

Column

If you have flown, more than likely you have heard the captain announce something to the effect, “We are beginning our descent into such and such airport.” Members of the cabin crew make their final walk-through of the craft and take their place in their assigned seats, as the flying bird heads for the tarmac.

Something similar happens as Good Friday and Easter nears. Beginning on the Fifth Sunday in Lent, we begin our final descent into Jerusalem. There in the Holy City will be accomplished what was first prophesied in Genesis 3:15: the seed of woman (Jesus, the successful Adam) will bruise the head of the serpent (Satan). Put another way, the dark power which has brought misery and death to the human race will be defeated once and for all. This will be accomplished on the cross.

Over the centuries countless gallons of ink have been spilt to attempt to explain how this victory was accomplished. Many ‘theories’ have been put forward. Some of these include:

--Christ on the cross became our example. As Jesus laid down His life, so we should be willing to lay down our lives in the service of others. “Let this mind be in you . . . he [Jesus] humbled himself and became obedient even unto death on the cross,” says Paul in Philippians 2:5, 8.

--Christ on the cross became our substitute and sin-bearer. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities . . . and with his stripes we are healed” to quote Isaiah 53:5.

--Christ on the cross, seen as a strong warrior, secured a victory against Satan and his dominions. Because of His victory, the gate to heaven has been opened to all believers. Paul points us in this direction when he writes in Ephesians 4:8, “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.”

No theory can do full justice to Christ’s mysterious yet efficacious work on the cross. In the end, we have to say with the hymn writer Harry Webb Farrington: “I know not how that Calvary’s

cross / A world from sin could free: / I only know its
matchless love / Has brought God's love to me.

Noted Bible scholar N.T. Wright makes an interesting observation when he says that that our Lord did not leave us a tome of theology to figure out the meaning of the cross; rather He gave us a meal – the Lord's Supper. By receiving the signs and pledges of His love in our mouths, we gain not only mental understanding of this mystery but become partakers of its benefits.

As the plane leading to Good Friday and Easter begins its descent, let us prepare . . . with Jesus in our minds and in our mouths in the rite He ordained.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ

*our Lord. Amen. (Collect, Palm Sunday from the
Book of Common Prayer)*

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