

Group Notes 13 November 2011

There is no greater love

Welcome - Ice Breaker

Do you have a hero, historical or fictional? What appeals to you about them?

Word – 1 John 4:7-14

On Remembrance Sunday I always think of my grandfather, Albert Taylor. He was born into a very poor family. They were farm labourers in Norfolk with lots of kids. To survive, my grandad learned to live off the land. He knew which plants you could dig up to eat the roots, which leaves you could eat, and if there was a pheasant or partridge anywhere in the landscape, he knew it was there. Ray Mears had nothing on him!

Albert signed up aged 16, younger than our Ben, to fight in WW1. He fought in the Battle of Cambrai. After initial British success, a German counter-offensive broke through. A small detachment, a few over a hundred, was thrown forward to hinder the enemy advance so that the rest of the troops could pull back safely and regroup. This was called a sacrifice party – they put their lives on the line so their comrades could be saved. Only my grandad and one or two others survived. Everyone else was killed.

Albert was taken prisoner and endured conditions of great hardship. Eventually he escaped, living off the land as he knew so well how to do, moving by night and hiding up by day. He made his way to Holland. As Holland was neutral in WW1, he was interned as a combatant for the rest of the war.

Question 1: Who or what do you think of during that two minutes' silence?

A sacrifice party... sacrifice is an almost universal practice. There were sacrifices for all kinds of things in the Old Testament, for sin, for thanksgiving, for mornings and evenings, for the birth of a child, the start of a new enterprise... The surrounding pagan nations also practised sacrifice, as did classical Greece and Rome. There were the ghastly human sacrifices of Aztecs and other South American tribes, but lest we think we are superior there were the mysterious sacrifices of the bog people throughout Europe. In China ritual sacrifices of burned paper objects represent offerings of the real things to ancestors. Animists in many parts of the world offer sacrifices to placate angry gods and demons. Muslims have just celebrated the second Eid (commemorating Abraham offering his son) by sacrificing a sheep or goat. It's everywhere! It's almost universal in human cultures.

Question 2: Why does sacrifice have such widespread appeal to people?

- Are we trying to buy God off with these gifts?
- Or are we trying to give God something costly? Why?

Of course sacrifice isn't just an interesting anthropological and theological phenomenon. It is an essential part of the fabric of human life, even in an apparently secular society. For example, athletes sacrifice a normal life to their training in order to excel, mystics sacrifice their comforts to the poor, statesmen and women sacrifice their private lives for a vision of their country's future, revolutionaries sacrifice their lives for an ideal... Closer to home, newly weds sacrifice personal freedoms to adapt to their partner's lifestyle, parents sacrifice time, effort and money to bring up their kids, get them through uni etc, carers give up job prospects for those in their care. A world where no-one made sacrifices for others would be a diminished world full of petty people.

Question 3: Who has made sacrifices for you? What was their motive?

- Has any great human enterprise ever been achieved without sacrifice?

One of the different things about Christianity is that, unlike Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and other isms above, we don't practice sacrifice any more. This isn't because we don't believe in sacrifice but because we know there has been one sacrifice so momentous that none other even comes close. Every sacrifice offered before it was just a faint foreshadowing, and no sacrifice after it could ever equal its life-changing power. This is the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. In 1 John 4:10 this is the very definition of what love is: *This is love... that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*. So if we want to know what love is really like, look at the Cross. The Cross is the ultimate revelation of who God is, because as 1 John 4:8 tells us, God *IS* love. Without the cross, God would not have shown the full extent of His love. Since God is the creator and sustainer of all things, since He is the ultimate person who defines all reality, it follows that sacrifice is in the very DNA of the universe. And He made us in His own image. Perhaps that is why sacrifice has such a universal appeal to human beings?

Question 4: Do sacrifice and love always go together? Can there be sacrifices made without love?

- **What about sacrifices that Christians still make, for example giving things up for Lent, sacrificing their career to be a missionary, or their time and effort for their family, friends or church? What is the relation of these sacrifices to the Cross?**

Worship ideas for groups with no musicians.

Try downloading some pictures of different crosses and crucifixes from the internet and printing them off, enough for everyone in your group to have a reasonable choice. There are loads on Google Images for starters. Spread them out on a table and ask people to choose the picture that most speaks to them. Let each person pray quietly to come to the foot of the cross and there receive whatever God wants to show them. Sharing with the group afterwards is optional.

Works/witness.

Is anyone in your group a carer? Are they getting enough support in this sometimes arduous task? Could the group pray for them? Could the group offer any other support?

Christmas is coming up soon and there are special opportunities for us. Could anyone in your group:

- Help distribute our Christmas flyers and posters?
- Have a Christmas party and invite friends?
- Invite friends or family to our Christmas events?