

# God Plants Blessings in Cracked Pots

An Easter meditation based on Mark 16:1-8 and Isaiah 25:6-9

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I had a disturbing dream earlier this week. On Tuesday night, after Darrell and I had set up the sanctuary for the Maundy Thursday Communion Service, I dreamt that when I got here on Thursday someone in the congregation had not only rearranged the entire sanctuary, but had removed the cross! I immediately called one of the matriarchs of the Church to enquire about the missing cross, and she informed me that she had taken it down because she didn't like it! I was frantic to reclaim it, and for the rest of the dream I rummaged through piles and piles of lumber, in the church, in the church yard, and in several other places I didn't recognize, trying to find the cross, but to no avail!

I'm not prepared to venture a guess as to the meaning of the dream, but I found it disturbing -- as I would find it disturbing if we removed the cross from our Easter celebrations! Not all Christians agree, however. In fact, an evangelism campaign, recently developed to attract people to church during the season of Easter, suggests that the cross be removed from all Easter celebrations! A survey has revealed that the cross is one of those symbols that a new generation of church goers considers too "churchy," and one pastor interviewed for the campaign gave his wholehearted endorsement, saying, "We are going to attempt to concentrate on the resurrection, ...not the death of Jesus." (Church's Advertising Network)

## Don't Remove the Cross

It seems to me that it's difficult to have a resurrection without a death! And one of the things I try to impress upon the students in my Baptism Preparation Class, when we look at our understanding of Jesus, is to keep in balance Jesus' life, Jesus' death, and Jesus' resurrection. Emphasize any one of those at the expense of the others, and you have a distorted gospel. Focussing on Jesus' life with little regard to his death and resurrection, and you have a noble example, but no nobler than many other noble examples. Focussing on Jesus' death with little regard to his life or resurrection, and you may have a great example of human suffering, and perhaps a wondrously mathematical or legal doctrine of the atonement, but a conveniently irrelevant life, and a tacked-on resurrection. Focussing on the resurrection with little regard to Jesus' life and death, and you have a nice story of new life -- but one not unlike pagan rituals of spring, and just as superficial.

The Christian gospel becomes a skewed gospel if crucifixion is separated from resurrection. The road to Easter's empty tomb will forever pass by the Good Friday cross, much as the road to the cross will forever pass through Jesus' life. The Risen Christ is none other than the Crucified Christ. Easter with-out a cross is a crock! A hoax!

## The Cross Reminds Us of a Good Friday World

One good reason to keep the cross central in Easter is to remind us of the rugged reality of Good Friday. There was nothing good about that first Good Friday. Those who

intended ill will won the day! Malevolence appeared stronger than benevolence! Love and Justice were hung out to dry! The cross symbolizes Jesus' suffering, which in one short week included being harassed by the religious authorities; betrayed by one of his own disciples; rejected by his own people; condemned, mocked, beaten and spat upon. And though sleepless to the point of exhaustion his cruel captors required Jesus to carry the instrument of his own death! The older versions of the Apostles' Creed have it right when they say that Jesus "descended into hell".

Many people, including many of us, know all about Good Friday. We know about pain, about suffering, about rejection, loneliness, abandonment and death -- certainly the death of loved ones. We come face to face with Good Friday every day, our media full of stories of death and desolation, whether it's children shooting children; young people stabbing young people; or newspapers, like the Ottawa Citizen, wallowing in every little detail of destruction and devastation.

Few of us are strangers to illness, and terminal illness has touched each one of our families. Some of us work with people who seem to hate us and wish us the worst. Some of us live with people who seem to wish us the worst. This is, in many respects, a Good Friday world! That's why passages like our reading from Isaiah sound so good! Isaiah's promise that "God will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isaiah 25:8) is good news to us because we have shed tears. Isaiah's promise that God will "swallow up death forever" (25:7) is good news to us because we have felt the cold touch of death. Isaiah's compelling description of the food and fellowship of the messianic banquet -- "a feast of rich food (and) ...well-aged wines" (25:6) -- is also good news to us because we have seen the agony of hunger, and felt the pain of isolation -- of having been cut off from close fellowship.

Truth be told, most of us probably dragged a little of Good Friday with us today. And if you have come here this morning broken in body or spirit, that's okay. Our Easter celebration acknowledges Good Friday; it acknowledges our brokenness. It doesn't flinch at imperfect, incomplete lives. The cross is central in our Easter worship. Remove the cross from Easter and you romanticize the resurrection, for Easter is much more than new spring outfits, fuzzy caterpillars, beautiful butterflies and baby chicks! Though those may be useful metaphors of renewal, they don't even begin to convey the good and stunning Easter news that God has taken hold of creation and will not let go until it is redeemed!

### **The Cross Reminds Us of God's Determined and Redeeming Love**

The cross reminds us of our Good Friday world, but it also reminds us of God's determined and redeeming love, for the knowledge that God, who came into this world to redeem it -- and rejected by this world, continues to love the world -- is amazing news! It's not necessarily what you'd expect! It may have been Mark Twain who said, "If I were God, I would give the world a good swift kick right in the equator!"

God, however, takes the evil that we do; God takes the things that we should not have done, and the things that we didn't do but should have done; God takes the terrible, ugly, cruel things that human beings do to each another and to creation, and says, "You meant this for evil, but I am going to redeem it, and I will give it back to you as something good." (Genesis 50:20, paraphrased) God is determined to redeem our lives, no matter how much we mess them up, and often God will not stop pursuing us until redemption's

work is done. God never gives up on us. We may give up on some people, and we may give up on ourselves, but God never gives up on us.

The cross reminds us that there is still hope, even in the face of death, even in the face of that final and worst enemy. The cross reminds us that there is the possibility of resurrection in all the little crucifixions we experience daily, be those connected with our families, our marriages, our friendships, our careers, or whatever. Though tragedy or ill health or growing old may diminish our zest for living, God is not finished with us yet.

During the season of Lent two pots have graced our communion table, one of them whole, the other badly cracked and broken. Lent, if we took it seriously, brought us face to face with our own brokenness. As the Bible tells us, that "we have this treasure in clay jars" (2 Corinthians 4:7) -- vessels that are subject to breakage. God may not always remove our brokenness, our clay-ness, our earthen-ness, our cross, but God can use us in spite of our imperfections. In God's great economy, nothing goes to waste. Though we're all "cracked pots" of a sort, it is into such pots that God pours His grace and mercy

## **Conclusion**

There's a story about a water bearer in a distant country who had two large pots. Each pot hung on the end of a pole which he carried across his back when he went to fetch water. One of the pots was perfect -- flawless -- but the other pot had a crack in it. The perfect pot always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house; the cracked pot, unfortunately, always arrived at the house half-full!

For two years the water bearer carried water in this way, consistently delivering one and a half pots of water to his master's house. The perfect pot, of course, was proud of its accomplishments, but as time went on the cracked pot grew ashamed of its imperfection and felt badly about accomplishing only half of what it was meant to accomplish. After two years it felt like a failure, and one day it said to the water bearer, "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the water bearer. "Why are you ashamed?" "These past two years I have delivered only half my load," said the pot, "because the crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to the master's house! Because of my flaws, you have to make extra trips to the stream, and you don't get full value for your efforts."

The water bearer replied, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." And indeed, as they went up the hill, the cracked, imperfect pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful flowers along the path. The pot still felt sad when they got home, however, because it had lost half its load again. The water bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, and not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flowers on your side of the path, and every day, on the way back from the stream, you watered them. For two years, I've been able to take those beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. You may be imperfect, but through your flaw beauty has graced our master's house."

No flaw, no imperfection, no sin can separate us from the redeeming love of God.  
Alleluia!

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All quotations of Scripture, unless otherwise noted, are from the New Revised Standard Version.