

Good Friday Moments

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Even as a young child, I always felt a poignancy on Good Friday that I did not feel any other time of the year. I was unable to understand or even verbalise it back then, but there was something about it that challenged me, made me feel uncomfortable. My local church – a place of hope and community – seemed darker and grimmer that day than any other time I can remember.

Trying to look back now through the eyes of a young child, I sense a mixture of thoughts and feelings: the lack of music, the sombre mood in the church, the brutality of the readings, the gnawing awareness that I was one of those lost sheep that Jesus had been crucified on the wooden cross for. I was coming face to face with sin and its damaging effect and my place in the narrative. Good Friday was different, and, while this awareness came long before theological reflection or further theological studies as an adult, I somehow got that piece of the jigsaw at that time.

I was not to know it then, but this fascination with the poignancy of Good Friday and the startling physicality of the bare wooden cross followed me into my theological studies. I often wondered why I had



been so strongly drawn to the study of suffering, the study of the cross, the complexity of the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of Christ. I used to think it was because of my own personal experiences of suffering and my sometimes somewhat pathetic attempts to make sense of the incomprehensible and inexplicable. I had no answers to the many theological, emotional and existential questions deep within me, and this I found complicated and challenging for someone who could speak with clarity about many other issues. The books made me more confused than ever, driving



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Now with many years of study, struggle and sorrow under my ministerial and theological belt, I see in my Good Friday experience a God who is simple and uncomplicated. I sense in that wooden cross, with its banality, brutality and pain, he who understands me, you, us better than we could ever imagine. I now believe that the Jesus who hung on the painful wooden cross is he who walks with us in our moments of struggle and pain. I see that it is he who encourages us when we are lost and alone. It is he who offers an open hand to us who need someone to lift us up when the world brings us down low. It is he who shows compassion to those who are judged harshly and brings mercy where there is condemnation. It is he who widens the circle of truth, hope and justice when the world struggles to do so.

I have come to see the wooden cross of Good Friday as the symbol of accompaniment, courage, compassion, mercy, justice, hope and healing. This simple cross demonstrates to me, to you, to us that each day of our lives can be a Good Friday moment – an encounter with the God who knows, who holds, who loves and who never forgets his precious sons and daughters.

me farther away from the notion of a loving and compassionate God and from the answers I sought.

Yet for me there was a draw towards the simplicity of the bare and wooden cross of Good Friday. There was something there in that harsh and empty wooden cross that did not seem to be anywhere else. It was a place of humility and simplicity. Many have overcomplicated it by trying to work out its meaning and purpose. The basic fact for me, as a Christian, as a believer and as a chaplain, was that the closer I got to the wooden cross, the nearer I felt to my God.