

O my Saviour, lifted
from the earth for me,
draw me in thy mercy,
nearer unto thee.

(AHB 521)

O my Saviour, lifted
from the earth for me,
draw me, in your mercy,
at your side to be.

(TIS 600)

If you have seen a film of the crucifixion of Jesus, there may have been ropes on the cross beam to pull up the cross so that the person on it is lifted up. A practical detail for a film, whatever way the crucifixion took place.

A question came to my mind, "Why do I or you need a Saviour?" How can Jesus, called the King of the Jews, save us?

The gospel reading is concerned to simply speak of the event and the reaction of people, soldiers and criminals. The crowd thought it was reasonable that Jesus could save himself. "He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one." (Luke 23:15) The idea of saving himself was the very thing Jesus had repeatedly said we cannot do. (Fallon p.343)

Jesus is called "Saviour" at his birth. The angels told shepherds, "Today a saviour has been born for you - the Messiah, The Lord! - in David's town." (Lk. 2:11 Wright p.20) Joseph, the husband of the mother Mary, is told to name the babe that will be born "Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Mt 1:21) Jesus simply means, "God saves."

The Jewish leadership challenged Jesus for breaking the Law of Moses and for telling people their sins were forgiven. Under Moses' Law he could expect to be stoned. During his ministry he discouraged people from saying he was the Messiah so at his trial, he refused to say he was the expected Messiah, but spoke of the Son of Man seated at the right hand of God. As much as that sounded like blasphemy, it also sounded like treason. The priests sent him to Governor Pilate on a pretext of him being a threat to the power of the Roman occupiers of Judea. He did not deny he was a King, but his kingdom was not of this world.

Throughout his ministry he spoke about the kingdom of God. He had brought salvation to people. Think of Zacchaeus the tax collector. The little man who climbed a tree. When he promised to repay all the people he had cheated, Jesus told him, "Today salvation has come to your house." There were people who sought healing. He told

them, 'Go your sins are forgiven. Your faith has made you well.' On the cross Jesus forgave all those who were involved in seeing him crucified.

He taught about the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son to be understood as lost people being found and reconciled to God. "I was lost but now I'm found" is a line in the hymn "Amazing grace." written by the slave trader, John Newton, who stopped slave trading and found salvation in Jesus.

Many people feel lost in their life at some point. It might be their work; a long term sickness; a marriage that is not quite what the couple thought it would be; bullying at school or work place, or for teenagers through social media. Parents and friends scratch their heads to know the best way to help when they too feel lost with the situation. A common cause is that we think we can manage things on our own. We do not need anyone to help us. It is self conceit, pride. In Christian understanding we rebel against the way of God. That is the primeval myth of Adam and Eve. They were disobedient and were lost, banned from the garden. We won't live the way God intended. Evidence of that abounds from our daily news across the world. But it is in our personal lives we find lessons learnt from our experience in faith. They may sow a seed for someone's salvation. The actor Anthony Hopkins was an alcoholic. One night he realised from deep within himself he needed help. He had a sense of a voice inside him saying, "Now you can start living."

The second criminal rebuked his fellow brigand for calling on Jesus to save them. He declared the two criminals were justly punished, "but this man has done nothing wrong." He turns to Jesus. He doesn't use a title, 'Lord,' 'Son of David' he simply said, 'Jesus' as someone, especially a friend, might call us by our name. Something in Jesus attracted the criminal. "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom." It is a personal address that recognizes Jesus is a king and will have his kingdom to which he could belong. Jesus assures this criminal that "Truly, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It is not only on the cross Jesus is lifted up. Luke gives two accounts of the ascension of Jesus. Essentially they are the same. The gospel states Jesus was "carried up into heaven." In the Acts of the Apostles Luke expresses, "he was lifted up." That is the physical action. The underlying thought is that Jesus is exalted. He is "King of kings and Lord of Lords," (Rev. 19:16) as we are told in the last book of the bible; Revelation (as much as we might think it is from Handel's *Messiah*.)

This exaltation of Jesus is the exaltation of our Saviour King. We discover what the Scriptures teach us, "God was in Christ reconciling us to himself" (2Cor. 5:21) who will draw us nearer to him.