

Lent gets more serious on Passion Sunday as it becomes all too evident that Jesus is determined to meet his fate in Jerusalem. In the city some Greeks want to see Jesus, and they come to Philip who is from Bethsaida. That may be more significant than it seems at first glance. Jews were notoriously hostile to non-Jews, but Philip comes from a town with a large Greek population and himself has a Greek name. Do they feel that by coming to him, they will get a friendly reception and may be able to meet this Jesus everyone seems to be talking about?

And why did they want to see Jesus? Were they Godfearers, non Jewish followers but uncircumcised worshippers of Yahweh? People once held that this was the case, but I do not think so. I think they were tourists for Jerusalem was on the list of places to do: this huge pilgrimage, the enormous Temple, and all these Jews coming from all over the world to this strange city up on the rocky mountains of Judea whose only purpose is the Jewish religion. 'Do Jerusalem before you die'?

And Philip agrees to introduce Jesus to them, and may well have been as surprised as they were, when Jesus takes them as a sign from God and declares '**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified**'. It sparks off in Jesus a realisation that this Passover is when the shadow hanging over him since the Transfiguration will become horrific reality. At this Passover, there will be Gentiles there who have met Jesus. Jesus has always held that God accepts Gentiles as much as Jews: now he must show it on the Cross. And we must, as always on a Sunday, struggle to understand this word of God which is both the scriptural record and the physical and sacramental presence of the risen Christ. And we must struggle with the fact that we must to apply it to every bit of us that is made in the image of God.

During the week I received an email. The Anglican Communion News Service website gathers together all sorts of material from all over the world and sends it out five times a week. Most I bin as irrelevant, but one caught my eye, and it was from Hannah Bailey-Evans, a young woman from Shropshire who is a member of the Community of St Anselm, which is a monastic community based in London founded by Archbishop Justin Welby consisting of young people who join for a year at a time. It was a reflection on crucifixes, and is about a crucifix in a churchyard near her home.

The first time I saw it, I was with my mother and brother. As an Anglican perpetually stretched with one foot firmly in both catholic and charismatic camps, I'm no stranger to crucifixes; every high church I attend has a large one hanging somewhere near the altar. But this one is different. It is so, so detailed. It is, it has to be said, pretty brutal. My vaguely-Christian brother shuddered at the sight, saying it creped him out. My Greek Orthodox mother didn't like it either, saying it made her sad. But I was really quite struck; neither creped out or particularly sad. I stood before it for a few minutes, taking in the details, all the time thinking to myself: "gosh, He looks like me."

Something I've noticed among not only my Orthodox family and charismatic friends, but also among many Anglo-Catholics I know, is how uncomfortable 3D crucifixes – and graphic ones at that – make people feel. I suspect a large reason why is precisely because He looks like us. We see ourselves in this man, desolate and destroyed. We see the strained tendons in His wrists, we see His muscles, each strand of His hair, His ankles, even His toenails. . . We see His body functioning and reacting exactly as ours would. And suddenly it's real. Suddenly, He becomes a person like you or me. And when Jesus becomes fully human to us, the full extent of His suffering is revealed. And that's rough.

But it's important. It's a painful, uncomfortable fact that we must embrace – not to guilt us into behaving ourselves, but in order to reveal fully the beauty and power of His sacrifice. His suffering is a reminder to us that our salvation comes not only from His spilled blood; but from His broken body. When we're unable to deny Jesus' torture, we're unable to deny the immense love that was His motive, and the motive of the Father who sent Him.

That might be the hardest part of all of it; accepting God's love. But I believe we all have the courage to do so. And when we need a reminder of the courage we're capable of, where better to look than the cross? The ultimate symbol of love and courage, displayed by a God who was and is human, just like you or I.

This Passiontide we need to ask ourselves is the Son of Man glorified in us? Hannah Bailey-Evans' insight: '**gosh, he looks like me**' must cut through layers of images we have in our minds. One of the greatest mistakes the Church of Ireland made at Disestablishment in 1870 was to ban the Cross on the altar. The Cross replaced the earlier Christian sign of a fish scrawled on the walls of a catacomb. That sign was a hidden one for a faith that had learnt how to make itself scarce in persecution: ictus, a fish in Greek was interpreted by the early Christians as the first letters of the credal statement: 'Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour'

But it is the cross that asks the questions that concern us, and even more when we confront the cross in the form of a crucifix for it is on the cross that Jesus is glorified. The banning of crosses and crucifixes was an ill thought out gut reaction to the abuse of the crucifix in Roman Catholic practice at the time of the Reformation: a classic case of 'if Rome does it, it must be wrong' syndrome. Thankfully, for the last 50 years in the Church of Ireland we can again have crosses on our holy tables, an empty cross which symbolises the resurrection: we have to some extent realised our folly, but in Passiontide we need to see what Jorgen Moltmann called '*The Crucified God*'. For it is only then we see the God of love for what he truly is . He is Christ on the cross: dying but still loving, caring, forgiving, looking forward into a future prepared by God. The crucified one is human: he is of and for all colours, ages, gender. He is not all things to all men: but the face we see in the bathroom mirror. **Gosh, he looks like me.**

The Epistle for yesterday, St Patrick's Day from *2 Corinthians* 4 v 6 ff is of great relevance: **It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.**

God's call to each one of us is to fulfil a calling, a vocation, to represent the sacrificial love of Jesus in the midst of the doubts and fears of a troubled, contorted world. What he did on the cross for his mother, we are to do for others: in bereavement and illness, in the frustrations of a secular society which tries to deny the spirituality in every human soul, and for many of our brothers and sisters, the struggle of living in an imploding society like Syria where lost humanity denies all love in a total disregard for even the most vulnerable of God's children.

The cross is magnetic: it draws all men to it for to be made in God's image is to be made in the form of the crucified one. Let us take up our cross, our burden, our challenges, and plant it firmly in our hearts where God's kingdom lives so that in this world of challenges he may be glorified and we may each be a burning light to illuminate a dark place with the love of God.