

Good Friday 2008

“This is love”

“This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” 1 John 4:10

To be able to love is one of the wonderful things about being alive and being human.

But sometimes it hurts to love.

In fact you can't really love without some pain.

We love children but it hurts to bring them into the world.

It hurts if your love is not reciprocated and returned to you.

It hurts to be rejected by someone you love.

It hurts to watch someone you love make poor decisions and ignore your loving advice.

It hurts to say goodbye.

And most of all it hurts to watch someone you love die.

Love hurts. You know that. I don't have to tell or convince you.

There was even a song with that title, interestingly by a band called “Nazareth”.

“Love hurts, love scars, love wounds and mars any heart.”

It hurt God to love. It hurt God to create us with the freedom to make our own choices and decisions and then watch us all walk away from him one by one....

And it literally wounded and scarred him on Good Friday.

It hurt God to watch his only Son have to suffer and die on a cross to atone for our sins, deal with them, be punished for them, and die for them to forgive us.

But he did it in love, because of love, love for us.

Love is Jesus dying for the sins of the whole world. Any other love is a distant second.

The symbols of love today are a wooden cross and cold steel nails.

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“This is love” - God's love. God's love for us and his strange but wonderful way of showing it.

If you ever doubt God's love (as we do) then this is where you go, to the cross of Christ. Good Friday. That's why it is “good”, because it is about a love so great we could never fully understand it and we could never earn or deserve it. God's love on Good Friday does something we could never do for ourselves, and that is to deal with the hurt we have caused God by the selfishness of our sins.

The Vatican has recently come up with another 7 so called “deadly” sins – that makes 14. The old list included envy, gluttony, greed, lust, anger and pride and sloth. The new list covers genetic modification, carrying out experiments on humans, polluting the environment, causing social injustice, causing poverty, becoming obscenely wealthy, and taking drugs. Interestingly these are about behaviours that affect others, and show lack of love. Better remember that when I forget to put things in the recycling bin! Actually all our sins are deadly, even the ones we think are minor. They all express lack of love for God himself. The Bible says **“the reward for sin is death”**, and not just the so called big sins either! All sin, any sins, they are deadly, deadly to life with God and relationship with God and threaten our eternal future with him as well.

There is a program on TV at the moment called “Moment of truth”. The contestant is asked a series of questions, which become more personal the further they go. They have to answer these personal questions about their inner thoughts and things they have done in the past truthfully in front of family and friends and the viewing world. The more they answer truthfully the more money they get. If they lie detector determines they have answered falsely they lose everything. The

catch is, will their family and friends still love them if they know that much about them? Would your family and friends love you if they knew everything you have thought about them or done with your life?

God does. God loves us in spite of what he knows and sees about us, our inner secret world and things we cover up from others. He knows we are not naturally lovers of him and his will, but he still loves us. That doesn't mean he just turns a blind eye to our sin. Just the opposite. He exposes it. He exposes the truth. But he does it in Jesus. Jesus was the only person who never had anything to hide, and who always told the truth. But he chose to become us and our sin on the cross to expose the truth about us and our sin and how bad it really is, but also to deal with it and take it away. And in the moment of greatest truth Jesus dies, dies to kill our sins and their power to condemn us, dies to relieve our consciences and to restore our relationship with God. On the cross not only is our sin exposed but also God's loving heart for us.

“This is love.”

It certainly isn't that we have loved God well at all. That's why Good Friday had to happen. But he loved us, loved us to death, death by crucifixion. He loved those who nailed him to the cross and even prayed for their forgiveness, he loved the two criminals on either side of him and even promised heaven to one of them who in a “moment of truth” admitted his guilt and looked to him, he loved the crowd who were abusing and laughing at him, Pilate who washed his hands of him, the church leaders who condemned him, the congregation that cried “crucify him”, he loved his mum and the mate who stuck by him and those who didn't, and he loved us....he loved us.

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Some women were the only ones left at the cross to watch their loved one die. One of them was his mother. I wonder what she saw when she looked up at her son?

What do you see when you look up at Jesus on Good Friday?

A tragedy?

Sadness?

Or love? - God's love for you. God's loving sacrifice for you. God's atonement for all your sins.

Can you remain unaffected by that love?

Can you claim it and then walk away as if it didn't matter most of the time, as if he didn't matter?

Or is it in the words of the hymn we are about to sing:

“love so amazing so divine (that it) demands my soul, my life, my all.”