

Palm Sunday 2014

I looked at the Palm Crosses for today – as no doubt you did too – and thought – this is rather small. Disappointingly small. This surely isn't what we ordered. Aren't the Palm Crosses I've seen elsewhere larger than this?

A very wise man (Austin Farrer) once said that "Crosses are never what we ordered, but always greater than we ordered, smaller than we ordered, or other than we ordered". And this, it seems to me, is a profound truth. But do we realize this?

We're used to the idea of "a cross to bear" as a kind of only-half-serious way of describing irritations or nuisances – the things we have to put up with. How often do we think of the cross we bear as something real, that cuts into the skin?

Our cross to bear might not be that relative or boss we don't get on with very well, or that pain in our hip. Actually, our cross to bear might be our natural selfishness or narcissism; it might be our arrogance or smugness; it might be that odd quality we think is shyness or modesty, but which is in fact a sort of judgmental superiority complex.

Some of us Christians think we carry a cross – and we do! But it's one we ordered for ourselves. It's the cross of being nice and helping all these people, even when they don't notice or appreciate it. It's the cross of being a decent, modest person who doesn't ask for much from life, who'd never hurt anyone and would always do what they can to help – and that person never quite gets their reward, do they? It's the cross of being a stickler for what you were brought up to believe was right – not like these people today... How extravagantly we carry these crosses! With what dramatic grunts and groans we alert people to our suffering!

But while we're carrying these comfortable, made-to-measure crosses, the cross God gave us sits there at the roadside, gathering dust. It's the cross of truly helping someone – even that difficult person who makes us feel horrible. It's the cross of really trying to get outside our own views and see what another person means. And most importantly, it's the cross of standing up to evil and injustice in this world. I say most importantly, because going along with evil and injustice is more comfortable now than it's ever been.

What is God asking you to bear for him? Maybe you think it's just something modest and unpretentious; maybe you think you're already carrying enough of a burden without adding to it. But maybe you're wrong. The crowd on the first Palm Sunday thought they were bearing palms for a conquering Messiah, beginning his new reign. Within a week, they'd realized their mistake. They were nodding with grim satisfaction as their beaten and bloodied "Messiah" was dragging his cross to Calvary. They didn't know that true cross would be the salvation of the world; nor that that was what Jesus was asking them to carry in their turn.

What does God really want from you? Are you sure you haven't settled for something comfortable, when what is really asked of you is the uncomfortable, thrilling adventure of following Jesus in his death and resurrection?

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