

Column

Back in my college days, I remember a conversation I overheard one Good Friday in a classroom. As we waited for the instructor to arrive, one student remarked that he found it strange that classes were being held as the college had a religious foundation. The girl seated beside him responded that it didn't bother her because her church didn't believe in Good Friday. Another person, overhearing her statement, asked, "Does your church believe in Easter?" Her response was, "Of course, it does!"

It seemed a shame that at this point the instructor entered the room and the discussion had to end. I would very much like to have heard how this girl explained her church's indifference to the crucifixion in view of its affirmation of the resurrection.

Perhaps she is not alone. Her statement seems representative of much of modern-day Christianity. Everyone wants to go to heaven when he dies, yet fewer by far are eager to embrace the cross. It would seem that Jesus' words found in Matthew 16:24 -- "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" -- have not been fully understood and obeyed.

Yes, on Easter morning death's dark power was broken and the gate to life eternal opened. All who believe and give their allegiance to Jesus, may share in His victory. A crown of life is promised. Yet, with that promised crown comes a summons to follow Jesus in the path of sacrificial and costly service . . . to take up a cross.

Once we have grasped both -- crown and cross -- how do we stay on task? A wise and godly man from the 6th–7th century by the name of John Climacus has left us some wise advice. It is to daily remember three things:

- The day of my death. One day I will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. At that time all the thoughts of the heart will be laid open before Him. What will be important then is what is important now.
- My incorporation in Christ in Baptism. What's true of my risen Head, my King and my God, is true of me. No condemnation.
- Jesus Christ. He is more than an historical figure. He is alive and my intercessor in heaven. As such, He demands my life, my all.

Good Friday and Easter can no more be separated than breath from life. Out from both comes a call to discipleship, a divine ascent, if you will. Keep climbing regardless the cost.

O GOD, who for our redemption didst give thine only-begotten Son to the death of the Cross, and by his glorious resurrection hast delivered us from the power of our enemy; Grant us so to die daily from sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; through the same Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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