



Good Friday | 29 March 2024

Why is Good Friday considered good when such evil seemed to prevail?

Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ, we come together today, to give heartfelt thanks, for Christ's sacrifice for the world, on that Friday over 2,000 years ago. A Friday we in Christendom call Good Friday. Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

Each year, year after year, we Christians gather on Good Friday to rehearse this story, what we call the Passion Narrative.

On Palm Sunday we read versions from Matthew, Mark and Luke, and then on Good Friday it has always been from John.

Each gospel offers a slightly different view of what happened on that day. We could liken it to looking at a diamond from different angles, one sees different facets, different sparkles, different ways the light plays off the gemstone.

For John, Jesus is Light, and His Light is the Life of the world.

We call it Good Friday, even though it looks as if the light is extinguished. But for people of faith, we know that is just not the case. We know the rest of the story. We know that the darkness has not overcome the light.

But we also know a few things about darkness in today's world. We see it from far off, we see it up close and personal.

From the tragedies of past history to our current tragedies of wars in Ukraine and Palestine, we see it in friends and family members who suffer from ailments like cancer and Alzheimer's, we see it in young people, whose lives are so broken they commit senseless crimes and end up incarcerated in our Correctional facilities.

There is darkness for those who have lost their jobs, for the child born of a mother addicted to drugs, for the homeless, the hungry, the destitute and those without jobs here and around the world.

We also may know something about darkness.

Darkness for John is evil, specifically the evil of living under the military yoke of Rome.

Even more so, John and his community hold the memory of Jesus standing up to evil, to the imperial powers and the ruling religious authorities, to say that a lot of people, most people, are not getting the kind of care and support they need to survive.

The kind of care and support our God commands us to provide as individuals and as a community.

I came across this quote on Dr Google, attributed to a theologian, Reinhold Neibuhr. As follows, *"groups are more immoral than individuals."*

It has been observed that individuals rarely act immorally or practice bad ethics on their own. Such behaviour patterns usually emerge in the actions and attitudes of a group, however large or small.

It is the group mentality, or again from Dr Google, to quote the sociologist Erik Fromm, the "herd mentality" that drives greater hatred than the individual.

Examples of this from the past:

- of the Holocaust,
- the Ku Klux Klan,
- Rwanda,
- Pol Pot,
- the Inquisition,
- the Expulsion by the Church of the Jews from Spain,
- the Crusades and numerous other similar movements throughout history.

This theory suggests that evil always needs help. Evil needs companions! Evil, the devil, does not and cannot act on its own in order to achieve its intended goal.

Or to put in our language, *'The only thing necessary for evil to triumph in the world is that enough good men do nothing'.*

By comparison, "goodness" or "godliness" can always stand and act on its own merits.

This is what is going on in this story about Jesus. Evil had just enough companions to crucify him on that Friday. The collusion and collaboration between the Roman soldiers, politicians, religious authorities already on the payroll of Rome, and the usual crowd of "rubbernecks" always looking for a gory site to behold, was just enough to put him on a cross and let him hang there for all to see what the consequences may be for those who dare to act out of goodness and godliness to speak truth to power.

It is the Day of Preparation before the Passover. Jesus has been arrested. People all over Jerusalem are preparing for the Passover feast. Lambs are slaughtered for the Passover feast. Pilate asks Jesus, **"What is truth?"** Pilate cannot understand that Jesus is Truth. No one seems to understand, even to this day, that God's new revelation and God's Good News is not a doctrine or an idea, but a person, a person like any one of us.

A person, "whose story and statements, in every point and detail, give us some deep truth about the life and will of God who creates and sustains us, and about the power and vocation of a soul which is transformed in Him, and pays ungrudgingly the price of generous love."

John's passion has numerous unique details:

- Jesus sends Judas out from the Last Supper; Jesus is not identified by Judas' kiss but steps forward announcing, "I am he";
- Jesus is not silent before Pilate, but speaks to him;
- Jesus carries his own cross and does not stumble or fall.

- Jesus, already nailed to the cross, as His last act of divine charity gives up His Spirit.
- It is that “giving up” that compels us to pay attention to this story year in and year out.

In both Hebrew and in Greek there is just one word that means “spirit,” “breath” and “wind.” All three are understood to come from God. God’s breath is our breath, God’s spirit is what sustains our life, and God’s wind fills our sails and directs us and sends us to places we would never imagine going ourselves to do things we could never imagine doing.

Here in his final act of love toward humankind, Jesus gives up His Spirit. After his resurrection he will breathe on his followers, offering His Spirit: the Spirit of God.

Jesus does not give in to the herd mentality. He does not give in to group evil. He remains steadfast in speaking truth to power, just like so many other individuals throughout human history who have made a difference.

This story we read together today is soaked with meaning. Today let us focus on the fact that the choice is ours. The choice is always ours. Evil is always looking for companions. Evil is always looking for help. And the choice to side with evil is often attractive. There always appears to be something in it for us, even if it is just the cheap thrill of watching someone else suffer. The other choice, of course, is to stand up to evil. To stand our ground. Not to give in to the group. To speak truth to power, or to simply walk away and say we will not participate.

The world is still a dangerous place. There is no limit, however, to how much goodness and godliness even one person can give to the world. If there is one moment to remember from this Passion Narrative of John’s, it is that final moment, when Jesus bows his head and gives up His Spirit.

Jesus gives His Spirit to the church, his followers, his body. He is still giving it to us. The man who healed people, helped people, fed people, gave outsiders dignity, and welcomed all to sit at his table and share a meal, gives His Spirit to us. The question that resides deep within the rites and rituals of Good Friday, however, is, will we accept His Spirit?

- Will we take God’s Spirit and make it our own?
- Will we set our sails to capture God’s divine wind, breath and Spirit and allow it to direct us and take us to places we have never been, to do things we have never done?

The world needs His Spirit. The church needs His Spirit. We can accept His Spirit, which He gives to the church for the sake of the world. Only Christians may receive God’s precious Spirit, although God’s Spirit is surely at work in the hearts of those who do not yet believe. Only with His Spirit can we do that which is beautiful and bear much fruit.

The World needs God. The church needs God. God requires that we follow His Son. We all need one another.

Our choice must be to accept that Spirit of goodness and godliness, the Spirit of God’s divine love, and make it our own. We must allow God’s Passion to become our Passion. When we do, what looks like a tragic story becomes good, a very good story.