CRUCIFORM MISSION

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It is somewhat ironic that Christianity, a religion which talks about love and care for others, should be symbolised by a brutal instrument of torture - the Roman cross.

Of course the cross is the place where, through the death of Christ, God showed his love for us, forgave our sin and defeated the powers of death and hell. The cross is amazing and absolutely central to the Christian faith, but it is still a horrifying, nasty, degrading way thing for killing people.

Stripped of its ritual trappings, the cross speaks of humiliation, pain and death. It's not a nice thing, a cross.

We are told to take up our cross and we know that if the powers of the world nailed our master to a cross, then they may well do the same to his followers.

Mission is about proclaiming the reality of the cross in word and deed; but more than that, it is lived out in the shadow of the cross. Down through the years, humiliation, pain and death have accompanied Jesus disciples as they travelled the world, sharing the good news of the kingdom of God.

In today's jet-powered, air-conditioned, internet-connected world, Western missionaries rarely face the sort of suffering which was par for the course for our forebears. Isolation, home-sickness and malaria are all hard to cope with, I know from personal experience, butÂ they don't compare to being beaten up, imprisoned or even martyred.

However, local Christians and missionaries from the majority world have continued to face persecution, violence and even death as they share the good news with their friends and neighbours.

It is not inconceivable that Western missionaries will once again face the sort of issues that our ancestors lived through. As the economic and political power of the West wanes, a British or American passport may not protect missionaries the way it once did and as we reach into some of the world's hard places with the Gospel, we can expect to face strong opposition. If that does happen, we will just be returning to the norm. Mission as our Lord said it would be. Mission as the Apostles lived it. Mission shaped by the cross.