do... And nailed to the cross... In the darkness... This cry comes out.

And... The cry... Is... Is one of... I think it's one of ultimate agony... You know. Being... Being the first verses...

Of Psalm 22... My God... My God... Why hast thou forsaken me? It's the... It's the moment of agony... In which...

The Son of God... Shared... The deepest depths... Of human suffering... You know. That... That in his... In... In he who...

Came from heaven... And was born of a virgin... And suffered under Pontius Pilate... And was crucified... That he's gone right down... To the bottom... Of human experience...

[11 : 10] And he senses... The forsakenness from God... Which is... The fear... And the peril... And the anxiety... That somehow we all...

We all face... And the fear... The ultimate kind of fear... That at the end... We will be left alone... There will be nobody there... And there will just be...

An echoing... That goes out and out... And a cry... Which can't overcome... The enclosing darkness... And we will feel... Very desperate... And very alone...

Later... As... Theologians... I suppose... And Christian disciples... Thought about this... They... They...

They try... They try to understand it... In terms of... How could... Could such a thing happen... But... There... There it was... This...

[12:11] This cry... Interesting that the cry... Was not... Was not understood... Because... People had a certain expectation...

Around the event... And they thought... He's calling for Elijah... Because somewhere... In the folklore... And in the tradition... And in the biblical understanding... Interpretation... That people had...

They remembered... That there was... One prophet... Elijah... And that when the end... Of his life came... You know... The chariot... Swung low... The sweet chariot... Swung low... And took... Elijah... Bodily into heaven... So that... He had never... Experienced death... And therefore...

The understanding... About Elijah was... That... That he... Could come... And rescue people... Who are in the... Ultimate...

[13:07] To the point... Of... Of... Annihilation... That Elijah... Would come... And it's... It's not unlike... I think...

A lot of... A lot of... Pious and sentimental ideas... That we have... Still... About death... And that we use... To... To cover up... With such euphemisms... As we can find...

The stark reality... Of that separation... Which is death... From all our loved ones... And... And the agony of it... And...

We... We want to hide from it... And the way they hid from it... Was the expectation... That Elijah would come... At the last moment... And that this tragedy... Would be averted... And they thought... There might be some... Special reason why... In this case... It would happen... And one person who heard... The cry... Went and got a stick...

[14:04] And a sponge... And some vinegar... And held it up to Jesus... That he might... Take from it... And... Commentators writing about it... Said...

Whether it was some form of... Anesthesia... Whether it was... Even some form of poison... That would... Eliminate the suffering... The agony...

Which was there... And... Somebody with some... Compassion... Held up... The stick... And the sponge... And the vinegar... And... Somebody else said...

Wait... Let's see if Elijah will come... Perhaps it will happen... And the darkness continued... And then... At the ninth hour...

Another cry... Which we don't know... What it was... In one... I think in John's gospel... The cry is... Is...

[15:00] It is finished... It's over... It's done... And Christ... Gives up the spirit... And... Life is drained from his body...

On the cross... And he's dead... To the surprise of those who were watching... And to the... And to the... You know... I mean... There's a... Wonderful kind of reality to it... Because... In his death... You see... He... He gave up his life... Nobody ultimately took it from him...

And of course... He had come into the world... To give his life... And so you have that... There's no elaboration on it... There's nothing... It just says that...

He cried... And he... Was active in... In giving up his spirit... In giving up his life to God... In the fulfillment of the obedience... To which he was called... As the son of God...

[15:59] To live in perfect obedience... The obedience which... Eludes you and me... The obedience which we can see... Ideally...

The necessity of it... But which we don't experience... And... He did... As he gave up his body... He gave up his life... On the cross... In that cry... And then... And then... Matthew takes off... As the other gospels don't...

And says things which... Cause us to scratch our heads... And wonder... What is being recorded here... But just... Let me tell you... The things that are... Thing... First that the temple... Curtain was... Was... Slashed open from the top... To the bottom... Was torn from the top... To the bottom... And I guess the...

[16:59] The... You see... I think it's... I think it's... I think it was to illustrate... What we find very difficult... Always...

The way we design our churches... The way we run our services... The way we conduct our religions... There is something very secret... At the heart of it... That the uninitiated are not to be let in on... That it only belongs to the priest...

That it only belongs to a few people... To know what really is... At the heart of the faith... And most people are glad... To stay away... From that part... You know...

To worship from afar... To stand afar... And not to see... What's really there... And so this was symbolized... In the temple... By a great curtain... Which hung over... The Holy of Holies...

And nobody... Was allowed behind that curtain... Except the high priest... Once a year... And he had to be... Carrying the blood of a sacrifice... In order to go in... Behind that curtain...

[17:57] And the great mystery... Of where man... Actually... Where the rubber hit the road... In terms of man's relationship to God... Was something which was contained... In the dark and secret place...

Where no human being could enter... And then suddenly... The curtain was torn in two... And to the vulgar gaze... Of the whole of humanity...

The most secret place was opened up... And you see... That's... That's... The understanding of that... Which... We've been given...

Is that... The place... Of encounter... Between God and man... Is not a secret place... It's... The cross...

On a hill... Shaped like a scaffold... Where Christ died... And... And that... Anybody can approach it... Who will... You know... It's not hidden from anybody...

[18:57] God is not acting in secret... What he has done... He has done publicly... And when Paul writes about it in Galatians... He says... You know... That...

Christ who was... Billboard... In front of you... This is in a sense... Christ's... Great billboard... On the highway of life... Saying...

You know... Is... Is Christ crucified? And so... The... The temple... The veil of the temple... Was... Was rent in two... And...

The earth shook... To mark... As they understood it... In... In ancient times... The death of a god... And...

That was... That was there... But... But there was more than that... Because Christ was... In a way... Breaking into... The prison house of death...

[19:55] Which was contained... And symbolized by people... Being buried in caves... And in the ground... And suddenly the earth shook... And the way to death... Was opened up...

And... Christ entered in there... Christ who could not be contained... Entered in... To the deepest place... Of death...

And the rocks split... And the tombs opened up... And... The bodies of many... Holy people... Were raised... To life... The dead came out of the tombs...

Something is symbolized by that story... Which is a part of the... I think the adornment of the story... Of the historical reality of the crucifixion...

That... The new covenant had begun... The power of death... Had been broken... The prison house of death... In which the dead were contained... That the great steel doors...

[21:00] Had been smashed open... And no longer... Was death a prison... And they spoke... Of that... Somebody spoke to me yesterday...

Of... And then this happens to you often... I'm sure... Where... Where you've lost a loved one...

And... In a crowd... You suddenly see him... Or her... It isn't them...

But you think it is... But... And here... They saw the saints... And... But it was for them... The... The... The...

The... The... The... The... The... The power of death was broken... Then you have the... The centurions...

Who represent the whole... Pagan world... The alien... Gentile world... Which was way beyond... The people of the scriptures... The people of the Jews...

[21 : 57] The children of Israel... Way beyond them... There was... Centurions... Standing there... Who were... Members of... Of another cult...

Another culture... Another religion... Another faith... And they said... Surely this was the Son of God... That...

And... That's part of the reason... That... The good news of the gospel... Is understood... Not to be the private possession...

Of the Christian community... But that something cosmic... A cosmic event has happened... So that death no longer... Holds power...

And... And... And then... The story ends... You know... And it's... It is the most... Peculiarly...

[22 : 57] Poignant thing... In this story... As I... Read it... This year... Why... On earth... Was the detail... Added... At the end of the story...

That there were... Women... Watching from a distance... That they were to be... The witnesses... To the resurrection...

And there was... Mary Magdalene... And Mary... The mother of James... And Joseph... And Mary... Salome... Who was the mother... Of the Zebedees... And they were there...

And they witnessed... And the... You know... The peculiar tension... In our world... Which is created by... What we regard... As the disparity...

Between the sexes... You know... You... It seems... It seems amazing... That... That this note... Is added...

[23 : 55] At the conclusion... Of the story... Of the central event... Of all history... That there were women... Who bore witness to it... And whose witness...

Becomes the basis of... The life of the church... That he is risen... They saw him die... And they saw him... Rise...

And they bore witness... It's a... It's a beautiful thing... I... I don't... That's the story... That's the... That's the encounter... As it were... Between...

Between... Evil... And... The prince... The prince... Of life... Who was nailed to a cross... Who became subject to death...

And... There's the encounter... You see... I'm... I'm frightened... By Michael Cassidy... I'm telling you... About political involvement...

[24 : 54] Of Christians... In South Africa... The reason I'm frightened... Is because... We live in a humanistic world... Which is able to take...

The products of Christian faith... Of which the primary product... Is love... And try and sell it... When it is separated... From the reality of... The death and resurrection...

Of Jesus Christ... The God who... So loved the world... That he gave his only begotten son... And... That separation... Must not happen...

Michael Cassidy... Won't make that separation... And... And... And in a sense... We mustn't make that separation... That there is no... Pragmatic value...

To love... Which is disconnected from... Or unrelated to... The primary event... Of the love of God... By which he...

[25 : 52] Demonstrated his love for us... And established a new covenant with us... By... The blood of the perfect sacrifice...

Of Jesus Christ on the cross... You can't... Will you give me 30 seconds... My friend... Who said... Who... I mean... I talked to him yesterday... And he'd been approached by somebody... Who said...

You meditate... Don't you? He said... Yes... And he said... You...

You read the stars... Don't you? And he said... No... And the man was disappointed... And... But he said... You have this sort of spiritual life... And my friend said...

When you remove spirituality... From the reality... From the reality... Of the cross of Jesus Christ... It is valueless... It has no meaning... And that's...

[26 : 50] The problem of our day... And it's the question... You have to answer... You know... In our aspirations... To be a spiritual people... We cannot be cut off...

From the reality of this event... Which is the central event... Of history... Let me pray... God give us grace...

This week... To remember... The body broken... And the blood shed... Of our Lord Jesus Christ...
So that our lives...
May be anchored... In the reality... Of what you have done for us... That we could never do... For
ourselves... We ask this in Christ's name...
Amen...