

## **Palm Sunday: From the Epistle for the day: Philippians 2:5-11**

Those readings from the gospel are long, aren't they? I'm really glad our church gets us to read the gospel story as we come up to Easter. To read again all the details of the terrible things that happened to Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

Do you know that lovely old Negro spiritual that goes:

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

*Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble;*

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

That's one way to think about it all - and a right way – to tremble.

It's not the only way, because the things that happened at Easter are like a diamond. Easter's got many, many sides – and each one tells its own story and shows its own light.

Like the side of the diamond we find in our Epistle reading for today. It's taken from the letter written by Jesus' apostle Paul to the Christian people in the town of Philippi; in the country we now call Macedonia – next door to Greece.

We listen now and over Easter to all that happened to Jesus:–

How he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot

Shared his last meal with his disciples

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Prayed in such anguish in the garden of Gethsemane

Arrested by the police

Denied being known by his closest friend, Peter

Suffers an unjust trial at the hands of the religious leaders

And then is so cruelly strung up on a cross and dies.

So let's hear what God is saying to us about these terrible events so deeply at the heart of our faith.

We are meant to see at least four things:

1. The crucifixion really did happen.

It is history. It did take place.

We all know that Cyclone Debbie happened. We know because we were there or we know or heard from other people who were there.

That's what we've got in the Bible. Ordinary people saw it and were prepared to stand up and say it happened, even when it wasn't popular to do so. And really careful university professors and people specialising in history have spent their lives right up until now looking at the evidence for what happened. And they can't find holes in the story. And they say it happened pretty much like it says in our Bibles.

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I think that's great!

2. The crucifixion is God showing what he's like.

Listen to this:

Speaking of Jesus, we read in sentences or verses numbers 6 to 8:

*Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!*

Notice 3 things:

- a. Jesus is truly God – he is “in very nature God”. All you can say about God is true of Jesus
- b. Jesus, true God, is not interested in himself. He “did not consider being equal with God something to be grasped”. Unlike all other ways humans think about God, he's not interested in himself. He's not focussed on what's good for him. He doesn't think: “It's all about me”. Instead:

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c. He's all about others: Starting with Christmas – it says: *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

And then moving through his life on earth and on to Easter:  
*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!*

We must catch how different this is from how all other religions wrongly think about God or make up gods. Those gods are only interested in what's in it for them. So they even demand human sacrifice as a sign people are fair dinkum in asking for a good harvest.

Or they're not interested in humans at all – “let them suffer – they deserve it. I'm (or we are) above such trivial things”.

Or there's no real God or gods – humans have invented them to make themselves feel better.

But with Jesus, and his birth, life, death and resurrection there's a completely different picture. And that's different because we haven't made it up like all the other religions, but God has shown himself to us. He's got down and been with us in human form, lived our life and died our death.

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3. The crucifixion was a victory, NOT a failure.

Listen to how our passage tells it:

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

This of course, as we know, is talking about both Easter Day and Ascension Day.

But they are both part of how God teaches us to think about the crucifixion of Jesus.

He was not giving in to forces he could not control.

Humans hadn't trumped God

He deliberately went to his death, not to die for anything he had done wrong. Remember Pontius Pilate saying "I find no fault in him"?

He deliberately went to his death to pay in full for all that we have done wrong. To pay for all the ways we show we want to live, not how God commands us to live.

And God says to him: "You've done it! You've done it all! You've paid in full – for them!"

And as God's own stamp of approval he raises Jesus from the dead and he brings him to his own throne so all will say: "Jesus Christ is Lord! Glory be to the Father!"

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Why does Jesus' apostle Paul talk like this?

Because:

4. The crucifixion is our culture:

Remember at the beginning of this section, it goes like this:

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*

One translation has it like this: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus"

All human culture says: Look after number 1.

Christian culture says: Be like Jesus – and look after others.

All human culture says: stand up for yourself.

Christian culture says: Be like Jesus – and stand up for others

As those who know that:

the crucifixion really did happen, that

the crucifixion shows what God is really like, and that

the crucifixion was not a failure, but great victory – to which we owe everything,

let's help one another be crucifixion culture people.