

whole world.

The Cross stands, and every one of us is an onlooker.
For what does the Cross stand, for you?



HOLY WEEK IN THE TIME OF CRISIS—

Good Friday – Crucifixion as a Spectacle

I hope no-one here has ever had to watch the kind of awful violence that we remember today. If you have, then I am very sorry, and I hope that today's account of the crucifixion will not revive for you the pain and trauma of that event.



But I imagine that most of us have not watched a person being tortured to death. If is not that such things no

longer happen in the world. More that, I assume, we are mostly privileged people who live in a time and place where it does not happen to us. So our engagement with Good Friday and the Crucifixion relies on our imagination.

So, let's imagine.

The scene is industrial, as these things go in the ancient world – an old quarry. Not rural or remote, but just beside the road into a swarming city. If you visit Jerusalem now, you can see a fake tomb set in a lovely garden. It was created by 19th century Protestant visitors as a place for quiet personal meditation. I'm sure that helps some people, but the real event was not like that.

Who is present, when you imagine the Crucifixion?

The Gospels tell us who was present at the Crucifixion, and the scene is crowded. Not quiet, but noisy. Soldiers, of course: gambling for the spoils, mocking the afflicted, and administering violence. The chief priests, scribes and elders - come to see the end of a rebel who had been bold enough to challenge them. Friends of Jesus: not the men – of the apostles, only John is mentioned. But women: “many women,” we read in Matthew, and five of them named. And also, a good many others who have no particular part to play. Luke describes a straggling procession through the city, with “a great number of people” following Simon of Cyrene as he carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha. Mark speaks of “bystanders” and “passers-by.”

So, imagine a crowd. Then I invite you to allow your imagination to swell the crowd, so that it includes not just the people of that day, but also the numberless host of folk who have lived since, and who live today. They are more numerous, but they are not different to the original crowd. Some are the agents of violence and brutality. Some of them are people with power, who have come to see the social structure affirmed by punishment of a rebel. Some of them people who love Jesus, and are filled with grief. And now, as then, perhaps the largest number are ordinary people – on-lookers, wondering what will happen next.

This crowd represents the whole world: the powerful, and the victims; the grieving, and the complicit. Among them, stands you.

Serried ranks of humanity, row upon row. At the centre, stands the Cross: lifted on its hill; a spectacle, a lesson, an illustration, an example. The King of the World hangs on the tree, under a sign that proclaims His royalty. Thus is proclaimed God's choice, and God's victory. God's choice being the path of love, rather than of violence or revenge. God's choice being always and only to stand on the side of the outcast; of the poor and humble and betrayed. Thus is proclaimed and inaugurated God's Kingdom.

A myriad of souls stand around the Cross: silent, watching, waiting. The Cross stands in judgement on those who refuse it. It stands for healing, for those with no other hope. It stands for God's Kingdom and the hope of the