

REFLECTION: 'God stands with the suffering'

John 19: 13 – 42 Good Friday. Rev Ian Brown

No one there that day, including the Romans who did the deed, would ever have agreed to call it "Good Friday." It was a terrible day by any standard. Nobody thought it good! It was a day of infamy. That day represents humanity at its worst, but it also shows God at God's best for us. 'Good Friday' is a theological statement about the upending of the concept of destiny.

Jesus' vision put him on a collision course with the authorities. His vision was shared with many Jews of the time; that God's new way would restore justice and freedom to the people. But his form of revolution was to teach and live out an experience and theology of God as love.

Good Friday would not be a good experience for Jesus or those with him. Not just another day to the family and followers of Jesus, it was the most terrible day. Not only did they lose a dear and special friend, their faith and hope was lost as well.

In some ways it was just another horrible day, like other horrible days, for people all over our suffering and broken world. It was one man's death. The ones there were too grieved and upset to remember he had said to them that it was "good" he was leaving, to their advantage even. He promised that he would be more substantially with them in his absence than when he was there. They didn't understand this when he said it and if it crossed their troubled minds on that Friday, it was no comfort.

"Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" It's a good question for us to

ponder. What do we believe when we come to such a day as this?

Some say Isaiah was prescient, given foresight by God. Some say the gospels wrote Isaiah's details into Jesus' story. Some say Jesus learnt the character of his mission in the lines of Isaiah. Some will say yes to all these and some shake their heads and won't believe anything.

"he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

"Wounded for our transgressions", said Isaiah, but Jesus was killed. Both texts have good arising out of suffering and brutality.

Life and death issues are the most divisive, the most profound and difficult to deal with of all the problems we face. It wasn't a new problem in Jesus' day and we still struggle with it. Symbols that remind us of these hard problems are often seen as offensive in themselves, but the cross is so familiar that it has lost its symbolic shock.

The cross, sign of brutal Roman power, is also our sign of Jesus' powerlessness. And within the symbol lurks something subversive. The cross is a confronting reminder that Jesus defeated death by entering into it. Jesus subverts brutal worldly power by submitting to it. The cross that we meet around reminds us that God stands with those who are victims of brutality. And through the cross our ultimate destiny is changed.

The very centre of our faith is this story of suffering, death and resurrection. We have to face the reality in front of us. There can be no healing of our pains until suffering and death have been faced.

Here is the truth that God stands alongside the suffering. We are invited here to face our pains before God. Invited to stand alongside others in their times of need, to put our little faith into action - for ourselves and for others. When faced with Isaiah's question of 'what do I believe?' this is the direction I look for answers; to this cross shaped sign of involvement and changed destiny.

The cross says to us reality is confronted; then there is hope for forgiveness and renewal that becomes for us the hope of resurrection, of beginning again. Amen!