

Good Friday 2016

Selfies. A newish word for something that has been around a while, but is now much more common. The mobile phone allows us to take pictures of ourselves and then send them on. We might decide to do this spontaneously or might even decide on it some time ahead. The selfie says to someone else, been there, seen it, met them –got the picture.

But it doesn't end there, it wants a response. Like „Wow, aren't you someone, be my love, or friend, favourite son/uncle etc-fill in the appropriate gap.

So although a selfie is often spontaneous, it is done with a **purpose**, the picture is **posed** and it seeks a **personal response**.

To say that the crucifixion is a selfie is to presume that God planned it. This is a bit of an outrageous idea, at first glance. But there is plenty of evidence to substantiate this. Probably the earliest is from Paul's letter to the Philippians ch 2v 6-12. This was most likely written in AD 61, some 28-29 years after the death of Christ. But this part of the letter is commonly regarded as Paul quoting an early Christian hymn. So it could be a fair bit older. Here it is:

**Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
who, although He existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,
but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,
and being made in the likeness of men.
Being found in appearance as a man,
He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.**

So the dominating idea is that God comes in the form of a human. Incredibly he does not come, as the Pantocrator, the God of all creation, but as a servant or slave. But if that was a surprise, the next bit is mind boggling. He comes as the suffering servant.

This is not an idea of the early church or even Paul, it is contained in the very first sermon of Jesus in his home synagogue in Nazareth. His text is a part of Isaiah ch 61. This part of Isaiah is known as the servant songs. So Jesus aimed to be a servant and on at least 3 occasions he says to his disciples, he would suffer and die. So in Mark ch 8 v31, he begins to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

Of course there are those who say, that this deliberate act of sacrifice cannot have been the intention of Jesus. It is all a later mythological interpretation by the church. This does have the advantage of making the early Christians incredibly inventive, but the drawback is that Jesus is pretty thick. And I don't mean a bit limited, but down right stupid. Nobody seems to dispute that Jesus was from

Galilee and that he spent about three years teaching there. He then decided to go to Jerusalem. He goes into the city at the time of the Passover. The security forces are on top alert, because there had been disturbances in the town in the recent past. Jesus does not lie low. Instead he makes a provocative entry into the town, which alerts the authorities of his presence and then the next day he causes unrest in the temple precincts. It was clear to anyone and everyone that there was not going to be a happy ending. Why else were the disciples so depressed at the beginning of the Last Supper. But throughout all this, Jesus is calm and in control until he gets to the Garden of Gethsemane. Here he is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death- Then he sees the guards coming to arrest him and he makes his last decision, „Look the son of man is delivered into the hand of sinners. Rise , Let us go! Here comes my betrayer.

And so the ordeal begins that takes him to the cross. And so we are given God's self- the crucified God. There can be no doubt about it being posed. It is not an accident. Love has encountered evil and the picture is grim. But what is the purpose of this?

Well there are many answers to this question. I will bring you just one. It comes from another German theologian, Prof Jurgen Moltmann.

He says that God who watches from a distance and who just watches human suffering is not found in the gospels. There we find a picture of one who both suffers our suffering, and who also suffers while witnessing our suffering. Moltmann's compelling quote from Elie Wiesel's book, *Night*, drives this point home:

The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth lasted for half an hour. "Where is God? Where is he?" someone asked behind me....And I heard a voice in myself answer: "Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows".... (The Crucified God p 271)

Christianity's emphasis on God's kenotic *agape*—self- emptying love for that which is Other—requires a God who will risk of being hurt in the process of loving. For a God who loves, it can be no other way.

And the response can only be that of Isaac Watts. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life , my soul, my all.