

Sermon 18 June 2023

Colossians 1:15-20 Mark 15:33-39

Jesus cries out on the cross, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'* I have always been kind of fascinated by this cry from Jesus. It gives us a glimpse of his humanness. It shows us that he had feelings and emotions just like us, and I find that reassuring because it helps me to relate to him.

A prominent American minister tells the story of the occasion when he took his 9-year-old son to Disneyland. Towards the end of the day, his son said to him, *'I want one more ride on Space Mountain.'* His father told him it was time to call it a day and head for home. His son replied, *'Jesus wants me to go.'*

His father was intrigued by his theological claim to be able to read the mind of God and asked him where he got such an idea. His son responded, *'From you. On Sunday when you were preaching, you said that whenever we cry, Jesus cries. You said Jesus feels everything we feel. So if that's the case, if I want to have a good time on the roller coaster, then Jesus would be feeling the same thing. So, are you really going to stop Jesus from having a good time?'* He got the ride!

In actual fact, his son's theology is not too bad. As we know, children have a way of understanding things in a very simplistic way. It is us adults who complicate things. I believe God is part of every one of us and so it naturally follows that he would share our feelings, whether they be joy or pain.

In this cry from Jesus, we can detect a note of despair and also anger, which raises the question, Is it ok to get angry with God? Well, I think it is fine. It is actually an act of faith. It must surely be impossible to get angry with someone whose existence you have serious doubts about. That would be rather pointless, I would have thought. You simply cannot have a relationship without communication, and believe me, when we express anger with someone, we are certainly communicating with them. There is no doubt about that. And let's be honest, we all have our moments when we get just a little angry with our nearest and dearest. It's all part of being in a relationship.

So in getting angry with God, we are certainly acknowledging our relationship with him. And besides, he is big enough to handle it. A few years ago, there appeared a billboard in South Auckland which read, *'It's ok to get angry with God – he can take it.'* I was fascinated that a piece of what I believe to be sound theology appeared in the public domain. I have no idea who was responsible for it and what their motivation was, but good on them.

As well as this cry of despair from Jesus on the cross, we do see him in the Garden of Gethsemane experiencing some stress as his crucifixion drew near, *"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me." He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.'* So we certainly do get a glimpse of the human side of Jesus and that is precisely the point of God coming to us in human form, in the form of Jesus. God wants us to relate to him, so how better to facilitate this than having him take on human form, just like us.

You might have heard the story of the Scottish farmer who refused to believe the Christmas story (Notice how we have jumped from the Easter story to the Christmas story!). Anyway, his wife and children would go to church but he refused to do so. He just couldn't get his head around the idea that God comes to us in the flesh. Why on earth should God lower himself to be like us? Foolish talk.

One Sunday when it was snowing, the family went off the church as usual. The father naturally stayed behind. The snow was getting much worse. Suddenly, he heard a thump against his window and then

another. He went outside to see what was happening. There in front of him was a large flock of geese which had got lost in the storm.

The farmer was a kind man and he felt for them. He wanted to help them. He realised that they could shelter in his barn. He got behind them and tried to drive them into the barn, but they only scattered. Then he tried by laying a trail of grain to the barn door, but the geese took no notice. There was nothing he could do to get them to enter the barn.

He said to himself, *'This is hopeless. Now if I were a goose, it wouldn't be a problem. They would follow me and I could lead them safely into the barn.'* Suddenly, he stopped and thought about what he had just said: if I was like them, they would relate to me and they would follow me. And it came to him just why God comes to us in human form in the person of Jesus.

I refer back to the first verse of our reading from Colossians – *'Christ is the image of the invisible God.'* God will always be something of a mystery to us but it would be fair to say that he was even more of a mystery before Christ appeared amongst us. To understand the nature of God, all we have to do is take a close look at the person of Jesus. That is one of the reasons why every little aspect of Jesus' life, what he did, what he taught, what he said, the sort of person he was, is examined and analysed in such detail. To know Jesus is to know God.

Samuel Gordon, author and evangelical minister, said, 'Jesus was God spelling himself out in language humanity could understand.'

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