

## ICH RUF ZU DIR HERR JESU CHRIST

**PREACHER : Catherine Staziker, Cathedral Reader**

Sunday, March 7<sup>th</sup> 2010

**Lent 3**

Isaiah 55: 1 – 9, I Corinthians 10: 1 – 13, Luke 13: 1 – 9

10.30am

Rochester Cathedral

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Ich ruf zu Dir Herr Jesu Christ  
I call to you Lord Jesus Christ

The chorale prelude from Bach's Little Organ Book which Roger has just played so beautifully is one of the most exquisite pieces of music I know. It reaches right into the depths of my soul and touches it in a way which is impossible to put into words.

Last October, I went on a journey up to Yorkshire to be with my mother who was dying. On the way there, I stayed over in Cambridge to visit Westcott House to check out whether this felt like a good place for me to study for ordination in September.

Across the road from Westcott, I found myself alone in Jesus Chapel, drawn in by this very same sublime piece of music being practised by an organist. I was transfixed by its beauty, the plaintive flutes, the gentle haunting melody.

I had gone there to pray, but found no words with which to pray. No words to express the fear and dread about my mother. No words either to express the deep joy of an affirmed vocation. Joy and sadness interwoven. Ich ruf zu Dir Herr Jesu Christ

Why? Why now? Why me? Why is life so unfair?

Those are the questions that lay behind my inability to pray. Questions which I suspect we have all asked at some point or another. It's not just theologians and philosophers who ask *why is life so unfair, so unjust*.

When your child is murdered, you ask it.  
When your spouse is stricken by cancer, you ask it.  
When it is your house is vandalized by thieves, you ask it.

It would be strange indeed if you did not ask it when your country is devastated by famine or a senseless war. "Why? Why us? Why me?" It is not a stupid question. The question "why?" goes to the very heart of our common humanity. Sadly, there is no definitive answer to this question.

This problem is central to today's Gospel. Jesus puts probing questions to some people who were deeply troubled by two contemporary moral outrages. Apparently, Pontius Pilate, who would later play so significant a role in Jesus' crucifixion, had ordered the murder of a group of pilgrims from Galilee. and had mixed their blood with that of their sacrifices. The second shock also occurred in Jerusalem. A tower that had been a part of the fortifications suddenly collapsed and eighteen Judeans were killed. Apparently no one was to blame. Why does God permit Pilate to murder devout Galileans? And why does God allow ordinary citizens of Jerusalem to die so senselessly?

It may seem surprising that people were even asking such questions, given that, in theory, they already had the answer in the Torah. The Book of Deuteronomy, in particular, spelled out a definitive answer: the idea is that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. God watches over Israel as a shepherd over his sheep. And Israel, in return, is to be obedient by measuring up to the obligations that are spelled out in the Ten Commandments. This is a simple doctrine and actually much of the time that's how it is: If the Israelites are obedient they are rewarded and, if not they are

punished. In today's reading from Corinthians, the Israelites had obviously not been good! "God was not pleased with most of the Israelites and so they were struck down in the wilderness."

HOWEVER, to accept this, raises a question: If God only punished people when they were wicked, were the Galileans who were murdered really that bad? Were the Galileans who stayed home and didn't go on the pilgrimage morally better than those that did? A simple reading of the book of Deuteronomy might imply that God was responsible for this.

And what about Job? Good and faithful throughout. Job shows clearly that there is no simple answer in the Jewish scriptures to the question "Why". Bad things just happen to both good and bad people. And most the time there's no logical reason. We cannot know the reasons when we feel that we have suffered injustice. Life just isn't fair! God knows. We don't. People do not always get what they deserve.

Sometimes one may be a very righteous servant of God and still be abused by a wicked people. But out of that very injustice God can bring healing and forgiveness and a new kind of justice, a new kind of righteousness. He has the power to transform people's lives.

Isaiah does not exactly reject the old traditions but he dramatically deepens and transforms their meaning. In today's passage, full of joy and assurance, he invites EVERYONE to Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. This, in many ways, is a very good starting point on a journey of discovery to answer the question "Why".

### **Relationship.**

Relationship with God is the key.

For in this relationship, there is always the hope of the power of transformation

The New Testament shows us clearly that Jesus agrees with these revised views. Good people do suffer unjustly. But God is able to do what may seem absurd. He can bring healing out of what appears irredeemable tragedy. You don't always get back from life what you put into it.

*Sometimes you get something much better!*

And sometimes, someone, may have to be a servant of God, an agent of God's strange justice that bears the burden of injustice and thereby transforms it. Sometimes, someone has to be Jesus.

The Bible doesn't make it easy to answer the question "why?" As usual there are several answers. Sometimes, being good does produce a rich and good reward. Sometimes it doesn't, and we don't know why. Sometimes, like the fig tree, good rewards take time to come to fruition. And sometimes a poor reward can be the occasion for a new flowering of something far better than could have previously been imagined.

As we journey with Jesus to Jerusalem we see God Almighty suffering injustice as well. He is with us in our suffering, though often we don't realise it. His love moves beyond injustice. His love is a love that will never let us go.

As I sat transfixed by the music in that Chapel in Cambridge asking "Why" and without the words to pray, a flurry of words did indeed suddenly come to me,

I am in heaven  
Jesus Chapel  
Bach plays.  
God speaks.  
Home.

A response to the wordless melody that had subconsciously been singing in my soul.  
Ich ruf zu Dir Herr Jesu Christ (I call to you Lord Jesus Christ)

At the time, I didn't know the title of the piece but through that music I had found myself calling to Christ from the depths of my soul. God had held me in prayer and in that relationship held me firmly in His love. No answer to "why", but a small glimpse of transformation of resurrection.