

**Year B, Trinity 14, Proper 20, HC  
17.09.06**

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**  
**James 3:1-12**  
**Mark 8:27-38**

The two themes that jump out at me from today's gospel are first, who is Jesus, and second, the inevitability of suffering.

Who was Jesus?

Who did he think he was?

Is there any evidence that he existed?

Are Gospel accounts reliable?

What happened to the Trinity at the crucifixion? Was there a partial amputation?

Did, and does, God suffer?

I'm not going to explore all these in an evening sermon, so I start with the question that Jesus addresses to each one of us.

**But who do you say that I am?**

I suspect there are as many images of Jesus as there are readers of Scripture.

- spiritual teacher
- charismatic healer
- mythical hero
- Hellenistic philosopher
- political revolutionary
- wisdom sage
- social prophet
- apocalyptic prophet
- divine Saviour
- craftsman
- bon viveur
- provoker
- disturber
- unpredictable orator
- anti-hero who overturned values

**But hang on.** God is love. Jesus is God. So Jesus is Love and Love is Jesus.

So then, all those descriptions of Jesus can be used about love.

Provocative, disturbing, teaching, healing, subversive, wisdom, prophet,

And this could then take us into the 13th Chapter of 1 Corinthians

Love in action.

Charis not cupidity

Outgoing love in which we try to discover the other person. agape

And suffering love  
Suffering is part of Jesus  
We neither try to pretend that it does not happen  
Jesus sticks to his guns though he knows what will happen  
He does not resist  
He tolerates what happens to him  
Human suffering on the cross

Theologians argue about what it means for God to suffer – indeed whether God suffers. But God can surely *perceive* our suffering, grieve for us and be angry for us. This is God suffering, what Origen called His passion of love for fallen humankind.' We hear talk of God's anger – but this is anger with suffering, not with us. We hear talk of God's judgement, but this is rather discernment and decision making.

Suffering – for others. This is PASSION.  
Love again.

Jesus was cross with Peter. Do not minimise suffering. Do not pretend that it can be avoided. Don't tell untruths.

Part of the human condition is to learn how to be ministered to. We spend too much time acting and serving others, but we also serve by being served. Passivity, Passion, Suffering, as in suffer the little children – allow the little children.

So we need to learn to experience the world, as well as act in it.

Resurrection follows passion and suffering for Jesus, as it will for us.

Jesus' death is a transformation *in* God. Crucifixion is followed by resurrection, new life.

If you like cosmology then it might be like the implosion of a star into the black hole followed by rebirth into the other universe. So, Jesus Christ drawn by the gravitational pull of Golgotha, only to emerge in an instant resurrected in glory. And again and again as after each fall, each error, each sin, we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves down, and start all over again.

God became man and suffered all men's woes. We didn't ask him to. **That is love.** Through the incarnation, life and crucifixion of Jesus, God enters into all human experience: *God enters man.* **That is love.** Through the resurrection man is reborn – a constant cycle of death followed by resurrection: eternal regeneration, eternal Eucharist, re-incarnation. *Man enters God.* **That is love.** We fall short, repent and are forgiven – crucifixion immediately followed by resurrection. Without repentance there is no resurrection, merely an increasing dis-ease precipitating ill-health.

Jesus tells each one of us to take up our cross.

not so much going to find a cause then taking it up, but living in the present – what you have with you now. Living in the present.

I've spent much of my life trying to change things  
Pattern of my life  
Don't regret what happened easily  
And look at the riches that have come my way  
I must try to be more grateful.

I don't see suffering as meaning tolerating patiently and sitting back.  
Suffering surely calls for action

Jesus in everyone  
Disadvantaged people are prophets in – people who reveal our values, make us uncomfortable.

So Jesus is Love, and let us never think we are too sinful or unprepared to meet him.

Jesus is love and love takes many forms so Jesus takes many forms. It guides but does not insist. It stands alongside. It surprises. It is sometimes angry – hatred of wrongdoing. It is not always 'nice' and it is never bland or anodyne. This sounds like the hymn to love in 1 Corinthians. That is what Jesus is like. And we can see him if we try in every situation and every person. Jesus and love are often unseen until they have gone – like the road to Emmaus.

Schweitzer next

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who did not know who he was. He says the same words, 'Follow me!', and sets us to those tasks which he must fulfil in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether wise or unwise, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering that they may experience in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.