

1. JESUS IS DYING – THE HORROR

Jesus is dying, and we've come to see.

Is that disgusting? Some people find the whole Good Friday thing very distasteful, which may be why many are not here.

Well, I'll grant that it's horrible. And I generally *avoid* horrible. I don't like horror *films*, don't get them; for me horror shouldn't entertain; that feels wrong. Yet we are here today – in a manner of speaking – to watch a horror movie.

Jesus is dying, and we've come to see.

2. JESUS IS DYING – SHOWING US OUR DEATHLINESS

Why would we want to do that?

Well, I don't *want* to – but perhaps it's important. For, if we believe it was for us, he hung and suffered there, perhaps I should be here to see.

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

“Err – no. It was disgusting; so I left and came back on Sunday.”

Hmm: something's missing there.

So, we are here. Not to gawp, nor for entertainment, but to look on the one whom we have pierced, to see who God is, and who we are.

And it's a sobering sight: the only truly innocent man who ever lived, good incarnate, God incarnate, made the focus of our rage, hate, rejection, and cruelty.

And it's not the worst of men and women, but the best of them, who have sentenced God to death today: the general public, and secular and religious authorities alike have all condemned him.

Yes, fervently religious people have been involved. Did you notice John told us three times "it was the Day of Preparation for the Passover"? This troubled them, because they were good religious types and needed everything done and dusted by six p.m.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.

You can't have unclean corpses littering the skyline on a holy day – have some respect for God! – and you can't bury someone on the Sabbath either: that's work. So, break their legs so they'll suffocate (that's how it worked on crosses), and we can finish up here, all for the sake of ... holiness.

Hello?

But this is who we can be, even when we try to be godly.

So, Jesus is dying, smashed, broken, thirsting, gasping. A truly horrible spectacle – but even uglier is the picture this gives us of us: look at what we do when faced with real goodness.

3. JESUS IS DYING – FOR US

So, Jesus is dying, and we're here.

Others are *not* here – and won't come.

Well, I don't blame atheists for staying away. Obviously ... But others may not be here, for, though they do believe in God, they cannot think *this* has anything to do with God. For God is love, so everything

and everyone will be OK anyway. This thing, this story, is offensive. There is simply no place for the cross in their beliefs. Nasty, splintery, bloody thing. Who wants that?

OK. But I'm not sure I *do* know who God is anyway, or whether things are simply going to be OK. Evidence for that is thin.

Crucially, as it were, I think that if God *IS* love, the place I learn that is, actually, here, at the foot of the cross.

For this Jesus who is dying is God with us.

If he's *not*, then this event has no meaning, certainly no spiritual significance. It'd be just another torture and execution in humanity's appalling history of such deeds, an example of our violence, not a remedy for it. If so, there's nothing to see here; move on, move on; break up that crowd; nothing to see. Certainly nothing *of God* to see here.

But if Christmas was after all worth celebrating back in December, and – yes – this *is* God with us on the cross, and in the tomb, then I learn who God is here. Christianity only began because Jesus' followers had to make sense of what seemed like the total failure of today, followed by the astonishment of Sunday.

They had to fathom what it could mean, that we see God here, in Jesus, who is dying.

3. JESUS IS DYING – GOD'S NO TO US AND HIS YES

And if we do then the cross says a massive “no” to the idea that we are and are going to be OK anyway.

A cross, an “X” for wrong, like when you are marking an exam question:

X - wrong.

The cross is God's massive "no" to us, insofar as we think we are doing fine anyway.

The humanity that thinks that it's doing fine anyway is the one whose priests and prime ministers took the perfect Son of God and killed him. Whoops.

It's the humanity that ends up at war with one another so often, and some of whom invent the Mother of All Bombs to drop on terrorists who they hate and their enemies hate them right back and want to kill them too.

No, Jesus is dying, and in this God says "no" to the idea we are OK anyway.

And it's a deliberate "no". This moment is not a mistake, a blip, a temporary Friday setback in his plans before a happy Sunday ending.

No: Jesus is dying today because God is choosing to love us in full knowledge of our hatred, violence, and petty selfishnesses too.

If he can carry all this, and die forgiving; and if he can then rise, rise above and beyond death's boldest play, evil darkest hour, and love us still, invite us to be his friends – then the cross is both God's implacable "no" to us, and then also his undefeated "yes".

Yes, you are loved, beyond your unloveliness; yes, you are forgiven – and not just weakly, in theory: I have won the right to forgive you. Yes, really, walk with me, now. Yes, share my death-defeating life. Be my people.

That is the reversal Sunday will bring.

It's not a "happy ending".

Not: "See I told you it'd all be OK!"

Not: now we've got past all that nasty stuff which I don't understand, we're back on track with a nice, loving God.

No: it's the redemption of lost, dead, messed up us by the God who bears the full weight of doing that.

It is God's truthful, necessary "No" to us, followed by his astonishing, merciful, "Yes".

4. JESUS IS DYING – THAT WE MIGHT ALSO RISE

Jesus is dying and we are here to see, because if we do not see him in his dying we will not understand his rising. Unless, in fact, we *die with him* to our sin, we cannot rise with him to new life. See, well, virtually every letter in the New Testament for more on that theme.

A religion of happy endings fails to grasp this.

You could say, and in one way I think we *need* to say, that it just doesn't work to only come to church on Easter Sunday, if you've not been here on Good Friday first.

Now I know some cannot come today, and it's great people do come on Sunday. Hopefully they will see that the resurrection means precious little without the cross.

But the deadly risk of Sunday only is that we might think we can hear God's "yes" to us without first hearing his "no", as if we could rise to what is life-giving life without dying to what's deadly first. Skipping to Easter Sunday might trick people into thinking that – thank goodness – because of the resurrection we can all just get on with our lives as

before, business as usual, without first coming to the end of ourselves.

That is not a resurrection.

Bishop Mark, who was with us a month ago, had a Sabbatical a couple of years ago, and he spent quite a lot of time with people working with Alcoholics Anonymous. He came to the conclusion that people in recovery often *truly* understand the gospel, because they have come to the end of themselves, and know they cannot change, cannot live, without help from God. In my terms, they have heard God's "no" – they experience it terrifyingly in their sickness – and so become open to his "yes". And healing in that situation - well, that is resurrection.

CONCLUSION:

Jesus is dying, and we are here to see.

Here we see God is love, and what love really costs, what true love offers.

We are here to see and hear God's "no" to us.

And then we have the chance come Sunday to really hear his "yes", and to rise with him to new life.

Jesus is dying, and we are here to see.

We will watch and wait to see him rise, that we may rise with him.