

Good Friday – April 2, 2010

Text: Luke 23:1-49

Title: **The Good News of Good Friday**

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Good Friday.

That is what we call the day Jesus of Nazareth died ... Good Friday.

Good?

Would any of those who were standing on that hill  
where Jesus was hanging on a Roman cross would have used the word “Good”?

How can the day the most beautiful,  
the most compassionate,  
the wisest person who ever lived  
gives Himself over to the painful,  
degrading death of crucifixion,  
ever be called “Good”?

Agonizing Friday.

Violent Friday.

Unjust Friday.

Hide-your-face-in-your-hands Friday.

Open-lamentation Friday.

But Good Friday?

The day the Man who healed broken bodies and troubled minds,  
suffers the worst form of torture the world knew at that time,  
... “Good Friday”?

Why Good?

Because THAT Friday,  
 Agonizing Friday,  
 Violent Friday,  
 Unjust Friday,  
 Wail-your-heart-out Friday,  
 is THE MOST important day in the history of the world.

Because THAT Friday  
 the Creator of all things accomplished His greatest work.

It is **Good** Friday because on THAT Friday the Holy God did amazing **Good**.

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Four people had the great privilege of telling the Good Friday story:

Matthew,  
 Mark,  
 Luke,  
 and John.

Each of them tells the story from slightly different perspectives.

Each of them comes at the events from a slightly different angle.

Each of them brings out a slightly different emphasis.

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This Good Friday we have been listening to Luke tell us what happened.

Next Good Friday, God willing, we will listen to John.

What is Luke, the medical doctor,  
 wanting us to see and hear, think and feel?

First off, he wants us to know that the Man suffering on the cross is an innocent sufferer.

Yes, Jesus has chosen to be nailed to the cross.

He is not fighting His tormentors.

No one is taking His life away.

This is an act of willing sacrifice.

But Luke is wanting us to know  
that Jesus does not deserve what He is experiencing.

Luke tells us that three times Pontius Pilate,  
the Roman Governor at the time,  
declares Jesus' innocence.

Jesus is charged with misleading the Jewish nation,  
with forbidding the paying of taxes,  
and with inciting rebellion against Rome.

Three times Pilate interrogates Jesus.

Three times Pilate emerges from his chambers  
and says to the chiefs and the multitudes:

“I find no guilt in this man” (23:4),

“I have found no guilt in this man” (23:15),

“Why evil has this Man done?  
I find no guilt demanding death” (23:22).

The highest tribunal of the land,  
representing the most rigorous legal system of that century,  
finds Jesus innocent of any and all charges.

Luke also tells us that one of the two criminals being crucified next to Jesus realizes this.

While one insults Jesus by saying,

“Are You not the Messiah? Save Yourself and us!” (23:39),

the other declares,

“Do you not even fear God,  
since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?  
And we indeed justly,  
for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds;  
but this man has done nothing wrong.” (23:40-41).

Luke wants us to realize that the Man on the cross does not deserve to be there.

Then why is He there?

The Man has chosen to be there.

In order to do something for us.

To do something for us we could never do for ourselves.

Three times someone cries out to Jesus, “save Yourself.”

The people yell,

“He saved others;  
let Him save Himself is this is the Messiah of God,  
His chosen one” (23:35).

The soldiers yell,

“If you are the King of the Jews save Yourself!” (23:37).

He could have.

Mark that. He could have come down from the cross.

And the unrepentant criminal,

“Save Yourself and us!”

He could have ... saved Himself.

The innocent sufferer could have saved Himself.

But He then would not have saved us who are not innocent.

THAT is the Good news of Good Friday.

On that Friday God saves the world!

So Luke records for us Words the Savior speaks from the cross.

Words that open up the Good News of Good Friday.

As you know, Jesus spoke seven times from the cross,

the so-called “Seven Last Words.”

Luke records three of those “words.”

The three that over the centuries have brought people the greatest comfort.

Notice that the first and third “words” begin the same way...

with Jesus saying, “Father.”

“Father, forgive them ...” (23:34)

“Father, into Your hands ...” (23:46).

“Father.”

We cannot understand Jesus  
apart from His relationship with the One He calls “Father.”

As we read the four Gospels we realize  
that Jesus lives a “Father-conscious-life,”

He lives a “Father-pre-occupied-life.”

The first time  
we hear Jesus refer to “Father” is when He is 12 years old.

When His mother and adoptive father  
after frantically search for Him  
finally find Him in the Jerusalem Temple,

Jesus says,

“Did you not know  
that I had to be about My Father’s business?” (2:49).

And now, on the cross, He is doing just that ...  
the Father’s business.

“Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34).

Of course they know, Jesus.

They know they are crucifying a Man.

And they know they are crucifying an innocent Man.

To which, I think, Jesus says,

“Yet, they do not know what they are doing.

They do not yet know Who I am.

They do not yet realize what I have come to do.

They do not get it.”

“Forgive them Father.”

The Good News of Good Friday

is that the Father answers His Son prayer!

The Father forgives those who kill His Son!

The Father forgives those who are guilty of killing His innocent Son!

For in the great mystery of grace

it is the through the unjust death of His Son

at the hands of guilty sinners,

that the Father deals with our sin.

The Son takes the place of us guilty ones.

The Son dies the death we guilty should have died.

And in through that death we are forgiven.

Through that death the Father gains sons and daughters.

As the apostle Paul would later exult in:

Christ died for the helpless,  
 Christ died for the ungodly,  
 Christ died for His enemies (Romans 5:1-11).

On Good Friday, God made enemies into children!

Who now cry out with Jesus,  
 "Abba, Father."

"Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (23:43).

"Today"?

On the very day He dies?

Why "today"? On Good Friday?

Because what He does on Good Friday opens the door to Paradise.

"Today."

Jesus has said that word a number of times in the Gospel of Luke.

In His first sermon, in the synagogue in Nazareth,  
 He has read from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon,  
 for He has anointed Me to preach good news ..."

and then says,

"Today,  
 this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21).

And then at the home of the tax-collector Zaccheus,  
 after Zaccheus has declared his intention to pay back  
 those he has ripped-off, Jesus say,

"Today,  
 salvation has come to this house" (19:9).

Jesus likes to say "Today,"  
 for that is His Good News.

Whatever day it is, it is the day of salvation.

“Today.”

“Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

Because of what He is doing on the cross,  
the repentant thief could know salvation.

“Today.”

The Good News of Good Friday is that

Jesus welcomes anyone who comes to Him.

The thief does not understand everything about Jesus.

He does realize Jesus is innocent.

But He does not seem to any clue other clues about Who Jesus is.

No matter.

Jesus receives the man just as he is, with whatever level of faith he has.

He simply asks to be remembered.

Jesus gives him Paradise!

Paraphrasing Saint Augustine:

“So little is asked, so much is given.”

Faith always gets more than is asked for!

So Richard Neuhaus can write:

“Jesus does not reject any who turn to him.

At times we turn to him with little faith,

at times with a mix of faith and doubt

when we are more sure of the doubt than the faith.



Jesus is not fastidious about the quality of faith.  
 He takes what he can get, so to speak, and gives  
 immeasurably more than he receives.  
 He takes our faith more seriously than we do  
 and makes of it more that we ever could.  
 His response to our faith is greater than our faith.”  
*[Death on a Friday Afternoon, 37-38]*

“Today.”  
 Paradise. Today.

“Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit” (23:46).

He could have ranted and raved at the injustice that brought Him to this place.

He could have lamented that once again evil seemed to be getting the upper hand.

He could have bemoaned that of all people He should not be suffering this way.

“Father.”

That is all He has left.

“Father.”

It is all that He has ever wanted.

“Father.”

It has been Jesus’ prayer all along the way.

“Father.”

“Not My will, but Yours be done.”

Not only in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But all along the way.

And so, at the end, where else was He going to turn?

Where else was He going to go?

But home.

To the One in whom and by whom and for whom

He has being living ...

and for whose glory He is now dying.

“Into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

It is Good Friday because it is the day God saves the world.

It is the day God accomplishes His greatest work.

And what strikes me the most this Good Friday,

is that God accomplishes His greatest work

when He most vulnerable,

and most helpless.

Is that not a great mystery?

It is when God the great and power Creator

becomes totally helpless, utterly passive,

that His greatest work is done.

And does that not put a whole new spin on growing old?

On growing toward greater and greater helplessness and vulnerable?

That it is just be

that as we move into that state

we just might be moving into

what can be our greatest time of ministry?

Where in our weakness and seeming passivity,  
we too pray for those who have hurt us,

“Father, forgive them...”

wherein we too say to those who turn to Jesus,

“Today, you will be with Jesus...”

and wherein we too say,

“Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit,”

and watch what He does  
with a life surrendered  
to the Good God of Good Friday.

