

“You demanded the reprieve of a murderer, while you killed the prince of life.”

“Jesus Christ is the sacrifice that takes our sins away.”

“It is written that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead: and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations.”

These statements carry a view of the death of Jesus

- which relates it to our lives, specifically the distance from God at which our lives are led,
- which relates it to the evil that is in the world, and our involvement in it, and
- which relates it to the love of God which is for our reconciliation and pardon.

Our distance from God is a fact which Scripture acknowledges. Often we assume that it is our sins that cause this distance: but in Genesis God himself is depicted as ejecting us from Eden, and placing a guard before its gate which prevents us from re-entering the lost world of our innocence. This reminds me that *God* has placed a distance between us and him, and it is in this space that we experience our loneliness, our yearning need for God, in which we begin our pilgrimage to find our way to him. So this is no simple setting apart. Our distance from God is an integral part of the story of salvation; without it, we could have no independent life, make no choices, in fact, we would not be human as we know and think of humanity. It isn't for us to say whether this would be good or bad; it is God's choice that made creation unable to attain its object, and that's the situation in which we find ourselves.

The option of *rejecting the prince of life and accepting the murderer* opens in that same space. We tend towards the easier option, the cut corner, the compromise. In this we show that we have only a very questionable taste for goodness and truth. Our history as a race has been more a story of designer selfishness than inspired holiness; it is our greed and dishonour which has usually filled in the bottom line: *every man has his price, live in the real world*. We pardon Barabbas every time we build our lives on our self-interest alone; we add our voice to the Crucifixion whenever we exclude sacrificial love from our own agenda.

The sacrifice of Christ takes our sins away by establishing in the human story a contrary law, a bastion of generosity directly fed from the love of God - specifically the love of the Son for the Father. This divine and eternal self-gift is the true antithesis of the corrupted stories of so many human deeds and days. In cancelling its distance from the lost human family, the sending Father and the obedient Son transform the history of the earth. When we cast up the value of the human record in God's sight, we have suddenly revolutionised the accounts. What he has done *in a body like ours* is sufficient to outweigh all the dereliction and failure of his brothers and sisters. When Peter calls the Jerusalemites to *repent* over the crucifixion, he is asking them to revalue their own lives in its light. *You had no idea what you were doing* is a phrase which resounds from Maundy Thursday: *now, you do not know what I am doing; later you will understand*. We have work to do in Eastertide, revising our ideas.

The Cross shows us the love of God because God could have left us in the contradictory state of sin; we should have displayed his holiness by our contrast with it, thus giving him praise in a broken kind of way. It was not his will that this should be our final state. His way to break in to our orphaned lives is exquisitely respectful of us. *He comes to us from below, and we must stoop to meet him*. This change of heart about the meaning of the Cross is to be simultaneous with our reconciliation to the Father. Only our ignorance of its meaning stands in our way. Our coming to the altar to receive his body, and even more clearly the blood which he shed *so that sins might be forgiven*, represents our change of heart, as clearly as that moment when he shared the meal of the disciples, and *showed them his hands and his feet*.