

“Student Cross” – Good Friday

Not until Tuesday this week did I realise how knobbly are my shoulders. You see, every year an event takes place during Holy Week called Student Cross. Groups of students and former students walk on pilgrimage to Walsingham from nine different places. One group begins in Colchester and is called the Essex Leg. To my great happiness, having never had anyone go before, except for one person last year, this year eight students from the University Chaplaincy joined the Essex Leg and I walked with them for all of Tuesday, from Framlingham in Suffolk to Harleston, just over the Norfolk boarder. And not only do they walk 120 miles and sleep on church hall floors but the students also carry a 50 pound cross. This is how I got to discover just how knobbly my shoulders are as one end of the crossbar of the cross pressed down on my shoulder as we walked the country lanes of north Suffolk.

In the morning the cross didn't seem that heavy; by 6 pm as we walked uphill, with still a little bit of distance to cover, it was a deadweight and, in a small way, I realised that on Good Friday Christ did not just say 'Yes' to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane - 'Your will be done' - but he chose to keep saying 'Yes' until he died upon the cross. On Tuesday, it was not possible for us to put down the cross until we reached Harleston. For Christ, it was unthinkable to put down the cross until He had been fully obedient to what love demands.

This morning, I joined the Walk of Witness from Wivenhoe Cross to the Congregational Church. We stopped for a scripture reading outside the Co-Op and two young men, in a perfectly friendly fashion, asked what we were protesting about. Someone explained, 'It's Good Friday' - the large cross hadn't given the game away - and we carried on and so did the two men, in the opposite direction.

I think that I might be able to die for someone I loved. It would certainly be infinitely easier if I knew they loved me. But as Jesus carried the cross, no one cared what he thought he was doing. On Tuesday, cars sped angrily passed us after we had briefly delayed them, so in Jerusalem, on that first Good Friday, some would have been annoyed by the kafuffle surrounding an execution. And others, like those two men outside the Co-Op, would have been perfectly well-meaning but would not have thought that Jesus' death was significant to anyone, let alone themselves.

That is why you and I have stopped today. The sun is shining, there is much pleasure to be had, but we sense that what we are remembering here is the most significant event in history. It is the still point around which the world turns.

Christ didn't stop; he moved one bare, torn foot in front of the other. He knew what he was doing: he was saving us by pouring out every last drop of his blood.

When you say to someone 'I love you,' you are saying 'I never want you to die.' Jesus did not want us to die so instead he died.