

Remembering pain and loss at Christmas - Rev Melvin Salzke

A couple of years ago I came across an article by Chad Bird [American writer & teacher who promotes honest Christianity].

It was called “**The things we carry to church**” – and it is a very important focus for Advent

We carry so many things with us – and we carry them to church – in silence

- Pain in many forms
- Fractured families
- Broken relationships – with their broken memories
- The death of loved ones – sometimes in tragic circumstances
- Pain of arguments and harsh words and with ones we love dear
- Regrets of words not said, feelings not expressed, opportunities gone forever
- Sense of failure
- Deep, deep loneliness
- We carry our buried desire for someone, anyone, to take notice of us, talk to us, show us that we’re not just useless human failures that our existence does matter, that we mean something to someone.
- We carry our disappointment with God, with his apparent brutal deafness to our fervent prayers, the lost enthusiasm and vibrancy that our faith once had
- We carry all these things, and much more.
- We carry them in silence, often wrapped behind the mantle of a smile.
- We carry them to church.

Now I am going to pose an unusual question – one rarely discussed in Church or Christian conversation.

What did Jesus do in his first 30 years, and is it important to us?

The answer to the latter – Yes ABSOLUTELY

As part of my journey I discovered this in Advent 43 years ago. I was a state youth leader in my church – we had revival of faith in youth, and I was a leader in large youth training camps 250 plus, camping in tents keen to learn and grow in God. I was a leader in another interdenominational group working street level in Kings Cross, and large event and beach missions of 40 to 60 young people. I was leading and giving much to others – But inside I was struggling with deep loneliness, deep sense of failure and struggles with a string of broken relationships. I took time out alone to fast and pray – which turned out to be more struggle than pray. I decided to ready the Letter to the Hebrews – and managed in three days to read just 3 ½ chapters. But I found something special for me!

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

This part of Hebrew chapter 4 is very rich in content – but let us just focus on that one question – **What did Jesus do in his first 30 years, and is it important to us?**

This section of Hebrew 4 gives us the answer – and it is very special. Jesus in his growing years learned to identify with our struggles.

Verse 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

There I was age 24 – the very same age of Jesus in his formative years..... and he had struggled with the same struggles I was dealing with. My Jesus understood my struggle – with empathy and understanding – and he had struggled with them - without sin. So he was my great high priest for me to go to in my struggles. How amazing is that! - Release came for me when I could say to Jesus, **I am sick of trying to sort out my struggles – I want you to sort them for me.** I share my story simply by way of illustration.

Here is a reason we prepare our hearts this Advent to welcome Jesus afresh. Not only did Jesus come to earth, born as a baby to carry our sins to the Cross - **But he came to live as one of us in his humanness – and identify with our weaknesses, our struggles, our temptations** – yet without succumbing to sin – so he identifies with us in a way that has a unique power to help

As we move towards Christmas carry our pains and struggles within - Lets us be encouraged with the words of Vs 16

¹⁶ Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. – Notice the words “mercy” and “grace”

Let us repeat that

¹⁶ Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I close with some words from the article by Chad Bird

“This brother, Jesus of Nazareth, is Jesus of the dying marriage, Jesus of the lonely victim, Jesus of the divorced, Jesus of the weeping parent, Jesus of the embittered worshiper who strikes out like a wounded child with words that damn his Father above. He is Jesus of sinners. He is Jesus of the soiled, of the shamed, of those who are sickened by what they see in the mirror.

He is embarrassed by none of them. They are welcome in his church. Only they will feel at home in his Father’s house anyway. This is not a place for those who have no problems, never do wrong, and imagine heaven is constantly clapping over their stellar life performance. Such golden people needn’t go slumming in God’s house.

Church is for the lost and losers, the hurting and bleeding, the walking or crawling or carried-on-a-stretcher wounded. The church is not a mirror-covered Gold’s gym to flex our spiritual muscles but a temple where the defiled are cleansed and made holy. The church is where poor, messy fools are bathed and robed as sons and daughters of the King.”

As we journey thru Advent and prepare to welcome Jesus anew in the festival of Christmas, let us be mindful – **Our Jesus that we welcome - came to live as one of us in his humanness – and identify with all our weaknesses, our struggles, our temptations** – yet without succumbing to sin – so he identifies with us in a way that has a unique power to help.

Amen.