

SERMON: What's Good About It?

TEXT: Isaiah 53:1-9

I remember a time – years ago – when I was thinking about how I would explain Good Friday to children. My own children were very young then, so I was anticipating their questions. Plus, I was planning a children's sermon to teach about the events of Holy Week.

Of course, with young children, I didn't want to share too many details about what happened to Jesus; I would just keep it simple and tell them that on Good Friday, Jesus died.

That may have been the first time it occurred to me that calling this day Good Friday, doesn't make much sense. At least to a child's ears it wouldn't. Or to anyone who is unfamiliar with the Christian faith, for that matter.

Today we remember that our Lord and Savior was brutally whipped and beaten, stripped naked and spat upon. The King of the Jews was mocked and humiliated as a sharp, thorny crown was shoved down on his head, cutting into his scalp. He was then forced to carry his own cross – upon which he would be crucified – up the hill to Calvary. Thick, heavy nails were driven through his

wrists and his feet and into the rough-hewn wood. He suffered there for hours, wracked with pain and struggling to breathe.

These are the events of the day we call Good Friday. Any thinking person – including those of us who know the end of the story – would find it hard to resist asking the question, WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT IT?

In fact, what’s worse is that Jesus doesn’t even put up a good fight. He doesn’t defend himself. He doesn’t speak up for himself. He doesn’t fight back. He allowed it all to happen.

Just when we thought we were getting a hero we get a Suffering Servant. But we need a hero these days. Just like the Israelites of Isaiah’s time needed a hero to free them from a life of oppression in exile. I’m reminded of the song written and sung by Bonnie Tyler:

*I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night
He's gotta be strong
And he's gotta be fast
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight
I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light
He's gotta be sure
And it's gotta be soon
And he's gotta be larger than life
Larger than life*

From Isaiah's description of him, the Suffering Servant was not strong, not fast, and not larger than life. He was not anyone we would want to hold out for. He was not anyone we would even want to cheer for – at least based on his outward appearance. “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely, he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.”

It is a great paradox that such a tragic figure would become our Savior. “But he was wounded... for our transgressions. Crushed... for our iniquities. Upon him was the punishment... that made us whole. And by his bruises... we are healed.”

Jesus was murdered... for us. And we commemorate that day, calling it GOOD Friday.

One commentary I read defined the death of Jesus Christ as *a beautiful tragedy*. “It was a tragedy, because Jesus did not do anything to deserve such treatment. He was accused unfairly. He was sentenced unjustly. *He was pierced*

because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes (Isa 53:5). Yet, Jesus' death was beautiful because of what it accomplished for us."

"Because Jesus was betrayed, we have been treated with kindness that we don't deserve. Because Jesus was arrested, we have been set free. Because Jesus was denied, we have been accepted. Because Jesus was condemned, there is no condemnation for us. Because Jesus was mocked, we have been commended. Because Jesus was cursed, we have been blessed. Because Jesus was abused, we have been comforted. Because Jesus was dishonored, we have been honored. Because Jesus was beaten, we have been healed. Because Jesus' body was torn, we have confidence to enter the holy places of God. Because Jesus was forsaken by God, we have been welcomed by God. Because Jesus was killed, our lives have been spared. From Jesus' anguish comes our peace." (Scott Hoezee, *The Abingdon Preaching Annual* 2019, p. 45)

And yet, beyond these truths, we all know through personal experience that his suffering does not prevent our suffering. But let's look beyond ourselves for a moment to think about how suffering continues for those who are despised and rejected. Suffering continues for those whose lives are ugly and infirm. Suffering continues for those whom we hold of no account. And often, the suffering of

others is inflicted by those of us who count ourselves righteous. The suffering of others comes by our actions and our inaction. The suffering of others comes by our words and our silence.

Some of the good news of Good Friday is that Christ, the Suffering Servant, shares our sufferings. We know that he understands all our pain – physical, emotional, relational. And because he shares in our suffering, we are never alone in our pain.

And the good news gets better still when we who proclaim that we are healed by his bruises, take on the role of servant for others. As Jesus shares our suffering, we are called to share the suffering of others.

Another theologian shared these challenging words: “Following in the wise, non-violent footsteps of Christ is God’s prescription for this ailing planet: bearing one another’s grief, carrying common sorrows, working on behalf of those who are languishing in Babylon, cut off and utterly without hope. The pattern of the innocent one standing up courageously against arrayed powers of the status quo is a proven fulcrum for shifting paradigms.... We are not just saved [by a Suffering Servant], we are called. Like the Jewish understanding of Isaiah, we *as a*

community are to be the Servant as well.” (Suzanne Woolston-Bossert, *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Vol. 2, p. 284)

A few years ago, I saw a fascinating documentary titled “I Am.” It is written and directed by Hollywood filmmaker, Tom Shadyac. After recovering from serious injuries sustained in a bicycle accident, he goes on a quest to find the answer to the question, “What’s wrong with the world?” He interviews philosophers, scientists, faith leaders, and others. Ultimately, he realizes that his original question should have been “what’s right with the world?” And his answer: I am.

So, WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT GOOD FRIDAY? The answer – from faithful servants and a servant church – should be, “We are.”

To the glory of God.

AMEN.