

"And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha". Mark 15:29

In every generation since the day of the cross the words of our text have expressed the attitudes of people toward the Christ. But for those deriding him, Jesus prayed "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". And he continues this supplication for those today who wag their heads piously about crosses coated with gold.

As you know, the setting for the scene of this text is one with which we are familiar. Jesus has been hung on the cross, and on the ground is people of every kind: his enemies, undecided people, distant disciples, close friends, and loved ones..even his mother. There was a crowd there, and not all of them shedding tears.

As he hung there, below him there were those who contempt was undisguised...and using a customary gesture ... some of them wagged their heads and hissed "Aha". Whether they were hired by the priests or not, they came not to serve him but to insult him; not to bind his wounds but to pour salt into them. And they had reason to believe they were on the winning side, for in few minutes Jesus would be dead, and in a few hours buried, and in a few days would be forgotten...so scornfully they screamed; "Aha".

1. But there was a surprise in store for both the foes and the friends of Jesus. But some time had to pass before

its nature was revealed.

2

To his friends the time was the worst they had known. And Good Friday looked good for evil and bad for good. Only later could they look back and call it Good. What happened on the cross was heart-breaking and hope-shattering, but what happened after the cross put hope and courage back where it belonged - in Christ-filled hearts.

His enemies, tho, thought they had won. What they thought was the end was actually the beginning. At sunset they were victors, and at sunrise Christ arose.

So a divine surprise awaited both friend and foe alike. It came 3 days later. And isn't that often our experience in days of gloom? When the clouds break from our gloom hope springs anew and life returns.

2. Thoughtful Christians cannot be smug because they know that while the Savior has come he has not been welcomed wholeheartedly.

When a fresh challenge comes in our faith, how often do we rush off to some remote Golgotha and hiss "Aha"? Are we forgetting that today's preoccupation with self, may mean that we are discarding a great destiny, the people we might have become?

God knows our full potential, and he desires our completion. And he constantly struggles with our pride-saturated wills. God's sees the heights to which he calls us. We are

often contented with where and what we are.

3

There are no pinnacles which a person can stand on and shout: "I have reached the end of ~~our~~<sup>my</sup> religious pilgrimage". For on the plane of each new faith-achievement there comes into view some fresh "promised land" of the soul and person, which summons him to further seeking and growth.

In every age, God wins the victories thru people who keep seeing higher ground, and who are willing to pay the price for journeying to it with faith. In every age, God suffers defeat in people who pride themselves on their pedestal and their achievements.

When the passersby at the cross shouted: "Save yourself"... they declared their lack of understanding. It made sense to them for a man to save himself, but it made no sense that salvation comes from giving oneself away for others in whom one sees the purpose of God waiting to be fulfilled. "No greater love", the laying down of life for a friend...they could not understand that. All they could understand was to preserve self - first, last, and always. That is a false philosophy with a huge following which numbers among its adherents people who closely resemble ourselves . . . indeed, too closely resemble for comfort.

3. One of the reasons why some of us scorn the cross - openly or secretly - is its meaning is found in love, loving sacrifice. We think that to be servant of all, in spite of



Jesus' teachings about it, is not to be the greatest but the least among men. To lord it over others remains a very attractive thing. 4

Yet, what if Jesus had felt that way? Then the only thing we might read of him today would be a few words in the works of some author like Josephus telling us that 3 men were crucified. One of them made himself look silly - Jesus of Nazareth by claiming to be the Messiah...and requesting that someone else carry his cross since it would be such a long hard walk. The story of Jesus does not read like that, and the way it does read makes the difference.

Someone has said that a person is never honored by what he receives, honor is a reward for what a person gives. Albert Schweitzer commented: "One thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve".

Let us not forget that God's heroes subordinate themselves. The applause of Christian history is not for those who go out and save their own skins.

It has been suggested that at a time when the Christian faith ought to be transforming people, people are transforming the faith; at a time when the faith ought to altering the culture, the culture is leveling the faith to its plane. If that is true, it is no wonder that the wicked do not quickly forsake their ways and come rushing into the

Christian fellowship?

5

The uniqueness and the magnetism of Christian example is often too weak for anyone to follow.

People are most often drawn to Christ by what they see in his followers. Granted, this seems to be unfair, because we are imperfect, susceptible to error. Still, that is the way it is. The world will continue to look for Christ in Christians. Luther said that every Christian should be a Christ to his neighbor. Actually, is there a more logical place to find Christ than in the life of one of his followers?

4. It is important that we increase our Christian magnetism. Two things need to happen. First, we must desire that our attractiveness as a Christian be intensified; and second, we must labor for its strengthening.

Prayer and good works attract others to Christ. One good deed continues to be mightier than a multitude of words, no matter how beautifully the words may be phrased.

A magnet has this nature: Its full strength remains concealed until it is given something to do. You are all familiar with a magnet...some hold notes on refrigerator doors, some are attached to the feet of little Scottish Terriers, some are vital to industry, etc. Left alone, however, a magnet's invisible strength is unemployed. It only becomes effective when it is given something to do...that is when its

full attractiveness is displayed.

6

Quite similarly, a person's Christian magnetism is seen when he is performing the things and the duties of God. Only by being employed by Jesus - in prayer and in good works - does a person discover how magnetic he can be in drawing others to Christ.

Yet, so many prefer to hold back, and leave their lives unused by Christ in the work of the Kingdom. How sad it is that there has been such a loss of witness magnetism by people who, at one time or another in their lives, confessed faith in Christ and were baptised in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. There is a far-too-prevalent attitude exuding from the Christian church that a person comes to Christ not to serve but to be served; and not to save but to be saved from sacrifice. We tend to have forgotten that for the love of God in Jesus Christ we are to extend ourselves as redemptive servants.

Let us pray that that tendency not be the end of the matter with each of us..

We close with a poem by Georgia Harkness, called the  
AGONY OF GOD

I listen to the agony of God  
In countless throats that sing no song,  
In broken youth nurtured in wrong,  
In children starving for want of bread,  
In outcaste aged who soon may be dead.

I turn from the agony of God



From the Christ upon his cross  
And my eyes run over the ledger  
For signs of profit or loss.

7

Can it be that I, a Christian,  
Am but a passerby  
→ Who says, "Aha" before the cross  
→ Of one about to die?

Can it be that I, a churchman,  
Have lost the power to see  
How selfish, cold indifference  
Keeps Christ on Calvary?