

**Brackenhurst Methodist 11 Oct 09**  
**The Cross of Subversion — Anti-crime liturgy**

- My Redeemer Lives

**Welcome and Notices (crime prayers)**

**Sentence: (2 Cor 13:11)**

Be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

**Opening Prayer**

Hear words that when we live in peace, the God of peace will be with us. We know that; but we also know that when there is no peace you are with us

You are with us in the times of doubt, trauma, pain that comes from living in a broken world

be with us this morning as we celebrate your presence, but also as we pray for peace in our country

- Life in Jesus
- Above All
- Thank you for the cross
- Judas
- I believe in Jesus

**Prayer**

Lord God, we acknowledge that crime is on the increase within our city and country  
From the depths of our hearts we pray that you will comfort, heal and bless all the victims of crime, and that you will protect all people from the evil of crime and violence.

We pray that through our love and peace we will work towards the removal of evil from the hearts of men and women, and will replace with your goodness and love that our land may be free from the scourge of crime and violence.

We pray also for the grace to purge ourselves of all violence

Violence in our own thoughts and actions

Violence in our family life

violence in our friendships and our relationships with others.

Lord, God of our fathers and mothers, you are the God of heaven; you rule over all the kingdoms of the nations:

**power and might are in your hand,  
and no one can withstand you.**

We have no power to face the perils that confront us:

**we do not know what to do,  
but our eyes are upon you, O Lord.**

Lord, we worship you with all our heart; before the powers of the universe we sing your praises.

We come into your house and honour your name because of our love and faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above all things. We worship you with all our heart:

**your love endures forever.**

When we called to you, you answered us; you gave us courage. We worship you with all our heart:

**your love endures forever.**

O may the leaders of the nations praise you, Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth — let them too sing of your ways, for your glory is very great. Though you are so high yet you look upon the lowly — while you distance yourself from the proud.

We worship you with all our heart:

**your love endures forever.**

So help us now to turn to you, trusting in your greatness and majesty, that as we bring you these gifts, and as we offer to you our lives, that in this moment of hearing your word, we may be equipped and encouraged to so proclaim your kingdom that the darkness of this present age is overcome by the light of your love.

**Amen.**

**Scripture:**

Mark 10:32-45

**Message**

## **INTRODUCTION**

- As you know, I think, I run a Bible Study class called Bible Study 101
  - Which is really about questioning why we believe what we do
- And one of the things that I always begin with is to ask people how they got to know about God,
  - what is your story in understanding who Jesus is?
  - Many times people are not too sure about how they learnt about Jesus, but as I help them to unpack it we get answers like this:

- \* from church, from parents, and so on.
- And then I go on to say that we learn about God from, partially, tradition (Teveye)
- I don't know how you got to learn about Jesus, but while I did hear a bit about Jesus from family, my parents didn't go to church, so the first I really heard about Jesus was at school
  - Songs we sung at assembly
    - \* One of those was fishers of men — a bit politically incorrect!  
“I will make you fishers of men IF YOU FOLLOW ME”
- And I think that all Christians will agree on that: we're in church because we want to follow Jesus
  - We may differ on how we follow Jesus
    - \* Some very legalistic; other we can do what we like
    - \* Some may say you have to believe certain doctrines; others, no as long as Jesus is Saviour
  - But all agree that basic to being a Christian is that we follow Christ
- I think that what we like to avoid, though, is that the journey that Jesus makes, the one in which we're supposed to be following him, is always the journey to the cross
  - if we are going to follow Jesus it means that in some way we are going to the cross with him
- In the story that we have just read Jesus is on the way to the cross, in fact this is the third time that he has told his followers that he is going to Jerusalem to die
  - But they, like us, prefer to ignore the reality of the cross in their journey, and focus instead on what they want to get out of the relationship
  - And often times I think this also defines our Journey with Christ:
    - \* What's in it for me?
  - But if we are truly going to follow Jesus cross has to be central
- And so I want to pick up on three things about the cross this morning
  - The cross is scary
  - The cross is sacrificial
  - The cross is subversive / salvific (don't know if that's word!)

### **(1) The Cross is Scary**

- I wonder what the things are that make you afraid?
  - Maybe spiders, or rats, or roller coasters
    - \* For me it's dying alone and forgotten (I hope that I have many years before I have to worry about that!)

- But I wonder if you can picture that thing that makes you afraid and how it makes you feel
  - Maybe waiting outside the principal's office for a jack
    - \* And then relate this to following Christ
- Not because we have to be afraid of God, or afraid of Jesus, but because when we follow Christ, what he calls us to do should scare the living daylights out of us!
  - I don't know if you have ever noticed verse 32 in passage carefully before.
- As I was reading the text it jumped out at me, probably for the first time:
  - "The disciples were astonished, while those who followed WERE AFRAID"
- Very often fear is the emotion that describes being truly in the presence of God
  - People are afraid, and the messenger of God usually responds with the words
    - \* "Do not be afraid"
  - The words of the angel to Mary, the words of the angels to the shepherds, the words of the LORD Yahweh to Joshua as he takes over from Moses
  - Everytime in scripture when we read of an encounter of people with God, there is this sentiment: fearful expectation
    - \* This was not a fishing trip!
- Jesus has just been teaching about the kingdom and what one must do to experience it, to inherit eternal life
  - The rich young man comes to Jesus, tells him that he has kept all the commandments, and Jesus tells him to go and sell everything he has
    - \* That is a scary message
  - But it inextricably linked to the message of the cross
    - \* Where Jesus is going (and where we are called to follow) you do not need possessions!
- The presence of Christ in our lives should scare us witless!
- Why should we be afraid?
  - Because when we follow Jesus he calls us to give up the things that make us comfortable and join with him in a mission of transforming the world
    - \* This is the mission statement of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa: A Christ healed Africa for the healing of the nations
  - And what a wonderful vision that is: How amazing for Africa to be well: no crime, no corruption, no nepotism
    - \* For the rest of the world to look at Africa and say this is an example of how things ought to be
- That's what Christ calls us to; to transforming the world, starting with us
  - But by God, transforming the world is dangerous, ask anyone who has been there

- We are called to follow Jesus in faith, as he looks toward the cross
  - Are we willing to take big enough steps following Jesus to make us afraid; are we willing to take the risks of faith that we need to, to make the difference that God wants us to?
- When was the last time following Jesus made you afraid?

## (2) The Cross is Sacrificial

- The cross is sacrificial
  - One of the things that we are taught early in Christianity is that we can pray, and that we should pray
  - And that's important, and very often our prayers are requests
    - \* "Let's bring our prayer requests to God"
- But very often our prayers never move beyond the 'give me' attitude of James and John
  - "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask..."
  - Many times that's how we pray!
    - \* Am I right?
  - Sometimes we even learn that this is how we should pray, be bold in our requests,
- Some years ago a little book that look at two obscure lines of scripture become very popular
  - It was called The Prayer of Jabez, and the essence of the prayer was enlarge my territory: "Give me more"
    - \* And it's not all bad
  - But it is interesting that Jesus never quotes Jabez, he says, give it all away!
- We can laugh about it, but the reality for many Christians is that Christianity is seen as a religion in which we can have whatever we ask for as long as we have sufficient faith
  - I don't think that this is what Jesus is about!
    - \* Jesus has just said that the Kingdom of God is about selling / giving up all that one has.
- If we look at the context of the time the Jews were being dominated by Rome and their own leaders — history of Jews; Egypt
  - There was this pyramid of power, and the people Jesus spoke to were at the bottom of it!
    - \* You know what it looks like — organigrams of organisations and companies and churches
- Culture says in order to be successful you have to work your way up the pyramid

- The closer you are to the top, the better
- This is exactly what James and John had in mind
  - Jesus at the top, next the two of them, then the remaining nine disciples, and the all the other followers of Jesus
    - \* They were simply expressing what all of us want, and what all of us have been taught to strive for all our lives
  - They were two normal young guys!
    - \* Jesus says to them that they do not know what they are asking
- They are asking him to reinstate, in his kingdom, the systems of the world that he came to destroy
  - Jesus came to inaugurate a system of leadership that is not dominant, but sacrificial
    - \* A system of leadership in which the leaders do not lord it over others, but serve them as slaves
- When we choose to follow Jesus we go with him to the cross
  - That cross is sacrificial, not about how much we can earn or achieve, but how much we can give up for the sake of the kingdom (Tithing — how little can we get away with)
    - \* How much can we give!
    - \* For Jesus it was his life
- We cannot tell the story of Jesus without the cross
  - But, and this brings me to my last point, the cross is not about needless suffering
    - \* rather the cross is a solution to the pyramid of power that James and John so badly want to be a part of

### **(3) The Cross is Subversive / Salvific**

- What do I mean when I say that the cross is subversive?
  - Subversion means overthrowing authority in a subtle way, undermining, destroying people's trust in structures,
    - \* Turning things around, showing them for what they really are
- For Jesus that was the authority of Rome, and the authority of the Jewish religion
  - Jesus this incredible, amazing man, who did all this good stuff
    - \* Yet he's put to death by the collusion of the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities
- And as that happens he reveals just how bad the system is, and how much better his way of doing things is

- The cross tells us that the world's way of doing things is upside down, and Jesus offers to us another way of living.
  - Just yesterday I was reading a story in the newspaper about a man who has decided to live without money for five years
    - \* We say it's crazy, but just maybe he has the right idea!
  - For so many of us life is all about money, and he is turning that idea on its head, subverting what the world considers a norm
- But it is in subversion that we find our salvation:
  - It's not about doing all these things that prove how good we are, but in the simple acceptance of us, while we were yet sinners.
- In the rich young man story the disciples are amazed and ask each other, "Who can be saved?"
- And this is exactly what Jesus is saying:
  - Your status cannot save you
    - \* Just because you think that you have a certain position in society, it doesn't mean a row of beans
    - \* James and John, I have just told the rich young man that his riches won't save him, and now you think that by your closeness to me in my glory you think that you can earn salvation?
- But there is another way to be saved
  - And that is the way of the cross
    - \* This is God's way of subverting worldly power and authority
    - \* It is God's way of turning worldly power and authority on its head
    - \* It is God's way of turning the pyramid of power upside down!
- Jesus says, through the cross I am going to challenge the notion that only those at the top of the pile are worth anything
  - The people with true worth, is not the few at the top, but the masses at the bottom
- And when Jesus hangs on the cross in his glory at his right and left are not his able lieutenants, not his disciples who deserted him in the Garden of Gethsemane
  - But instead hang two common criminals!
    - \* Those very people whom the world has said are so worthless that they do not deserve to live
- Are the people who occupy a position of glory with Jesus!
  - The pyramid of power has been totally subverted!
- Subversive activities are dangerous, and subversive activities are frightening
  - But this is where we find our salvation

- This is where we find the kingdom of God
- This is where we go if we choose to follow Jesus

## CONCLUSION

- Sometimes in today's world we are desperate to find a way of following Jesus without the cross
  - Because the cross calls into question all our human pride and glory
- Our liturgy today has been about crime, and asking God to stop it, and the lead story in yesterday's newspaper was about a new super police force.
  - You know, I don't think that this is going to change much
    - \* It's the same pyramid of power, but more so
- They say, the rank names are too civilian, going back to military ranks, with the general at the top
  - We won't solve crime in this country with a more militant police force, what we need is transformed hearts
- And that, brothers and sisters, is our task
  - The task of those willing to follow Jesus who said love your enemy, turn the other cheek, give up your undergarment, walk the extra mile
    - \* And sell all you have and give it to the poor
  - This is subversive!
- If we are to follow Jesus, then we should be astonished and fearful at what we are called to give up, and of where we are to go
  - The world's values and power systems must be turned on it's head, and we have no choice but to follow
    - \* Yes, the journey will be scary
    - \* Yes, we will have to give up much
    - \* But it is in this journey that we will find our salvation, and the salvation of our land
- May it be so for you, even as it is for me.
- Amen

*Those affected by crime to stand*

**Prayer** — *begin with silence for those who have lost loved ones*

We pray for all those who suffer as a result of crime in this country; especially those, especially us, who are afraid to live, afraid to be alive with possibility because of crime;

For the injured and the disabled, the innocent who have been gunned down, and for those traumatised through action taken against them, watching action taken against others, or simply by living in a high crime zone. And for those whose faith in God and others has been weakened or destroyed, we lift our hearts to you:

**O Lord of mercy, hear our prayer.**

For those who turn to crime because they have nothing else to turn to; for the homeless and refugees, for those who are hungry, and for those who have no livelihood or security, we lift our hearts to you:

**O Lord of mercy, hear our prayer**

For those who have been stunned and shocked by death; for widows and orphaned children, especially for those who do not see how they can put their lives together again; and for those who suffer remorse because of what they did or failed to do, we lift our hearts to you:

**O Lord of mercy, hear our prayer**

For all who are weighed down by guilty conscience, for those who lack imagination, and for those who immerse themselves in activities so that they never stand still to see themselves as they really are, we lift our hearts to you

**O Lord of mercy, hear our prayer**

For those who carry civic and political responsibilities; for all whose words and actions mould public life. Cause them to put aside all merely selfish ambition, to seek to be instruments of your will, and to carry out your purpose for the welfare of all people. Let your grace sustain them, your love work through them, and your power uphold them, for these we lift our hearts to you.

**O Lord of mercy, hear our prayer**

And God of truth and justice;

we ask you to help the men and women who administer and police our laws;

grant them insight, courage and compassion,

protect them from corruption and arrogance

and grant that we, whom they seek to serve,

may give them the support and affection they need;

so that our people may be strengthened more and more in respect and concern for one another

*Silence — own prayers*

**Amen**

- The Servant King; **Doxology & Benediction**