

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*

What do you see when you look at the cross? The sin of the world? Suffering, pain, loss? Sorrow, separation, death? To some extent all of that is present in the crucifixion. No doubt, all those things are the sword that pierced Mary’s soul as she stood and watched. Those things, however, can also become the veil, the lens, that distorts our vision of the cross. They can keep us from seeing why this day is called Good Friday. They can keep us from seeing a way forward. Sometimes we let the suffering of Jesus blind us to the love of God.

If today is just another day of suffering and brutality, a day to reenact the execution of Jesus, then it makes no sense to speak of this day as good. We must recognize that good does not mean easy or magical. The goodness of Good Friday does not eliminate the reality of sin, grief, suffering, and death. It means those are not the final or ultimate reality of this day... or any day for that matter.

To fixate on the bloody details of the crucifixion risks promoting a false view of what the cross of Christ accomplishes. That fixation leaves us with an angry God seeking retribution, payment, for humanity’s sinfulness through the violent, bloody, torturous execution of Jesus. That is not the good news of Jesus.

The biblical descriptions don’t focus on the brutality and violence of the cross. For some reason we have allowed that to become the focus of the crucifixion. It is there, to be sure, but that is not where scripture places the focus. John’s gospel gives us no graphic or bloody details. He simply states the facts:

- “One of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face” (18:22).
- “Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged” (19:1).
- “The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head” (19:2).
- They kept “striking him on the face” (19:3).
- Jesus carried “the cross by himself” (19:17).
- “They crucified him” (19:18).
- Jesus said, “I am thirsty” (19:28).
- Jesus said, “‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (19:30).
- After Jesus was already dead “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear” (19:33-34).

For Jesus, the focus is not on suffering and death. It is on love. That’s why Jesus can give himself to the cross. He doesn’t look at the cross, he sees through it. Death is not the end. Jesus trusts the Father’s love more than his own death.

Peter, however, can neither look at the cross nor the one who is dying. “I do not know him. I do not know him. I do not know him.” Peter fears death is the end. For Jesus and for himself. In a sense he’s right. Without love death is the end. Without love the entire earth becomes a tomb.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Robert Browning’s words, “Take away love and our earth is a tomb.”

There’s no question that Jesus suffered and died. Mary suffered, cried, and had her heart broken by grief. Good Friday does not deny any of that. Those things were real in the crucifixion of Jesus, and they are real in our own lives. We cannot help but look at the many crosses of our lives and world and see sin and brokenness, suffering, sorrow, tears, loss, and death.

But what if there is more to see? What if those are simply the veil that Jesus’ death tears down? What if we are to see love there as well? That’s what makes this Friday good. The crucified love of Christ is stronger and more real than death. The crucified love of Jesus does more than join us in our sufferings and dyings. It carries us through them. God’s love defeats sin and death. Every time.

Every day we must decide which we trust more, death or love. That decision in many ways determines our world view, guides our relationships, affects how we approach the circumstances of our lives, and colors our image of God. Can we see and trust the crucified love of Good Friday in our deaths, in the violence of our world, in our losses and sufferings, in the brutalities we experience, in the sins we commit? That is both the challenge, and the hope Good Friday offers. **Amen**

*by Michael K. Marsh - April 22, 2011  
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