

Jim Gill

April 19, 2019

“Black Friday”
Mark 15:1--47

As I shared with our high noon crowd earlier today after over 40 years as a Presbyterian pastor tonight is the second time I have ever led a Good Friday service. The first time was today at noon. 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. As far as I'm concerned a Good Friday is a day when I go to Red Lobster for fish. When they cook it right it's a Good Fry Day no matter what day it is.

The day Jesus died when the sky went black at noon may have ultimately been a good day for us, but it was a terrible day for Jesus and his followers. So I'd like to propose a trade.

Like I wrote on my Facebook page today, I propose we 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 Black Friday sales the day after Halloween! 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 and stayed that way ... for 3 hours.

One person challenged this tradition of calling the day of Jesus' crucifixion a Good Friday. She said that there was enough betrayal, denial, violence, bloodshed and death in the world. The idea of coming together in a church to hear of all this as it was heaped on Jesus was too much for her. She could not hear of it without coming to tears, or feeling a combination of outrage and depression.

But still we call this Friday Good Friday, as Christians in the English speaking world have done for centuries. Our Spanish speaking fellow Christians speak of this day as Viernes Santo - "Holy Friday." The Germans speak of it as Kar Freitag - literally "the Friday of pure gold." Swedes know it as Lang Fredag - "Long Friday," implying unhurried devotion throughout the day on the meaning of the Cross. From these and many other traditions come names for the day that refer to its supreme value and importance to all believe the Gospel.

We call this Friday good because not because of a sordid curiosity over one man's excruciating ordeal of going through a crucifixion. It is the consequence of that great sacrifice that occupies us. It was because it brought our salvation. We are here in worship to behold the meaning of the cross from God's perspective.

In spite of the cruelty, treachery, and injustice heaped upon Jesus from every side, he was not simply a victim of circumstances. He entered into the ordeal fully, with nothing spared. But he did so with an air of mastery. He saw and knew that the Father was working out his purposes of saving love through everything that seemed to oppose it.

At the Last Supper in the Upper Room, Judas prepared for the act of betrayal. Our Lord said, in the presence of the betrayer and the other eleven disciples, "See, my betrayer is at hand," and puts the whole shameful deed in the context of the fulfillment of what was prophesied a millennium before in Psalm 41: "he who ate my bread lifted up his heel against me."

At his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus intervened against the impulsive effort of Peter to defend him with a sword. "Shall I not drink the cup my Father has given me?" he states. Then he healed the one whose head was slashed by Peter's sword, thereby sparing the disciples the inevitable reprisal that would have brought them all to a similar death as his.

Before the religious court of Caiaphas, the high priest that year, Jesus calmly announced to those arranging his condemnation, "You shall see the Son of man seated at the right hand of power."

Before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Syria who held the power to free Jesus or send him to death, Jesus said, "You would have no power over me at all unless it had been given you from above."

At every critical point, when it seems that all the wrong forces were prevailing, Jesus speaks as the one who is in control.

When Pontius Pilate shoved Jesus in front of the mob with the taunting slur, "Here is your king!" Pilate did not begin to grasp the real truth of Jesus' Kingship. The regal air that dominated our Lord all through the events of his trial and crucifixion bore witness to God's power at work through his Son. Jesus did not soar above the bloody sweat, the pain and horror of suffering and death, but entered into it so as to take hold of it and conquer it through enduring it. He turned the wrath of humans to the purposes of God's accomplishing our salvation.

Nothing takes him by surprise, nor moves him to work out a plea bargain compromise. With frenzy and fanatical hatred bursting out all around him, Jesus was strong and steady in his mission to carve out the pathway through all that our sins create.

It is here that our faith is centered. What we preach on Good Friday, and every opportunity of proclamation on every day, is Christ crucified - and risen, for us. There is no other foundation on which we can establish our trust.

This is a Black Friday. Hurtling through the sound barriers of twenty centuries, the cry of Jesus from the Cross still pierces our ears and rends our hearts with, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

Now none of us would pretend that we have been to the depth of the darkness of the Cross, yet most of us can identify with the feeling of being forsaken - forsaken by friends and loved ones, forsaken by the goodness of life, even forsaken by God. And most of us have asked on occasion, where is God? We may not have asked it verbally but deep in our inner souls where we struggle alone that which matters most, most of us have

asked, "Where was God?" We ask it when a loved one dies. We ask it when starvations ravage the poor and no help comes to the needy. We ask it when we sink into depression and find no relief for our souls.

On this Black Friday, when we are forced to look at human suffering at its worst, and human goodness and self-giving at its best, perhaps, we can hear more clearly some solid truth which we can store up in our minds and call upon in the future, when the need is great - when we are in the midst of pain and death, or on the brink of despair - and that terrible question may be silent in our throats, but clamoring in our souls: "O God, why have you forsaken me?"

In Jesus' greatest hour of need he was abandoned. His closest disciples ran for their lives and left Jesus alone. Did none of those who followed Jesus on the long road from Galilee also follow him to the cross? Well, yes, there were followers of Jesus faithful enough to stand by the cross.

There was John to whom Jesus commended the care of his mother Mary. There were women looking on in addition to his mother Mary there was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses and Salome. They were among the women who, when he was in Galilee, followed him.

Women, who were not even thought worthy in their time to be called disciples, and whose testimony was inadmissible in a court of law stood by Jesus at the cross. The men were full of brave words, but when the time of testing came, they were not there.

Also there were the most unlikely others you could possibly imagine. The only person at the cross to speak of faith was a Roman soldier who proclaimed: "Truly, this was the Son of God!" Why was a Roman soldier at the cross? The only reason a Roman soldier was at the cross was to crucify! The only words of faith at the cross were spoken by the soldier who crucified Jesus!

Finally, another faithful person came to the cross that day. He came when Jesus was dead. He came to claim Jesus' body for burial in his own tomb. His name was Joseph of Arimathea. Mark states that he was an honored member of the council. And in the previous chapter, Mark says twice, just to be sure that we have heard, that the whole council condemned Jesus to death. The whole council condemned Jesus? Including that honored member of the council, Joseph of Arimathea?

These are Mark's faithful witnesses at the cross: a Jew who condemned Jesus, a Roman who pounded in the nails, women who were not afraid to watch him die and two thieves on either side of him.

I think Mark worried about the disciples of Jesus who ran and fled and hid away. I think God worries about people like those who were intrigued and attracted by Jesus' miracles, ran from the pain and despair of the cross. I think God worries about us, when we look to Jesus for a way out of our troubles, as a path to self-fulfillment or a guide to successful living; when the presence of God in our "normal" life just doesn't seem to be

enough and we go off looking for some spiritual excitement or enlightenment, some spiritual high which will "help us believe."

In a skeptical world which wants to see proof, which says, "give me a miracle and I'll believe," we are called to have faith in the Lord of the cross. For that Lord comes to us when we hurt, stands by us when we weep, lifts us up in our pain and comforts us in our loss.

At the close of our service we will sing the familiar spiritual that asks the question, "Were you there?" Whether you could imagine yourself to have been with John and Joseph of Arimathea and the centurion and the women at the cross or whether you imagine yourself to have been among those in hiding, you were there. I was there. My need for a savior was there. When Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world we were there. ..on that Black Friday.

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.

"Yes. We were there."

Easter Thoughts-(continued) 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