

Joined For Life

Have any of you ever heard of the term ‘inosculation’? Can anyone give me a definition for it? I have to confess that until someone did a devotion using that term a couple of weeks ago, and thus gave me an idea for this Good Friday message, I didn’t know what it meant. But you may well have seen it, and marvelled at it. Inosculation is the term used to describe what happens when the roots, or trunks, or branches, of two trees grow so closely together that they rub up against each other, eventually wearing all the outer bark away so the tissues of the trees end up growing together and fusing, thus the two become one; they are joined for life. The term ‘Inosculation’ comes from the Latin word for ‘pair’, and, you may have already thought this, the process is very similar to what we as people do when we graft two trees together to produce new varieties of fruit trees, etc. And perhaps, when it occurs naturally, if we were to walk through a forest and see two trees growing so closely together we might think that one or both have to die. But instead of death, very often not only is there life, but joined together they are more able to stand stronger against whatever nature throws against them.

Life, stronger life, better life, where we may well first see death. In our Christian cultures the way we view the cross is very different from how it was seen by those living under the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago. The Roman Empire spread out over a large area, and in order to maintain their power over the lands they had conquered the Romans ruled very brutally and violently so no one would dare to take them on; that’s not to excuse or justify what they did, just to explain it. To be crucified was a very public, shameful, and painful way to die, and the Romans used it to proclaim to everyone, ‘Don’t mess with us!’ The pieces of wood which joined together to make up a cross came to mean not only death, but also oppression, fear, and hopelessness for the situation in life you found yourself in.

But for us, of course, it's very different. And that's because of the death we remember today; Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour who came to give up His life for us. Not only do we have a number of accounts of His death, but also in the Bible there are many explanations of what it now means for us. One of those is from the letter to the Hebrews, the second reading we have for today. In this reading we hear about how, because of Jesus' death for us, we are changed from the inside. When the writer here says, 'I will write my laws on their minds and their hearts', (v. 16b) that's referring to us being changed from the very core of our being. It reminds me of the process of inosculation; how when two trees join together their tissues eventually merge to become one, so that what they look like and what they do is now different. They can take on different characteristics, and, as we see with grafting, they can produce different fruit.

What is spoken about here, is that because of Jesus' death on the cross, and His resurrection, through faith we are joined to Him. Instead of now following God's laws because we are afraid of what will happen to us if we don't do that, the change comes from the inside out meaning we now want to follow God and share His love because of what He has already done for us. Again, like the two trees joined together, we are changed because of who we are now joined to. We read here also, as we know, that our sins are forgiven so we no longer need to offer sacrifices, not just animal sacrifices but also anything we feel we need to do to earn God's forgiveness and approval. On the cross that was done for us, once and for all. The cross is now where we see that we are joined to God for life, for eternal life, once and for all.

And it is in looking at it like this that we now see the cross in a completely different way. We no longer see it, as the Romans meant it, as a symbol of fear and oppression, but of love and forgiveness. For us it doesn't represent hopelessness that there is no way we can get out of the situation we are in, but hope that God's love is with us in all that we go through, and nothing can take that away from us. In Jesus we see God joining us to Him and His love, just like those two trees, in a way which can't be broken. We also see how the weaker of the two, us, are now made stronger because as we have His laws written on our hearts and minds, as we are forgiven in a way which

assures us it has all been done for us, as we know that Jesus has opened the way for us to go back to God, in all these we have the promise and absolute assurance that we are joined to Him, His love, His forgiveness, in whatever we now go through.

The events which we remember this Good Friday, and all the thousands of years of plans which went into them, guarantee to us that we are grafted to God's grace. In a strong bond that through our faith in Jesus' death and resurrection comes from inside of us, we are now joined to God for life; eternal life, new life, a forgiven life, a serving life, a life of knowing His love and worshipping and serving Him, and of sharing His love with each other. Through Jesus, not only do we see the symbol of a cross in a different way, but our relationship with God and the lives which follow are completely changed also. When someone asks you what Good Friday is all about, maybe don't tell them it means you've been inoculated, but instead that because of His love for us, through Jesus God has joined us to new life with Him, now and forever. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- Can you think of any other examples from nature where two living things are joined together so that they become one? What is the effect on both when this happens?
- Reflect on the events of Good Friday. If you can, go back and read through John 19 for the full account of Jesus' crucifixion. Think about what God's love and Jesus' sacrifice means for you now that in faith you are joined to them. How has God's love in Jesus changed your life?
- Trees being joined together in inoculation become stronger, especially when a weaker tree is joined to a strong one. How does that relate to what you experience from being joined to Jesus' death and resurrection and all this means?
- We artificially graft trees together to produce a different kind of fruit. As we are joined to God, with His laws written on our hearts and minds, we are called to produce fruit of love for Him and others in our lives. Are there any areas of your life in which you find it hard to do this?

Pray: Thank God for the great love He has shown to us in Jesus dying on the cross, and that through our faith we are joined to all this now means for us. Pray that we may each day live out and share the new life we have with Him. Amen.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
18.04.2025*