

Shame and death

Jesus “Was crucified, dead, and buried”

Deuteronomy 21:22 – 23, Mark 15:37 - 47

Most of us prefer not to dwell on Jesus death do we, death generally for that matter. We prefer to focus on the positive but Anglicans are good at reality. Some of us struggled with the interdenominational Good Friday services we were part of some time back. Some churches simply wanted to celebrate but we wanted to remember, with sufficient decorum and reverence, what happened to Jesus on Good Friday.

Last week Peter helped us place Jesus’ suffering, actually his whole life and work, along with his death, in a particular time and place in history. He discussed why this God chose the time and people he did to implement his salvation plan through Jesus.

Today we are going to look at the next phrase in the Apostles’ Creed. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried.

In my teenage years I did something really stupid. It was a big something and for months, maybe even years, my school mates would talk about what I had done with disgust. My reputation was sullied forever with some people. I felt deeply ashamed but I couldn’t undo what I had done. So I did what lots of people do, I got on with life and tried to forget it. And I was fairly successful at that for about ten years.

Many of us have done dumb things; things that hurt others or ourselves; things that Christ those things have been dealt with, our conscience can be clear. We don’t have to live with shame because Jesus has born the shame that should have been ours. We can walk in total freedom because of what Jesus has done.

We often talk about the fact that Jesus died. I’m sure you have heard sermons on the physical distress Jesus underwent before and during his crucifixion. Part of Jesus’ suffering was the extreme whipping he received under Pontius Pilate. I don’t want to go into this in detail because it is so distressing. Many did not survive this punishment – it was so brutal. Both Luke and John imply that Pilate had Jesus scourged so the Jews would think that was enough punishment.¹

But no. Nothing short of death, and that death on a shameful cross would suffice. The passage from Deuteronomy gives the rules for dealing with the crucified recording that only criminals were crucified. Criminals were scum of the earth, the lowest of the low – no-one liked to look at them hanging on a cross; it was a reproach. Almost all of the disciples deserted Jesus when he was crucified. John and some women stayed but they mostly watched from a distance.²

The crucified were considered to be cursed by God so why would you want to hang around. The sensationists might watch them being nailed to the tree perhaps. The crucified acted as a warning – this is what will happen if you get on the wrong side of Roman law. Beware!

¹ Luke 23:1 – 25 esp 17, John 18:28 – 19:16 esp 19:4

² Matthew 27:55 – 56, Mark 15:40 – 41, Luke 24:49, John 19:25 - 27

The sight of them was offensive – crucifixion was carried out outside the city walls. The sight of the crucified was so offensive, the bodies had to be taken down from the cross and buried the same day. Leaving them on the cross overnight somehow their being there defiled the land itself.

The crucifixion is described with ‘the most astonishing restraint’.³ William Barclay points out this is because the early New Testament readers knew all about it. This kind of punishment and death was introduced by the Romans and commonplace in the time of the Caesars.

After Jesus was forced to carry his own cross, or at least the cross bar as far as he could, he came to the death site – the Place of the Skull. There Jesus was further shamed - his garment, his covering, the last vestige of his dignity, was stripped away. Jesus’ nakedness was displayed for all to see. Most pictures show Jesus on the cross with a loin cross, but that is for our sensibilities. Jesus was completely naked – that added to his shame.

In the last throes of death even the presence of God is taken from him. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” have to be some of the most pitiful words ever recorded. Jesus is carrying out this self-less act of self-sacrifice in obedience to his heavenly Father, and no longer is this Father, with him. To this point Jesus has only done what the Father has told him to do; nothing more; nothing less. And this is his reward – abandonment!

Why did that have to happen? How could God do that?

The answer is because Jesus experienced our judgement! We deserve this not Jesus. We are the ones who have committed shameful and selfish acts. We are the ones who have withheld our love from those who needed it. We are the ones who get sucked into the things this world entices us with. Not Jesus. But Jesus takes our shame and experiences our loss.

And so he dies. And as he does the temple curtain rips in two – from the bottom down – not the other way. Now this curtain was not made of flimsy net. It was very heavy fabric and separated the rest of the temple from the holy of holies – the place where God’s presence dwelt. And all of this happened on the most sacred day of the year Yom Kippur.

On this day, the high priest would bring a blood sacrifice into the holy of holies. The curtain kept him and everybody else all the rest of the year. As Jesus died, God said “No more sacrifices required! Everyone can come now! You are all welcome!”

Mark emphasises this by the centurion’s comment that surely Jesus was the Son of God. Roman soldiers only acknowledged Caesar as the son of God. But his man recognises that it was Jesus who deserved that title. This man alone recognises what

³ William Barclay, *The plain man looks at the Apostles’ creed*, 95.

is really happening. The disciples are freaked out, the religious lot have rejected Jesus. But this pagan man recognises Jesus for who he is.

In the interest of time I'm going to skip the part about the women remaining though that is well worth pondering in your own time.

And so Jesus is dead; killed by the Romans at the insistence of the Jewish hierarchy! The religious lot, the high priest and his cronies, they had all been complicit in Jesus' death. They had schemed and plotted, until finally they got what they wanted.

Then along comes Joseph of Arimathea – a member of the Sanhedrin – the Jewish council. This man was wealthy and had a good reputation to preserve. And yet, he comes to take Jesus to the grave he had purchased for himself.

My version says Joseph "took a risk".⁴ That understates it hugely. Nicodemus took a risk when he snuck in to see Jesus at night time.⁵

Joseph is really putting it out there. It isn't dark yet. People will see him. They will see respectable Joseph putting himself on the line for the criminal Jesus. Joseph is making a very bold statement here. Joseph is saying at the very least "This man Jesus is worthy of respect." Everyone would have interpreted his actions as meaning he was a follower of Jesus.

Joseph had discovered what really mattered. He didn't care what people thought of him. He reverently wraps Jesus dead body in linen cloth – making himself ritually unclean as he does so. The detail Mark gives us emphasises the fact that Jesus is really dead.

There was no plot to take him down from the cross before he died. He didn't live and go off and father some children and live a quiet life somewhere. He really died. He died the most painful and shameful death it was possible to die.

Every one of us has done things that we are ashamed of; we have broken God's law – hurt others and hurt ourselves.⁶ We deserve to be cursed not Jesus. Jesus didn't do anything wrong but he willingly took the shame and the curse that should have been ours onto himself. He died on the cross for us. Because he did that we can stand before God with a clear conscience. We never need be ashamed again.

Remember that I said every aspect of the Apostles' Creed links together. We've considered the phrase that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried today but that is not an isolated part our statement of faith. The Father Almighty initiated the plan, Jesus the Son carried it out with the enabling and power of the Holy Spirit. The holy catholic church exists because of what Jesus has done. We are here today because of this.

⁴ The New Living Translation

⁵ John 19:39 records that Nicodemus brings spices to anoint Jesus body for burial.

⁶ Galatians 3:10

I said earlier that I managed to get on with life, denying my shame for about 10 years. When the Lord's time was right, he confronted me very gently with my past. I was able to get wise counselling and prayer ministry from mature people and so my past was healed and my secret shame was taken away. Because of their prayer ministry, the Lord healed me from the memories of that shame long ago.

I still do stupid things by the way. I recently heard the Christian journey described as a drunken person walking along a pathway, staggering from side to side of the path. Sometimes that describes my walk.

But there is no shame in that.

Because of Jesus' death, I am not ashamed of my many mistakes and even my deliberate sin now. I know that God loves me desperately because of Jesus' amazing courage. Because he underwent such deep shame, we need never be ashamed again. None of us does.

Jesus death takes away our shame. That doesn't happen overnight. Sometimes it takes deep prayer ministry before we can face some of our deepest darkest secrets and allow the Lord to take our shame away and bring healing.

Sometimes the Lord will take away our shame instantly when we pray or others pray for us. At other times, it takes more regular and consistent prayer ministry.

We have a team of trained prayer ministers here in this church. More recently Margaret Martin, John Palmer, Michaela Ross and Mariannne Brosnahan have been trained in the healing of memories.

If the Lord is speaking to you today, you may like to come forward for prayer this morning. Or you may like to have some deeper prayer ministry. If either instance applies to you, please come forward at the end of the service. I will stay at the front of the church and I can pray for you or refer you to the prayer team for deeper ministry.