

Good Friday

James Dunn

RCL: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25 or 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42
LM: Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Psalm 31:2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1–19:42

Jesus' crucifixion has continuing meaning for Christ's followers. It was a historical event on an actual hill at a specific point in time. Yet Christians see the cross's abiding relevance. The way to God, as always, involves accepting the redemptive work done on the cross.

The cross has a place in a practical theology for facing problems like world hunger. It is the unifying symbol of a distinctly Christian life. The cross reveals fully God's love for people and God's hatred for sin. We could never have known either of those if Christ had not died on the cross. Cross-bearers do not make lame excuses about their lack of compassion for haunting, hungry persons. The very cross in which Christ's followers claim redemption is the seal of God's love for all people, even those with bloated bellies and bony faces. Those who kneel at the cross have no difficulty mustering and sustaining indignation and anger at the power of corporate evil. They have seen evil at its worst. The very selfishness and greed that killed Christ is at work in the world still killing innocents (Isa 53:3).

The cross-life means that those who follow Jesus will, like him, seek not their own will but God's (John 20:21). It means giving of self and privilege. It means changing society by love and self-denial, putting others first surrendering self with redemptive cross's meaning for contemporary life has narrowed, distorted, and perverted by only as the symbol of personal salvation. makes us care about one another and ends 2:16). The cross is central in a Christian It involves returning good for evil, the strong serving the weak, the privileged working out problems with the underprivileged, the just taking upon themselves the sins of the unjust.



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The New Testament doctrine of the resurrection has something to do with a theology for facing world hunger. The Christian belief that Jesus Christ actually did rise from the grave and literally conquer death is a source of real hope. This belief is far more than simply a personal promise of immortality. For believers, there is a different look toward the future than that of those who do not have the promise of the resurrection.

God is in history and is not through with humankind. God is still in control. Our efforts for positive change are never wasted. So when we passively resign ourselves to the evils of the day,

we are sinful. The one who knows how to do good and does not do it is guilty of real sin (Jas 4:17).

It's hard to muster sufficient motivation to make the needed changes for the world to avoid starvation and ecological calamity. But Christians have a responsibility for the future. In a chapter entitled "What Has Posterity Ever Done for Me?" Robert L. Heilbroner puts it well:

Will Mankind survive? Who knows? The question I want to put is more searching: Who cares? It is clear that most of us today do not care—or at least do not care enough. How many of us would be willing to give up some minor convenience—say, the use of aerosols—in the hope that this might extend the life of man on earth by a hundred years? Suppose we also know with a high degree of certainty that humankind could not survive a thousand years unless we gave up our wasteful diet of meat, abandoned all pleasure driving, cut back on every use of energy that was not essential. Would we care enough for posterity to pay the price of its survival? . . . Even a century far exceeds our powers of empathetic imagination.¹

Believers in Jesus Christ have the quality of hope for the future that permits—no, demands—that they work to identify with those yet unborn. Christians have a theology of hope. God is not trapped in history, a thing of the past, or up there somewhere out of touch with reality. Neither is the living God simply within us, confined by our apathy.

God is, rather, leading us, going on before us as with the children of Israel in the Exodus, as with Jesus in facing death. God is in and behind and under and above all the events of the week ahead, the years ahead, waiting for us to catch up (Psalm 22). A genuinely Christian eschatology is not so concerned with signs of the end times as with having the blessed hope in Jesus Christ. Precisely that ingredient, hope, is the one thing most necessary in tackling world hunger.

Children's Time [LH]

It's hard on a day when we come to grips with our Savior's death to talk to children honestly about things that may be on their minds. Many Good Friday services probably don't include a children's time, because the laughter and good spirits that often accompany these moments in worship are not the aura we want on Good Friday. But if there are moments with children, remind them of Heilbroner's point that it matters for us, in every time of life, to care about our children and their futures. Even on the cross, Jesus spoke to those he loved gathered around him about what they would do and how they would care for each other after he was gone (John 19:25-27). Even on days like this, we remember the needs of hungry people.

Musical Suggestions [LH] Christ Is the Truth, the Way—BP 179 I Bind My Heart—GC 668 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross—UMH 298 O God, My God—NCH 515

1. Robert L. Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975) 169.