

Lent is nearly over. Let's not worry about whether it's been a good Lent so far. It is still possible to finish well.

The church invites us to spend a whole week - The Holy and Great Week - focussing on the account of The Lord's passion we find in the Bible.

The bible is an anthology - about God's relationship with our ancestors. When we look at the old testament we can see some unease about their centuries old framework – that animal sacrifice was necessary to stay in God's good books.

Some people had started to float the idea there was a better way - that God wasn't too impressed with animal sacrifices. They said what God really wanted was for people to be forgiving, peaceful, kind and loving.

Jesus embodied and taught that all through his ministry. The kingdom of God is here now. Try choosing to live differently and turn the world upside down. Love God and love people, especially people not like us. Folk latched on to Jesus and his teaching. - Hence the demo that first Palm Sunday – a crowd of joyful people peacefully serenading their Messiah into his Royal city. They didn't realise how subversive and unsettling that would be for those in authority.

It had to end in tears.

But the lasting effect of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection was seismic. People saw that the way of self giving love that Jesus taught and exemplified was what God wanted. It made sense. Doing things differently felt good. In fact it felt so good and spread so fast that it triggered the change of an era - a paradigm shift.

From the first century small Independent groups of people who followed Jesus' way grew over the next 300 years into a church which fixed the theoretical framework with words - creeds and a canon of scripture. That was all rather intellectual.

People have spent nearly 2000 years coming up with theories about what Jesus' passion achieved and what it means for humanity. Sometimes one theory made sense and then another seemed better. None is mutually exclusive, you can hold several different theories at once, - and all can be justified by the manual.

But when I think these theories through – theories that reduce to concepts like Balance the books or Pay the Ransom Theories like those don't cut the

mustard for me nor for many who are not in church today. The problem is that these theories imply that our relationship with God involves a transaction.

Christianity continues to evolve. The final version of Christianity as a religion is some way off. I think it's called the kingdom of God. But Christianity as a faith remains strong and unassailable.

Let's return to this Holy Week and Jesus' passion.

My scientific background doesn't help. My dominant way of being present wants to analyse, to discuss, to understand. That is what you do in transactions.

But I am faced with things too wonderful for me. Jesus showed us the extent of his love, God's love – limitless – he loved to the end. It's not a transaction – it's a gift.

Intellect can't handle that alone. I must pull back from my habitual comfort zone. To be fully present I need a broader base.

As I reflect on the passion story I need to

- quieten my intellect, stop turning the precious gift over to check the hall mark,
- allow my hibernating emotional centre to warm up and feel the love,
- activate my movement centre and find an appropriate posture or activity,
- and then watch and wait in gratitude and in awe.

That is how I hope to spend some time this Holy Week.