

“Jesus’ Humbled Head”

Once upon a time, when clothes became dirty, someone had to take them down to the river and rinse them over and over. Eventually, somebody came up with the idea of a washboard. You’d get water and soap and rub the dirty clothes against the washboard until the dirt came out. It was tough on the clothes and on the hands, but you didn’t have to go to the river anymore. These days, we throw the clothes in a machine, add soap, and push a button. Brilliant ideas have made our lives easier, across the board. Brilliant ideas save hands, save time, save clothes, presumably. But not all ideas born in the human mind are brilliant. Some are dull, and others are downright destructive.

The heads that have come before ours have been able to solve problems such as washing clothes faster and keeping the inside temperature around 70 degrees no matter what. We are capable of brilliant thought but are just as capable of dark and twisted thought. One of the tempting dangers of our minds is that no one else can see what we think or imagine. And a person may conclude that ‘I’m free to think whatever I want to think because they are only thoughts, thoughts that stay inside my head. No one else can see them. What’s the harm in imagining certain scenarios—no one’s getting hurt.’ But here’s a challenge: we are to love God with all our heart, soul, MIND, and strength. Our thoughts are to be involved in our love of God. Having said that, do you think that God would approve of all that goes on in your head?

On this Ash Wednesday, I invite you to consider both your thoughts, and thoughts that occupied the mind of Jesus. Though it’s nearly impossible for us to imagine, inside of Jesus’ head were only pure, good, loving, holy thoughts. He was completely considerate of those around him. He was consumed with helping those in need. When Satan tried to lead Jesus into sin in the wilderness, our Lord’s thoughts never strayed from the Word of God. His mind was made up: it was fixed on accomplishing his mission in Jerusalem. And here is what you really ought to find astonishing: Jesus fully understood what was going to happen in Jerusalem, and he went there anyway.

And it didn’t take long—after Jesus rode into Jerusalem, hailed as a hero, things got messy. Soldiers found thorns and wrapped them around Jesus’ head, crafting a cruel crown. With all the good Jesus had done, he deserved a crown of gold covered in jewels, but what he got instead was grotesque. This was a callous bit of mockery, shaped by a lifetime of execution and bloodshed. For the soldiers, this was just another day at the office; another Hebrew rebel to put down, and this one said he was King? In these soldiers we see something dreadfully familiar—we’re reminded of just how easy it is for human beings to warp and become numb to violence; to be entertained by torture, to slap God in the face and laugh.

As Jesus staggered through the streets of Jerusalem, everyone could see the ugliness of the crown on his head. In that crown of thorns, you can see how ugly and dark humanity can be. The soldiers dreamed it up and pressed the thorns into his flesh. But that crown was made of our hateful, twisted thoughts as well. The only one who didn’t deserve to wear it is wearing it. His

brow is encircled by sin not his own. Yet he's wearing the awful crown. He makes no attempt to pull it off. He keeps walking the pathway to the cross, because his mind is made up.

O Sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down/Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown./O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was thine!/Yet though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.

We can't do much about the thoughts that come into our heads. We can try to think about good things, and concentrate on brilliant ideas, but the dark images appear automatically. No act of will can stop them. What is there, then, to do?

It is to do what we have been doing; it is to fix our minds on Jesus. Remember: Jesus fully understood what was going to happen in Jerusalem, and he went there anyway. Why? He went to Jerusalem's cross to lay down his head for the thoughts that go on in ours. The crown of thorns is a sickening symbol of suffering, but for you it can be something else; it can be a sign of sacrificial love. Jesus decided to wear that crown for you. He resolved to bear the cross for you. He understood that if you were left to pay for every ugly thought you've ever had, that the debt would be insurmountable, and the resulting prison would be inescapable. So he set his mind and took action and paid your debt, and mine, and everyone else's thrown in. He didn't wait until all your thoughts were pure. He went ahead and paid with his life, crediting your account. Do you understand that Jesus did this specifically for you? To the degree that you do, you will have peace of mind and a settled heart, because when we fixate on ourselves, the flaws and failures are painfully obvious. When you concentrate on Christ Jesus you come to know that your flaws and failures and darkest thoughts were buried in Jesus' tomb. The price for them is paid.

This means you can relax. You can be at rest. The goodness of God flows to you continuously. Wholeness and clarity come to you in your connection with Christ Jesus. That only makes sense if Jesus is alive, and that is the central claim of the Christian faith; Jesus died and rose again—so he is a living source of the integrity that comes from thinking through the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus is alive. The crown of thorns was worn for a few hours. A kingly crown of eternal life has replaced it. By faith we follow Jesus through this pattern of suffering followed by glory. His future is yours. He laid down his head for the thoughts that go on in ours. He now fills our heads with visions of hope and heavenly worship. He pours into our minds a vision of a kingdom where the poor are lifted up, the sick are healed and the dead are raised. During this season of Lent, let us commit to flooding our minds with God's Words, which will point us to the cross and crown of our Savior, Jesus.

