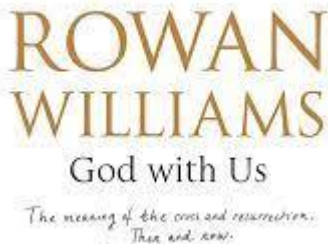


Rowan Williams: God with us



Rowan Williams needs no introduction and these days it seems he only has to sing in the shower for it to be published as a short book. This little offering is, again, a collection of recent lectures. It has his characteristic insight and learning and, at 105 pages, is a quick read.

He begins by dismissing a popular theory that there might have been an 'early' form of Christianity before its reflection on the cross. No. The cross is where Christian thinking begins. And it has to be, as it's such a shocking un-religious object. It is an example *to* us (how to live out our faith self-sacrificially) and an example *for* us (of the extent of God's love). It reveals the power and vulnerability of the God that Jesus revealed. But more than this, it achieves something, acting as a ransom to 'spring the trap' of evil.

Williams then goes on to explore the notion of sacrifice, noting its similarities to the animal sacrifices in the Temple but ends up framing it within the contemporary Jewish ideas of a 'living' sacrifice: a life of total obedience. As such the cross is a rescue operation which affects the whole community and renews the broken relationship with God. And while these are all very traditional beliefs, he is keen to avoid any sense of legal contract, insisting that the meaning of the cross is still ultimately a mystery to be lived with rather than a problem to be solved.

The book then moves on to look at the resurrection, an event that, for Williams, certainly happened, rather than it being a metaphor for a 'change of heart'. It is a sign of the new age, the last days have begun and the relationship between God and creation is finally settled. And it is evidence that human life is validated by God. People are of intrinsic value. It demonstrates that the future is open rather than fixed and indicates that we don't 'survive' death but rather that, beyond the grave, we are remade into a new creation.

The book ends – unsurprisingly – with a reflection on an icon. Here, resurrection hope is not about wiping out our painful history but offering us a transformation of the person this life has made us: our history is not cancelled, but transfigured.

As ever, Williams gives us plenty to think about and this book – which provides questions at the end of chapters, may well make a useful study course for parishes.