



IN,
NOT OF,
THE WORLD



FROM
KEITH'S
HEART
TO
YOURS

Easter 2020 is upon us and our thoughts naturally turn towards the familiar events that we celebrate in the next few weeks.

Different Christian traditions have their own way of celebrating, but the absolute facts that we all acknowledge at this time, are beyond dispute.

At the very heart of our reflection is the sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus, both equally essential elements of the Gospel and critical to our faith. If there is no Cross, there can be no forgiveness of sin, and if there is no Empty Tomb, there can be no promise of eternal life, victory over death or freedom from sin and the kingdom of this world triumphs. All of these are very good reasons to celebrate at this time of the year indeed.

With our attention being drawn so forcibly to the Cross, it is worth remembering that there is huge *symbolic* value attached to Jesus' death on the wooden structure that was central to the penal code of the Romans at the time He lived on earth. Jesus' dying on the Cross is immense in what it means for me

Personally, that I have a way to be reconciled with and restored to the Father, to understand and experience what it means to be loved unconditionally, receive His grace and mercy and to be declared righteous, all things that I could never achieve outside of Jesus taking my place as the Lamb of God.

However, the Cross also has a wider significance, one which often gets overlooked in our emphasis on the personal dimension. There is an equally important **Community** element to Christ's death, something that is emphasized at length by the New Testament letter writers, who were able to extend our understanding of that single crucifixion event. In a timely article I have just read by Fred Sanders of Biola University, he reminds us that "Paul started his *world-changing* message **with** the Cross and centered his *life-transforming* message **on** the Cross." What a great way to bring together both of these components of Jesus' death. It's not only about delivering salvation for me personally (life transforming), but it is also about touching and making a profound difference to the very world John chapter 3 tells us, remains the focus of His love. It is about *both* personal and community transformation. Sanders adds: "The Apostles Creed has the Cross at its centre but *all things* at its circumference." It's a *both/and* situation to appreciate fully the scope, reach and impact of the death of Jesus, not an *either/or*. It's for me personally that Jesus died and rose again AND it's for the world.

Apart from re-iterating what should be very obvious theological truth to us, why would I make this subject the focus of this AC Talk article? It's one thing to *delight* in my personal salvation, yet another altogether to be concerned about how that life transformation affects my daily living within a community context. So, it seems to me that the

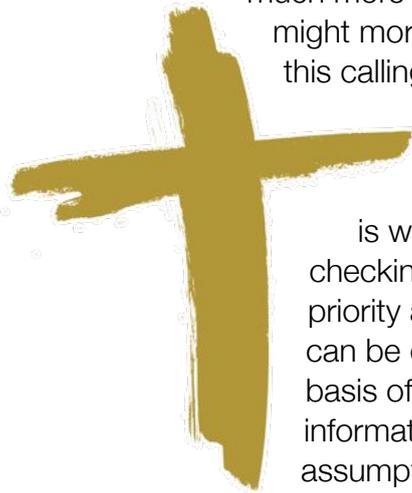
Community component of the Cross is of particular importance at this Easter time, if the reality of life today is captured in just a smattering of global news headlines in the past few weeks. For the sake of space, let me quote just two very different headlines:

1. From the respected **Economist** news magazine of 17 February, the headline, *The pathogen of prejudice*. The report details how, in the light of the outbreak of the Coronavirus

in a province of China, individuals of Chinese background are being targeted or singled out in nations that are regarded as developed and mature and who pride themselves on their democratic practices, freedom of speech and cultures of tolerance. Quite apart from the obvious fact that these nations are far removed geographically from China, these individuals are suffering the most demeaning abuse and racist pushback *simply on the basis* of their Asian facial features. Report after report of hate speech, segregation and isolation are cited in the article, without any thought being given to the fact that many of these individuals have been citizens by birth of those developed nations and are every bit as far removed from mainland China where the virus first broke out. Even more alarming is that there is evidence of such discrimination and *virus-related profiling* existing even in China itself now, directed against people from the Hubei province where the virus first emerged. While concern for personal health and welfare is justified, the quick default to separation and our "difference" on the basis of race or ethnicity should be a huge concern, especially in the light of a kingdom calling that takes its lead from Jesus who came, according to Paul, to break down the middle wall of division and calls us to model what it means to be one in Christ.

2. From **Christianity Today**, the headline, *Christians in the Age of Callout Culture*. The subtitle says it all - *How Christians lost the benefit of the doubt and why we need to find the good in each other again*.

Here, the reporter examines the rise in "pushback" culture on social media, where people are quick to point out others' faults, from innocent spelling mistakes to something



much more serious. While one might more readily understand this calling out and holding people accountable when facts are in play, it is worrying that fact-checking is not always a priority and people's lives can be destroyed on the basis of incorrect information and assumptions or rumor. It is a reflection of a society that

has lost trust in people's motives, meanings and intentions; a society that more readily sees failure and experiences despair than hope and celebration; a society expressing its huge disappointment at so often being let down by those who should know better and behave better, especially leaders. Rather than trust being *lost*, we now default to trust having to be *earned* and, when we find examples of that trust being broken, we respond with criticism, personal attack and judgmentalism. We run the risk of losing the ability to disagree without destroying each other or to dialogue in a civil manner. Our positions are becoming entrenched and, if you do not see things the same way that I do, it gives me liberty to say and think what I like about you, no matter how demeaning or dishonoring that might be.

With so many examples in play right now on our world stage, it is almost commonplace for *passion* for a cause to justify a lack of civility, or *youthfulness* being condoned as a reason for tolerating language of accusation towards other generations.

All of this drives us further apart into factions or camps, emphasizes our differences rather than who we are and what we have in common as members of the human race - a far cry from what the Cross represents as the single most powerful symbol to unite us rather than separate us.

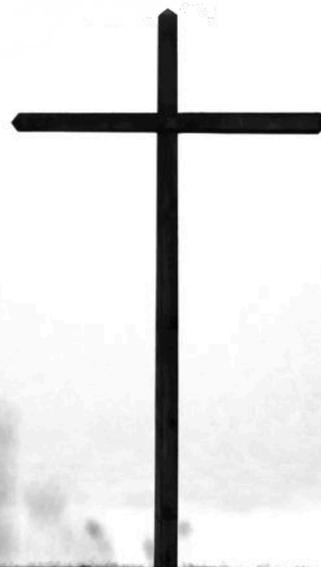
So, the Cross is a rallying point for us again at this Easter time, to celebrate the immense significance such grand terms as redemption, rescue, forgiveness, sonship and others mean to us at a Personal level, that *life-transforming* dimension. But, it is also a sobering reminder to us that the Cross is Jesus' call to every one of us to live lives that are committed to His equally important mandate of *world-change* as we develop our own "pushback" in all of those areas where society continues to get it so wrong.

Let your kingdom come
Lord and let your will be
done in and through us.

Keith



KEITH & SHELLEY
du PLESSIS



T I M E S O F R E F R E S H I N G

It would be amiss during this time, where the entire global community has been plunged into a health and economic crisis, never seen outside of the World Wars in our lifetime, not to be cognizant of it. The very real disruptions to everyone's lives, from layoffs, indices and whole sectors of commerce and society being plunged into chaos.

Most of our churches have even had to cease from all forms of gathering.

Yet the Lord has said that He gives unprecedented peace in unprecedented times.

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.

Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful'. - John 14:27 Nas.

In addition, the word tells us to;

'Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord'... Acts 3:19 Nas.

So, in spite of all the worlds advice on self- improvement, it seems to me that the Lord is still calling us to repent and withdraw so that we may be refreshed.

I recently read an article by a well-known Californian pastor who after 50 yrs. of very effective years of pastoring, still proclaimed what a privilege it is to be in ministry, despite all the trials, hardships and misunderstandings. Notwithstanding his own personal humanity and valleys, he had managed to remain fresh. Like him, we need to continually see the value of what we are called to by guarding our wellbeing and prioritising time to dwell in His presence.

During this current season several of my friends, (mostly senior pastors and leaders) have embarked on such a journey, withdrawing to be refreshed. In each case they have returned having been touched and refreshed by the Holy Spirit. After all Jesus modelled this regularly during His earthly tenure, often moving up the mountain or by simply withdrawing. When we do this, it equips us for what may lie ahead.

Keith du Plessis has very aptly focused our thoughts toward the Cross in his article above.

In anticipation of the unimaginable, Jesus withdrew to the garden, so that he would be equipped to face the cross and liberate all of mankind and each of us individually.

The secret is to allow ourselves to continually be renewed by the Holy Spirit. I believe we as the COTN family are entering a new season, notwithstanding all that is going on around us, where the Lord is leading us into a wonderful time of refreshing.

So continually make time for the mountain and 'times of refreshing will come'.

Let us, from a place of rest, claim this supernatural promise of peace.

Be Blessed.

Dave



**DAVID & CAROL
C A P E**