



Drawing Near Will Change You..

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

As part of their acts of devotion, early Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem retraced the route of Jesus as he carried his cross to his death. Early pilgrimages varied considerably with different starting places and different routes. By the sixteenth century, the route this pilgrimage took through Jerusalem came to be called the *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of Sorrow. Along the Way, certain points on the journey were associated with specific events recounted (or implied) in the Gospel accounts.

The journey of our Faith as modern Christians is not only a journey through history that can be marked by events in the past. It is also a journey of our own personal commitment to God, of our own growth as a community of Faith and as individuals maturing from self-centered children into faithful servants. It is a journey that we need to remember just as deeply and profoundly as we remember the journey of God's people across 3,000 years of human history, or the journey of Jesus from Pilate's Hall to Golgotha.

Most Protestants, especially in the West, are used to thinking of the crucifixion of Jesus as an event happening at a certain time and place. Of course, the crucifixion was such an event. But it is more than that. It is a truth about God and how he works in the world with human beings. It is that truth about God revealed in Jesus and his actions that provides us with an important touchstone for our own journey.

In our eagerness to celebrate Easter and the resurrection, Protestants often rush too quickly through Holy Week, the week between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday. Too much of the week, especially as it draws to an end in Good Friday and Holy Saturday is much too messy for Christians accustomed to the language of triumph and praise to give much attention. In doing so, we miss the tremendous significance of the Cross as something more than a symbol of the crucifixion and death of Jesus as prologue to the resurrection, or as a symbol of a theological doctrine of the atonement. As Jesus himself taught his disciples on more than one occasion, the Cross symbolizes something far more profound than suffering and death, and perhaps even more significant than theologies of the atonement.

The journey that Jesus makes to the cross is not easy. Most such journeys of faithfulness and servanthood are fraught with great risk. There is suffering, and the death is real. It is not the end of the story. But it is part of the journey. If we are to remember the cross honestly, we must remember the entire journey, honestly. There will be a Sunday morning, and we cannot forget that part of the story. But not yet. The journey of the Cross winds through Holy Week, from the singing crowds on Sunday to the darkness of Good Friday. Sunday will come. But not without the journey through Good Friday and the Cross. The journey from Sunday will have little meaning without the journey through Good Friday.

If we follow Jesus on his journey, we begin to understand that in Jesus' sufferings we see our own journey mirrored in his. Oh, we are not likely heading to such a cruel and humiliating death. But in those somber hours of our own "dark night" we experience similar emotions of helplessness and sometimes hopelessness. To face such darkness we need some glimmer of light, some hint of hope beyond endings, some model of perseverance that comes from a faith that does not know the outcome yet is willing to trust God with it.

In Jesus' journey to the Cross on Good Friday, we see faithfulness in the midst of Passion (from the Greek word for "suffering"), perseverance in the midst of endings, and courage in the midst of hopelessness. As we trace Jesus' journey we take up our own cross, the symbol of our own passion, and bear the imprint of his cross in our own. But in accompanying Jesus on the *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of Sorrow, we also gain courage from his commitment to the Father in that journey, from his courage to face what comes, and finally from the realization of the truth that with God endings become the building blocks of new beginnings.

-Excerpts from Dennis Bratcher's The Cross As A Journey

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