

## A Reflection for Peace Sunday 2018

By Revd. Phil Jump

*Jesus and his disciples passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." [Mark 9:30-37]*

What was there not to understand? Jesus again explained that he would be handed over, put to death and would rise again. He couldn't have been any clearer - yet we are told that his disciples did not understand.

Didn't understand or didn't listen? Confronted by this foretelling of self-sacrifice, they respond by arguing among themselves about who is more important than the other. Invited to explore the profound truth of the cross, they resort to familiar narratives of power, prestige and ambition. Though their quarrels did not escalate beyond words, they chose a pathway of conflict. And when challenged by Jesus to admit their self-obsession, remained silent.

Some have used the cross to justify war - life laid down for the greater good. This is not something we can simply ignore; it is right to honour sacrifice and mourn the loss of EVERYONE whose life is destroyed through conflict and war. But this should also spur us even more to seek peace.

Christ's sacrifice was once and for all – not a demand for other lives to be laid down as a consequence of our human failings. The Gospel writer intends us to see the irony and tragedy of a group of men, confronted by God's greatest act of sacrifice, standing in its shadow, embroiled in the narratives of human power.

This is the tragedy of war; it is the assumption and exertion of human power, justified by ill-founded morality that shifts to the suit the eye of the beholder. And the task of God's people is to forever demonstrate that such actions take place in the shadow of the cross. Not as some hollow symbol to justify the lives destroyed, but as an inescapable declaration that God has offered this world another way.

But Jesus does not despair at their foolish hardness of heart – for we have but one message, Christ, crucified. So he points our attention to a child. An innocent; still untainted by narratives of division and conflict. "Make them the centre" he insists. Yet all too often they remain the victim.

Who's right? Who's wrong? Who's in? Who's out? Who's good? Who's bad? Who matters? Who doesn't? Who's important? Who's not? These are the questions with which those disciples wanted to wrestle, and these are questions that lead too often to war and violence. The cross does not so much answer them as prove them unnecessary.

This was first written for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Peace Sunday resource for 2018. For more details visit [www.for.org.uk](http://www.for.org.uk)