

John 18:1-18

John 19:16-20

Introduction

Show the bottle of water

Q. How would you describe it? Half full or half empty?

How we see things depends on who we are.

Our characters - optimist/ pessimist

Our past - what we have been led to expect/ our experience of life affects our attitudes.

If it has been good and we have found people trustworthy we ourselves will expect good things and trust people. The opposite also applies

The past is vital in shaping who we are, how we understand things and how we react to what is going on around us.

The people who came to Calvary on that first Good Friday saw what was happening and the way they understood it was affected by who they were and the things that had happened to them in the past..

Jewish Leaders

Many of them were devout men who had studied scripture but had misunderstood it. They had learned to apply the letter of the law to everything they did, keeping rules in order to please God but not understanding the spirit behind the laws they so carefully kept. This meant that although they were waiting for the promised Messiah to come and rescue Israel they did not recognise him in Jesus. They found Jesus very difficult to deal with because the things he did always seemed to overturn the traditions and rules that they held so dear. He didn't fit their understanding of the Messiah and they certainly didn't expect God's promised saviour to be somebody who would die on a cross.

They recognised that Jesus had the power to save and help others - they had seen him heal people and release them from wrongdoing - helping them to change the way they lived, but they did not believe that God's Messiah would allow himself to be put to death in such a humiliating way. Because they

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misunderstood the role of the Messiah they mocked Jesus and challenged him to prove who he was by miraculously coming down from the cross.

The soldiers

Had seen many rebel leaders try to free their oppressed people and had seen many criminals die. Crucifixion was routine to them and they were just getting on with their job. Most of them were indifferent to what was happening but not above mocking this man who was called the king of the Jews. They too misunderstood the nature of Jesus' kingdom and kingship and called on him to prove himself by coming down off the cross.

But there was one soldier who was able to draw on his past - his knowledge of people and of all the executions that he had attended to recognise that here was something different. As Jesus died the officer in charge was struck by the way that he died and could see that here was a truly good man, a man who was blameless and sinless who had died with grace and humility. Luke records that he said "certainly he was a good man", though in Mark's records that he recognised him as who he claimed to be The Son of God - the true King and Messiah.

The criminals

Were in some sense in the same situation. They too were going to die, punishment for the things they had done wrong. But, although superficially they might have been similar their understanding of what was happening and their reaction to it was totally different.

One of them simply followed the lead of the religious leaders and the soldiers and joined in with the mockery and insults that were being thrown at Jesus. But the other, fully aware that he himself had done wrong and deserved to be punished was able to see that Jesus was entirely blameless - and more than that was able to recognise that Jesus' kingdom was a heavenly one which was going to be established through his death on the cross. He humbly admitted that he deserved his punishment

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but turned to Jesus asking him to help him. "remember me when you come into your kingdom".

The women

knew and loved Jesus. They had come with him from Galilee, had heard his teaching, cared for him as he travelled and ministered to the crowds, had seen his miracles and seen people healed. They themselves had received healing and forgiveness from Jesus. We know that among the women was Mary Magdalene, who had been a prostitute and possessed by evil. It was this knowledge of Jesus, their grateful love for him that brought them to the cross and enabled them to stay with him.

All of the people who came to see Jesus die on that first Good Friday morning came shaped by the things that had happened to them in the past. Some of them were able to see that Jesus's death could help them to leave their past there at the foot of the cross and start again in a new way.

St Peter, who had not himself been able to follow Jesus to the cross because he was so afraid, later came to see the truth about what actually happened as Jesus died, and came to understand the power that Jesus' death has to make a difference not only in the future but in dealing with our past, our hurts and our failures. He later said this: "Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed."

Christ died to take away the power that our past failure and sin has upon our lives, some of the people who watched him die understood that and were able to leave that sin at the cross and went away trusting in Christ to change them.

All of us have things in our past that hold us back and make the present difficult to deal with. There are also some good things that were important but which are past and if we cling to them will prevent us from growing as God wants us to, some

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not so good things, past hurt and failure that has affected our attitude to life and each other. Peter tells us that Christ, as he died on the cross carried all our sin and failure so that we could be healed and walk into the future as God's children.

I have placed this cross in a rubbish heap this morning to remind us that Christ's death on the cross has the power to transform and to change all our sin and failure. He has the power to heal us and to change us. So today as we remember all that Jesus won for us on the cross may I encourage you to bring the past to him and allow him to renew you and transform you.