THE FINAL SHOWDOWN – THE CRUCIFIXION

For Jesus and the disciples (and perhaps even you if you have been here every day), this has been a rollercoaster of emotions. Tension has been building, as the disciples have tried to understand all that Jesus has been teaching them. The tension has also been high in Jerusalem, as the Pharisees have intensified their search for a way to kill off Jesus to maintain their own sense of religion and propriety.

Finally, we find ourselves before the cross. Jesus left the Upper room last night and went out to pray. Since then, he has been arrested, found guilty by the religious leaders in a kangaroo court; taken before Pilate and Herod and finally condemned to death after being flogged within an inch of his life.

Now in the stillness, we see a lifeless body. The crowds have gone, now the spectacle is finished. Only a few remain to mourn the loss of Jesus. Grief overwhelms everybody. Not only have they lost a son, a friend, a brother, but also all the hopes of a Messiah, coming to set them free, seem to be flowing away with the blood disappearing into the earth below.

Yet all of this was predicted in the Old Testament scriptures.

When God sent the last plague on the Egyptians, the death of the firstborn, he commanded the Israelites to sacrifice the Passover lamb and smear its blood over their doorways (Exodus 12:12-13). In this way, the destroyer would pass over the houses of the Israelites, sparing them from death (Exodus 12:23). Likewise, Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of the Passover Lamb, who was sacrificed to cover the sins of the world.

Perhaps the most well-known is found in Isaiah 53.

*“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.* ***4****Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God,  stricken by him, and afflicted.****5****But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.****6****We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

***7****He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”*

These make sense to us now, sitting here some 2000 years after the event. In fact, it is quite easy to treat everything we have witnessed over this week, as just history. But, as we look at Jesus hanging on the cross, we need to remember that he has died in our place, so that we can be set free from God’s eternal punishment.

The final word should go to John chapter 3:

*“As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,**so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

*“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.**God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.*

*“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son.”*

If you have any questions or would like to know more, please do contact our parish office.