



Homily - Good Friday 2015

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One of my favourite writings from St Paul is his first letter to the Corinthians. In that letter, Paul tells his readers and, of course, that also includes us, that

we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called... a Christ, who is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

As we gather together this afternoon to remember the death of the Lord, we might ask ourselves if we, like Paul, can see this death as a sign of wisdom and power or whether, in our heart of hearts, it is for us, like the Jews and Gentiles of old, a stumbling block, a folly, a scandal which we can't really understand and which we therefore make safe by civilising it, by sanitising it, by putting it into the "religion" box, to be believed in, yes, to be brought out on Sundays, or whenever we feel particularly "churchy" or, indeed, perhaps only on Good Friday, but which we won't allow ourselves to consider too deeply into, in case it might really challenge and upset us and demand of us more than we are willing to give.

These are hard questions for a beautiful autumn Friday afternoon, but if we don't ask such questions on Good Friday, when will we ever ask them?

So, can we see any wisdom in the degrading suffering and death which we recall today? Can we see the power of God in the humiliation and the pain? I suppose the answer might be a quick "yes" if we can manage to somehow skip over the events of this Friday without too much thought, and concentrate instead on the Sunday, the day of resurrection, the day of death's defeat: but, in a sense, that is too easy. Christians are called to enter as deeply into the death of Jesus as they are the resurrection. It is only through death that resurrection comes and, if we seek too easily to avoid the death, then we run the risk of missing the resurrection too.

Where, then, does the wisdom and the power lie? What stands behind this death that can make it life-giving for us?

Paul again gives us an insight when he says, in his letter to the Christians at Phillipi, that:

*Jesus, although He was in the form of God, emptied Himself.
He humbled Himself, and became obedient... even to death on the cross.*



Paul is reminding us that at the heart of everything which Jesus said and did was an approach to God and an approach to life which led Him to death, yes, but which, in and through that death, led Him to full life. It was an approach of humility, an attitude of obedience, a readiness to let go and hand all things over to God: a readiness to surrender control. This is the wisdom and the power of Jesus: He was ready to give everything into God's hands, in trust.

This afternoon's celebration of the Lord's death is a challenge to us to do the same thing, to seek to build into our daily lives the same attitudes.

It was not easy for Jesus: in the garden, after His last supper with His disciples, He prayed, aloud and in silent tears, for God to deliver Him from death. He struggled with the call to give everything into God's hands. But, despite the struggle, He was eventually able to say, *"Father, not as I would have it, but as you would have it"*.

It will be for us, too, a struggle. To let go, to surrender control, to be vulnerable and open and unprotected: these are all things which we find so hard to do. But, united with the Lord, we, too, can grow to the point where we can say, *"Father, not as I would have it, but as you would have it"*.

When Jesus, as He died, said to the Father, *"Into your hands I commit my spirit"*, He was not only making the final and inevitable gift of Himself to God which death must be for all of us: He was also confirming and sealing the gift of Himself which He had made in every moment of His life. He was able to commit Himself into God's hands with trust at the end, because He had committed Himself in trust into God's hands every day of His life. He had had friends who were dear to Him, and with whom and for whom He had even wept, and He had many people who cared for Him and attended to His needs, but He could also say, *"The Son of Man has no-where to lay his head"*. He had a mother whom he loved, and a family who were concerned for Him, but He could also say, *"He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"*. Jesus was fully immersed in life, but He knew that it all came from God and must all be returned to God. He lived and loved fully, but He did not grasp onto or cling to life and love: for Him, God was at the heart of everything, and only God was to be clung to with a passion and a determination which would not allow Jesus to let go.

If we can look into ourselves, and discover there a deep desire for life and for love, for integrity and wholeness, then we have discovered, too, a call to follow Jesus in His daily giving of His life to God, in His daily readiness to surrender control, in His daily willingness to let go and allow God to be the main actor in His life. It will lead us to death, yes, just as it led Jesus to death. But, for us, it will be a death to selfishness, to greed, to bitterness, to sin, and it will be for us a rising to a new and truer life and love.

Father, not as we would have it, but as you would have it. Father, into your hands we commit our lives.