

Mark 15:2 Towards the Cross: The Agony of the Cross, 1/4/2012, am

- (Palm Sunday; used core material originally at Good Friday service 9/4/2004)

Chat with the Children

- Getting at the meaning of something - requires us to act on what we understand to be true...
 - images of snake (danger), road signs and a large cheque
 - what do we do with each one? What does it mean?
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Introduction

- How have we got here...?

Meaning?

- I remember the first time I saw the film the *Passion of the Christ*:
 - the captions were initially off the bottom of the screen!
 - we couldn't follow what was happening - its in Latin & Aramaic! - until someone went out, told the staff, and they pressed the appropriate button on the projector to re-calibrate the screen!
- Images without meaning are empty!
 - they may move us, but on their own they are without ultimate value!
- When it came out, Mel Gibson's film gave us a widely accessible set of very powerful images of the Crucifixion, of Jesus' sufferings
 - and, whatever the controversies, we owe him a debt for that
 - but, on its own the film is useless!
 - because it does not explain or explore the meaning, the accomplishment, the point of the Cross!
- Just some bloke being betrayed, tortured, wrongly convicted, and then killed in excruciating agony!
 - how many were betrayed, tortured, wrongly convicted, and then killed in excruciating agony across the Roman empire 2000 years ago?
 - how many were betrayed, tortured, wrongly convicted, and then killed in excruciating agony in Germany 65 or 70 years ago?
 - how many were betrayed, tortured, wrongly convicted, and then killed in excruciating agony in Rwanda 15 years ago?
 - and we could multiply examples...
- A film... a dramatic reading (complete with pictures)... songs... none of these on their own plumb the depths of the Cross

Meaning!

- There are pointers towards the meaning in the accounts of his death:
 - *Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified (15:15)*
 - one man's life for the sake of another... one man lives, saved by another
 - *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" - which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (15:34)*
 - pure, spotless, undeserving, perfect Son of God - separated from him? What could separate Jesus from his Father?
 - only sin... only the taking of sin onto his own shoulders and bearing its cost, its pain, its punishment!

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- *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (15:38)*

- sign of the separation between holy God and sinful humanity - torn in two!

- *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!" (15:39)*

- leading to confession and faith!

- As I grew up... and more especially when I worshipped in St Caths - I grew fond of the predictability, the rhythm of communion
 - the familiar words, the stillness
 - but without meaning, it is empty - merely a comforting ritual!
- As we worship this Palm Sunday may we worship in Spirit and in Truth
 - not with a meaningless ritual, the habit of being at Sunday worship, but with a knowledge of the profound, life-changing impact Jesus' death on the Cross makes for us now
 - putting our trust in him...