

# *Good Friday*

We encounter failure and loss in the world on a regular basis, and indeed most of the news is concerned to chronicle these things before all else. It sometimes looks as if we are looking for bad news, to feed some inner need: is it that *schadenfreude* that is comforting when bad things happen to others rather than to us? Do we even fear that these evil things *ought* to have happened to us, because we deserve them? Do we contemplate them because we need to know the worst that can come to us?

What would it be like if someone entered the human world with no heritage of evil? Someone who trod our path without hatred, without deceit, in complete loving generosity, harmless to others, athirst for justice, and willing to share selflessly with all? Would such a one acquire respect and love, be greeted with the finest fruits of success and happiness, and reach old age loaded with honours, sought out for his wisdom and guidance by the Lords of the Earth?

The answer is that we would have to do away with him. We could not have anyone like that on the loose in our world for long. He would ask too many questions of the cruel way we solve our problems, of the corners the rest of us cut, for our own advantage and at the cost of others. If he entered politics, he would be ridiculed in Parliament, if he engaged in trade he would be sued for every penny in the courts; he would be chased out of the University, pilloried in the press, mugged on the street and, in the right part of the world, assassinated by an armed fanatic. Or, if he simply taught the truth to all comers, and gave to the poor and broken the promise of fulness of life, all those powers would unite against him, and he would be condemned to death and executed in some way that would discourage any follower from imitating him or taking up his torch. Our world isn't built to protect the likes of him, and he wears no armour of his own.

We aren't grouped today around the scene of an accident, or the death of a man born before his time. We are grouped around the complete truth about God and us. This is what our way does to God. So what price your religion? Can you seriously worship this man, pinned wide open and naked, to die as a convict amid a jeering crowd, can you really say *this is what God is like*? And from the other direction: if God were in this man, whose whole life was an errand to teach us how we should find life: could we really say, *this is what Man should be like*? Could you hold up this horrible image, and tell unbelievers what Jesus did: *If you want to belong to me, you must take up your Cross and follow in my footsteps*?

We want to add to the story; we don't accept the last words Jesus spoke, *It is accomplished*. We want to say: but this isn't the end of the story: there's something more, there's a happy ending, it gets better, don't go away. But we're missing the point. *In all the words a human being can speak, this is the end, the completion of the story*. In the words of this world and the prospectus of this life, this broken disaster of a man is truly the last word. That's why a picture of him suddenly restored to perfect health and thirty-three-year-old vigour is so unconvincing, really so trivial to us: we feel we can't believe it, the ends don't tie up.

Look hard at the appalling sight of the Cross. Forget the years of familiarity with the little shape on the wall of the house or the side of the Church or the end of the Rosary beads. We forget too soon the reality it depicts: the crunching violence of it, the pain, the weight, the sound, the smell of crucifixion. The crowd is there to watch; I do not know what nervous system could bear such a sight. But make no mistake: this ending of Jesus of Nazareth is the heart of human truth, the ultimate revelation of the divine judgment on the lost earth. This sign to you is the necessary one, decreed by the Father, which cost Jesus the Agony of Gethsemane to accept. If you learn how to read it, you will find here the coincidence of two verdicts: the one we passed on the Son of God, when he called us to a new, divine life; and

the one passed by God on us, when he decided, in the teeth of our ignorance and helplessness, to send us his Beloved Son.

Jesus paid with his life for you to see this sign. Every one of us owes it to him to read in it the truths it tells us: about the astonishing depths to which our human nature can sink; and about the awesome and terrible love with which God loves us, in the very moment when we reject, and torment, and crucify the Saviour he sends us.

What comes afterwards is not to be written in the same ink, or spoken in the same human words; the Resurrection is in God's language, and not ours. You must wait for God to show you this divine deed; and the cost to you, as for Jesus, is that you should look upon the Cross, and take to yourself the agony that it is to be really human, really loving, in the world we have made for ourselves, in the absence of our Maker. When you have let go of your hopes in this false and twisted parody of life, you will be ready to see the dawn of God's restoring light, the *divine* dawning of Easter.