

The theme for this morning's meditation is 'Lessons of the cross for daily life'. The cross is central for Christianity, and why is it so? There are numerous symbols that could have been used for the Christian faith like the crib or the manger, or the carpenter's bench where he worked. However, the early church focused on his death and his crucifixion and therefore the cross has become the central symbol for the Christian faith. This morning I would like us to look at three key lessons from the cross: the lesson of suffering, the lesson concerning humility and servant nature, and finally the lesson about serving Christ together - that there are many groups but one Master.

Immediately after the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Hermon and the incident in which the disciples were unable to deliver the boy possessed with an evil spirit, Jesus and his disciples were now passing through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were because he was interested in teaching his disciples. The disciples had not understood the purpose for which Jesus had come. He tells them that the Son of man was going to be delivered into the hands of men and that they would kill him and after three days he will rise again. There were several things that the disciples could not understand in what Jesus said. The first thing that they could not understand was that the Messiah had to suffer and die. The idea of a suffering Messiah was totally alien to them; leave alone a Messiah who had to suffer and to die. They had a picture of a Messiah who would be strong to save them from Roman rule and be a powerful king. So the concept of a suffering Messiah just does not fit in with their scheme of things. Secondly, Jesus says that he would rise again on the third day. The Jews believed in the general resurrection of all people on the Day of Judgment but for a man to die and rise again on the third day was incomprehensible. Suffering was the way to glory for Jesus. If you and I want to be his followers then the way ahead for us is the way of the cross. Jesus himself challenges us to take up the cross daily and follow him.

As they reach Capernaum and were probably in the home of Peter and Andrew, Jesus questions them about what they were arguing on the road. They all kept quiet because they had argued about who was the greatest. For the disciples of Jesus, power, position and status had become more important than their love for Jesus. They wanted to sit on his right and on his left so that they too would get their moment of glory. Jesus then teaches them a lesson on humility and service. He called the twelve disciples and said to them 'anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of all'. The radical lesson from the cross is one of servant-hood and humility. Jesus himself though God did not count equality with him, but emptied himself and took on the nature of a servant. Whoever wants to be first must be the very last, and servant of all. In God's economy it is always upside down mathematics, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. Jesus then picked up a child in his arm and said 'Whoever welcomes one

of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.' A child was not considered to be important in a society nor did they have any status. Jesus says that when we welcome people who have no name or status, we are really welcoming him and the Father. Status in the kingdom of God is radically opposed to that of the world and it is marked by lowly service. Kingdom, glory and power are what human being seek after. However, Jesus being the epitome of the kingdom, glory and power chose to serve.

The third lesson from the cross is about following Christ together. John reports to Jesus that they saw someone driving out demons in the name of Christ and they had asked him to stop doing so because he was not one of them. Jesus then teaches John and the other disciples about partnership in ministry. He tells them, 'Do not stop him. For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me.' Here again the issue is one of status. The twelve thought they had a special status and now others were also been given the same privilege. Very often we too are cliquish about our ministries we tend to dismiss the work of others while we want to make sure that our work and ministry is recognized as authentic. Jesus calls to be team players. The way forward for God Kingdom to increase in our country is by partnership in the ministry. May we remember that we have one Master and we have been baptized with one Spirit.

Shalom
Paul Swarup

23rd September 2012