

Good News

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[0 : 00] St. John's Shaughnessy Church I wonder if you would turn your Bibles open to Mark chapter 15 verses 33 to 39.

As you do so I think it's a nasty trick that Felix does to say to the children to ask their parents what the preacher preached about. It means you have to stay awake for the whole sermon, although today it's not too difficult.

Well now we come today to the centre of the Christian faith, to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. And you know that the whole Bible is about this.

All the Old Testament points forward to it, all the New Testament explains it. It is the core of what Christians believe, it's what makes us sing, it's the heart of the faith.

As the Apostle Paul says, the Christ Jesus died for sinners. There's nothing else like it anywhere in the world, in any of the world religions. I don't know if you've ever thought about that.

[1 : 31] I mean we wear crosses as jewellery. It's an instrument of execution of course. It's appalling to Muslims and Jews that we should think that God would work salvation through the death of a man on the cross.

And indeed the idea that God's answer to the problems of the world, that this is the door for heaven, the fresh start with God, that's incredible.

And yet without it we do not understand the love of God, nor the justice of God, nor God's desire for us. One of the most wonderful things about the God of the Bible as you know, is that he is a promise making and promise keeping God.

Every word that God speaks has the character of promise. So when God created the world, the world bristles with purpose and goodness because the word is promised.

When he says to man and woman, be fruitful and multiply, with those words comes the promise of fulfillment. And the words of God, which are words of warning, have the same character as promise, just as the words of blessing.

[2 : 48] And so when he says to the man and the woman, you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For in the day that you eat of it, you will die. It is a promise. And the tragedy of the garden unfolds and the man and the woman choose to believe the word of the serpent when he says you will not die.

And their disbelief and their disobedience explains why the world is as it is today. It explains why we only live 80 to 90 years. It explains why we don't believe God naturally.

It explains why we do achingly stupid things to those around us whom we love. It explains why our hearts are filled with a dull sense of disappointment, of insecurity and inadequacy.

Why we're afraid of one another. And I think why our hearts are restless, restless, restless. Because we too, children of Adam and Eve, we live outside the garden.

And while Adam and Eve opened the door, we have willingly walked through. And the result is deep fracture and deep sense of disconnection in our three primary relationships.

[3 : 57] With God there is disconnection. We no longer feel we can trust him. We're suspicious of him. He's not really after our best. With one another we're filled with fear of each other, shame, blame.

And with creation we sense that disconnection in many ways. And the story of the Old Testament is the story of how God seeks to re-establish his purposes of blessing which were there at creation.

It's amazing. At almost every turn God's people resist him and reject him. Which is incidentally why when you open every page of the Old Testament you can see yourself there.

And you can hear the voice of God speaking. But as we come to the end of the Old Testament, God promises a new creation.

Let me read you these great words from Isaiah. God says, And a new earth. And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

[5 : 03] I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping or the cry of distress. They shall build houses and inhabit them.

They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox and the dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountains says the Lord. It's an astounding word anyway you look at it. Don't you find it remarkable that the God who created this world does not just wipe his creation clean and begin again.

I mean if you were God and you created something and that creation turned against you and began to mistrust you and could hardly have the time of day for you. Would you not be tempted to just, you know, kazot and start again?

Well, God promises to bring joy and delight. And the amazing thing is that he promises to bring this new creation into the old creation.

[6 : 12] And for a while they will overlap. So by the time we come to the end of the Old Testament we have been taught to expect that God is going to begin something new. There is going to be a new Adam.

A new man without the stain of sin. Who demonstrates what it is to live in perfect harmony with God and with others and with creation. A man who is completely human so that he can represent us to God.

And who is completely divine who can represent God to us. A man who will come and will somehow deal with all the evil that we have created and with the condemnation that is righteous from God.

And open the door for a new creation. And the central wonder of all the New Testament and of the Gospels is that Jesus Christ is that man.

Jesus Christ is that man. Born of a virgin by the power of God. Tempted in the most brutally searching and personal ways. And again and again it's emphasized that he is entirely and completely without sin.

[7 : 19] And everything that Jesus does demonstrates what it is to live in absolute harmony with God and with one another and with creation. That's why his miracles are described for us.

His miracles are not a sideshow to gather the crowd. The miracles demonstrate for us what it is to live in harmony. What it is to have a relationship with creation of dominion.

But I think what's most striking if you've read the Gospels. And I encourage you to take one of the Gospels and just read it through. They only take an hour or so. The most striking thing is that the central focus of the Gospels is not like any other biography.

You know we don't get a great story of the childhood of the great man and the influences of his parents. We don't get a description of what he looked like. There isn't a huge emphasis on his miracles.

Well I guess there is some emphasis and some emphasis on his sinlessness. But clearly the largest emphasis and the single focus is his death. You know Mark's Gospel which we'll look at in just a moment.

[8 : 28] Fully a third of that Gospel is given to the death of Jesus Christ. And the reason of course is because this is not some great tragedy on the level of King Lear.

He is not a noble martyr who dies for a very good cause. He is not someone who has a very brave end and shows us how to face our own death. But the fundamental purpose of his coming into the world is to die.

And that what happens in his death is somehow that God brings the old creation and the new creation together. Together. And God in that bringing together of those two things works our deliverance and our salvation.

And through his death opens the door for us to have new life and new birth and new creation. And the account for us in Mark 15 is very simple and very powerful.

And I want to begin and just point out to you that there are three features in this account. And the first is the darkness. Verse 33. When the sixth hour had come there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

[9 : 38] Jesus was crucified at 9am. And then from noon till 3. There's darkness over the whole land. And do you know that the sentence of crucifixion could not be God forsaken?

Jesus had been arrested and tried on trumped up charges. Betrayed by people closest to him. Abandoned by friends. Mocked and beaten by the chief priests and their servants.

Brutally beaten by the Roman guards. Flogged. Dragged outside the city. Bleeding and bruised. Nailed to a rough wooden cross and left there to die.

But at noon there is a dramatic change. At noon darkness covers the whole land. And I think the reason for that is because what is happening on this cross involves all of creation.

It cannot be an eclipse. This is Passover time. Full moon. But at the brightest part of the day when the sun is at its height. The sun turns its face away because somehow creation knows that God has promised judgment.

[10 : 51] And when judgment comes there will be darkness. It is as it were creation recognises something of the depth and the affront of our disobedience and our disbelief.

And there is darkness. And I think the cosmic grief is because creation can see the tragedy that the creator himself has to come.

And die in our place that we might live. That's the first feature of the darkness. The second is the cry. Verse 34.

At the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice. Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. Which means my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

And some of the bystanders hearing it said, behold he is calling Elijah. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink saying, wait let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.

[11 : 49] And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. Of course in the darkness our hearing becomes more acute. And these are the only words spoken in Mark's gospel by Jesus on the cross.

And they provide deep insight into what is happening. Jesus cries out in a mega voice. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It's an agonizing cry of utter desolation. And some commentators are so shocked by it, they think that Jesus has just lost his faith for a moment.

Jesus is mistaken about what's really going on. That God hasn't really abandoned him, but Jesus just feels as though that he has. I don't think that can possibly be true. If you read through Mark's gospel you know that Jesus chose to die.

Three times he said clearly to his disciples, I will be crucified, I will be crucified, I will be crucified. And he even said to them that the reason I have come into this world is to give my life as a ransom for many.

[12 : 56] Now when Jesus says God is forsaking him, he's not play acting. It means, he means it with a searing and utter sense of desertion.

Do you know this is the only time in all of Jesus' ministry when he speaks to God and does not call him Father. For the universal testimony of both the Old Testament and the New Testament is this, that Jesus died for our sins.

And we can never get to the complete depths of this and fully understand it. But these words of Jesus take us to the centre of what is happening on the cross. Jesus is being forsaken for us.

He's forsaken by God so that we need never be forsaken by God. Listen to these words again from the prophet Isaiah.

Surely he took up our infirmities. He carried our sorrows. We considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.

[14 : 05] But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. And the punishment that brought us peace was upon him. And by his wounds we have been healed.

We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. But the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. A stunning words.

700 years before Christ came. Or listen to the words of the New Testament. Christ died once for all. The righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God.

Or from the apostle Paul. God made him who had no sin to be sin. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. When the Bible says that Jesus bears our sin.

What it means is that in some miracle beyond our understanding. God makes him to be our sin. He so closely identifies with us that somehow he becomes sin.

[15 : 12] And in that state God judges him. So that we might be forgiven. For the first time in all eternity.

The Trinity is torn apart. God himself is torn apart. God the Father and God the Son are separated. Jesus does not just die an innocent victim for a worthy cause.

Jesus bears our sin. And the righteous Father executes judgment on himself. In his Son. In our place. So when Jesus cries, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It's not the pain of the lacerations in his back. It's not the nails in his hands. It's the abandonment of God that engulfs him in our sin.

Here is a quote by a commentator. He says, Was Jesus scourged? It was that through his stripes we might be healed.

[16 : 14] Was he condemned though innocent? It was that we might be acquitted though guilty. Did he wear a crown of thorns? It was that we might wear a crown of glory.

Was he stripped of his raiment? It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness. Was he mocked and reviled? It was that we might be honoured and blessed.

Was he reckoned a sinner numbered among transgressors? It was that we might be reckoned innocent and justified of all sin. And was he declared unable to save himself?

It was that he might be able to save others to the uttermost. And did he die at last and that the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? It was that we might live forevermore and be exalted to the highest glory.

It wasn't the nails that held Jesus to the cross. It was his love for you and for me. Darkness, the cry and thirdly the curtain.

[17 : 20] Verse 37. Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. Very interesting phrase. And the curtain of the temple was torn into from top to bottom.

Now this is no ordinary curtain. It's massive. It's huge. It's huge. It is a symbol of the separation that we must have between God and us.

It hung between the inner sanctuary and the outer sanctuary and it demonstrated that our sin and our disobedience has created a barrier between us and God that we cannot restore.

It has to come from him. That's why the curtain has to be torn from top to bottom. And as Jesus dies, it's not that his life just ebbs away passively. That phrase in verse 37 is that he chooses to die.

It's a sudden violent choice. He breathes his last. And as he does that, in his death, he sweeps away everything that stands between us and God.

[18 : 23] There is no distance now. There is no need for any distance between us and God. All that God could hold against us has been paid for in the death of his son.

There are no barriers to friendship on God's side. God has made us for himself and at the root of our dissatisfaction is this separation.

But Jesus' death opens the door for restoration. That's why Christians are so thrilled about the cross. That's why we sing about it all the time. That's why we build buildings in the shape of the cross.

Because the cross reveals that God, our creator, is willing to endure what we deserve through his righteous condemnation so that we might be restored to him.

It shows us a love which I think is simply stunning and extravagant. He bears the punishment of his own wrath for us. And the cross not only shows us the result of the separation from God in all its vivid colour, but it is the very means by which God overcomes that separation and offers us his embrace.

[19 : 33] And at the end of the story something surprising happens in verse 39. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, truly, this man was the Son of God.

Here is a Roman. And the cross, any form of crucifixion is an unmentionable obscenity. And yet he sees in this Jew his only and true emperor.

In the humiliation and in the degradation, the Roman soldier can see something of God's triumph and glory. Yes, the suffering, yes, the abandonment is real. But so is the fact that God is working something entirely new here, truly, he says.

This man is the Son of God. That is where the new creation begins for each of us. We begin to acknowledge that it was our sin that took Jesus to the cross.

And it was our sin that Jesus took to himself. And in his mercy and in his love, he is dying our death so that we don't need to do so and that we might begin a new life.

[20 : 46] And the Christian faith really begins in earnest when that moves from being something out there to being something in here, something personal.

It's the realisation that Jesus died for me, that he gave his life for me, that he loves me. And I think we see in that death the terribleness of our own sin and its consequences, the loveliness of God's love.

And it drives us to turn away from our sin and to cast ourselves on that love that's shown in the cross and to see in his death God extending his hand to us and invites us to reach out and take that hand and to receive the life and the love and the forgiveness and the grace and the righteousness and salvation that is available to us today through the cross of Jesus Christ.

Amen. This digital audio file, along with many others, is available from the St. John's Shaughnessy website at www.stjohnschaughnessy.org That address is www.stjohns.org On the website you will also find information about ministries, worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy.

We hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others. We hope that this message has helped you and start to zaczynam seshal song to the students who are to share it with you and it will be applied to each other.

[23 : 01] The way they will take a look at each other is a success. If you have easily satisfaction, you will also be involved in each other. We will also be involved in each other and let you start to represent success,