

# The Way of Tears

Lent 1 2004

February 29, 2004

Theology of glory – arms raised in victory  
Theology of the cross – sign of the cross

Jesus walks beside those who are rejected.  
It's a funny place to be, isn't it?  
You would think that Jesus would rather be  
With the cool kids, the in-crowd, the popular bunch.  
You would think that Jesus would rather  
Wear the best jeans and the most expensive running shoes  
And eat pizza every day for lunch instead of peanut butter sandwiches.  
You would think Jesus would rather drive  
a Mercedes-Benz than an old car that might not make it  
from here to Waterdown.  
But Jesus walks beside those who are rejected,  
Un-cool, teased or bullied because they are different  
Or lonely or because they can't ignore the hurt.  
That's where Jesus walks.  
That's the difference between  
A theology of glory  
And a theology of the cross.  
One way is about success and popularity and pride.  
The other way is about being with those who suffer.

Franklin P Shuckles was rejected.  
He wore glasses and had skinny legs –  
Like lots of people do, really!  
Nothing to get excited about.  
But just enough for some kids to notice, point out,  
laugh about.  
And when a kid like Franklin gets that kind of attention  
It means other kids might feel cool and powerful.  
Somehow, they might feel okay about themselves  
Because they can make fun of someone else.  
It's pretty sad, isn't it?

It happens not just to kids.  
Sometimes teenagers know what it's like to be rejected by  
other teens.

Some teens say, "Let's get drunk. I know where to get booze."  
What if you don't want to do that –  
Maybe you think it's not safe,  
Or you know your parents would worry about you,  
Or you just don't want to?  
And so you say that, only to hear the kids  
Call you names and put you down  
And threaten to hurt you if you tell anyone what they are doing.  
You think, "Maybe these kids will never invite me to do things with them again.  
Maybe they will tease me at school.  
Maybe they will pick fights with me."  
It's not always easy to make choices when you are afraid of being rejected.

But rejection happens not only to kids and teens.  
It happens to lots of adults too.  
Some adults lose their jobs, even though they have worked hard  
For many years.  
Even though you know your work was good,  
Even though you know you did your best,  
It feels like rejection when you no longer have a job to go to everyday.  
Some adults lose their marriages,  
Even though they have loved their husband or wife,  
Even though they have tried to make their homes happy.  
But even adults who know they have done all they could in their marriages  
Still can feel rejected when their partner moves away.

Sometimes even the Bible makes it sound like  
The people who are good-looking and smart and rich  
and married with a nice family  
are the people that God loves best.  
And lots of studies today tell us that  
good looking people fare better in this world.  
Studies show that people with winning personalities  
are received better in this world.  
Studies show that people seen as fitting the right mould ...  
be it class or race or whatever ... have an easier time of it.  
Studies show that all these people are perceived by others as being "blessed."  
This is a theology of glory.

I'd like us to look at the person who is described in our bible reading today.  
This person is not beautiful, not popular, not admired.  
And yet, this person was chosen by God.  
That is why our text today begins with words of astonishment,  
words of utter disbelief.

*"Who has believed what we have heard?"*

*And to **whom** has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"*

What is about to be described is something that is shocking.  
The prophet is saying, "Can you believe this?  
It is the opposite of what you think."

The text describes a man who is a "*man of suffering,*"  
one "*acquainted with infirmity.*"  
*"He had no form or majesty  
that we should look at him,  
nothing in his appearance  
that we should desire him.  
He was despised and rejected by others ...  
one from whom others hide their faces ...  
one held of no account ....  
**We accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.**"*

There you have it.  
*We accounted him stricken,  
struck down by God, and afflicted.*

No beauty ... no blessing.  
No blessing ... no account.  
That's what a theology of glory would say.

The lack of beauty and blessing in the life of the man  
described in Isaiah 53 is unrelenting.  
It began when he was born  
continued when he grew up like a root out of dry ground,  
continued as he lived cut off from the land of the living  
and pursued him even past his death when his grave was made with the wicked.  
His vile condition was proof that he was afflicted by God  
and this was the source of his being rejected by people.  
This is why people turned their faces away so they wouldn't have to look at him.  
This is why they held him in contempt.

The big surprise is that this man,  
this man with no beauty and no blessing  
is in fact the agent of redemption and healing for others.

It is **this** idea that runs counter to expectation.

*We accounted him stricken, struck down by God,  
and afflicted  
yet  
he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases.  
He was wounded for our transgressions,*

*crushed for our iniquities ...  
By his bruises we are healed.*

What we have here is the opposite of a 'theology of glory.'  
What we have is a 'theology of the cross.'

The theology of the cross is the way that Jesus shows us.  
Jesus shows us that God cares even more  
For the kids and teens and adults  
Who are teased or tormented or rejected  
Than God does for those who seem to have it all together.  
Even more than that,  
God can turn things right upside down  
And use the people who are teased or tormented or rejected  
To help the ones who seem to be so powerful.  
Because if power comes from putting others down,  
If power comes from being a bully,  
If power comes from being rich while others go hungry,  
Then that is power that hurts.  
It's not the kind of power that God uses.  
God uses the power of love.  
Love doesn't always look like it wins.  
Sometimes love seems to lose.  
But that is the way that God works in our world.  
Jesus showed us that when he spent a lot of his time  
With people who weren't beautiful or popular or healthy or rich.  
Jesus showed us that when he loved unpopular people  
And when he went to the cross, loving even his enemies.

God can use people who seem to be rejected  
To help make all people more loving.  
To help us all see the ways in which we reject one another  
Instead of seeing how we are all alike – all human beings with feelings,  
In the eyes of God.  
That is the power of the theology of the cross.  
That is the road we walk this lent –  
The road of tears,  
The way of love.

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