

GOOD FRIDAY – 2007

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THREE thoughts about GOOD FRIDAY that I'd like to share with you. ...**1st thought:** When I was a kid, the Passion Gospel had a profound effect on me....I can remember being in church, listening as the central drama in all of human history was described...And being the very prayerful & reverent 12 yr old I was, I recall thinking to myself: "Is this thing ever gonna end?! Fer cryin' out loud, that guy's been talking for 25 minutes!"...After all, when you're 12 years old and you're used to three minute Scripture readings, a 25 minute Gospel seems like 25 hours...But at least after going to Palm Sunday Masses & GOOD FRIDAY services year after year as a kid, I knew the story. I knew what happened at the Last Supper, and in the garden of Gethsemane, and before the Sanhedrin, and in Pilate's courtyard, and at Calvary...I may not have been paying close attention all those years—and I certainly wasn't always happy to be there—but the story did sink in.

Which brings me to another childhood memory of the Passion Gospel....I had a tough time trying to figure out why they called the day Christ died "Good" Friday...You take an innocent man who's been preaching about love and forgiveness... You arrest Him in the middle of the night and drag Him before a vengeful assembly, which ignores all the evidence and sentences Him to death...You beat the snot out of Him and rip open His back with a metal-studded whip... You strip Him naked, nail Him on a crossbeam with spikes,... and hang Him up in the air so a crowd can jeer at Him & insult Him as His body is slowly and painfully drained of life....Oh, yah, sounds like the perfect description of "good" Fri to me.

Of course, I eventually came to understand that the key to Good Friday is not that it was GOOD on that day. It was bad, real bad... It did not become Good Friday until after the fact... Good Friday was Awful Friday for two days...and then Sunday came. ...On Sunday morning, as Paul Harvey would say, we got the rest of the story...God's full plan was finally revealed....Jesus' death was not an unfortunate, tragic, inconsequential event...It was part of God's plan... His death was the atoning sacrifice for all of humankind's sins...And on Sunday morning, the 2nd half of the plan was completed. ...Jesus conquered death once and for all—and He promised us that if we put our faith in Him we could do the same... His Resurrection had transformed Awful Friday into GOOD FRIDAY.

2nd thought: I recently read about a woman named Laura who said something I found very profound... She said: *We should live as Easter Christians in a Good Friday world!*...Isn't that good? ..To really appreciate Laura's remark, you need to know that she battles a very serious illness every day.... She doesn't have an easy life. She clearly lives in a GOOD FRIDAY world, but she is an Easter Christian whose Easter faith helps her to transcend the difficulties of her Good Friday life.

Good Friday was a day of death - of dashed hopes - of crushed beliefs...Good Friday was a day when everything went wrong.... On Good Fri, nobody said, "Thank God it's Friday."...On GOOD FRIDAY, nobody gave thanks for anything...Haven't you had days like that?... Haven't you had days when you felt overwhelmed?... Haven't you had days when you felt as if you had been hit once too often ~~ that you were hanging on the ropes?... Haven't you had days when you were ready to give up?... Those are GOOD FRIDAY days. But Laura says: *We should live as Easter Christians in a GOOD FRIDAY world.* ..What does that mean?

It means that we can live as hopeful Christians in a hopeless world....Just read your newspaper. How much good news do you see?.... News stories focus on wars and genocide ~~ on government gone amuck ~~ on racial conflict ~~ on drugs and violence.....child pornography ...sexual abuse...3000 abortions a day... One look at your newspaper will convince you that we live in a Good Friday world.... But Easter is God's promise that He is always with us, ready to roll back the stone from the entrance of the tomb, so that we can live hopefully in a hopeless world....As Laura says: *Let us live as Easter Christians in a Good Friday world!....We have no need to fear, even in the midst of our worst Good Fridays ~~ because our Lord is with us ~~ and he will neither fail us nor abandon us. Let us live as Easter Christians in a Good Friday world!*

3rd thought: Elie Wiesel is a Nobel prize winner and survivor of the Holocaust.... He tells of a time in his concentration camp when he was forced to watch the hanging of two Jewish men and a Jewish boy.... The two men died almost instantly, but for some reason the boy struggled on the gallows for almost half an hour... As Wiesel and others stood watching this boy die a slow, agonizing death, someone behind him muttered "Where is God?" ...Where is he?" ... Again in anguish the voice muttered ... "Where is God?" ...Wiesel was struggling with the same question. Then he heard a voice within him saying, "God is there...hanging on the gallows."

That same question, "Where is God?" is one that many of us have asked in the midst of our own personal suffering, and it is one Jesus asked 2000 years ago...It is the question that I have heard from family members, as they have watched a loved one suffer the agony of a slow, painful death...It is the question that I've heard from parents whose child was suddenly taken from them... Faced with suffering that defies explanation or reason, we often cry out, "Where are you God?" It's a cry of the tortured heart.

Good Friday will never answer the 'why' of suffering....why we have to go through all kinds of pain and heartache....But it does tell us this: it tells us that God is not removed from our suffering.God does not watch as an impartial bystander in our lives... If we ever think that God does not understand what we are going through,...that He does not understand what makes us cry out in anguish & despair, we are sadly mistaken...God feels our pain; He knows our pain, because he suffered too...Not only excruciating physical pain, but the pain of betrayal & abandonment...And the pain & the shame & the guilt of each & every sin ever committed. ...Our God is no stranger to pain.

So, GOOD FRIDAY is indeed GOOD, as we look back at it from our place in history...Good, because it showed us that God understands & shares in our sufferings & pain...GOOD because it showed us the immensity of God's love to let His Son die on the cross for our sins,...and GOOD because it showed us that death does not have the last word...it has been defeated. ...And in the grand scheme of things, eternal life with Jesus in heaven is as GOOD as it gets. AMEN.

