

Journey's End – Mark 15

Last Sunday the unthinkable happened at a vacation home just outside of Kingston, Ontario. Three-year-old Jude Leyton went missing. The resort is in a wooded area, and last weekend the weather was not very good. Immediately the Ontario police along with two search and rescue teams were deployed to look for the boy. 100 professions searched the area, assisted by helicopters and drones in the sky. With each passing hour the chances of finding little Jude alive decreased. It is hard to imagine the anguish of little Jude's parents as each report from the teams on the ground said they found nothing.

By the time Wednesday came the searchers feared the worst – something had happened to little Jude. But at 3:00 pm the helicopter team noted a blue jacket in the bush. When the search team went to that spot they found little Jude fast asleep. He was not only alive but he was very well. Fortunately, he was dressed in a warm coat and boots, but the rescue teams were amazed at how well he was. The rescuers were absolutely delighted that the story ended so well.

As I read that story I noted that we are willing to do almost anything to rescue a lost child. Over 100 professional searchers, helicopters, drones, dogs and even divers were deployed to rescue a lost boy. No one asked "How much will this cost?" It simply was what had to be done.

This Good Friday we think of a greater rescue. God looked down on the people he created and was grieved to see that they were plagued by sin, the desire to live life without God which led to all kinds of terrible acts. From lies and dishonesty to murder and warfare, sin brought ruin and death to people around the world. Even the religious institutions, some established by God Himself, were infected, and greed and pride and arrogance flowed from the so called righteous people.

God's heart was broken by what He saw, but he was not surprised. He knew exactly what sin would do to the perfect world He had created. So God had a rescue plan. 1 Peter 1:20 says that before the creation of the world God had a plan to rescue us from sin.

God was not concerned about how much the rescue would cost him, but wholly committed himself to the plan. And what was the plan? God would lay aside his majesty and come to earth as a baby, grow up among us to become a man, and after three short years of ministry, would allow himself to be betrayed, arrested, falsely tried, condemned, beaten, whipped, punched, spat upon, clubbed over the head, and finally led to a hill outside the city where he was nailed to a wooden cross. There he would die. This was God's plan.

When God came to earth and put on flesh and blood, he took the name Jesus, which means, "God saves." Jesus spent his life in doing good, healing people, delivering them from demons, even raising the dead. He taught people to love one another, and demonstrated that love to the outcasts of society – the lepers, the foreigners, the poor, the tax collectors.

And then one day Satan got a hold of one of the disciples – though Jesus knew all about it – and Judas agrees to betray Jesus to those who felt threatened by His authority. On the night of the Passover Supper, the Jewish celebration of their deliverance from Egypt, Jesus was arrested.

But it was all in God’s plan.

To read the accounts of what happened to Jesus that night and the next day is enough to give a person nightmares. Soldiers used Jesus for a punching bag, laughing as they punched him and beat him with rods. They were given permission to whip him, and the infamous cat-of-nines – a whip with several strands of leather dipped in blood so pieces of glass and bone could be stuck to its strands. This was used to literally rip the flesh off Jesus’ back, sides and torso. Of course, the Romans were not concerned if flesh was torn off the arms and legs as well.

A crown of thorns was put on Jesus head, and then he was hit over the head with a stick so that the three-inch thorns penetrated his skull. No wonder Jesus did not have the strength to carry his own cross to the place of execution, and Simon of Cyrene was commandeered to carry it for him. There on the hill of Golgotha, which we also know as Calvary, Jesus was laid out on a cross and nails were driven into his wrists and ankles. He was hoisted up and displayed to all the world, broken, bleeding and seemingly defeated.

People who watched the proceedings shouted out, “He saved others, but he can’t save himself!” (Mark 15:31)

They were right, and they were wrong. Jesus did not come down from that cross. But not because he **could** not, but because he **would** not. Also he could have saved himself, but to do so meant he could not save others. Jesus had come to seek and save those who were lost. That would be every one of us.

If Jesus came off that cross, the debt we owed because of our sin would not be paid. The wages of sin is death, but Jesus willingly died in our place so we could live. All that suffering and pain Jesus went through was to save us from having to suffer forever in hell. No, he would not come off the cross and save himself. He would rather die so he could save us.

Others mocked, “Let this Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe.” (Mark 15:32)

Jesus knew they would not believe – no matter what he did. He also knew that to be the Messiah, God’s anointed deliverer, he had to stay on that cross.

He was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

And as our true king he showed us that the way to life is through death. Yes, Jesus would conquer death in three days, and that victory would be for all who put their faith in him for

salvation, but our king showed us that before there could be life there must be death. We must die to our selfish lifestyles, die to our desire to be king of our own lives, and learn to submit to the true king – Jesus.

At noon darkness came over the land. Creation could not bear to see her creator murdered. And then Jesus gave a loud cry, Mark tells us, and breathed his last. The king of glory was dead. Unthinkable...

But wait. What was that final cry? The Apostle John records that the last words of Jesus were these: "It is finished!" It was not a cry of defeat, but of victory.

What was finished? The rescue mission. As Jesus died the penalty of your sin, my sin, and the sin of every person who ever lived or will ever live was paid. How do you put a value on the life of the Son of God? His life was more valuable than all our lives combined and more.

Jesus died to rescue us.

It was finished. The rescue was complete. The deal would be sealed on Resurrection morning, but the rescue was finished. What a price was paid. God withheld nothing, but gave all to rescue us. Now all who will confess their sin, turn from their wicked ways and invite Jesus to forgive them and take control of their life will find they get a new start in life. The old is forgiven and forgotten by God, and He gives us a fresh start. And to be sure we have the strength to live the right life, God gives us the Holy Spirit to live in us, and to guide us and empower us to do good.

What a rescue.

Has he rescued you?

You have not been rescued until you say "Yes" to Jesus. Going to church is good, but it does not rescue you. Being baptised is important, but it does not rescue you. Taking communion is precious, but it cannot save us. Only faith in Jesus saves us.

Today we will partake of the bread and wine as commanded by Jesus, to remember Him and the great price he paid to rescue us. The bread reminds us of his body, broken and wounded for us. The wine, or juice, reminds us of his blood that was spilt out for us. We remember that Jesus died that we could live, and as we take the bread and juice into our bodies, we symbolically say, "Come into my life Lord Jesus."

We are saved today not because we are good people. We are saved because of the rescue performed by Jesus through his death and resurrection.

Robert is going to sing. Hear the words of this song: "Yet not I but Christ in me."