



When I was at primary school, in our RE lessons we learned about the crucifixion and resurrection. This being a very long time ago, at the beginning of the 1960s, there were tests on such things as remembering all of Jesus' words in the course of his walk to execution and during his crucifixion. I never could remember them all.

However, I do remember the teacher saying how remarkable Jesus was because he cared for others even while he was being crucified. Being 8 and not very nice – some people might say only one aspect of that has changed – I was unimpressed. Surely this was a story, and he got his lines right.

Age may not teach us much, but for many it teaches the nature of risk. We learn that we are not immortal; that things can go wrong. With age, we learn to be more cautious, much more aware of disappointment and pain and therefore more able to identify with the depths of a story: the complex realities of human suffering.

So it is with the crucifixion. Jesus was in physical agony to an indescribable extreme. He was also in spiritual and emotional agony. He had seen his community of disciples torn apart by outright betrayal as well as cowardice and desertion. He could see his mother watching him die; is it possible to imagine her anguish? He was mocked and told he was a failure.

His sense of God the Father's presence was gone. There was no earthly or heavenly help in his hour of need. Like every human being he had to rely, in his agony, on what he could find within himself. Jesus could not call on God for help because he was choosing to enter into the fullest hell of all: separation from his loving heavenly Father, and therefore bearing the weight of the wrongs of our world

Jesus would bear our sins, taking the whole darkness of human history and cosmic chaos, and die under their weight. The resurrection was promised, but in the absence of God the Father it could only be taken in faith.

These were not lines to be spoken in some school play: this was God's love in action, even to the point where the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit - that deep mystery - was separated, out of love for God's creatures.

As we wait at the cross, and bring the darkness of bereavement, of isolation, of confinement, of insecurity and homelessness, or the sufferings of others, we place them all at the feet of Jesus. We can do nothing else. But at feet of Jesus, at the cross, we also find the sign of our hope and the faithfulness of God-in-Christ, crucified. This is Jesus Christ who bears our sins and our suffering, that we may hear the whispers of resurrection: of new life, forgiveness, freedom and healing.

We too may call out: "Oh God, where are you?" The answer will come, "With you in your suffering and fear, knowing every aspect of it, for I drank it to the dregs. With you, if you take my hand, to lead you to new light and life."

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