

God Identifies with our Broken Humanity, Through the Cross

Texts: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hebrews 10:16-25 (Series A, Good Friday) Ps. 22

John 18:1-19:42

Prayer

"And what did you hear, my blue-eyed son? And what did you hear, my darling young one? ...Heard the roar of a wave that could drown the whole world ...Heard ten thousand whisperin' and nobody listenin' Heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin' Heard the song of a poet who died in the gutter. Heard the sound of a clown who cried in the alley ... And it's a hard rain's a-gonna fall."

I'm sure that many of you, from the very first words, recognized the song of Bob Dylan. On and on, the lyrics allude to all manner of human tragedies: *burning bodies, hunger, unrequited love, a child's heartbreak, prisons and executions*. Many radio and TV programs banned it because the advertising agencies complained that it was too disturbing, too upsetting and, therefore, bad for business.

But the young people sang it for a long time. And as they did, they were saying, 'That's the way it is! Open your eyes and look! Look at yourself! Look at your family! Look at your city! Look at the country! Look at the world around you!' That is the way it is, and God help us if we won't see it: *"a hard rain's a-gonna fall."*

Fortunately for us, the New Testament writers are willing to be perfectly honest about the fact that *"a hard rain's a-gonna fall."* They tell us a glorious story about a Gracious God who loves us beyond our imagination. They tell us about how this Gracious God sent Jesus Christ to proclaim this Good News.

They tell us about how Jesus taught us to show our love for God through our love for one another. And we couldn't stand it! We simply could not stand to have that kind of love and that kind of goodness around.

Our pride, our lack of sensitivity, our love of the status quo, our unwillingness to change, all of these things rose up in rebellion, and we nailed Him to a Cross. We killed Him. The Gospel writers know that it is necessary for us to be honest about this hard rain that we have brought down upon ourselves; so much so that they went beyond the call of duty in telling us more about the Crucifixion than any other of the Gospel events.

Did you know that the Crucifixion Story was the first part to be written down and that all the rest of the stories were written around it? Have you noticed that the Gospel writers take up more space telling us about the death of Jesus - including all of the suffering, the trials, and everything that leads up to it - than any other single incident in His life?

Have you noticed the power of their words? Why do they lavish such care upon this *one* event? Why are they trying so hard to get it across to us? They're holding the Cross up before us, these writers of the Gospel, because they know the *"hard rain's a-gonna fall"* and that we've brought it upon ourselves because of who we are and how we've acted.

They want us to see that and to be honest about it. Our inhumanity toward one another is causing the hard rain to fall. Having said that, we can see that there is another reason why the Gospel writers hold this Cross up before us. They want us to know that in the Cross of Jesus Christ, we are offered the love of God as in no other place, no other way. They're trying to tell us how much God loves us. He doesn't annihilate us because of the way we act. He doesn't abandon us. On the Cross, He shows us how much He loves us, and He shows us the infinite cost of His love. He shows the degree to which He will give Himself. If you want to know how sin hurts God, just look at the cross.

Once Jesus is on the Cross, Almighty God has done everything He can to prove His love for us. The only thing God refuses to do is to take our freedom away; this He will not do! We are given the freedom to believe or not to believe.

He honours the gift of freedom that He has given us. But, when our freedom takes us into the hard rain of sin and despair, He just keeps on forgiving and loving us.

God doesn't withdraw and say, "All right you people down there, get your affairs straightened out, and then I'll love you." He doesn't say, "Achieve world peace, rebuild your damaged earth, establish brotherhood or sisterhood, and then I will love you." The sheer wonder of His love we see on the Cross is that it is at the center of the hard rain.

God identifies with us in our broken humanity: right where we are hurting most today; right where you feel fear and anxiety; right where your hopes are burning; right where you need to be confirmed in those hopes; right where you need to be strengthened for action; right where you're really living your life; right at the heart of your real humanity, that's where the love of God is.

I want to suggest that there are two appropriate forms of our response to this love of God that we see on the Cross. The first is for us to admit our responsibility for what's happening there. We admit our responsibility for the 'hard rain that's *falling*'. '

The writers of the Gospel insist that, unless we take this first step, we'll never go any further along the way. Yet, this is exactly where many of us **tune out** very fast. We have a built-in self-defense mechanism which begins to blame other people for the state we're in.

We blame our parents: "They didn't bring us up in the right way for a world like this." If we happen to be parents, then we blame our children: "Children these days won't learn to accept responsibility." Political parties blame each other. Nations blame each other. One group of people blames another group of people. There are always "*those others*" to blame it on: "It's their fault."

But the New Testament writers say, 'The Cross reminds us that we cannot blame others!' As the Negro spiritual goes ... "*It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer; not my father, not my mother but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*" They are telling us to "**repent**" especially on Good Friday. They are telling us to look at ourselves honestly.

They are telling us to be honest about the way we've been hurting ourselves; the way we've been hurting other people; the way we've been hurting the world. Only then, only then, they tell us, can we begin to make an appropriate response to God's love as we stand at the foot of the Cross.

The form of response the New Testament writers are getting at becomes apparent when we see what happened to them when they first experienced the love of God through the Cross.

They knew it as a love they could trust! They were willing to throw themselves upon that love, unconditionally. We can just feel God's love picking them up, healing them, renewing them, and equipping them for their ministry to the world.

During my school years in Sweden, I visited an old Church in Uppsala, which was historically important for several reasons; but the thing that struck this visitor most was the life-size Crucifix on the wall in back of the Church. It hangs directly opposite the pulpit, where the preacher, not the people, can see it. When a guide is asked why the Crucifix is in back rather than up front where everyone can see it, the guide tells this story:

One Sunday, King Charles XII made an unexpected visit to the Church. When the preacher saw the king come in, he put away his prepared sermon and spent the time talking about the king's virtues and how much he was doing for his people. A few days later, that Crucifix arrived at the Church as a gift from the king.

Along with it came a letter in which the king ordered that the Crucifix be placed on the wall opposite the pulpit so that, thereafter, anyone who mounted that pulpit to preach would be reminded of what he was supposed to be talking about. Jesus Christ reveals to us, in an incredible way, the overwhelming love God has for us. Bob Dylan is right!

**There's a hard, hard rain a-fallin'. But God comes to us in the rain,
offering us forgiveness, acceptance, the life-giving warmth of His life,
and of His love. Amen.**

Let us continue to pray for all levels of government and all people of our beloved country, Canada, and for the world; for our doctors, nurses, and essential service workers. Pray for those who are afflicted with COVID-19 and for families who have lost their loved one to this virus. Let us all do what is possible for us such as: staying indoors as much as possible; washing hands often; eating right; and watching less TV. Don't give in to panic. Read and meditate on God's word and let God do what is impossible ... heal our world of this virus. 2 Chronicle 7:14

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- *Go to Dark Gethsemane # 347*
- *Were You There # 353*
- *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross # 335*

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