

Strange Kingdom:

Meditations on the cross to transform your day-to-day life

By Ken Costa

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I was drawn to this book because the Cross has been important to me since the age of eight when I first sought to understand the death of Jesus, albeit in childlike thoughts. But to quote Richard Holloway “Watching [the crucifixion]...can break our hearts and that can be the beginning”.¹

Strange Kingdom has its origins in, and is based on, services held at Holy Trinity Brompton. Indeed it reminded me of a Three Hours Good Friday devotion. For many, the cross remains a difficult concept and Ken Costa begins here to unravel its meaning, its power and its implications for the Christian life day-to-day.

The ‘liberating message of the cross’ (p.192) is the foundation and strength of the author’s own faith, which emanates throughout these meditations and is an inspiration in itself. We are invited to make the journey with him into the *Strange Kingdom*. Gently we are asked to explore and expand our own understanding of the cross, take a fresh look at our lives in a social and cultural context and change the living out of our faith.

As the title suggests, the shape of this book is one of meditation and reflection, best read one chapter at a time, each concluding with ‘A Time to Meditate’ and suggestions for Music, Reflection and Prayer. As such it would make an excellent choice for Fellowship or Parish groups especially during Lent.

A primary question and starting point is: ‘What does the cross mean for ordinary Christians, for you and me, in our everyday lives – at work, at home, in our communities?’ (p.xv). In the nine chapters, each focusing on different aspects of the Cross, we are encouraged to walk

The extraordinary ‘outpouring of forgiveness’ (p.35) shows us how to change the world by adopting a ‘Spirit-led worldview’ (p.42).

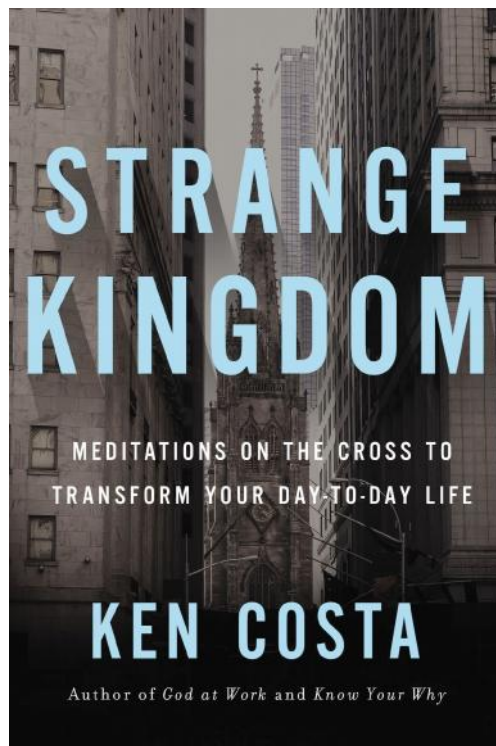
Finished, the last words ‘it is finished’ becoming victory and a bridge to hope. Parallels can be found in our lives when the end of a phase, stage or season concludes and we look forward, moving on to a new day.

Forgiven, examining betrayal and true forgiveness towards others and ourselves. We are asked ‘When was the last time you searched your soul, ransacked your memory, or probed your motives?’ (p.83)

Friendship explores reconciliation and unity to bring healing and wholeness. This encourages us all to be peacemakers and to have ‘grace-healed eyes that see the potential in others’ (p.97) and play our part in revitalising our world.

Freedom calls us to surrender to the will of God and change our pattern of behaviour. As visible Christians in the workplace ‘our greatest witness in the world is to draw strength from this new way of living...even at the coalface of a demanding work environment’ (p.115).

Forlorn takes us to the tomb, grief and waiting for the new dawn. Although the steadfast foundation of faith supports us through the pain of loss, as the author says, ‘I know of no mature disciple of Christ who has not experienced the deep frustration of waiting for God to act’ (p.140).



consciously with our faith, reassess our relationships and our being in the world. In summary these are:

Foolishness, in contrast to today’s power constructs in the world. What appears to be ‘foolishness in the eyes of modern sensibilities’ (p.18) brings a different perspective to ‘the terrible void at the heart of our culture’ (p.3).

Forsaken, confronting Jesus’ suffering and spiritual abandonment.



Photo: Financial News

Fulfilled moves beyond Easter to the new age that is Pentecost. The unsurpassed act of love creates the foundation for living when the cross of Christ becomes the centre of our day-to-day lives ‘in our communities, churches, cities, and countries’ (p.152).

Flourishing reminds us that Jesus meets people in the everyday and ordinary. ‘He met them not in the temple or a synagogue, but in their place of work, in their everyday routine, and there he sanctified their daily lives-and ours with theirs’ (p.173).


In conclusion there are *Quotes To Ponder*.

The author brings a wealth of wisdom and experience to bear on his work. These include being an internationally renowned investment banker (nominated in 2016 one of the City of London’s top dealers in the

last 20 years); Emeritus Professor of Commerce, Gresham College, London; Chairman of both the Lambeth Trust and Reconciling Leaders Network; and Dean of Holy Trinity Brompton’s Leadership College. His other publications, both of which have been reviewed in FiBQ, explore what it means to live every day with spiritual purpose: *God at Work* (www.godatwork.org.uk) and *Know Your Why* (www.knowyourwhybook.com/).

Most of the analogies used to expand his themes, however, are taken from culture in general: films and television, redundancy and disasters, or his worldwide activities meeting such people as Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu. A heart-warming exception is his testimony about a fellow City investor which led to his friend’s conversion and the building of a new life: ‘he then set

out to apply his new faith to the way he lived, worked, and carried out his relationships’ (p.85).

Throughout the book, the writing style is conversational and easy-going, exuding the feeling of a friendly chat in a comfortable armchair: not that this makes the challenge any the less. Some readers may struggle and need to hold in abeyance their biblical/historical criticism or modern theological scholarship to enjoy this book, as certain terms eg: salvation, resurrection and the creation story are assumed and used without interpretation. However, it is not intended to be an academic tome but a readily available meditation; as such it remains very accessible. Reflection on the Cross is always a spiritual challenge and making this journey with Ken Costa can be commended. 

1 Richard Holloway, *Between The Monster And The Saint: The Divided Spirit of Humanity: Reflections on the Human Condition*, Canongate Books, 2008, p.169.



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