

Good Friday  
Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12, Psalm 22: 1-11, John 19:1-37  
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This past Wednesday, 14 of us, young and old, walked The Way of the Cross or The Stations of the Cross. We stopped at 14 locations marked by wooden crosses inside and outside of the church and took turns reading short passages starting with Jesus' condemnation by Pilate and ending with his body being placed in the tomb after his crucifixion. Each reading had a part in which Jesus is speaking. The introduction to this very moving devotional exercise, read,

*My people, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. I am always with you. You approach me now to pray, to reflect, to find meaning for your life from my experience with death. You do me honor.*

*My friends, fear not my agony....it will help you cope with yours. Pity not my hurting....I know that you hurt too. Mourn not my death....for it brings us all to life.*

Here is an excellent summary of Good Friday. We do honor Jesus by being here on this day when the subject matter is principally a gruesome and a seemingly tragic death. Of Jesus crucifixion, Richard Neuhaus wrote, "In this killing that some call senseless, we are brought to our senses."

Listening to the passion narrative again, we certainly feel something. Our sense of horror and inner cry of injustice are raised close to the surface even though John sterilizes his version of Jesus' path to death. Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, John's Jesus doesn't agonize in the garden and ask that the cup of suffering be removed. John makes it clear that Jesus carries his own cross all the way to Calvary, and we don't hear cries of pain and confusion such as, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" as Jesus is bleeding and struggling for every breath.

No, John's Jesus is strong, in control and victorious. On the cross he takes care of business – making arrangements for his mother's care. His final words, "It is finished," indicate that his job on earth is at last accomplished.

Don't get me wrong, John's gospel is a masterpiece. The author makes Jesus accessible and divine like no other. But his passion narrative, in my estimation, misses the mark.

At the tenth station of last Wednesday's devotional, Jesus is stripped of his clothing. The reader at that station, speaking for Jesus, said,

*Golgotha is my place. Now is my time. It is a comfort to have you at my side. They wish to strip me now, strip me of everything I possess. Do not stop them. I endure this stripping that I may experience in my flesh and share in my soul what the sick feel when they are stripped of health, what the sorrowing endure when they lose joy, what the separated experience when their unions rupture, what widows and widowers suffer when loving companionship vanishes. I want to be with the young when life begins to test them and with the aged as their strength fades. Like all who suffer, I could now ask, "Why?" But I won't.*

If Jesus suffered in every way that we suffer as suggested above, then the cross and the events leading up to it had to be fraught with fear, doubt, agony and despair. Did you know that the word "excruciating" comes from the Latin words *to crucify* and *cross*? Who of us won't say at some time in our lives, "O God, have you left me altogether?" and/or "What have I done to deserve this?"

Robert Morris, in his book, Suffering and the Courage of God, wrote, "His wounds are not the sign that suffering is good, but that some things in life are good enough to suffer for." (repeat) Jesus thought we were good enough to suffer for. Isn't that, after all, why we call this day Good Friday?

The story is told of a once great Samurai warrior, who now in old age, decided to teach Zen Buddhism to young people.

One day a young warrior who had never lost a fight came to the same place. Having heard of the great Samurai's reputation, he had come to defeat him and increase his own fame. His students tried to dissuade the old master, but he accepted the young warrior's challenge. The entire community gathered in the town square to watch. The young man started taunting the old man. He insulted him and his ancestors, threw stones and spat in his face. After several hours of

this, the old man remained passive. Finally, exhausted and frustrated, the egotistical young man left.

The old man's students were disappointed and asked how he could bear such indignities. Why hadn't he used his sword even if he'd lost instead of displaying so much cowardice in front of everyone?

The old Samurai asked them, "If someone comes to you with a gift, and you do not accept it, to whom does the gift belong?"

"It still belongs to the giver." One of them answered.

"The same goes for envy, anger and insults." The old master replied. "When they are not accepted, they still belonged to the one who carried them."

Good story? Yes. Sound wisdom? Sure. But it's not quite the gospel. It's not quite the Good Friday outcome. Jesus suffered insult and injury and death in an attempt to take upon himself our envy, our anger, our insults, our fears and every other sort of behavior that would create a distance between us and our heavenly Father. Jesus doesn't want us to keep our sin. He wants to take it from us, to take it off us and set us completely free to live lives of peace, joy, gratitude and unselfish service.

*My friends, fear not my agony....it will help you cope with yours. Pity not my hurting....I know that you hurt too. Mourn not my death....for it brings all to life.*