



Good Friday is far more difficult to preach than Easter or Christmas. Easter and Christmas are celebrations with lots of great music, family and friends sharing food, and most of all, feelings of love and hope.

Good Friday is as completely opposite as it gets in the church year. Yes, we know what happens in the next few days, unlike those who were living the crucifixion and death of Jesus as it happened. Thus, for us, Good Friday has lost some of its terror and despair because we can, *almost*, overlook it. Indeed, in my own lifetime, we have gone from being excused from school from noon to 3 p.m. to not even observing it. It's simply another day in the secular calendar. It's more of a hassle than it is a pivotal point in the life of the church and of our society.

Skipping Good Friday, though, isn't a good idea most especially when we

encounter our own Golgathas. Those events in our life when hope is lost, despair is deep and our outlook is bleak. Perhaps it is the death of a spouse or child or close friend. Perhaps it is a diagnosis of cancer with no hope held out by doctors of remission. Perhaps it is loss of a job at a time in our life when getting another job- let alone one that paid as well as the one we just lost- is dim. Whatever it is, each of us has faced or will face some event in our life that has the capacity to bring us to our knees wondering if we can go on.

From early in Genesis when we read of the serpent beguiling Adam and Eve through to the devil tempting Jesus at the end of his stay in the wilderness, we learn that evil needs us to carry out its plans. Evil does not act alone. Evil needs humans to succumb to its temptations to be effective. We, as Christians, are called to stand firm in the face of temptation and turn our faces towards God and towards life.

In a meditation on Good Friday from the Center for Process and Faith, we read: "Never doubt the meaning of Lent. It happened a long time ago, but it happened. Jesus walked on this earth. He practiced a ministry of radical inclusivity, drawing to himself all the despised and rejected members of society. He lived what he taught: a life of justice and love, of profound compassion for all people. He lived a life

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Ps. 40: 1-14; Hebrews 10, 16-25; John 18:1-19:42

acceptable to God. His death terrifies us because it reveals to us how committed the world is to its own way and the price the world exacts from those whose commitment is to God.”¹

Each day we are tempted to give in to evil – be it big or small. To make a choice that promotes our own well-being at the expense of our neighbor. To not call the cashier’s attention to the fact that we got more change than we should have. To be grumpy rather than offer a smile to the waiter who is overwhelmed and brings our order a little bit differently than we asked for. To snap at our children because they didn’t do their chores or they forgot their homework and we had to stop what we needed to do and rush to school with it. To snarl at our spouse who forgot to take out the trash. Whatever it is, we don’t behave with love and kindness to our loved ones or those with whom we come into contact.

Malcolm Boyd, an Episcopal priest, reminds us that everyone has a cross to bear. ...[He believes this means that] everyone has ultimately to face up to reality- one’s own calling, destiny, nature and responsibilities. In his own life, Jesus faced reality directly and unequivocally. He incarnated the truth as he believed it. Jesus did not pander to any easy or obvious popularity. Jesus attacked the hypocrisies of the human power structure head on. He rejected the status quo in favor of obedience to the realm of God. And, Jesus took the consequences of his actions all the way to death on the cross. The way of the cross, Boyd says, was the way Jesus understood his mission and his faithfulness to that mission. The way of the cross seems to be, for every individual Christian, the reality that dictates how we live.²

There’s a story of a father and son on a trip to Paris, although it could have taken place in any other major city with a major museum. The father wanted his son to experience art masterpieces as a beginning to understanding how our world is shaped by what we love and how we understand that love.

The Louvre in Paris is one of those great museums – you can’t possibly see or take it all in in one day. But that’s what they had and so they determined to do the best they could with their time. They made their way from their hotel to the museum, stood in line to get their entrance tickets and then meandered a bit.

The father stopped in front of the Winged Victory of Samothrace to admire how compelling this statute was even though it is missing head and arms. His son was by his side but in the way of young boys somehow managed to slip away. When his father noticed that his son was gone, the question immediately became what to do.

He could shout out the boy’s name in hopes his son would hear him. He could contact Museum Police but that brought with it red tape. He could begin to go from gallery to gallery hoping to see his son but that option ran the risk that he would always be one step behind his son. Finally, the father decided to go to the central gallery and stand in the middle. Stand tall and still. He hoped his son would finally make his way back to his father and all would be well. After some 45 minutes, that’s exactly what happened. The young boy found his father, standing still and tall in the middle of the central gallery. Excitedly, the young boy said: Oh Dad! You should have been with me. So many neat things to see!

¹ <http://processtheology.net/resources/liturgy/good-friday-service> (Jan. 11, 2014)

² Malcolm Boyd. Are you running with me Jesus? (Crowley Publications, 2006).

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Ps. 40: 1-14; Hebrews 10, 16-25; John 18:1-19:42

Despite all the temptations of the Louvre- and there are many- the young boy returned to his father who stood straight and tall. The father was the pivot point for their journey. Without the father, the young boy would not be in Paris nor would he have seen all those wonderful things.

Today more than ever, Jesus is our pivot point. The person who dies on a cross in complete conformity with the life he lived. A life that ended in pain and suffering but even at the last, Jesus stands still and straight. A beacon to us all that love will conquer all, even when it is dark and our despair is deep.

God who has given us life meets us on this Good Friday- whether it is today or any other day when we feel we cannot bear it any longer. God walks with us when we are weary and discouraged. We are forgiven the times we fell short of loving God and loving neighbor. We are healed and made a new creation through the love of grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that is the good news on this day- a day which the world outside and the forces of evil might think is the death of our dreams and our hopes. We are here to tell them: not yet, not yet. God is here, deep in our pain and our despair. All is not lost.

Amen.