

In The name of The Father, and of The Son, and of
The Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Publicity of the Crucified

'This inscription was read by many Jews, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city, and the inscription was in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.' John 19:20 (NEB)

The inscription that Pilate wrote read 'Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews' and was fastened to the cross. It was written in three of the chief languages of the civilized world because the many passers-by who would read it had come from many different lands near and far. Crucifixion at any time was one of the most public forms of death ever devised by the depravity of the human mind. The condemned person didn't die in the relative privacy of the execution chamber. He was exposed in the open air to a lingering death in the full gaze of all the people who would come out of the city for the free horror show. At the time of the Passover these crowds would be not only unusually large but would include pilgrims from most of the nations of the known world. That was why the inscription over the cross was written in three languages.

When Jesus died he was where people were. The same could be said of his whole ministry-- of his whole life. From the very beginning Jesus was where people were. He was born in the parking lot of an inn. The stable of an inn was where travellers parked their donkeys. There are few places that are more public than a parking lot, whether we are talking about the ancient or the modern version. At the age of twelve he made the journey to Jerusalem with Mary, Joseph and so many other people that his mother didn't miss him for a whole day after they had started home. She thought he was with his cousins. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan he was baptized along with a multitude of men and women who had come from all over Judea and Galilee to hear John the Baptist.

Throughout his ministry Jesus was where people were, in the crowded

house in Capernaum, among the crowds in the street, in the market-place, on the mountain side, by the sea-shore, in the synagogue, in the temple, preaching, teaching, comforting, casting out demons, healing, bearing the burdens of others. True, he had periods of solitude in fellowship with his Father alone, but he never sought solitude for its own sake, but only with a view to receiving fresh supplies of strength to overcome temptation and to serve his neighbors. He literally spent all his energy on people, he emptied himself in service to the point of exhaustion, so that he could fall asleep instantly on lying down in a boat and go on sleeping even in a violent storm at sea.

2. And when he died on the cross he was surrounded by people. There were the Jews who watched and read with protest the inscription; there were the chief-priests; there were the ^{Roman} soldiers who actually carried out the dirty work, simply following orders; there were his mother, his mother's sister, and Mary of Magdala; there was the apostle John; and there were the two criminals crucified with him, one on either side. As in his life, so also in his death, he was surrounded by people. All sorts of people. Good people. Rough and secular people. Religious people. Criminals. Politicians. ⁽³⁾ why?

Because he loved them with a universal, all-embracing love. Pilate unwittingly gave expression to that universal and all-embracingness love of Jesus when he ordered the superscription of the accusation of Messiahship be written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. ⁽⁴⁾ Jesus loved his own people. He loved his disciples. His love for his mother found utterance on the cross. He loved his own nation; he wept over Jerusalem. As Dean Inge pointed out, some of the rare tears that are recorded as falling from the eyes of Jesus were tears of patriotism. ⁽⁵⁾ But the ocean of his love swept over the boundaries of family or nation. He loved all people, good and bad. He will sprinkle many nations ... what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

In the death-throes of his agony he remembered in love not only Mary and John but his enemies: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. The way he died moved not only his own loved ones, but even the pagan centurion standing by. The power of this love not only was, but is, the most dynamic force in the world. There are millions of many different races, colors, and languages who confess with Isaac Watts: 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all'.

But this love for all people which we see in Jesus on the cross is none other than the love that the Holy God has for the world. The love that Jesus felt is not greater than God's love. It is not, as I use to think, that it is God the Father who is holy and just and who hates sin and must punish it. And that it is Jesus who loves sinners and places himself, like some third innocent party, in between God's wrath and our sin. No! Jesus is no less holy and just than the Father and he hates sin no less. And God the father is no less loving than the Jesus we see dying on the cross. They are one and the same God.

What a revelation this has caused in my thinking. There was very little good news in the religion of my youth. I grew up believing that God's saving love was very narrow. I was raised in a church that taught that the world as a whole is going to hell and that only a few individuals will be saved. Most will go to hell because they never even heard of Jesus. Roman Catholics will go to hell because they don't trust in Christ alone as Savior (or so I was taught). Lutherans will be damned because they believe in baptismal regeneration. Episcopalians will go to hell because they are a bunch of ritualists. The main line denominations will go to hell because they are all a bunch of liberals who deny the deity of Christ and the value of his atoning death. When it came right down to it it was just our little sub-culture that was going to be the object of God's saving love. If you

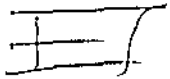
Isaiah prophesied, "he shall justify many" "welcome the sin of many"

didn't speak our language, you were probably lost.

But as I have prayed and read the scriptures and come in greater contact with Roman Catholics, episcopalians, lutherans and other Christians I am convinced more than ever that

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.



I am convinced by the cross of Christ that God has chosen to save the whole world, even though some will be lost. The world is like a tree. God is going to save the tree even though there will be some branches broken

off. I am convinced on the basis of scripture alone that those who finally make it home to the Father will fulfil the infallible promises of God that his chosen people will be vaster than the sand on the seashore or the stars of heaven. I am convinced of this above all because of the cross of Christ. It is the one who cried out on the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do' who from all eternity has chosen a people to be his very own and has come to die for them and through his Spirit enables them to believe and obey him and so be saved. So the superscription that Pilate wrote on the cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek speaks to me of the universality of the love of God for the world.

Missions



But, Jesus surrounded himself with people in life and in death, not only because he loves the whole human race in general, but also because he loves people individually. It is a feature of Calvinism, which I believe to be a feature of true biblical Christianity, that Jesus died, not for

humankind in general, but for particular men and women and children. It was the Old Testament prophets who first proclaimed that it was not the nation of Israel as a nation that inherited the blessings of the covenant, but particular individuals of any and every nation who through the experience of faith, repentance, and forgiveness were made members of the covenant, given the sign and seal of the covenant, and made heirs of God's promises.

The New Testament is all the more clear. Not only did God so love the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life. But Jesus commanded his disciples to preach the good news to every creature, that is, to definite particular people.

For Paul, also, the mystery of the cross of Christ was not only that 'he died for all' and that 'he loved the church and gave himself for it' but that 'he loved me and gave himself for me', a particular individual. What transforms an individual is not the belief that God loved the world in general or that Christ died for sinners as a whole, but that Christ died for me.

'Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?'

So the inscription on the cross in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek speaks to me of the love that Jesus has for individuals in every tribe and nation and tongue.

Isn't it interesting that the first one to publicize the crucified Jesus as King was the pagan governor Pilate? Pilate publicize the Lordship of Christ in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. He published so that all people could read and understand who Jesus was and is. Of course Pilate didn't believe

his own advertisement. But Pilate's resourcefulness in advertising ought not to be allowed to surpass that of the followers of Jesus. Advertising pays, as the world of business knows. It was Jesus himself who told his disciples that they had much to learn from the wise of the world. Are Christians in the Reformed tradition as creative and imaginative in advertising their crucified and risen Lord as men and women of business are in advertising their goods or the enthusiasts of other movements their creeds? There is nothing wrong with propoganda, so long as it is propoganda of the right sort. There is too much of the wrong sort in the world today and not enough of the right sort. It is the bounden duty of every Christian to advertise Christ in ways that the world might understand. So often we talk of Christ in such religious jargon than the average Greek or Roman in our midst simply doesn't have the slightest idea what we are talking about. We preach evangelistic sermons using words that the average secular man or woman simply is unfamiliar with and we expect everyone to learn to speak our own religious language.

Pilate publicized the crucified in Hebrew. That was the language of religion and morality. But Pilate wasn't interested in reaching only religious people. He publicized the crucified in Greek. That was the language of art, science, philosophy and the market-place. Thank God for contemporary Christian writers and artists such as Grahame Greene, C.S. Lewis, Flannery O'Connor and Fred Buechner who publicize the crucified in the language of the market-place which the average sophisticated and secular man or woman might understand. Have you ever read them? Read them and learn the language which so many secular people speak. And he publicized in Latin. That was the language of engineering, politics, law and order. Thank God for Christian sociologists, politicians and lawyers who seek to publicize the crucified and impress the stamp of kingdom of

~~peace and righteousness on a nation and world that is war-crazy and power hungry.~~

Pilate publicized the crucified in Hebrew, Latin and Greek but a day is coming when the same words which he wrote on the cross are going to be sung around the throne, not only in Greek or Latin or Hebrew, but sung by a great multitude of all nations and kindred and people and tongues in the perfected language of heaven--"This is Jesus the King! Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Hail to the King!" Will our voices join theirs, on that great crowning day?

Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.