

## He carried the cross...

The giver of life carried the tree...

It was once a tree, this ugly cross. It began so small and weak; as it was nurtured it sprouted forth and became taller and stronger. It was full of potential, growing, flourishing, providing a place of shade and rest under its strong arms. A place to be cool and refreshed in the midday sun, as place to wait a while – to be still.

It was beautiful through every season of its life and as it produced its seeds so it continued to create year after year more beauty, more potential, more places of shelter, more signs of strength and growth and hope.

...and its leaves created day by day the air we breathe – keeping us alive.

Then it was cut down- ruthlessly, roughly, without regard for all it still had to give.

The tree which Jesus carried, the cross beam which sat rough on his shoulders, was more than just a piece of wood – it revealed a deeper truth.

Jesus, came to earth, small and weak –a baby, as he was nurtured he grew taller and stronger. He was full of potential, growing, flourishing, providing for the needs of all people under His strong arms. Showing people how to be refreshed and how to wait a while – to be still. He was strength and hope.

Then he was cut – ruthlessly, roughly, without regard for all He still had to give. Like the wood of the tree, he was stripped and killed and breathed His last.

As Jesus carried the tree the splinters pierced His shoulders and His hands. These were little things, compared to the nails which would later be driven through Him. But it had started...

Here we meet Jesus walking along the road carrying the cross. He carries the weight of the cross – the huge amount of sin throughout the ages. But he feels the pain of the splinters too. He feels all the little sins. The times when we have uttered unkind words, given unpleasant looks, written people off... He feels the hurt which we have suffered from these things.

He feels the splintering of our communities, the fractured nature of our relationships and all the difficult memories that are as hard to get out of our heads, as splinters are to get out of your hands.

Simon of Cyrene is taken out of the crowd to help carry the tree. The roughness of the cross pains him. His hands are pierced – some of the splinters are his to bear – his life is as sinful as the next man, but he too is injured beyond what he deserves, not all the splinters belong to Him... he, like us, experiences the complicated and incomprehensible pains of humanity's fall.

Simon looks to Jesus, and as he carries the tree he carries something which seems dead and useless, and yet, because of Jesus, it is to become the symbol of hope throughout the ages and the place where God's purposes are fulfilled.

At this moment your sins, even the little things, are embedded in Jesus' hands, they are taken with Him to Golgotha and to the grave, and he says 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.'

God takes us as He finds us today, and as we walk the way of the tree, let us confess before Him our splintered lives, so that we may die to sin and once again be made fully alive.

### **He carried the purposes of God...**

Jesus, God's own son, carried the purposes of His Father.

Have you ever had a huge responsibility – one that weighs heavily, one that keeps you awake at night? Jesus, in the garden, knew the biggest responsibility of all. God's plan, His purposes for the salvation of the world.

Now, on the cross, He was faced with a choice. His own life, or His Father's plan.

His Father's plan- Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down His life for His friends.

How could Jesus possibly communicate these purposes to those who watched, not least Mary and John? He had already predicted His death, and we are told he spoke plainly about it. But this was raw. Incomprehensible to the world. Why? Because no one in the world can ever comprehend the greatness and majesty and power and might of God. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

Jesus had shown them something of God's unbelievable grace. He lived among them and had given them signs of the kingdom through healings, acts of compassion and justice, but this was even bigger than that. He has shown each of us something of His ways, but the depth of this is beyond even the most intense Spiritual encounters we may have had, or the words of pictures the Spirit may have revealed to us.

For so long the Priests had been the only ones allowed into the holy of holies in the temple, sacrifices had to be made and rituals carried out. Jesus was to be the last sacrifice – the lamb of God. The one who would fully reconcile all people to the Father. No systems required, no keys, and no entrance qualifications save that of knowing Christ crucified.

As we come to the cross we may feel as lost as Mary and John. We may just 'not get it.' Well perhaps we just won't, perhaps we won't ever understand God's purposes, but it happened – that we do know.

Jesus, despite the pain, gave Mary and John in their confusion to one another, and He gives us to each other now.

Mary's example of obedience to God's plans from the day she said 'let it be' is important. She could not have understood God's plan anymore then than she does now at the cross. A sword is piercing her own soul too – as Simeon told her it would back as she presented Jesus in the temple when he was only a few days old. But this is little explanation...

Like Mary and John united, we do not come alone. We bow down together and must pray for one another- that we will all take our right place in God's story.

Jesus is carrying God's purposes – bringing the Kingdom of God to earth – His body on the cross and His death, resurrection and ascension, fulfil the prophecies of old and God's covenant promises, making a way for us to be reconciled to the Father for ever. It is hard to comprehend.

But, consider this: imagine if your life was in danger, you are in the sea, perhaps, and about to drown, and someone pulls you from the sea, but dies themselves. Or you have stepped out into the road and are about to be hit by a car, but someone pushes you out of the way and suffers fatal injuries. How would you feel about the person who saved you?

We were about to die. Our sin was weighing us down and we had been separated from the Father, we had gone so far there was no way back. We were drowning in the sea of our own failure and selfishness, walking on the road- moments away from being hit by hatred of fallen humanity. We were doomed.

Jesus carried the purposes of God and saved us. For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. He made a way back to God- to a new life. How do you feel about God's sacrifice, and the person who saved you?

Respond to Him, and pray for one another.

**At the Cross- Andy Stinson – April 2011**

I wait,  
And time ticks past.

I gaze,  
Made silent by the sight.

I watch,  
As soldiers meticulously move  
Executing each terrible, torturous task.

I gasp,  
Still life lingers in His fragile, broken form.

I flinch,  
As blow by blow,  
Nails bite deep through flesh to find wood.

I stand  
As He is lifted high,  
Silhouetted 'gainst the sky which He has made.

I weep  
As His cry echoes deep in my hardened, calloused heart.

I wail,  
As He screams 'it is complete,  
Finished, final, said and done.'

I fall,  
As the sky turns inky black  
And the sun and moon and stars forget to shine.

I kneel,  
As worlds collide,  
And time ticks by;  
What once bound, no longer seems to hold.

I bow,  
For part of me is gone,  
Kept forever on Calvary's painful peak.

I wait,  
At the foot of the cross, to begin my journey home.