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The Periphery Where God Is: Good Friday (Mark 15: 6-41)

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I like to visit this place. When I stop awhile, and pay attention, I start to notice a 'secret life' unfolding in our midst. We're close to Belconnen – the shopping mall, the bus station, and some massive new construction sites. We're near the suburbs where some of us lead our busy important lives, and the roads and bike paths that connect us to the rest of our busy, important city. Listen now, to the life going on around us: traffic, aeroplanes, people passing on the bike path.

Meanwhile here, on this little island, there's another life going on. The swans, the ducks and waterbirds, the ravens and red-wattle birds, the trees and their strange root systems ... all fulfilling wholly other destinies. It's as if they participate in a different, secret, half-hidden life with its own rhythms and logic, unobserved by most, unnoticed ... just on the periphery of the world's awareness.

It might have been like this at Golgotha ... as Jesus hung on the cross, dying slowly in agony while, just within earshot, life went on in the city of Jerusalem – and closer at hand the soldiers doing a day's work, passers-by idly curious.

I find it a confronting thought – that then, as now for much of our society, what we remember here, the event we today mourn and honour, happens just off-stage. At the edge of the city, Jesus the Nazarene was pushed out of the world ... apparently in ignominy, a failure, the whole ambitious enterprise come to nothing, maybe even doubting himself, without consolation – even the felt consolation of God's approval.

Like I said – it’s a confronting thought. But after all, perhaps it’s not so strange. In my experience, often enough God shows up in our lives like this too ... just on the edge of things; provoking the half-remembered memory we don’t really want to dredge up; bringing awareness of pain that lies just below consciousness; whispering a call which seems at one level absurd, impossible – and yet, despite our doubts and against all appearances, connected to a deeper truthfulness.

For us, as for Jesus, God draws us into some dark and difficult places, places that many do not see or, if they do, perceive only as threat and unrighteousness. For us, as for Jesus, God’s call – if we respond – is likely to lead us into being misunderstood, lonely and filled with dread. No wonder we want to ignore it, push it out, return to business as usual. The way of God’s life in the world, the way of the Cross, moves to a different rhythm – and life sourced here unfolds with a different logic. And that’s because it’s not about just making nice – covering over what is fearful, dark and unreconciled. It’s about uncovering, naming, bringing healing at the root.

So where is God present at the edge of your life? At the edge of our world? What half recognized pain is prickling just on the periphery of awareness? What, when you dare really pay attention, is crying out to be heard? Perhaps it’s the cry of the earth, muffled by the noisy imperatives of an exploitative economy. Perhaps it’s the despair of millions of refugees and the silent poison of the arms industry. Perhaps it’s the pang that comes as I turn my head at the traffic lights – avoiding the eyes of the guy who wants to wash my windscreen. Perhaps it’s some wound from the past, to name which seems to risk everything.

Hanging on this Cross, Jesus absorbs without self-protection or resistance the sin of the world – all we have done and left undone; all that has been done to us; all that we can’t help participating in again and again and again. At the foot of this Cross, we can name and lay all our burdens – of failure, injury, self-loathing, complicity, guilt and

shame; all that we are enmeshed in, run by, and cannot transform by ourselves. He has gone where we hardly dare to look, taking into the life of God all that separates us from love, so that we might be healed, forgiven, restored. This is the periphery where God is. Here we find life.