**Reflection 2 (12.30)**

**‘The place called the skull’** - the crucified God

**Hymn** *– to read or sing*

O sacred Head, now wounded, With grief and shame weighed down, Now scornfully surrounded With thorns, Thine only crown; O sacred Head, what glory What bliss til now was Thine Yet though despised and gory I joy to call Thee mine. Bernard of Clairvaux

**Reading:**

*‘As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’* Matt 27.32-37

**Reflection**

Executions always took place outside the city, in places of maximum publicity, by the main routes into the city – as a warning and deterrent. That the sign above the cross of Jesus was in three languages (as we learn elsewhere) makes this clear.

This is a message and a signal.

Around the edge of any growing ancient city would have been quarries, close to the main roads, managing the endless demand for building material.

Occasionally the quarriers would come to a rock that was flawed or cracked – perhaps from earthquakes. They would chisel round and continue cutting back so that, over time, the quarry floor would have lumps and outcrops of damaged rock sticking out, standing alone, rejected by the builders.

One of these had attracted the name ‘skull’ – because that is what it looked like.

It was a place used for executions. It was by this rock, or upon it, that Jesus was crucified.

We know that for the first years after the death of Jesus, the Jerusalem Christians gathered by this stone on Easter day. That makes sense of the words of Peter,

‘Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood. ‘The stone that the builders rejected’ has become the very head of the corner’. 1Peter 1.1&2.4-7 4

The first Christians were often from among the poor, the marginalised, the socially ‘worthless’. To such people comes this unexpected invitation. Come to Jesus. You too are like stones in the quarry, left behind like so much debris, odd shapes and flawed pieces no one found any use for; discarded after the powers have chosen the best by their measures of value and importance.

But you are, in fact, of great value.

Here at the place of the skull - we too come flawed, unpromising and far behind when judged by the preoccupations and obsessions of this present age.

But listen. All the usual measures of what makes us acceptable, impressive or even useful have been suspended – or rather reversed.

‘Come to him’, says Peter. Really?

This takes some trusting. We should expect anything built on such a foundation to look foolish, sound irrelevant, and be easy to mock and despise by any normal measure.

We will not be found on ‘Grand Designs’.

We will never be impressive building materials. But nor was Jesus.

He was a stone the builders rejected. If Jesus, the rejected one, is the foundation stone of life, we are being shown a completely different way of knowing ourselves and of seeing and knowing God. All that has been rejected and left behind as worthless must be seen in a new light.

Jesus, the stone the builders rejected, has become the foundation stone for the only building that really matters – the new humanity built upon his love.

*Where do you connect with these thoughts?*

*You might pause and keep silence for a few moments.*

**Prayer**

Christ our victim, rejected and cast aside as of no worth.

May we not turn away from you,

but find here, with all this world rejects,

a sure foundation for new life and hope.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Janet Morley - adapted)

*A space to add your own prayers*

We adore you O Christ and we bless you

For by your Holy Cross

You have redeemed the world.

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