

We are saved by the death of Jesus. This is basic to the Christian faith. Jesus' death changed history forever. In fact, we measure time by it. The effect of His death so marked the world that, not long after He died, the world began to measure time by Him. We are in the year 2024 since Jesus was born.

But how does this work? How can one person's death ricochet through history, going backwards and forwards in time, being somehow beyond time, so as to effect past, present, and future all at the same time, as if that death is forever happening at the present moment? Is this simply some mystery of God that isn't meant to be understood within any of our normal categories?

Too often, the answer we were given was simply this: It's a mystery. Believe it. We don't have to understand it.

And there's a lot of wisdom in that. How we are washed clean in the Blood of Christ is something we understand more in the heart than in the head. We know its truth, even when we don't understand it. We know its truth so deeply that we stake our lives on it. I wouldn't be a priest for almost 45 years if I didn't believe that we are saved through the death of Jesus. And you would not be here celebrating the beginning of the holiest week of the year. But how do we explain it?

Theologian Edward Schillebeeckx wrote a ground-breaking book called *CHRIST THE SACRAMENT OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD*, and in it he states simply that we have no framework within which to explain this. Another theologian, C.H. Dodd, states, 'There was more here than could be accounted for upon the historical or human level. God was in it.' That's part of the mystery. God was in it.

We just read Mark's account of the Passion of the Christ – and Mark provides us with the example of Mary of Bethany, who anointed Jesus at Simon the leper's house. By breaking the alabaster jar of very expensive perfume over the whole body of Jesus, and filling the house with that gorgeous scent, she seems to have intuited what Jesus was about to do on the cross. The authorities were set on killing Him. What her lavish gesture symbolized was the deepest meaning of Jesus' passion and death. The body of Christ is the jar containing the most precious perfume of all time, namely, the Holy Spirit. It was about to be broken open so that the Holy Spirit could be poured out over the whole of humanity – past, present, and to come – with boundless generosity. Until that body had been broken on the cross, the full extent of the gift of God in Christ could not be known. It's full transforming possibilities for us could not be foreseen.

Dodd describes how Jesus' death ricochets through history in these words: There was more here than could be accounted for upon the historical or human level. God was in it. The creative purpose of God is everlastingly at work in this world of His. It meets resistance from our wayward wills. But if at any point, human history should become entirely nonresistant to God, perfectly surrendered to His design – then from that point, the creative purpose would work with unprecedented power. That is just what the perfect obedience of Jesus affected. Within human nature and human history, He established a point of complete nonresistance, complete surrender to the will of God, and complete transparency to God's plan and design. As we revert to that moment, it becomes contemporary, and we are laid open to the creative energy forever working to make us more closely into the image and likeness of God. The obedience of Christ is the release of creative power for the perfecting of human life. A decision taken by a great man or woman can alter every aspect of life, for the present and for all that comes after.

Our moral actions all leave a trace, and sometimes -- if that moral act is equivalent to splitting the atom -- that effect lasts forever. Jesus' death split the moral atom -- for all eternity. And nothing has been the same since. Amen. (adapted from Rolheiser, posting of 13 March 2011)

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