

Our theme for this morning's meditation is the magnetism of the cross. Magnets show us that opposite poles attract each other. So one side we see the cross of Christ as one of the crudest and most cruel forms of punishment in the Roman world which was reserved for the worst kind of criminals or for those who revolted against the regime. People who were accused of sedition were sent to the cross! Thank God we are not under Roman rule in the first century!! However harsh and cruel the punishment that was meted out to Jesus on the cross was, the cross has become central to our faith. The cross was central to the life of Jesus himself. He knew from the very beginning that he had come into this world in order to give himself up for our sake on the cross. He knew that he had to suffer and die because that was the only way he could save humanity. So his focus was always about heading to the cross. The cross is the symbol of supreme sacrificial love.

John Stott says that numerous symbols could have been chosen for the Christian faith, like the manger, or a throne, or a boat or a towel and so on. In spite of all these possibilities the chosen symbol was a cross. The early church was keen to commemorate as their central understanding of Jesus neither his birth nor his youth, neither his teaching nor his service, neither his reign, nor his gift of the Spirit but his death, his crucifixion (Stott 21). The cross continues to attract people towards Jesus. In this morning's portion we see some people who are attracted to Jesus and also his teaching about the cross.

There were some Greeks who were probably 'God fearers' people who were attracted to Judaism by its monotheism and morality, but repelled by its nationalism and requirements such as circumcision. They worshipped in the synagogues but did not become proselytes. These Greeks come to Philip with the request that they would like to meet with Jesus. They have either heard enough about Jesus or have seen him healing somebody or the other and they are eager to meet with Jesus. Andrew and Philip tell Jesus about the men. Jesus draws these men towards himself.

Jesus states that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Jesus is talking about his impending death, knowing that it is only through his sacrificial death on the cross can all of humanity enjoy the fruit of salvation. The seed on its own has no life giving and fruit bearing ability, but if it dies then it brings in life and fruit.

Jesus then goes on to challenge his followers. He says whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Jesus is saying that those who seek to follow him must be willing to hate their life in order to gain eternal life. Just as dying and fruit-bearing are inseparable in the mission of Jesus, so also it will be in the lives of his followers. Following Christ is the way of the cross. It is the path of suffering. Suffering leads to glory in the life of Christ, so it will be in the life of his followers. Following Jesus involves bearing one's cross, that is, dying to one's sinful self and living for God.

The cross of Christ also effects judgment on the 'ruler of this world'. The ruler of this world is an usurper who seeks to overthrow Jesus (14:30). He is the head of the supernatural and ungodly powers that are working all the evil in this world. He is also termed as the evil one (1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12) and the world is said to be in the power of this evil one (1 John 5:19). He is the personification of darkness and tries to overcome the light (1:5) and wishes to keep the world in the realm of darkness (3:18-19). He is described as the 'devil', 'a liar and the father of lies', and a murderer from the beginning (8:44), who wants to rule over people. He does not allow them to believe in Jesus or worship the one true God. But now his time has come to an end with the death of Jesus. Human beings have been liberated from the power of the evil one through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The cross of Christ continues to attract us towards itself. The defeat of Satan has been accomplished on the cross. We are called to appropriate the gift of eternal life that Jesus offers to each one of us through the cross. May we respond to that love.