ANDREASCOURSE 8



Week 8: ´Why suffering and the cross?´
The meaning of the suffering of Jesus and his victory.

Who understands the cross?
In the (Christian) world the cross has become a familiar symbol: on church towers, on necklaces, in hospital rooms, and sometimes on cars or taxis.
But no one seems to remember that it is one of the most cruel methods of execution used by the Romans. At the time of the birth of Jesus and during his ministry in Israel there were crosses everywhere along the roads and on intersections, on which the condemned perished in the hot sun, a repulsive spectacle, specifically intended to intimidate the population
Jesus also dies this cruel death, as a criminal, a condemned man, in the prime of his life, at 33 years of age.
So it's not that Jesus fell victim to a misunderstanding or a couple of terrorists. There was a trial beforehand in which he was declared guilty. First by Jewish religious leaders, then by the Roman government, by Pontius Pilate.
Usually the judgement was attached to the top of the cross. Above Jesus' head hung the simple words: Jesus Christ, King of the Jews. So his condemnation was that he crowned himself king of the Jews. His own people had accused him of that and Pilate took it for granted: he literally washed his hands in innocence, but at the same time he handed Jesus over to be crucified. So it was a show trial.
Aside from that, for a Jew it was horrifying- a curse- to hang on a tree.
(Deut.21: 23; Gal.3: 13)

Why Jesus accepted the cross.

It's unimaginable what that meant for Jesus: voluntarily relinquishing all power, to face this suffering, and to go into it voluntarily. He knew the glory of the Father. He knew the immense joy with God. He was the Son of the Father. That is precisely why the suffering on earth was very hard. He made his choice for the people who wanted him dead.
Jesus didn't give up holding on to mankind. That was why He came.
The Bible says that in the cross Jesus took the judgement. That He suffered, innocent of the guilt of people who rejected Him or abandoned Him. By that surrender He overcame the powers of guilt and death. He didn't answer violence with violence (the prevailing way on earth), but He disarmed evil by complete surrender, *absolute love*.

What does the cross show you?

The cross has transforming power, it shows us two things:
1. God's condemnation of evil. Jesus received bitter beatings because He carried evil, the sin of the World. That's why He is named the Lamb of God. The 'God-

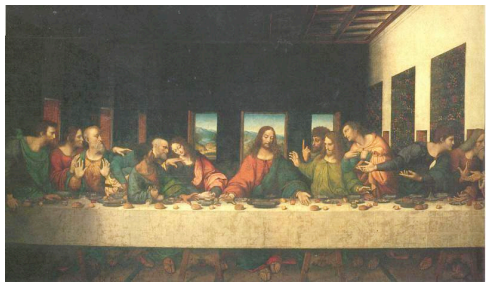
given lamb' reminded every Jew of the night in which they were rescued from the slavery in Egypt. The blood of a lamb on their doorpost protected them against the angel of wrath and paved the way to freedom.
2.God's infinite love. He took the condemnation, suffered for us to free the path to real peace, to happiness (that was lost since humankind wanted to be independent from God, as we have seen in Genesis 3). Jesus brought a new access to God's father heart, to God's peace, for us individually, for the community, and for the world.

Jesus triumphs over death!

The confirmation of that is given in the resurrection from death. Luke and the other evangelists have described this unique and inconceivable event very carefully. Jesus could have been a religious fanatic, a psychopath, a charlatan with nice ideas, or at it's best a do-gooder, a great man, a great revolutionary, a very wise teacher like Buddha, Gandhi etc., if He wasn't resurrected from death. But the resurrection, which was irrefutable for the first Christians, proves He is a completely different person: The Son of God, who came to deprive the Opponent of his power and to guide you and me on the path of the new life.
The message of the Evangelists is: He is alive, and He longs for us to be alive, in the original intention, as it was meant to be!

Five questions you can ask yourself when you read the text for this week:

→ 1. What does this text tell you about people?
→ 2. What does this text tell you about Jesus (his character, his performance ?
→ 3. Does this passage (implicitly) explain anything about the work of God or about the Holy Spirit??
→ 4. Which verses do you experience as difficult and why? Which verse would you like to stay with you?
→ 5. How does this passage move you?



Scripture passages for the next six days.

Day 1: Luke 22:14-23. *The Last Supper.*

- Ask God for rest, new vision.
- Read and reread, note your views, questions.
- Question: *Why, do you think, did Jesus look forward so much to having this meal with his disciples?*
- End in prayer: maybe ask for God's help so you can have 'a table' where you can find peace and the peace of Christ.

Day 2: Luke 22:39-46. *The bitter cup.*

- Try to really make time to concentrate, and pray…
- Read and reread. This is one of the most intense and intimate parts of Jesus' life on earth.

- Question: Why would Jesus say to his disciples*: ´Pray that you may not enter into temptation'?* Where do you encounter this ordeal or this temptation?
- End in prayer. Ask for protection and persistence in times of tribulation.

Day 3: Luke 22:47-62. *Jesus abandoned by all.*

- Ask God for rest, new vision.
- (Re)read, think, write...
- Question: It seems as if a dark power takes control over people. Even one of the most loyal disciples, Peter, renounces Jesus. How could all this happen? Is there an explanation for what is happening here?
  What would you have done if you had been present?
- Maybe you want to reflect about how you think about Jesus, and try to articulate it in a prayer.

Day 4: Luke 23:33-43. *´If you are the King of the Jews save yourself..´*

- Present to God that which bothers you, troubles you.
- Put question marks and exclamation marks in what you're reading..
- Question: What would be your position, if you ended up in this dark place? What would go through your mind? Why would this all be happening?
- End in prayer. Maybe it's good to think about the love that Jesus shows, even in the bitterest suffering, and that he looks at you with a loving glance.



Day 5: Luke 24:1-12 *The First witnesses of the resurrection.*

- Thank God for being able to come out of the bustle into His Presence.
- Read…
- Question: The disciples of Jesus were very perplexed, even shocked by what they heard and saw. Angels and an empty tomb. It hardly touches them, they can hardly believe. Very conceivable! *How does Luke try to convince his readers that what seems impossible from a human point of view, really has happened?*
- In your final prayer you can ask if you may meet Jesus the Living one.

Day 6: Phil.2:5-13 *Descending into greatness!*

- Begin with prayer. Bring to God what kept you occupied today.
- Question: In Philippians 2, Paul gives a summary of the meaning of the humiliation and exaltation. What are the effects for our lives?
- End in prayer. Pray for joy, and for the faith that Jesus is now Lord, and works in us by his Holy Spirit to make us the people God intended.