



Easter Message 2004

Jesus is Risen

Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, has brought the suffering and death of Jesus into sharp focus this Easter. But was the crucifixion just about mindless cruelty and an agonising death for an innocent person? In fact, the story of Jesus is also about a willingness to suffer so that the mission given to him could be fulfilled. His teaching gave people a new understanding of themselves and of the God who loved them.

As they drew close to him, they experienced a deep healing on the inside of their lives, as well as the outside. They experienced the reign of God in a new way.

But while all of this may have made Jesus' suffering worthwhile, there is much more to it. By accepting rejection, arrest, torture and death in the way of God, Jesus was breaking the mould of rebellious humanity and creating it again in his image – as it was always meant to be. In this sense, he puts himself in our place, achieving what we could never achieve without him through his suffering and death. He has paid the price, not in the sense of some kind of 'deal', but as doing what needed doing. Those who accept this find that they are friends with God, at peace within and remaking broken relationships with those around.

Fittingly, the rising again of Jesus is the beginning of this new humanity. The Resurrection gives us a glimpse of God's purposes for us and for the whole of creation. Here is not an old and tired god who is slowly fading away, as some would have us believe. On the contrary, here is God renewing his creation. Throughout history, men and women have been changed by this work of God, able to re-direct their lives, be healed of past mistakes and grow in spiritual maturity. Nor is transformation only a personal matter. It also concerns the flourishing of family life, and justice and compassion in the community.

Christians and churches pray and work for this transformation in the lives of those around them. In this task they have many partners: mediation councils working for reconciliation, centres re-equipping people for employment and those working with people on the margins. Today, many of the so-called Millennium Development Goals, such as reducing the numbers of women dying in childbirth, making primary school education available to all and ensuring safer water for more people, are in grave jeopardy. Will Christians join with others in a

campaign to put these goals on track again? They are certainly about the abundance of life that God wants to give us.

The love and power released in the rising again of Jesus continue to change people, communities and even nations. This Easter, ask this love and power into your own life. Open yourself to its work so that you, too, will be God's agent of hope in a broken and hurting world.

+Michael

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