

The emblem

Good Friday 2 April 2010

### **The emblem (of suffering and shame)**

I want to show you FIVE WELL KNOWN symbols and I what I'm going to get you to do. What I want you to do is to look at each one. And as you do. I want you to ask yourself two things. The first thing ... ask yourself ... Do you recognize the symbol? Is it familiar to you? That's the first thing. The RECOGNITION TEST. And the second thing. I want you to get all introspective and ask yourself..... What kind of feelings do these symbols create in you? What's your emotional response to these EMBLEMS.

Here's the first one.



MacDonalds

Do you recognize it? Yell it out if you want. What does it evoke in you? Just make a mental note. Here's number two.



Commonwealth Bank. What's that? What does it evoke? Don't answer that!



Three. Ferrari. Four. Apple. And here's the last one. Nike

Now I don't know what kind of response you had to those symbols. I had a range of responses. From apathy, to mouth watering, to anger, to desire and a I suppose a few other sub-conscious responses.

And you may have had some of the same. And of course. These logos are designed to be recognizable. They're meant to evoke something.

Seems like It's almost impossible to have a successful business if you haven't got the EMBLEM factor.

Do a quick google search with the words " logo design". And the search returns 133 million page references. One expert put it this way.

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branding is an attempt to garner an **emotional response** to one's products and/or services. ....This may include specific color schemes, design styles.....

And so...with your emblem. You do it in an INSTANT. And you HAVE TO. No-one's got time to read a paragraph of text. So your symbol needs to do most of the talking.

Now let me show you just one more symbol.

Slide - Picture of the Cross.

There's the Christian emblem.

There's the raw marketing material of the church.

We had a logo way before MacDonaldis.

But I wonder. ..if you had the choice..... If you could decide on the best marketing material for the church. Is that what you'd choose?

You want to grab people in that instant. Wouldn't you want to come up with something that's going to draw people. Maybe something a bit more exciting? And maybe a bit less GRUESOME? Something that's not going to scare small children? Something more powerful looking? More attractive?

Can you imagine fronting up to the marketing executive to run a campaign for the church. What've you got to work with they ask you? And you drag a splintery wooden cross into their office.....how about this? They'd probably try to talk you down I'm guessing - In that instant.....is that what you want people to get? The cross.....It's Not particularly exciting. It's a symbol of suffering. That's what we sing.

On a hill far away,  
Stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem..... of SUFFERING..... and SHAME;

So why the cross... When we could have had the horse, or the swoosh. Or something else?

And sometimes as churches it seems as though we're a little embarrassed by the cross. So we talk about the gospel of power. And the life of victory instead.

But you can't get away from it.

In Galatians the apostle Paul says

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**Galatians 6:14** <sup>14</sup> May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.... through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

In 2 Corinthians he says.

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... **1 Corinthians 2:2** ..... I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

For Paul the message of the cross is of first importance.

And in his first letter to Corinth Paul says those words you heard me read out earlier. Verse 17 of chapter 1

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**1 Corinthians 1:17-31** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel-- not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

So for Paul the cross is pivotal. But he's not just looking through rose coloured glasses. In the same breath as he declares the importance of the cross. And the

power of the cross. He draws attention to what it looks like to a lot of people.

Verse 18

<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.....

The cross has a polarizing effect.

For some...it's ridiculous. And just like on Good Friday two thousand years ago. Some will mock. Some out loud. Some just quietly. But others will cling to it tightly. Give God praise because of it.

Now I confess. I'm a consumer. And I buy into the whole brand thing. I like having that Toyota badge on the car. I trust the brand. If had the money probably buy a Ferrari. Just for the badge. Show how cool I am. Make you all jealous. I can understand..... why people buy into emblems.

I can understand that. But Why would Christians buy into this message of the cross?

Must be some appeal – According to About.com. Christianity is ranked as the largest religion in the world Something like 2 billion Christians worldwide.

Approximately 83 million Bibles are distributed globally per year.

And get this. An average of 171,000 Christians worldwide are martyred for their faith per year.

The cross might be marketing nightmare but Christians are pretty well represented. And sure,..... sometimes we get it wrong. And make Jesus the king of prosperity. Or the king of my emotional healing. Or the king of moral example.

But he's the king who went to the cross. First importance Paul says.

And more than that. Try marketing this. Don't leave this bit out. He's the king who wants his followers to do the same. Take up your cross and follow me. Jesus said.

For Jesus' disciples the whole idea of the cross was a pretty hard pill to swallow. Day after day they're with Jesus.

And here's a guy whose power heals cripples and blind people.

Here's a guy who's teaching has authority. Whose words expel demons.

Here's a guy who walks on water. Tells the waves and the storm to CALM DOWN.

Who RAISES THE DEAD. Who's wiser than the trickiest of his enemies.

Who they work out is the Christ. Peter gets it right. Who do you say that I am Jesus says?

You are the Christ. The king.

And Jesus says don't tell. Because they haven't got the foggiest idea what this king's here to do.

Despite the fact that Jesus spells it out for them.

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**Luke 18:31-34** <sup>31</sup> Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. <sup>32</sup> He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him.

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<sup>33</sup> On the third day he will rise again." <sup>34</sup> The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

And as things unfold exactly as Jesus said. (as Nathan read it out for us) Things don't get much clearer for the disciples. As Jesus hangs on the cross – he's the Christ..... crucified. And it doesn't make sense. He's the king..... with a crown of thorns. Which is all wrong. And a sign above his head. Inscribed into the wood of his cross. The king of the jews.

At that point even Jesus' closest friends..... don't get it...they can't understand the suffering and the shame...but at the same time.... the importance...of the cross.

There's an old proverb that says. He who laugh last not get joke.

And I wonder who was the last of the disciples to get it. Or if they all got it at the same time. We're not told. But we are told that after the resurrection... their minds were opened. So they could understand the Scriptures.

At some point there was that moment of clarity. As they understood the cross. And went from hiding behind locked doors in fear and shame. To boldly telling the world about Jesus and defying the authorities themselves on pain of death.

They understood what Jesus had been saying. Here's the highlight of Peter's first sermon in the book of Acts.

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Acts 2:23 <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

And when the disciples understood the cross as God's plan..... They Took up their own. And put it to others that they should too.

Here's a bunch of Jews who – knew the POWER OF GOD. The God who saved his people from Pharaoh in Egypt. Who parted the red sea. Knocked over the walls of Jericho. Who won battles for his people. Over and over again. Who made the sun stand still.

Here's a bunch of Jews who knew GOD'S HOLINESS. Who knew the seriousness of being out of step with God. That called for the blood of the sacrifice of animals. Year after year. For the sins of the people.

Here's a bunch of Jews who knew God demands JUSTICE and MERCY.

And as their minds were opened– every single bit of that crammed into the events at Easter.

At the cross God's justice is satisfied. As Jesus takes the punishment for sin.

At the cross God shows his mercy to sinners. AND Jesus stands in our place as the sacrifice of atonement.

At the cross. And through it's scorn and shame. God's powerfully ending the reign of death itself.

God's weapon of choice. The cross.

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Even if it looks like foolishness. Verse 18 again of 1 Corinthians.

.....the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.....

, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

The cross turns everything upside down. So that Paul can say. God's made the wisdom of the world foolish. Verse 21

<sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Which I guess leaves us with a choice doesn't it. The wisdom of God...or the wisdom of men? The foolishness of God...or the foolishness of men?

I hope you're seeing things clearly.

I hope you understand what God's done for you at the cross.

And I hope you have a great easter break.

Don't forget. Easter Sunday at Wilston at 10.15am.

Let me pray.