

How to destroy evil

The day that Scotland wept. 13th March 1996.

If I remember right, it was a grey day. I was queuing up for a 3rd year exam, at Glasgow University, the subject - *The Problem of Evil* – Christian philosophy.

My mind was buzzing with thoughts of theodicy and the philosophical question, the question that has stretched theologians of every generation, *if God is all good, all loving, all powerful, where does evil come from?*

Then a murmur of noise came spiralling thorough the queue, as a message was passed down the line.

School massacre in Dunblane. A man has shot indiscriminately into a crowd of children.

Surely not! Surely not in Scotland!

In a moment Scotland was on its knees, as 16 children and a school teacher died in Dunblane at the hands of a man going crazy with a gun.

How could one of our own murder innocent children?

Suddenly, I realised that the problem of evil was not just a subject for an exam, but it was a reality on our streets, in our schools, and suddenly people were asking again the old question - why?

Why God, did you allow this to happen?

The day the world wept. 11th September 2001, almost 3000 fatalities.

I can clearly remember this day, I was in my first charge and had been to the Christian bookshop. I had picked up a book about God's grace. Everything was going well that day: the sky was blue, and there was no reason to doubt that God was not in control.

Then, suddenly, the news broke; I was in a shop and the radio was on; America was under attack; four planes were simultaneously hijacked; two planes flew into the Twin Towers, and one into the Pentagon, and one was heading towards the White House but crashed into a field.

In a moment the world was on its knees.

Who could do such a thing?

Who could perpetrate such evil and cause such destruction to happen in the heart of America, in the city of New York? And suddenly the word *evil* was on people's lips, and within hours came a message from the President of the U.S.A. and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

We will hunt them down. We will get rid of this evil – uproot it and deal with it. There will be no hiding places. And, with these words, suddenly the world became a very dangerous place, with those statements and subsequent bombs into the heart of Iraq.

But the terrorists had the reaction they wanted from the Western leaders, that war had broken out, and this gave them the justification to take up weapons and fight the *infidel*. Suddenly, all Westerners were a target, and terrorists began to breed and find a cause that in their eyes was a righteous one, and so the world was put on Red Alert, and a terrorist attack could happen at any moment.

These are two examples in fairly recent history, where the problem of evil, and its manifestation, has been witnessed in our world.

But was the response justified? Is our response ever justified to fight like with like? To take arms and try to act like the Sovereign Judge and cleanse the world from all evil.

Who has given us the right to act like judges?

Who can see as God sees?

Who can make that objective call, to know where and how to rid the world of evil, to uproot everything that in our eyes is evil.

As Christians, we have to turn to our sacred text for help. And today our reading comes from the words of Jesus, who speaks about this perennial problem of evil. He didn't shy away from the issue, but tackled it head on.

For the problem of evil was not just a side-show for Jesus, it was his *raison d'être*. This is why he came. This was his moment. He came to take up the fight against the power of the Evil One. Jesus saw beyond what humans could do, to the power that orchestrates evil in the world.

But he was to demonstrate a different way that we would do well to learn.

So, how did he tackle evil?

For Jesus, evil was a reality. It is part of parcel of the universe, as there is light and darkness, there is good and evil.

Jesus, master of stories, the one who could take great subjects, such as evil, and put them into words which were totally down to earth, and could be understood by the simplest of people, speaks of good and evil as being like seeds.

Last week, we looked at the parable of the sower and the seed, the seed was the gospel and the soil were people, and depending on the soil and its receptiveness to the gospel, depended on its growth and fruitfulness.

Our parable today is different: the seed is the person. The seed is the heart of those who have responded to the gospel.

Matthew 13 v24 & 25...

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: *“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.”*

What is Jesus saying? Well in v 37-39 Matthew has Jesus' interpretation of his words.

³⁷ He answered, *“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.”*

We must understand firstly, that these words were addressed to Jesus' disciples, and more specifically to the early church. This would have been given to them to help them understand all the evil that was in the world in their day and particularly the evil that they were facing in their daily lives.

The persecution that they were coming under, the hostility, the attacks on them and their family... Why were these things happening and what should they do?

Well, it goes back to the very beginning. The world is like a field and it all began perfect. God saw that it was good and he loved his creation. It was good seed that was scattered but an enemy came and sowed weeds, or the older version uses the word *tares*, which is a much better translation. Tares were more than weeds. Tares began as seeds that looked identical to the wheat, almost indistinguishable and hard to tell the difference, and, as they grew, their similarity was striking.

But as the tares grew amongst the wheat they began to link their roots deep into the wheat, that it made the wheat and the tares almost inseparable. The tares were also poisonous – in that, if they were eaten, they could make some sick and drowsy.

Jesus had no difficulty in exposing the enemy as the Devil or Satan. The dark side of the universe, the Evil One who has come to destroy.

Jesus' reaction to evil is to acknowledge it, it is part of the universe. It was not planned, it was sown by an enemy of God.

But it is here and it will always cause problems.

It is pointless trying to deal directly with it – in that it is so closely ingrained in our human lives that if we try and uproot it, if we try and bomb it, and if we try to get rid of it by force, all that does is cause even further problems. We uproot the tares, we spoil the goodness of others.

In hindsight would Bush and Blair have done something different?

But Jesus knows that there is a day of reckoning coming, a day of judgement, when God himself will uproot evil by his angels and they will weed everything out of God's kingdom that causes sin and evil.

But what do we do meanwhile?

Do we stand back and do nothing and let evil win the day?

Definitely not, God's kingdom must continue to grow. That was Christ's message – concentrate of the Kingdom. *Seek first God's Kingdom*, said Jesus.

But it's not a kingdom of human power or force, but it is a kingdom with different values. It is a kingdom that transforms the world from within and it changes people life by life, not by the bomb but by love.

It is a kingdom that is based on the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer. We pray every week, *thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven*.

Jesus' way is not the bomb, but prayer; it is not the fist, but turning the other cheek.

Does that mean we let the terrorist walk all over us? No, but it does mean that we show them a different way, and a better way, and that is Jesus' way.

The Apostle Paul said *and now I will show you a better way* and then he described all about love. Love does not hold a record of wrong but forgives.

The Son of God, who had the power to stop evil by force, chose another way. He confronted evil not with a sword but with a cross. He met evil at Calvary and he gave his life that evil might be defeated.

You see, Calvary was the climax of the battle. It is where God and Satan met head on. Satan did his worst and his best to destroy Jesus. He had the Son of God crucified. The end!

But through Christ's death, a new seed fell into the ground. A seed of hope, of life, of resurrection.

Christ's death was actually just the beginning of a new kingdom, with new values and new seed.

This is what it means to be a Christian, to have the life of Jesus in our hearts and soul.

Are you up for the battle? Then we must follow Jesus. It is not for us to judge or to take revenge. It is for us to love, to turn the other cheek, to love our enemy and to go the extra mile, for when we do this then evil will be defeated and the Kingdom will grow, one person at a time.

May God give you the strength to go forward in faith.