

The Heart of the Matter Video Series

Christ the Crook! By Mark Slatter

Theme:

Christianity has always had a tendency to suppress the cross' disturbing, upsetting properties and has therefore isolated *us* from disturbing and upsetting traits in ourselves and in the world. The crucifixion of Jesus might be the best kept secret – from Christians.

Welcome and Pre-Video Activity:

Find a setting outside of Church property, or somewhere you consider a God-forsaken place (a place that seems to be “farthest” from God’s presence, a lifestyle or attitude that seems “anti-God” and “anti-religious,” a place where God is “powerless”).

Or go to a place inside yourself, an inner wilderness, where you feel farthest from God. What does it feel like to be there? What thoughts and emotions arise in you?

Now, try changing perspective about this place: what if this place that seems far from God is actually a place where God is most present; desiring to meet you/others in the pain and struggles of life? Try to imagine God’s love and embrace. Can you make this shift? What thoughts and emotions arise in you when you do?

Introducing the Video:

For good reason Saint Paul described the crucifixion of Jesus as an obstacle and a scandal. This scandal is a game-changer in terms of our relationship with ourselves, how we view “sinners”, and God’s attitude to the unrighteous. The cross was unspeakably offensive and ungodly *especially for religious persons*. God loves the godforsaken Jesus on the cross, no less than he loves those who in our estimation are also godforsaken.

Spiritual renewal in Christian circles is stultified without this radical understanding of the cross.

The Heart of the Matter:

The Learning Goals of this video are as follows:

- The original meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus is so offensive and disturbing that it is difficult to discuss in religious settings.
- But it is one of the most significant points of conversion that can happen in Christian’s life. It is not belief in something Jesus did for us but more of a change of consciousness, a change of the meaning of failure, weakness, power, control, egoism, who is considered “in” and “out”, and how God chooses self-revelation.
- Those we often think are closest to God are in fact the farthest; and those we think are farthest from God are in fact closer.
- That is the offense and scandal of the Crucified God.

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Learning Activities - Engaging the Heart:

What would I consider to be my most god-awful sin? What am I deeply ashamed of? What are the areas of my life that seem to be “without God,” that is, without hope of being loved and transformed?

This can only be approached from a place of disadvantage and taking ownership of who we are.

The temptation is to take the theology of the cross and control it, run with it, and channel it. I advise the opposite; stay with it, incubate it, and let it release its healing power, in the scandalous places in our lives ... slowly like a time-release capsule. It's an event and an experience first; a theology second.

Review - Gathering the Learning:

This is difficult. It really means being stripped of the religious defence mechanisms and egocentrism (our need to be right, to be in control, which is different from having a strong sense of one's dignity).

Closing:

Read Psalm 22 and then allow silence – an uncomfortable silence, if need be. Sit with the silence for 3-5 minutes.

Share with the person next you one thought that comes from the video by Fr. Mark and your experience of the wilderness.

Close with a version of the spiritual “Were you There?” song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6e3Z0EW60Gc> J.Cash version

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE HEART OF THE MATTER VIDEO](#)

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Resources:

Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion*. Fortress Press, 1977, 99 pp.

<http://www.newsweek.com/how-romans-used-crucifixion-including-jesus-political-weapon-318934>

The crucifixion was the electric chair of its day; a punishment reserved for social pariahs.