



A friend said that, sometimes, I am difficult to understand, I am too wordy. And so when I was asked to condense the message the church has for the world in one or two sentences it invariably trapped me into a swamp of words. Perhaps she is right? After turning out several alternative ways of expressing the core in my own mind, I have come to take a rest at:

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (ESV) or as expressed by the translators of the NLT,

"God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.."

The gospel in one sentence!

Others may have turned to John 3:16-17. "For this is how God loved the world: He gave[a] his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

Both, verse 16 or 17 say the same in a different way. First of all, I hear John announcing good news in the very first words: *God loved the world*. The gospel, and so the message we have been given is not about an angry God who is so enraged at sinful humanity that God will damn every one of them if they don't repent. The Gospel, and therefore our message is about a God, who is Father and whose character and motives are all about love, love for the creation that He has made. Love in the form of compassion for the lost drives God's actions.

The object of God's love is the world (in Greek the word *cosmos*). I read that as every human being, indeed the whole cosmos.

What lies at the heart of the gospel message is good news that God is a God of love, not wrath.

May GOD make these “worst of times”, better, and one day, finished!

Charles Dickens’ in his book A TALE OF TWO CITIES starts with its famous opening narrative:

“It was the best of times and the worst of times.”

Only a very unusual person would say that this COVID-19 pandemic is “... the best of times ...”!

And yet, it is a time in which we can experience the presence of God nonetheless, because he is never far away. He can become visible through acts of generosity, picking up food for seniors, dropping a little "Easter Gift" at the front door of our neighbours, or perhaps more radical picking up the grocery bill of the person coming after you. But we can also see God's presence among us in the courageous health care providers, workers designated as ‘essential,’ and relentless can-do first responders. This sight, seeing God can make these horrific days, especially for those who desperately need them, a “best of times”.

Couples that were often apart, are rediscovering what connects them to each other. The long forgotten board game or playing cards come out again. The old fashion photo album is picked up again.

It is the “worst of times”. It is a friend, a daughter, son, a loved one working or laying in an isolation ward, with COVID-19. It is lost jobs, lost income, and fear creeping into our every thoughts. It is the time when fear begins to rule us, with one small question that would change all: ‘What next?!’

It is the "right of times". This is not a quote from TALE OF TWO CITIES, and though it is one of my favorite stories, it is another book that reminds us that we are in the "right of times."

We are, I believe, all too in love with the life-affirming part of the Gospel. Enthusiastically welcoming Jesus into our lives, and yet we are being repulsed by the prospect of our own cross. On Palm Sunday, like any other day being enveloped in life-affirming chaos, there is always a side of this Passion Sunday which points to death.

This is not the consolation we want to hear. Our “knowing” that all, in-the-end, will come to a good end is still unsettling.

Whether riding a donkey while travelling on a carpet of palms or garments or, soon after, while bleeding-out on a cross: Jesus' mission did not change, his thoughts did not wonder, his focus remained.

For us in the "West" COVID-19 is our time to trust. For millions elsewhere, it is a lack of clean water and food, for millions more it is the lack of safety and shelter, for millions more it is the lack of hope that anything will ever change.

Whatever the outcome of COVID-19 will be for the individual, when it is all over things will have changed and things we have lost will remain lost. Eventual answers will never really satisfy, and dissected "what ifs" cannot bring back the things that were lost, or who has died. But perhaps our cross can make us more sensitive and aware of the millions and millions who do not suffer under COVID-19 but under oppression, war and lack of the basic essentials of life, including hope.

GOD and the Gospel is the axis where the "best" and "worst" of times converge.

We are invited, encourage to trust Him without knowing a set outcome because we trust, like Jesus, that GOD alone will see us through!

Perhaps she is right :), I am difficult to understand, perhaps I am using too many words and so;

1 Timothy 2:4-6 Easy-to-Read Version (ERV)

"God wants everyone to be saved and to fully understand the truth. There is only one God, and there is only one way that people can reach God. That way is through Christ Jesus, who as a man gave himself to pay for everyone to be free.

This is the message that was given to us at just the right time."

Your wordy friend

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