

## **The Absorbing Christ**

### **A Good Friday sermon**

**2 Corinthians 5:11-21**

Speak to any jewelry retailer and they'll tell you, "Crosses are in." Wherever you see them, on buses on trains, in planes or on TV, crosses certainly make a fashion statement,

"Crosses are in" in the fatality field as well. Our highways are adorned with crosses announcing to every driver who travels the road that death and carnage are ever present.

Cemeteries are adorned with crosses so much so that you'd be excused for wondering where all the sinners are buried!

And faith's not to be left out. Walls, the interiors and exteriors of most, if not all Christian communities, boast a cross somewhere.

It's not a wonder mind you. The death of Jesus occupies an inordinately large place in the Gospel story. Take the story of the events leading up to and including the death of Christ out of the Gospel narratives and you have a severely truncated the Gospel story.

### **All of which poses the question why?**

Lay aside the Cross as a fashion statement or an announcement of death in general and concentrate on the place of the Cross in the life of faith and you face the question, "Why?"

### **Why is that the Cross, the death of Jesus occupies such a central place in the Church's life?**

What is the significance of the death? Why do we solemnly remember it every Good Friday and on every occasion we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

It's not that the question has never been asked. Interpreters of the Gospel have long wrestled with the significance of Christ's death.

*Theories, for that's what they are, range from the idea of sacrifice, substitution, moral persuasion, declarations of love, identification, perfect penitence and victory over the powers of death and evil.*

Thinkers, theological and philosophical have sought to explain this central fact of faith. "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures."

Hymnbooks abound in hymns and songs that declare in one way or another, the Cross-and its life changing power.

Every interpretation, every theory, every attempt to explain why Christ died for us and our salvation has the seeds of heaven in it. Let me share with you an understanding of the meaning of Christ's death that's helped me grasp a little of why Christ died. It owes something to the theories of

substitution, identification, Eternal love and victory over the power of evil.

For want of a better term I've called it:

### **The Absorption theory of the Atonement.**

*It affirms this. That in the death of Christ, there is the proclamation of the Eternal love of God who absorbs sin and evil in himself, thus freeing us from its weight and destructive power and setting us free to be new people. Absorbing our sin, you say. What does that mean?*

### **Let me draw from two human experiences to illustrate what I mean.**

**C.S. Lewis**, as you may know, entered into a relationship with and finally married Joy Davidman. In his biography of Lewis, A.N.Wilson describes how the announcement that Joy Davidman had terminal cancer deeply affected Lewis. Doctors gave her little hope but during this period she and Lewis developed an intense loving relationship. Whether through this, or in some other way, there came a period of regression. The cancer, which had crippled her and brought near intolerable pain in her bones and legs abated. At the same time as her pain lessened and abated, Lewis found himself developing intense pain in his own legs and bones. His pain increased as his beloved partners subsided. The conclusion he came to was that in some miraculous way he was being called on to absorb, through love the intolerable pain and suffering of his partner.

**Paul Tournier** was a noted Swiss physician whose books on faith were illumined by his experiences as a medical practitioner. Books such as "Guilt and Grace," "The Strong and the Weak," "A Doctors casebook in the light of the Bible," helped many of us understand the patterns and practices of human nature as we encountered them in the pastoral situation.

He recalls how often after dealing with relationship and marital difficulties in his client's lives, he would come home and he and his wife would get into stressful and debilitating arguments. As they reflected on what was happening to them they came to the conclusion that they were in fact bearing the pain and anguish of their patients. They had absorbed the anger resentment and anguish of their patients and then in the strength and love of their own marriage were bearing and absorbing that which Paul Tourniers patients had laid on him. Absorption.

Do we have here an insight in to the death of Christ? The Cross is the place where God absorbs our despair, our anger, our hatred, pride, malice, discontent and all that comes under the umbrella of human sinfulness.

**Is the Cross the place where God absorbs that which if we keep it to ourselves finally destroys and cripples us?**

Is that the meaning of, "He became sin for us?"

If so, it makes sense of Christ's words to his disciples. "If you come to the altar and have been wronged by your brother and sister, first go and make peace with them". That's a topsy-turvy way of living. We say. "If some one's done the dirty on me let them come and say sorry and I will perhaps forgive them. Not so says Jesus.

**As God-bearers go, absorb that wrong done to you, and forgive.**

**Then come and make your relationship with God intact.**

If one assaults you, turn the other cheek. Jesus listened to Herods taunts and said nothing. He absorbed the ridicule and lampoonery. This is the pattern of Christ and in it, says Peter, lies our healing.

Here then is a way of grasping what the Cross means. Here we bring all that threatens to engulf and destroy us and we lay it on God knowing that in the mystery of the Cross he absorbs it himself and we go free.

It does not means we will not deal with evil, or confront those who abuse us or deal evilly with others or us. But in dealing with that affirmatively and openly we know we will have to absorb their reactions, their attitudes their calumny, their misunderstanding as Christ did and does still.

**This then is the Cross in the heart of God.** He is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. A God who absorbs in merciful love all that is done to him and his world thus opening a way through penitence and faith for all to receive the healing of our lives and our world.

**As I said, it's only an interpretation, But it has helped me both discover the healing freedom of forgiveness and be, despite weakness and failure, one who in turn seeks to make reconciliation rather than waiting for it to happen.**