

GOOD FRIDAY C 15042022 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

Isaiah 52.13 – 53.13; Psalm 22; 1 Corinthians 1.18-31; John 18.1 – 19.42

1 Corinthians 1.18-31

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.'

Jesus died. How can that happen? All that goodness, all that love, snuffed out, extinguished, gone.

Of course, we know that wasn't the end of the story. We know it wasn't the end of Jesus because we've been hearing about Easter and resurrection for as long as we can remember.

But the people who lived with Jesus, his followers, his closest friends and family- they didn't know. Jesus had tried to tell them, but it didn't make sense to them. Even those who perhaps feared something bad happening to him thought they could prevent it, or thought they would be strong enough to die alongside him.

But the worst thing imaginable happened, and they stood at a distance watching him die. The end of hope and promise, the end of loving friendship- the end.

We know how it feels when a loved one dies; the pain can be as physical as it is emotional. And when that loved one is young and healthy, full of potential- it feels even worse. Add to that the injustice of the execution of an innocent, and the grief, anger and despair is overwhelming.

In John's gospel the writer paints a picture of Jesus that begins in the very first chapter:

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'

This wonderful, poetic introduction sets the scene for the whole gospel. Jesus, John tells us, is the light and life of the world, eternally with God in the dance of the Trinity.

Humanity did its best to destroy him, accusing him of blasphemy- he who is in the heart of God. So Jesus suffered and died, executed as a rebel or a common criminal.

But the punishment that was meant to humiliate and shame him, warning his followers to cease and desist, did not work- it never could.

Jesus described his coming death on a cross as the moment when God would glorify him- the moment when God's glory would be revealed to the world.

How can that be? How is crucifixion- a cruel and humiliating punishment, in any way glorious? How can just one death, this death, among so many, do anything really- apart from taking away someone who did nothing wrong and everything good in his short life?

It was only later, after the resurrection, that the followers of Jesus began to understand what had happened. For the past two thousand years Christians have recognised the cross not as simply an instrument of torture- which it was- but as a symbol of God's amazing love for humanity and all creation.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'

When we see the cross, our response may be sadness; this grief inevitably links to all the other grief and loss we have experienced.

But accompanying this grief must be gratitude. Eventually, after the loss and heartbreak of a death, we need to be grateful for the life that has been and the love we shared.

So with this death, the death of Jesus. His death was not pointless, it was not for nothing, because he died for us. We are grateful for all that his life and death have done for us.

His death showed the world that death has no power, that he has overcome death, and when we die Jesus will take us to the place he has prepared for us.

John Donne's Sonnet says it best.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

The Lord be with you.