

Message

Friday, 29 March 2024 (Good Friday)

Pastor Hans Peethala

A new Pastor in the Wimmera town spent the first four days making personal visits to each of the members, inviting them to come to his first services.

The following Sunday the church was all but empty. Accordingly, the Pastor placed a notice in the local newspapers, stating that, **because the church was dead, it was everyone's duty to give it a decent Christian burial. The funeral would be held the following Sunday afternoon, the notice said.** Morbidly curious, a large crowd turned out for the "funeral." **In front of the pulpit, they saw a closed coffin, smothered in flowers.** After the Pastor delivered the eulogy, **he opened the coffin and invited his congregation to come forward and pay their final respects to their dead church.**

Filled with curiosity as to what would represent the corpse of a "dead church," **all the people eagerly lined up to look in the coffin. Each "mourner" peeped into the coffin then quickly turned away with a guilty, sheepish look.**

In the coffin, tilted at the correct angle, was a large mirror.

Dear Friends! Guilt is something that we are often wrestle with. A lot of preachers preach the law and people walk out with guilt.

There was once a few members who performed a drama nailing some words on the cross saying "He isn't coming." Some of us reflected on our weaknesses and how our actions and words have hammered nails on Jesus hands on the cross.

For those of you who sat through Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, the scene when Jesus was shown in very graphic fashion being nailed to the cross, the hand that performed the action of nailing was Gibson's own. I trust you see a pattern here.

Many of the Good Friday services and depictions I know have focused on our guilt, my guilt and yours specifically, for Jesus' horrific crucifixion and death. If the servant suffered, then, by God, we had to suffer, too, because God knows we deserve some suffering and a boatload of guilt, complicit as we are in the death of the son. Am I alone in thinking that there is something theologically amiss in all this? Jesus suffers and dies on a cross, the typical method of Roman torture and murder, and in response I too must suffer and assume for myself some degree at least of responsibility for his agony.

And I must assume this guilt because God demands it of me. If I do not take on this guilt, then Jesus dies alone, and I wash my hands of the whole thing. His death, in this way of seeing things, requires me to atone for my responsibility by suffering and wailing and self-hatred. In that way, so it goes, God can then forgive me for my murder of God's child, a child God has sent to die apparently in the first place, and order is then restored in a universe rent asunder by my killing of Jesus.

I do not presume to speak for you, this kind of atonement, where God trades Jesus for my sin, and then I profess that I have helped to murder Jesus in order to have my sin forgiven by his death, makes my theological head spin.

I must tell you Guilt doesn't come from God. Whenever you are guilty just know that the Devil is at work and the devil wants to take away your Joy and Peace and make you feel you haven't done enough.

Is there no other way to fathom this event of Good Friday than that?

What is so good about this Friday? Why do we call it "Good Friday"?

The goodness of God for all humanity was displayed on the cross of Calvary on that Friday. Jesus was on his way to reconcile us with God through his suffering and death on the Cross. The **goodness of Friday** is, knowing that the **death of Jesus doesn't condemn** the world, but **it empowers** the world, it sets people free from their Sin, guilt, and shame.

Dear friends, if you are holding on to some guilt and shame on this Good Friday, hear the good news. John says Jesus did not come to condemn this world, but he came to serve and save. Jesus has taken away your guilt and shame as you truly repent and believe in God's forgiveness through the cross. Good Friday depicts the suffering of Jesus Christ to show us the love of God for each one of us. **The goodness of Friday is to taste the reconciling power of God through the cross. We are washed by his blood and cleansed by his body. All we need to do is wait in hope till Jesus rises and lifts us up offering a new life on Easter Sunday. Amen**