



Neil Turner

Read the Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon at Christ Church by the Sea, Colon, Panama.

Readings: Psalm 119: 161-168; 2 Timothy 3:10-17; Mark 12:35-37

Christians have always suffered for being Christians. Ever since the time of Jesus and Jesus himself, those in power want control. A US Senator said many years ago about a Roman Catholic judge, who was the President of the Supreme Court in the US, 'I don't mind him being a Roman Catholic, so long as it does not affect his way of work'. To which, we answer, but if he's a Christian it changes his whole way of living.

Paul writes to Timothy from prison. He is suffering. He will shortly be murdered. He writes personally to his adopted son. He says look at how I've lived. What persecutions I endured. Augustine, 600 years later, talks about persecutions in one of his sermons, but he divides martyrs into two kinds. He talks of red martyrs - those who die for their faith and their blood is shed. On Tuesday in El Salvador I visited the place of the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero. He was a red martyr. Not red because of communism, but red because of blood. My heart was challenged, my will was shaped. Because he so loved Jesus Christ that he loved justice for the poor.

The other kind of martyr Augustine talks about is the white martyr. Not anything to do with colour of skin. But everything to do with living a life in obedience to Christ. Because you may not be persecuted, but to live in obedience to Christ is to dance to a different tune to the world. To march in step with Jesus Christ, not in step with the rulers and governments of this present world. We don't oppose governments because they are governments, we pray for them. We don't hate those who rule us, but we live and walk to a different tune.

The song of the angels in our hearts, the words of Christ in our mind. The call of the Holy Spirit as our aim. And the love of God the Father which sustains us. And so Paul says, yes, suffering. But it will come both from what we say and from how we live.

In the old British empire, in India, the words of the Magnificat were banned. They did not want the poor to hear about the rich being thrown down. They did not want to hear about the rulers being dethroned and the weak and powerless being set up in their place. Where do we find these values, says Paul. We find them in scripture. And we allow the scriptures through the Spirit to reshape our hearts and minds. The day we stop allowing the scripture to change us is the day that our love for Christ begins to get dull. We are not all called to be red martyrs. But we are all called to be white martyrs. And even in doing that we must speak for justice.

Even the most harmless and obvious comments and actions can lead to us being despised and hated when they go against the control of government. You have just had an election in Panama. We are in the middle of one in England. One of the candidates, one of the party leaders, is from a very populist, nationalist group. He really dislikes me, he hates me. Some years ago on Christmas Day this populist leader issued a

statement. 'Happy Christmas,' he said on Twitter, 'and pay no attention to the Archbishop of Canterbury!'

People think that Christianity should be in its little box where it does no harm and no good, in fact it does nothing. This is not what Paul is talking about. It is not what Jesus is talking about. He is talking about kingdoms, without weapons, without frontiers, without cruelty, without corruption, without a desire to hold power. Kingdoms that transform the world. Live in that kingdom and you will be a martyr. Martyr simply means witness. Live in that kingdom together and the world will see Christ. Amen.

4 min read

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