

irrevocably defines God's role within the history of the universe. This is what I mean by saying that the Cross and Resurrection inaugurated the Kingdom. There is a before and an after, and they are different. God has chosen a side; God has chosen inclusion, healing, and justice; and God has paid the price of this choice. The die is cast. From Good Friday onwards, the Kingdom is not a future possibility, but a present fact. What does this mean for us, here and now, in our benighted generation? This is my main theme tomorrow; for now, two very brief points:

- ◆ First, in the Cross and Resurrection, God defined His role within the history of the world. That means radical change for the good is now not a mere possibility, but is inevitable. How foolish would we be if, knowing what is coming, we did not try to align our lives to the Kingdom?
- ◆ And second, the nature of the Kingdom is now known. The company of the Kingdom includes all who recognise themselves as needy, poor and helpless. If we cling to being rich, self-sufficient and powerful, we defy the meaning of history; we choose death over life.

In this is hope: for the world, and for individuals. It's not an easy hope – it does not suggest that things can somehow become more pleasant without otherwise changing much. The Kingdom will turn everything upside down. If we are comfortable in the world as it stands, we might fear God's goodness nearly as much as we dread evil and death. But nevertheless this is Christian hope: in the Cross, in the Kingdom, in the King.

To these themes of solidarity, challenge and change, I will return tomorrow.



HOLY WEEK IN THE TIME OF CRISIS—

Monday: Crucifixion of a Rebel

If you were present at Mass yesterday, you will have heard me introduce this series of Holy Week sermons, which I have entitled, Holy Week in the Time of Crisis.

While our faith is ancient, the task of each generation is to express it in words that respond to now, and to here. And it seems to me that we live in a time of particular challenge. I am hearing people speak of a 'polycrisis', reflecting a sense of insecurity and change in almost every dimension of life at once. Simultaneous crises in politics and international relations, in culture and politics, in personal and gender relationships, in the economy and the underlying ecosystem. We are divided and dismayed, harrowed by violence and confused about how to live.

And so I describe this Holy Week as coming in the time of crisis. That word, 'crisis', comes from a Greek root meaning 'choice' or 'judgement'. The choice is ours, because the world is starving for hope, and confused about which way to turn. I believe the church's greatest challenge in 2026 is to express Christian hope in terms that show the way ahead, the path towards the light.

So, what account of Holy Week is adequate to our times? How to speak about the difference made by the Cross and the Resurrection? And is that difference enough to justify our worship? Are they a sufficient foundation on which to build our lives?

My core theme this week will be that the Cross and Resurrection inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

- ◆ Today, I will talk briefly about the nature of the Kingdom of God, and how Cross and Resurrection relate to the Kingdom.
- ◆ Tomorrow, I will say more about what this means for our lives – the ethics of the Kingdom, why it brings hope, and how we can embrace a reality that is 'already but not yet'.
- ◆ On Wednesday, I will speak about what this understanding of Holy Week might mean for our religious practice.
- ◆ And then, through the great Three Days, we will follow those themes through our liturgy and reading of Scripture.

I want to make clear at the beginning that I am *not* offering this perspective so as to replace other ideas of what the Cross achieves – what theologians

traditionally refer to as the Atonement. The Bible offers multiple metaphors and resources for understanding the Atonement - images and ideas around sin and death, victory and buying-back, and around Jesus as offering a moral example to us.

All of these ways of explaining the Atonement are true, in their way. I am speaking about something else this week because I think it might help, in the time and place where we live. Joining up Atonement with Kingdom theology has been an important theme in post-war theology, and this renewal of teaching arose in part precisely from the horrors of war and Holocaust, and the need for a theology that tackles evil head on. And partly from a sense that traditional theologies seem to bear little relationship to the Jesus we meet in the gospels. Because what Jesus teaches about in the gospels is not substitutionary sacrifice or any particular Atonement theology – but the coming Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God stands at the heart of Jesus' ministry. In the synoptic gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke - Jesus' teachings revolve around the Kingdom: the Kingdom "of God" in Mark and Luke, "of heaven" in Matthew, though both terms mean the same. Jesus describes what the Kingdom is like, how to live within it, and how it contrasts with human ideas of power and authority. (While John's gospel uses the phrase less, in one sense he says more about the Kingdom, because Jesus in the fourth gospel is more explicit about His own central role in the business of heaven coming to earth.)

What is the Kingdom like? Jesus teaches various 'both/ands':

1. The Kingdom is pervasive, but also unexpected. Because God is unpredictable. Also, because we often don't notice what is under our noses.
2. The Kingdom transforms individual lives but is not mainly about individuals: in its essence, it is a collective thing. There is obviously no such thing as a Kingdom of one person, or of a bunch of individuals who all relate to the King but don't recognise each other as fellow-citizens. In fact, to separate the individual and the collective is a false dichotomy. The inner life of each individual is shaped by social conditions, and if those conditions change, then individuals will also change.
3. So, the Kingdom is about collective, social issues – it addresses here-and-now failures of love like poverty and discrimination - while it also confronts existential problems such as death and meaninglessness.

4. The Kingdom involves God's judgment, which is both near at hand, and in another sense reserved for a later day.

At its heart, the Kingdom is Jesus' personal, sovereign rule. And because this Kingdom is not just a mental state, but challenges real-world conditions of injustice and exclusion, this makes Jesus a personal threat to the powerful. If His teaching were only about inner life or a distant future, it would not have led to His crucifixion. But Jesus was executed, as a rebel king - under a sign declaring Him "the King" - because the authorities recognized the threat His message posed to the established order.

The fact that Jesus' teaching led to His death raises the stakes. Because of the Cross, we cannot respond by saying "that's an interesting message, I'll think about it." If the Kingdom is only a message – an invitation, which we can take or leave - then hope is dashed on Calvary. If Jesus is only a messenger, then the story ends with "nice guys finish last."

But the Cross is not a message; it is an event, which achieved a result: it inaugurated the Kingdom.

The logic of this inauguration rests on the central point that Jesus did not just preach the Kingdom; Jesus is the King. The Kingdom has come in the Christ's own person, and this means that Jesus' own existential choice defines the Kingdom. Jesus did not just teach us or inspire us. He lived the difference He wants to make; He made the ultimate, life-and-death choice that defined His existence, and showed what God's Kingdom is like.

In putting Himself in the way of a humiliating, painful slave's death, Jesus chooses to place Himself among outsiders, the despised, the condemned, those seen as blasphemers. Golgotha is where the King chooses to be; desolate and forsaken is who the King chooses to be. Not one of the nice people, the insiders, those who pass comfortably through the world. The Crucifixion shows us - definitively, once and for all - God's choice. This is the choice of God who is Three-in-One. In the first instance, it's the choice of God the Son, who chooses the Cross. That is Friday's message. And then, this choice is in turn ratified, vindicated and glorified by the Father's choice to raise Jesus from the dead. That is Sunday's good news. So: in Crucifixion, and then in Resurrection, God's choice is made. In some metaphysical sense, we might want to argue that this choice was always inherent in the inner life of God, in the love that is the essential nature of God. This may well be true. But within history – the history of humanity, or of the universe - nothing is pre-ordained, and everything has to be played for. It was in pain and sweat and blood that God made the definitive choice which