

Jim Gill

April 19, 2019

High Noon  
Mark 15:1-39

After over 40 years as a Presbyterian pastor this is the first time I have ever led a Good Friday service. The church's I grew up in and the churches I have served have not held services on Good Friday.

I have never liked calling this day Good Friday. It may have been a good day for us, but it was a terrible day for Jesus and his followers. I'd like to propose a trade.

Like I wrote on my Facebook page today, Let's call the Friday after Thanksgiving "Good Friday" because it's a good day to shop. I assume it started being called Black Friday because it's the day that retailers hope to get out of the "red" and back in the "black." Some retailers have not been able to resist and start the day after Halloween advertising Black Friday. Be warned. Black November is coming!

I propose that we call today Black Friday because it was the day that the sky went black at High Noon.

In Jewish life, days begin at night. The Saturday Sabbath starts on Friday night. That is because according to Genesis 1, the world started in darkness. As the days of Creation are recounted each time it says, "It was evening and it was morning the first day."

On Thursday evening, in the darkness of an olive orchard Jesus had asked for the support of his disciples. In particular, he had asked for the support of Peter, James and John while he went a little distance away. He went off to pray for relief from the necessity to drink from the cup of suffering he could see before him. They seemed to do as he had asked them, when in fact they were indifferent to his request. They were tired from the events of the day, and so they took the opportunity to sleep. This meant, of course, that he was left to agonize alone. While his closest friends were sleeping, his enemies were wide awake and were on the move.

During that same evening, in the darkness, possibly near midnight, he was arrested by an armed mob. His disciples, all of whom, including this closest inner circle Peter, James and John, had sworn loyalty to him until death if need be, fled for their lives from the armed mob and he was left alone.

In the courtyard of the High Priest, while he was being questioned, Peter denied all knowledge of him. Of the 12 Peter was the only disciple who had followed him that far. He was the only one close enough to be accused of knowing him.

Jesus was left to face an unknown future alone. Later on, the religious leaders of his own people accused him before a Roman official they all hated. While charges that were inconsistent with one another were shouted back and forth around him, he maintained a dignified silence. Condemned to death by a man who feared public pressure, he was beaten so badly he needed help to carry his cross-beam. A stranger carried it, and two strangers were put to death with him.

*At this point Mark's gospel provides us with a poignant picture of Jesus; -- betrayed by a man he had called and trusted, -- deserted by all the rest of his disciples, -- falsely accused by his own people, and ridiculed by complete strangers.*

*Now, as it was in the Garden of Gethsemane, once again he was in darkness. The darkness this time is not the sort that follows sunset. It was rather the sort of darkness that accompanied great events in ancient history. When he speaks of "darkness at noon" Mark is telling his readers that the death of Jesus was an event that affected the whole universe. What was done on Golgotha, he is saying, was of ultimate significance for any place in the world, and for every place in the world at any time.*

*Our spiritual ancestors understood the darkness at high noon as a reflection as well of the dark night of the soul through which Jesus had been passing. When it was over, he cried out to God in words that have been remembered ever since.<sup>1</sup>*

Those words came, we believe, as the climax to his experience of being betrayed, deserted and abandoned by humankind. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?"

This is the final abandonment! At this point Jesus was totally deserted and completely alone! The cup of suffering had been drained even to the dregs.

The loneliness of Jesus' suffering is a loneliness his people have always known. Pain brings with it a particular loneliness. It cannot be shared, not really. It must be borne alone. The absence of God is an experience that means something only to those who have ever known the presence of God.

The presence of God is still a reality, if, in the midst of feeling completely forsaken, we are able to cry out "My God." (or abbreviate it with OMG!) It is the experience of countless believers that, when all our resources have been exhausted and every experience denies the presence of God, the strength is still provided to search for God.

The presence of God is real at all times, and in terrible places. Even when we cannot bear to think of God at all, or even if we are able only to rail at God and against God, that is precisely what the psalmist tells us to do.

In a strange sort of way Jesus was misunderstood to the end. Even the words of his final appeal to God were misunderstood by those who heard them. Some people thought he was calling for Elijah. Out of curiosity to see whether Elijah would come to rescue this Son of Israel at the last moment, they tried to keep him alive.

Then, writes Mark, Jesus died "with a loud cry." He died violently. As a result of his death, and more precisely as a result of what followed his death, the religious life of humankind was forever transformed. No longer was it a way of salvation for a few, whether by right of office, race or religion. The church has taught ever since that by his death and resurrection, the gates of the kingdom of God were thrown open to all.

The final hour, the end of time, all is over. You and I are making our way however slowly and painfully, toward the wonderful God who loves us all. Who then was the One who died? Who was the One who died as a result of the treachery of Judas, as a consequence of the betrayal of the disciples, as a sequel to the denial by Peter, as a result of the conspiracy of his own people?

To illustrate the pain and torment in Jesus' spirit, a couple of missionaries in a far and remote place shared their story. They had their four-year-old son with them. The son enjoyed a beautiful trust and love relationship with his father.

One day it is discovered that the boy has a nasty tumor growing on his body. His body is afflicted with fever from an infection and his life is threatened. Finally, a doctor on the mission field comes and examines the child. He tells the parents that the child needs to be operated on immediately to save his life. The only problem is that there is no anesthetic available in the mission hospital.

The father knows that operation has to be carried out. He takes his son aside, and says to him, "Son, there is this tumor on you that is making you sick. It is not your fault, but it has to be taken out. You are going to feel great pain. But I want you to know, even while you are feeling this pain, I love you and I will always love you. So be brave, my son."

The operation takes place, and the child is strapped to a makeshift operation table. As the surgeon's knife falls, the son screams with pain. He looks to his father who stands near the door to seek comfort from the one whom he has trusted and loved since birth. The father looks at his son in terrible pain, but there is nothing he can do. He turns his head from seeing the suffering of his son. Imagine the loneliness that little boy is experiencing. The trauma he is going through. (2)

That was the experience of Christ on the cross. That is the experience of his Father who watches it all. In those moments when Jesus took on the sins of the world he experienced his Father looking away as being forsaken.

Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, says John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished."

"The history-long plan of redeeming man was finished. The message of God to man was finished. The works done by Jesus as a man on earth were finished. The task of selecting ambassadors was finished. The job was finished. The song had been sung. The blood had been poured. The sacrifice had been made. The sting of death had been removed. It was over. A cry of defeat? Hardly . . . No, this is no cry of despair. It is a cry of completion. A cry of relief. A roar of fulfillment. A shout of victory." (3)

According to Luke's Gospel, at the end of this ordeal, Jesus made one last sound. He called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last (Luke 23:46). And the terrible deed was done. It was a

terrible deed, but like all things in creation, God used a terrible deed to bring a beautiful result. .

Jesus was a Jewish son of Galilee. He was a son of Mary, whose name has ever since been immortalized. He was a teacher of great charisma, a healer known for his compassion, a young prophet, a true spokesman for God. And we believe he was more even than all of those things. He was, whatever else, who the Centurions said he was when he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God."

Through Jesus, God has given us the priceless gift of salvation, a gift given when the sky went black ... at high noon.

#### Master Plan.- Jim Gill

It wasn't nails that held him to the cross. It was his love, his master plan.  
I was the nail that held him to the cross. He had me right in the palm of his hand.

He could have called legions of angels to rescue him and set him free  
He could have called legions of angels but he showed his love for all to see

It wasn't nails that held him to the cross. It was his love, his master plan.  
I was the nail that held him to the cross. He had me right in the palm of his hand.

It was nails of need and nails of anger that held him there, held by my sin.  
Though it was he who once was held by us, risen in power we're now held by him...

It wasn't nails that held him to the cross. It was his love, his master plan.  
I was the nail that held him to the cross He had me right in the palm of his hand.  
Now he holds us all in the palm of his hand.  
He holds us all in the palm of his hand

He took the whole world in his hands He took the whole world's sin in his hands  
He took the whole world in his hands He took the whole world in his hands.

#### Easter Thoughts-Darrell Cluck

God borrowed a body to become one with us.  
On a borrowed beast he rode to a borrowed room  
Where he broke the borrowed bread and served the borrowed wine  
Borrowing condemnation from ones on borrowed time.  
He bowed his head and borrowed death.  
They wrapped him in borrowed linens and laid him in a borrowed tomb

1. C.S.S. Publishing Company, THE ISOLATED JESUS, by R. Sheldon MacKenzie
2. Kenneth Thien, <http://www.antioch.com.sg/my/asc/SERMONSgFriday98.htm>.
3. Max Lucado, *The Cross*, pp. 37-39. Contributed by Dr. John Bardsley.

Let us pray,

Good and gracious God, to whom our personal stories are known, and by whom we are loved and loved again, you know our feelings of loneliness for your presence. In all our dark times help us to know your presence all about us, to forgive us, to heal us, to restore us to you. Help us to deal with misunderstanding, rejection, lies and betrayal as did Jesus. Help us to deal with those who would impose their greed, their hunger for power, their envy on us or on those whose love sustains us. Help us to see in the One crucified for us, and raised by you to glory, the Lord and Savior of the world. - Amen.