

“We Believe” Series – St. George’s Anglican Church

Notes from Brian Dijkema’s presentation on Feb. 7, 2010-02-09

*As such He came; He came as Saviour. He died, but He vanquished death; in Himself He put an end to what we feared; He took it upon Himself and He vanquished it, as a mighty Hunter He captured and slew the lion. Where is death? Seek it in Christ, for it exists no longer; but it did exist and now it is dead. O Life, O Death of death! Be of good heart; it will die in us, also. — St. Augustine, Homily 233*

Creed segment: “For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; suffered and was buried.”

- This segment forms the central part of the creed, and is rightly seen as the central event in history.
- The three words “for our sake” form the core of this statement without which the statement would find near universal assent.
- Understanding why we needed someone to die for our sake can only be understood in the context of earlier parts of the creed – description of who God is, and a description of the goodness of God’s creation.
- Further, understanding why we needed someone to die “for our sake” can only be understood in the context of sin. It is because of sin that we needed Christ to become incarnate “for us and for our salvation.”
- Sin broke our communion with God, and brought forth death and suffering. It is because of sin that we need salvation.

Salvation should not be understood individually, but it must be understood personally. Salvation is at once cosmic in scale and deeply personal.

Salvation Story:

- Immediately after the fall, God promises to “crush the serpent’s head” and that it will bruise God’s heel.
- Jewish understanding of salvation centred around release from bondage/slavery in Egypt. Jews were saved from the angel of death by the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. The passover meal, which preceded the Jews’ release from Egypt was celebrated annually as a great remembrance of God’s mighty act of redemption.
- Jewish law mandated the sacrifice of pure, perfect lamb to atone for the sins of Israel. Likewise, only a priest who made atonement for his and his people’s sins could enter behind the curtain of the temple into God’s presence.
- Old Testament prophecies (i.e. Isaiah) predict the redemption of God’s people. The suffering servant – who will be despised, rejected and who will take on

the sins of the world (not just Israel) is central to this, and provides us with the clearest connection to Christ

- Christ himself predicted his death, much to the chagrin of his disciples.

The crucifixion:

- Public display of Roman Imperial power meant to shame, intimidate
- Excruciatingly painful
- Those crucified were meant to serve as an example of the results of defying Roman law.

Why this segment is particularly important for orthodoxy:

- Christ, being fully human and fully divine, died. He did not leave his body to hang while his heavenly spirit checked out. He suffered the most painful, shameful death.
- Christ's death at the hands of Pontius Pilate, and his response to Pilate's assertion of authority (i.e. "don't you realize that I have the power to either release you or crucify you?"..."you would have no power if it wasn't given to you") radically minimizes earthly and political power.
- Christ suffered the penalty that was due us: to be completely forsaken by God. Christ's death restored our Edenic ability to commune with God, but in a new way (i.e. the temple veil was torn in two) We end our prayers with "for Jesus' sake" because he died "for our sake."
- Christ's death restored life – as indicated by the resurrection of the dead from their tombs at Christ's death.
- Christ's death broke the hold that sin had on the cosmos. A death contrary to nature restored nature as well. – as indicated by the earthquake and blackness.
- Not only did Christ pay the legal debt of God's law, or a ransom, but his death was the decisive victory against death and evil: thus "dying he destroyed our death." Thus we can speak of Christ as victor on the cross. "Having disarmed the powers and authorities he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them on the cross." (cf. Colossians 2)

What implications this has for discipleship:

- Joy: Those who have been saved from death should be among the most joyful people on the planet. We know what our fate should be. We now know what it is. What joy that should bring!
- Obedience: Such joy should enable us to respond in obedience through gratitude.
- Missions: The joy and obedience should combine into telling the world the good news!
- Williness to suffer, ridicule or worse: Christ calls us to "take up our crosses" and follow him, just as he emptied himself and became obedient to death on a cross (cf. Phil. 2)

- Comfort in times of suffering. Hope in the face of evil: While we cannot comprehend how evil intruded into this world, we can comprehend what we have been shown. That is Christ, who, while innocent, suffered agony of the most complete sort. “Oh, tidings of comfort and joy! Comfort and joy!”