

Alternative Good Friday, 9th April 2004

In reflecting on the actions of Good Friday, the entire work of Jesus on that day was to bring us back into communion with the Father. All through time God has been seeking to have a direct relationship/communion with man.

Paul says that we should not take Communion without discerning the Lord's body. This is not limited to the earthly shell that was crucified 2000 years ago or even the resurrected body that came out of the grave three days later, but is also the fellowship of the saints/believers.

As such, Communion is a time when we are to be bringing the body of believers back together in a joint communion with fellow believers and God. We are to remember His body (we are to put back together the fellowship of believers and remove strife, discord, etc. in the process). If we come to take Communion and have something against a brother or sister, we should address that first. How can we love God when we hate our brother, etc.

Let us open with prayer ...

Now my apologies; I wasn't aware that we in this congregation celebrate Holy Communion on Good Friday, so we shall need to start off with sharing the bread and wine around the table, and then continue afterwards with our mediation on several aspects of Good Friday, which of course centres around the Lord's trial, His execution, his death, and His burial.

<Communion with Pastor Aman>

"...but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness..."

Paul, Sha'ul to the Jews, Paulus to the Romans, in writing to the church in Corinth.

Look. The cross is empty!

We'll ask you now to listen to the CD that was playing quietly when you arrived. Called "On the Way to the Wedding", by Wes Beavis, an Australian who has a ministry towards the lost, in much the same way as Keith Green did. This track is called "Soldier".

<http://eagles-lair.dyndns.org/mp3/Wes_Beavis/soldier.mp3>

Wesley is a contemporary and personal friend of Geoff Bullock who started Hillsong nearly twenty-five years ago. And we shall hear more from Wes in a moment.

"Easter" is as much a time to celebrate as is Christmas. We have celebrated it here in uniquely different ways the last four years, and something that is different is often remembered.

We need remember Jesus' atonement throughout every week, and in communion, and not just in the twelve stations of the cross that some people identify during a three hour long service once a year, much of which is traditional rather than biblically based, like parts of a recent film.

Some claim that Easter is named after the Philistine goddess Eshtar, the same pagan deity as the Greeks' Astarte, and maybe the naming happened when the church moved from being a sect of a hostile Judaism, to an autonomous Gentile organisation.

Easter is celebrated according to a calendar different from a year that is 365 and a quarter days long, which re-calculates the occasion of "Peschar" - the Jewish Passover - every year, because that was the season when Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, was tried, convicted, crucified, died, buried, and finally resurrected.

Different judges in different parts of the world - highly respected in their own countries - have published critiques of the New Testament narrative of Jesus' trials.

You may find a few copies at the back of the church from an Australian judge of Jewish origin, who was greatly inspired by the address on the same subject by the Chief Justice of Israel when he visited Australia back in 1969.

Another is from an American Christian judge. Both describe the total non-compliance of Caiaphas and his Sanhedrin with the judicial requirements laid down.

I promised you more of Wes Beavis... here is a poor quality track recorded in 1992 at Hope Valley ... not only is it hissy and hummy, but in the middle there are a couple of seconds missing because that was where the sound man had to turn the tape over. In it Wes introduces the song we heard earlier.

<http://eagles-lair.dyndns.org/mp3/Wes_Beavis/intro_to_soldier.mp3>

Moving on to the Crucifixion, without any graphic images of the way in which Romans executed their capital punishment. First, you were beaten till nearly, but not quite, dead. Lead and bone pieces attached to the thongs of a multiple tailed whip called a scourge - did the damage.

<Geoff Faggotter walks on with bag of nails, timber, sledgehammer etc, and demonstrates non-vocally>

Then, in unbelievable pain, you carried a huge baulk of timber the size of a railway sleeper to the execution site - not the whole cross, but just the cross-arm, often tied to your shoulders. The cross-arm was then attached to the upright by the execution detail of battle-hardened soldiers as Wes described...

... then huge nails the size of a railway dog-spike - say seven inches long with a 3/8th-inch square shaft - through your wrists; not through your palms which would tear - and your legs were bent sideways and feet nailed to the upright. Not as depicted by Monty Python.

The whole thing was then raised by several soldiers, probably using ropes, and when upright, the bottom portion slid into a hole in the ground with a clunk. The jolt as the upright hit the bottom of the hole would further rip the wrists and feet.

<Geoff demonstrates dropping the assembled cross to the floor with a thud>

We observe that nobody was EVER resuscitated from a Roman execution. Those who say Jesus came back to life, living to old age with wife and kids, lie through their teeth.

<Geoff walks off>

Let us remember that Jesus permitted them to do this to Him, as part of God's plan that *"whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life"*.

So that He might suffer the pain that you and I really ought to suffer, ourselves, as sinners - for the attitudes we have had - for the nasty things we have done - and for the things we should not have done, and additionally those flaws of ours we have not yet recognised and repented of, as well as for the sins of all others.

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God".

Music is a poetic medium by which we can often better understand things... and ignore the horrific side, too...

I'd like to share some video clips from an oratorio which examines Jesus' passion from a different, yet biblical perspective, using a large choir, a symphony orchestra, soloists and a narrator.

This is not Sir John Stainer's "The Crucifixion", although that is also a beautiful biblically-based work. It is a more recent oratorio, composed nearly twenty years ago by an Australian.

We experience musically a series of consecutive scenes...

Christ's triumphal entry into the Holy City, then the Last Supper, He then prays for His disciples of all ages - us - that the Father will keep them - us - in His name and make us one, just as He and the Father are one.

The anguish in the "Garden called Gethsemane", where The Son must take from His own Father 'the cup' of the sin of mankind.

'If it be possible...' He cries, but 'nevertheless ... I'll take the cup'.

Then His trial; Pilate tries three times to release Him, but is told by the Jews that they ‘... have a law, and by that law He must die!’

We ponder the tragedy that the very law given by God, had become man’s means of rejecting and destroying the truth.

Finally four pieces dealing with the crucifixion; a chorale “The Lamb Most Pure” which starts with a soloist lamenting the death of the Saviour of the world, after which the spotless Lamb of God is lifted up; now we see His face and adore Him, with humility and reverence.

The dismay and anguish of the watching crowd and the unbelief of the thief beside Him are echoed next, ‘O Jesus, Saviour, come down from that cross...’ Even greater is Christ’s own anguish, as He is encompassed by the pains of hell, as well as the awesome agony of the Father’s rejection.

We hear phrases from the Messianic psalms, foretelling His suffering, which when complete, He finally cries ‘it is finished!’ And the tension at the piano, conveying the resolution of all universal conflicts through the composers ‘weep’ theme which develops into the tenderness of the ‘consolation’ melody, ‘For You are My Rock...’ picked up in the following piece...

Again words from the Messianic Psalms, and more familiar words in the chorale where the faith of His commitment to the Father, and the ecstasy of His consolation in the Father’s bosom are expressed with ‘Into Your Hands I commit My Spirit’. With eighty bars of Amen which follow, we must do more than just nod assent at His sacrifice for us... we need to grasp it with both hands, thankfully, gratefully...

This is not the end of the story, nor the oratorio. Both are completed in the resurrection, which Sir John Stainer’s is not.

At this point, we shall pause for private reflection

The story concludes on Sunday with our celebration of the resurrection, and few churches would not have communion at

that time as a sharing for all believers of the risen Christ, praise His Holy Name!

Remember that Christ's death was not the end, as portrayed in Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical play, "Jesus Christ, Superstar". Jesus is not a superstar. He is the Living Word who spoke the creation into existence, obedient as always to the Father's plan, and the Father's intentions for his people.

Look! The cross is still empty, Halleluiah! We do not need to crucify Him every week, or whenever we share communion.

<36mins 20secs video clip 1988 Brisbane Concert Hall performance "The Jerusalem Passion">

Pastor Aman - Closing Prayer

As we conclude, we need to understand the togetherness, the unity God needs and wants us to enjoy CAN be had, as we visit an earlier piece in this musical work. In it, the opening flute sets the scene for a processional anthem, which describes the future gathering together of all of Christ's sheep - you and me - out of every nation and tribe, from every mountain and valley, which can only be made possible through His willing laying down of His life. This surely sums up the whole meaning of Easter-tide.

Ya varech kha Ha'Shem veh yish merkha. Ya air Ha'Shem pan'av el'eikha v0sch na'kha. Yissa Ha'Shem panav el'eikha vey yasem lehkha sha'lom.

The LORD bless you, and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you: The LORD lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you (His) peace.

Please feel free to leave at the end, and thank you for coming.

<6mins 33secs video clip 1988 Brisbane Concert Hall performance "The Jerusalem Passion">